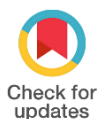


An Exploration of Teachers' Perspectives on the Imbalance in Science and Social Studies Track Selection at SMAN 1 Mataram



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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of imbalance in the selection of Science (IPA) and Social Science (IPS) streams at the senior high school level remains a relevant issue in the context of Indonesian education. This study aims to explore teachers' perspectives on the predominant tendency of students to choose the IPA stream at SMAN 1 Mataram, as well as the impacts of this imbalance on both teachers and the social dynamics among students. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with several teachers from diverse subject backgrounds. The findings indicate that the stream selection process is conducted objectively by considering academic achievement, psychological test results, as well as students' interests and talents. However, student choices remain dominated by the IPA stream due to rational considerations related to future prospects. This imbalance affects the distribution of teachers' workload and creates distinct social characteristics between the streams, although it does not cause overt conflicts. These results highlight the importance of fairer stream socialization and the critical role of teachers in providing personalized guidance to students. This study recommends strengthening internal school policies to manage the imbalance and encourages further research exploring students' perspectives and other socio-cultural variables influencing stream selection.

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INTRODUCTION

The selection of study tracks at the Senior High School (SMA) level represents a critical stage in determining students' educational pathways and future career trajectories. In Indonesia, the choice between the Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) streams often reveals a significant imbalance in student enrollment numbers. Nationally, the Natural Sciences stream tends to attract more students compared to the Social Sciences stream. This disparity is influenced by a range of factors, including societal perceptions regarding job prospects, social prestige, and views on academic ability (Devianti, 2015; Nelissa, Astuti, & Martunis, 2018). Such imbalances are not unique to Indonesia but have also been documented in global education contexts, where science tracks are frequently regarded as superior to social sciences (Rufaidah, 2015).

Teachers, as academic managers and mentors, play a strategic role in the decision-making process of students when choosing their study tracks. They act as sources of information, guides, and advisors, assisting students in selecting paths aligned with their interests and potential (Heriyansyah, 2018; Risal & Alam, 2021). Despite the crucial role of teachers, there is a noticeable gap in research exploring teachers' perspectives on the imbalance between IPA

and IPS enrollment, especially within schools in the Nusa Tenggara Barat region. This gap underscores the need to deeply examine teachers' voices as part of efforts to promote equitable education and enhance the quality of learning in schools.

This study originates from the observed imbalance in student numbers between IPA and IPS streams, a phenomenon that can have significant implications on academic outcomes, social dynamics, and school resources. However, the literature lacks sufficient exploration of how teachers understand and respond to these disparities. The underrepresentation of teacher perspectives in the discourse around study track selection results in less informed academic counseling policies and practices that do not adequately incorporate firsthand teacher experiences.

The imbalance does not only threaten the equitable distribution of educational quality but also affects teachers' workload and students' social relationships within schools. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap by addressing the primary questions: How do teachers perceive the imbalance in IPA and IPS student enrollment at SMAN 1 Mataram? What factors do teachers believe influence students' tendencies toward choosing these streams?

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand teachers' perspectives on the enrollment imbalance between IPA and IPS streams, including the factors influencing student preferences. Furthermore, the study aims to identify the impact of this imbalance on teachers' workload and social interactions among students at SMAN 1 Mataram. The findings are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge on secondary education in Indonesia and provide insights for school policy and academic counseling practices.

This study holds significant relevance in enriching understanding of the dynamics involved in study track selection at the secondary education level, particularly from the teachers' viewpoint, who are often the frontline actors in supporting students. By highlighting teacher perspectives, this research amplifies the voices of key educational stakeholders who have been underrepresented in existing literature. The outcomes of this study are anticipated to inform the development of more effective academic counseling strategies and more inclusive school policies. Additionally, it opens avenues for further research examining the social and cultural factors that influence students' academic decisions.

Students' academic decision-making, including study track selection, can be interpreted through various social and educational psychological theories. One relevant framework is Rational Choice Theory, which posits that individuals make decisions rationally by weighing the benefits and consequences of each option (Sastrawati, 2019). Within the context of study track selection, students often evaluate their choices based on perceived opportunities for further education and career advancement, which frequently leads to a preference for the IPA stream.

Moreover, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) explains that decisions are influenced by attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Social and cultural factors play a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes toward particular streams. The perception that the IPA stream holds greater prestige and offers brighter future prospects can become a social norm that strongly influences students' preferences (Pritantia, Kosasih, & Supriyono, 2021).

Numerous local and international studies have investigated the phenomenon of IPA and IPS stream selection. Nelissa et al. (2018) identified that parental support, peer influence, and teacher encouragement significantly impact students' decisions when selecting study tracks. Devianti (2015) emphasized that students' interests, talents, and psychological test results are key indicators in the selection process in Indonesian high schools. Meanwhile, Irawan (2014)

highlighted the importance of decision support systems, such as the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), to assist students in making objective study track choices.

However, most of these studies have focused primarily on student perspectives and external influencing factors, without delving deeply into the teachers' viewpoints as direct agents in the academic counseling process. Teachers occupy a central role in providing information, motivation, and reinforcement regarding students' choices (Heriyansyah, 2018).

Teachers do not only function as instructors but also as academic counselors and role models for students (Wahyudin, 2020). They are tasked with delivering accurate and neutral information about the characteristics of each stream, as well as their educational and career prospects. Furthermore, teachers serve as social agents who mediate the influence of the surrounding social environment on students, making their role crucial in guiding students' decisions effectively (Risal & Alam, 2021).

Khalimah (2025) underlines that the social and ethical roles of teachers in academic counseling should be optimized to prevent discrimination and stereotypes that may reinforce the imbalance in study track selection. Hence, teachers' understanding of enrollment disparities and their impacts is essential for developing inclusive and equitable counseling strategies.

Although the importance of teachers' roles is acknowledged, there remains a significant lack of studies specifically exploring teachers' perspectives on the IPA-IPS enrollment imbalance, especially in schools outside Java, such as SMAN 1 Mataram. This research aims to fill this gap through a qualitative approach that positions teachers as primary subjects to gain deeper and more contextual insights into this phenomenon.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an exploratory design utilizing a single case study method. This approach was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives regarding the imbalance in Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) stream selection at SMAN 1 Mataram. It aimed to capture richer meanings and experiences within the social and academic context of the school (Rahardjo, 2017; Sugiyono, 2016).

The research was conducted at SMAN 1 Mataram, a public senior high school in Nusa Tenggara Barat, which exemplifies the phenomenon of study track selection imbalance in the region. The participants consisted of teachers teaching in the IPA and IPS streams, homeroom teachers, and Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers. Participants were purposively selected to ensure they possessed direct and relevant experience in the student study track selection process (Devianti, 2015; Heriyansyah, 2018).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility to delve deeply into teachers' views and experiences. The interview questions were designed based on the research focus, specifically targeting teachers' perceptions of the imbalance in study track selection, along with related factors and impacts. In addition, internal school documentation—such as statistical data on study track enrollment and school policies—was also used to triangulate interview data and provide a more comprehensive contextual understanding (Hansen, 2020; Irawan, 2014).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, which has been widely applied in educational research (Fitriyani et al., 2024). The analysis process included familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and interpretation in relation to theoretical frameworks and research objectives. This

approach was selected for its ability to systematically and transparently identify patterns and main themes emerging from teachers' narratives.

To ensure data validity and reliability, the study employed source and method triangulation by comparing interview findings across teachers with diverse backgrounds and corroborating with school documentation. Member checking was also conducted by seeking confirmation from several participants regarding preliminary findings. Furthermore, an audit trail was maintained to document the research process in detail (Sugiyono, 2016; Rahardjo, 2017).

Ethical considerations were carefully observed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality of respondents' identities, and securing permission from the school as the institution hosting the research (Khalimah, 2025). These commitments were essential to maintain trust and integrity throughout data collection and management.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perceptions on the Dominance of the Science Stream (IPA)

The majority of teachers at SMAN 1 Mataram perceive the dominance of students choosing the Natural Sciences (IPA) stream as a deeply entrenched phenomenon—one that has become a habitual pattern difficult to change. These teachers expressed that the IPA stream is often regarded as a symbol of intelligence and higher social prestige compared to the Social Sciences (IPS) stream. This perception is reflected in the common viewpoint among students, parents, and the broader community, which tends to regard IPA students as a group that is academically superior. Such perceptions are not merely rooted in academic factors but are also driven by social values associating the IPA stream with higher status within society.

One teacher illustrated that students and their parents hold high expectations for the IPA stream because they believe it opens greater opportunities for continuing education at prestigious universities and access to careers deemed more promising and stable. As explained by Devianti (2015) and Nelissa, Astuti, & Martunis (2018), parental pressure and social environment significantly influence students' decisions to choose IPA. This pressure sometimes compels students to opt for IPA even when their interests and talents may be more aligned with IPS.

The belief in the superiority of the IPA stream is also reinforced by societal stereotypes, where IPS students are often perceived as less academically capable and having poorer future prospects. This viewpoint not only influences students' stream choices but also shapes the social dynamics within the school environment, where IPA students tend to receive greater recognition and are regarded as the "elite class." This aligns with findings from Rufaidah (2015), which show that students' intelligence and interests are heavily influenced by social perceptions linked to the chosen stream.

Beyond external pressure, teachers also noted the rational aspect behind the dominance of IPA choices. Both students and parents tend to consider economic factors and future career prospects, such as job opportunities in technology, health, and science sectors, which are perceived as more stable and better remunerated compared to social science fields. This supports the academic decision-making framework based on Rational Choice Theory, which posits that individuals make decisions by weighing the benefits and consequences of each option (Sastrawati, 2019; Fitriyani et al., 2024).

However, teachers also highlighted that the dominance of IPA does not always reflect truly free choices by students. At times, students lack a full understanding of their own potential due to

insufficient information provided about the strengths and opportunities of the IPS stream. Teachers indicated that the socialization efforts regarding IPS are often inadequate, leading to poor awareness and lower student interest in that stream. This is consistent with Devianti's (2015) research emphasizing the critical role of teachers in delivering objective information and offering personalized guidance, enabling students to make choices aligned with their interests and abilities rather than solely social pressure or stereotypes.

Furthermore, teachers observed that the dominance of IPA is influenced by the academic evaluation system and selection processes that tend to favor quantitative measures such as report card grades and psychological test results, which generally advantage students with strong science skills. In contrast, social skills, creativity, and interests in socio-cultural fields receive less attention in the decision-making process. This situation leaves students with talents in the IPS domain feeling marginalized and lacking adequate recognition in their academic path selection (Irawan, 2014; Junaedi, 2019).

These perceptions also impact the internal conditions of the school. IPA teachers face a significantly heavier workload due to the larger number of students, necessitating the management of bigger classes and the preparation of more varied instructional materials to meet diverse student needs. Conversely, IPS teachers, confronted with fewer students, often have to teach across grade levels or other classes to fulfill their teaching hours, which indirectly reflects an imbalance in the distribution of human resources within the school (Wahyudin, 2020).

From a social perspective, teachers noted that the disparity in student numbers between the IPA and IPS streams also influences students' social interaction patterns and character development. IPA students tend to have a more academic and competitive orientation, whereas IPS students are generally more active in social activities and organizations. Nevertheless, this imbalance has not triggered significant social conflicts, thanks to the role of teachers and school policies that encourage cross-stream interactions, maintaining harmonious social relations among students (Risal & Alam, 2021).

Overall, teachers' perceptions of the IPA stream's dominance at SMAN 1 Mataram affirm that this imbalance is not merely an educational phenomenon but also reflects complex socio-cultural realities. This phenomenon demands serious attention from the school and stakeholders to create a more balanced narrative and provide fair opportunities for students to choose streams aligned with their interests, talents, and individual potentials.

Factors Influencing Stream Choice

Teachers at SMAN 1 Mataram identified several key factors driving students' tendency to choose the Science (IPA) stream over the Social Sciences (IPS) stream. These factors extend beyond academics, encompassing social, cultural, and economic pressures inherent in the students' environment. Understanding these factors is essential to grasp the complexity of students' academic decisions and the implications for the imbalance in stream selection.

One of the most dominant factors cited by teachers is parental pressure. Parents often exert significant influence over students' stream choices, frequently instilling expectations that their children enroll in the IPA stream due to its perceived brighter and more secure future prospects. Interviews revealed that parents believe IPA opens doors to admission at prestigious public universities and stable careers, especially in fields such as medicine, engineering, and science. This pressure is sometimes explicitly communicated but often manifests as implicit social expectations, leading students to feel compelled to meet these

demands to maintain their family's social image (Devianti, 2015; Nelissa, Astuti, & Martunis, 2018).

In addition to parental pressure, stereotypes surrounding the streams play a critical role. The IPA stream is regarded as academically superior and carries higher social prestige compared to IPS. Conversely, IPS is often perceived as less prestigious and less promising, despite its significant potential and relevance to social and economic development. These perceptions stem not only from the school environment but also from broader societal views that equate academic success and future achievement with mastery of exact sciences. Such entrenched stereotypes shape the mindsets of students and families, fostering a tendency to choose IPA even when genuine interests may lie in social studies (Rufaidah, 2015).

Career opportunities perceived as broader and more promising in the IPA stream also significantly influence choices. Teachers reported that students and parents tend to favor IPA because they view science and technology as future-oriented fields with abundant employment opportunities and higher salaries. This perspective aligns with the global emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) as priority sectors for development and innovation (Fitriyani et al., 2024). Consequently, the IPA stream becomes an economically rational choice for students aiming to secure future success.

Moreover, social prestige associated with the IPA stream is an equally important factor. In Indonesia's socio-cultural context, academic achievement in science is seen as a marker of intellectual superiority and elevated social status. Students admitted to IPA often receive greater recognition from both school and society, encouraging more students to follow this path. This social prestige functions as a form of "social capital" that students and families seek to acquire to be regarded as successful and respected within their communities (Sastrawati, 2019).

Aside from external social and cultural influences, teachers emphasized the importance of academic factors in stream selection. Report card grades and psychological test results are primary indicators used by schools in the selection process. High academic achievement in science subjects typically leads to recommendations for the IPA stream. Psychological tests serve to identify students' interests and talents, aiming to make stream allocation more objective and aligned with individual potential. Nevertheless, teachers acknowledge that despite the objectivity of academic criteria, socio-cultural factors and external pressures remain more dominant in shaping final decisions (Rufaidah, 2015; Irawan, 2014).

Furthermore, teachers highlighted the strong role of the students' social and cultural environment in academic decision-making. This environment includes peers, social media, and cultural norms that idealize the IPA stream as the "correct" and "best" choice. Peer influence through discussions and shared experiences encourages conformity, such that students tend to follow the majority stream choice among their friends. Additionally, the competitive school culture, which emphasizes IPA achievements, reinforces this perception. This aligns with Ningsih et al.'s (2024) findings on the critical role of sociocultural variables in understanding student academic behavior.

Teachers also pointed out a lack of balanced socialization and education about the IPS stream, leading to insufficient student awareness of its benefits and potential. This informational imbalance contributes to the low interest in IPS, as students and parents lack a clear understanding of career opportunities and academic fields available through IPS. Yet, social sciences offer diverse employment opportunities in government, community development, business, and other sectors relevant to national development. Teachers hope schools will strengthen academic guidance programs and comprehensive stream socialization to help

students make more informed choices based on interests and potential rather than external pressures alone (Devianti, 2015; Rahardjo, 2017).

Additionally, school curricula and policies also influence stream selection dynamics. Emphasis on quantitative academic aspects such as report card grades and science-focused psychological testing leads to bias in the selection process. Teachers recommend adopting a more holistic approach that includes qualitative assessments accommodating creativity, social skills, and leadership potential, especially for students interested in IPS (Junaedi, 2019).

In summary, the factors influencing students' stream choices at SMAN 1 Mataram represent a complex interplay of socio-cultural pressures, economic expectations, stream stereotypes, academic criteria, and school policies. This imbalance calls for attention from all stakeholders to develop a fair and inclusive academic guidance system, enabling students to select streams truly aligned with their potential and aspirations, rather than merely following trends or external demands.

Impact of Imbalance on Teachers and Students

The imbalance in the number of students between the Science (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) streams at SMAN 1 Mataram results in significant consequences affecting both teachers' workload and the social dynamics among students. Teachers and school staff face distinct challenges due to this uneven distribution of students, which also impacts the management of school resources.

One of the most tangible effects experienced by teachers is the uneven workload distribution between IPA and IPS teachers. Teachers in the IPA stream typically bear greater responsibilities because they handle more students and classes compared to their IPS counterparts. This leads to a demanding teaching schedule for IPA teachers, who often face pressure to meet high learning targets. Conversely, IPS teachers tend to have fewer teaching hours within their own stream. As a result, many IPS teachers must teach across different grade levels or educational stages to fulfill the minimum teaching hours required by the school or government (Wahyudin, 2020).

This imbalance in workload distribution potentially causes physical and mental fatigue among IPA teachers and may affect the quality of instruction delivered. Heavy workloads often limit teachers' ability to provide optimal personal attention to each student, especially in subjects that require intensive guidance and deep comprehension. Meanwhile, IPS teachers who teach multiple grade levels face the challenge of managing diverse content and pedagogical approaches, necessitating high flexibility and adaptability. This situation calls for school management's attention to provide balanced support and fair workload management strategies for all teachers (Wahyudin, 2020).

The impact of imbalance is also evident in the unequal distribution of learning resources and facilities. With a larger number of IPA students, facilities such as laboratories, practical equipment, and science-related learning media tend to receive higher priority. Consequently, the IPS stream often experiences limitations in supportive facilities, including adequate classrooms, teaching aids, or interactive learning media relevant to social sciences and humanities. This condition may reinforce perceptions that IPS is less "important" or "attractive," thereby exacerbating the existing imbalance in interest and stream choices (Risal & Alam, 2021).

From a social perspective, although the numerical imbalance between IPA and IPS students does not lead to overt social conflict, it does shape distinct social characteristics between streams. IPA students tend to exhibit stronger academic orientation and a highly competitive

attitude, influenced by intense academic pressure and demands for mastery of complex scientific concepts. Conversely, IPS students are generally more socially active and participative in extracurricular activities and school organizations. They tend to engage more in social, artistic, and leadership activities, which foster interpersonal skills and high empathy (Risal & Alam, 2021).

These differing social characteristics, while creating unique identities for each stream, do not hinder interpersonal relationships between IPA and IPS students. Social interactions across streams remain open and positive, with frequent cross-stream collaborations in school activities. Teachers and school authorities actively promote joint activities to strengthen social bonds among students from both streams, minimizing potential social segregation that may arise from disparities in numbers and characteristics. This demonstrates the school's proactive efforts in maintaining social integration and fostering an inclusive, harmonious school climate (Risal & Alam, 2021; Wahyudin, 2020).

Nevertheless, the consequences of this imbalance remain a significant concern for the school. Effective management in distributing teacher workloads and providing equitable facilities must be continuously pursued to ensure optimal educational quality across both streams. Additionally, enhancing cross-stream social and extracurricular activities serves as an essential strategy to maintain social harmony and nurture students' holistic development in both academic and social domains (Wahyudin, 2020).

In summary, the imbalance in student numbers between IPA and IPS streams results in tangible consequences that require systematic handling by the school. These issues encompass human resource and facility management as well as character building and social relations among students. A holistic approach involving teachers, school management, students, and parents is key to managing these impacts to create a balanced and conducive learning environment for all stakeholders.

Teachers' Roles and Responses in Addressing Imbalance

In addressing the imbalance in stream choices at SMAN 1 Mataram, teachers play a central role as academic advisors providing objective support and information to students. Teachers are not only responsible for instruction but also act as facilitators in students' decision-making processes to select streams aligned with their interests, talents, and potential. Within this context, teachers strive to offer neutral guidance without bias toward any stream, enabling students to make well-informed decisions based on personal considerations rather than external pressures or social stereotypes (Heriyansyah, 2018).

However, this role is challenging due to pervasive negative perceptions and stereotypes within society and school environments, especially toward the IPS stream, which is often viewed as less prestigious compared to IPA. These stereotypes influence students' and parents' attitudes in stream selection, requiring teachers to address such dynamics with sensitivity and strategic approaches. To mitigate this, some teachers at SMAN 1 Mataram have initiated more balanced and fair stream socialization efforts. They aim to educate students and parents on the strategic value and opportunities each stream offers, helping to transform the prevailing unfavorable mindset towards IPS (Khalimah, 2025).

Socialization efforts are conducted not only formally through meetings and counseling but also via activities encouraging interaction and collaboration among students from IPA and IPS. By fostering cross-stream social relationships, teachers hope to reduce stigma and strengthen solidarity among students, promoting a more holistic understanding of the diversity of potentials and strengths within each stream. Such interactions also serve as platforms for

students to learn to appreciate differences and develop essential soft skills for future social and professional life (Heriyansyah, 2018; Risal & Alam, 2021).

Besides balancing information, teachers also serve as motivators who encourage students to believe in their capabilities and choose streams based on genuine interests and aspirations. Motivation provided through guidance and psychological support helps students cope with environmental pressures and confusion during the academic decision-making process. In this role, teachers act as mediators who assist students in deeply recognizing their potential and building strong self-confidence to determine the right academic path (Heriyansyah, 2018).

Teachers' roles as motivators and information balancers are crucial in creating a school ecosystem that supports diverse stream choices without discrimination. This aligns with the view that teachers are not merely instructors but also mentors capable of managing students' social and psychological dynamics within secondary education. Therefore, enhancing teachers' capacities in academic counseling skills and socio-cultural understanding is an urgent need to enable them to perform these roles effectively and professionally (Khalimah, 2025).

Overall, teachers' responses to the stream selection imbalance at SMAN 1 Mataram demonstrate a high awareness of their strategic roles in shaping students' academic choices. Despite challenges from stereotypes and social pressures, teachers' efforts to provide equitable guidance, conduct socialization, and encourage cross-stream interaction are positive steps that can reduce imbalance and strengthen social integration within the school. This also underscores the importance of teachers as change agents in building an inclusive and responsive education system tailored to students' needs.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

This study reveals that the dominance of the Science (IPA) stream at SMAN 1 Mataram is a complex phenomenon, shaped by the dynamic interaction between rational and socio-cultural factors. These findings align with academic decision-making theories, particularly Rational Choice Theory, which posits that individuals make decisions based on rational considerations aimed at maximizing benefits (Sastrawati, 2019). In the context of stream selection at SMAN 1 Mataram, students and parents appear to conduct rational calculations by considering various factors, especially the prospect of a brighter future associated with choosing the IPA stream.

The choice is not solely based on personal preference or academic interest but is heavily influenced by the social and cultural environment surrounding the students. As noted by Fitriyani et al. (2024), academic decisions cannot be separated from social influences that shape expectations and norms regarding which streams are perceived as "prestigious" and "valuable." In this case, the perception that the IPA stream offers a more prestigious path and better future opportunities—including access to higher education and broader career prospects—serves as the primary driver reinforcing students' inclination toward IPA.

From the teachers' perspective, this imbalance is viewed as a natural outcome given the deep-rooted and structured underlying factors; however, it does not mean that the phenomenon should be left unmanaged. The professional awareness among teachers, who perceive this imbalance as both a challenge and an opportunity to manage stream selection dynamics, reflects a mature and responsible attitude in fulfilling their roles as educators and advisors (Heriyansyah, 2018). This awareness is crucial to prevent the imbalance from escalating into more serious academic or social issues.

Comparison with Previous Literature

The findings of this study are consistent with prior research revealing the dominance of the IPA stream due to perceptions of prestige and advantageous prospects (Nelissa, Astuti, & Martunis, 2018; Devianti, 2015). This consistency strengthens the argument that similar academic preference patterns occur not only at SMAN 1 Mataram but also in other secondary schools across Indonesia, raising important concerns about imbalance that require serious attention from stakeholders.

However, an interesting contrast emerges when compared with international studies. Research conducted abroad, such as by Pritantia, Kosasih, and Supriyono (2021), identified sharp social conflicts between science and social science students, negatively impacting the school climate and social relations. This phenomenon was not observed at SMAN 1 Mataram, where social relations between IPA and IPS students remain harmonious despite the significant disparity in student numbers between the streams.

This suggests that the role of teachers and internal school policies is highly effective in maintaining social integration and fostering an inclusive environment. Teachers not only manage academic aspects but also actively create spaces for cross-stream social interaction that strengthen solidarity and collaboration among students (Risal & Alam, 2021). This factor stands out as a valuable best practice example in addressing stream selection imbalance without leading to detrimental social segregation.

Policy and Practice Implications

Based on these findings and interpretations, this study offers several important implications for managing stream selection in secondary schools, particularly at SMAN 1 Mataram and other schools facing similar challenges.

First, it is essential to strengthen internal school policies that systematically promote equitable stream distribution. Such policies should be supported by more inclusive, objective, and transparent socialization efforts directed toward all stakeholders—students, parents, and teachers alike. Information regarding the advantages, prospects, and opportunities within each stream must be communicated evenly to dispel negative stereotypes attached to the IPS stream (Citriadin, 2019). This approach is vital to enable students to make more balanced decisions, free from social pressure and inaccurate assumptions.

Second, the role of teachers as academic advisors needs to be enhanced through targeted training and capacity development. Such training aims to enable teachers to recognize potential biases—both personal and environmental—and provide personalized, holistic guidance to students. Consequently, teachers will serve not only as information providers but also as counselors who help students navigate dilemmas and pressures in stream selection and motivate them to pursue paths aligned with their individual potentials and interests (Heriyansyah, 2018).

Third, schools should develop cross-stream programs that focus not only on academic aspects but also strengthen social interaction and collaboration between IPA and IPS students. These programs might include joint extracurricular activities, collaborative projects, or discussion forums involving students from both streams. The objective is to build solidarity, reduce socio-cultural gaps, and create a more inclusive and supportive school environment (Risal & Alam, 2021).

Consistent implementation of these programs can help reduce entrenched stereotypes about specific streams and foster mutual respect among students. Moreover, this can enhance

students' social skills and cooperation, which are essential for their readiness to face challenges in higher education and future careers.

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive understanding that stream selection is a complex process intertwined with both rational and socio-cultural dimensions. Therefore, managing stream selection imbalances requires a holistic approach involving multiple stakeholders and integrating academic, social, and policy frameworks. The role of teachers and school policies is pivotal in creating conditions that support equitable stream choices while maintaining social harmony within the school environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that teachers at SMAN 1 Mataram perceive the students' stream selection process as objective and holistic. The determination of streams considers several indicators such as report card grades, psychological test results, as well as individual student interests and talents. Nevertheless, there is a strong tendency for students to choose the Science (IPA) stream, largely driven by rational considerations regarding further education prospects and future employment opportunities. This indicates that the perception of the "superiority" of the IPA stream remains deeply rooted in the views of students and their social environment.

The imbalance in student numbers between the IPA and Social Science (IPS) streams has structural impacts on teachers' workloads. IPA teachers tend to face heavier workloads due to teaching more classes, while IPS teachers, who handle fewer classes, often have to teach across different grade levels to meet teaching hour requirements. However, the school has implemented adjustment policies by proportionally distributing teaching assignments and staffing, thus mitigating the imbalance effectively.

From the students' social relations perspective, the numerical imbalance does not create significant conflicts between streams. However, the difference in student numbers shapes distinct character patterns. IPA students tend to exhibit stronger academic orientation and competitiveness, whereas IPS students are more socially active and participative in organizational activities. Despite these differences, social relationships among students remain well-maintained, with open cross-stream collaboration.

These findings have several important implications. For schools, efforts are needed to build a more balanced narrative regarding stream choices, emphasizing that each stream holds strategic value and equal contribution. Additionally, improvements in facilities and learning support for the IPS stream require attention to prevent resource gaps from reinforcing existing stereotypes.

Meanwhile, teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to choose streams based on personal interests and potentials rather than external pressures or common perceptions. Teachers can also encourage more cross-stream activities that allow students to interact and collaborate, thereby strengthening social integration within the school environment.

For future researchers, this study opens broader exploration opportunities into the issue of imbalance in the stream selection system. Further research is recommended to directly examine students' perspectives and consider other influencing factors such as family background, economic conditions, local culture, and academic achievements as variables affecting students' academic decision-making.

Declarations

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