



Students' perceptions of graduate profile and curriculum alignment in English education

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum alignment plays a crucial role in ensuring that learning outcomes are effectively achieved in higher education. This study aims to examine students' perceptions and understanding of the graduate profile within the framework of curriculum alignment in an English Education program. The research is conducted to evaluate whether students not only perceive the curriculum as relevant but also fully understand the intended graduate competencies. A quantitative approach, supported by open-ended responses, was employed to analyze students' perceptions and level of understanding. The findings reveal that the majority of students hold positive perceptions of the graduate profile, while their understanding remains relatively low. This indicates a gap between students' affective perceptions and their cognitive comprehension of curriculum objectives. In addition, students are more familiar with the role of a novice teacher than with those of a researcher and an edupreneur, reflecting an imbalance in the emphasis on competencies. These findings suggest that although the curriculum is perceived as relevant, its intended outcomes are not fully internalized.

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ABSTRAK

Keselaran kurikulum memegang peranan penting dalam memastikan capaian pembelajaran dapat terwujud secara efektif di pendidikan tinggi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi dan pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap profil lulusan dalam kerangka keselaran kurikulum pada Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kebutuhan untuk mengevaluasi apakah mahasiswa tidak hanya memandang kurikulum sebagai sesuatu yang relevan, tetapi juga benar-benar memahami kompetensi lulusan yang ditargetkan. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dengan dukungan respons terbuka untuk menganalisis persepsi serta tingkat pemahaman mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa memiliki persepsi positif terhadap profil lulusan, namun tingkat pemahaman mereka masih tergolong rendah. Temuan ini mengindikasikan adanya kesenjangan antara persepsi afektif dan pemahaman kognitif mahasiswa terhadap tujuan kurikulum. Selain itu, mahasiswa cenderung lebih memahami peran sebagai guru pemula dibandingkan dengan peran sebagai peneliti dan edupreneur, yang mencerminkan ketidakseimbangan dalam penekanan kompetensi. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kurikulum dipersepsikan relevan, capaian yang ditargetkan belum sepenuhnya terinternalisasi.

Kata Kunci: keselaran kurikulum; pendidikan berbasis capaian; persepsi mahasiswa; profil lulusan

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a critical role in preparing graduates to meet the evolving demands of the global workforce. In the context of rapid technological advancement and shifting labor market expectations, universities are increasingly required to equip students with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies that support professional success and employability (Nyagope, 2025). This responsibility has become more urgent in the era of future work, where graduates are expected to demonstrate adaptability, critical thinking, and work readiness. Consequently, higher education institutions are not only expected to transmit knowledge but also to ensure that students develop competencies aligned with real-world professional requirements (Pandya et al., 2023). Curriculum design and learning processes must be aligned with labor market expectations and intended graduate outcomes to address these demands. Previous studies have shown that curriculum alignment significantly contributes to graduates' professional readiness and employability (Sophia & Onen, 2024).

In the 21st century, this alignment also includes the development of higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving, which are essential for success in the digital era (Mahmud & Wong, 2022). One widely adopted approach to achieve this alignment is Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which emphasizes clearly defined learning outcomes and graduate attributes. The implementation of OBE has been associated with efforts to improve the alignment between curriculum goals and expected graduate competencies (Ali & Jamin, 2025; Li & Rohayati, 2024). Supported by the principle of constructive alignment by Biggs and Tang in "*Teaching for quality learning at university (4th ed.)*" where learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments are systematically integrated. In the Indonesian context, similar principles are reflected in the implementation of the Kualifikasi Kerja Nasional Indonesia (KKNI), which requires higher education institutions to design curricula aligned with academic, professional, and societal needs (see: <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/163703/permendikbud-no-3-tahun-2020>).

Within this framework, the graduate profile serves as a central reference that defines expected competencies and professional roles. However, the effectiveness of curriculum implementation is determined not only by curriculum design but also by how well students understand and enact it. When students lack awareness of the graduate profile, misalignment may occur between intended learning outcomes and actual learning experiences. From the perspective of educational psychology, students' perception and understanding are essential factors influencing how they interpret and engage with the curriculum. Perception, as a cognitive process involving interpretation and meaning-making, shapes students' responses to academic expectations, consistent with Robbins and Judge's "*Organizational Behavior*". Previous studies indicate that students' perceptions are associated with academic engagement and interpretation of curriculum expectations (Gustiani & Kardena, 2024; Li et al., 2022), while a clear understanding of graduate competencies supports better preparation for professional development (Dalangin, 2023; Dirgantara et al., 2025).

Conversely, limited understanding may lead to superficial learning and misinterpretation of expected competencies, resulting in a gap between curriculum design and learning outcomes. At the local level, the English Education Study Program at Bengkulu University has established a graduate profile consisting of three main roles: novice teacher, novice

researcher, and edupreneur. These roles are intended to equip students with teaching competence, research skills, and entrepreneurial abilities. Ideally, students should understand and internalize these roles as a foundation for their academic and professional development. However, preliminary observations indicate that many students are not fully aware of the graduate profile and tend to associate their future careers primarily with teaching, while other roles receive less attention. This condition suggests a potential misalignment between curriculum expectations and students' understanding. Despite the recognized importance of graduate profiles in curriculum implementation, few studies have examined the relationship between students' perceptions and their understanding of these profiles in the Indonesian higher education context.

Previous studies have generally focused on individual dimensions of curriculum implementation rather than examining their interconnectedness. Studies have investigated students' perceptions of curriculum implementation and learning motivation, perceptions of Outcome-Based Education implementation, graduate attributes in relation to workplace readiness and employability, curriculum alignment and graduate employability, as well as broader issues of curriculum development and quality improvement (Dalangin, 2023; Gustiani & Kardena, 2024; Handayani et al., 2024; Nuraini et al., 2023; Sophia & Onen, 2024). Although these studies provide valuable insights into curriculum implementation, graduate development, and employability outcomes, previous research has predominantly examined students' perceptions, understanding of competencies, curriculum development, or curriculum outcomes as separate constructs.

Consequently, limited attention has been paid to how students' perceptions and understanding interact to shape curriculum alignment and the internalization of graduate profiles. This indicates a clear research gap regarding the integration of perception, understanding, and curriculum expectations in the implementation of higher education curricula. Based on the identified gap, several questions remain regarding the implementation of graduate profiles within curriculum alignment. In particular, it is important to understand how students perceive the graduate profile, how well they understand the intended graduate competencies, and whether a gap exists between their understanding and curriculum expectations.

Therefore, this study was conducted to determine students' perceptions of the graduate profile in the English Language Education Study Program at the University of Bengkulu, to determine students' understanding of the graduate profile and expected competencies, and to determine the gap between curriculum expectations and students' understanding of the graduate profile. This study offers a scientific novelty by integrating students' perceptions and their levels of understanding to examine curriculum alignment, an approach rarely explored in previous studies. Furthermore, this study incorporates students' open-ended responses to provide deeper insights into how graduate profiles are interpreted in practice. The findings are expected to contribute to improving curriculum implementation, strengthening the integration of graduate profiles into teaching and learning practices, and supporting institutional efforts to enhance graduate quality and employability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' Perception in Higher Education

Students' perception refers to the process through which learners interpret and give meaning to their educational experiences. Perception involves cognitive, affective, and interpretative processes that influence how individuals respond to particular phenomena, as described by Robbins and Judge in "*Organizational Behavior*." In higher education, students' perceptions play a crucial role in shaping their engagement, motivation, and responses to curriculum implementation. Previous studies indicate that students' perception significantly influences their academic behavior and learning outcomes. Student satisfaction with the learning environment positively affects student engagement and is moderately associated with learning outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2025). The study also emphasized that alignment in curriculum, learning materials, and institutional support contributes to students' engagement in learning.

Positive perceptions of curriculum design and learning activities enhance students' engagement and participation in the learning process, whereas unclear or negative perceptions may lead to confusion and reduced academic motivation. Moreover, perception is closely related to students' awareness of academic expectations, including learning outcomes and graduate competencies. When students perceive the curriculum as coherent and purposeful, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with course content, thereby facilitating the internalization of intended graduate attributes. Therefore, understanding students' perception is essential for evaluating how effectively a curriculum is communicated and implemented, as it serves as the affective gateway through which students interpret and respond to curriculum expectations.

Students' Understanding of Graduate Attributes

Understanding refers to the extent to which students can comprehend, interpret, and internalize the competencies and expectations embedded in a curriculum. Understanding is considered a higher-order cognitive process that goes beyond memorization and involves interpreting, explaining, classifying, and applying knowledge in different contexts, in line with Anderson and Krathwohl in "*A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*". In higher education, students' understanding of graduate attributes is essential to achieving meaningful learning outcomes, as these attributes represent the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected to be developed throughout their studies.

When students clearly understand these attributes, they are more likely to align their learning strategies with curriculum goals and engage in deeper learning processes. A strong understanding of graduate attributes helps students connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications and reflect on their learning progress and areas for improvement. Conversely, a limited understanding may lead to surface-level learning, in which students focus primarily on completing academic tasks without fully grasping their significance. Moreover, understanding is closely related to students' readiness for professional life, as students who are aware of their expected competencies tend to be better prepared to face

workplace challenges and transfer knowledge and skills into real-world contexts. Therefore, enhancing students' understanding of graduate attributes is an important factor in improving both academic and professional outcomes.

This perspective is supported by the importance of understanding employability-related competencies in enhancing students' professional preparation and career readiness (Okolie et al., 2020). Similarly, a multi-university study in Australia found that the explicit integration and communication of graduate attributes resulted in graduates with stronger professional identities and better ability to articulate their competencies to employers (Bridgstock et al., 2019). Collectively, these findings indicate that understanding graduate attributes is not merely a supplementary concern but a fundamental component of curriculum effectiveness, bridging the gap between curriculum design and students' learning experiences.

Outcome-Based Education and Graduate Profile

According to Spady in "*Outcome-based education: Critical issues and answers*" OBE is an educational approach that emphasizes achieving clearly defined learning outcomes. Within this framework, all components of the educational process are systematically aligned to ensure that students achieve the intended competencies at the end of their academic program. OBE shifts the focus from teaching-centered to learning-centered approaches by prioritizing what students can demonstrate upon completing their studies rather than merely emphasizing instructional delivery. Therefore, higher education institutions are required to clearly formulate learning outcomes, design appropriate learning activities, and implement assessment methods that accurately measure students' achievement of competencies. Within the OBE framework, the graduate profile serves as the foundation for curriculum development by defining the competencies and professional characteristics expected of graduates.

Graduate profiles generally include professional competence, critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration, and ethical values. Consequently, curriculum components such as teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessment practices should consistently support the development of these competencies throughout the learning process. However, the effectiveness of OBE depends not only on curriculum design but also on how well intended outcomes are communicated and understood by students. Even a well-designed curriculum may fail to achieve its objectives if students are not fully aware of the graduate profile and its expected competencies. For this reason, continuous reinforcement and the integration of graduate attributes into teaching and learning practices are essential for supporting meaningful curriculum implementation and ensuring that students can connect their academic experiences to intended graduate outcomes.

Recent studies have demonstrated that effective OBE implementation depends on the clarity and integration of graduate outcomes within curriculum and instructional practices. Research findings suggest that clearly articulated learning outcomes can enhance curriculum coherence and support the development of more defined graduate competency profiles (Ali & Jamin, 2025). In line with this, pedagogical implementation, particularly through project-based learning and formative assessment, plays a strategic role in translating intended learning outcomes into actual graduate competencies (Li & Rohayati, 2024). In the

Indonesian context, integrating graduate profiles into daily instructional practices has been reported to be more effective at fostering creative and work-ready graduates (Dirgantara et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings indicate that graduate profiles should function not only as curricular documents but also as active pedagogical instruments that continuously guide students' learning toward intended outcomes throughout their academic journey.

Constructive Alignment in Curriculum Implementation

According to Biggs & Tang in "*Teaching for Quality Learning at University (4th ed.)*", the concept of constructive alignment provides a theoretical framework for ensuring coherence in curriculum design. It emphasizes the alignment between intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods. This approach is based on the assumption that learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences. Therefore, teaching strategies should be designed to facilitate this process, while assessment methods should accurately measure the achievement of learning outcomes. When alignment is achieved, students are more likely to engage in deep learning and develop the intended competencies.

Recent empirical studies have further supported this relationship by showing that constructive alignment contributes significantly to deep learning engagement and competency development. Constructive alignment has been reported to be associated with deeper learning approaches and more meaningful learning experiences among university students (Roßnagel et al., 2021). Different elements of constructive alignment played an important role in guiding student learning, particularly through teaching and assessment practices that required active student involvement and encouraged deeper approaches to learning (Hailikari et al., 2022).

In relation to graduate profiles, constructive alignment ensures that all curriculum components consistently support the development of expected graduate attributes. However, misalignment may occur when there is a disconnect between curriculum design and implementation. This may happen when learning outcomes are not clearly communicated, teaching activities are not aligned with objectives, or assessment methods do not accurately reflect expected competencies. Such misalignment can lead to confusion among students and reduce the effectiveness of the curriculum. As a result, students may complete courses without fully understanding the purpose or relevance of their learning experiences to the graduate profile. Therefore, maintaining alignment requires continuous evaluation and improvement of both curriculum design and teaching practices.

Curriculum Alignment and Employability

Curriculum alignment refers to the extent to which curriculum components align with expected learning outcomes and labor market demands. In higher education, alignment is closely related to graduates' employability and professional readiness. Well-aligned curricula contribute to the development of relevant skills and competencies required in the workforce. When curriculum design reflects real-world needs, students are more likely to acquire practical knowledge and transferable skills. Conversely, poor alignment may result in a mismatch between graduates' competencies and labor market expectations. Furthermore,

students' awareness and understanding of curriculum goals play a significant role in achieving alignment. Even when a curriculum is well-designed, its effectiveness may be limited if students do not fully understand its intended outcomes. Therefore, improving curriculum alignment requires both strong structural design and effective communication with students.

The relationship between curriculum alignment and graduate employability has been extensively examined in recent scholarship, with converging evidence highlighting the importance of coherent curriculum design in preparing students for professional entry. A systematic review of graduate employability interventions in higher education concluded that programs with clearly articulated, structurally aligned curricula produce graduates with greater workforce readiness and more favorable employer evaluations (Barachino et al., 2025). Their findings further indicated that employability outcomes improve when alignment extends beyond individual courses to include institutional program strategies and authentic assessment tasks that reflect real-world professional contexts. Similarly, a significant positive relationship between curriculum alignment and graduates' professional preparedness at Makerere University has been identified, particularly highlighting the importance of integrating labor market feedback into curriculum revision (Sophia & Onen, 2024).

Interdisciplinary curriculum alignment, where multiple disciplines are coordinated around shared graduate outcomes, enhances both employability prospects and the long-term relevance of higher education programs (Akhtar et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that curriculum alignment is not merely an internal academic concern but a strategic institutional priority with direct implications for graduates' professional trajectories. Importantly, employability is most effectively developed not through isolated career-preparation activities but through the systematic integration of professional competencies across the curriculum, reinforced by consistent communication of graduate attributes throughout students' academic journey.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to analyze students' perceptions of the graduate profile, examine their level of understanding, and identify the gap between curriculum expectations and students' understanding. This design focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data using statistical methods, in line with Creswell in "Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (4th ed.).

Population and Sample

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Bengkulu University, and involved students in the English Education Study Program. The population consisted of 149 undergraduate students from the 2017 and 2018 academic years. This study employed total sampling, including all students who met the criteria of having taken several

core courses and not yet graduated as of September 2021. The sample included students from five classes: 19 students from Class A, 26 from Class B, and 7 from Class C of the 2017 cohort, as well as 33 students from Class A and 30 from Class B of the 2018 cohort. Due to nonresponse, the final dataset comprised 115 students who completed the questionnaire.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure three main variables: students' perceptions, students' understanding, and curriculum alignment. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items, combining Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions. The Likert scale, consisting of four response options, was used to assess students' perceptions and level of understanding. At the same time, the open-ended items were included to capture students' reasons and provide additional qualitative insights. The instrument was developed based on relevant theoretical frameworks on perception and graduate attributes and was validated through expert judgment. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to English Education students from the 2017 and 2018 cohorts. The collected data were then organized and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentage distributions, to address the research objectives.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was reviewed and evaluated through expert judgment by a lecturer in the English Education Study Program to ensure content validity. This process aimed to ensure that each item accurately represented the constructs being measured and was aligned with the research objectives. In addition, reliability testing was conducted to assess the instrument's internal consistency. The reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. A coefficient value above 0.70 indicates that the instrument has acceptable reliability and can be used for data collection. The inclusion of open-ended questions also contributed to the trustworthiness of the data by enabling triangulation and supporting the interpretation of quantitative results.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed descriptively using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS 25.0. Descriptive statistics, including percentages and mean scores, were used to describe students' perceptions and level of understanding regarding the graduate profile. Percentage distributions were used to assess response tendencies for each questionnaire item, while mean scores were interpreted using predetermined scale intervals to classify students' perceptions as positive or negative. In addition, the findings on students' perceptions and understanding were compared descriptively to identify the gap between curriculum expectations and students' awareness of the intended graduate competencies. Responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed thematically by grouping similar responses into recurring themes related to students' perceptions and understanding of the graduate profile. The results were then interpreted to examine the extent of curriculum alignment and potential misalignment in curriculum implementation.

Trustworthiness

The instrument's validity was established through expert judgment by a lecturer in the English Education Study Program, ensuring that the questionnaire items were relevant and aligned with the research objectives. To enhance the reliability of the data, several open-ended questions were included to confirm and support students' responses, allowing for more accurate interpretation of their perceptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in response to the three research questions: students' perceptions, level of understanding, and the gap between curriculum expectations and students' understanding. The data were collected from 115 students using a structured questionnaire.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Perceptions of the Graduate Profile

No	Indicator	Positive (%)	Negative (%)
1.	Awareness of vision and mission	64.00	36.00
2.	Understanding of the graduate profile	39.15	60.85
3.	Knowledge of graduate roles	62.02	37.98
4.	Interest in graduate profiles	67.50	32.50
5.	Preference for supporting courses	90.98	9.02
6.	Perceived course relevance	90.26	9.74
7.	Perceived profile compatibility	78.50	21.50
Average		70.34	29.62

Source: Research Result

Table 1 presents a summary of students' perceptions of the graduate profile across seven indicators: awareness of the vision and mission, understanding of the graduate profile, knowledge of graduate roles, interest in graduate profiles, preference for supporting courses, perceived course relevance, and perceived profile compatibility. The table shows the distribution of positive and negative responses for each indicator.

Students' Perception of the Graduate Profile

As shown in Table 1, 70.34% of students have positive perceptions, while 29.62% have negative perceptions. This indicates that the majority of students perceive the graduate profile as relevant and beneficial for their academic experience. In terms of specific indicators, the highest positive responses are observed in students' preference for supporting courses (90.98%) and perceived course relevance (90.26%). Furthermore, 78.50% of students report that the graduate profile is compatible with their learning experience. These findings suggest that students generally respond positively to curriculum-related components associated with the graduate profile. However, relatively lower positive responses are found in students' awareness of the vision and mission (64.00%) and their understanding of

graduate roles (62.02%). This indicates that although students generally demonstrate positive perceptions, their awareness of certain conceptual aspects remains at a moderate level.

Students' Level of Understanding of the Graduate Profile

Despite the overall positive perception, the findings reveal that students' level of understanding of the graduate profile remains limited. Only 39.15% of students demonstrate adequate understanding, while 60.85% indicate insufficient comprehension. In contrast, students show a relatively better understanding of specific graduate roles, such as novice teacher, novice researcher, and edupreneur, with 62.02% of responses being positive. This suggests that students are more familiar with individual components of the graduate profile rather than the concept as a whole.

Gap between Curriculum Expectations and Students' Understanding

The findings further indicate a gap between curriculum expectations and students' actual understanding of the graduate profile. This gap is reflected in the discrepancy between students' high level of agreement with curriculum-related aspects, such as course relevance (90.26%) and supporting courses (90.98%), and their low level of conceptual understanding (39.15%). Additionally, students tend to associate the graduate profile primarily with teaching roles, while other roles, such as researcher and edupreneur, receive less attention. This imbalance suggests that students' awareness of the intended learning outcomes is not evenly distributed.

Table 2. Summary of Qualitative Insights from Open-Ended Responses

Theme	Representative Response	Interpretation
Teacher role dominance	<i>"The courses support my goal to become a professional teacher."</i>	Students associate graduate profiles mainly with teaching competencies
Research competency challenges	<i>"Research activities are difficult because they require critical thinking."</i>	Research competencies are perceived as academically demanding.
Limited edupreneur exposure	<i>"The courses do not really support becoming an edupreneur."</i>	Entrepreneurial competencies are not yet strongly emphasized

Source: Research Result

Table 2 presents three main themes derived from students' open-ended responses: dominance of the teacher role, challenges in research competency, and limited exposure to edupreneurship. These themes summarize how students perceive and interpret the graduate profile based on their learning experiences.

Discussion

Students' Positive Perceptions toward Curriculum Relevance

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap between students' positive perceptions and their level of understanding of the graduate profile. Although most students demonstrated favorable attitudes toward the curriculum, their understanding of the intended graduate competencies remained relatively limited. Similar findings have been reported, indicating that students often recognize the relevance of the curriculum but have difficulty explaining specific graduate competencies associated with their academic programs (Giovani et al., 2022; Sophia & Onen, 2024).

From the perspective of educational psychology by Anderson & Krathwohl in "*A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*" perception represents affective responses, whereas understanding reflects deeper cognitive processing. These two dimensions are conceptually different and do not automatically develop simultaneously. In the present study, the contrast between the 70.34% positive perception rate and the 39.15% adequate understanding rate demonstrates that students may appreciate the curriculum at a surface level without fully internalizing the intended graduate profile. This condition suggests that students' positive responses may be influenced more by general satisfaction with courses and institutional trust than by a comprehensive understanding of curriculum goals.

Limited Understanding of Graduate Profiles

The findings indicate that students' understanding of the graduate profile is closely related to the extent to which graduate competencies are communicated explicitly throughout the learning process. Previous studies have shown that students tend to develop only partial understandings of learning outcomes when curriculum goals are communicated implicitly rather than explicitly (Nguyen et al., 2025). Students' understanding of competencies is strongly influenced by the alignment between learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment practices (Hailikari et al., 2022; Kushari & Septiadi, 2022). When learning outcomes are not consistently reinforced through classroom instruction and assessment, students may struggle to connect course content with broader curriculum objectives. As a result, students may recognize curriculum relevance at a surface level without fully internalizing the intended competencies. This condition may lead to passive acceptance rather than active engagement with expected learning outcomes.

Curriculum Misalignment and Communication Issues

This issue can be further explained through the concept of constructive alignment, which emphasizes coherence among intended learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment practices. In the context of the present study, students demonstrated greater awareness of the novice teacher role than of the researcher and edupreneur roles, suggesting that certain competencies were more consistently emphasized in classroom practices. This finding indicates that uneven implementation of learning outcomes may result in imbalanced

competency development among students (Mursid et al., 2022). However, while previous studies primarily attribute this issue to inconsistencies in curriculum implementation, the present study suggests that the problem may also stem from differences in how specific competencies are communicated and reinforced across courses. The findings also reflect a broader challenge in implementing OBE.

Although students generally perceived the courses as relevant and supportive of their academic development, many were still unable to articulate the graduate profile's overall purpose and structure clearly. This suggests that OBE implementation may remain procedural and does not always translate into students' meaningful understanding of learning outcomes (Putri et al., 2021). Furthermore, the effectiveness of OBE is highly dependent on how clearly learning outcomes are communicated and reinforced during the teaching and learning process (Pai & Upadhyaya, 2021). However, while previous studies focus on structural and instructional aspects, the present study highlights an additional dimension, namely the gap between students' positive perceptions and their actual conceptual understanding of the curriculum. Several factors may contribute to this condition.

First, communication about the graduate profile may not be sufficiently explicit in classroom instruction, hindering students' understanding of competency targets (Handayani et al., 2024). Second, teaching practices may place greater emphasis on content delivery than on competency development and reflective learning, potentially limiting the achievement of intended outcomes (Syamsudin & Maulana, 2023). Third, assessment practices may not consistently align with the intended graduate competencies, thereby reducing students' awareness of the relevance of the graduate profile to their academic performance and future careers. Misalignment between assessment and intended outcomes has been shown to reduce the effectiveness of learning and students' engagement in meaningful learning processes (Putri et al., 2021). These findings indicate that curriculum misalignment is influenced by the interaction between communication, pedagogy, and assessment rather than by a single factor.

The relatively low level of awareness regarding the program's vision and mission further supports the argument that foundational curriculum communication has not yet been fully integrated into students' academic experiences. Students' understanding of graduate competencies plays a crucial role in shaping their academic engagement and readiness for future careers. In contrast, a clearer articulation of graduate attributes is essential for improving professional preparedness (Jaya et al., 2025). While previous studies tend to assume that such awareness can be developed through curriculum design alone, the present study suggests that explicit and continuous communication within classroom practices plays a more decisive role in fostering students' understanding. However, the present study extends previous research by demonstrating that positive perceptions alone are insufficient to ensure meaningful curriculum alignment. Students may perceive the curriculum as relevant while still lacking a clear understanding of its intended outcomes, indicating a disconnect between perceived relevance and actual learning alignment that has received limited attention in previous OBE research (Mursid et al., 2022).

Therefore, improving curriculum alignment requires more than the formal formulation of learning outcomes. It also necessitates systematic efforts to enhance students' understanding of the graduate profile through explicit communication and consistent integration across teaching and assessment practices. Effective OBE implementation requires alignment not only at the curriculum level but also in classroom practices, including assessment design and instructional strategies (Putri et al., 2021). Strengthening alignment between learning outcomes and assessment is essential for improving overall learning effectiveness (Handayani et al., 2024). Building on these perspectives, the present study argues that alignment should also be viewed as a communicative process in which students are actively guided to internalize and reflect on intended competencies, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum alignment in OBE contexts.

Insights from Open-Ended Responses

The open-ended responses provide additional insights into students' perceptions and understanding of the graduate profile. Most students demonstrated greater familiarity with the novice teacher profile than with the roles of novice researcher and edupreneur. Several students stated that teaching-oriented courses, such as Micro Teaching and Course Design, helped them understand their future professional role as teachers. One participant explained that the English Education program had produced "*many competent young teachers*," while another student stated that the courses supported their goal of becoming a professional teacher. These responses indicate that teaching-related competencies are more explicitly emphasized throughout the learning process, leading students to associate the graduate profile primarily with teaching roles.

In contrast, students showed more diverse and less confident responses toward the novice researcher profile. Some participants perceived research activities as difficult because they require critical thinking and extensive reading. One student mentioned that research was challenging due to limited critical thinking ability, while another believed that researchers are "*less appreciated in Indonesia*". These findings suggest that although research-related courses are available, students may still perceive research competencies as academically demanding and less professionally attractive. This condition may contribute to students' limited understanding and engagement with the researcher role. Similar patterns were also identified in students' responses toward the edupreneur profile.

While several students recognized that English-teaching skills could be leveraged into business opportunities, such as private courses or educational services, others argued that the existing courses did not sufficiently support entrepreneurial competencies. This finding suggests that the integration of edupreneurship into the curriculum may not yet be fully evident to students. Overall, the open-ended responses support the quantitative findings, indicating that students generally hold positive perceptions of the curriculum; however, their understanding of the broader graduate profile remains limited and uneven. Table 2 presents a synthesis of the key themes derived from students' responses regarding their understanding of the graduate profile within the curriculum. Each theme reflects students' perceptions of how the curriculum aligns with the intended competencies, a topic discussed

in the outcome-based education literature regarding the alignment among learning outcomes, curriculum design, and graduate attributes (Handayani et al., 2024; Jaya et al., 2025).

The first theme, teacher role dominance, indicates that students predominantly associate the graduate profile with teaching-related competencies. This finding suggests that the curriculum is largely perceived as oriented toward preparing students for professional teaching roles. Similar tendencies have been reported in recent studies, in which higher education curricula are often understood to emphasize program-specific competencies and learning outcomes within an outcome-based framework (Jaya et al., 2025; Mufanti et al., 2024). However, other discussions highlight the importance of incorporating broader graduate attributes beyond specific professional roles. Therefore, the dominance of teaching-oriented perceptions may indicate a potential partial misalignment between the intended comprehensive graduate profile and students' actual understanding.

The second theme, research competency challenges, reveals that students perceive research activities as cognitively demanding and difficult to engage with. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that higher-order thinking skills, including critical thinking, remain challenging for students to develop and require appropriate instructional support and learning strategies (Irdalisa et al., 2024; Kusumaningtyas et al., 2024). In contrast, other studies suggest that structured, student-centered learning approaches, such as problem-based or inquiry-based models, may support the development of these competencies and improve student engagement. Therefore, this contrast suggests that while research competencies are formally included in the curriculum, their pedagogical implementation may not yet fully support optimal student engagement and skill development.

The third theme, limited exposure to edupreneurship, indicates that students perceive a lack of curricular support for developing entrepreneurial competencies. Entrepreneurial education has been found to contribute significantly to the development of entrepreneurial skills among higher education students, highlighting the important role of educational institutions in fostering entrepreneurial competencies through structured learning experiences and curriculum support (Saoula et al., 2023). However, this result diverges from the expectations of curriculum frameworks that emphasize graduate readiness for diverse career pathways, including entrepreneurship and innovation (Nuraini et al., 2023). This gap suggests that components of edupreneurship may not be sufficiently explicit or systematically embedded in the curriculum, resulting in limited student awareness and participation.

Overall, these findings suggest that while the curriculum appears aligned with the graduate profile at a conceptual level, there remains a gap between intended outcomes and students' perceived experiences. This misalignment highlights the need for more explicit integration, pedagogical support, and communication of diverse competencies within the curriculum to ensure that students fully understand and achieve the intended graduate attributes. However, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the data were collected from a single study program, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may not fully represent students' actual competencies or learning outcomes. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve multiple institutions and adopt mixed or longitudinal approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum alignment and graduate profile development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that although the majority of students hold positive perceptions of the graduate profile, their understanding remains relatively low. This discrepancy indicates a gap between students' affective responses and their cognitive comprehension of the graduate profile. The findings suggest that positive perception alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful engagement with curriculum objectives, as students may recognize the curriculum's relevance without fully understanding its structure and intended outcomes. The findings further indicate that effective curriculum implementation requires not only alignment in curriculum design but also clear communication and integration of graduate profiles into teaching and learning practices. The stronger emphasis on teaching-related competencies compared to researcher and edupreneur roles suggests that students' understanding of the graduate profile remains uneven. This condition may limit students' ability to fully align their learning experiences with the intended graduate competencies and future professional preparation.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated analysis of students' perceptions and understanding, and the gap between curriculum expectations and students' awareness, within the framework of curriculum alignment. The findings provide empirical evidence that misalignment may occur not only in curriculum design but also in limited student understanding of graduate competencies. In terms of practical implications, higher education institutions need to strengthen the communication and integration of graduate profiles into teaching and learning processes. This can be achieved by explicitly linking course content, learning activities, and assessments to the graduate profile, and by continuously reinforcing these concepts throughout the academic journey. Lecturers also play a crucial role in ensuring that students understand the purpose and relevance of the competencies they are expected to achieve. Furthermore, future research is recommended to explore this issue using different research designs, such as qualitative or mixed-methods approaches, to gain deeper insights into students' experiences and perspectives. Expanding the study to different study programs or institutions may also provide a broader understanding of curriculum alignment in higher education.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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