

Research Article

Publicity as a Policy Instrument: Analyzing Communication Strategies and Public Perception of Aceh's Teacher Capacity Enhancement Policy

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the application of the principle of publicity in the education policy of the Aceh Provincial Government, with a particular focus on the teacher quality improvement program in rural areas. The principle of publicity refers to openness and transparency in the dissemination of policy information to the public, serving as a critical element in promoting participation and accountability. This study aims to evaluate the extent to which policy communication and publication processes are conducted transparently, and how these processes influence public understanding and engagement. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through policy document analysis, content review of online and print media, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including education department officials, school principals, teachers, and representatives of civil society. The findings reveal that publicity plays a strategic role in shaping public perception of education policies, particularly in enhancing the legitimacy and trust of the community toward teacher capacity-building programs. However, the study also identifies a major challenge: limited access to information in rural areas due to inadequate digital infrastructure. This digital divide hinders equitable access to policy information and restricts meaningful public participation in the policy process. These findings underscore the necessity of developing communication strategies that go beyond digital media, incorporating local approaches such as community forums, local radio broadcasts, and engagement with community leaders. In doing so, the principle of publicity can be implemented more inclusively and effectively to support equitable and transformative education development in Aceh Province.

Keywords: Publicity; Education Policy; Teacher Quality; Rural Areas; Information Access

1. INTRODUCTION

The principle of publicity, which refers to openness and transparency in the dissemination of policies to the public, is a crucial element in this process (Reads, 2024). Effective policy communication enables citizens to understand the objectives, mechanisms, and benefits of government program (Wang & Que, 2025). Beyond that, publicity functions as an instrument of accountability and public participation. As emphasized (Guo & Guo, 2024), policy publicity underscores essential elements that must be clearly understood. This allows the public to actively engage in both the implementation and evaluation of policy measures.

Education policy is one of the main pillars in the development of human resources (Howerter et al., 2024), particularly in the context of ensuring equitable quality and access to education in remote areas (Jabar & Fauzi, 2025). In the Province of Aceh, efforts to enhance teacher quality have become a priority agenda aimed at strengthening educational capacity in rural regions, which have long faced serious challenges—ranging from inadequate infrastructure and limited human resources to unequal quality of educational services. In practice, the success of education policies is not solely determined by the substance of the programs, but also by the extent to which these policies are understood, accepted, and supported by the public (Queen Sinha, 2024).

The Government of Aceh Province has exhibited a strong and consistent commitment to improving the overall quality of education, with a particular focus on addressing disparities in rural and remote areas. This commitment is operationalized through a series of strategic public policies aimed at strengthening the professional capacity of educators and enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process across diverse regional contexts. One of the flagship initiatives is the *Remote Area Teacher Certification Program* (Sertifikasi Guru Daerah Terpencil/SGDT), which is implemented in

collaboration with the Aceh Educational Quality Assurance Agency (LPMP Aceh) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek). This program provides targeted professional development and formal certification for teachers working in geographically isolated areas, thereby enabling them to improve instructional quality and receive due professional recognition. In parallel, the provincial government has introduced a *School-Based Community Training* model that leverages peer learning within school clusters. This initiative focuses on enhancing pedagogical competence and digital literacy through collaborative, in-situ training mechanisms. It empowers teachers to engage in continuous learning within their immediate professional environment, fostering a culture of mutual support and innovation in classroom practices. Moreover, the Aceh Government has forged strategic partnerships with local Teacher Education Institutions (LPTK), notably with Syiah Kuala University. These collaborations facilitate a range of programs such as microteaching workshops, Professional Teacher Education (Pendidikan Profesi Guru/PPG), and continuous professional development sessions. These efforts aim to ensure that teacher training is not only accessible but also contextually relevant to the specific challenges faced in the region. Collectively, these policies and initiatives reflect a broader effort by the Aceh Provincial Government to build an inclusive, adaptive, and responsive educational ecosystem. By prioritizing the professionalization of educators and fostering institutional collaborations, the government seeks to overcome structural barriers in education and advance equitable learning opportunities for all, particularly those in marginalized and hard-to-reach areas.

Nevertheless, the Province of Aceh continues to face significant challenges, particularly in terms of disparities in access to information between urban and rural areas. The heavy reliance on digital media as the primary channel for disseminating public policy poses the risk of informational exclusion for segments of the population lacking adequate connectivity infrastructure. This condition raises concerns about the effectiveness of the government's communication strategies, especially considering that rural and remote communities are the primary targets of various strategic programs, including teacher quality improvement initiatives. Empirical evidence highlights this issue, with data indicating a persistent and significant disparity that has yet to be fully addressed.

Table 1. Comparison of the Number and Quality of Teachers in Urban and Rural Areas

Aspects	Urban Areas	Rural Areas
Number of Teachers	Higher and more evenly distributed	Limited, frequent shortages
Educational Qualification	Majority hold a bachelor's degree or higher	Many do not meet the standard qualifications
Professional Certification	Higher proportion of certified teachers	Many remain uncertified
Access to Training	Easy access to training and workshops	Limited access to training opportunities
Placement Stability	Relatively stable	High rotation rate is common
Incentives and Allowances	More attractive compensation packages	Inadequate or less competitive

Source: Analysis based on data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and various relevant studies, 2023.

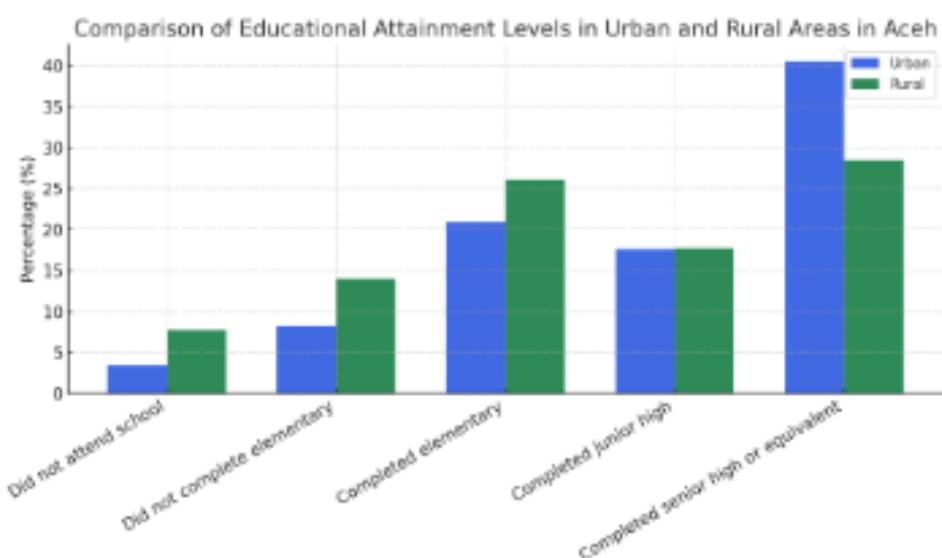


Figure 1. Highest Educational Attainment of the Population Aged 15 Years and Over by Region
Source: Aceh Provincial Education Office, March 2023

This data highlights the importance of effective and inclusive policy communication strategies, particularly in teacher quality improvement programs in rural areas. Limited access to information and educational infrastructure in remote regions can hinder community participation and program success. Therefore, the implementation of the principle of publicity in education policy must be adapted to local conditions, ensuring that policy information is accessible to all segments of society, including those in areas with limited digital access.

Previous studies on education policy communication have generally focused on message effectiveness, media usage, or public perception of policies (Nani, 2021). Research on education policy has also emphasized the urgency of educational reforms for national progress (Dwi et al., 2024). Governments, including local authorities, have produced numerous policies related to education, including evaluations of educational mechanisms and systems (Gumilao, 2025). In the current era, education policy is also increasingly expected to promote educational innovation (Najib & Maunah, 2022). However, few studies have specifically examined how the principle of publicity namely transparency and accessibility of public information is implemented within socially and geographically complex contexts such as the Province of Aceh. Moreover, most studies tend to overlook the structural gap between urban and rural areas in accessing policy information, even though this disparity critically influences the success of education programs targeted at remote communities. Therefore, examining the implementation of the publicity principle in education policy particularly in programs aimed at improving teacher quality in the Province of Aceh is an urgent and indispensable agenda. The complexity of the region's geographical conditions, along with its social and cultural heterogeneity, demands communication strategies that are not only technically effective but also contextually adaptive. By developing a comprehensive understanding of policy communication patterns and the accompanying public responses, this study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the formulation of more inclusive, participatory, and responsive policy communication approaches. Such efforts are essential as part of a strategic step toward ensuring the successful and equitable implementation of education policies across all regions of Aceh.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach by integrating literature review and field study methods (Flick, 2009). The literature review was conducted to examine theories and previous research findings related to education policy communication, the principle of publicity (public information transparency), and issues surrounding information access in diverse geographical areas. Reviewed literature includes scholarly journals, policy documents, and relevant research reports (Way, 2019). The field study was conducted in several regions of Aceh Province that represent varying social and geographical characteristics, such as urban and rural areas. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants (Hofmann & Malkmus, 2023), including education department officials, school principals, teachers, and community leaders. In addition, document analysis of local education policies and limited field observations were carried out. Data were analyzed thematically through a process of reduction, categorization, and interpretation of field findings in connection with the literature review (Albert & Csizér, 2022). To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and methods was employed, along with member checking with informants to verify the accuracy of the collected information (Turale, 2025).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Public Understanding of the Teacher Quality Improvement Program

One of the key indicators in assessing the effectiveness of public policies in the education sector is the extent to which the public understands the objectives, goals, and implementation of the programs being carried out in accordance with their targets (Dorji, 2022). In the context of the Aceh Government, the Teacher Quality Improvement Program is a strategic agenda aimed at strengthening the pedagogical and professional competencies of educators through training, certification, and continuous mentoring. However, the success of this program largely depends on the extent to which the public comprehends its essence and significance.

Findings from field research reveal notable variations in public understanding of the program between the primary target group (teachers) and the general public (parents, community leaders, and local stakeholders). Teachers, as the main implementers of the program, generally possess a relatively good understanding of its objectives, implementation mechanisms, and expected outcomes. The information they receive is disseminated through various official channels such as circular letters from the Education Office, departmental meetings, principals' forums, and digital communication groups among teachers. However, some teachers expressed concerns regarding delays in information dissemination, unclear

technical procedures, and inconsistent training schedules that disrupted school teaching processes.

Conversely, the general public demonstrates a more limited understanding. Most parents are not aware of the existence or content of the teacher quality improvement program in detail. The information they receive is generally informal, unevenly distributed, and often unofficial (Arya et al., 2023). Some respondents even perceive teacher training as a routine activity with no direct impact on improving their children's learning quality. This indicates a communication gap (Inobemhe et al., 2025). between the local government as the policy implementer and the public as its beneficiaries. Furthermore, this low level of public understanding is also due to the lack of inclusive and community-based communication strategies (Majekodunmi & Olajide-arise, 2025). Information about the program has not fully reached grassroots communities, especially in remote and inland areas of Aceh, which face limited access to information. Several principals and teachers in these regions admitted that they only learned the details of the program after receiving training invitations, without any prior adequate socialization process.

The impact of this condition is significant on the effectiveness of policy implementation. When teachers and school principals lack adequate understanding from the outset, they tend to be passive, less enthusiastic, or even skeptical about the programs being offered. The absence of a communication strategy that reaches remote areas further exacerbates the information gap between regions, creating disparities in teachers' readiness and participation in quality improvement programs. As a result, the policy's goal to achieve equitable education quality becomes difficult to attain. Moreover, the lack of early-stage participation weakens the sense of ownership toward the program, thereby reducing the long-term effectiveness of the policy interventions designed by the government.

The consequences of this limited understanding are clearly reflected in the low level of public participation and suboptimal support for the program. Some teachers reported encountering resistance from parents when they had to leave their classes to attend training sessions, as the parents did not understand the urgency of the program. On the other hand, teachers who felt unsupported also tended to show apathy toward the program, even questioning its sustainability and effectiveness. Nevertheless, there are positive indications that better understanding leads to stronger participation and support. In several regions such as Aceh Besar and Lhokseumawe, efforts to foster dialogue between schools, school committees, and the community have successfully raised public awareness about the importance of improving teacher quality. This highlights that participatory and contextual communication approaches are crucial for the successful implementation of public programs. Thus, the success of teacher quality improvement programs depends not only on the technical aspects of training, but also significantly on effective public communication strategies that are inclusive and adaptive to the socio-cultural conditions of Acehnese society.

3.2 Aceh Government's Communication Strategy for Public Program Dissemination

Policy publication is one of the fundamental aspects in the public policy cycle, particularly during the implementation phase (Smorgunov, 2022). The effectiveness of a program is significantly influenced by how communication strategies are executed by the government. In the context of the Teacher Quality Improvement Program implemented by the Aceh Government, the communication strategies employed still exhibit various dynamics and challenges in the field (Juliyan & Emperador-garnace, 2025). Based on field findings, the communication strategies applied by the Aceh Provincial Education Office and local city/regency governments tend to be top-down and focus on formal dissemination through bureaucratic channels, such as official circulars, internal memos, and school-based forums. While this approach is relatively effective in reaching teachers and school principals as direct implementers of the program, it has proven to be less effective in engaging the broader public particularly parents, community leaders, and non-governmental actors who could potentially serve as strategic partners in supporting the program's success.

In addition to official media, the government has also attempted to utilize digital channels such as the Education Office's website, social media platforms, and WhatsApp-based applications to disseminate information. However, these efforts remain suboptimal. The content delivered tends to be unidirectional and merely informative, lacking elements of persuasion or mechanisms for encouraging active public participation. Some teachers and school principals even reported that important announcements are often made abruptly, without sufficient contextual explanation. One of the key findings from the field study is the limited use of community-based and culturally grounded communication approaches. In several regions, such as Central Aceh, East Aceh, and more remote inland areas, program dissemination has not been adapted to the local socio-cultural contexts. Effective communication strategies in local settings must prioritize participatory dialogue and leverage local actors as communicators (Onwuka, 2025), including religious leaders, traditional figures, and community elders. The absence of these elements has led to a lack of grassroots public engagement and reduced the visibility and reception of government programs. From a message substance perspective, the information disseminated by the government often uses overly technocratic language, making it difficult for the general public to understand. This indicates

that aspects of message framing and simplification have not been prioritized in communication planning. In the digital era, government communication strategies are expected to simplify policy complexity into narratives that are relevant, emotionally engaging, and easily digestible by the public.

As a consequence of the overly technocratic nature of the message content, a gap emerges between the government and the public including teachers, who serve as key actors in the implementation of education policies. When policy messages fail to resonate with the everyday experiences of teachers or remain detached from local contexts, the likelihood of resistance or passive reception increases. This weakens program effectiveness, as emotional and participatory support from beneficiaries is not sufficiently cultivated. Therefore, it is essential for local governments to craft communication narratives that are not only technically accurate but also culturally sensitive, inclusive in language, and grounded in a human-centered approach. Such messaging will help ensure that policies are better received, understood, and owned by grassroots stakeholders.

Some regions demonstrate better communication practices, such as in Banda Aceh and Lhokseumawe, where local governments involve school committees and community forums in program outreach. Here, communication is conducted dialogically, explaining the importance of improving teacher quality for children's learning. This approach has resulted in higher levels of support from parents and increased school participation in ensuring the program's success. Overall, it can be concluded that the Aceh Government's communication strategy in promoting programs remains predominantly informational and administrative in nature. It has not yet fully transitioned into a dialogic and participatory public communication strategy. The dominant communication model still reflects the public information model, falling short of achieving the two-way symmetrical communication that is ideal in participatory democratic practices (Andrade et al., 2025). Looking ahead, there is a need to reformulate a more adaptive and inclusive public communication strategy both in terms of content, media, and delivery methods. The government should adopt a multi-channel, community-based, and participation-oriented communication approach to enhance public engagement and strengthen the legitimacy of educational programs in Aceh..

3.3. The role of publicity in building teachers' trust in local government

Publicity as part of public communication strategy plays a crucial role in shaping the perceptions and trust of policy actors (Permatasari, 2013), including teachers as the primary implementers of educational programs. In the context of implementing the Teacher Quality Improvement Program in Aceh, publicity holds strategic significance in strengthening the relationship between local government and teachers as policy partners. Publicity is not merely about disseminating information, but also about creating a positive image and legitimizing policies (Lubis et al., 2024). Field findings indicate that teachers tend to have greater trust in programs that are communicated openly, transparently, and consistently. In several districts/cities, when program publicity is conducted through various media such as direct meetings, official social media platforms, and local news coverage, teachers respond more positively. They feel more valued and involved in the process of educational transformation.

Field findings indicate that the presence of publicity within the teacher quality improvement policy in Aceh remains unsystematic and lacks strategic direction. Publicity has not yet become a main priority in the strategy for implementing education policies; rather, it functions more as an administrative supplement following program execution. In many cases, publicity efforts only emerge during launch events or ceremonial activities, such as the opening of teacher training sessions or the signing of MoUs. Information is disseminated through press releases, institutional social media posts, or local news reports that are one-way and documentary in nature, rather than dialogic. As a result, teachers the primary targets of the program often feel they do not fully understand the overarching goals of the initiative. Many only become aware of the program's objectives after participating in the training, not through initial publicity or early socialization efforts.

Publicity tends to be technical and is not designed to be user-friendly. Brochures, flyers, or social media posts often contain administrative information such as schedules, venues, or program names, but lack narratives explaining why the program matters to teachers and educational quality. There is little effort to produce materials that build a sense of purpose or public motivation toward the program. Findings from Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar show that teachers are more inclined to read information from educational communities or peer-managed social media accounts rather than from official government channels.

Although the government has utilized several channels such as the official website of the Education Office, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups, the dissemination of information remains limited to certain circles. Publicity has yet to reach the wider public or non-formal education stakeholders such as school committees, community leaders, or education NGOs. In regions such as East Aceh and Aceh Singkil, teachers in remote schools admitted that they only found out about teacher training through their principals, without having received any written outreach beforehand.

One significant finding is the absence of specific evaluation on the extent to which program publicity affects teachers' understanding or participation. Publicity is implemented without measurable communication success indicators. As a result, there is no clear data on whether publicity efforts are actually effective in encouraging teachers' support for the programs. In many cases, publicity is merely embedded in bureaucratic information systems, such as circular letters, assignment orders, or internal announcements. This makes communication rigid and fails to reach teachers on an emotional or personal level.

One key finding is the absence of a dedicated evaluation mechanism to assess the extent to which program publicity influences teachers' understanding or participation. Publicity efforts have been implemented without measurable communication success indicators. As a result, it remains unclear whether such publicity has been effective in fostering teacher support for the program. In many cases, publicity exists merely as part of bureaucratic information systems through circulars, assignment letters, or internal announcements. This makes communication rigid and fails to emotionally or personally engage teachers. Overall, field findings indicate that the function of publicity has not yet been optimized as a strategic instrument in building teachers' support and trust. Publicity remains a supplementary part of formal activities rather than an integral aspect of planned public communication. Within the framework of public communication theory, local governments are still operating at the level of public information and have not yet achieved public engagement.

Public trust in institutions is strongly influenced by perceptions of the institution's competence and integrity (Abdulkareem, 2023). In this context, publicity that is framed with narratives touching on teachers' concrete experiences, training participant success stories, and the impact on learning quality, is more effective in building positive perceptions. Success stories or testimonials from teachers who have participated in training programs if widely publicized can strengthen a sense of ownership and emotional engagement with the program. Therefore, publicity should be positioned as an integral part of change management strategies within education policy. Publicity is not merely a promotional tool, but a medium to build relational trust between the government and teachers. In the era of information transparency, local governments are required to develop communication that is not only informative but also engaging, reflective, and responsive to the needs of teachers as key actors in the education system.

3.4. Existing Publicity Practices in the Aceh Government's Teacher Capacity Development Program

One of the critical findings in this study is the ineffective role of publicity in the implementation of teacher capacity development programs in Aceh. The concept of publicity as a structured communication effort aimed at creating awareness, understanding, and support among target stakeholders appears to be underdeveloped within the local government. Policy designers and program implementers often treat publicity as an administrative requirement rather than a strategic tool for building trust and engagement. A significant concern is the lack of understanding of the publicity concept itself among policymakers. Publicity is often reduced to formal announcements or bureaucratic information-sharing mechanisms, such as circular letters, duty orders, or internal memos. These forms of communication tend to be rigid and fail to emotionally or personally connect with teachers as the primary target audience.

Secondly, there is a notable gap in teachers' understanding of the programs themselves. Many teachers interviewed in this research admitted that they were not fully aware of the objectives, mechanisms, or benefits of the training programs they were invited to attend. This lack of clarity is directly linked to inadequate publicity and socialization efforts prior to program implementation. Moreover, no structured evaluation has been conducted to assess the extent to which publicity efforts influence teacher comprehension or participation. There are no measurable indicators of communication effectiveness, which makes it difficult to determine whether existing publicity mechanisms are achieving their intended outcomes. As a result, there is no evidence that publicity efforts are effective in fostering teacher support for the programs. Another key issue is the absence of pre-training program socialization. Teachers are often invited to training sessions without sufficient contextual explanation or engagement beforehand. This causes a disconnect between the program's content and the teachers' actual professional needs. The training modules are frequently perceived as irrelevant, especially by teachers in rural or remote areas who face unique challenges that are rarely addressed in the design of the training content.

Furthermore, teachers in remote and disadvantaged regions often receive minimal updates about ongoing or upcoming programs. Limited access to digital infrastructure and the passive nature of one-way communication hinder information flow. In many instances, the dissemination of program-related information relies heavily on social media platforms or government WhatsApp groups, which are not universally accessible or regularly checked by all teachers. The overreliance on digital channels without proper support systems also creates an exclusionary environment, particularly for older teachers or those unfamiliar with technology. This digital divide further exacerbates disparities in information access and participation.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the failure of publicity mechanisms is one of the root causes of the ineffective implementation of teacher development programs in Aceh. Without proactive, inclusive, and strategic publicity efforts, teachers remain passive recipients rather than active participants in capacity-building initiatives. Going forward, there is a pressing need for the Aceh government to reconceptualize publicity as a participatory and two-way communication process. This includes designing tailored communication strategies, allocating specific budgets for outreach and socialization, involving school leadership as communication agents, and establishing clear success indicators to measure the impact of publicity efforts. Only through such systemic changes can the government hope to bridge the gap between policy intentions and field-level implementation, thereby improving the overall quality and effectiveness of teacher development programs.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that publicity plays a significant role in supporting the success of public policies, particularly in the context of teacher quality improvement programs in Aceh. However, field data reveals that the implementation of publicity by the Aceh Government has yet to be optimal in fostering effective communication and building trust among teachers as the primary policy targets. The communication strategies applied tend to be one-way and ceremonial, lacking opportunities for active participation and open dialogue with teachers. Publication content focuses more on administrative aspects and formal activities, rather than on the substance of policy changes and their impact on professional teacher development. As a result, many teachers feel distanced from the policymaking process and lack comprehensive information regarding the relevance and benefits of the program. Limitations in information channels and publication reach further widen the information gap between policy makers and school-level implementers. Publicity has not yet been utilized as part of a well-planned, inclusive, and evaluative communication strategy. Instead, public communication continues to rely heavily on traditional bureaucratic structures and informal school-level interactions. Nevertheless, there are considerable opportunities to enhance the role of publicity as a strategic communication tool. If designed with a participatory approach, based on the needs of its audience (teachers), and utilizing more dialogic and transformative media, publicity can function as a bridge of trust between local governments and teachers, while also accelerating the dissemination of values and benefits from education quality improvement programs. Therefore, the Aceh Government must reconstruct its communication approach by positioning publicity not merely as a supplementary element of policy, but as a key instrument for managing perceptions, garnering public support, and securing policy legitimacy in the education sector.

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