

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT TOWARD AN EXCELLENT SCHOOL

^{*1}Akhmad Fadhilah, ²Ahmad Suriansyah, ³Sulistiyana

^{*1,2,3}Universitas Lambung Mangkurat

Email: ^{*1}akhmadfadhilah0601@gmail.com, ²a.suriansyah@ulm.ac.id,

³sulis.bk@ulm.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to describe the application of strategic management in establishing exemplary schools at SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin. This study employs a qualitative approach using a multi-case study method and descriptive techniques. Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The study focused on three main strategies: human resources, partnerships, and school marketing and branding. The results indicate that the human resources strategy is implemented through recruitment based on Islamic values and competencies, regular training, performance evaluations, and personal development. The partnership strategy is carried out collaboratively with parents, social institutions, and school-based business units to strengthen internal and external support. Meanwhile, the marketing and branding strategy is implemented through digital media, educational visual content, and image enhancement based on flagship programs and parent testimonials. These three strategies are applied adaptively and contextually to improve the quality of education. This study recommends strengthening the evaluation system, innovating digital promotion, and managing sustainable partnerships to enhance the competitiveness of Modern Islamic schools.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Human Resources, Partnerships, Marketing

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penerapan manajemen strategik dalam mewujudkan sekolah unggul di SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin dan MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi multi kasus dan teknik deskriptif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Fokus kajian mencakup tiga strategi utama: kepegawaian, kemitraan, serta pemasaran dan branding sekolah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi kepegawaian dilaksanakan melalui rekrutmen berbasis nilai Islam dan kompetensi, pelatihan rutin, evaluasi kinerja, serta pembinaan personal. Strategi kemitraan dijalankan secara kolaboratif dengan orang tua, lembaga sosial, dan unit usaha sekolah untuk memperkuat dukungan internal dan eksternal. Sementara itu, strategi pemasaran dan branding dilakukan melalui media digital, konten visual edukatif, dan penguatan citra berbasis program unggulan serta testimoni orang tua. Ketiga strategi tersebut diterapkan secara adaptif dan kontekstual untuk meningkatkan mutu pendidikan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan sistem evaluasi, inovasi promosi digital, dan pengelolaan kemitraan berkelanjutan guna memperkuat daya saing sekolah Islam Modern.

Kata kunci: Manajemen Strategik, Kepegawaian, Kemitraan, Pemasaran

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental instruments of national development, playing a strategic role in improving the quality of human resources. A country's success in addressing global challenges is greatly influenced by the quality of its education system. Education serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a vehicle for character building, competency development, fostering creativity, and reinforcing the moral and social values required by modern society (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, education is a long-term investment that determines a nation's competitiveness across various sectors of life, including the economic, social, cultural, political, and technological spheres. As noted by Riyanto et al. (2023), a nation's level of progress is strongly correlated with the quality of its education system, as education produces human resources who are productive, innovative, and capable of adapting to changing times. In the context of Indonesia's national development, education holds a very important position, as mandated by Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which affirms that every citizen has the right to education. This constitutional mandate is reinforced by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that education aims to develop the potential of students so that they become individuals who are faithful, devout to God the Almighty, of noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible. Thus, education is not merely viewed as an academic process but also as a process of holistic human development capable of contributing to national development (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022).

As we enter the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0, the education system is facing rapid changes driven by advancements in digital technology, *artificial intelligence*, the Internet of Things, big data, and automation across various aspects of life. These changes require educational institutions to produce graduates who possess critical thinking skills, creativity, communication skills, collaboration skills, digital literacy, problem-solving abilities, and strong character (OECD, 2023). It is no longer sufficient for schools to merely deliver instructional content; they must be able to create a learning environment that is adaptable to change and capable of preparing students to face future challenges. Improving the quality of education depends heavily on the quality of educational institution management. As educational organizations, schools are *open systems* composed of various interacting components that work together to achieve educational goals effectively and efficiently (Bush, 2020). These components include students, the principal, teachers, educational support staff, the curriculum, facilities and infrastructure, funding, school culture, leadership, and community support. All of these components must be managed in an integrated manner through a professional management system to produce high-quality graduates.

According to Hoy and Miskel (2024), the effectiveness of a school organization is not determined solely by the adequacy of resources but rather by management's ability to optimize all these resources through continuous processes of planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating. Effective school management can foster a conducive organizational culture, boost teacher motivation, strengthen collaboration with the community, and generate learning innovations focused on improving educational quality. In line with this view, Afridoni et al. (2023) explain that a school, as a system, consists of various interrelated components. School inputs—including students, educators, financial resources, facilities and infrastructure, the curriculum, and the educational environment—must be managed effectively to produce graduates with academic competencies, character, skills, and social abilities that meet community needs. Managing all these components requires a professional management system focused on continuous quality improvement.

The concept of modern school management has evolved from the traditional administrative paradigm toward the *school-based management* (SBM) paradigm, which grants schools greater autonomy in managing all their available resources. Through school-based management, the principal, together with the entire school community, has the flexibility to design programs tailored to local needs, making the decision-making process faster, more flexible, and more responsive to changes in the environment (Caldwell, 2022). Various studies indicate that the implementation of school-based management positively contributes to improvements in the quality of learning, community satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and students' academic achievement (Hallinger & Wang, 2021). In recent decades, the concept of “excellent schools” has become a key focus in the development of Indonesia's education system. An excellent school is not only measured by students' academic achievements but is also determined by the quality of organizational governance, instructional innovation, school culture, the principal's leadership, the quality of educational services, partnerships with the community, and the school's ability to build a positive public reputation (Leithwood et al., 2020). Excellent schools are able to create an effective learning environment so that all students have the opportunity to develop according to their individual potential.

A school's excellence is also influenced by its ability to build public trust. In an era of increasingly competitive educational institutions, schools compete not only in producing the best graduates but also in providing quality educational services to the community. Parents, as consumers of educational services, are becoming increasingly selective in choosing schools that can guarantee academic quality, character development, a safe learning environment, and students' future success (Kotler & Fox, 2021). These conditions are driving every school to implement innovative management strategies to maintain its competitiveness. Competition among educational institutions has become increasingly complex with the growing number of both public and private schools offering various flagship programs. Private schools face greater challenges because they must earn public trust through the quality of their educational services without relying

entirely on government funding. Therefore, the success of private schools is largely determined by the effectiveness of the organizational management implemented—ranging from the principal’s leadership, human resource development, curriculum innovation, student services, to strategies for building the institution’s image (Fidler, 2021). In Indonesia, Muhammadiyah schools are recognized as one of the largest private educational networks, making a significant contribution to national educational development. According to data from the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership (2024), Muhammadiyah manages thousands of educational institutions—ranging from elementary schools to universities—spread across the entire country. The success of many Muhammadiyah schools is determined not only by the Islamic values integrated into the learning process but also by a management system that is relatively modern, professional, and adaptable to the changing times. The integration of Islamic character education, learning innovations, and institutional governance is one of the key factors enabling Muhammadiyah schools to compete with both public and other private schools.

In the city of Banjarmasin, SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin are two elementary schools that have shown significant progress in recent years. Both schools have successfully attracted public interest through various academic and non-academic achievements, a focus on character education, technology-based learning innovations, and relatively effective organizational management. Amid increasingly fierce competition among educational institutions, both schools have managed to maintain their presence and have even seen an increase in student enrollment each year. This phenomenon indicates that a school’s success is not determined solely by the curriculum or the quality of its teachers, but also by management strategies that are implemented systematically and with a focus on quality.

Nevertheless, previous research has largely focused on the general effectiveness of school management—such as principal leadership, school-based management, organizational culture, or *Total Quality Management* (TQM). Studies that comprehensively compare the management strategies of high-performing schools at two Muhammadiyah elementary schools with distinct characteristics remain relatively scarce, particularly in South Kalimantan. Furthermore, most studies measure success solely based on academic achievement without integrating dimensions such as institutional governance, transformational leadership, organizational culture, instructional innovation, community participation, and the reinforcement of Islamic values as an integrated part of a high-performing school management strategy.

Developments in the study of school management over the past two decades indicate that the quality of educational institution governance is closely linked to improvements in educational quality. Various studies have demonstrated that a school’s success is determined not only by the quality of teachers or the curriculum but also by the effectiveness of the principal’s leadership, organizational culture, resource management, community participation, and the school’s ability to engage in continuous innovation (Bush, 2020; Hallinger & Wang, 2021). This paradigm highlights that schools are

learning organizations that must be able to adapt to changes in both internal and external environments to continue providing quality educational services. One of the most extensively studied aspects is the leadership of school principals as the primary drivers of organizational change. Leithwood et al. (2020) explain that transformational leadership can boost teacher motivation, strengthen a culture of collaboration, and foster instructional innovation that directly impacts improvements in student achievement. School principals no longer serve merely as administrators but also as *instructional leaders*, *change agents*, and *strategic managers* capable of integrating all school resources to achieve educational goals.

Research by Hallinger and Wang (2021) demonstrates that instructional leadership has a significant impact on improving the quality of learning through strengthened academic supervision, teacher professional development, and the creation of a conducive learning culture. These findings indicate that high-performing schools consistently exhibit strong leadership in directing all organizational activities toward the achievement of the school's vision and mission. In addition to leadership, *School-Based Management* is also a widely studied approach. Caldwell (2022) explains that granting autonomy to schools enables educational institutions to make decisions more quickly in accordance with local needs. This autonomy encourages schools to be more innovative in curriculum development, financial management, human resource development, and services to students and the community. Various studies indicate that schools that consistently implement school-based management tend to have higher levels of community satisfaction compared to schools that still operate under a rigid bureaucratic system (OECD, 2023).

Research on school organizational culture also shows that a positive work culture significantly contributes to improving the quality of education. Deal and Peterson (2016) explain that school culture is a set of values, beliefs, norms, and habits that develop within school life and serve as a guide for the behavior of the entire school community. Schools with a strong organizational culture tend to be able to create a comfortable learning environment, increase teacher loyalty, strengthen student discipline, and build harmonious relationships with the community. On the other hand, research on *Total Quality Management* (TQM) in education indicates that improving school quality requires a process of *continuous improvement* through evaluation, innovation, and the involvement of all stakeholders (Sallis, 2015). This approach positions students and the community as primary *customers* who must receive the best educational services. Therefore, exemplary schools are not only focused on academic achievement but also on community satisfaction with the quality of educational services provided.

In the context of Islamic schools, several studies indicate that integrating Islamic values with modern management systems can enhance the effectiveness of educational institution management. Mulyasa (2022) explains that exemplary Islamic schools are characterized by visionary leadership, a religious culture, innovative learning, excellent service, and active parental involvement in the educational process. This management model has proven capable of increasing public trust while simultaneously strengthening

the school's identity as a leading educational institution. Research conducted by Fadhlī et al. (2023) on Muhammadiyah schools in Central Java found that the success of Muhammadiyah schools is significantly influenced by the principal's ability to build an organizational culture based on Islamic values, strengthen teacher professionalism, and develop technology-based learning innovations. This study confirms that the success of Muhammadiyah schools stems not only from religious aspects but also from the effectiveness of the management strategies implemented.

Similarly, research by Rahman et al. (2024) indicates that the competitiveness of private schools is significantly influenced by the quality of educational services, curriculum innovation, the digitization of school administration, and partnerships with the community. Schools capable of integrating these four aspects have a greater chance of maintaining public trust amid increasingly competitive educational institutions. Although these various studies have made significant contributions to the development of educational management theory, several limitations remain, opening opportunities for further research. First, most previous studies have focused primarily on a single aspect of school management—such as principal leadership, organizational culture, school-based management, or quality management—in isolation. This approach has not provided a comprehensive picture of how these various management components interact to shape high-performing schools. Second, research on Muhammadiyah schools is still dominated by studies focusing on the implementation of Islamic character education, the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan curriculum, or principal leadership. Research examining the management strategies of exemplary schools holistically at the elementary school level remains relatively limited.

Third, most research has been conducted on the island of Java, particularly in large schools that already have well-established management systems. Research on Muhammadiyah schools in South Kalimantan, particularly in the city of Banjarmasin, remains very scarce and thus has not been able to describe the characteristics of exemplary school management within the local social and cultural context. Fourth, previous studies generally employed quantitative approaches that emphasized relationships between variables. This approach has not been able to provide an in-depth explanation of managerial processes, decision-making strategies, organizational culture, or the innovative practices that have emerged in high-performing schools.

Based on these findings, this study addresses a clear research gap: the absence of a comprehensive analysis of high-performing school management strategies at two Muhammadiyah elementary schools with distinct characteristics, using a qualitative case study approach. This study not only identifies the management practices implemented but also examines how leadership, organizational culture, human resource management, learning innovation, educational services, community partnerships, and Muhammadiyah values interact to shape the schools' excellence.

This study offers several novel aspects compared to previous research. First, this study developed an integrative analytical model for exemplary school management, combining the dimensions of transformational leadership, school-based management, organizational culture, quality management, learning innovation, the digitization of educational services, and community partnerships within a single conceptual framework. Second, the study was conducted comparatively at two equally high-performing Muhammadiyah schools—SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin—thereby enabling the identification of *best practices* that can be replicated by other schools.

Third, this study integrates modern educational management perspectives with Islamic values and the principles of Muhammadiyah, resulting in a model for managing exemplary schools that is oriented not only toward organizational effectiveness but also toward fostering Islamic character and a religious culture. Fourth, this study produces strategic recommendations regarding a model of Islamic private school governance that is adaptive to developments in digital technology, community needs, and national education policies, thereby providing practical contributions to school principals, educational foundations, local governments, and the Muhammadiyah organization.

Thus, this study is expected not only to enrich the body of knowledge in educational management but also to produce an empirical model of strategies for managing exemplary schools that are relevant to the educational challenges of the 21st century. Based on the above, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the exemplary school management strategies implemented at SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) describe the implementation of management strategies for exemplary schools at both schools; (2) analyze the factors that support and hinder the implementation of management strategies; (3) compare the *best practices* implemented by both schools; and (4) formulate a conceptual model of excellence-oriented school management strategies based on Muhammadiyah values that are adaptable to developments in 21st-century education.

METHOD

This study, titled “Strategic Management in Schools,” employs a qualitative approach and utilizes a descriptive research design. In this study, the data collected are not numerical figures or scores; rather, they are derived from interview transcripts, field documents, memos, or other official records. Thus, the objective of this qualitative descriptive study is to describe the relevant subjects as they actually exist. Therefore, to examine the focus of the problem, a qualitative descriptive research design was chosen because it was deemed most appropriate. Qualitative research does not focus on testing hypotheses but rather on developing a deep understanding of the context and dynamics of a phenomenon (Bahiyah & Gumiandari, 2024). The qualitative approach employed by the researcher will yield data and information that will subsequently be organized and analyzed to provide a description of the research subject. Through this method, the data found in the literature

will be analyzed in depth and explained comprehensively to provide a clearer and more detailed understanding of the subject under discussion (Saefullah, 2024).

The primary focus of this study is the application of Strategic Management toward achieving excellence in schools. To address how strategic management is applied in the areas of human resources strategy, partnership strategy, and marketing or *branding*—as implemented by the school—in-depth observation is required, conducted in a natural setting (*natural setting*). Qualitative research is research intended to understand phenomena related to the experiences of research subjects—such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and so on—in a holistic manner through descriptive analysis using words and language within a specific, natural context, while utilizing various naturalistic methods (Rustamana et al., 2023). The research design used in this study is a multi-case study. A multi-case study was chosen for this research because it is a form of qualitative research that can be used specifically to develop theories derived from several similar research settings, thereby yielding theories that can be generalized to broader and more general contexts. A multi-case study (*multi-case study*) is conducted when the researcher encounters several cases in contexts with different settings but which still share commonalities. For example, they may be at the same level, share similar organizational characteristics, have the same main programs, or share similar economic and socio-cultural backgrounds. The primary objective of a multi-site study is to identify common patterns or to generate new propositions and theories from the existing sites. The appropriate analysis method used is inductive analysis (Hasiara, 2016). Based on the above description, this study will discuss a theory or a systematic overview of strategic management toward excellence in schools, which will be examined at SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings from SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin, which were presented in the previous chapter, the author will now discuss the results from both schools regarding their strategic management approaches toward becoming high-performing schools;

A. Human Resources Strategy

The personnel strategies implemented by SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MIS Diniyah Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin share a common emphasis on Islamic values, character, and alignment with the school's vision as top priorities in the human resource management process. Both schools view the success of an educational institution as being largely determined by the quality and character of its teaching staff, rather than solely by physical facilities. This aligns with the view of Akbar & Rindaningsih (2025) that quality education depends not only on the curriculum and infrastructure but also on the quality of the human resources involved, such as teachers and educational staff. Human resource management in an educational setting, when implemented systematically and correctly, fosters the development of professionals in their respective roles (Sinagula et al., 2025).

Educational staff must meet established academic qualifications and competencies, which include formal education as well as relevant training and certification (Syahren & Rindaningsih, 2025).

Regarding recruitment, both schools implement a phased selection process that considers the competencies, character, and alignment of prospective teachers' values with the school's culture. This process includes a probationary period to ensure a good fit between prospective teachers and the school environment. Although there are variations in recruitment mechanisms, both schools strive to ensure that accepted prospective teachers can adapt well to the institution's values and vision. This aligns with the findings of Rizadiliyawati et al. (2025), who state that in the effort to achieve quality education, the presence of professional and appropriately qualified educators is a determining factor. Recruitment aims to identify potential human resources aligned with the organization's values, thereby increasing the likelihood of organizational growth and improvement (W. F. Akbar et al., 2024). Riani et al. (2024) also note that recruitment is a key function in human resource management (HRM) that plays a strategic role in preparing and providing the right workforce.

Teacher competency development is also a primary focus at both schools. Training activities are conducted regularly to strengthen teacher quality, both through internal training and through collaboration with external institutions. Training materials focus on improving the quality of instruction, curriculum understanding, and classroom management skills. Whether conducted on a semesterly or annual basis, these training programs demonstrate a commitment to the continuous professional development of teachers. Educational institutions must comprehensively develop their human resources through effective planning, organization, and control (Agustia et al., 2025). The development of teachers' and staff members' competencies is a crucial aspect in ensuring educational success and the optimal achievement of academic goals (Subandi et al., 2025). Teachers need ongoing training to improve their digital literacy and understand the latest educational technologies (Islawati et al., 2025).

In terms of evaluation and recognition, both schools conduct structured supervision and evaluation of teacher performance, involving the principal and an internal team. Academic supervision is professional support designed to assist, coordinate, and guide teachers so they can achieve learning objectives (H. V. Putri et al., 2025). Recognition of teacher performance has also begun to be implemented, both in symbolic forms and through systems based on attendance and discipline. These efforts reflect a commitment to fostering a productive and appreciative work culture. Learning assessment is a crucial aspect of the educational process, as through this evaluative process, teachers gain insight into the extent to which instructional objectives have been met and the quality of the learning that has taken place (Farahdila & Wagiran, 2025). Teacher performance evaluation serves not only as an assessment tool but also as a means to foster professional development and improve the overall quality of education (Zahara et al., 2025). Evaluation enables teachers to adjust their teaching methods to better suit students' needs

and learning styles, thereby ensuring that the quality of learning can continue to improve (Karengga et al., 2025).

Efforts to foster a harmonious, disciplined, and religious work culture were also evident in both schools. Joint religious activities and the creation of spaces for collaboration among teachers were part of the strategy to strengthen solidarity and collective commitment. These initiatives served as a driving force in creating a positive work environment, fostering professionalism, and reinforcing Islamic values within the school setting. According to Sari & Munthe (2025), an Islamic work culture is a crucial element in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of both educators' and students' performance. An Islamic work culture consists of a set of values, norms, and ethics applied in the field of education based on Islamic teachings. Work culture can be characterized by discipline, openness, mutual respect, and cooperation (Adam et al., 2025). A positive organizational or school culture helps teachers improve their performance and positively impacts the organization's overall performance (Sutomo & Egar, 2025).

From this discussion, it can be concluded that the personnel strategies at both schools were designed with consideration for character, competence, and the continuity of professional development. Differences in technical implementation are contextual in nature and do not detract from the core substance of personnel strategies oriented toward quality, religiosity, and the professionalism of educators.

B. Partnership Strategies

The partnership strategies implemented by SD Muhammadiyah 9 Banjarmasin and MDIM 1 Sei Kindaung demonstrate a strong commitment to building collaborative networks both internally and externally. Both schools understand that the success of educational institutions cannot be achieved in isolation but requires support and collaboration from various relevant parties, including parents, the community, government agencies, and private institutions. This aligns with the view expressed by Syahputra (2020) that partnerships need to be fostered, developed, and maintained due to the challenges and obstacles faced in the effort to provide high-quality education. A strong partnership between parents and the school is a crucial foundation for creating an effective educational environment that positively impacts student development (Akhyar et al., 2024). Schools and the community have mutual needs: the community seeks educational opportunities, while schools require community participation to implement their educational programs (Hakim & Rozi, 2024).

Internal partnerships—particularly the relationships among the principal, teachers, and school staff—are built through harmonious communication and solid teamwork. Both schools recognize that positive collaboration among educators will directly impact the success of school programs. A supportive, mutually respectful, and faith-based work culture serves as a vital foundation for maintaining the institution's internal stability.

As leaders, school principals play a central role in shaping a positive work culture where teachers feel comfortable, valued, and appreciated—which ultimately has a direct impact on improving teacher performance and achieving the school’s educational goals (Anggraini et al., 2025). Principles such as “*ing ngarso sung tulodo*,” “*ing madyo mangu karso*,” and “*tut wuri handayani*” encourage school principals to serve as role models, motivators, and supporters of the learning process (Saparudin et al., 2025). One of the key factors in shaping organizational culture is the effective management of the school’s internal environment (S. M. Putri et al., 2025). Regarding external partnerships, both schools maintain active relationships with various stakeholders, such as universities, government agencies, community organizations, and the business sector. These collaborations include extracurricular activities, health services, outreach programs, teacher training, and facility support. In this context, external stakeholders’ trust in school management is key to fostering sustainable relationships.

Asiah (2021) supports the above statement with her view that schools need to manage partnerships with the business and industrial sectors as a form of interdependent management between the two institutions in carrying out education and training programs that are complementary, mutually necessary, and mutually beneficial within the framework of planned partnership programs. The government’s role in the education sector is governed by the 1945 Constitution; as amended in Article 31, paragraphs 1–4, it is stated that every citizen has the right to receive an education, all citizens are obligated to complete basic education, and the government is responsible for funding it. The government is also required to develop and implement a national education system aimed at fostering faith, piety, and good moral character to cultivate the nation’s intellectual capacity, as regulated by law (Azzahro et al., 2025).

Although formal partnership structures, such as school committees, take different forms, both schools maintain close relationships with students’ parents through informal communication and regular activities. This flexible yet intensive approach reflects the schools’ efforts to create positive synergy between educational institutions and families, ensuring that students’ education proceeds in an integrated manner.

This view is also consistent with that expressed by Simamora et al. (2023), who state that such partnerships aim to encourage active parental participation in various aspects of school life, ranging from supporting extracurricular activities to providing input in school decision-making. It is undeniable that parental involvement in school education—across all levels, ethnic groups, and cultures—can have a positive impact on students’ performance at school, both academically and non-academically (Rahman, 2014). Parents, as representatives of the family, are the people closest to students; they not only influence students’ characteristics but also serve as a support system for children in pursuing their education (Khusniyah et al., 2023).

Partnerships are also utilized as a means to strengthen schools’ financial and operational resilience. Several initiatives, such as school cooperatives and independent business units,

have been developed as forms of empowering internal resources that support the sustainability of educational programs. This demonstrates the schools' awareness of the need to not only rely on a single funding source but also to innovate in fostering institutional self-reliance.

This aligns with the view of Rojaki et al. (2021) that the management of school partnerships with the business and industrial sectors constitutes a network of interactions that schools strive to establish in order to address various challenges in improving educational quality, in line with national educational goals. Schools cannot sufficiently improve the quality of education and students' competencies without the assistance of business partners or companies (Hatijah & Sholeh, 2019). A school cooperative is a cooperative established within a school environment with the aim of teaching students about the importance of cooperatives and contributing to the development of cooperatives in Indonesia (Fadhilah et al., 2023).

In general, the partnership strategies implemented by both schools reflect strong collaborative and participatory principles, involving all stakeholders in the process of improving educational quality. Whether on a local scale or within a broader network, partnerships play a crucial role in expanding a school's influence and enhancing the quality of educational services that are inclusive and adaptable to the changing times. The fundamental principles in establishing these partnerships include: mutual benefit, mutual trust, and a spirit of give-and-take among the partnering parties (Ixtiarto & Sutrisno, 2016). These collaborative efforts aim to mutually support one another in achieving their respective predetermined goals (Maydatullaela & Yahya, 2023). Students' interests are influenced by recommendations from people around them, recommendations from companies, agencies, and institutions, alumni who contribute to society and are successfully placed in the job market, and public relations efforts (Hanif, 2023).

C. School Marketing and *Branding* Strategies

The marketing and branding strategies implemented by Muhammadiyah Elementary School 9 Banjarmasin and MDIM 1 Sei Kindaung are based on the respective schools' visions and missions and are aimed at building a positive, competitive institutional image that aligns with community needs. Both schools recognize the importance of establishing a strong and distinctive identity as part of their efforts to attract prospective students amid increasingly intense competition among educational institutions.

This aligns with the findings of Hanafi et al. (2023), who state that if an institution cannot effectively manage its business and marketing operations, it will eventually lose out in the competitive landscape—where marketing management is one of the core activities carried out by educational administrators. The consequence of a school failing to brand itself by keeping pace with technological advancements—particularly in digital marketing—is that it will lose its “customers,” namely parents. Parents leave the school because they are unaware of or unfamiliar with the school's brand (Wahyunto et al., 2024). A similar view was expressed by Zulfiah et al. (2023), who noted that proper

marketing management planning can give educational institutions a significant competitive advantage, thereby leading to strong institutional performance.

Identifying a school's strengths serves as the primary foundation for developing a branding strategy. Both SD Muhammadiyah 9 and MDIM 1 highlight distinctive characteristics relevant to their respective strengths, such as a commitment to character development, student achievement, and environmental stewardship. This identity is not merely a slogan but is embodied in concrete and consistent programs, thereby adding value in the public's perception. This aligns with the view of Lay et al. (2023) that in the marketing of educational services, the process involves informing the public about the school's outcomes, generating public interest in the school's offerings, differentiating the school's offerings from those of other educational institutions, and emphasizing the quality of the educational services provided by the school in question. Schools must provide high-quality services so that prospective students and their parents are confident in their decision to choose that school as a place of learning (Arofah & Suwandi, 2024).

In terms of promotion, both schools have adapted to technological advancements and digital communication trends. Social media is actively utilized as the primary channel for disseminating information, documenting activities, and promoting the schools' strengths. These efforts demonstrate an adaptation to the communication patterns of modern society, which tends to rely on digital platforms when seeking educational information. Digital marketing is a set of strategies involving various efforts to promote products or services through internet-connected devices (Amir & Savero, 2024). This aligns with the view of Sudarso et al. (2024) that educational institutions can utilize social media, websites, digital campaigns, and other online marketing strategies to reach a broader target audience and enhance their online presence and reputation.

In addition to social media, interpersonal approaches and word-of-mouth communication among parents also form part of an effective promotional strategy. Both schools prioritize maintaining close relationships with parents, recognizing that recommendations and testimonials from parents can serve as influential promotional tools in attracting prospective new students. This aligns with the view of Riyanto & Kharisma (2024), who note that by providing excellent service, schools hope students and parents will voluntarily share their positive experiences with others, thereby enhancing the school's reputation. Using social media is an effective strategy for attracting public interest; however, *word-of-mouth* promotion has proven to be the most effective in capturing public interest (Basorah et al., 2024)

Direct outreach activities, such as visits to kindergartens or early childhood education centers, are also conducted ahead of the new student enrollment period. This strategy reflects an awareness that strengthening the school's image must be approached holistically—from internal to external aspects—and target various relevant audiences. During the evaluation process, the success of marketing strategies is measured by indicators such as an increase in the number of applicants, positive public perception, and

the achievement of new student enrollment targets. Both schools noted a positive response from the community, reflected in high enrollment interest, which even exceeded available quotas.

This aligns with the view expressed by Prayitno (2025) that earning the trust of satisfied users of educational services is essential for every institution to remain competitive. The level of innovation in marketing has a direct correlation with the positive perceptions of students and parents toward the institution, reinforcing the view that innovation is key to enhancing an institution's reputation (R. R. Sari et al., 2025). However, challenges remain, particularly regarding budget constraints and regulations governing the placement of conventional promotional media. Both schools responded to this situation by reducing their use of print media, such as banners, and shifting their focus to digital media, which is considered more effective, flexible, and cost-efficient.

The main challenge for educational institutions lies in their ability to effectively implement modern marketing strategies. Many still rely on traditional methods, which have become less effective in the digital age (Rofiki & Susmiati, 2025). Consistently posting content about school activities on social media is a highly effective strategy for attracting public attention and building trust in the school. Given the significant influence of social media in shaping public opinion, optimizing content to align with platform algorithms and resonate with public interests will have a significant impact on the school's positive image and appeal in the eyes of the community (Pratama et al., 2025)

Based on the overall practices implemented, it can be concluded that the marketing and branding strategies adopted by both schools are adaptive, targeted, and grounded in the schools' internal strengths. By highlighting authentic values of excellence and managing them consistently, both schools have been able to build public trust and enhance the institutions' competitiveness within the context of modern Islamic elementary education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study at the two sites, it can be concluded that the schools' management strategies in the areas of human resources, partnerships, and marketing and *branding* have been designed and implemented using an adaptive, contextual, and education-quality-oriented approach. The Staffing Strategy indicates that both schools implement value- and competency-based recruitment, accompanied by ongoing training and structured performance evaluations. Although there are still limitations in the formal reward system, a collaborative work culture and a personalized mentoring approach have become key strengths. The Partnership Strategy has successfully strengthened the schools' support networks through active relationships with committees and external institutions. This success is underpinned by open communication and the principle of reciprocity, although challenges in maintaining consistent communication and aligning values with partners remain a concern. The school's marketing and *branding* strategies are implemented systematically, emphasizing promotion based on flagship programs, active parental involvement, and the optimal use of social media. The school's strong

identity serves as its main draw, but challenges related to enrollment numbers require the implementation of more aggressive and innovative promotional strategies.

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