

Managerial Leadership Strategy to Sustain New Student Enrolment: A Case Study at SMAN 1 Cisaga

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A B S T R A C T

The decline in new student enrolment presents a significant challenge to the sustainability of secondary schools, particularly in non-urban areas. This study aims to analyse the principal's managerial leadership strategy in sustaining new student enrolment at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis Regency. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving principals, teachers, and parents as participants. The findings identify three consistently implemented strategies: strategic planning involving community collaboration, adaptive and technology-based school promotion programmes, and ongoing evaluation of strategy effectiveness. The principal plays a central role in shaping a positive school image through the development of extracurricular activities, strengthening community engagement, and optimising digital communication platforms. These strategies have been effective in enhancing the school's attractiveness and increasing public trust in the institution. The study concludes that managerial leadership that is inclusive, participatory, and responsive to social dynamics is essential for maintaining enrolment stability. Further research is recommended to include a broader range of schools and external variables to enhance the generalisability of the findings.

Keywords: *Managerial Leadership, Principal, New Learners, Promotion Strategy*

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INTRODUCTION

Principals' managerial leadership has a very important role in managing the sustainability of the number of new learners in secondary schools. The admission of new learners (PPDB) is not just an administrative activity, but also closely related to various strategic factors that can affect the image and development of the school. In the context of education, especially in an era full of global challenges, the phenomenon of declining numbers of new students in various schools is becoming a worrying issue. Data shows that some educational institutions have experienced a decline in the number of applicants in recent years, which shows how important a proactive managerial leadership strategy is to attract new prospective students (Lasrin, 2023).

The declining enrolment in rural schools has become a critical issue threatening the sustainability of educational institutions in non-urban areas. Limited population growth, competition among schools, and shifting parental preferences contribute to this downward trend. In response to this phenomenon, many education experts argue that effective leadership plays a central role in addressing the problem (Anwar & Umam, 2020). According to Simanjourang et al. (2024) the quality of leadership within the school environment significantly influences parents' decisions when selecting an educational institution for their children. Therefore, efforts to increase student enrolment must begin with a critical evaluation of the leadership and management strategies employed by school principals.

Empirical evidence indicates that principals who are responsive to community needs and capable of implementing innovative admissions systems can enhance a school's appeal

(Ryan et al., 2023). From the perspective of education stakeholders, effective admissions management involves not only procedural efficiency but also strategic communication and promotion of the school's unique strengths (Putra & Dapiokta, 2020). Recent studies further highlight the potential of digital-based systems to improve transparency and operational efficiency in admissions processes (Refani & Azis, 2022). To address the enrolment challenge, principals must adopt managerial leadership strategies that prioritise community engagement, develop strong partnerships with parents, and promote the school's vision through inclusive and adaptive initiatives.

An evaluation of the existing literature has identified various approaches to admission management. Research conducted by Lasrin states that good management in PPDB can improve access and quality of education in the school concerned (Lasrin, 2023). Furthermore, research by Nurmailis (2022) emphasizes that the interaction between school principals and the community is an important element in creating a positive image of the school, which in turn can attract the attention of prospective new students. Therefore, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution in understanding the application of principals' managerial leadership strategies in the context of PPDB.

This paper seeks to fill the existing research gap by linking previously researched good practices, such as the implementation of digital systems in PPDB, with an effective managerial leadership approach (Supriyanti et al., 2023). This is in line with research done by Ryan et al. (2023) who suggested the importance of developing informative and attractive marketing strategies to promote schools in the era of information technology. By reviewing and positioning this research in the middle of previous studies, it is hoped that new, more comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of leadership strategies in increasing the number of new students can be generated.

To develop the discussion further, it is worth noting that most of the previous studies focus more on the aspects of technology and information systems, but less on the role of managerial leadership in depth. Therefore, this article seeks to look at leadership aspects holistically, including how principals can influence school culture, motivate stakeholders, and set policies that support the sustainability of new learners (Amrona et al., 2023). By providing a clear and strong context of leadership in education, this article aims to provide a better understanding of the important role of school principals in facing challenges in education.

In the study of principals' managerial leadership, there are several gaps that need to be filled. First, although there are many studies that discuss information systems in PPDB, very few conduct an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the principal's leadership and the success of PPDB. Research by Budiman et al., (2021) indicates an urgent need to further analyze the influence of leadership on the effectiveness of learner management. Secondly, the evaluation results from various studies as stated by Hidayat state that although the online PPDB system can improve efficiency, there are still problems related to leadership that have not been solved (Tiasna et al., 2023). This creates the need to link the two aspects in one comprehensive study.

Thirdly, most studies focus only on one aspect of the PPDB system without considering various other related dimensions, such as the impact of zoning policies and local approaches in education (Samsiadi & Romelah, 2022). For this reason, this study seeks to place the managerial leadership of school principals at the center of attention, and examines the extent to which these dynamics impact the PPDB process. By providing a clearer picture of the direct and indirect effects of leadership on the sustainability of the number of new learners, it is hoped that this study can make a significant contribution to the development of further education research.

Finally, this article explains the importance of making recommendations to education leaders and policymakers regarding strategies that can be implemented to improve the admission process, especially in the context of dynamics affected by global and local developments in the education sector. By identifying these gaps, this research not only adds to the academic repertoire but also has relevant practical implications for improving the quality of education in Indonesia.

In the context of education, principal leadership serves as a determining factor in improving teacher performance. Several studies have shown that diverse leadership styles, whether transformational, situational or participatory, have a significant impact on teacher motivation and commitment (Ariani et al., 2021; Hartawan, 2020; Setiyadi & Rosalina, 2021). However, while there is a wealth of literature discussing the leadership role of school principals, there are still challenges in effectively implementing such approaches in the field. Research by Seriyanti et al. (2020)) shows that the relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance is not always linear; factors such as school culture and school committee support also play an important role. Thus, there is a need to bridge this gap by finding out more about how all these elements can support each other in the context of SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis.

In the study of education management, the strategies implemented by school principals play an integral role in achieving overall school success. Triwiyanto et al. (2023)) found that good management can improve the quality of education and community participation in the education process in schools. This is also recognized by Mohamed Jais et al. (2021)) who emphasized the importance of collaboration between school principals and school committees in establishing effective educational visions and strategies. As a result, a positive learning environment can be created, supporting not only teachers but also students in achieving academic success. However, the biggest challenge in implementing managerial leadership strategies often lies in the lack of understanding from all stakeholders of their role in the process. Influences in the form of community dissatisfaction or internal conflict often result from a lack of communication and engagement (A'yun, 2022). Therefore, further research is needed to explore more innovative methods of involving all stakeholders at SMAN 1 Cisaga in decision making related to education and management strategies.

One important aspect of principal leadership is its impact on student motivation. Research shows that effective leadership can build a learning environment that promotes positive student development both academically and socially (Tishana et al., 2023). The principal's actions in creating an inclusive school culture that supports students' existence is key in improving their learning outcomes (Anjani & Dafit, 2021).

Although the importance of leadership influence in student motivation has been recognized, many studies are still limited to academic measurements without considering more complex social and emotional factors. Research conducted by Yunus et al. (2021) indicates the need for a holistic approach in evaluating principals' leadership in relation to student motivation, which does not rely solely on academic aspects. There is an urgent need to develop a leadership model that supports the improvement of motivation at SMAN 1 Cisaga by considering various approaches that integrate character education and are oriented towards the overall development of students.

This research has three main objectives that are directly related to the question above. *First*, to describe and analyze the managerial planning strategies applied by school principals in maintaining the stability of the number of new students. *Second*, this study aims to identify the pattern of organizing and implementing school promotion programs, as well as examining how the principal's role in driving internal school collaboration and establishing effective communication with the community. *The third* is to explore the evaluation mechanism carried out by school principals on the strategies that have been implemented, as well as to explore forms of strategy development that are adaptive and innovative. This research also aims to produce strategic recommendations based on field practices that can be used by other school principals in similar contexts, especially in areas that face similar problems related to the declining number of new students.

The urgency of this research stems from a real phenomenon that many public schools are currently facing, namely the declining number of new students each school year. This issue not only impacts on quantity, but also on the operational sustainability and reputation of educational institutions. In non-urban areas such as Cisaga sub-district, this condition becomes more complex due to limited access, the influence of zoning policies, and competition

with private and vocational schools. In this situation, the leadership of the school principal becomes a key element that determines how the school can survive and thrive.

This research is important because not many studies have specifically examined the relationship between managerial leadership strategies and the sustainability of the number of new students. The majority of previous studies have focused more on the technical aspects of information systems or zoning policies, but have not examined in depth how the principal's leadership strategy can play a role in building the school's image, increasing the attractiveness of the institution, and strategically establishing partnerships with the community. Therefore, this study is expected to make a practical contribution to school principals, policy makers, and other researchers in developing an educational leadership model that is oriented towards institutional sustainability and increasing community participation in schools.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore and understand the managerial leadership strategies applied by the principal of SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis, in maintaining the number of new students. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides flexibility to explore the experiences, perspectives, and social contexts that influence leadership in (Ginanjar et al., 2024). Furthermore, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the interactions between principals, teachers, students, and parents, and how these relationships contribute to new student enrollment decisions (Alzahrani & Albeladi, 2023).

Data will be obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews will be conducted with principals, teachers and parent representatives to get first-hand accounts of the leadership strategy and its impact. Semi-structured interview techniques will be used to allow respondents to express their views and experiences more freely. Observations will be made in the school environment to record the social interactions and dynamics that occur in the school, which are important for understanding the social context (Creswell, 2014)

For data analysis, a thematic analysis technique will be applied, which allows the researcher to identify patterns and themes emerging from the data collected. Data obtained from interviews and observations will be organized, and categories will be formed to support findings relevant to the research objectives. This aims not only to describe leadership strategies but also to explain how principals use their leadership to improve teacher performance and student motivation, which in turn affects the number of new learners in the school. In conducting the research, the researcher will also pay attention to ethics, such as obtaining permission from the authorities and maintaining the confidentiality of individual information. As the culmination of this process, the findings are expected to contribute not only to the theoretical understanding of managerial leadership in the educational context, but also provide practical recommendations to improve the new learner enrollment strategy at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Principal's Strategic Planning in Increasing School Attractiveness

The results obtained in this study indicate that the principal's strategic planning at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis, has a significant positive influence on the school's attractiveness to potential new learners. The process of identifying and evaluating the strategies implemented covered several important aspects, including collaboration with stakeholders, innovation in teaching methods, and the development of programs that meet the needs of students and the surrounding community.

An interview with the Principal, Mr. Ahmad Kusnadi, revealed that one of the main strategies implemented to attract new students is to involve parents in every aspect of school activities. "In every activity planning, we always invite parents to participate, so that they feel

they own this school. We also encourage them to join activities such as weekly meetings and parent seminars," explains Mr. Ahmad. This approach is recognized as effective because it creates a sense of ownership among parents and helps them understand the added value of the education provided at SMAN 1 Cisaga.

Based on a similar interview with one of the teachers, Ibu Siti Fatimah, there is an emphasis on the importance of education programs that are relevant to the community. "We have just launched an entrepreneurship program where students not only learn theory, but also hands-on practice. This caught the attention of students and parents. They are increasingly aware of the importance of education that focuses not only on academics, but also skills that can be applied in everyday life," said Ibu Siti. Furthermore, field observations show that the use of well-maintained facilities and infrastructure is very helpful in supporting the attractiveness of the school. The principal added, "We always try to prioritize the improvement of school facilities. Comfortable classrooms, well-equipped laboratories and a good sports area are all our main concerns. This is part of our strategy to create a conducive learning environment."

From the interviews with principals and teachers, a comprehensive picture emerges of how strategic planning can contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the school. Active parental involvement in the education process appears to have a significant positive impact. As Mr. Ahmad Kusnadi noted, this not only helps in creating a sense of parental ownership but also enhances collaboration between the school and the wider community.

The development of programs relevant to students' skills and needs, such as the entrepreneurship program, shows that SMAN 1 Cisaga seeks to respond to the challenges of the times by promoting practical application-oriented education. As an illustration, the results of this invention show that the relevance of curriculum integrated with community needs is one of the determining factors in student enrollment decisions (Triwiyanto et al., 2023). Thus, careful planning does not depend only on academic aspects, but also on social and economic aspects around the school.

Implementation and Organization of School Promotion Program

This study aims to analyze the implementation and organization of school promotion programs at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis. Through interviews with the principal, teachers, and field observations, several adaptive and effective promotional strategies were found to increase the attractiveness of the school. The results show that the involvement of all parties in the preparation of the promotion program has a significant impact on the perception and decision of parents and new students in choosing the school.

First, the promotion program that was developed collaboratively between the principal, teachers and school committee emphasized the importance of the uniqueness and excellence of the school. In an interview with the principal, Mr. Ahmad, he stated, "We involve all stakeholders in the promotion planning. That way, everyone feels they have a responsibility to introduce the school's excellence to the community." This is in line with the opinion of Rosyidani et al., (2024) which emphasizes the importance of collaboration in creating a consistent and integrated appeal in promotion.

Secondly, observations of the implementation of promotional programs such as education fairs and involvement in community activities showed that effective communication is very important. Ibu Siti, one of the teachers at SMAN 1 Cisaga, explained, "We are active in various community events and use the opportunity to demonstrate the advantages of the school's learning programs, such as project-based teaching." These results are in line with research by Nurbawani (2021) which shows that promotion involving the local community can significantly increase the interest of prospective students.

Third, the utilization of social media and digital platforms greatly supports the promotion program. In an interview with Mr Ahmad, he added, "We utilize Instagram and Facebook to reach a wider audience, share student successes, and explore new programs." This trend is reinforced by Lestari (2023) which notes that social media is an effective tool in introducing and promoting educational institutions to the public.

Based on the research results, several important aspects that influence the implementation of the school promotion program can be identified. The first is collaboration between stakeholders. This research shows that a promotional program that involves all parties not only enhances the spirit of collaboration, but also adds more value to the school's image which is further strengthened by various perspectives Scandaryanto & Sumarsih (2021). This shows that collaboration is able to bring various innovative ideas and approaches in creating a relevant and urgent promotional program. Furthermore, the use of social media as a promotional tool adds a new dimension to education marketing strategies. In the local context, Mr. Ahmad underlined that social media platforms have opened up many opportunities to interact with prospective students and parents in *real-time*. This allows schools to have two-way communication and respond quickly to requests or concerns, which makes the community feel more engaged (Lestari et al., 2023).

Evaluation of Leadership Strategies in Maintaining Learner Sustainability

This study aims to evaluate the principal's leadership strategies in maintaining the sustainability of student enrollment at SMAN 1 Cisaga. Through a qualitative method involving interviews with the principal, teachers, and direct observation in the field, it was found that several strategies were implemented to maintain and increase the interest of new learner enrollment. The results show that adaptive and inclusive leadership in school management plays an important role in achieving learner sustainability.

Based on an interview with the Principal, Mr. Ahmad Kusnadi, revealed that one of the main strategies is to establish good partnerships with parents and the community. "We continue to build good relationships with parents and involve them in decision-making related to the school. This creates a strong sense of belonging and increases their trust," he says. This is in line with research by (Asri et al., 2021), which emphasizes the importance of partnerships between schools and industry in improving the relevance of education and graduate skills.

The development of diverse extracurricular programs is another strategy prioritized to attract more students. In an interview with Mrs. Siti Fatimah, a teacher at SMAN 1 Cisaga, she explained, "We offer a variety of extracurricular activities that not only focus on academics but also character development and student interests. This provides a special attraction for prospective students and parents. It shows that transformation in the principal's leadership style can create an environment that supports students' freedom to learn. The utilization of technology as a tool for school promotion and management was also found to be an important factor in maintaining learner retention. Mr Ahmad added that they use social media and websites to introduce the advantages of the school and the new programs offered. According to the observation, the school website is now one of the main sources of information for prospective students and parents.

From the results of the study, several key factors were identified in the evaluation of leadership strategies carried out by school principals in maintaining learner retention. First, strategic collaboration with parents and the community is an important foundation in creating a positive school climate. Parents' involvement in supporting school programs reflects the synergy between the school and the community, which can have an impact on parents' decisions in enrolling their children. This shows that the principal not only acts as an internal leader, but also as a change agent in the community (Asri et al., 2021).

Discussion

The principal's strategy in improving school attractiveness includes the active involvement of parents and the community in school activities. Through this approach, the principal managed to strengthen the relationship between the school and parents (Octaviana et al., 2022). The researcher found that parents' participation is very important to create a conducive school climate. This is in line with previous findings which revealed that if parents are involved in school activities, this can increase students' motivation to learn and achieve

Principal's Managerial Leadership Strategy in Maintaining the Sustainability of New Student Enrollment at SMAN 1 Cisaga Ciamis (Penkunas et al., 2019). To that end, schools organize parent committees and socialization activities, which enable parents to understand the education programs offered.

Innovative programs such as *project-based learning* and the introduction of entrepreneurship programs in the curriculum also contribute to increasing the attractiveness of schools. As revealed in the research (Suryani & Sari, 2024), the implementation of programs that are relevant to the needs of the local community can attract students to enroll in the school. The principal at SMAN 1 Cisaga also focuses on developing skills that are relevant to the world of work, thus adding value to students in seeking future opportunities.

One of the factors that support the attractiveness of schools is the management of adequate facilities and infrastructure. Based on observations, improving learning facilities if done well can invite prospective students to participate in the school (Ananda et al., 2023). Research shows that the availability of adequate facilities, such as comfortable classrooms and sports facilities, also has a major influence on parents' decisions in enrolling their children. Therefore, the principal's alignment in planning and managing facilities is an important step in increasing the attractiveness of the school.

Furthermore, a good communication strategy in promoting various school programs and achievements is also an important component in attracting the attention of the community and prospective students. Research conducted by (Chan et al., 2019) revealed that the use of social media and other digital platforms can be an effective means of disseminating information regarding activities, excellent programs, and student achievements in schools. This is also in accordance with the communication strategy implemented by the principal at SMAN 1 Cisaga, which involves the use of various communication channels by involving parents (Akib et al., 2019).

The principal's strategic planning at SMAN 1 Cisaga is not only limited to academic aspects, but also includes community development, innovative programs, facilities management, as well as effective communication. The results show that by adopting these various strategic approaches, SMAN 1 Cisaga can increase its attractiveness, which in turn helps to maintain a sustainable number of new learners. By placing leadership in a broader context, creating strong social networks and considering feedback from the community, the principal can achieve the goal of improving the quality of education in the school and strengthening the school's image in the wider environment.

Last but not least, involvement in community activities has proven effective in building a positive reputation. Programs such as community teaching and participation in local events not only foster a good image of the school, but also show the community that the institution is committed to engaging and contributing to the development of the community. As such, these measures not only provide promotional benefits, but also build community integrity and trust in the school. The results confirm that promotion based on strengthening character values and student achievement can provide a competitive advantage in the midst of many other schools. This is in line with the thinking in the field that consistent delivery of excellence and uniqueness can attract the attention of parents and students. For this reason, the expansion of promotional methods that include various existing resources, both within the community and outside, needs to be the main strategy in future school promotion activities.

The implementation and organization of the promotion program at SMAN 1 Cisaga was successful in increasing the attractiveness of the school through collaboration, the use of social media, and community involvement. The findings suggest that with proper planning and integrated implementation, the school can build a strong positive image, resulting in more new student enrollment decisions. Further research is expected to broaden the insights on how promotional strategies can be adapted for different educational contexts in Indonesia.

The development of innovative extracurricular programs makes SMAN 1 Cisaga attractive to new students. By increasing student participation in various activities outside of class hours, the school seeks to create a more holistic learning experience. A leadership model that emphasizes the development potential of students in non-academic aspects supports a broader and deeper vision of education (Megayanti & Asri, 2022). The implementation of these

programs is expected to not only attract prospective learners but also retain students who have been enrolled.

The use of technology in the promotion and management process makes it easier for schools to adapt to the changing times. It creates better accessibility of information for prospective students and parents about the school's programs, activities and advantages. The utilization of social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, allows schools to reach a wider audience and maintain effective communication (Refani & Azis, 2022). As indicated in a study by Yusmina et al. (2022) school leaders who are adaptive to the development of information technology can expand the impact of the various initiatives they run.

The evaluation results show that leadership strategies that focus on collaboration, program innovation and technology utilization are effective measures that principals can take to maintain learner retention. The findings confirm the important role of inclusive and adaptive leadership in increasing school attractiveness and retaining learners. Further research can be directed at exploring the role of external factors such as government policies and educational trends in the context of learner retention in other schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The study finds that the principal's managerial leadership at SMAN 1 Cisaga plays a crucial role in sustaining new student enrolment. Key strategies include community and parental collaboration, the development of diverse extracurricular programmes to enhance student appeal, and the use of technology to improve promotion and communication. These efforts collectively strengthen the school's public image and accessibility. However, the study's scope is limited to a single school with a small number of informants, suggesting the need for broader research involving multiple schools and stakeholders to validate and expand upon these findings.

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