

Strategies to Increase New Student Admission in Islamic-Based Elementary Schools Post Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. *This study aims to analyze the status of new pupil enrollment, identify internal and external factors influencing the school's competitiveness, and formulate appropriate strategies to increase new pupil enrollment at SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method combined with SWOT analysis and the Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM). Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and the distribution of questionnaires to 84 parents selected through purposive sampling. The results of the study indicate that SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo experienced a decline in pupil numbers from 521 pupils in 2018 to 343 pupils in 2026. An analysis of internal factors indicates that the school's main strengths lie in the application of Islamic values, teacher competence, its flagship tahfidz and character-building programs, and effective school communication. Meanwhile, the main weaknesses include limited facilities and infrastructure, a non-integrated information system, and a high rate of teacher turnover. From an external perspective, the greatest opportunities stem from the public's growing interest in Islamic-based education, parental support, and the development of social media. The main threats, meanwhile, are increasingly fierce competition between schools, more comprehensive facilities offered by competitors, and rising parents. The IFAS analysis results produced a score of 3.295 and EFAS of 3.419 which places SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo in the Grow and Build position (Cell I) in the Internal-External Matrix and in Quadrant I in the SWOT diagram. These conditions indicate that the school is in a strong position and has great opportunities so that the right strategy is an aggressive growth strategy (growth-oriented strategy). Based on the QSPM analysis, the recommended priority strategies are strengthening branding and digital promotion based on Islamic flagship programs, quality differentiation through Islamic excellence, character, and student achievement, and the development of new flagship programs such as accelerated tahfidz, inclusive schools, and digital literacy.*

Keywords: *Competitive Advantage; Educational Marketing Strategy; Islamic Elementary Schools; New Student Admissions; QSPM; SWOT.*

1. Introduction

The strategic role of education in developing individuals who are competitive, have character, and contribute to society is naturally a primary goal of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, as enshrined in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, paragraph IV. In the current era of globalization, where the world is increasingly connected economically, socially, and culturally, education is the primary foundation for producing a generation capable of facing challenges and rapid change. Investment in education not only benefits individuals but also contributes significantly to the development of civilization. Countries with high levels of education tend to have economic stability and better health. This demonstrates that education not only influences an individual's quality of life but also determines the sustainability of development and civilization. However, achieving this requires various challenges, including the implementation of education, accessibility, quality, and the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the workforce. Educational inequality, both geographically and socioeconomically, remains an unresolved issue. Amid these challenges, basic education plays a crucial role as an initial foundation for character formation and individual knowledge. The quality of education at the primary level will significantly determine students' success in subsequent levels of education and their ability to face life's challenges. Therefore, improving the quality of basic education is a top priority in efforts to create a competent and competitive next generation.

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, nearly every sector has been significantly impacted, including education. Restrictions on social interaction as a measure to prevent the spread of the virus have disrupted the continuity of teaching and learning activities in schools. Nevertheless, students' rights to access educational services must still be fulfilled, even under these limitations. In response to concerns about the spread of the virus, schools, including those in Indonesia, have been forced to temporarily suspend face-to-face learning and transition to online learning. The Covid-19 pandemic has drastically changed the educational landscape, pushing institutions education For quick adopt methoddistance learning to maintain the continuity of the teaching and learning process and minimize the risk of virus transmission (Mollenkopf et al., 2020). There are two major challenges facing schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first is the challenge of providing teaching and learning services. This challenge includes limited online learning resources, lack of IT literacy, the safety and health of teaching and non-teaching staff, and so on. The second challenge is related. The sustainability or existence of schools. It is undeniable that Covid-19 has significantly eroded cash flow. People's purchasing power has declined sharply, given that incomes have also decreased during the pandemic. Parents' ability to pay school fees has been impacted. On the one hand, school operational costs have increased. To survive or remain viable, schools must optimize all available resources and use them as effectively as possible. The added value or advantages a school possesses are very useful and support its sustainability.

Every school certainly has advantages that attract students to study there. According to (Nasef and Azaliah 2020) and (Sukartini, Pramudito, and Yuliani 2019), pursuing competitive advantage is a fundamental aspect of business strategy, as organizations seek to differentiate themselves from competitors and secure a superior position in their respective markets. Achieving a sustainable competitive advantage requires a diverse approach, encompassing factors such as price, brand positioning, product quality, customer service, and intellectual property. According to Porter (2001), "competitive advantage is a company's ability to perform better than other companies in the same industry or market. This advantage is achieved through the characteristics and resources the company possesses."

2. Research Methods

The study type (approach) is a qualitative analysis based on a case study approach that applies a SWOT analysis. This technique involves observation, interviews, and document review. Qualitative methods focus on deductive and inductive inferences, as well as the dynamics of relationships between observed phenomena through scientific logic.

The philosophy of this research is post-positivist, emphasizing qualitative research methods. This method is applied in the investigation of natural objects (as opposed to experiments), with the researcher as the primary tool. Data collection is purposeful and snowball-based, data collection is inductive based on triangulation (combined data), and data analysis is inductive based on qualitative data. Thus, qualitative research findings are more than simply generative.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Interpretation of School Strategic Position

The SWOT analysis findings consistently place SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo in the most advantageous position. The Internal-External (IE) Matrix places the school in Cell I (Growing and Building), with an overall IFAS score of 3.295 and an overall EFAS score of 3.419. At the same time, the SWOT quadrant indicates the school is located in Quadrant I (aggressive strategy), with coordinates (1.73; 0.93). The synthesis of these two analytical methods helps strengthen the effectiveness of the conclusion: the school possesses both internal competitive advantages and sufficient external opportunities.

Freddy Rangkuki (2015) argues that the ideal scenario is for organizations to be in Quadrant 1 because they have the ability to implement an aggressive approach to growth (growth-oriented strategy) where they utilize all their internal resources to seize their external opportunities. Similarly, as explained by David and David (2017), the position of Cell I in the IE matrix guides organizations towards intensive strategies of market penetration, market

development, product development, and integrative strategies. Therefore, SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo is not on a defensive strategic direction, but rather growth and development through the utilization of existing strengths.

The dominance of these strengths is demonstrated by the strengths subtotal score of 2.512, which is significantly higher than the weaknesses subtotal score of 0.783. Similarly, the opportunities score (2.176) is greater than the threats score (1.242). The strongest strength measure is the use of Islamic values in daily learning (rating 3.70), and the most important weighting factor is the opportunities factor (rating 0.298), namely creating social media as an instrument for expansion promotion. These two factors, when combined, create the basis for formulating priority strategies.

3.2. Strategic Priority Discussion

Based on the QSPM calculations as presented in Table, eight alternative strategies were obtained which were sorted according to the Sum value.

Total Attractiveness Score(STAS). These eight strategies are discussed below in order from most attractive to least attractive.

1. Strengthening Branding and Digital Promotion Based on Islamic Flagship Programs

This strategy ranks first in priority with the highest STAS score of 6.3665. Within the framework of David and David's (2017) strategy typology, this strategy is a form of market penetration, namely an effort to increase market share for existing educational services through marketing intensification. Kotler and Armstrong (2008) emphasize that promotion is an element of the marketing mix that functions to communicate the value and advantages of a product or service to the target market; in the school context, digital promotion is the most effective communication channel for reaching prospective parents.

This strategic priority is highly relevant to field findings. Respondent characteristics indicate that only 4 of 84 parents first learned about the school through the internet and social media, while the majority still rely on information from neighbors/relatives and kindergartens/early childhood education institutions. In fact, the development of social media is considered an opportunity with the highest weighting score in the EFAS matrix (0.298). There is a clear gap between the enormous potential of digital channels and their low utilization by schools. Several studies support this trend: Habibah and Hidayat (2023) found that the planned use of social media contributes to increasing new student enrollment in private schools, while A. Rahmawati and Hidayati (2023) showed that the implementation of digital marketing is effective as an information system in the new student admission process. Therefore, strengthening branding and digital promotion that consistently highlight flagship Islamic programs such as tahfidz, BTAQ/Qiroati, Bina Pribadi

Islam (BPI), and character building has great potential to expand reach prospective parents and reverse the downward trend in student enrollment.

2. Quality Differentiation through Islamic Excellence, Character, and Student Achievement

Differentiation strategy ranks second with a STAS score of 6.1357. Michael E Porter (1985) stated that differentiation is one of the generic strategies to gain competitive advantage, namely by offering uniqueness that is considered valuable by customers so that it is difficult for competitors to imitate. For SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo, the strongest sources of differentiation are Islamic identity, character and etiquette development, and student achievement is shown by the high rating of the Islamic values factor (3.70) and character development program (3.57) in the IFAS matrix.

This strategy is crucial because the biggest threats facing schools are increasingly fierce competition between schools (rating 3.43) and increasing parental expectations (rating 3.49). Several competing schools in Wonosobo District offer similar Islamic-based programs, so Islamic excellence alone is insufficient if it is not managed as a tangible and well-communicated differentiation. Pratama and Anggrainie (2022) found that service quality, cost, location, and brand image are significant factors influencing parents' decisions in choosing a school. Therefore, strengthening quality differentiation ensures that SDIT Insan Mulia has a unique and defensible position amidst the competition.

3. Development of New Flagship Programs

The new flagship program development strategy ranks third with a STAS score of 6.0362. In the typology (David and David 2017), this strategy is classified as product development.

namely, increasing acceptance by improving or expanding the range of educational services offered. Respondents' open-ended responses revealed some parents' hopes for differentiated programs relevant to current developments, including accelerated tahfidz classes, strengthening inclusive school services, digital literacy and coding, and discussions about developing boarding schools.

This strategy strengthens the school's differentiated position by enhancing the value offered to prospective parents without abandoning its Islamic values. New program development also addresses opportunities, such as the school's potential to develop flagship programs that are in high demand in the community (rating 3.48) and parental support for program development (rating 3.46). Therefore, this strategy serves as an important complement to the two previous priority strategies.

4. Strengthening Parental Services and Communication

The service and communication strengthening strategy ranked fourth with a STAS score of 5.8643. Service quality and communication are crucial components in service marketing, as customer satisfaction is shaped by the alignment between the service received and expectations (Kotler et al. 2016). In the school context, responsive service and effective communication with parents play a direct role in building trust and loyalty.

Research findings indicate that the school has good capital in this aspect. The professional and friendly attitudes of teachers and educational staff received a rating of 3.60 and the school's communication media was deemed effective (rating 3.54). However, the school's response to parental complaints remains a weakness (rating 2.75) that needs to be addressed. Haryono and Theresia Pradiani (2025) emphasized that service quality has a significant influence on parents' decisions to choose a school, so strengthening service and communication is an important factor strategic support strategies to maintain school retention and reputation.

5. Teacher Retention and Competency Improvement Program

The strategy for improving teacher competency and retention ranked fifth with a STAS score of 5.8054. Teachers are a core resource that determines the quality of educational services. (David and David 2017) emphasize that the success of strategy implementation is highly dependent on the capabilities of an organization's human resources. Respondents rated teacher competency in teaching as good (rating 3.51), but the high rate of teacher turnover was the weakness most frequently complained about in open-ended responses.

Frequent teacher turnover has the potential to disrupt the continuity of learning and erode parental trust. Therefore, teacher retention programs through improved welfare, career advancement, and ongoing professional development need to be implemented in tandem with competency enhancement. Furthermore, weekly coaching through Islamic Personal Development for teachers and staff can build and strengthen teacher-employee camaraderie, aligning their vision and mission for school development. This strategy is foundational: without the stability and quality of the teaching staff, differentiation strategies and the development of flagship programs will be difficult to sustain in the long term.

6. Improvement of Facilities and Infrastructure and Integration of Academic Information Systems

This strategy ranks sixth with a STAS score of 5.7285. This strategy is aimed at addressing the most prominent internal weaknesses, namely poorly integrated academic and administrative information systems (rating 2.36), suboptimal learning evaluation and

feedback (rating 2.32), and Facilities and infrastructure still need to be improved (rating 3.24).

While not a top priority, improving infrastructure and information systems is a crucial prerequisite for optimal digital promotion strategies and service enhancements. Integrating academic information systems, for example, will accelerate administrative services while providing reliable data for decision-making and communication with parents.

7. Strategic Partnerships with Other Institutions and Local Governments

Partnership strategy ranks seventh with a STAS score of 5.6833. Strategic partnerships align with opportunity factors such as collaboration with other institutions that have the potential to improve school quality (rating 3.48) and openness of local government support for private schools (rating 3.28). Through partnerships with kindergartens/early childhood education centers, Islamic institutions, parent communities, and local governments, schools can expand their referral network for prospective students while strengthening supporting resources. Given that word of mouth information channels from neighbors/relatives and kindergartens/early childhood education centers are still dominant in this study's findings, partnerships with preschool institutions around Wonosobo can be an effective strategy to maintain a sustainable flow of prospective new students.

8. Competitive Fee Policy and Administrative Transparency

The competitive cost policy strategy ranks eighth with a STAS score of 5.5882. Within the generic strategy framework (M.E. Porter 2001), cost management is associated with a cost leadership strategy. However, in the context of Islamic schools, which compete through quality differentiation, cost strategy is not positioned as a primary advantage, but rather as a hygiene factor that must be managed fairly and transparently.

This is consistent with the lowest STAS scores on this strategy, which This indicates that cost is not a school's primary competitive advantage. However, education costs remain a significant consideration for parents (threat rating 3.21) and have been shown to significantly influence school choice decisions (Haryono and Theresia Pradiani 2025). Therefore, a competitive cost policy, coupled with administrative transparency and a scholarship scheme, remains necessary to ensure that schools' superior quality is accessible to a wider segment of parents.

3.3. Managerial Implications

The results of this study provide several managerial implications for the management of SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo. First, the school needs to prioritize the development of digital marketing capabilities in a planned manner, including consistent management of social

media accounts, content production highlighting flagship Islamic programs, and optimizing the school website as a central information center for new student admissions. Second, Islamic excellence, character, and student achievement need to be deliberately managed as measurable and communicated differentiation, not simply as inherent attributes.

Third, growth strategies must be supported by internal improvements, particularly teacher stability and competence, information system integration, and responsiveness to parents to ensure sustainable growth. Fourth, schools can leverage the still-dominant word-of-mouth channel by establishing formal partnerships with kindergartens/early childhood education centers (TK/PAUD) and parent communities around Wonosobo. All of these strategies should be implemented sequentially according to QSPM priorities, but within a mutually supportive framework.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of research on methods to increase the number of new student admissions at SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo after the COVID-19 pandemic, with SWOT analysis and Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM), the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Insan Mulia Islamic Elementary School in Wonosobo has seen a downward trend in the number of new students enrolling in universities in recent years. The number of students dropped from 521 in 2018 to 343 in 2026, a decrease of 34.17 percent. This indicates that the school faces several challenges in maintaining its attractiveness and competitiveness as competition increases among the growing number of Islamic elementary schools in Wonosobo Regency.
2. SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo boasts several strengths, including Islamic characteristics and quality educational services. Benefits include the application of Islamic values in the learning process, teacher professionalism, a superior curriculum focused on Quran memorization (tahfidz) and character building, strong communication within the school, and a conducive school climate. The following are some of the key strengths that make this school stand out from other similar schools.
3. Infrastructure and service support systems are the school's main weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses identified include: a lack of facilities and school grounds, an information system that isn't integrated with academics, a lack of responsiveness to parent complaints that needs improvement, and a high teacher turnover rate that can easily disrupt the learning process.
4. There are also promising external opportunities for this school. Increasing public attention to Islamic-based education, parental involvement in school development,

promotion through information technology, and social media as a promotional tool present opportunities that can be exploited to attract new students. On the other hand, risks include increased competition between schools, more sophisticated facilities than competitors, rising parental expectations, and concerns about education costs.

5. SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo is in a very advantageous position, as indicated by the results of the SWOT analysis. This school has an IFAS score of 3.295 and EFAS of 3.419, so it will be placed in Cell I (Grow and Build) of the Internal-External Matrix and Quadrant I of the SWOT Diagram. This position means that the school has strong internal strengths and significant external opportunities, so the most appropriate strategy is aggressive growth strategy (growth-oriented strategy).
6. According to the QSPM analysis, the priority strategies for increasing the number of new students are as follows:
 - a) Strengthening branding and online marketing through Islamic flagship programs (STAS = 6.3665);
 - b) Differentiation by quality using Islamic excellence, character, and student achievement (STAS = 6.1357);
 - c) Creating new flagship programs (e.g., accelerated tahfidz (Quran memorization), inclusive schools, and digital literacy) (STAS = 6.0362).

These three strategies are believed to be the best in increasing school competitiveness and attracting the attention of the community at SDIT Insan Mulia Wonosobo.

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