

The Effect of Service Quality, Costs and Location of Education on Students' Interest in Entering Private Vocational High School (Smks) Nurul Islam Cianjur

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Abstract. SMK Nurul Islam Cianjur, which was established in 1999, offers various expertise competencies that have been accredited A and licensed by the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP), such as Institutional Financial Accounting, Software and Game Development, Office Management and Business Services, Computer Network Engineering Telecommunications, Visual Communication Design, and Automotive Engineering. SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur has succeeded in attracting the interest of prospective students for years, as seen from the continuously increasing student admission data. However, in recent years, there has been a decrease in the number of applicants and students who re-register. The type of research used in this thesis is quantitative research with an explanatory research approach. This quantitative study aims to measure the influence of existing variables—service quality, cost, and location—on student interest in enrolling at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur, through brand image as a mediating variable. Education costs do not have a significant effect on interest in entering SMK Nurul Islam Cianjur, affordable costs with inadequate facilities received by students will actually be an obstacle to children's development in achieving their competencies.

Keywords: Competencies; Facilities; Prospective; Students.

1. Introduction

The number of Private Vocational High Schools (SMKS) in Cianjur Regency, West Java Province, has increased significantly, leading to increasingly fierce competition between schools. Prospective students have the freedom to choose the school they are interested in to continue their education. In this situation, vocational schools need in-depth information about the needs and desires of prospective students in order to design effective strategies to attract their interest. Although many studies have discussed the factors influencing student interest in choosing a school, this study aims to highlight the influence of specific factors that are more relevant to the context of private vocational schools, particularly in Cianjur Regency.

Vocational high school (SMK) education focuses on developing specific competencies to

prepare students for the workforce. The growing demand from society, particularly among young people, for good jobs in an increasingly competitive job market has led to the emergence of many vocational high schools (SMKs) in Cianjur Regency. Therefore, it is crucial for each vocational high school to offer advantages that will attract prospective students to continue their education at the institution.

One of the factors that greatly influences students' decisions in choosing a school is the quality of service provided by the school. Therefore, good quality of service at school is very important to create a positive experience for students and parents, which will ultimately influence students' interest in choosing that school.

SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur, which was established in 1999, offers various expertise competencies that have been accredited A and licensed by the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP), such as Institutional Financial Accounting, Software and Game Development, Office Management and Business Services, Computer Network Engineering Telecommunications, Visual Communication Design, and Automotive Engineering. SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur has succeeded in attracting the interest of prospective students for years, as seen from the continuously increasing student admission data. However, in recent years, there has been a decrease in the number of applicants and students who re-register, as recorded in the student admission data as follows:

Table Number of Students at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur from the 2020-2021 to 2024-2025 Academic Year

School year	STUDENT		
	Target	Register	Re-registration
2020 – 2021	680	620	556
2021 – 2022	680	600	520
2022 – 2023	680	580	551
2023 – 2024	680	480	460
2024 - 2025	680	420	357

The data shows a significant year-to-year decline in the number of new students. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the number of re-registered students reached 556, but in the 2021-2022 academic year, this number decreased by 36 students. This decline continued in the 2022-2023 academic year with a decrease of 31 students, and became even more pronounced in the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 academic years, with decreases of 41 and 103 students, respectively. This significant decline in student interest at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur illustrates that private vocational schools in this area face challenges in attracting prospective students. This study aims to explore how service quality, cost, and location can influence student interest, and how brand image can play a role as a mediating variable linking these factors to student interest in continuing their education at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur.

Based on the phenomena occurring at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur, several research gaps exist that warrant further study. First, although numerous studies have examined the influence of service quality on student interest in choosing a school, (Azkiyah et al., 2020; Efendi & Muhsin, 2019) However, no studies have specifically examined the specific factors that differentiate service quality in private vocational schools (SMK), particularly in Cianjur Regency. However, the local characteristics and context of private schools have their own dynamics that can influence student enrollment. Second, although brand image has been shown to play a significant role in consumer decision-making in general, (Mahbub et al., 2023) However, there is still little research that specifically examines how brand image can influence students' interest in entering vocational schools, especially in areas such as Cianjur. Third, although the relationship between service quality, cost, and location with student interest has been widely studied (Sulce et al., 2022; Triyono et al., 2021) However, the role of brand image as a mediating variable in this relationship has rarely been studied. This study will contribute by examining in depth how brand image mediates the influence of these variables on student interest. Fourth, the significant fluctuations in new student admission data at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur indicate that there are still factors that have not been fully identified that influence students' decisions in choosing a school. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring more deeply the factors that may influence students' interest in entering SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur.

2. Research Methods

The type of research used in this thesis is quantitative research with an explanatory research approach. This quantitative study aims to measure the influence of existing variables—service quality, cost, and location—on student interest in enrolling at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur, through brand image as a mediating variable. Quantitative research with an explanatory research approach was used because the main objective of this research is to explain the causal relationship between existing variables. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2019) Explanatory research is used to explain how and why a particular phenomenon or variable relates to other variables, as well as to provide a deeper understanding of the influence between the variables studied. In the context of this research, explanatory research aims to explain the extent to which service quality, cost, and location influence student interest in entering SMKS Nurul Islam, and how brand image can mediate this relationship. A quantitative approach allows researchers to collect data in numerical form, which is then analyzed statistically. This aligns with the research objectives of identifying relationships and influences between variables and testing established hypotheses. By using appropriate statistical analysis techniques, this study is expected to provide objective and measurable results regarding the influence of each independent variable on student interest, both directly and through the role of brand image as a mediating variable.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Respondent Description

This study used primary data, namely a questionnaire distributed to 102 respondents, parents of ninth-grade students in two districts of Cianjur. However, only 100 respondents were usable for analysis. The purpose of this data distribution was to determine the characteristics of the respondents. The following are the respondent criteria:

1) Gender

Table Respondent Description Based on Gender

No	Information	Amount	Presentation
1.	Man	28	28%
2.	Woman	72	72%
	Total	100	100%

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Based on Table it can be concluded that in this study, the dominant respondents were women (72%) and men (28%). This indicates that the gender that decides on a child's education is women.

2) Age

Table Respondent Description Based on Age

No	Information	Amount	Percentage
1.	35 - 40 years	59	59%
2.	41 - 45 years old	13	13%
3.	46 - 50 years	15	15%
4.	51 > years	13	13%
	Total	100	100%

Source: Primary data processed in 2026

Based on the data on the characteristics of respondents aged 35-40 years, there were 59 respondents or 49%, then at the age of 41-45 years there were 13 respondents or 13%, then at the age of 46-50 years there were 15 respondents or 15% and finally at the age of 51> there were 13 respondents or 13%. Based on the data above, it can be shown that this study can find out the Parents of Class IX in 2026 from the age range of 35-40 years.

3) Descriptive Analysis

Based on this study, researchers obtained the results of answers from 100 respondents to

each question from the variables that have been distributed through the questionnaire. These variables include: Quality of Service, Cost, Location, Brand Image, Interest in Entering SMKS. Therefore, each variable is measured using a Likert scale to see the weight of the respondents' answers, using the categories strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. With the following formula:

$$\text{Index Value} = ((\%F1 \times 1) + (\%F2 \times 2) + (\%F3 \times 3) + (\%F4 \times 4) + (\%F5 \times 5)) / 5$$

Information:

F1 is the frequency of respondents who answered 1

F2 is the frequency of respondents who answered 2

F3 is the frequency of respondents who answered 3

F4 is the frequency of respondents who answered 4

F5 is the frequency of respondents who answered 5

The total index is 100 using the Three-Box method, dividing the answers into three categories. Respondents' answers are scored from 1 to 5, resulting in the following perceptions:

$$\text{Lowest: } (\%F \times 1) / 5 = (100 \times 1) / 5 = 20$$

$$\text{Highest: } (\%F \times 5) / 5 = (100 \times 5) / 5 = 100$$

$$\text{Range: } 20 - 100 = 80$$

$$\text{Class Interval Length: } 80 : 3 = 26.7$$

The index value obtained from the calculation above starts from 20-100 with a range of 26.7. With the class interval length of 100 divided into 3 parts, thus obtaining a range of 26.7 each which is used as the interpretation of the perception value below:

Category:

$$\text{Low} = 20 - 46.6$$

$$\text{Medium} = 46.7 - 73.3$$

$$\text{Height} = 73.4 - 100$$

Significance testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method on 100 samples. This test was conducted to examine the significance of the direct relationship between variables (direct effect) and the indirect relationship through brand image (indirect/mediation effect). The results of the hypothesis testing can be seen in Table and Figure.

Table Results of Direct Effect Test

Influence	Path coefficients	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Cost -> Brand Image	0.111	1,247	0.213
Cost -> Interest	0.113	0.865	0.387
Brand Image -> Interest	0.751	5,348	0,000
Service Quality -> Brand Image	0.077	0.773	0.440
Service Quality -> Interest	0.197	1,639	0.101
Location -> Brand Image	0.749	8,133	0,000
Location -> Interest	-0.131	0.830	0.406

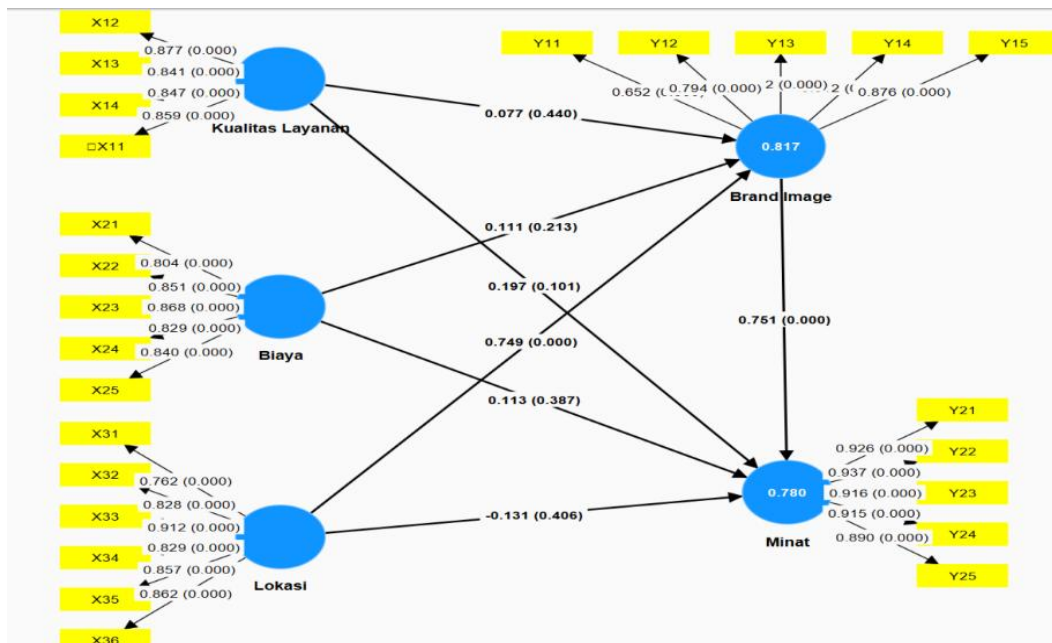


figure full model

Based on table and Figure, the following hypothesis test is produced:

1) Hypothesis Testing 1: Service Quality on Student Interest in Entering SMKS

Based on the test results, it shows that the Service Quality variable does not have a positive effect on students' interest in entering SMKS with a coefficient of 0.197 (positive), while the t-statistic value = 1.639 and p-value = 0.101 (more than 5%). These results indicate that Service Quality does not have a positive effect on Student Interest in Entering SMKS. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 1, which states that Service Quality has a positive effect on Student Interest in Entering SMKS, cannot be accepted.

2) Hypothesis Testing 2: The Effect of Cost on Student Interest in Entering SMKS

Based on the test results, it shows that the Education Cost variable does not have a positive effect on students' interest in entering SMKS with a coefficient of 0.113 (positive), while the t-

statistic value = 0.865 and p-value = 0.387 (more than 5%). These results indicate that costs do not have a positive effect on students' interest in entering SMKS. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 2, which states that costs have a positive effect on students' interest in entering SMKS, cannot be accepted.

3) Hypothesis Testing 3: Location of Education on Students' Interest in Entering Vocational Schools

Based on the test results, it shows that the Educational Location variable does not have a positive effect on Student Interest in Entering SMKS with a coefficient of -0.131 (Negative), while the t-statistic value = 0.830 and p-value = 0.406 (more than 5%). These results indicate that the location of education does not have a positive effect on students' interest in entering SMKS. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 3, which states that the location of education has a positive effect on students' interest in entering SMKS, cannot be accepted.

4) Hypothesis Testing 4: Brand Image on Students' Interest in Entering Vocational Schools

Based on the test results, it shows that the Brand Image variable has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS with a coefficient of 0.751 (positive), while the t-statistic value = 5.348 and p-value = 0.000 (less than 5%). These results indicate that Brand Image has a positive influence on Student Interest in Entering SMKS. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 4, which states that Brand Image has a positive influence on Student Interest in Entering SMKS, can be accepted.

5) Hypothesis Testing 5: Service Quality on Brand Image

Based on the test results, it shows that the Service Quality variable does not have a positive effect on Brand Image with a coefficient of 0.077.(Positive), while the t-statistic value = 0.773 and p-value = 0.440 (more than 5%). These results indicate that Service Quality does not have a positive effect on Brand Image. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 5, which states that Service Quality has a positive effect on Brand Image, cannot be accepted.

6) Hypothesis Testing 6: Costs on Brand Image

Based on the test results, it shows that the Cost variable does not have a positive effect on Brand Image with a coefficient of 0.111.(Positive), while the t-statistic value = 1.247 and p-value = 0.213 (more than 5%). These results indicate that Cost does not have a positive effect on Brand Image. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 6, which states that Cost has a positive effect on Brand Image, cannot be accepted.

7) Hypothesis Testing 7: Location of Education on Brand Image

Based on the test results, it shows that the Educational Location variable has a positive influence on Student Interest in Entering SMKS with a Brand Image of 0.749.(Positive), while the t-statistic value = 8.133 and p-value = 0.000 (less than 5%). These results indicate that the

location of education has a positive effect on brand image. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 7, which states that location has a positive effect on brand image, can be accepted.

Table Results of Indirect Effect Tests

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Cost -> Brand Image -> Interest	0.083	0.091	0.071	1,172	0.241
Service Quality -> Brand Image -> Interest	0.058	0.052	0.073	0.791	0.429
Location -> Brand Image -> Interest	0.562	0.547	0.129	4,353	0,000

Based on table, the results of the indirect influence test:

1) Hypothesis Testing 8: Service quality has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image.

The test results show that brand image is unable to mediate the influence of service quality on student interest in enrolling in vocational schools. This is indicated by the Original Sample value of 0.058.(Positive), while the t-statistic value = 0.791 and p-value = 0.429 (More than 5%). These results indicate that service quality does not have a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 8, which states that service quality has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image, cannot be accepted.

2) Hypothesis Testing 9: Costs have a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image.

Based on the test results, it was shown that brand image was unable to mediate the influence of costs on students' interest in entering vocational schools. This is indicated by the Original Sample value of 0.083.(Positive), while the t-statistic value = 1.172 and p-value = 0.241 (More than 5%). These results indicate that costs do not have a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 9, which states that costs have a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image, cannot be accepted.

3) Hypothesis Testing 10: Location has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image.

Based on the test results, it shows that brand image is able to mediate the influence of location on students' interest in entering vocational schools. This is indicated by the Original Sample value.0.562(Positive), t-statistic value =4,353and p-value =0,000(less than 5%). These results indicate that location has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS

through brand image. Based on these results, it can be concluded that hypothesis 10, which states that location has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image, can be accepted.

3.2. Discussion

1) Influence Quality of Service on Student Interest in Entering SMKS

The results of this study indicate that Service Quality does not have a positive and significant influence on Student Interest in entering SMKS. These results show that the quality of service does not have a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur.

2) The Influence of Costs on Students' Interest in Entering Vocational Schools

The results of this study indicate that cost does not have a positive and significant influence on students' interest in enrolling in SMKS. This finding suggests that cost is not a factor among parents' considerations in enrolling their children in SMKS Nurul Islam.

3) Influence Location versus Interest

The results of this study indicate that location does not have a positive and significant influence on students' interest in entering SMKS. These results indicate that location is not a consideration for parents of students interested in enrolling their children in SMKS Nurul Islam.

4) The Influence of Brand Image on Interest

The results of this study show that Brand Image has a positive and significant influence on Interest. *Brand image* (brand image) has a positive and significant effect on parents' interest in SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur, the higher the interest in enrolling their children in SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. A good brand image, which includes parents' perceptions of the quality and identity of the school, makes it easier for parents to make the decision to enroll their children in SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur.

5) Influence Service Quality on Brand Image

The results of this study indicate that service quality does not have a positive and significant influence on brand image. Consistently superior, friendly, and reliable service will build positive customer perceptions of SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. High service quality will not only increase parents' interest in enrolling their children at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur, but also encourage parents to enroll their children at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur.

6) The Influence of Cost on Brand Image

The results of this study indicate that costs do not have a positive and significant influence on brand image. Costs (prices) do not have a significant and positive influence on brand image. *brand image* and the decision to enroll in SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. Costs commensurate with

quality (fair/premium prices) strengthen a positive brand image. High costs are often associated with better quality and status, strengthening brand image, while affordable prices can build an image as an economical brand.

7) Influence Location to Brand Image

The results of this study show that location has a positive and significant influence on brand image. Its strategic geographic location, easy access, and location in a premium area directly enhance the school's perceived quality and prestige. A good location builds trust, facilitates access, and creates a positive impression that strengthens SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur's identity in the eyes of parents and students.

8) Influence Service quality has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image.

The results of this study show that service quality does not have a positive and significant effect on increasing prospective students' interest in entering SMKS, with brand image act as a mediator who strengthens the relationship. Excellent services, such as facilities, curriculum, and teaching, build a positive image that triggers interest and enrollment decisions.

9) Costs have a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image.

The results of this study indicate that costs do not have a positive and significant effect on increasing the interest of prospective students to enter SMKS. Based on the test results, it shows that brand image is not able to mediate the effect of costs on students' interest in entering SMKS.

10) Location has a positive influence on students' interest in entering SMKS through brand image.

The results of this study indicate that location has a positive and significant influence on students' interest in entering SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur through brand image. The location, which is easily accessible, representative, and comfortable, makes it attractive. parents of students to register their children at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn from this research: Service quality does not positively influence student interest in enrolling at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. This indicates that elements of the educational service product, such as accreditation, curriculum, graduate prospects, and study program suitability, are not effective enough in generating interest in enrolling at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. Therefore, service quality is not the primary factor influencing parents' and children's interest in enrolling at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. Education costs do not have a significant effect on interest in entering SMK Nurul Islam Cianjur, affordable costs with inadequate facilities received by students will actually be an obstacle to children's development in achieving their

competencies. The location of education does not have a significant and positive influence on interest in attending school, where close distance, easy accessibility, and a safe environment do not guarantee increased student interest. Brand image has a significant impact on interest in enrolling at SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. The more positive the brand image, the more likely prospective students are to be attracted to the school. Brand image has been shown to be a key factor in influencing prospective student interest. The quality of service does not have a positive influence on the interest of parents in enrolling their children in SMKS Nurul Islam. Costs do not affect the brand image of SMKS Nurul Islam Location has a crucial role in shaping and influencing the School's brand image, Brand image cannot be a mediating variable between service quality and prospective students' interest in entering SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. Brand image cannot be a mediating variable between costs and interest in entering SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur. Brand Image can be a mediating variable between Location and students' interest in entering SMKS Nurul Islam Cianjur

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