

Educational Quality Management In Building Branding

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Abstract:

This study is motivated by the importance of quality management in strengthening the competitiveness of schools, particularly vocational institutions that face intense competition. The purpose of this research is to analyze the implementation of educational quality management and its relation to school branding at SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina Cimerak, Pangandaran. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, using observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques. Data were analyzed through Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that quality management was implemented through integrated planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling, which contributed to the improvement of teaching processes and student competencies. These quality outcomes serve as the main asset in strengthening school branding, particularly through the achievements of alumni in both employment and entrepreneurship. However, the branding strategy remains limited to simple promotional activities and lacks systematic communication, thereby reducing its effectiveness in enhancing the school's image. It is concluded that educational quality functions as the fundamental basis for building public trust, while branding serves as a strategic instrument for reinforcing the image and competitiveness of the school.

Keywords: *educational quality, branding, school*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya manajemen mutu pendidikan dalam membangun daya saing sekolah, khususnya pada lembaga pendidikan kejuruan yang menghadapi persaingan ketat. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis implementasi manajemen mutu pendidikan serta keterkaitannya dengan strategi branding di SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina Cimerak, Pangandaran. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, melalui teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan dengan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa manajemen mutu pendidikan dilaksanakan melalui perencanaan, pengorganisasian, pelaksanaan, dan pengendalian yang saling terintegrasi, sehingga berkontribusi pada peningkatan mutu proses pembelajaran dan lulusan. Mutu tersebut menjadi aset utama dalam memperkuat branding sekolah, terutama melalui keberhasilan alumni di dunia kerja dan wirausaha. Namun demikian, strategi branding yang ada masih terbatas pada promosi sederhana dan belum terkelola secara sistematis, sehingga belum mampu sepenuhnya memperkuat citra sekolah. Kesimpulannya, mutu pendidikan berfungsi sebagai fondasi utama dalam membangun kepercayaan masyarakat, sementara branding menjadi instrumen strategis dalam memperkuat citra dan daya saing

sekolah.

Keywords: Mutu Pendidikan, Branding, Sekolah

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in building quality and competitive human resources. Through education, individuals not only acquire knowledge but also develop their potential to face global challenges. Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere so that students actively develop spiritual strength, self-control, intelligence, and skills needed for themselves, society, nation, and country (UU Sisdiknas, n.d.).

In the context of the globalization era, educational institutions are demanded to improve quality and build competitive advantage. Education quality management becomes one of the important strategies that can ensure the learning process runs effectively, efficiently, and produces competent graduates. According to Mulyasa, education quality management is a management approach that places quality as the main focus participatively and continuously, involving all components of the educational institution (Mulyasa, 2016). Thus, education quality is not only related to input and process but also to output in the form of quality graduates.

In addition to internal quality, educational institutions also require external strategies in the form of branding. School branding is a systematic effort to build a positive institutional image so that it is known, trusted, and chosen by the community. Branding plays a role in building public awareness, association, and loyalty towards an institution. In the field of education, branding is not merely related to logos or slogans but rather to graduate reputation, school achievements, and the excellence of programs offered (Kotler, P., & Kevin, 2012).

Nevertheless, a problem that often arises is the weakness of branding strategy even though the school has good graduate quality. This condition is also experienced by SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina Cimerak. Based on student number data from year to year, the school experiences significant fluctuations; even in the 2024/2025 academic year, the number of registrants dropped drastically to 16 students. This indicates that excellent graduate quality has not been fully communicated effectively to the community. Therefore, the application of quality management integrated with branding strategy becomes important so that the school is able to maintain sustainability and increase attractiveness amidst competition among educational institutions.

Several previous studies show the relevance of this issue. Suhendut found that school quality management can increase community trust and institutional competitiveness (Suhendut, 2020). Herawan, Kurniady, and Sururi emphasize the importance of an ISO 9001:2008-based quality management model integrated with the needs of the business and industrial world (Herawan, D., Kurniady, D. A., & Sururi, 2019). Meanwhile, Mustika shows that effective school branding can increase competitiveness through accreditation strategies, teacher quality, and planned promotion (Mustika, 2021). However, research regarding the direct connection between education quality management and branding strategy in private vocational schools, particularly in the Pangandaran area, is still limited.

Based on this background, this research aims to analyze education quality management in building branding at SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina Cimerak. The research results are expected to provide theoretical contributions for education management studies as well as practical recommendations for school managers in strengthening quality and branding strategies sustainably.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina, located in Batumalang Village, Cimerak District, Pangandaran Regency. The selection of this location is motivated by the school's need to strengthen its image (branding) amidst increasing competition among educational institutions. The research subjects include the principal, productive teachers, students, and alumni who are considered to have strategic roles in the education quality management process and school branding development.

The type of research used is a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth understanding related to the implementation of education quality management in building school branding. According to Sugiyono, qualitative research aims to investigate natural object conditions with the researcher as the key instrument, while the case study design enables the exploration of phenomena contextually and in depth (Sugiyono, 2021).

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques. First, observation was used to directly observe education quality management activities and school branding strategies. Observation was chosen because it is able to record phenomena occurring in the field (Nasution, 2020). Second, in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, students, and alumni, which aim to explore the experiences and views of informants regarding education quality and branding. Interview techniques are considered effective in obtaining richer and more detailed information (Sugiyono, 2018). Third, documentation in the form of collecting secondary data such as administrative records, school archives, activity photos, and other documents relevant to the research topic.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which includes four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data presentation, and (4) conclusion drawing. Data obtained in the field were sorted to focus on relevant aspects, presented narratively and in tables, then interpreted to answer the research questions (Rian Utama et al., 2020).

To ensure the validity of findings, source, technique, and time triangulation techniques were used. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the principal, teachers, students, and alumni; technique triangulation by using a combination of observation, interviews, and documentation; while time triangulation by conducting data collection at different periods. According to Moleong, the use of triangulation is very important to increase the credibility and validity of qualitative research (Moleong, 2017).

3. RESULTS

The improvement of education quality at SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina is evident from the integration between planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation in school management. At the planning stage, the school compiles an annual work plan oriented towards character strengthening, teacher quality improvement, and competency-based curriculum development. Teachers are also involved in the preparation of learning tools so that the strategies applied are more contextual with student needs. This kind of planning reflects the principle of quality planning, which emphasizes comprehensive planning from the beginning so that quality can be achieved sustainably (Mulyasa, 2016).

Organizing at the school is conducted by forming a clear work structure, including task division through the principal's Decree as well as the formation of quality teams and teacher working groups. This pattern shows the existence of a structured coordination

system so that every school element understands its respective role. In addition, the school builds collaboration with students, alumni, and parents in efforts to strengthen the school image. This collaboration is in line with Sallis's view that a healthy educational organization is one that is able to involve all stakeholders to create a quality culture (Sallis, 2010).

Learning implementation at SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina utilizes project-based learning and scientific approaches that are appropriate to the characteristics of Vocational High Schools (SMK). Teachers do not only rely on lecture methods but also involve students in direct practice, the use of digital media, and project-based activities. Thus, students obtain richer learning experiences, both from the theoretical and vocational skills sides. This finding is in line with the research of Herawan, Kurniady, and Sururi, which emphasizes that the connection between the education quality system and the needs of the industrial world is the main key in SMK development (Herawan, D., Kurniady, D. A., & Sururi, 2019).

Quality evaluation is conducted through a continuous monitoring system, including daily quizzes, mid-semester exams, final exams, to competency skill exams (UKK). The school has also begun to implement tracer studies as a form of assessment of graduate outcomes, both those continuing to higher education, working in the industrial world, and those who are self-employed. This finding shows an effort to build a continuous improvement cycle, in accordance with the Kaizen framework applied in quality management.

From the branding perspective, competent graduate quality becomes the school's main asset. However, this positive image has not been fully communicated to the wider community. Promotion is still conducted simply, so that brand awareness has not been formed optimally. This condition is reflected in the unstable fluctuations in the number of new students, even dropping sharply in the 2024/2025 academic year. This affirms that strong branding does not only depend on internal quality but also on consistent external communication strategy. Aaker explains that brand equity is built through quality perception, brand awareness, positive associations, and public loyalty. The suboptimal branding at the school causes the excellence of graduate quality to not be fully translated into attractiveness in the eyes of the community (Aaker, 1991).

4. DISCUSSION

The connection between education quality management and branding is clearly seen in the case of SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina. Good quality forms the foundation of the school's reputation, while effective branding functions as a communication means that strengthens that positive image in the community. In line with Mustika's (2021) findings, branding strategies based on graduate quality play an important role in increasing school competitiveness, particularly in the context of vocational institutions oriented towards the working world. Thus, it can be affirmed that education quality and branding have a mutually reinforcing relationship: quality becomes the foundation of internal success, while branding is the external manifestation of well-maintained quality (Ilmi, I., Erihadiana, M., & Wanayati, S. 2023).

In addition, the involvement of alumni in the process of strengthening quality and branding becomes an important factor that needs attention. Alumni not only become indicators of education output success but also function as promotional agents who can expand the school's network and reputation. The presence of alumni in the working world and their success in entrepreneurship provide added value to the school image. According to Kotler and Keller, consumer experience in the context of education is that students and alumni play a large role in building quality perception and loyalty towards a brand. This

shows that school branding strategies will be more effective if they are able to integrate alumni experiences and successes as real proof of education quality (Kotler, Philip & Keller, 2009).

On the other hand, the findings of this research also reveal challenges that must be immediately overcome. The limitations of facilities and infrastructure, such as the minimal availability of textbooks and practice equipment, become obstacles to the optimization of education quality. This limitation has implications for the less than optimal learning experience of students, which in turn can affect the school image. Therefore, quality strengthening needs to be accompanied by continuous investment in supporting learning facilities. This is in line with Sallis's view, which states that the success of education quality management is highly dependent on the adequacy of resources supporting the achievement of standards (Sallis, 2010). Thus, quality improvement strategies at SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina must pay attention not only to managerial and learning aspects but also to the completeness of facilities as one of the main pillars of school branding sustainability.

5. CONCLUSION

Education quality management at SMK Nurul Huda Al Gina Cimerak is implemented through integrated planning, organizing, implementation, and controlling, so that it is able to support the improvement of learning process quality and graduate competence. The quality achieved becomes an important foundation for strengthening school branding, particularly through the success of students and alumni. However, the branding strategy has not been fully optimal because it is still limited to simple promotion and has not been supported by systematic external communication. Thus, education quality plays as the main foundation, while branding becomes a strategic instrument to strengthen the image and competitiveness of the school amidst competition among vocational educational institutions.

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