



Strategies to Improve the Recruitment of New Students at MTSN 02 Lebong During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The quality of madrasa contributes to public trust in continuing education. A similar thing happens to MTsN 02 Lebong. A strategy is required so that MTsN 02 Lebong becomes the primary choice. Even though the madrasa is not new, the condition of each new student admission to this madrasa is difficult to move to increase the number of prospective new students. One of the causes is the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. This research adopted a field study with a qualitative descriptive approach. The data were garnered from observations, interviews, and documentation. The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation with the Head of MTsN 02 Lebong, Head of PPDB 2018/2019, Deputy Chair of PPDB 2020/2021, Chair of PPDB 2020/2021. Subsequently, the secondary data were solicited from books, journal articles, and various documents relevant to this research. The results revealed that prior to the emergence of covid-19, the number of students was only 22 people. However, during the covid-19 pandemic, the number of students was 26 people. Before, the covid-19 pandemic, the strategies to increase the recruitment of new students included distributing brochures, conducting chat activities with parents, visiting every elementary school to introduce MTsN 02 Lebong. During the pandemic, many recruitment socialization activities were carried out using social media and the implementation system for the recruits.

Keywords: *Strategies; Improvement; Recruitment; New Students; Covid-19 Pandemic*

Introduction

Education is a fundamental need for humans in order to develop and live their lives (Irwin et al., 2022). As a result, in order to meet their educational needs, the community will select schools or madrasas based on their preferences and strengths (Ayangco-Derramas, 2022). Both schools and madrasas have their own certain qualities.

Today's disruptive era triggers an increase in competitiveness between schools or madrasas. Such competitiveness lies in the aspect of schooling facilities with their competitive growths (Hidayat et al., 2022). This can be seen in the various forms of promotions and strategies, especially for private

educational units, which must have higher quality and competitiveness than state educational units as their counterparts (Efferi, 2019).

The real situation found in MTsN 02 Lebong in terms of public interest in enrolling students in the madrasah has demonstrated an unstable scale of students' enrollment. For instance, in 2018-2019, there were 22 students who registered. In 2019-2020, the years when the covid-19 pandemic initially appeared, the number of students were only 13 people. In 2020-2021, this school got 17 students. Lastly, in 2021-2022, the school had 26 students.

Education is the main point in a nation's progress (Zembylas, 2022). Without education, it will give birth to backwardness in all things, including international competition (Rietveld & Schilling, 2021). In line with this, Islam has encouraged every Muslim to love science and to constantly educate himself, his family, and society in cognitive, affective, and conative aspects. Other things considered even more important are the education of the soul and the security of the right faith in accordance with Allah's and His Messenger's guidance. Education represents dynamic rather than static activities of learning (Kohen et al., 2022). Reviewing the dynamics of education management, education necessitates good and consistent management in order to achieve educational goals effectively and efficiently.

Several supporting components, such as financing, curriculum, and infrastructure to support educational institutions, can determine the quality of an educational institution. Other human resource components or elements include principals, teachers, managers, and students (Bratton et al., 2021). To achieve the goals of educational institutions, one component provides support for other components. The foregoing pattern provides maximum participation and contribution to achieving the goals of educational institutions. Learners are the community members who try to develop their potential through learning processes (Moriña, 2022). Learners also represent the people who expect to receive educational services based on their talents, interests, and abilities to improve well. To some extent, learners are associated with those who have the authority to receive lessons. Student management is a service that focuses on regulating, supervising, and providing student system services in and out of the classroom, such as introduction, registration, individual services, and the development of overall abilities, interests, and needs until students reach maturity in school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Quality student management is critical for educational institutions so that students can grow and develop to their full physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and psychological potential (Al Qorni, 2021).

Quality management is a system that aims to improve customer satisfaction while also allowing for continuous improvement (Maganga & Taifa, 2022). Quality management can also be defined as an organization's ability to maintain the quality of the services or goods provided (Fang et al., 2022). Hence, quality management is a managerial effort that includes planning, organizing, controlling, and evaluating quality and is carried out by every member of management in the organization to improve the quality of work.

Quality management ensures that an organization, product, or service works in a consistent fashion. Quality management has four main components, namely quality planning, quality assurance, quality control, and quality improvement (Pop & Țițu, 2020). Quality management is focused not only on product and service quality, but also on how to achieve them (Chang et al., 2009). Therefore, using quality assurance and control of processes and products is of importance to achieve more consistent quality.

When compared to developed countries, the quality of education in developing countries remains significantly lower. As we all know, education in developing countries is such a mess. Many people in developing countries still do not understand the value of education, so the majority of people in developing countries pay less attention to it (Meles, 2020). Indeed, education is one of the development indices and a component of determining whether a country is progressing or not.

In most developing countries, educational policies are associated with a legacy of colonial education policies. It is claimed that this is because developing countries did not have the opportunity to develop their own educational policies based on the realistic needs of their people at the time of their independence. Independence in the political sphere does not automatically translate into independence in other spheres, particularly in education.

It can be determined that all educational policies in developing countries, which are still looking for their own forms and patterns of policies, always learn from the main colonial countries, which have been very advanced compared to their own countries in terms of implementation. This demonstrates that developing countries do not simply abandon the forms of policies brought by colonial countries. Rather, they can still use and apply them in regulating educational policies in their countries.

Low educational quality kills post-secondary students' creativity and undermines students' self-confidence when they enter the harsh world of work. School graduates are often less courageous children with a strong youthful nature, and they are further removed from the reality of their surroundings. Other issues that arise are the relatively low welfare of teachers, the lack of basic education facilities, and the limited operational costs of education. Even if it is done gradually, this solution must be distributed (Umam, 2020). The purpose of this research is to determine the true condition or number of students at MTsN 02 Lebong prior to the covid-19 pandemic; to determine strategies for increasing new students at MTsN 02 Lebong; to determine the system for implementing new student recruitment activities at MTsN 02 Lebong; and to determine what obstacles arise in the implementation of new student recruitment activities at MTsN 02 Lebong. All of this is used as data for a comparative analysis of patterns and outcomes of new student recruitment under normal conditions and in the event of a pandemic disaster.

A strategy is required to achieve the best results in the recruitment of new students. The term strategy is derived from the Greek *strategos*, which means "a general set of maneuvers carried out to overcome an enemy during combat." Strategy is the initial foundation for an organization and the elements within it to arrange steps while taking internal and external factors into account to achieve predetermined goals. The overall strategy is developed by Hax and Majluf as explained in the following details. First a strategy is a unified, consistent, and integral decision pattern. Second, a strategy defines and presents long-term organizational goals, action plans, and resource allocation priorities. Third, a strategy chooses the field in which the organization will work on or with. Fourth, a strategy attempts to gain a long-term advantage by responding appropriately to opportunities and threats from the organization's external environment, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Fifth, a strategy involves all levels of hierarchy and organization. With the foregoing theory, it is possible to give the organization the strength it needs to achieve the goals known as organizational strategy (Efferi, 2019). In terms of recruitment, Jackson, Schuler, and Werner explained that recruitment is an effort to find qualified candidates that can be occupied in certain positions in a company or organization. Meanwhile, Hadari Nawawi added that recruitment can be defined as the process of obtaining a number of qualified candidates for the main position or job in the environment, organization, or company (Ansar, 2022). Furthermore, the discourse of recruiting new students has been stated in Article 1 paragraph 4 of Law Number 20 of 2003. When it comes to recruiting new students, the processes are inextricably linked to competitiveness among educational institutions. The recruitment of new students in madrasas, regardless of any level, as the educational institutions under the management of the Ministry of Religion are not subject to the system of zoning. The schools determine new students in a way that collects, selects, and places prospective students into those at certain levels and educational paths (Syafuruddin, 2021). New Student Admission (in an Indonesian abbreviation known as PPDB) is one of the stages that every student who wishes to continue his or her education must complete. Admission of new students is usually done as part of the first activity, which is a selection. Admission of new students online during the covid-19 pandemic for Indonesia, when it was still struggling during the covid-19 pandemic, showed an increase in the number of transmissions. The world of education also requires special attention to continue attempting to halt the spread of COVID-19 through the activities of learning from home. In such a condition, the

Ministry of Education and Culture's policy even eliminates the 2020 National Examination. Admission of new students in 2020 is another critical activity that must be tailored to the pandemic conditions at the time. Parents and students who come directly to the intended school participate in the activities of recruiting new students. This is where the problem in this research lies: during a covid-19 pandemic, this cannot be done because it will result in crowding at schools, which potentially increases the level of covid-19 transmission. The solution to the problems listed above is to create a new student admission website that can be accessed from home, beginning with the list process, selection, and announcement results. In the foregoing way, parents and students do not need to come to school. Furthermore, this website serves as a means of communication between the school and the parents of prospective students. This online website for the admission of new students is built using the waterfall method and the PHP and MySQL programming languages, making the site display more interactive and allowing the server to process new data and information for a quicker process of new student admissions (Sofica et al., 2020).

Relevant Research

The first research discusses the new student recruitment strategy to increase competitive advantage at MA Nahdlatul Muslimin Undaan Kudus. The type of research adopted was field research with a qualitative approach on the basis of a naturalistic perspective (naturalistic inquiry). The purpose of this study was to determine the strategy of recruiting new students to increase competitive advantage at MA Nahdlatul Muslimin Undaan Kudus. This research was conducted by Adri Efferi from the Kudus State Islamic Institute, Central Java, Indonesia. The similarity between Adri Efferi's research and the current research is that they both examine student recruitment strategies. Adri Efferi's research and the current research are both applying a qualitative approach. However, the difference between the two studies is in the locus of discussion. The current research discusses the strategy to increase the recruitment of new students during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is located at MTsN 02 Lebong. While, Adri Efferi's research discusses the recruitment strategy of new students to increase competitive advantage located at MA Nahdlatul Muslimin Undaan Kudus (Efferi, 2019).

The second research is oriented towards school marketing discourse in increasing student interest based on the Delta Model. This study used a qualitative method. This research was conducted by Ririn Tius Eka Margareta, Bambang Ismanto, and Bambang Suteng Sulasmono. The similarity between their research and the current research is that they both discuss the recruitment strategy of new students. Other similarities are found in the research approach which both adopts a qualitative approach. Meanwhile, the difference between the two studies lies in the locus of discussion. Their research discusses new student recruitment strategies that have been specified using the Delta Model (Margareta et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the current research does not focus on a specific recruitment model, thus providing an opportunity to obtain more data.

The third relevant research discusses marketing strategies in the recruitment of new students at madrasah ibtidaiyah ma'arif (MIMA) 01 Kh. Siddiq Jember. This study used a qualitative research approach using a descriptive method. This research was compiled by Silfiah Aisyatul Mazyah, Khotibul Umam, and Hepni. The similarity between their research and the current research is in the discussion discourse that talks about student recruitment strategies. While, the difference between their research and the current research is found in the research locus (Mazyah et al., 2020).

The fourth relevant research is research on recruitment strategy and selection of staff underwriting positions at PT. MSIG Insurance Indonesia. This type of research was qualitative research using descriptive method. This research was compiled by Diandra Rizko Siswanto, Lindawati Kartika, Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Management, Bogor Agricultural University. The similarity between their research and the current research is that they both discuss recruitment strategies and the type of research that is qualitative. However, the difference between their study and the current

study is found in the research locus. The current study discusses the strategy to increase the recruitment of new students during the covid-19 pandemic, where this research lies in the realm of education. Meanwhile, their research is oriented to the realm of the company (Siswanto, 2016).

The fifth relevant research is entitled *The Effect of Recruitment and Selection Process on Employee Performance at PT. BANK Sulutgo*. This study applied a quantitative research method to analyze the effect of recruitment and selection on employee performance at PT. This research was compiled by Billy Renaldo, Viktor Lengkong, Silcyjeova Moniharapon. The similarity with the current research is that they both discuss recruitment. However, the difference is in the method adopted. The current research uses a qualitative research method. Furthermore, the current research talks about strategies to increase student recruitment that are focused on the educational discourse. In contrast to the aforementioned research, that research talks about the recruitment and selection of employee performance aimed at the company (Potale, 2016).

Methods

This research was a field study with a qualitative descriptive approach (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). According to Creswell and Poth, the foundation of qualitative research is constructivism, which holds that reality has multiple, interactive dimensions and that social experiences are exchanged and interpreted differently by each individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data of this study were gained from primary and secondary data sources. Data collection techniques consisted of observation, interviews, and documentation. Subsequently, the data analysis techniques comprised some elements such as editing, classification, verification, and conclusion (Miles et al., 2014).

Findings and Discussion

First, the data obtained from interviews with Sri Sayekti, the Head of MTsN 02 Lebong, revealed that the real number of students at MTsN 02 Lebong was 22 students. Fahrizal Hadi, the Head of 2018/2019 PPDB, stated that the true condition of the number of students before and after the COVID-19 pandemic was 22 people. According to Mat Syairun, Deputy Chair of PPDB 2020/2021, the real condition of the number of students at MTsN 02 Lebong prior to the Covid-19 pandemic was 22 people. The statements above indicate that they share the same information, stating that there are 22 students. Furthermore, Ratih Ade Lestari, the Chair of the PPDB 2020/2021, stated that the real condition of MTsN 02 Lebong was related to public interest in registering as students prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, totaling 22 students.

Second, according to the head of MTsN 02 Lebong, the strategic implementation in efforts to increase the number of new students before the Covid-19 pandemic, namely socialization activities held such as visiting elementary schools in Lebong by introducing MTsN 02 Lebong and explaining the importance of going to school at MTsN. When the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, these activities shifted away from being mediated by a face-to-face mode to being mediated via social media. The head of PPDB 2018/2019 MTsN 02 revealed that the strategy was used to increase the number of new students by visiting elementary schools in Lebong, introducing MTsN 02 Lebong, and explaining the importance of going to school in madrasas. After the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic, these activities switched to using social media. The head of PPDB 2020/2021 MTsN 02 elucidated “the first recruitment process was that we went to the elementary school and provided adequate explanations to student candidates. We also distributed our school brochures to grade 6 students. Since the emergence of covid-19, we have switched the strategy in which such socializations are done via Facebook. In that way, we explained various provisions so that prospective new students knew various requirements including registration time and end of registration”. According to the explanation above, the strategy of increasing the number of new students prior to the COVID-19 pandemic is by visiting elementary schools and then carrying out

activities to explain alongside distributing the school brochures to grade 6 students. The brochures are complete and cover many components such as madrasa profiles, extracurricular activities, vision and missions. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic stroke, the socialization switched as it was mediated by via social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Such media were utilized both in groups and individually.

Third, there are three approaches to recruitment implementation. First, it was the requirement for new prospective students before and after the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic. The Head of MTsN 02 Lebong stated that the approach to the requirements before the covid-19 pandemic used family cards, photocopies of diplomas, photographs, and photocopies of deeds. It has remained the same since the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic, with the addition of child identity cards (in the Indonesian abbreviation known as KIA). After the covid-19 pandemic, the addition of MCH was related to the interests of student EMIS data so that student data collections such as NISN was uploaded later. It was in sync with the new student registration file. The foregoing data were delivered by the head of PPDB 2018/2019. Second, according to Sri Sayekti, the Head of MTsN 02 Lebong, the registration procedure carried out remained the same both before and after the covid-19 pandemic. Students were first required to fill in the link that had been shared via brochure. According to Fahrizal Hadi, the Head of PPDB 2018/2019, there was almost no difference in the way of registering new students before and after the covid-19 pandemic. Parents and the guardians of students could come directly to the madrasa. The madrasa had prepared a student registration book specifically for this matter. Such a registration book was also functional for ensuring that the data entered were not disorganized. As such, the operators could easily record new students in the EMIS application. According to the preceding description, the registration procedure prior to the COVID-19 pandemic involved notifying prospective new students to return brochures and forms that had been distributed along with the madrasa's requirements. In the meantime, following the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic, the registration procedure remained largely unchanged, except for filling out the registration link that had been provided or shared on social media. Third, the data entry process was conducted by officers so that the data could well-organized. According to Sri Sayekti, the Head of MTsN 02 Lebong, in terms of data management or data entry, the students were guided to filling in their data regularly, well, and accurately, so that the data could be managed as systemized. Fahrizal Hadi, the Head of PPDB for 2018-2019, explained, "We could see data entry based on the completeness of the student files collected at the time of registration, so all identity data were copied into the prepared book. Any deficiencies were reported. In addition, the most crucial aspect was the collection of diplomas, family cards, and credit cards. This was because, in the future, there would be correlations among the cards, allowing the data to be neatly organized and making data entry in the EMIS application easier for operators". According to the above description, data entry activities before and after the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic were carried out by filling out student registration books. Data entry activities could be carried out properly and correctly using the student registration data books, leading to a more complete, neater, and orderly data entry arrangement.

Fourth, Sri Sayekti, the Head of MTsN 02 Lebong, explained that there were almost no obstacles to admitting new students. Even if there were, all of them could be overcome. The madrasa was well-prepared and ready for any process of promoting madrasas both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Fahrizal Hadi, the Head of PPDB 2018/2019, shared information which was almost in line with what the head of the madrasa stated above. Nonetheless, with some details, he informed that the quite distance of students' location at some point made it difficult for new students to deliver files before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of which was caused by the weak internet signal. When students uploaded their data on the given link, some internet signal interference often occurred. Ratih Ade Lestari, Chair of PPDB 2020/2021, explained that before the covid-19 pandemic, there was an approach to chatting with the parents of prospective students. It was difficult to find those who were ready and willing to take part in the event, whereas after the covid-19 pandemic, these obstacles no longer existed. There were a few difficulties for operators who worked on social media. Sometimes the internet signal was weak.

The four things presented above show that the madrasa had made strategic efforts and steps to produce the number of new students both before and after the covid-19 pandemic. However, the results found indicated that the number of new students were still in a worrying condition, with the number of new students still in the range of fewer than 30 people. Taking these conditions into consideration, several steps must be taken for the madrasa, including: The first is to build collaborations to make promotions to study in madrasa with the KUA Sub-district, influential religious teachers, some male teachers who conduct regular Friday sermon, those who conduct Ramadan safari if it is during Ramadhan, and those who are active in mosques. The second is to establish programs which can promote society to study in madrasa. For example, every Islamic holiday commemoration, the madrasah celebrates the activity by inviting community leaders, influential people such as BMA, businessmen, and organizational leaders to attend madrasa by inserting motivational messages. The third is to develop programs for extra-curricular activities that can attract society to let their children to study in madrasa. One of which is creating a Drum Band group. Fourth, madrasa teachers always strive to increase sincerity in carrying out their duties, increase the sense of belonging to the educational unit, and improve their academic abilities. Thus, the foregoing will generate high-quality services, learning processes, and outputs. If the aforesaid four strategies are implemented, it is expected that public trust in MTs.N 02 Lebong will increase. When trust increases, it is expected that new prospective students will also increase.

Conclusion

The real condition of the number of students at MTsN 02 Lebong prior to the covid-19 pandemic was 22 students, and 26 new students were gained after the covid-19 pandemic. Several strategies for increasing new students prior to the covid-19 pandemic were done by visiting elementary schools to provide explanations, distribute brochures to 6th grade students, hold a chat with the parents of 6th grade elementary school students. When the covid-19 pandemic stroke, the strategies switched to using social media such as Facebook to spread information about madrasa. Before the covid-19 pandemic, the registration procedure was to notify prospective new students to collect the forms that had been distributed along with the madrasa's requirements. However, during the covid-19 pandemic, the registration procedure was to fill in the registration link that had been provided or distributed via social media. Data entry was done by filling out the new student registration book. The obstacles faced when the recruitment of new students was the low level of public trust in the education unit of MTs.N 02 Lebong. Further strategies were needed to increase public trust.

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