



# Strategic Optimization of Student Management in Strengthening the Institutional Image of Educational Institutions: A Multi-Case Study at the Junior Secondary School Level

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## Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the optimization of student management in improving the branding image of schools through a multi-case study at SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan. Student management plays a strategic role in supporting educational quality and strengthening public trust in educational institutions. This research employed a qualitative approach using a multi-case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving school principals, vice principals, teachers, students, and parents. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that the optimization of student management is implemented through systematic planning, student admission management, student development programs, discipline enforcement, extracurricular activities, academic and non-academic achievement enhancement, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. These efforts contribute significantly to building a positive school image characterized by improved student achievements, increased community trust, stronger stakeholder engagement, and higher enrollment rates. Furthermore, both schools integrate student-centered management practices with institutional vision and mission to create a competitive and distinctive branding image.

## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive educational era, educational institutions are required not only to provide high-quality educational services but also to build a positive image in the eyes of the public. School image or branding image has become one of the key factors influencing public trust in selecting educational institutions. Schools with a strong branding image tend to be more attractive to prospective students and receive greater support from various stakeholders. Therefore, effective management strategies are needed to build and maintain a positive school image, one of which is through the optimization of student



management.

Student management is a crucial component of educational management that encompasses the entire process of managing students from admission to graduation. Student management activities include planning, new student admissions, student development, potential enhancement, discipline supervision, evaluation, as well as guidance and counseling services. The effective implementation of student management can produce students who are high-achieving, well-characterized, and possess competencies aligned with educational goals. Ultimately, such success contributes to improving the school's reputation and public image.

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The school's branding image is not only constructed through promotion or publication alone, but also through the quality of educational services directly experienced by students and the community. Students' academic and non-academic achievements, a positive school culture, discipline, and student involvement in various activities are indicators that can strengthen the school's branding image. Thus, student management serves as a strategic instrument in building the competitive advantage of educational institutions.

SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan are junior high schools that strive to improve the quality of educational services and strengthen their school image through various student management programs. Both schools have different characteristics, strategies, and practices in managing students to develop their potential and build public trust. Various academic and non-academic development programs, character strengthening, extracurricular activities, and efforts to enhance student achievement are part of the schools' initiatives in building a positive branding image.

Based on these phenomena, this study is important to be conducted in order to deeply examine how the optimization of student management is implemented in enhancing school branding image. This research uses a multi-case study approach at SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies, implementation, and impacts of student management on the formation of school branding image. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational management studies and serve as a practical reference for schools in improving institutional image and competitiveness.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multi-case study design. The qualitative approach is selected because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of optimizing student management in

enhancing school branding image from the perspectives of the involved actors. The multi-case study design is used to compare and analyze student management practices implemented at SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan, thereby obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the similarities, differences, and unique strategies applied in each school.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan, Situbondo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The selection of these two schools was based on the consideration that both implement various student management programs oriented toward improving educational quality and **strengthening the school's image in society**. The research subjects were determined purposively, based on the consideration that the informants possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the focus of the study. The informants included school principals, vice principals for student affairs, teachers, extracurricular supervisors, students, and parents of students.

Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to obtain data regarding the implementation of student management programs and school activities related to the formation of school branding image. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore information regarding strategies, implementation, and the impact of student management on school image. Documentation was used to complement the research data, including school documents, activity reports, student achievement records, activity photographs, and various archives relevant to the research focus.

Data analysis was conducted interactively based on the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis was carried out from the beginning of data collection until the completion of the study. In the multi-case study, analysis was conducted in two stages, namely within-case analysis to deeply understand each individual case and cross-case analysis to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between cases.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation. In addition, the researcher also conducted member checking with informants to ensure that the data corresponded to actual conditions. Thus, the research findings are expected to achieve a high level of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

The findings of the study indicate that SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan implements student management in a planned and systematic manner, starting from student admissions until students complete their education. At the planning stage, the school develops a student affairs program aligned with its vision and mission. The program includes character development, improvement of academic and non-academic achievements, development of extracurricular activities, and strengthening a culture of discipline.

In its implementation, the school provides various development services for students through both curricular and extracurricular activities. The various achievements obtained by students in academic and non-academic fields serve as

indicators of the effectiveness of student management. In addition, the school actively publishes its activities and achievements through social media, the school website, and community engagement activities, thereby enhancing the school's visibility within society.

SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan also implements comprehensive student management with an emphasis on developing students' potential and character building. Development programs are carried out through religious activities, discipline reinforcement, counseling services, and the development of students' talents and interests. The school provides extensive opportunities for students to participate in various competitions and social activities. These efforts have resulted in improved student achievement and increased public trust in the school. Furthermore, the school collaborates with parents and the community to support student development programs, thereby fostering a harmonious relationship between the school and its surrounding environment.

The findings show that the optimization of student management has a positive impact on school branding image. This impact is reflected in improved student achievement, the development of a positive school culture, increased community participation in school activities, and a rising number of new student enrollments each academic year. The school's branding image is constructed through various student achievements in both academic and non-academic domains. Student success represents the quality of educational services provided by the school, thereby shaping a positive public perception.

The findings also indicate that student management is a strategic factor in building school branding image. This finding is consistent with educational management theory, which states that students are the central focus of educational services and a key indicator of school success. Effective student management produces high-quality graduates, thereby increasing public trust in educational institutions.

In both schools, the optimization of student management is realized through systematic planning, continuous implementation of development programs, and regular evaluation. These practices demonstrate that school branding image is not only determined by promotional activities but also by the quality of the educational process within the school. When students demonstrate achievement, discipline, and good character, the community tends to develop a positive perception of the school.

Further findings show that extracurricular activities are an important instrument in building school branding image. Through these activities, students can develop their talents and interests, enabling them to achieve various accomplishments that bring recognition to the school. These achievements serve as effective promotional media, as they provide tangible evidence of the school's educational quality.

In addition, the use of digital media and social media by both schools strengthens the branding image developed through student management. Consistent publication of student activities and achievements increases the school's visibility in society. This indicates that school branding image is formed through a combination of internal school quality and effective communication strategies to the public.

Cross-case analysis shows that SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan is more prominent in strengthening academic achievement and school activity publications, while SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan places greater emphasis on character development, religious activities, and community involvement. Although they adopt different approaches, both schools demonstrate that the optimization of student management significantly contributes to improving school reputation and competitiveness.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that student management plays a central role in shaping school branding image through systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. This is consistent with educational management theory which positions students as the core of educational services and the primary indicator of institutional quality. In both SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan, student management is not merely an administrative function, but a strategic process integrated **with the schools' vision** and mission. The structured planning of student affairs programs indicates that both institutions have adopted a goal-oriented approach that aligns student development with institutional identity building. This alignment is crucial because branding image in education is not only constructed externally through promotion but internally through consistent educational quality. Therefore, student management becomes a foundational mechanism that connects internal educational processes with external perceptions of the school.

Furthermore, the implementation of student management in both schools reflects a holistic approach that integrates academic, non-academic, and character development dimensions. The emphasis on extracurricular activities, discipline enforcement, and counseling services illustrates that student development is viewed comprehensively rather than narrowly focused on academic achievement alone. This finding reinforces the notion that modern educational institutions must adopt a whole-child approach to ensure balanced development of learners. In addition, the integration of religious and character-based activities, particularly in SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan, highlights the contextual adaptation of student management practices to local cultural and religious values. Such contextualization strengthens institutional identity and contributes to a distinctive branding image that differentiates the school from others. The combination of academic excellence and character formation ultimately enhances the perceived quality of the school in the eyes of stakeholders, including parents, students, and the wider community.

Another important aspect revealed in the findings is the strategic role of student achievement as a key determinant of school branding image. Academic and non-academic achievements serve as tangible evidence of educational effectiveness and institutional success. In this context, student achievements function as **symbolic capital that enhances the school's reputation**. The more students achieve in various competitions and activities, the stronger the public perception of the school's quality becomes. This phenomenon aligns with reputation theory, which suggests that organizational image is constructed through observable outcomes rather than mere promotional narratives. Both schools actively encourage student participation in competitions and

extracurricular events, indicating a deliberate strategy to generate achievements that can be used as branding instruments. Therefore, student achievement is not only an educational output but also a communicative tool that reinforces institutional credibility and competitiveness in the educational market.

The study also reveals the importance of communication and digital media utilization in strengthening school branding image. Both SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan actively use social media platforms and school websites to disseminate information about student activities and achievements. This practice reflects the growing importance of digital visibility in educational branding. In the contemporary digital era, public perception of schools is significantly influenced by online representation and communication strategies. The consistent publication of school activities creates transparency and builds trust among stakeholders. Moreover, digital communication allows schools to reach a wider audience beyond their immediate geographical environment. This finding supports the view that branding image is not solely determined by internal quality but also by how effectively that quality is communicated to the public. Thus, digital literacy and media management become essential components of modern student management systems.

In addition, collaboration between schools, parents, and communities emerges as a significant factor in strengthening student management and school branding image. The involvement of parents in supporting student development programs indicates the presence of a participatory educational ecosystem. Such collaboration enhances the effectiveness of student management by providing emotional, social, and material support for students' development. In SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan, for example, community engagement is particularly emphasized through religious and social activities, which strengthen the school's social legitimacy. This aligns with the concept of school-based management, which emphasizes stakeholder participation in educational governance. When schools successfully build strong relationships with external stakeholders, they not only improve student outcomes but also enhance their institutional image. Therefore, school branding image is not an isolated construct but a collective product of shared responsibility among schools, families, and communities.

The comparative analysis between the two schools reveals both similarities and differences in their approaches to student management. SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan focuses more on academic achievement and digital promotion strategies, while SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan emphasizes character development, religious activities, and community engagement. Despite these differences, both schools demonstrate that effective student management contributes significantly to strengthening branding image. This indicates that there is no single standardized model for building school branding, but rather multiple pathways depending on institutional context and values. The diversity of strategies highlights the importance of contextual adaptability in educational management practices. Schools must align their student management approaches with their unique identity, resources, and community expectations to achieve optimal branding outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the idea that student management is a multidimensional construct that integrates administrative, pedagogical, and socio-cultural dimensions. It is not limited to technical

management processes but extends to identity formation and institutional reputation building. The study contributes to the development of educational management theory by highlighting the linkage between student management practices and branding image construction. This relationship suggests that student management should be understood as a strategic asset rather than a routine administrative function. The integration of student development programs with branding strategies represents an emerging paradigm in school management that emphasizes performance-based reputation building.

Practically, the findings suggest that schools should strengthen the synergy between student development programs and branding strategies. Effective student management requires continuous innovation, particularly in integrating digital communication, extracurricular development, and stakeholder collaboration. Schools should also prioritize consistency in implementing programs to ensure sustainable outcomes in student achievement and institutional reputation. Additionally, professional development for teachers and staff in managing student affairs and digital communication is essential to maximize the impact of student management on branding image. Therefore, improving human resource capacity is a critical factor in sustaining school competitiveness.

Finally, the overall findings confirm that school branding image is not merely a result of external promotion but a reflection of internal educational quality shaped through effective student management. The continuous interaction between planning, implementation, achievement, communication, and stakeholder involvement forms a comprehensive system that constructs institutional identity. Both schools in this study demonstrate that when student management is optimized, it produces not only high-quality students but also a strong and positive institutional image. This underscores the importance of viewing student management as a strategic foundation for educational excellence and long-term institutional sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the optimization of student management at SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan is implemented in a systematic, well-planned, and sustainable manner, starting from the planning stage, implementation, to evaluation. Both schools demonstrate that student management is not limited to administrative aspects, but also encompasses academic and non-academic development, character building, and strengthening of school culture. Various programs such as curricular and extracurricular activities, counseling services, as well as the reinforcement of religious values and discipline serve as the main instruments in improving student quality. In addition, the involvement of parents and the community, along with the utilization of digital media, further strengthens the implementation of student management in achieving educational goals.

Furthermore, this study finds that the optimization of student management makes a significant contribution to enhancing school branding image. This is reflected in improved student achievement, the establishment of a positive school culture, increased community participation, and a growing number of new student enrollments each academic year. Although there are differences in strategic

focus between the two schools, with SMP Negeri 1 Mlandingan emphasizing academic achievement and digital publication, and SMP Negeri 2 Mlandingan focusing more on character development and community engagement, both schools consistently demonstrate that effective student management is a strategic factor in building a positive institutional image and competitiveness. Thus, student management can be viewed as a fundamental foundation for the sustainable development of school branding image.

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