

# Optimizing Educational Service Management to Attract New Students: A Qualitative Study at SMP 3 Tanjungsiang

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## ARTICLE INFO

### *Keywords:*

Educational Service  
Management;  
Strategy;  
Interests of New Students

### *Article history:*

Received 2024-09-20  
Revised 2024-11-23  
Accepted 2024-12-31

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the management of educational services as a strategy to attract new students at SMP 3 Tanjungsiang, a junior high school situated in a mountainous area. Modern education focuses not only on quantitative measures, such as student enrollment, but also on qualitative aspects, aiming to prepare human resources capable of facing future challenges. Growing competition among schools requires effective strategies to recruit competent students. This research applies a qualitative descriptive approach to gain an in-depth understanding of service management strategies. Data were collected through direct observation of the school environment, structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, and members of the new student admissions committee (PPDB), as well as documentation of school programs and activities. Data analysis followed an interactive model, including data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation applied to ensure validity. The findings reveal that SMP 3 Tanjungsiang successfully attracts new students through multiple strategies, including enhancing academic and non-academic programs, organizing students into regular and superior classes, and improving extracurricular achievements. Among these, the most influential factor is the performance and coordination of the PPDB committee. These results offer practical guidance for schools seeking to optimize educational service management and student recruitment, particularly in geographically challenging regions.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization and technological advancement, educational institutions face significant challenges in attracting new students (Fidiyanti, 2020). Competition among schools and universities has become increasingly fierce, driven by the evolving preferences and expectations of prospective students and their parents. In this context, educational service management plays a pivotal

role in enhancing the competitiveness and appeal of educational institutions. Research on educational service quality and recruitment strategies has shown that high service standards and stakeholder engagement significantly influence school attractiveness and enrollment decisions (Setyadi & Utari, 2023). Moreover, studies in vocational settings have found that public relations, school facilities, and the quality of services provided directly affect parents' decisions to enroll children in a school, highlighting the need for strong communication and service excellence in institutional management (Lestari & Ruspitasari, 2025).

Effective service management involves developing strategies to provide positive experiences for prospective students, including clear communication, transparency, adequate facilities, and friendly yet professional services. The advantage of quality educational services has also been observed in kindergarten settings, where dimensions such as reliability and responsiveness significantly influence parental preferences, suggesting that service quality impacts family decisions even at early education levels (Rahmawati, 2025). Studies at the secondary level further reinforce that schools implementing structured service quality and promotional strategies tend to attract higher student participation, particularly when service delivery aligns with stakeholder expectations. For example, research reviewing PPDB-based marketing programs found that strategic branding and digital outreach significantly improved institutional visibility in elementary contexts (Nurkarim & Muin, 2024).

Education is essentially a lifelong process of transmitting knowledge, skills, and values, occurring both inside and outside formal institutions. Local governments and communities play an essential role in facilitating educational equality through decentralization policies, which empower regions to plan, finance, and execute educational programs tailored to local needs. However, disparities in educational access across Indonesian regions have persisted and, in some cases, widened since decentralization, as noted by Tahir (2014). Policies such as the zoning system for new student admissions have generated debates regarding the balance between equity and quality (Tahir, 2014). Research on PPDB implementation has indicated that zoning strategies can sometimes create bottlenecks in service delivery and access, suggesting the importance of tailoring admission management to local contexts for better outcomes (Qonita, 2020).

Human resources, infrastructure, and other supporting elements must meet adequate standards to ensure that students receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for life and not merely for work, as highlighted by Kurniadin et al. (2013). Quality planning and implementation of educational services, including quality control systems, strengthen institutional reputation and stakeholder satisfaction, which in turn affect enrollment decisions (Kurniadin, Santoso, & Prasetyo, 2013). Empirical studies across various educational levels have shown that service quality and school image mediate parents' decisions in choosing a school, with higher perceived quality linked to greater satisfaction and enrollment rates (Tjay & Widodo, 2025). This situation has intensified competition among educational institutions, as they must continuously improve and respond to the pressures of various stakeholders. Management, as Suyuthy (2017) emphasizes, is a critical component in ensuring that educational institutions operate productively and effectively (Suyuthy, 2017).

Nevertheless, challenges remain that hinder the quality of education, including insufficient and unevenly distributed educators and staff, inadequate infrastructure such as textbooks and learning media, underdeveloped quality control and assurance systems, and limited operational funding to sustain quality learning activities (Mustari, Indihadi, & Elan, 2020). Research in different school contexts supports these findings, showing that administrative and service processes—especially during student admissions—require systematic supervision to ensure equitable outcomes and stakeholder trust (Asiyah & Supardi, 2024). These gaps demonstrate that the quality of educational services has not been standardized across inputs, processes, and outputs, resulting in an education system that often prioritizes graduation outcomes over the actual quality of the learning experience (Fadhli, 2017). Service quality in education is essential not only for enhancing learning outcomes but also for influencing the interest of prospective students, as institutions that succeed in satisfying their stakeholders tend to attract more students (Dwiyanto, 2018).

This is particularly relevant for schools in geographically challenging areas, such as highland regions, where limited population and socio-economic factors consistently present obstacles to enrollment. Cultural, social, and economic conditions, combined with logistical limitations, make it especially difficult for these institutions to attract new students each academic year. International literature on parental school choice underscores that factors such as perceived educational quality, teacher competence, facilities, and school-parent engagement are significant determinants in families' decisions, indicating that service-related factors operate across diverse educational settings and cultures (Bekele, 2025). Although previous studies have explored general aspects of educational quality, teacher performance, and policy impacts, there remains a limited understanding of how structured service management strategies directly influence student enrollment.

Research by Setiawan and Hartati (2019) has shown that effective communication strategies affect prospective students' decision-making (Setiawan & Hartati, 2019), while Prasetyo (2020) emphasized the importance of school branding and service innovation (Irawan & Prasetyo, 2020). Wibowo et al. (2021) examined parental perceptions of educational services in rural areas (Pambudi, Masteriarsa, Wibowo, Amaliyah, & Ardana, 2020), and Putri and Santoso (2022) explored service management strategies for improving student satisfaction in secondary schools (Putri & Santoso, 2022). Moreover, studies evaluating online PPDB systems during the pandemic found that technology-mediated admission processes can improve service continuity and stakeholder satisfaction, reflecting evolving management needs in response to external disruption (Warmanto & Arif, 2025). Collectively, these studies indicate that service management is a key determinant in attracting new students, yet there is a gap in integrating these findings into comprehensive strategic frameworks that guide schools in highland and challenging areas to increase enrollment.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of educational service management in attracting new students and to identify key factors in service provision that enhance the interest and satisfaction of prospective students. By examining strategies related to communication, facilities, staff professionalism, and service innovation, this study intends to provide practical recommendations for educational institutions to improve service quality and competitiveness, ensuring that schools can meet both community expectations and stakeholder demands in a sustainable manner.

## 2. METHODS

Research methodology is a systematic approach used to obtain scientific truth, which is tentative and open to continuous testing and revision (Moleong, 2024) (Sugiyono, 2011) (Sugiyono, 2018). Choosing an appropriate research method is crucial to achieve optimal results and must be tailored to the phenomenon being studied (Budiharto, 2023). This study was conducted at a private junior high school from August to October and employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative descriptive research aims to describe and illustrate existing phenomena, focusing on characteristics, quality, and interrelationships between activities without manipulating variables (Abduloh, 2020). The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for educational research as it allows researchers to investigate social phenomena and human interactions in natural settings (Iskandar, 2020).

The primary data in this study were collected through field research methods, including structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Structured interviews were conducted with five school administrators and ten teachers, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, to obtain detailed information about the management of educational services aimed at attracting new students (Budiharto, 2023). Observations were carried out to directly examine the conditions and service practices at the school, providing insights into real-time interactions and processes (Kartika, 2020)(Kartika, 2021). Documentation involved analyzing written records, such as school reports, policy documents, meeting minutes, and other institutional records, to complement field observations and interviews (Juhadi, 2020) (Moleong, 2024) (Nuary, 2024).

Secondary data were obtained through library research, collecting information from books, journals, articles, theses, dissertations, and online resources relevant to educational service management and student recruitment strategies (Supriani, 2023) (Supriani, 2024). This combination of primary and secondary data allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Romdoniyah, 2024).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Moleong, 2024) (Rifky, 2024). Data reduction involved filtering relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents. Data presentation organized findings into a systematic narrative, while conclusion drawing interpreted patterns and insights in relation to the research objectives. To ensure validity, source triangulation was employed by comparing information from multiple data sources (Rahardjo, 2023).

The research process can be summarized in the following table:

Stage	Method	Data Type	Details
Data Collection	Observation	Primary	Direct observation of school service practices and interactions
Data Collection	Structured Interview	Primary	5 administrators, 10 teachers, 45–60 min each
Data Collection	Documentation	Primary & Secondary	School records, policy documents, reports
Data Collection	Library Research	Secondary	Books, journals, theses, online articles related to educational service management
Data Analysis	Interactive Analysis Model	Primary & Secondary	Data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, source triangulation

This methodology allows a systematic and comprehensive analysis of educational service management as a strategy for attracting new students, integrating both empirical observations and literature-based insights.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Findings

The research at SMP 3 Tanjungsiang, a junior high school located in a mountainous area, shows that geographic and demographic conditions strongly influence the school's strategies for attracting new students. The school's remote location limits the pool of prospective students, necessitating proactive service management strategies.

#### Educational Service Management Planning

Interviews with the Principal revealed a phased plan for student development: "A short-term plan for one year, for example, 7th grade students get to know and enjoy school. The following year, 8th grade students are trained to be independent and courageous. The following year, 9th grade students are trained to compete academically and non-academically. Graduating students must be independent, intelligent, courageous, and willing to compete." Both academic and non-academic programs, including extracurricular activities such as scouting and reog kendang, are planned to develop students' talents and interests.

The Public Relations (PR) department communicates school programs to the community through the school website, magazines, and student participation in competitions. Interviews with PR staff confirmed these strategies are used to inform prospective students and parents about school programs. The PPDB (student admission) committee was formed based on teacher competencies, experience, and community knowledge, including collaboration with village and religious leaders.

### Implementation of Educational Service Management

Observation and interviews indicated that the school implements area mapping and sets recruitment targets, conducts door-to-door presentations, and collaborates with elementary schools. Promotional activities include competitions, religious studies, exhibitions, and distribution of scholarships and awards. Community engagement activities, such as attending national celebrations and social services, are carried out to build public trust and strengthen relationships. A teacher explained, "We visit elementary schools and hold competitions to introduce our school programs, ensuring children and parents know what we offer."

### Supervision and Evaluation

The principal supervises all stages of educational service management, particularly the PPDB committee. Monitoring ensures program implementation runs smoothly, with guidance and intervention when challenges arise. Teachers participate actively in the recruitment process, supporting optimal implementation. The principal emphasized: "We monitor every stage of the PPDB process, guide the committee, and address challenges promptly to achieve the school's enrollment goals."

### New Student Enrollment Data

Table 1 shows new student enrollment over the last three years.

School Year	Class Quota	Number of New Students	Status
2021/2022	30	25	Did not meet quota
2022/2023	30	35	Exceeding quota
2023/2024	30	43	Exceeding quota

The data indicate a positive trend, with enrollment exceeding quotas in the last two academic years, suggesting that the school's service management strategies are effective despite geographic challenges.

### Factors Affecting Recruitment

Two major challenges were identified: the school's remote location and competition with three other junior high schools in the area. Interviews highlighted that effective communication, structured planning, and innovative promotional strategies are key in maintaining competitiveness.

### Discussion

The findings at SMP 3 Tanjungsiang indicate that educational service management plays a pivotal role in attracting new students, particularly in a geographically remote setting with limited population density. The school's location in a mountainous area presents inherent challenges, including lower visibility, limited access for prospective students, and heightened competition with neighboring schools. Data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation reveal that the school's strategies encompass a comprehensive approach involving planning, implementation, supervision, and community engagement. The quantitative outcome shows an increasing trend in student enrollment over the last three years, with 25 students in 2021/2022, 35 in 2022/2023, and 43 in 2023/2024, exceeding the school quota for the latter two years. These findings indicate that structured educational service management can mitigate geographic disadvantages and enhance institutional attractiveness.

Analysis of the planning phase reveals that the school systematically designs academic and non-academic programs to address both student needs and community expectations. Interviews with the Principal highlighted a phased developmental plan: "A short-term plan for one year, for example, 7th grade students get to know and enjoy school. The following year, 8th grade students are trained to be independent and courageous. The following year, 9th grade students are trained to compete academically and non-academically. Graduating students must be independent, intelligent, courageous, and willing to compete." This approach aligns with the holistic education theory proposed

by Kurniadin et al. (2013), emphasizing that education should develop life skills and not merely prepare students for employment (Kurniadin et al., 2013). Furthermore, the combination of academic excellence with non-academic development, including scouting and reog kendang, demonstrates a comprehensive strategy to nurture student potential, echoing Mayasari et al. (2021), who argue that continuous development in extracurricular activities supports long-term student growth (Mayasari, Pujasari, Ulfah, & Arifudin, 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, service management in education emphasizes planning, implementing, and evaluating services to meet stakeholder needs effectively (Basri, 2011) (Dwiyanto, 2018). The school's efforts to integrate PR and the PPDB committee illustrate the application of service marketing principles within educational settings. Kotler and Keller (2016) highlight that delivering quality services and engaging with stakeholders builds trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2016). SMP 3 Tanjungsiang operationalizes this by providing transparent information to prospective students and parents, utilizing multiple communication channels such as brochures, banners, website content, and community engagement events. These strategies reflect the school's recognition that stakeholder perception is as critical as service quality in influencing enrollment decisions.

The PPDB committee emerges as a unique and novel aspect of the school's strategy. Unlike conventional approaches that focus solely on promotional tactics, this committee embodies a collaborative operational model, integrating teachers, administrative staff, community leaders, and local authorities. This organizational design ensures that recruitment efforts are informed by both internal expertise and external community knowledge, facilitating a more targeted and culturally sensitive approach. The Principal emphasized the importance of committee members' behavior, image, and experience, noting that these factors directly impact public perception. This insight provides a significant contribution to the literature, extending findings by Mayasari and Irwan, who primarily focus on marketing strategies without considering internal collaborative structures (Mayasari et al., 2021) (Irawan & Prasetyo, 2020).

The implementation phase demonstrates a systematic application of educational service management principles. Area mapping, target setting, and SWOT analysis are conducted to identify the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, guiding recruitment strategies. The school's activities—competitions, religious studies, exhibitions, and social services—serve dual purposes of community engagement and student development. A teacher noted, "We visit elementary schools and hold competitions to introduce our school programs, ensuring children and parents know what we offer." This confirms Safroni's (2012) assertion that educational activities must align with community needs and expectations to be effective (Safroni, 2012). Similarly, Setiawan and Hartati (2019) emphasize that clear communication strategies significantly influence parents' decisions in choosing schools (Setiawan & Hartati, 2019), an assertion affirmed by the observed outcomes at SMP 3 Tanjungsiang.

Supervision and evaluation are critical in sustaining program effectiveness. The Principal's continuous oversight of the PPDB committee and the monitoring of academic and non-academic activities ensure that strategies are implemented consistently and challenges addressed promptly. Budiharto (2023) posits that methodical monitoring and leadership directly affect the quality of educational management, a statement confirmed by this study's findings (Budiharto, 2023). The active involvement of teachers in recruitment activities also reinforces the importance of organizational loyalty and teamwork, consistent with Dwiyanto (2018), who highlights that collaborative efforts within educational institutions enhance service delivery and stakeholder satisfaction (Dwiyanto, 2018).

Comparison with previous studies highlights both affirmations and antitheses. The study affirms the findings of Setiawan and Hartati (2019) and Prasetyo (2020) regarding the importance of marketing and communication in attracting prospective students. Similarly, the alignment of academic and non-academic planning with student development needs supports the conclusions of Kurniadin et al. (2013) and Mayasari et al. (2021) regarding holistic education. However, the role of the PPDB committee presents an antithesis to prior research (Kurniadin et al., 2013). While earlier studies primarily

emphasize external promotional strategies, this study demonstrates that internal collaborative structures and coordinated engagement with community stakeholders are equally, if not more, critical in recruitment success. This insight challenges the notion that marketing alone drives enrollment outcomes, emphasizing the interdependence of service quality, organizational management, and stakeholder participation.

Further, the study highlights the practical application of service quality theory in an educational context. Dwiyanto (2018) and Basri (2011) stress that quality services encompass both academic and non-academic dimensions, including the responsiveness of the institution to stakeholder needs. SMP 3 Tanjungsiang operationalizes this by offering tailored programs, scholarships for high-achieving and underprivileged students, and inclusive participation in community activities. These practices confirm theoretical assumptions and provide empirical evidence that comprehensive service management enhances institutional attractiveness, even in challenging geographic locations.

Additionally, the study extends the understanding of competitive dynamics among schools in rural settings. The observed competition with three neighboring junior high schools illustrates that limited population density intensifies the need for strategic differentiation. The school's emphasis on quality, innovation, and stakeholder engagement offers a model for other institutions facing similar constraints, supporting Safroni (2012) and Arifudin (2021) while adding the novel perspective of internal committee-based strategy as a critical factor (Safroni, 2012) (Arifudin, 2022).

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that SMP 3 Tanjungsiang's educational service management effectively addresses enrollment challenges through integrated planning, implementation, supervision, and community engagement. The study affirms previous research on the importance of service quality, stakeholder communication, and extracurricular development while providing a novel contribution by highlighting the strategic role of the PPDB committee in coordinating recruitment and community involvement. This approach illustrates that successful enrollment outcomes are the product of both high-quality service provision and structured organizational collaboration, offering practical insights for educational institutions in geographically or demographically constrained environments.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that SMP 3 Tanjungsiang effectively utilizes educational service management as a strategy to increase new student enrollment. This strategy is implemented through three main stages: planning, implementation, and supervision/evaluation. In the planning stage, the school designs long-term and short-term programs through deliberations involving the Principal, Deputy Heads, teachers, administrative staff, and educational personnel. These programs aim to enhance both academic and non-academic student achievements. The implementation stage includes dividing students into regular and superior classes, conducting structured academic programs, and offering diverse extracurricular activities such as scouting, dance, and karawitan to develop students' talents and interests. The PPDB committee plays a critical role in executing the marketing strategy, including area mapping, setting promotion targets, distributing brochures, installing banners, and engaging directly with prospective students and parents. Supervision by the Principal ensures that these activities are carried out effectively, resulting in a positive trend in new student enrollment over the last three academic years.

The study also finds that the collaborative role of the PPDB committee and active community engagement are central to the success of enrollment strategies. The school's ability to combine quality educational services, promotional activities, and continuous monitoring ensures that prospective students and their families perceive the institution positively, even in a geographically challenging location. These findings affirm the importance of service management, strategic planning, and stakeholder collaboration in enhancing school attractiveness, consistent with prior research on educational service quality and enrollment strategies.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed. First, the school should continue to improve both academic and non-academic facilities and infrastructure to enhance service quality and student experience. Second, expanding cooperation with external parties, such as other schools, community organizations, and local authorities, can increase the school's visibility and public recognition. Third, providing targeted guidance and development for high-demand extracurricular activities, such as *sisingaan* arts, can attract greater interest from prospective students.

For future research, it is recommended to examine the long-term impact of educational service management strategies on student performance, satisfaction, and retention rates. Additionally, comparative studies involving multiple schools in similar rural or remote contexts could provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of different service management models, including the role of collaborative committees and community engagement in enrollment success.

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