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Implementation of The Principal's Flagship Program in Increasing Enrollment at Muhammadiyah 1 Junior High School in Surakarta

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to describe the managerial strategies of the Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta in efforts to improve the quality of education while also increasing public interest in the New Student Admission (PPDB) process. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with data collected through interviews and documentation. The findings show that the principal implements a visionary leadership style and engages the participation of the entire school community through programs such as Among Siswa Plus, Breaking News, PRESISI (Simpon Student Attendance) and Teacher Fingerprint System, ICT Classes, Character and Morality Report Cards, Simpon Mart and Food Court, and the Integrity Pact, all executed intelligently, sincerely, and optimally. These programs enhance teacher professionalism, foster a religious–collaborative culture, and create a modern, technology-based learning environment. Consistent implementation of these strategies has resulted in increased public trust, higher enrollment numbers, improved student achievement, and greater external recognition for the school. Overall, the school's success is the result of synergy between leadership, innovation, technology, and the commitment of the entire school community.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly competitive educational landscape, every school needs to have a unique and effective strategy to remain recognized and accepted by the community. Communication efforts between schools as service providers and the community as users are crucial to attracting interest and introducing the values and strengths of the school. Community interest in schools, which is usually reflected in the number of applicants, is an important indicator of public trust and the school's reputation amid increasingly fierce competition (Purba & Rosmilawati, 2024). This is

reinforced by research conducted by Laputri (2024) at MTs Al-Istiqomah Dungus Madiun, which shows that the implementation of a systematically developed marketing management strategy, including team planning, promotion through various media, and periodic evaluations, can significantly increase the interest of prospective new students from year to year. In addition, the Education Report Card can be utilized as a strategic data-driven planning instrument because it provides an overview of educational quality in terms of learning outcomes, learning processes, school climate, and governance, enabling schools to identify strengths and weaknesses, diagnose root causes of problems, and formulate appropriate action plans (Christine & Raharja, 2025).

In response to these challenges, the role of the principal becomes very important, because the principal determines the progress and decline of a school. Success in school management depends heavily on the professionalism of the principal. The principal's role as a role model and motivator for educators, as well as their ability to improve and provide educational facilities and infrastructure, has proven to be a major attraction for prospective students to enroll (Zai et al., 2022). The leadership style used by the principal greatly influences the internal quality of an educational institution. For example, participatory leadership encourages two-way communication based on mutual respect and trust. When principals are able to apply the appropriate leadership style, teachers tend to perform better and have higher work motivation. Ultimately, this contributes positively to the overall improvement of school quality (Kuleng & Ugha, 2025). This is supported by evidence showing that transformational leadership, academic supervision, and teachers' pedagogical competence simultaneously contribute positively to educational quality (Sulistyorini et al., 2025).

To create an excellent school, principals need to have clear and focused strategies in implementing each program. This strategy includes various interrelated steps, such as improving the quality of human resources (teachers and educators), managing learning in innovative ways, providing adequate facilities and infrastructure, encouraging digitization in the school environment, and actively involving various related parties, especially parents, in the school development process (Gunawan et al., 2025) . The quality of school human resources is one of four core strategies that must be strengthened to produce outstanding graduates and improve competitiveness, in addition to strengthening students' mental health, supporting graduate services, and strengthening institutional capacity (Amalia & Kholik, 2025).

In addition to managerial strategies, the success of various programs is also greatly influenced by the principal's ability to encourage teachers to improve their performance. Various steps have been taken, such as implementing a democratic leadership style, establishing intensive communication with teachers, rewarding outstanding teachers, and continuing to strive to fulfill facilities and infrastructure needs. These efforts have proven to be effective in fostering a sense of togetherness, belonging, and motivation to grow together among educators (Zhahira et al., 2022).

Although previous studies have reviewed educational marketing strategies (Purba & Rosmilawati, 2024), the management of PPDB promotion (Laputri, 2024), the leadership style of school principals (Kuleng & Ugha, 2025), the use of digital technology in schools (Sari, 2024), and the influence of leadership on teacher motivation (Zhahira et al., 2022), these studies still highlight each aspect separately. There has been no research that comprehensively examines the integration of various school flagship programs as a single managerial strategy to increase PPDB enthusiasm. In addition, no research has been found that specifically analyzes how the principal's managerial innovations, including character building, strengthening manners, digitizing services, coaching educators, and strengthening school culture, contribute to an increase in the number of new registrants.

Thus, this study offers a novelty in the form of a "Synergistic Managerial Strategy" model developed through seven school flagship programs, namely Among Siswa Plus, PRESISI, Breaking News, ICT Class, Character and Manners Report Card, Simpon Mart & Food Court, and Integrity Pact. The integration of these seven programs has never been the focus of research in the context of increasing interest in PPDB, so this study provides new contributions, both theoretically and practically, to the study of educational management in Indonesia. One school worth analyzing in this context is SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta. This school is known as one of the leading private educational institutions with a strong reputation. However, in recent years, the school has experienced a decline in enrollment, especially as other schools have begun to introduce innovations that are more attractive to the community.

The change began to take shape when Mr. Rusmanto took over the leadership of the school. Under his leadership, SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta initiated various innovative flagship programs as a form of systematic managerial approach, such as Among Siswa Plus, ICT Class, and Adab and Character Report Cards. These programs were designed to rebuild an effective learning environment, which has proven to have an impact on improving the school's positive image and increasing the number of new registrants from year to year. This phenomenon is interesting to study further, especially to understand the strategies behind the creation and implementation of these programs. This study is expected to provide practical contributions as a reference for education leaders in creating innovations that can attract public interest. The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the implementation of flagship programs created by the principal and their impact on improving the quality of education and increasing interest in the student admission process at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta.

2. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method, which is an approach that seeks to describe a phenomenon in depth according to the actual conditions in the field. The focus of this study is to reveal how the principal's leadership strategy increases public interest and engagement in the New Student Admission Process (PPDB) at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta. The approaches used in this study are

educational and managerial approaches. The educational approach is used because this study relates to leadership practices in the school environment, while the managerial approach is used to examine how the strategies and policies formulated by school principals can influence the views and decisions of the community in choosing a school.

The data in this study was collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted directly with school principals as the main sources to obtain in-depth information about leadership strategies, flagship programs, and the reasons behind their implementation. In addition, the researchers also collected additional data from school documents such as PPDB registration data, annual work plans, and official school publications. This approach was taken so that the data collected would be more comprehensive and mutually reinforcing. To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, the researchers applied triangulation techniques by comparing the interview results with various school documents. This step was taken to ensure that the information obtained truly reflected the conditions in the field and was scientifically accountable.

3. Results and Discussion

SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta is one of the private junior high schools under the Muhammadiyah foundation that has long been recognized by the community as a religious-based educational institution. Prior to the implementation of the principal's flagship programs, the school faced challenges related to declining student enrollment, increasing competition among private and public schools, and rising community expectations regarding educational quality and facilities.In recent years, many schools in Surakarta have introduced various innovations in learning, infrastructure, and educational services. This situation placed SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta in a highly competitive environment, requiring the school to continuously adapt and develop strategic initiatives to maintain its existence and public trust. Although the school had a strong religious identity, this alone was no longer sufficient to attract prospective students without being supported by managerial innovation, modern facilities, and effective school branding.

These conditions encouraged the principal to redesign school management through a series of integrated flagship programs aimed at improving internal quality, strengthening school culture, and increasing public interest in the New Student Admission (PPDB) process. Therefore, understanding the general condition of the school is important to contextualize the findings of this study and to explain why strategic managerial interventions were necessary. The research process was conducted through a qualitative descriptive approach by emphasizing in-depth understanding of the principal's managerial strategies. Data collection was carried out primarily through semi-structured interviews with the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta as the key informant. The interview technique was chosen to allow flexibility in exploring strategic decisions, program implementation, and the perceived impact of flagship programs on school quality and student enrollment.

In addition to interviews, documentation analysis was conducted to strengthen data validity, including school profiles, PPDB data records, program reports, and official school publications. To ensure data credibility, triangulation was applied by comparing interview results with documented evidence. This process enabled the researchers to obtain comprehensive and reliable data that accurately reflected the actual conditions and managerial practices at the school. The interview guidelines used in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Guidelines Used in the Study

No	Interview Question
1	How would you describe the general condition of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta before the implementation of the flagship programs?
2	What challenges did the school face in increasing student enrollment (PPDB)?
3	What considerations underlie the formulation of the flagship programs at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta?
4	How do the flagship programs contribute to improving educational quality and school culture?
5	What strategies are used to involve teachers and staff in implementing these programs?
6	How does the use of technology support school management and learning processes?
7	What impacts have been observed after the implementation of the flagship programs on student enrollment and public trust?
8	What factors support and hinder the implementation of the flagship programs?

The Role of the Principal as a Strategy Driver

The principal plays a strategic role in steering the educational organization toward improvement. He is not only an administrative figure, but also a key motivator who unites all elements of the school in accordance with its vision and mission. The success of a school greatly depends on the effectiveness of its leadership. In an interview, Mr. Rusmanto, Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta, emphasized that this effectiveness lies in the optimal management of human resources. He said,

> *"One of the roles of the principal is to manage human resources, where teachers and educational staff are organized so that they can work well, intelligently, sincerely, and to the maximum extent possible."*

The interview results show that, according to Mr. Rusmanto, the success of a school depends on the principal's ability to manage human resources optimally. Teachers and educational staff need to be organized so that they work well, intelligently, and sincerely. This view is in line with Asy'ari & Inayati (2023), who emphasize that the principal acts as a manager who manages human resource potential and conducts continuous evaluations. In addition, the participatory leadership style he applies creates harmonious two-way communication, as stated by Kuleng & Ugha (2025). This fosters a sense of togetherness and a positive work climate.

The principal also ensures that teachers not only carry out their teaching duties, but also have professional awareness and work with sincerity. This is in line with the opinion that human resource management in education should be directed towards creating a harmonious, productive, and quality-oriented work environment (Dowansiba, 2022). Effective school resource management can be strengthened

through reflection- and coaching-based human resource development, humanistic leadership, and transparent participatory financial governance, indicating that school improvement is driven not only by technical managerial skills but also by reflective and collaborative leadership (Ridha et al., 2026).

The role of the principal goes far beyond administrative duties; he or she also serves as a motivator, facilitator, and character builder. This dual role is supported by Zai et al. (2022), who identify that the professionalism of school principals is manifested in their capacity as "role models" and "motivators for educators." Mr. Rusmanto understands that the success of education depends on the performance of teachers, so that quality improvement must be rooted in their coaching and empowerment. Visionary leadership strengthens sustainable educational quality through collaborative vision formulation, human resource empowerment, continuous motivation, and routine evaluation followed by program improvement (Cholik et al., 2025). Academic supervision conducted systematically through pre-observation, classroom observation, and post-observation has been shown to improve teacher weaknesses that hinder learning quality, including teaching discipline, academic administration, awareness of educational innovation, and the utilization of information technology (Kurniawan et al., 2026).

This approach is in line with Gunawan's (2025) research, which emphasizes that strengthening human resources through technical guidance, workshops, and training is a fundamental step in implementing school programs. The goal is for every teacher to not only teach, but to do so professionally and wholeheartedly. Research conducted by Kuleng & Ugha (2025) reinforces this view by showing that successful school principals are those who apply a participatory leadership style. This style enables two-way communication based on mutual respect and trust between leaders and teachers, thereby creating a more conducive working atmosphere. Interaction and communication built through open dialogue can foster a sense of togetherness, belonging, and responsibility among teachers. These values become a collective force that drives a more positive work environment. The values of togetherness and responsibility that grow through good communication are an important part of the "smart, sincere, and maximal" work culture that Mr. Rusmanto wants to realize in his leadership at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta.

Implementation of Flagship Programs as an Educational Marketing Strategy

Innovation is key for educational institutions to maintain their existence and increase public trust. As visionary leaders, school principals play a strategic role in creating innovations that meet the needs of students and the community's expectations for quality education. Based on the interview results, Mr. Rusmanto initiated a number of flagship programs that have become the main attraction of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta. He said,

> *These programs must be creative and tailored to the characteristics of the children."*

This statement reflects an adaptive and student-centered leadership orientation that

focuses on the real needs of students, not merely on administrative routines.One of the main findings of this study is the success of the Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta, Mr. Rusmanto, who not only relied on conventional managerial strategies, but also actively created a series of innovative flagship programs. These programs are specifically designed to address three challenges simultaneously: (1) improving the quality of internal learning, (2) strengthening school culture and teacher professionalism, and (3) increasing competitiveness and applicant enthusiasm (PPDB).

These flagship programs include Among Siswa *Plus*, PRESISI *and Fingerprint Guru*, *Breaking News*, ICT Class, Rapor Adab dan Karakter, *Simpon Mart and Food Court*, and *Pakta Integritas.* These seven programs were developed taking into account the characteristics of students, current trends, and the school's vision of producing a generation *that is civilized, knowledgeable, and accomplished.* Each program has its own objectives and impact on strengthening the school's image (*school branding*), both in terms of academics, character, and public service. Strong *school branding* is not only created through external promotion, but also through maintaining quality, continuously developing innovation, and providing services that give positive experiences to students and the community. Through various flagship programs, the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta not only builds the school's image but also instills values of excellence that can be directly felt by students and parents. These innovations are clear evidence of the school's identity as a modern, religious, and character-building educational institution. Here are the 7 flagship programs implemented by the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta:

1) Among Siswa *Plus*

The Among Siswa *Plus* program is an innovation that focuses on strengthening school culture and climate through direct interaction between the principal, teachers, and students every morning. In an interview, Mr. Rusmanto explained this program:

> *"Among Siswa Plus is carried out every morning. Teachers welcome students, motivate them, and build good relationships. This is very important so that students feel appreciated from the moment they enter school."*

Welcoming students is an effective relational strategy for fostering emotional bonds, increasing feelings of appreciation, and creating a positive learning atmosphere. Ramdhani (2025) supports this view, stating that such simple interactions have a positive psychological impact and strengthen students' emotional attachment to the school. The participation of school leaders and teachers in the morning is very helpful in creating a comfortable and friendly school climate, strengthening social relationships, increasing motivation, and effectively reducing the potential for conflict between students.

This program is a tangible form of *visible leadership*, where leaders set an example through direct involvement. This is in line with the findings of Zai et al. (2022), that the physical presence of the principal can increase the professionalism and motivation of the school community. This daily interaction practice is also consistent with democratic and participatory leadership that emphasizes open dialogue and two-way communication (Kuleng & Ugha, 2025). Through consistent implementation of Among Siswa *Plus*, the school has succeeded in fostering a strong sense of security, togetherness, and belonging among students. This simple but meaningful program has become the foundation for the formation of a positive and religious school culture.

2) PRESISI (Student Attendance System)

This program is a form of managerial innovation that focuses on improving discipline, efficiency, and transparency in the school environment. PRESISI (Simpon Student Attendance) and *Teacher Fingerprint* are implementations of the adoption of a modern digital attendance system to monitor the discipline and accountability of the entire school community. Although this program serves as a means of enforcing discipline, it also plays a very strategic role as it is an important part of promoting school digitization. This is in line with the findings of Gunawan et al. (2025), which confirm that administrative digitization is one of the key strategies in the implementation of flagship school programs.

In the context of increasing interest in PPDB, this program sends a positive signal to parents through a neat, transparent, and accountable system. Based on the "education marketing strategy" framework described by Purba & Rosmilawati (2024), this structured mechanism is part of the "*Process*" element, which shows that schools are managed professionally and modernly, thereby increasing public trust. According to Dowansiba (2022), digitization is a key feature of modern schools because it not only utilizes technology in administration, but also in data management, communication, and services to school members. Digitization increases transparency, accountability, and work efficiency, thereby strengthening public trust. With faster workflows and fewer errors, digitization is an important strategy for schools to adapt to the times and improve the quality of educational services.

3) Breaking News

This program is a unique and highly effective innovation in the school's internal communication strategy, designed specifically for teachers. It consists of a short *briefing* session held every morning before teaching and learning activities begin, during which the principal conveys important information, gives direct appreciation for teachers' performance, and shares a brief motivational message. Mr. Rusmanto describes the program as follows:

> "*We have Breaking News every morning. Teachers are given information, motivation, and new enthusiasm before they start teaching."*

This initiative also reflects the tangible form of the human resource strengthening strategy, as stated by Gunawan et al. (2025), that improving teacher performance is not only determined by formal training, but also influenced by consistent mentoring, effective communication, and continuous motivation from leaders. Through the Breaking News program, schools are able to build a more cohesive, responsive, and quality-focused work culture. The effective implementation of educational quality improvement is strongly influenced by synergy between principals' collaborative instructional leadership and teachers' pedagogical autonomy (Hartanti et al., 2026).

4) ICT Class

The *ICT Classroom* Program is one of the leading innovations in infrastructure that has had the greatest impact on public perception and learning quality. This program is not merely about procuring computers, but rather a total overhaul of facilities in every classroom to support digital learning. In an interview, Mr. Rusmanto proudly described these facilities:

> "It *also supports the facilities and infrastructure, which have been upgraded in each classroom. Instead of LCDs, 50-inch Android TVs have been provided. All the air conditioners are new, so the children in the classroom are comfortable and can learn to the best of their ability."*

This program is a strategic step that has been proven to have a direct impact on increasing interest in PPDB. Findings by Zai et al. (2022) show that the ability of school principals to provide and improve educational facilities, for example through the addition of computer equipment, is one of the factors that can attract the attention and interest of the community, especially prospective students around the school. This also reflects the implementation of two strategies identified by Gunawan et al. (2025), namely the provision of supporting facilities and the acceleration of school digitization. In the context of strengthening the school's image, the ICT Classroom has become a major attraction that emphasizes the school's modern character, supported by adequate facilities, and a strong commitment to providing a comfortable learning environment through investment in quality resources.

5) Report Card on Manners and Character

This program is an innovation in the field of non-academic curriculum that demonstrates the school's focus on balancing academic achievement and morality. It is a separate evaluation medium that specifically monitors and

reports on the development of students' attitudes, behavior, and morals. The principal explained the strategic role of this program,

> *"The Adab Report Card serves as a link between the school and parents so that character education can be synergized from home to school."*

This step is very important because it addresses the needs and concerns of today's parents. Simply put, this program is a concrete example of the "involving all relevant parties" strategy, which, according to Gunawan et al. (2025), is one of the main keys to the success of a school program. This is reinforced by Rahmawati & Dartim (2023), who state that character education can be optimized when families, schools, and communities work together. Conversely, this process becomes less effective when one of these parties, especially families, is not involved. By involving parents as partners in monitoring students' moral and character development, the principal helps align educational values at home and at school. This is important because, according to Akbar and Azani (2024), differences in family environment and levels of faith at home greatly influence student behavior. Moral reports are a practical solution to bridge these differences. Through neatly organized reports, parents can identify areas that need improvement, while schools can ensure that character building continues consistently.

6) Simpon *Mart* and *Food Court*

This program is an innovation in the field of supporting facilities designed with dual functions. As shown in Figure 1, Simpon *Mart* and Simpon *Food Court* are facilities provided by the school to support the comfort of the entire school community. More than that, these facilities also serve as a practical means of entrepreneurial learning for students.

Figure 1. Simpon Mart and Food Court

In an effort to attract new applicants, the existence of this facility has a significant psychological impact. *Simpon Food Court* is implemented as an

honesty canteen, where students make their own payments, thus serving as an effective medium for instilling honesty in the school environment. This clean, modern, and well-equipped facility is able to make a positive first impression on parents and prospective students. They will see that the school is well-managed and truly cares about the comfort and needs of students, even beyond learning activities and character building. This concept is in line with the findings that the Honesty Canteen Program is an effective medium for improving students' honest character at school (Amalia & Kholik, 2025).

7) Integrity Pact

This program is an innovation aimed at strengthening organizational culture and enhancing professionalism in the school environment. It is not only intended for teachers, but also involves all school stakeholders. The Integrity Pact is a symbol of moral commitment signed jointly by teachers, employees, and other related parties to work honestly, with discipline, and with full responsibility.

If *Breaking News* serves as a daily motivator, then the Integrity Pact acts as the foundation for long-term commitment that regulates the behavior of the entire school community. This is in line with the opinion of Azani & Darmawan (2024), who emphasize that school principals need to set clear and objective performance standards such as discipline, work quality, and participation levels to serve as guidelines that are understood and obeyed by all teachers and staff. This program also ensures that human resources, which Purba considers to be a key element in education marketing, have high quality and work ethics. With integrity and professionalism, schools can build a positive image that becomes a selling point in the eyes of the community (Purba & Rosmilawati, 2024).

Azani & Darmawan (2024) also emphasize that parents assess school quality through the attitude, discipline, and performance of teachers. Therefore, the existence of the Integrity Pact provides assurance to the community that schools are managed by educators who are trustworthy, professional, and have a strong commitment to the quality of educational services. This is because the performance of teachers and staff greatly determines whether the community has a positive or negative view of the school (Qiftiyah et al., 2020).

The Use of Technology as a School Principal's Management Tool

One of the main strategies implemented by the Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta, Mr. Rusmanto, in improving the quality of learning and attracting public interest is technology-based managerial development. He emphasizes the need for modern learning facilities that support student comfort. This innovation is realized through the ICT Class program, which integrates information technology into the learning process. This is in line with Dowansiba's (2022) opinion that

digitization not only accelerates performance but also encourages the creation of a more innovative and flexible learning environment.

The use of digital facilities also contributes to strengthening the school's image as a modern institution. Schools that apply technology in learning are generally more trusted by the community because they are considered capable of keeping up with the times and providing superior educational services. Sari (2024) emphasizes that technology-based media increases the clarity of material, interactivity, and student motivation to learn. Thus, the provision of digital facilities not only improves the quality of the learning process but also serves as an effective managerial strategy to strengthen the school's image and attract public interest in SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta.

Strengthening Values and Culture

Strengthening values and culture is one of the main focuses of Mr. Rusmanto's leadership at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta. He emphasizes that the quality of education is not only measured by academic achievement, but also by the character and moral development of students. To that end, the school has developed a Manners and Character Report Card program as a tool for monitoring the development of students' attitudes, responsibility, and ethics. This program also strengthens the synergy between the school and parents in character building, in line with the opinion of Gunawan et al. (2025) regarding the importance of stakeholder involvement in the success of school programs.

The strengthening of values and culture is also reflected in routine activities such as Among Siswa *Plus* and *Breaking News*, which foster positive habits such as discipline, politeness, and respect for teachers. These various programs show that building school culture requires consistency and exemplary behavior. Implementing a school quality culture plays a critical role in improving educational outcomes, promoting stakeholder engagement, and creating a sustainable and competitive learning environment (Rustamto et al., 2026). Mr. Rusmanto emphasizes this through his daily behavior, which reflects professionalism and *uswah hasanah*, as emphasized by Zai et al. (2022). Thus, the strategy for strengthening values and culture at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta is carried out through three pillars: student character building, teacher professionalism, and leadership role modeling. The synergy of these three pillars forms a school culture that is religious, disciplined, and highly competitive.

Impact of Program Implementation on Increasing Interest in PPDB

The implementation of flagship programs initiated by Mr. Rusmanto has proven to have a significant impact on the progress of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta, particularly in increasing interest in New Student Admissions (PPDB). Based on the results of interviews, he said,

> *"The first change is in the number of applicants. When I joined, the total number was 300. Now it is 365. God willing, in the new school year, it will be 266, and our target is to increase it to around 500."*

This statement shows a consistent increase every year, reflecting the effectiveness of managerial strategies and public trust in the quality of the school. The impact of implementing these strategies can be described in the following aspects:

1) Increased Public Trust and Community Enthusiasm

The success of various flagship programs such as Among Siswa *Plus*, Rapor Adab dan Karakter, and especially Kelas ICT has succeeded in building a positive image of the school in the eyes of the community. This is in line with the branding strategy where schools need to develop flagship programs that become their hallmark, and integrate branding through unique learning methods. Innovations focused on improving infrastructure have proven to be a highly effective strategy (Budiarti et al., 2023).

The findings of Zai et al. (2022) show that the professionalism of school principals is reflected in their ability to seek improvements in infrastructure and meet educational facility and equipment needs. Efforts such as submitting proposals for building renovations and adding computers to classrooms are considered capable of increasing the attractiveness of schools in the eyes of the community. More modern facilities make schools appear serious about improving educational services, so parents feel more confident about the quality of learning offered.

Similarly, according to Purba & Rosmilawati (2024), various innovations and improvements in facilities carried out by schools serve as effective educational marketing strategies. Flagship programs, more professional services, and infrastructure upgrades are important elements in building a positive image and attracting public interest. It is this consistency between innovation and service that gives schools a strong position in the competition and enables them to increase the enthusiasm of new students.

2) Strengthening Internal School Quality

In addition to increasing public interest, the implementation of this program also contributes greatly to strengthening the internal quality of schools. The *Breaking News* and Integrity Pact programs are able to build work motivation and increase the professionalism of teachers. Findings by Kuleng & Ugha (2025) support this by stating that teacher performance tends to improve when school principals implement the right leadership style, particularly participatory and managerial leadership that provides space for dialogue, guidance, and continuous support. Academic supervision, school culture, and teacher motivation have been found to significantly and positively influence learning quality, with academic supervision showing the strongest contribution to instructional improvement (Purnomo et al., 2026). The findings

highlight that synergy among school committees, teacher work discipline, and principal leadership is essential to achieving better educational performance and sustainable quality improvement (Chrisandi et al., 2025).

The ICT Class Program not only gives a modern impression in terms of appearance, but also has a positive influence on the learning process in the classroom. Sari (2024) explains that the use of digital devices, such as learning videos and interactive applications, can increase student motivation, encourage active engagement, and make the material easier to understand and more interesting. Therefore, the use of technology is an important element in providing a more effective and enjoyable learning experience.

Gunawan et al. (2025) emphasize that improving the quality of learning will not be optimal without the support of strong teacher competencies. Teachers' pedagogical competence has a strong and significant positive effect on education quality, indicating that improvements in pedagogical competence directly contribute to better educational outcomes (Arifin et al., 2025). Efforts to improve the quality of education begin with strengthening human resource competencies through training, technical guidance, and mentoring processes. With skilled teachers who are ready to adapt to technological developments, programs such as ICT Classes can run optimally and have a real impact on the quality of learning in schools.

3) Improved Performance and External Recognition

The positive impact of the implementation of the flagship program is also evident in the improved performance of students and schools as a whole. The principal said that several students had achieved national-level accomplishments. In addition, the school and principal received awards for "*Ranked Number One Innovative Principal" and "The Best Winner Award Innovation 2025."* The achievements of the school are a form of external recognition that the innovation strategy implemented has been effective. Interestingly, it emphasizes that one way to increase teacher motivation is by giving awards to those who demonstrate the best performance. In this context, the awards received by the principal and the institution are not only a form of appreciation for the various efforts that have been made, but also serve as a source of motivation that strengthens the pride and enthusiasm of the entire school community.

4) The Formation of a Positive School Culture

The formation of a positive school culture at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta is the result of various programs systematically designed by the principal through visionary leadership. Programs such as Among

Siswa *Plus*, *Breaking News*, Rapor Adab dan Karakter, and Pakta Integritas demonstrate the school's efforts to build healthy values, habits, and interactions. This is in line with Sukandari's statement that school culture is a collection of values, traditions, and habits that are practiced together by the entire school community and become the school's distinctive character. A positive culture can create a conducive atmosphere, foster discipline, cooperation, a sense of belonging, and responsibility.

Sukadari (2020) also emphasizes that a good school culture has a direct impact on improving the quality of education. This can be seen at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta, where the flagship program not only shapes disciplined behavior but also strengthens the relationship between students, teachers, and school leaders. Positive interactions that take place every day help create a harmonious, religious, and disciplined climate, thereby increasing the school's competitiveness and public trust.

5) Strengthening the School's Image and Competitiveness

Through well-planned managerial strategies and innovative flagship programs, SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta has been able to emerge as a leading school in Surakarta. Purba emphasizes that strong *school branding* is formed from consistency in innovation, service quality (*Product* and *Physical Evidence*), and public trust (Purba & Rosmilawati, 2024).

Schools that implement quality-based management are generally able to build an image as competitive educational institutions. Good school management is the foundation for increasing public trust, strengthening the institution's reputation, and maintaining sustainable competitiveness. Schools that demonstrate excellence in various aspects also tend to find it easier to gain public trust (Manullang, 2025). The flagship programs that are implemented help shape a religious, disciplined, and collaborative school culture. Quality-based management has been proven to foster a positive work culture, enabling all human resources to work optimally. It is this solid performance that gives the school its strength and high competitiveness.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be understood that the managerial strategy implemented by the Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Surakarta, Mr. Rusmanto, has been a key factor in improving the quality of education and increasing public interest in PPDB. His leadership not only focuses on administrative aspects, but also emphasizes strengthening human resources, developing innovative programs, and creating a positive school culture. Through his policies and concrete examples,

he encourages all teachers and employees to work well, intelligently, sincerely, and to the best of their ability in carrying out their duties. This visionary and participatory leadership has proven capable of fostering motivation, professionalism, and a strong work ethic among educators. Flagship programs such as Among Siswa Plus, Breaking News, PRESISI, ICT Classes, Character and Manners Report Cards, Simpon Mart and Simpon Food Court, and the Integrity Pact have become important instruments in building a modern, religious, disciplined, and comfortable learning environment. These various innovations not only strengthen the internal quality of the school but also enhance its positive image in the eyes of the community. The use of technology such as digital attendance and ICT-based learning shows that schools are able to respond quickly to changes of the times. This implementation has resulted in increased learning effectiveness, student comfort, and parental trust. Consistency in innovation, providing adequate facilities, and maintaining intense communication also strengthen the school's reputation, thereby attracting prospective students year after year. Thus, the increase in PPDB enthusiasm is not the result of a single policy, but rather the fruit of synergy between visionary leadership, a strong school culture, continuous innovation, and the commitment of the entire school community to work well, intelligently, sincerely, and to the best of their ability.

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