

## Principals Managerial Leadership Strategy in Maintaining the Sustainability of New Student Enrollment

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Received: 03-08-2025

Revised: 24-09-2025

Accepted: 13-10-2025

### KEYWORDS

Managerial Leadership,  
Principal, New  
Students, Promotion  
Strategies

### ABSTRACT

The decline in the number of new students poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of secondary schools, especially in non-urban areas. This study aims to analyze the managerial leadership strategies of school principals in maintaining the sustainability of new student enrollment at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis Regency. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation with participants consisting of the principal, teachers, and parents. The results of the study show that there are three main strategies that are consistently implemented: strategic planning that involves collaboration with the community, implementation of adaptive and technology-based school promotion programs, and continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies implemented. The principal plays a key role in building a positive image of the school through the development of extracurricular programs, strengthening community relations, and optimizing digital communication media. These strategies have proven to strengthen the school's appeal and increase community trust in educational institutions. This study concludes that inclusive, participatory, and responsive managerial leadership to social dynamics is key to maintaining the stability of new student enrollment. Further studies are recommended to include more schools and external variables to broaden the relevance of this research.

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## Introduction

The managerial leadership of school principals plays a very important role in managing the sustainability of new student enrolment in secondary schools. New student enrolment (PPDB) is not merely an administrative activity, but is also closely related to various strategic factors that can affect the image and development of schools. In the context of education, especially in an era full of global challenges, the phenomenon of declining enrolment in various schools is becoming a worrying issue. Data shows that several educational institutions have experienced a decline in enrolment in recent years, highlighting the importance of proactive managerial leadership strategies to attract new students (Lasrin, 2023).

In response to this phenomenon, many education experts argue that effective leadership can be the key to overcoming this problem. According to Simanjorang et al. (2024), the quality of leadership in the educational environment greatly influences parents' decisions in choosing a place of learning for their children. Thus, efforts to increase the number of new students must begin with an evaluation of the leadership and management strategies implemented by the school principal. Research findings indicate that school principals who can adapt to community needs and implement innovations in the admission system can significantly enhance the school's appeal (Ryan et al., 2023).

Based on the views of education stakeholders, the importance of good management in the admission of new students is not only related to processes and procedures, but also involves a smart marketing approach to promote the school's excellence (Putra & Dapiokta, 2020). Recent research indicates that innovation in new student admission methods can be achieved through the implementation of a more transparent and efficient digital-based information system (Refani & Azis, 2022). To address these challenges, school principals need to implement various managerial leadership strategies that focus on community development and partnerships with parents and the community.

An evaluation of existing literature has identified various approaches to managing new student admissions. Research conducted by Lasrin states that good management of PPDB can improve access to and quality of education in the schools concerned (Lasrin, 2023). Furthermore, research by Nurmailis (2022) emphasises that interaction between school principals and the community is an important element in creating a positive image of the school, which in turn can attract the attention of prospective new students. Therefore, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to understanding the application of school principals' managerial leadership strategies in the context of PPDB.

This paper seeks to fill existing research gaps by linking previously studied best practices, such as the implementation of digital systems in PPDB, with effective managerial leadership approaches (Supriyanti et al., 2023). This is in line with research conducted by Ryan et al. (2023), which suggests the importance of developing informative and attractive marketing strategies to promote schools in the information technology era. By reviewing and positioning this research among previous studies, it is hoped that new and more comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of leadership strategies in increasing the number of new students can be generated.

To further develop the discussion, it should be noted that most previous studies have focused more on technology and information systems, but have not explored the role of managerial leadership in depth. Therefore, this article attempts to look at leadership holistically, including how school principals can influence school culture, motivate stakeholders, and establish policies that support the sustainability of new student enrolment (Amrona et al., 2023). By providing a clear and strong context regarding leadership in education, this article aims to provide a better understanding of the important role of school principals in facing challenges in the field of education.

In the study of school principals' managerial leadership, there are several gaps that need to be filled. First, although there is a lot of research discussing information systems in PPDB, very few conduct in-depth analyses of the relationship between school principals' leadership and the success of PPDB. Research by Budiman et al., (2021) shows that there is an urgent need to further analyse the influence of leadership on the effectiveness of student management. Second, the evaluation results from various studies, as stated by Hidayat, indicate that although

the online PPDB system can improve efficiency, there are still unresolved issues related to leadership (Tiasna et al., 2023). This creates a need to link these two aspects in a comprehensive study.

Third, most studies only focus on one aspect of the PPDB system without considering other related dimensions, such as the impact of zoning policies and local approaches in education (Samsiadi & Romelah, 2022). Therefore, this study attempts to place the managerial leadership of school principals at the centre of attention and examine the extent to which these dynamics impact the PPDB process. By providing a clearer picture of the direct and indirect influences of leadership on the sustainability of new student enrolment, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of further educational research (Anwar, 2024).

Finally, this article explains the importance of making recommendations for educational leaders and policymakers regarding strategies that can be applied to improve the new student admission process, especially in the context of dynamics influenced by global and local developments in the education sector. By identifying these gaps, this study not only adds to the academic knowledge base but also has relevant practical implications for improving the quality of education in Indonesia. (Permadi et al., 2026).

In the context of education, school leadership serves as a determining factor in improving teacher performance. Several studies show that diverse leadership styles, whether transformational, situational, or participatory, have a significant impact on teacher motivation and commitment (Ariani et al., 2021; Hartawan, 2020; Setiyadi & Rosalina, 2021). However, despite the abundance of literature discussing the role of school leadership, there are still challenges in effectively implementing this approach in practice. Research by Seriyanti et al. (2020) shows that the relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance is not always linear; factors such as school culture and school committee support also play an important role. Thus, there is a need to bridge this gap by finding out more about how all these elements can support each other in the context of SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis.

In educational management studies, the strategies implemented by school principals play an integral role in achieving overall school success. Triwiyanto et al. (2023) found that good management can improve the quality of education and community participation in the educational process at school. This is also acknowledged by Mohamed Jais et al. (2021), who emphasise the importance of collaboration between the headmaster and the school committee in establishing an effective educational vision and strategy. As a result, a positive learning environment can be created, supporting not only teachers but also students in achieving academic success. However, the biggest challenge in implementing managerial leadership strategies often lies in the lack of understanding among all stakeholders about their roles in the process. Influences in the form of community dissatisfaction or internal conflict are often caused by a lack of communication and involvement (A'yun, 2022). Therefore, further research is needed to explore more innovative methods of involving all stakeholders at SMAN 1 Cisaga in decision-making related to educational strategy and management.

One important aspect of school leadership is its impact on student motivation. Research shows that effective leadership can build a learning environment that encourages positive student development, both academically and socially (Suherman et al., 2025; Sulastri et al., 2024). The principal's efforts to create an inclusive school culture and support students are key to improving their learning outcomes (Anjani & Dafit, 2021).

Although the importance of leadership in student motivation has been recognised, many studies are still limited to academic measurements without considering more complex social and emotional factors. Research conducted by Yunus et al. (2021) indicates the need for a holistic approach in evaluating principal leadership in relation to student motivation, which does not rely solely on academic aspects. There is an urgent need to develop a leadership model that supports increased motivation at SMAN 1 Cisaga by considering various approaches that integrate character education and are oriented towards the overall development of students.

This study has three main objectives that are directly related to the above questions. *First*, to describe and analyse the managerial planning strategies implemented by school

principals in maintaining the stability of new student enrolment. *Second*, this study aims to identify patterns of organisation and implementation of school promotion programmes, as well as to examine the role of school principals in driving internal school collaboration and establishing effective communication with the community. *Third*, it seeks to explore the evaluation mechanisms used by school principals to assess the strategies that have been implemented, while also exploring forms of adaptive and innovative strategy development. This study also aims to produce practice-based strategic recommendations that can be used by other school principals in similar contexts, especially in areas facing similar problems related to declining enrolment of new students. (Permadi et.al., 2025).

The urgency of this research stems from a real phenomenon currently faced by many public schools, namely a decline in the number of new students each academic year. This issue not only has an impact on quantity, but also on the operational sustainability and reputation of educational institutions. In non-urban areas such as Cisaga Subdistrict, this condition becomes more complex due to limited access, the influence of zoning policies, and competition with private and vocational schools. In situations like this, the leadership of the headmaster becomes a key element in determining how the school can survive and thrive.

This research is important because there have not been many studies that specifically examine the relationship between managerial leadership strategies and the sustainability of new student enrolment. The majority of previous studies have focused more on the technical aspects of information systems or zoning policies, but have not examined in depth how the leadership strategies of school principals can play a role in building the school's image, increasing the attractiveness of the institution, and establishing strategic partnerships with the community. Therefore, this study is expected to provide practical contributions to school principals, policy makers, and other researchers in developing an educational leadership model that is oriented towards institutional sustainability and increased community participation in schools.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore and understand the managerial leadership strategies applied by the principal at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis, in maintaining the sustainability of new student enrolment. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides flexibility to explore the experiences, perspectives, and social contexts that influence leadership in (Ginanjar et al., 2024). Furthermore, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the interactions between principals, teachers, students, and parents, as well as how these relationships contribute to new student enrolment decisions (Alzahrani & Albeladi, 2023).

Data will be collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews will be conducted with school principals, teachers, and parent representatives to obtain direct information about leadership strategies and their impact. Semi-structured interview techniques will be used to allow respondents to express their views and experiences more freely. Observations will be conducted in the school environment to record social interactions and dynamics that occur in schools, which are important for understanding the social context (Creswell, 2014).

For data analysis, thematic analysis techniques will be applied, allowing researchers to identify patterns and themes that emerge from the collected data. Data obtained from interviews and observations will be organised, and categories will be formed to support findings relevant to the research objectives. This aims not only to describe leadership strategies but also to explain how principals use their leadership to improve teacher performance and student motivation, which in turn affects the number of new students enrolled in the school. In conducting the research, the researcher will also pay attention to ethics, such as obtaining permission from the authorities and maintaining the confidentiality of individual information. As the culmination of this process, the findings are expected to contribute not only to the theoretical understanding of managerial leadership in the context of

education but also to provide practical recommendations for improving strategies for enrolling new students at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

#### Principal's Strategic Planning in Increasing School Attractiveness

The results obtained in this study indicate that the strategic planning of the principal at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis, has a significant positive influence on the attractiveness of the school to prospective new students. The process of identifying and evaluating the strategies implemented covers several important aspects, including collaboration with stakeholders, innovation in teaching methods, and the development of programmes that meet the needs of students and the surrounding community.

An interview with the principal, Mr Ahmad Kusnadi, revealed that one of the main strategies implemented to attract new students is to involve parents in every aspect of school activities. "In every activity plan, we always invite parents to participate so that they feel a sense of ownership of the school. We also encourage them to attend activities such as weekly meetings and parent seminars," explained Mr Ahmad. This approach is recognised as effective because it creates a sense of ownership among parents and helps them understand the added value of the education provided at SMAN 1 Cisaga.

Based on a similar interview with one of the teachers, Mrs Siti Fatimah, there is an emphasis on the importance of educational programmes that are relevant to the community. "We have just launched an entrepreneurship programme where students not only learn theory but also get hands-on practice. This has attracted the attention of students and parents. They are becoming more aware of the importance of education that focuses not only on academics but also on skills that can be applied in everyday life," said Mrs. Siti. Furthermore, field observations show that the use of well-maintained facilities and infrastructure greatly helps to support the school's appeal. The principal added, "We always try to prioritise the improvement of school facilities. Comfortable classrooms, well-equipped laboratories, and good sports areas are our main concerns. This is part of our strategy to create a conducive learning environment."

From the results of interviews with the headmaster and teachers, a comprehensive picture emerged of how strategic planning can contribute to increasing the school's appeal. The active involvement of parents in the education process seems to have a significant positive impact. As stated by Mr Ahmad Kusnadi, this step not only helps to create a sense of ownership among parents, but also increases collaboration between the school and the wider community.

The development of programmes relevant to students' skills and needs, such as entrepreneurship programmes, shows that SMAN 1 Cisaga strives to respond to the challenges of the times by prioritising education oriented towards practical application. As an illustration, these findings show that the relevance of the curriculum integrated with community needs is one of the determining factors in student enrolment decisions (Triwiyanto et al., 2023). Thus, careful planning does not only depend on academic aspects, but also on the social and economic aspects surrounding the school.

The principal's strategy in increasing the school's appeal includes the active involvement of parents and the community in school activities. Through this approach, the principal has succeeded in strengthening the relationship between the school and the students' parents (Octaviana et al., 2022). Researchers found that parental participation is crucial to creating a conducive school climate. This is in line with previous findings which revealed that when parents are involved in school activities, it can increase students' motivation to learn and achieve (Penkunas et al., 2019). To that end, schools organise parent committees and socialisation activities, which enable parents to understand the educational programmes offered.

Innovative programmes such as *project-based learning* and the introduction of entrepreneurship programmes into the curriculum also contribute to increasing the school's appeal. As revealed in the study (Suryani & Sari, 2024), the implementation of programmes that are relevant to the needs of the local community can attract students to enrol in the school.

The headmaster at SMAN 1 Cisaga also focuses on developing skills that are relevant to the world of work, thereby adding value for students in seeking opportunities in the future.

One factor that supports the attractiveness of a school is the management of adequate facilities and infrastructure. Based on observations, improving learning facilities, if done properly, can attract prospective students to enrol in the school (Ananda et al., 2023). Research shows that the availability of adequate facilities, such as comfortable classrooms and sports facilities, also has a major influence on parents' decisions to enrol their children. Therefore, the principal's commitment to planning and managing facilities is an important factor in increasing the attractiveness of a school. (AbdhuGhani et al., 2026).

Furthermore, a good communication strategy in promoting various school programmes and achievements is also an important component in attracting the attention of the community and prospective students. Research conducted by (Chan et al., 2019) reveals that the use of social media and other digital platforms can be an effective means of disseminating information about activities, flagship programmes, and student achievements at school. This is also in line with the communication strategy implemented by the principal at SMAN 1 Cisaga, which involves the use of various communication channels with the involvement of parents (Anwar & Umam, 2025; Hanan et al., 2023).

The strategic planning of the principal at SMAN 1 Cisaga is not only limited to academic aspects but also includes community development, innovative programmes, facility management, and effective communication. The results of the study show that by adopting these various strategic approaches, SMAN 1 Cisaga can increase its attractiveness, which in turn helps maintain the sustainability of new student enrolment. By placing leadership in a broader context, creating strong social networks and considering feedback from the community, the principal can achieve the goal of improving the quality of education at the school and strengthening the school's image in the wider community.

## Discussion

### Implementation and Organisation of the School Promotion Programme

This study aims to analyse the implementation and organisation of school promotion programmes at SMAN 1 Cisaga, Ciamis. Through interviews with the principal, teachers, and field observations, several adaptive and effective promotional strategies were found to increase the school's appeal. The results show that the involvement of all parties in the development of promotional programmes has a significant impact on the perceptions and decisions of parents and new students in choosing a school.

*First*, the promotion programme, which was developed collaboratively by the principal, teachers, and school committee, emphasised the importance of the school's uniqueness and excellence. In an interview with the headmaster, Mr Ahmad, he stated, "We involve all stakeholders in promotional planning. That way, everyone feels responsible for introducing the school's strengths to the community." This is in line with the opinion of (Rosyidani et al., 2024), which emphasises the importance of collaboration in creating consistent and integrated appeal in promotion.

*Secondly*, observations of the implementation of promotional programmes such as education fairs and involvement in community activities show that effective communication is crucial. Mrs Siti, a teacher at SMAN 1 Cisaga, explained, "We are active in various community events and use these opportunities to demonstrate the advantages of the school's learning programmes, such as project-based teaching." These results are in line with research by Nurbawani (2021), which shows that promotions involving the local community can significantly increase the interest of prospective students.

*Thirdly*, the use of social media and digital platforms greatly supports promotional programmes. In an interview with Mr Ahmad, he added, "We use Instagram and Facebook to reach a wider audience, share student successes, and explore the latest programmes." This trend is reinforced by Lestari (2023), which notes that social media is an effective tool for introducing and promoting educational institutions to the public.

Based on the research findings, several key aspects influencing the implementation of school promotion programmes can be identified. The first is collaboration among stakeholders. This study shows that promotional programmes involving all parties not only increase the spirit of collaboration but also add value to the school's image, which is further strengthened by various perspectives Scandaryanto & Sumarsih (2021). This shows that collaboration can bring about various innovative ideas and approaches in creating relevant and urgent promotional programmes. Furthermore, the use of social media as a promotional tool adds a new dimension to educational marketing strategies. In the local context, Mr Ahmad emphasised that social media platforms have opened up many opportunities to interact with prospective students and parents in *real time*. This allows schools to engage in two-way communication and respond quickly to requests or concerns, which makes the community feel more involved (Lestari et al., 2023).

Equally important, involvement in community activities has proven effective in building a positive reputation. Programmes such as community teaching and participation in local events not only foster a good image of the school but also show the community that the institution is committed to being involved and contributing to community development. Thus, this step not only provides promotional benefits but also builds integrity and community trust in the school. The results of the study confirm that promotion based on strengthening character values and student achievements can provide a competitive advantage among many other schools. This is in line with the thinking in the field that consistent communication of excellence and uniqueness can attract the attention of parents and students. For this reason, expanding promotional methods that include various available resources, both within and outside the community, needs to be made a key strategy in future school promotional activities.

The implementation and organisation of the promotional programme at SMAN 1 Cisaga succeeded in increasing the school's appeal through collaboration, the use of social media, and community involvement. These findings show that with proper planning and integrated implementation, schools can build a strong positive image, resulting in an increase in new student enrolments. Further research is expected to broaden insights into how promotional strategies can be adapted to different educational contexts in Indonesia.

### **Evaluation of Leadership Strategies in Maintaining Student Retention**

This study aims to evaluate the leadership strategies of the principal in maintaining student retention at SMAN 1 Cisaga. Through qualitative methods involving interviews with the principal, teachers, and direct observation in the field, several strategies were found to be implemented to maintain and increase interest in new student enrolment. The results show that adaptive and inclusive leadership in school management plays an important role in achieving student sustainability.

Based on the results of an interview with the principal, Mr Ahmad Kusnadi, one of the main strategies is to establish good partnerships with parents and the community. "We continue to build good relationships with parents and involve them in decision-making related to the school. This creates a strong sense of belonging and increases their trust," he said. This is in line with research by the Australian Council for the Development of (Asri et al., 2021), which emphasises the importance of partnerships between schools and industry in improving the relevance of education and graduate skills.

The development of diverse extracurricular programmes is another strategy prioritised to attract more students. In an interview with Mrs Siti Fatimah, a teacher at SMAN 1 Cisaga, she explained, "We offer a variety of extracurricular activities that focus not only on academics but also on character building and developing students' interests. This is particularly appealing to prospective students and parents. This shows that a transformation in the principal's leadership style can create an environment that supports students' freedom to learn. The use of technology as a tool for school promotion and management was also found to be an important factor in maintaining student retention. Mr Ahmad added that they use social media and websites to introduce the school's strengths and new programmes on offer. According to

the results of the observation, the school website is now one of the main sources of information for prospective students and parents.

From the research results, several key factors were identified in the evaluation of leadership strategies carried out by principals in maintaining student retention. First, strategic collaboration with parents and the community is an important foundation in creating a positive school climate. Parental involvement in supporting school programmes reflects the synergy between the school and the community, which can influence parents' decisions to enrol their children. This shows that the headteacher not only acts as an internal leader but also as an agent of change in the community (Asri et al., 2021).

The development of innovative extracurricular programmes makes SMAN 1 Cisaga attractive to new students. By increasing student participation in various activities outside of class hours, the school strives to create a more holistic learning experience. A leadership model that emphasises the potential for student development in non-academic aspects supports a broader and deeper vision of education (Megayanti & Asri, 2022). The implementation of these programmes is expected to not only attract prospective students but also retain enrolled students.

The use of technology in the promotion and management process makes it easier for schools to adapt to changing times. This creates better accessibility to information for prospective students and parents about the school's programmes, activities, and strengths. The use of social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, allows schools to reach a wider audience and maintain effective communication (Refani & Azis, 2022). As shown in research by Yusmina et al. (2022) school leaders who are adaptive to developments in information technology can expand the impact of the various initiatives they implement.

The evaluation results show that leadership strategies focused on collaboration, programme innovation, and technology utilisation are effective measures that school principals can take to maintain student sustainability. This finding emphasises the importance of inclusive and adaptive leadership in increasing the attractiveness of schools and maintaining student enrolment. Further research could be directed towards exploring the role of external factors such as government policy and educational trends in the context of student retention in other schools.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the managerial leadership strategies of the principal at SMAN 1 Cisaga play a significant role in maintaining the sustainability of new student enrolment. Collaboration with parents and the community strengthens inclusive leadership, while the development of varied extracurricular activities increases student engagement and attraction. In addition, the use of technology for promotion and communication has been proven to expand access to information and strengthen the school's image in the surrounding environment. However, the limitations of this study lie in its scope, which only covers one school and a limited number of informants. Therefore, further research involving more schools and stakeholders is recommended to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of principal leadership strategies in the context of new student enrolment.

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