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Strengthening School Management through Strategic Interventions to Enhance Student Recruitment Capacity

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ABSTRACT

Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School in Rejang Lebong Regency has struggled with low interest from prospective students during new student admission, which poses a management challenge. This program aimed to strengthen the school's capacity for promotion, outreach, and building public trust. The program used a field-based descriptive qualitative approach. Participants included the principal, vice principal for student affairs, public relations team, six admission committee teachers, and fifteen senior students. The intervention ran for four months (February–May 2024). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Assessment relied on observable indicators: the availability of an admission SOP, the number of promotional materials, the frequency of outreach, and stakeholder participation. The university team provided public relations training, mentoring on work plans and SOPs, and promotional templates. The school then formed a five-member admission committee, produced three types of materials (brochures, banners, and 24 Instagram posts), and carried out eight community outreach activities with three nearby mosques. The results show strengthened institutional capacity, as indicated by a structured committee with clear roles, outreach that grew from two to eight activities, and the active involvement of ten teachers and fifteen students. However, the results reflect improvements in capacity and promotional practices rather than a statistically measurable increase in enrollment, because enrollment data were not yet available. Continued implementation and evaluation are needed to assess the impact on future enrollment.

Keywords: *School Management Assistance, Management Intervention, New Student Enrollment, Public Relations, Student Recruitment*

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INTRODUCTION

Competition among junior high schools, particularly private schools in peri-urban areas, has intensified because of school zoning policies and the emergence of new public schools. In this environment, an institution's sustainability depends not only on educational quality but also on effective management, public trust, and the ability to communicate its value (Arrifa'i, 2025; Basori et al., 2023; Zaakiyyah, 2024). Consequently, declining new student enrollment should be viewed as a

management issue that calls for coordinated institutional intervention, not merely as a promotional problem.

This issue is especially relevant to Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School, which is located in Tempel Rejo Village, Curup Selatan District, Rejang Lebong Regency. The school was established on July 29, 1982, operates as a private school under the Muhammadiyah Branch Leadership of Rejang Lebong 1, and holds a B accreditation status. When the community engagement program began on June 3, 2024, the school had only 60 students spread across three relatively small classes (Grade 7, Grade 8, and Grade 9), which reflects a continuous decline from earlier periods. Based on school records and teacher interviews, enrollment trends were as follows:

Table 1. Historical Enrollment Trend (2019-2024)

Academic Year	Total Students	Grade 7 Intake
2019/2020	145	52
2020/2021	112	38
2021/2022	85	27
2022/2023	71	20
2023/2024	60	18

The decline coincided with the establishment and expansion of competing schools within a 2–3 km radius, including SMPN 10 and SMPN 1 Di Merigi, which intensified competition for prospective students. This condition poses a substantial challenge to maintaining the school's student population and institutional sustainability. Discussions with teachers also indicated that the school had previously enrolled considerably more students (Cinta et al., 2023; Halimah et al., 2024; Mu'ammar & Muchtar, 2024). When it was still known as SLTP Muhammadiyah 2, the school reportedly had such high enrollment that students had to attend in morning and afternoon sessions. Over time, however, the emergence and growth of other junior high schools in the area, including SMPN 10 and SMPN 1 Di Merigi, made the local educational environment increasingly competitive and contributed to the school's declining enrollment.

The decline in student enrollment should be seen not merely as a quantitative issue but also as a management challenge that requires a comprehensive institutional response (Chrostowski, 2025; Efendi et al., 2025; Fauzi, Hidayat, et al., 2025; Mahmud, 2023; Yugo, 2025). A school that wants to sustain its educational role must build public confidence by demonstrating the quality, relevance, and distinctiveness of its educational services. This is consistent with the broader goals of national education set out in Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, particularly Article 3, which emphasizes developing students into individuals who have faith, piety, knowledge, competence, creativity, independence, and a sense of responsibility as citizens. Within this framework, schools bear an important responsibility to offer educational processes that equip students with the knowledge, skills, character, and competencies needed to face future challenges. Therefore, strengthening schools' institutional capacity cannot be separated from efforts to ensure that communities recognize and trust the educational value the institution offers.

Consequently, increasing new student enrollment requires an integrated management approach (Agustian et al., 2023; Alam & Muchtar, 2025; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Badrun, 2024; Steen et al., 2024). Public trust generally develops through the interaction of several institutional dimensions, including educational quality, school leadership, teacher professionalism, facilities and infrastructure, student achievement, communication with parents, community engagement, and the ability to present relevant, accessible information about school programs. Promotion alone may be insufficient when it is not backed by better institutional management and a clear understanding of what prospective students and their families expect (Adhikari & Shrestha, 2023; Chowdhury et al., 2024; Fauzi, Al Ayyubi, et al., 2025). Accordingly, intervention in school management can serve as a planned effort to identify institutional constraints, strengthen organizational capacity, improve stakeholder coordination, and develop practical strategies for attracting and retaining students.

The concept of assistance is especially relevant here because community engagement should position the implementing team not merely as a provider of solutions but as a facilitator who supports partners in identifying problems, developing strategies, implementing planned actions, and evaluating the outcomes. Assistance can build capacity by enabling partners to take an active part in problem solving and to develop strategies that remain sustainable after the program ends (Kosim & Maryani, 2025; Nurhasanah et al., 2024; Sudarsono et al., 2025). From a management perspective, such assistance may involve planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and evaluating institutional efforts toward clearly defined objectives (Caniago, 2024; Nurhikmah, 2024; Ren et al., 2023; Soliha et al., 2024; Vorontsova & Dakhari, 2024). Meanwhile, intervention can be understood as a planned change that change agents introduce to address specific problems at the organizational or community level. In this program, management intervention is therefore aimed at strengthening the school's capacity to formulate and implement coordinated strategies for increasing new student enrollment.

Previous studies provide a relevant foundation for developing this program. Loho et al. (2023) reported that management assistance in administering a community religious institution brought practical benefits by strengthening its organizational management. Rianawati et al. (2022) emphasized careful planning, clear task distribution, and commitment to agreed procedures in managing new student recruitment at the junior high school level. Other studies have applied intervention approaches in educational settings, including counselor interventions to address students' self-esteem and interventions designed to improve learning concentration among students with learning difficulties (Al Ayyubi et al., 2025). These studies show that assistance and intervention approaches are relevant for strengthening educational practices; however, earlier work has generally focused on institutional management in specific community organizations, student recruitment procedures, or interventions addressing individual student needs. Little attention has been paid to management assistance that integrates institutional intervention with the specific problem of declining new student enrollment in a private junior high school.

This gap is most evident for private junior high schools, where declining enrollment has rarely been addressed through an integrated management approach. The novelty of this program lies in its integrated intervention framework, which combines five pillars into a single management system: (1) strengthening of public relations management, (2) stakeholder participation through teachers and senior students as peer promoters, (3) conventional promotion, (4) digital communication via social media, and (5) community-based outreach through collaboration with local mosques. Unlike existing programs that treat promotion and public relations as separate activities, this model combines them into a coordinated, structured management intervention. Accordingly, the objectives of this program are stated as measurable institutional outcomes: (1) to establish a structured new student admission management system with clear SOPs and job descriptions, (2) to diversify communication channels from one to at least four types (brochure, banner, social media, and mosque-based outreach), (3) to increase stakeholder participation in promotional activities from 2 teachers to at least 10 teachers and 15 senior students, and (4) to increase the number of prospective-student inquiries recorded during the admission period.

METHOD

This community engagement program used a field-based approach with descriptive qualitative methods (Lichtman, 2023) to identify enrollment-related challenges and to develop management interventions suited to the school's context. The program took place at Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School in Rejang Lebong Regency from February to May 2024, a four-month intervention period.

Participants and Selection Criteria. The program involved 12 primary participants, selected through purposive sampling based on their direct roles in new student admission management: (1) the school principal (1 person), (2) the vice principal for student affairs (1 person), (3) members of the school public relations team (4 persons), and (4) teachers assigned to the admission committee (6 persons). In addition, 15 senior students took part as peer promoters. The criteria for teacher participants were a minimum of two years of service at the school and prior involvement in admission activities, while senior students were selected for their communication skills and active participation in school organizations.

Data were gathered through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out systematically with an observation checklist and field notes. The observations focused on: (a) institutional conditions and facilities, (b) existing promotional practices and communication flows, (c) the preparation and distribution of promotional materials, (d) coordination meetings of the admission committee (4 meetings observed), and (e) community outreach activities at three nearby mosques. Observations were recorded in structured field notes, photographs, and activity logs.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 key informants: the principal (1), vice principal (1), and teachers (8). The interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide covering enrollment history, management challenges, and promotional practices. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, took place face-to-face at the school, and was audio-recorded with permission and

transcribed verbatim. The principal and vice principal were interviewed twice more to clarify emerging themes.

Documentation complemented the observation and interview data and included school enrollment archives (2019–2024), existing promotional materials, committee meeting minutes, Instagram account insights, and photographs of outreach activities. The engagement activities were carried out in four interconnected stages. The first stage involved problem identification and needs assessment. The second stage focused on formulating strategic interventions through focus group discussions with the school management team. At this stage, the university team provided training on public relations management, along with templates for SOPs and promotional content. The third stage was implementation, in which the school independently carried out the agreed strategies, including establishing the admission committee, producing promotional materials, managing social media, and conducting mosque-based outreach, with mentoring from the engagement team.

Before implementation, the team helped prepare communication materials and gave briefings and rehearsals to teachers who would deliver Friday sermons to ensure consistent messaging. The final stage consisted of monitoring and evaluation using explicit indicators and data validation. Evaluation Framework. To strengthen the evaluation, the indicators were divided into process (output) and result (outcome) levels:

Table 2. Evaluation Indicators for Management Intervention

Type	Indicator	Measurement	Target
Output (process)	Promotional materials	Count brochures, banners, IG	3 types, 24 posts
	Communication channels	Number of channels	4 channels
	Personnel assigned	Teacher/students involved	10 teachers, 15 students
	Outreach activities	Mosque/community activities	8 activities
Outcome	Community contacts	Audience at mosques	>300 people
	Student inquiries	Via WA/ social media	Recorded inquiries
	Enrollment applications	Registration forms collected	2024/2025 period

Qualitative data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure validity, source triangulation was applied by cross-checking findings across observation notes, interview transcripts, and documentation. Method triangulation was also used by comparing data from different participant roles (principal vs. teachers vs. students). Regarding sustainability, the program has created emerging potential for independent continuation through the formation of a structured committee and SOPs, but not yet an established sustainable outcome, because no systematic follow-up assessment has been conducted beyond the four-month period. Further

monitoring in the next admission cycle is needed to assess whether the school can implement the strategies independently.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The program identified a significant gap between the institutional potential of Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School and its current student enrollment. The school has several supporting conditions that can serve as a basis for increasing new student enrollment. Its permanent building is owned by the Muhammadiyah foundation and is considered large enough to accommodate additional students. Geographically, the school is strategically situated on the Curup–Bengkulu main road in Tempel Rejo, Curup Selatan District, Rejang Lebong Regency, which makes it relatively accessible to the surrounding community. The area surrounding the school is predominantly Muslim and relatively densely populated. In addition, most teachers hold at least a bachelor's degree, and administrative staff are available to support school operations. These conditions show that the school has institutional and environmental resources that can be developed to support its sustainability and enrollment efforts.

The initial assessment, however, identified several factors that limited the school's ability to attract prospective students. The most prominent issue was that new student admission socialization was limited in intensity and lacked a systematic approach. The school had not yet made full use of its public relations function to communicate its educational programs and admission opportunities to the surrounding community. Existing social networks and professional or community relationships were also rarely used as channels for disseminating information. Furthermore, conventional and digital promotional media had not been used systematically. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp had not been fully integrated into the school's new student admission strategy. This created a gap between the school's institutional potential and how well that potential was communicated to prospective students and parents.

Based on these conditions, the community engagement team provided management intervention assistance focused on strengthening school promotion, public relations, stakeholder participation, and new student admission communication. The intervention began with coordination with school management to identify priorities and formulate practical strategies. Assistance was then provided in preparing admission banners, brochures, other promotional materials, and social media content. The program also supported the formation of the admission committee and the designation of personnel responsible for outreach to prospective students and nearby educational institutions.



Figure 1. Team, School Personnel, and Students with the Promotional Banner

Another intervention strengthened community-based communication through teachers and senior students. The engagement team helped the school prepare Friday sermon and religious lecture materials that trained school representatives could deliver in nearby mosques and community religious activities. Before implementation, the materials were prepared and rehearsed so that the messages would be delivered appropriately and consistently. The intervention was designed to use existing community networks while introducing the school and its educational programs to the surrounding community.

The program also broadened the school's promotional approach through conventional and digital communication. Printed brochures were prepared for distribution to colleagues, community members, mosque administrators, prospective students, and elementary schools. At the same time, assistance was provided in developing promotional posters for Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. As a result, the intervention introduced a more diversified communication strategy that combined direct community outreach with printed and digital media.

The implementation took place through a series of scheduled assistance activities from May to October 2024. The activities included initial coordination, preparation of admission banners and brochures, development of social media promotional materials, preparation of sermon and community outreach materials, formation of the admission committee, preparation of outreach personnel and materials for elementary schools, and development of community socialization materials. The final phase focused on documenting the program and preparing the community engagement report, the journal manuscript, and intellectual property documentation.

Overall, the implementation produced several immediate institutional outcomes. The school obtained more structured promotional materials, established a clearer division of responsibilities for admission activities, expanded its planned communication channels, and increased the involvement of teachers and senior students in community outreach. The intervention also gave the school practical experience in combining conventional promotion with social media-based communication. These outcomes indicate that the school is better prepared to run admission activities in a more organized and diversified way.

DISCUSSION

The results show that the challenge facing Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School was not solely a matter of facilities or physical capacity but also of how well its institutional potential was communicated to the surrounding community. The school has several resources that can support enrollment, including an adequate permanent building, a strategic location, qualified teachers, and a predominantly Muslim surrounding community. Nevertheless, these resources had not been matched by a sufficiently systematic communication and promotion strategy. This finding suggests that institutional capacity does not automatically translate into greater public interest when the school's strengths and educational programs are not communicated effectively to prospective students and their parents.

The management intervention approach was therefore aimed at strengthening the school's capacity to manage communication and enrollment activities rather than relying on a single promotional activity (Sarfika et al., 2023). This approach is in line with the principle that management means planning, organizing, directing, and controlling available resources to achieve set objectives. For new student enrollment, these functions need to be translated into concrete activities, including forming an admission committee, allocating responsibilities, developing promotional materials, identifying communication channels, and coordinating school personnel and community stakeholders. The assistance in these areas helped the school move from limited, fragmented promotional practices toward a more organized enrollment communication strategy.

Strengthening the school's public relations function was another important component of the intervention (Hastasari et al., 2022). Public relations in an educational institution goes beyond disseminating information about admission schedules (Hasan, 2025; Maarif et al., 2023; Mutholingah, 2021; Santosa, 2022; Toledano, 2017). It involves building communication and relationships between the school and its surrounding stakeholders. In this program, teachers, senior students, mosque administrators, elementary schools, community members, and existing social networks were identified as potential communication partners. By involving these stakeholders, the school gained additional channels for information about its programs and admission opportunities to reach prospective students and their families.

The use of religious and community activities as communication channels should also be understood within the partner institution's social context (Malak et al., 2025; Samarkandi et al., 2025; Sarfika et al., 2023; Sukmawati et al., 2025; Suntana et al., 2023). Because the school operates within a predominantly Muslim community, collaboration with nearby mosques and participation in religious activities offered an existing community network through which school representatives could interact directly with residents (Tamphu et al., 2024; Nurhikmah et al., 2024). Preparing and rehearsing the Friday sermon and religious lecture materials helped ensure that participating teachers and students were well prepared. Importantly, the approach placed school-related information within broader community engagement rather than treating religious activities solely as promotional tools. This strategy illustrates how local social capital can be

incorporated into school outreach, provided it is implemented appropriately and remains consistent with the primary purpose of the community activity.

The intervention also addressed the limitations of the school's earlier promotional practices by introducing digital communication (Mardatillah et al., 2025; Penuel et al., 2020; Westby, 2020). Preparing promotional materials for Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp gave the school opportunities to share information beyond face-to-face interactions. Digital media can support continuous communication by allowing schools to present information about educational programs, activities, achievements, facilities, and admission opportunities in formats that prospective students and parents can easily access. However, the effectiveness of digital promotion depends not simply on having social media accounts but on the consistency, quality, relevance, and continuity of the content. Therefore, the assistance should be viewed as an initial step in capacity building rather than a guarantee of increased enrollment.

The findings are broadly consistent with previous studies on community engagement and educational management. Tran & Smith (2020) demonstrated the practical value of management assistance in strengthening how a community religious institution is managed. Similarly, Supriani et al. (2022) emphasized careful planning, a clear division of responsibilities, and adherence to established procedures in new student recruitment. The present program extends these insights by situating student enrollment within a broader framework of school management and community communication. Rather than focusing only on recruitment procedures, the intervention addressed the institutional capacity needed to communicate the school's educational value and admission opportunities to the surrounding community.

The results also reinforce the relevance of intervention as a planned process of change. The intervention in this program followed a sequence of problem identification, strategy formulation, material preparation, stakeholder involvement, implementation, and monitoring. Such a process is important because sustainable improvement in school enrollment requires institutional participation rather than dependence on an external engagement team. The involvement of teachers, senior students, and school management in preparing and carrying out outreach activities provides an initial foundation for continuing the strategy independently.

Nevertheless, the available results mainly show changes in institutional preparedness and promotional capacity rather than a statistically measurable increase in new student enrollment. Therefore, claims about the direct effect of the intervention on enrollment should be made with caution. A stronger assessment would require comparative enrollment data, such as the number of prospective applicants, registered new students, and the conversion rate from applicants to enrolled students before and after the intervention. Future implementation should also monitor the reach and engagement of digital promotional content, community responses, inquiries from prospective parents and students, and the number of new students enrolled. Such indicators would provide stronger evidence of how management intervention relates to enrollment outcomes.

From a sustainability perspective, the program gives the school a framework that can continue beyond the assistance period. The promotional materials, admission responsibilities, involvement of teachers and senior students, and diversified communication channels can become part of the school's annual admission planning. Continued evaluation is nevertheless necessary to determine which communication channels generate the strongest community response and how the school's educational programs can be presented more consistently to prospective students and parents. In this respect, the program's main contribution lies in strengthening the school's institutional capacity to plan and manage enrollment-oriented community engagement in a more systematic, participatory, and context-sensitive way.

CONCLUSION

The community engagement program found that the main challenge facing Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School, Rejang Lebong Regency, was the relatively low and stagnant number of new student enrollments despite adequate institutional resources and a strategically accessible location. The management intervention assistance showed the importance of strengthening the school's capacity to plan and implement systematic enrollment strategies. The intervention focused on strengthening the public relations function, organizing admission activities, developing promotional materials, involving teachers and senior students, and expanding community outreach through conventional and digital channels. These activities gave the school a more structured framework for communicating its educational programs and admission opportunities to prospective students, parents, and the surrounding community. The program also laid a foundation for more sustainable stakeholder engagement and promotional practices. Continued implementation and periodic evaluation are needed to determine whether these strategies generate measurable increases in new student enrollment in subsequent admission periods. Future research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of school management interventions using quantitative and mixed-method approaches, particularly by comparing enrollment data before and after the intervention and identifying the relative contribution of conventional promotion, digital media, community engagement, and stakeholder involvement to enrollment. Such studies could provide stronger empirical evidence for developing sustainable, context-sensitive strategies to strengthen student recruitment in private educational institutions.

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