

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2025, Vol. 6, No. 9, 4614 – 4621

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.09.30>

Research Article

Factors Influencing School Development and Student Enrollment: A Case Study of Santa Maria 1 Senior High School, Cirebon

Natalia Tika Indrawati*, Henky Lisan Suwarno

Faculty of Digital Business and Law, Maranatha Christian University

Article history:

Submission 03 August 2025

Revised 31 August 2025

Accepted 23 September 2025

*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

nataliatika99@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the internal and external factors influencing school development and student enrollment at Santa Maria 1 Senior High School, Cirebon. Student numbers have fluctuated in the past five years, showing the need for institutional improvement. This research adopts a qualitative method, applying the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) technique to identify the root of the problem and formulate appropriate development strategies. The data for this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, including the foundation, principal, teachers, students, alumni, and parents. The results of this study indicate that school development and the increasing number of students are influenced by a combination of internal factors such as the quality of education program, leadership system, facilities, and the school image, as well as external factors that covered the economic conditions of the community, public perception, and competition with other schools. The root cause includes a lack of innovation in learning programs, promotion strategies were insufficient, and the misalignment of school values with community expectations. This study suggests the need for increased innovative learning programs, maximizing the strategic digital promotion, strengthening the school image, and involvement from active stakeholders to raise the competitiveness and the number of students sustainably.

Keywords: *School Development, Student Enrollment, Secondary Education, Root Cause Analysis, Educational Leadership*

Background

Education is a key factor in national development. Education has a strategic role in producing the next generation of the nation. Schools as formal education institutions play a role in educating the next generation of the

nation who are qualified and able to adapt to the challenges and needs of the nation's future. In today's era of rapid global development, schools are expected to integrate various advancements into the educational steps to strengthen their roles in educating the

How to cite:

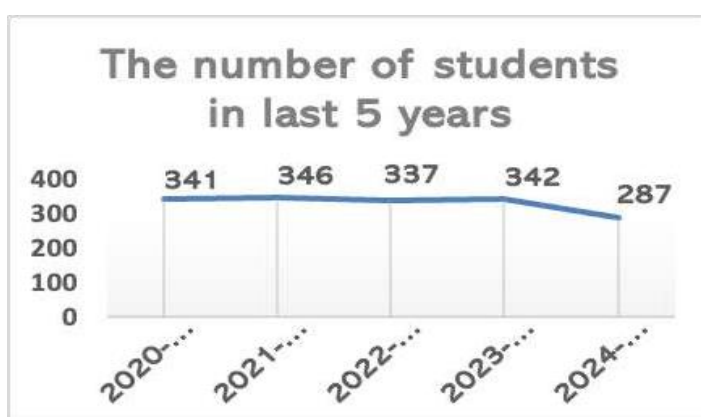
Indrawati, N. T. & Suwarno, H. L. (2025). Factors Influencing School Development and Student Enrollment: A Case Study of Santa Maria 1 Senior High School, Cirebon. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 6(9), 4614 – 4621. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.06.09.30

students. Schools must be continuously adaptive to remain relevant and competitive. In doing so, schools can maintain their position as key institutions for self-development of the nation's successors. However, regarding the challenges of globalization with its complex social dynamics, schools must also be able to

fight for the purpose of their existence which plays an important part in contributing to national education. In order to meet the ongoing and future demands of the 21st century, educational institutions are required to increase multi-education in order to produce

alumni who are competitive and well-prepared to face the challenges of globalization (Kabatiah et al. 2024).

Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon is one of the prominent private educational institutions in Cirebon for its distinctive characteristics and strong core values. Since its establishment, this school has been considered as one of the most favourite schools. Even though, during the past five years, it has experienced notable fluctuations in student enrolment, showing the need for strategic evaluation and institutional development.



Graphic of the number of student enrolment in Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon for the last five years.

The internal factors which cause the current situation at Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon include the limited availability of proper facilities and infrastructure. Both are either insufficient or unsupported with the needs of students. In addition, the leadership and school management practices have impacted the education quality which is expected by students and parents. On the other hand, the school is also facing competitiveness due to the existence of other new schools which offer better facilities and more efficient management systems. Furthermore, social media which has made it easier for students and parents to access the school information has intensified the competition for school enrolment. Even more, changes in government policy and economic factors also influence the decision-making of parents in selecting the school for their children.

In response, The Foundation of Santo Dominikus has initiated various solutions,

including infrastructure upgrades, curriculum enhancement, and teaching staff quality development. While maintaining its core values, it continues to implement innovative policies under the leadership of the principal and the management team. Development of various programs are designed to ensure the continuity for the relevancy of this school in a dynamic educational environment and sustaining appeal among prospective students and parents.

School development is a strategic and continuous process at intentionally enhancing institutional quality across several aspects, including management, infrastructure, curriculum, and school culture. The factors that are mainly influencing school development include leadership, effectiveness, the competence of teaching staff, the availability and quality of school facilities, and the support from surrounding community and school committees. According to (Triana 2024), organizational development is shaped by two

principal dimensions; internal and external factors. The internal factors cover structures, systems, processes, and facilities must align to enable organizational renewal. Externally the factors cover intensified competition between organizations, rapid advancements in science and technology (IPTEK), and changes in both physical and social environment that require the urge for organizations to design strategies for acquiring external resources ensuring the future of institutional sustainability. Improving educational quality also involves systematic evaluation aligned with national standards—most notably, school accreditation. As mandated by Indonesia's Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, the purpose of accreditation as a strategic factor for determining the eligibility and accountability of institutions in implementing their educational programs. The eight national education standards include curriculum content, teaching processes, alumni competencies, educator qualifications, infrastructure, school management, financing and assessment mechanism (Sumaryanti and Purwanto 2023).

Organizational development serves few goals and objectives. As stated by (Ma'arif et al. 2023), in general the objectives of this development are as follows; enhancing individual competencies, changes in value systems which are made in such a way so each individual can also improve their skills, creating intergroup and intra-group development in preventing conflict with improved resolution mechanism compared to traditional bureaucratic methods used by the organization so far. The preferred shift is toward an organic organizational system that promotes adaptability and innovation.

On a functional level for institution and organizational development in broader scope aims to boost the performance of individual, team, and organizations while increasing member satisfaction (Ma'arif et al. 2023). Through this process, it requires leaders to quickly adopt the appropriate responsive management style to be able deal with new problems that must be handled by collaboration involving the subordinate roles in the authority division (not authority application hierarchically) based action research principle. Meanwhile, in the organizational development with the aim of

developing a system that is able to self-assess and manage the realisation of organization on its own through various ways, to adjust the nature of the task, increase mutual trust and help each other among members because of the foundation of knowledge and skills which create an environment that showing the increasingly expanding authority role. The occurrence of a multi-directional communication system is increasing the sense of both individual and group responsibility in the field of planning and implementation, increasing cooperation system and interdependence and reducing unhealthy competition, raising functional conflict in organization, collective decision making is being done based on accurate information instead of organizational roles, the encouragement from the managers in outlining realistic and challenging goals for each individual. These elements help create a resilient and high-performing institution.

Influenced factors for quality of education that emphasized by Directorate General of Higher Education (DIKTI) are the standard aspects which consist of ten indicators as follow are learning process, curriculum, human resources, students, infrastructure and facilities, academic atmosphere, finance, research and publication, community service, and governance (Chalim 2018). Those factors determine the school's success in differentiation strategies include curriculum and education offering program, facilities and infrastructure availability, accessibility, education process, services quality and post- education services. The more aspects owned will certainly strengthen the organizations and institutional optimal capacity and competitiveness.

(Ma'arif et al. 2023) also proposed that organizational development strategies other than approaching, there is also an action plan or strategy which can be used to manage the organizational development and changes to happen. Some of the strategies include the following, linking the present time with the future. Concerning the work as something beyond the continuity of the past, also about challenge and opportunities in the future and involve them in today's satisfaction, applying learning as a lifestyle, adaptive organization will excel at sharing the insight and management, actively

support and encourage daily improvement, which can cause success either big or small, guarantee the team diversity that showing things will not be done traditionally. Encouraging unconventional people because their ideas and approaches are outside the box so they able to drive radical change, keep new breakthroughs and the adaptive-friendly organization who always find ways to make innovations, integrate and use technologies to implement change, build and cultivate the trust that leading people tend to support their trustworthy organizational culture also given credibility and integrity by the managers.

The increasing number of students can be seen as the success of educational institutions in building public appeal and trust. Student admission is essentially the process of searching, selecting, and determining relevant students who will join the school institution. In the Implementation of Student Admissions (PPDB), usually each school forms a committee involving all elements of teachers, staff from general administration (Tata Usaha), and school councils. In addition, the school posts an announcement about new student admission openly so the public can get clear and comprehensive information regarding the admission and catch their interest. Although the result of PPDB for each school differs every year, depending on the success of the school management in enhancing its quality and promoting it to the public (Yudiastuti 2024).

One of the possible designed strategies to keep and strengthen the resilient ability of school institutions is the adoption of competitive strategy. This strategy is an effort to identify and secure an advantageous market position in a fundamental arena where the competition takes place. The objective of this strategy enables the winning over competition. Furthermore, explained by (Learning 2004), that the purpose of competitive strategy is to cultivate where the institution is either able to protect itself well against the pressure of competition or influence the pressure positively. Thus, creating an established safe position, an effective competitive strategy is needed which include attacking or defensive actions. Therefore, investigating and analysing the sources of each internal strength and external threats is

key to developing a certain strategy (Learning 2004).

When it comes to consumer decision-making in school selection, there are four factors influenced by culture, social, personal, and psychological factors. Culture shapes deeply in broader impact on consumer behaviour in purchasing decision-making. Marketers must understand the role played by culture and subculture, and the social class of buyers. The behaviour is also impacted by social factors such as reference groups, family, roles, and social status of consumers. One's decision can also be influenced by personal characteristics such as age and life cycle, occupation, economic conditions, lifestyle, personality, and self-concept of the consumer concerned. Buyer choices also play a significant role that contributes to school choice impact, as do psychological factors like motivation, perception, learning, beliefs, and attitudes. The growing demand for educational change so it can be relevant to the needs of society. This has shifted schools in many aspects of concept, process, function, goals, and the management of school institutional as well as educational resources. Quality of educational programs and services plays as a critical factor in enhancing student excellence and heavily influencing teacher competence and professionalism (Chalim 2018), (Diana et al. 2022).

From the side of parents, they often consider a range of factors when choosing a school, including the quality of educational services, curriculum relevance, the institution reputation, positive image through school achievement and extracurricular activities, school accessibility, parents' affordability, and the success of the offered programs. Schools must also make sure the education cost remains financially accessible and the effectiveness of their services. Education services that prioritize the improvement of their quality, such as better teaching methods and resources availability will also enhance the students' excellence (Firdaus, Fadhilah, and Masuwd 2024).

Based on these challenges, this study aims to analyse the internal and external factors that influence school development and the increasing number of enrolled students at Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon.

The findings are expected to provide clear understanding and valuable insight into how educational institutions face the competitive challenges, address enrolment fluctuations, and recommend strategic responses that can be applied to strengthen the demands of Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon in the education sector.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach applying the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) technique. The research was conducted at Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon and employed structured interview techniques as the primary data collection method using the question items that had been provided in advance. Regarding this study case, the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) was used to analyse the identified problems.

As described by (Bhattacharya et al. 2014), Root Cause Analysis is a problem-solving process involving systematic investigation into the identified problem to uncover the root cause of the issues. It also facilitates the formulation of corrective actions to solve the problems. RCA was chosen because it enables researchers to systematically uncover the underlying causes of problems rather than stopping at surface-level symptoms. Unlike other qualitative methods, RCA provides a structured framework that links problems directly to corrective actions, making it highly suitable for identifying institutional challenges in education (Meyers and VanGronigen 2020). In this study, RCA contributed by clarifying the connections between internal weaknesses, external pressures, and enrollment fluctuations, thus supporting the development of actionable recommendations for school leaders.

A total of 20 respondents participated in structured interviews, including school leaders, teachers, alumni, students, parents, and foundation representatives. The RCA methodology processes are as follows: (1) identification of the incidents (problems); (2) determination of the root cause; (3) analysis of the potential impacts of the problem; (4) proposed corrective actions; and (5) implementation within the school institution.

Result and Discussion

In this section, the researcher presents the findings related to the educational dynamics at Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon. Using qualitative approach and Root Cause Analysis, this study analyses the factors affecting school development and the fluctuation number in student enrolment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with notable stakeholders, including the foundation representatives, the principal, teachers, students, alumni, and parents. This study also highlights the school's vision and mission as the main basis for shaping a fundamental reference in designing school development and shaping institutional strategies to boost the number of students. The school's vision- *"To become an individual who learns and loves the truth"* - which is translated through various missions emphasizing Christian character formation, quality education, and the integration of information technology. This vision and mission are the core of all school policies and development strategies initiatives. Regarding the quality of education at Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon, the majority of respondents considered it to be good marked by capable teachers and education staff competencies, the implementation of adaptive curriculum (Indonesia's Independent Curriculum or *the Merdeka*), continuous upgraded facilities and infrastructure, a focus on character education, and a conducive learning environment. However, several alumni addressed that teaching methods in this school require further innovation to remain more relevant with current educational trends and students' needs. The school expects to boost the number of students through new student enrolment matched with its class capacity and resources (ideally around 120 to 150 students per study year). The expectation is accompanied by efforts to achieve that by committedly continuing to improve education quality service and strengthen school reputation within the public community. Several strategic initiatives that school have implemented to boost enrolment growth included: (1) digital promotion via social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube, (2) held an open house events and visits to local churches, (3) offering scholarship programs, (4) providing a safe and

comfortable learning environment which supports student growth and development, (5), lastly, involving alumni and establishing partnership. The analysis results of the factors which contribute to school development and student enrolment trends are divided into categories of internal and external factors. Internal factors covered the quality of education (teacher competence, curriculum, learning methods), school facilities (classrooms, laboratories, libraries, sports fields, canteens, and toilets sanitation), school management and leadership effectiveness, school image and institutional reputation, school culture and alumni character, the attractiveness of flagship program (such as extracurricular activities, scholarships, and religion study program). While external factors consist of the parents' economic conditions, public perception of the school, government policies, and demographic shifts and population mobility.

Interviews with students, alumni, teachers, and parents reinforced these findings. Some respondents highlighted that decisions to choose other schools were strongly influenced by clearer program offerings and more consistent promotional efforts elsewhere. Teachers emphasized that while digital platforms were used, the content often lacked consistency and failed to showcase the school's strengths. Alumni and current students pointed out the importance of positive branding and attractive extracurricular activities, noting that the discontinuation of certain programs reduced the school's appeal. Parents stressed the role of scholarships, tuition flexibility, and active promotion through social media in influencing enrollment choices. Together, these perspectives underline that effective digital promotion and innovative learning are critical to improving the school's competitiveness.

According to the field data and interview findings, the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) was able to identify the problem using this technique indicating underlying challenges as follows: first, lack of innovation in learning methods – although teacher quality is generally strong, the adoption of updated methods has not been fully optimized. Second, strict competition between public and private schools, particularly from the cost wise, often leads parents

to most likely choose public schools, becoming one of the significant challenges for many private schools. Third, ineffective systematic promotional strategies – while the school already did the digital promotion to get exposure from various social media platforms, its content lacks consistency which does not sufficiently provide informational needs of students and parents. Fourth, the incompatibility between public expectation and school values–the school highlights spiritual and character development whereas some parts of society are still judging the school based on academic achievement or facilities. Last, diverse economic conditions of students' parents and family – education costs are a major concern, even more for the lower- middle class students' family.

Among these, ineffective promotion strategies and limited innovation in learning methods had the strongest impact on enrollment trends. Without effective outreach and adaptive learning, the school struggled to compete with institutions offering modern facilities and strong digital visibility (Labausa, Pinca, and Cruda 2023). The dominance of these two factors is consistent with interview responses: parents and alumni repeatedly emphasized the importance of clear, engaging information about school programs and modern teaching practices. When promotion content failed to showcase the strengths of Santa Maria 1 Senior High School, potential students were easily attracted by competitors with stronger online presence (Ghosal, Prasad, and Kaur 2020). Likewise, although the school had qualified educators, the limited use of technology-enhanced and student-centered learning methods reduced its appeal among digitally literate youth. These shortcomings created a perception gap: the school was seen as traditional rather than innovative, making promotion and pedagogy closely linked in shaping enrollment outcomes (Galin Anggraini and Saputra 2024).

Moreover, it can be concluded from the findings that the increasing number of student enrolment at Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon does not depend on the school's internal quality alone. External factors –such as the school's public reputation, community economic conditions, and the local competition– also set critical roles towards this challenge.

Therefore, the school's strategic efforts must be implemented directly to both internal and external development. The focus internally should be on improving educational quality, enhancing facilities, and expanding high-value programs. Meanwhile from the external side, the highlight should be placed on strategic digital promotion, partnership, and engaging alumni and the broader community. The key to sustainable school development required visionary leadership, continuous evaluation and quality enhancement, also a strategic adaptive approach to changes in the educational and diverse social environment. Above all, this would not succeed without the active involvement of all stakeholders in shaping the school's development in the future.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the development of Santa Maria 1 Senior High School and the increase in student enrollment are influenced by internal factors such as the quality of teaching, teacher competence, facilities, and institutional image, as well as external factors including community economic conditions, parental expectations, and competition among schools. Through Root Cause Analysis (RCA), three main causes were identified: limited innovation in teaching methods, insufficient promotional strategies, and misalignment between school values and community expectations. Among these, weak promotional strategies and limited innovation in learning emerged as the dominant factors most strongly affecting enrollment trends. These shortcomings made it difficult for the school to compete with institutions offering modern facilities and stronger digital visibility.

The findings emphasize that improving internal quality alone is not sufficient to ensure the sustainability of the school. Internal improvements must be integrated with external engagement through stronger institutional identity, more targeted digital promotion, and learning innovations aligned with the needs of the current generation. The school should optimize the use of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to deliver consistent and engaging content, showcasing student achievements and alumni testimonials so

that its strengths are widely recognized. At the same time, innovations in the learning process using technology-based and student-centered approaches will increase the school's appeal to prospective students. Furthermore, enhancing the involvement of alumni, parents, and the local community in supporting school programs, along with providing scholarships and flexible tuition schemes for families from diverse economic backgrounds, will broaden educational access while strengthening institutional support. All these efforts must be accompanied by regular evaluation and monitoring to ensure that teaching quality, promotional effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction are continuously improved, enabling the school to maintain competitiveness and achieve sustainable development.

The findings of this study offer direct benefits for school administrators by providing strategies to design more effective promotional efforts and pedagogical innovations. They also serve as a useful reference for policymakers in formulating regulations and programs that strengthen the competitiveness of private schools. More broadly, the study contributes to the field of educational management by presenting a practical example of applying Root Cause Analysis (RCA) to identify fundamental institutional challenges and develop solutions that can be adapted to other educational contexts.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to beloved parents and family for their overflowing prayers, supportive morals, and encouragement along this research process. Special thanks are also given sincerely to fellow partners and close friends who have contributed inputs and motivations during this research. Furthermore, regarded to Santo Dominikus Foundation and the management of Santa Maria 1 Senior High School Cirebon, especially the headmaster, teachers, teaching staff, students, alumni, and students' parents who were willing to participate in the observation, and also provide valuable information as supporting the succeed of this research. Lastly, Universitas Kristen Maranatha especially Mr. Hengky Lisan Suwarno as the academic advisor

for the guidance and mentorship so this research can be done well.

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