



The impact of curriculum quality and brand image on private school competitiveness

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of curriculum quality and brand image on school competitiveness, focusing on private schools. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data were collected from 139 respondents, specifically guardians of students enrolled in private school. The analysis was conducted by SEM-PLS approach and using Smart PLS version 4 Application. The findings reveal that curriculum quality significantly affects school competitiveness. Brand image was found to significantly influence school competitiveness, with a moderating effect on the relationship between curriculum quality and competitiveness. These results underscore the necessity for private schools to enhance both their curriculum and brand image to improve their competitive standing in the educational landscape. It is also recommended that the influence of online schools in the digital era, and the views of Gen Z as parents, are also researched.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Private schools in Indonesia face significant challenges in maintaining competitiveness, especially in terms of curriculum and brand image. The implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum has shown mixed results, with the latter being more flexible and student-centric, but hampered by resource gaps and teacher readiness issues (Rahmah et al., 2024). The 2013 curriculum aims to improve 21st century competence through scientific approaches and project-based learning, but its effectiveness is hampered by inadequate teacher readiness and infrastructure.

The Merdeka curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, and character development, has shown promise in increasing student motivation and engagement. The success of this curriculum is uneven, with significant gaps in the availability of resources, especially in remote areas. The Competitiveness Strategy implemented depends on internal and external factors. Curriculum reform in Indonesian private schools has the potential to increase competitiveness, the success of which is highly dependent on addressing infrastructure gaps and improving teacher training. Also visionary leadership, is essential to improve the school's competitiveness and align with global standards (Komariah et al., 2023).

School brand Image is also important to develop a clear brand identity and personality to stand out in a competitive market. An effective branding strategy includes positioning the brand effectively and communicating it well to the public (Irdiyanti et al., 2023). Brand image significantly affects the marketing performance, trust, and ultimately, competitiveness of private schools (Propheto et al., 2020). Social media platforms, such as Instagram, play a crucial role in improving

brand image and engaging with prospective students (Kurniawan et al., 2024). An effective branding strategy is essential for these schools to stand out. These strategies include developing a strong brand identity, positioning the brand effectively, and ensuring clear and consistent brand communication. In addition, brand image significantly affects student satisfaction, which is important for attracting and retaining students (Nusraningrum & Endri, 2024). A strong brand image not only helps differentiate private schools but also plays a crucial role in decision-making and student satisfaction (Propheto et al., 2020).

Despite the important role of private schools in Indonesia, there are some unknowns regarding their competitiveness, especially in relation to their curriculum. First, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how private schools adapt their curricula to meet the demands of a competitive educational environment (Waluyo et al., 2023). Additionally, while strategic management and quality control are known to affect student competence, the specific curricular components that contribute to this are not well documented (Cahyaningrum et al., 2024). In addition, the influence of visionary leadership on curriculum development and its subsequent effects on school competitiveness is still underexplored (Subaidi et al., 2023).

Another gap is the adaptation of the curriculum to incorporate modern information technology, which is very important to improve competitiveness but is not adequately addressed in current studies (Maulani & Hamdani, 2019). The role of religious training in the curriculum, which is an important factor for many private schools, also needs to be investigated further to understand its impact on overall competitiveness (Stern & Smith, 2016). In addition, the challenges that low-cost private schools face in updating their curricula to remain competitive are not well understood, especially in terms of integrating modern technology and teaching methods (Wijayanti et al., 2024). The impact of accreditation on the quality of the curriculum and its role in increasing the competitiveness of private schools is another area that requires a more detailed examination (Susilawati et al., 2024).

Brand image significantly influences various aspects of educational institutions, such as student satisfaction, loyalty, and enrollment decisions (Alkhawaldeh et al., 2020; Bohara et al., 2022; Osman et al., 2024). It also plays an important role in enhancing the competitive advantage of private schools by shaping perceived reputation and quality (Erazo-Ordoñez et al., 2024; Fan, 2021; Liu et al., 2022). Although these findings suggest that a strong brand image can have a positive impact on the competitiveness of private schools. However, the specific moderation effect of brand image on the relationship between curriculum implementation and competitiveness is not explicitly discussed. Therefore, this study wants to confirm the role of brand-specific moderation on the relationship between the curriculum implemented and the competitiveness of private schools in Indonesia.

This study distinguish from recent studies that primarily focus on either curriculum effectiveness or institutional branding in isolation. Unlike previous research that treats brand image as a static attribute, this study posits that a strong brand image can dynamically enhance the perceived value of a school's curriculum quality, thereby influencing its competitive edge. Furthermore, while many studies emphasize quantitative metrics of competitiveness, this research incorporates qualitative aspects of brand perception, providing a more holistic view of how schools can leverage their identity to attract students. Additionally, the focus on Indonesia's specific educational context allows for a nuanced understanding of local market dynamics, which has been underexplored in existing literature. By integrating brand image into the analysis, this research aims to fill a gap in understanding how private schools can strategically position themselves in a competitive landscape. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on educational competitiveness by highlighting the interplay between curriculum and branding, offering actionable insights for private school administrators in Indonesia.

The development of this research thinking is stated in several hypotheses as research questions. The hypotheses that are to be expressed are as follows: H1 : Is there an influence of Curriculum Quality on school competitiveness?, H2 : Is there any influence of brand Image on school Competitiveness?, H3 : Does brand Image moderate the effect of Curriculum Quality on the school competitiveness.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative research was conducted in private school in January 2025 with the number of samples as many as the number of population, namely all parents of students (139 people). The author distributes the questionnaire through an online google form. The questionnaire was used to measure three variables, namely curriculum quality (Fullan, 2007), brand image (Wardhana, 2024), competitiveness (Schwab, 2024). A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure respondents' level of approval of each statement in the questionnaire. Validity and Reliability are measured based on data processing rules using the SEM-PLS approach (Hair et al., 2019). The correlation test between Construct was measured by the path analysis on Smart PLS v4 application. The demography in this study can be described as follows.

Table 1. The respondent demography

Criteria	Item	Amount	%
Gender	Male	67	48,2
	Female	72	51,8
Range of Age	<46	44	31,7
	46-50	36	25,9
	51-55	34	24,5
	>55	25	18,0

The data obtained is processed using the SEM-PLS approach with Smart PLS4.0 software. Hypothesis tests are carried out if the data obtained meets the requirements of validity, reliability and model tests.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

All Construct Indicator are reflective indicator, the validity was measured by the outer loading value, as below:

Table 2. Validity (outer loading value)

Construct	Item indicator	Questioner Statement	Outer loading
Curriculum Quality (X1)	CQ1	The curriculum objective has been prepared according to the competency needs that must be achieved by students	0.779
	CQ2	The curriculum is able to accommodate the needs and interests of students in the learning process.	0.797
	CQ3	The curriculum effectively improves the students' understanding	0,772
	CQ4	The curriculum provides a good mechanism for assessing learning achievement in a holistic (comprehensive) manner	0.729
Brand Image (Z)	BI1	The advantages of this institution provide a positive image in the eyes of the public.	0.802
	BI2	This institution has the power that makes its image more trusted by the public.	0.813
	BI3	The uniqueness of this institution is easily recognized and remembered by the community.	0,768
	BI3	This institution is known to have different characteristics from other institutions	0.745
School Competitiveness (Y)	SC1	This institution provides access to education that is easily accessible to the community.	0.641
	SC2	The technological facilities provided are very supportive of the smooth running of teaching and learning activities.	0.780
	SC3	The availability of quality labor increases public trust in this institution.	0,730
	SC4	This institution continues to innovate in the development of curriculum and learning methods.	0,769
	SC5	The collaboration carried out by this institution has a positive impact on increasing the competitiveness of students.	0.732

Table 2 shown that all outer loading $> 0,4$, it mean that all data are valid (Hair et al., 2019), It is supported by AVE measured as below:

Table 3. Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach'Alpha	Rho_a	Rho_c	AVE
Curriculum Quality (X1)	0.770	0.770	0.883	0.592
Brand Image (Z)	0.789	0.790	0.863	0.613
School Competitiveness (Y)	0.782	0.787	0.852	0.536

The overall *composite reliability* and *Cronbach's Alpha* values of the latent variables of this study have been above 0.7. This means that all latent variables have good internal consistency reliability. Thus, if the data collection is re-done using all the same latent variables and indicators as this study, the results obtained will be the same. So, it can be concluded that the results of the research obtained using latent variables and indicators of this research have good consistency. The model test was carried out in several steps, where in this study with endogenous latent R Square, where the model is said to be feasible if the value of R Square is more than 0.2.

Table 4. Model assesment

Variabel dependen	R Square	R Square Adjusted
School Competitiveness (Y)	0.672	0.665

The Mediation role of Public awarness and the relation between construct indicated by the Path value and the specific indirect effect in Bootstrap operation, as Below.

Table 5. Path coefficient

Hypothesis	Original sample	Sample Mean	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
X1 → Y	0,500	0,498	0,067	7,453	0,000
Z → Y	0,450	0,452	0,074	6,066	0,000
Z x X1 → Y	0,129	0,124	0,066	1,960	0,025

Hypothesis 1: Curriculum Quality significantly effect on school competitiveness, indicated by P-value less than 0,05 (0,000). Curriculum quality significantly impacts school competitiveness by enhancing student academic performance and overall learning outcomes. Research conducted at an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia demonstrated that an innovative curriculum aligned with contemporary needs, coupled with effective leadership, substantially improved learning quality and academic competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Rohmad et al., 2024). Similarly, the modernization of educational standards and curriculum optimization in higher education institutions has been shown to improve the quality of graduates' training, thereby increasing their competitiveness in the labor market (Zykina et al., 2020).

In Taiwan, curricular reforms aimed at improving national competitiveness have been implemented successfully, highlighting the importance of curriculum quality in fostering educational excellence (Cheng & Chen, 2018). Additionally, the Universidad de Zamboanga's curriculum development project, aligned with outcome-based education, has significantly contributed to enhancing the institution's competitiveness by equipping students with essential skills and knowledge (de los Reyes, 2017). These findings collectively underscore the pivotal role of curriculum quality in driving school competitiveness and preparing students to excel in a globalized educational landscape.

Despite the positive correlation between curriculum quality and school competitiveness, some studies suggest that other factors may play a more significant role in influencing student achievement. For instance, research on the Cisco Networking Academy found that individual student ability, motivation, and demographic factors were the most important influences on student achievement, with school-level factors, including curriculum quality, having a smaller impact (Dennis et al., 2006). Additionally, a study using PISA data from Costa Rica revealed that student effort and behavior, rather than curriculum quality, were the primary determinants of academic performance (Giménez et al., 2019). Furthermore, the implementation of the 2008 Louisiana Science Education Act, which altered the science curriculum, resulted in a decline in student test performance, indicating that curriculum changes can sometimes negatively affect educational

outcomes (Sen & Tucker, 2022). These findings suggest that while curriculum quality is important, it may not be the sole or most significant factor in determining school competitiveness and student success.

Hypothesis 2: Brand Image significantly influence school competitiveness, indicated by P-Value less than 0.05 (0,000). Brand image significantly influences school competitiveness by shaping students' perceptions and decisions. Research indicates that brand image positively impacts brand identity, which in turn enhances students' satisfaction and their likelihood to recommend the institution to others (Chen, 2019). This relationship is crucial as it fosters word-of-mouth communication, further strengthening the school's competitive position 1. Additionally, brand image and brand performance mediate the link between perceived academic service quality and students' behavioral intentions, suggesting that a strong brand image can lead to favorable behavioral outcomes among students (Rodrigo et al., 2022). The competitive landscape of higher education necessitates effective branding strategies to attract and retain students, making brand image a vital component of institutional competitiveness (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024). Moreover, universities that successfully manage their brand image can differentiate themselves from competitors, thereby improving their overall market performance (Fan, 2021).

Despite the positive influence of brand image on school competitiveness, some studies suggest that its impact may not be as significant as presumed. For instance, research conducted in Jakarta found that brand image did not significantly influence marketing performance directly; instead, trust played a more crucial role in mediating this relationship (Propheto et al., 2020). Furthermore, the emphasis on brand image can sometimes overshadow other important factors such as academic quality and service, which are critical in students' decision-making processes. In competitive educational markets, focusing solely on brand image might lead to a skewed distribution of students, creating disparities between institutions perceived as 'good' or 'bad'. Additionally, the reliance on brand image can result in public silence, where schools restrict employee voice to maintain brand alignment, potentially compromising the public interest and informed decision-making (Dahle & Wæraas, 2020). Therefore, while brand image is important, it should be balanced with other elements to ensure holistic competitiveness and equity in education.

Hypothesis 3: Brand Image was moderate influences of Curriculum quality to school competitiveness, indicated by P-Value less than 0,05 (0,025). It can be Seen from the simple Slope as seen at Figure 1

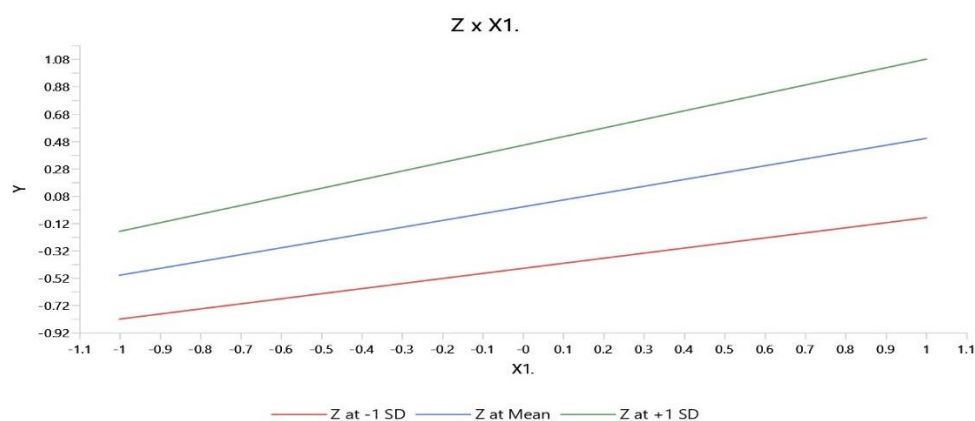


Figure 1. Simple slope analysis

The graphic reveals how brand image alters the impact of curriculum quality on school competitiveness at different levels of brand image (less and more than Standard Deviation). Specifically, the analysis generates plots illustrating the relationship between curriculum quality and school competitiveness for each chosen level of brand image, demonstrating whether the slope (representing the strength of the curriculum quality effect) changes significantly across these brand image levels. The slopes differ substantially, it indicates that brand image moderates the

relationship, meaning the influence of curriculum quality on school competitiveness is contingent on the level of brand image.

Brand image has a moderate influence on curriculum quality and school competitiveness, as evidenced by several studies. For instance, branding significantly impacts the visibility of educational institutions, which in turn affects their overall performance and competitiveness (Pandita & Kiran, 2020). A well-established brand can attract more students, thereby enhancing the school's competitive edge. Additionally, branding helps in reducing perceived risks associated with the quality of education, which is crucial for maintaining a competitive position in the market (Chung, 2012). Schools with strong brand images are more likely to be recognized and respected, which can lead to increased student enrollment and better educational outcomes (Huang & Chen, 2022). Furthermore, branding plays a role in shaping the perceptions of teaching quality and research sources, which are essential components of strategic management in education (Budiharso et al., 2022). Therefore, a positive brand image can moderately enhance curriculum quality and school competitiveness by improving visibility, reducing perceived risks, and shaping positive perceptions.

Despite the moderate influence of brand image on curriculum quality and school competitiveness, some studies suggest that its impact may be limited. For example, branding has been found to have the least impact on the performance of higher education institutions compared to other indicators such as employee and student experience. The beta values for branding were significantly lower, indicating that other factors play a more crucial role in enhancing school competitiveness. Additionally, the competitive structure within educational systems can sometimes overshadow the benefits of branding, as schools focus more on performance metrics and rankings rather than brand image (Powell, 2023). Moreover, the effectiveness of branding in improving curriculum quality is often constrained by external factors such as government policies and demographic changes, which can significantly affect school competitiveness (Hillman & Baydoun, 2020; Urban, 2018). Therefore, while branding can contribute to school competitiveness, its influence is often moderated by more dominant factors such as academic culture, employee experience, and external policies.

School stakeholders, including the principals should prioritize enhancing their school's brand image and curriculum quality to improve overall competitiveness. They can achieve this by actively promoting the school's unique strengths and achievements through effective marketing strategies that resonate with the community. Principals should focus on continuously developing and updating the curriculum to ensure it meets current educational standards and student needs. By leveraging a strong brand image to attract high-quality teachers and resources, enhance the curriculum's effectiveness, as well. Ultimately, a strategic integration of brand image and curriculum quality will position the school favorably in a competitive landscape, attracting more students and fostering a positive educational environment.

4. CONCLUSION

The curriculum quality significantly affects school competitiveness, serving as a critical factor in attracting and retaining students. Additionally, brand image plays a significant role in enhancing school competitiveness by shaping perceptions and influencing student choices. While brand image is important, it has a moderate influence on curriculum quality, suggesting that a strong brand can enhance the perceived value of educational offerings. This interplay between curriculum quality and brand image highlights the need for schools to focus on both aspects to improve their competitive standing. Ultimately, a well-rounded approach that prioritizes high-quality curricula alongside effective branding strategies can lead to greater success in the competitive educational landscape. School management should prioritize enhancing curriculum quality as a fundamental strategy to improve overall competitiveness in the educational market. Additionally, investing in brand image development is crucial, as it significantly influences perceptions and can attract more students, thereby reinforcing the school's competitive position. Furthermore, recognizing the moderate influence of brand image on curriculum quality implies that schools should integrate branding efforts with curriculum improvements to create a cohesive strategy that maximizes both aspects for better educational outcomes. It is recommended that this research be continued by

measuring other variables such as the influence of online schools in the digital age on Gen Z parents, one of the limitations of this study.

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