Branding Matters: Private Islamic Schools Struggle to Attract Students Under Educational Zoning

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Abstract. This article discusses a study that aims to explore the branding of private Islamic schools and its impact during the implementation of educational zoning. Educational zoning is a government policy aimed at providing equal educational opportunities for students. School branding is the image of an institution in the public's mind that can influence school selection. The study utilized the systematic literature review method and analyzed articles published in accredited journals between 2019 and 2022. The study found that private Islamic schools do not have strong branding, and this affects their ability to attract students under the educational zoning system. The implication of the study is that private Islamic schools need to improve their branding to attract more students and compete with government schools.

Keywords: Private Islamic schools · branding · educational zoning · student acquisition · systematic literature review

1 Introduction

The school zoning policy for admitting new students is contained in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 14 of 2018, which aims to equalize education delivery in Indonesia. This zoning policy is a mechanism for regulating student acceptance based on the geographical position of the school and the student's residence. This policy aims to build equal access to education services and equivalent distribution of the quality of national education. This policy was adopted because the phenomenon in society had formed favourite or excellent schools on one side, and schools, on the other hand, were considered unfavourable. This zoning policy eliminates symptoms of inequality in the national education sector.

This zoning policy for accepting new students seeks to eliminate inequality in the form of concentration of high achieving students and usually also from families who are economically well off in their favourite schools. This zoning policy presents rules for admitting new students based on the geographic location where students live and the school. Regardless of social conditions, parents are expected to enrol their children

in the nearest state school without considering the preference of the school in question. Parents can send their children to the best schools if they have the closest distance to the school in question. This will create an even distribution of quality and equity of school services in Indonesia [1, 2].

This zoning policy is implemented by prioritizing schools as public services, which must prioritize three aspects, non-rivalry, non-excludability, and non-discrimination. Government-owned schools serving the public must not be overly competitive, must not be exclusive to specific people or groups, and there must be no discriminatory practices. The zoning system policy in education in the country has changed the mindset of people in accessing educational institutions. The results of Anjarwati and Rochmat's research show that parents of students still feel that the zoning system at PPDB needs to provide free space to access education according to their wishes. But the government has changed the pattern of the old society into a new order that is more complex in terms of educational facilities. Besides effectively changing people's perceptions of the differences between favourite and non-favourite schools, this system is also conceptually sound. However, it needs to be more effective in equating to the quality of education [3].

The education community also understands the purpose and impact of implementing this zoning policy. When the zoning system policy is implemented, the response of the education unit to anticipate the effect on the number of new student admissions includes various steps, such as increasing the school brand, picking up the ball strategy, and sending teachers to the community [4]. Other educational actors responded that the policy of limiting the area for admitting new students has the goal that zoning facilitates access to educational services; zoning equalizes school quality, but it is also perceived that zoning reduces the quality of schools; zoning is not suitable for SMA level; the zoning system restricts students from choosing schools; the zoning policy must be accompanied by equal distribution of educational facilities and infrastructure; even zoning is perceived as damaging diversity [5].

This year's zoning policy has entered its fourth year in its implementation phase, with various accompanying social consequences and other conditions accompanying the procedure due to pre-existing facts. Obstacles in implementing the zoning system include uneven facilities and infrastructure due to disparities in favourite and non-favourite schools, clearer information circulating, and discrepancies between population numbers and the existence of schools in certain areas [6]. Even though this policy gave birth to various positive responses from the community because of the successfully realized facilities, there were still deficiencies on sure sides. The study's results [5] how that the perspectives of teachers and school principals on zoning include the following. This program facilitates access to educational services and can equalize school quality but also reduce school quality. Implementing the education zoning policy and giving rise to a pro attitude also gave birth to a contra attitude in society. The people's reasons underlying the contra attitude towards the policy are the obstacles they have in enrolling their children in their favourite school because the school in question is outside the permitted zone. [7] Implementing the zoning policy has yet to eliminate the quality disparity between schools [8].

Private schools in the education system in the country occupy the second choice position for the community after government schools. However, only some private schools

are the top choice because of the quality of their educational services, which are considered good. Due to the position of private schools as the second choice, only some can attract excellent and high-achieving students. In the end, they accommodate students from the poor, with low academic abilities, and also offer low fees [9] This further emphasizes the powerlessness of private schools amid competition.

On the other hand, private schools still need to work on introducing their branding to the public in intense competition between educational institutions [10]. This situation was exacerbated by the enactment of the zoning system for admitting new students. Private schools have experienced an impact from the implementation of the zoning policy, especially in the reduction in the number of new student admissions [11] On the other hand, Muhammadiyah schools emphasize holistic education to show their learning identity that is different from other schools, [12] However, the findings of Thoha and Ghazali show something else, Islamic educational institutions have a greater chance of getting qualified newcomers because registration is not limited in zones, with changes to improve the quality of resources and improve the school's image in the community, as well as change the student registration system to be more innovative.. [13].

Private schools, including Islamic-based schools, are currently forced to promote their institutions to increase student enrollment. Therefore, a school's branding must be built consistently and continuously to attract selected and outstanding students. A school that has positive branding can imply three understandings to the community about the school; namely, brand image strengthens the position of Islamic education institutions, illustrates the effectiveness of the institution, and can be used as a reference in designing institutional identity [14] some schools implement image building strategies. Schools through extracurricular programs that support academic and non-academic fields, [14] some schools implement image building strategies. Schools through extracurricular programs that support academic and non-academic fields [15]. The implications of branding educational institutions impact people's decisions and interest in choosing these institutions. The more positive the branding of the institution, the more favourable the interest and attention of the community in selecting the institution because the majority of people make decisions in choosing an educational institution by looking at the branding owned by the institution [16]. This article will raise the issue of the readiness of the branding of private Islamic schools during the implementation of the education zoning system and examine how far the strength of the image of private schools is in the ease with which people receive the best educational services from government schools.

2   Methodology

This research method uses the SLR (Systematic Literature Review) method which aims to identify, evaluate and interpret research that is relevant to research problems that want to be explored and determine the findings and answers, [17] The stages of this research adopt the PRISMA method (Preferred Reportinh Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses). This research procedure has 4 stages consisting of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion [18]. The literature in this study comes from various journals sourced from Google Scholar, Lens, SINTA, and DOAJ.

The identification stage began with keyword search of Islamic school branding found (798 articles) and, zoning policy found (1,116 articles) and school zoning found (732
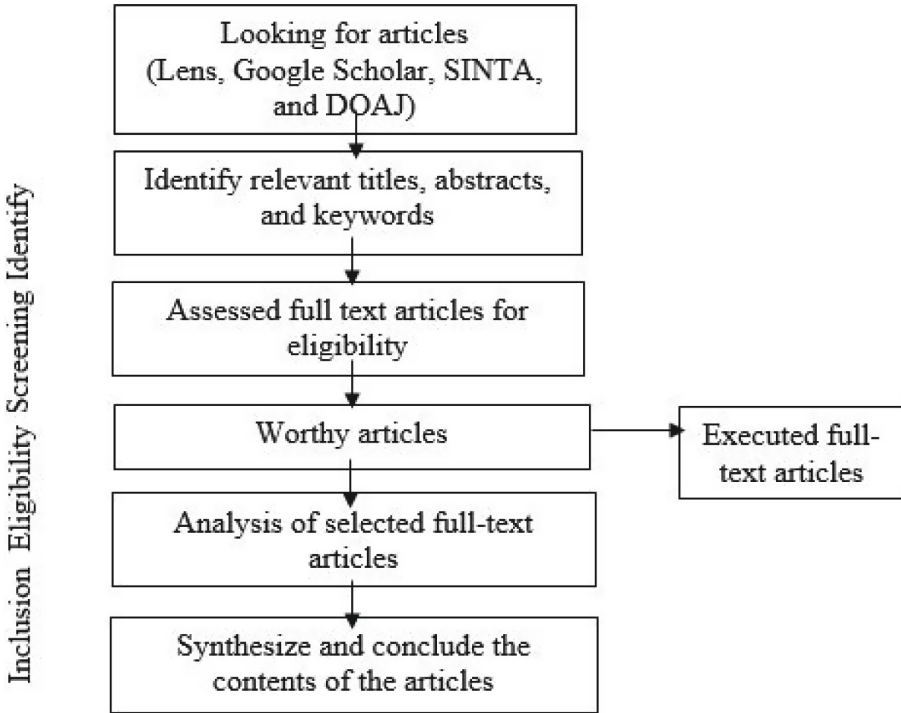
Fig. 1. Research Procedure

articles). The next stage is the eligibility selection of articles relevant to the keywords published from 2019 to 2022 including Islamic school branding found (192 articles) and, zoning policy found (279 articles) and school zoning found (281 articles). At the screening and eligibility stage, 45 articles were identified based on the suitability, and relevance of the research theme. The next stage is to analyze several reference articles that are widely used in supporting research problems that want to be studied in depth, Researchers mapped 17 articles related to the research topics used in relation to Islamic school branding, zoning policies and school zoning Fig. 1.

3   Result and Discussion

Branding is the process of creating impressions in the form of user perceptions in ways that are memorable for the user's life. Branding is usually a series of efforts to communicate something to build and grow a brand. A school that has branding will benefit from being able to attract and maintain user interest, including in facing the challenges of changing government policies. In conditions of intense competition, branding is one of the school's strongest assets to maintain its existence. This includes Islamic schools that must strive to build branding in the community, while pesantren have their own market segments.

Between Islamic schools and Islamic boarding schools, there are quite clear differences in the implementation of education, which has implications for the orientation of users to be willing to join their respective institutions as knowledge seekers. Islamic schools are characterized by an integrative blend of Islamic values and teachings in the building of their educational curriculum, [19] so that there is no dichotomy between general and Islamic sciences. Islamic schools in the country began to be established massively in the 1980s [20]. Subsequent developments in Islamic schools have been increasingly accepted in urban communities and have become one of the symbols of urban Islamic society [21]. Meanwhile, pesantren education is characterized by the teaching of classical books (yellow books) to instill faith and piety to Allah Swt, [22] The existence of Islamic boarding schools is usually integrated into the lives of people in rural areas and colors the style of social life of the local community [23]. Among the two types of institutions, it is Islamic schools that are affected by the zoning policy.

The zoning system policy implemented by the government can have an impact on the number of new student admissions that an institution can attract. An institution that has a brand image affects the user's value system, so also the brand image of an educational institution will affect the user's memory of that existence [24]. Therefore, an institution that already has a brand tends to be unshakable by the implementation of educational zoning.

One of the strengths possessed by educational institutions in dealing with the implementation of zoning policies is the institution's brand image [4]. Every educational institution that already has a brand image seeks to strengthen the image of its institution in society to secure its ability to attract potential students [9].

The review of articles related to this topic will then be explored using Elicit.org. By tracing this device, six variables associated with zoning policies and branding of Islamic education institutions were obtained. The six variables are Islamic identity transformation, curriculum based on Islamic values, brand image, government policy, equality education, and student safety zone. The results of mapping articles based on the variables obtained are described in Table 1.

From the table, almost all articles related to this paper allude to government policy, especially regarding the application of the zoning system in admitting new students. It can be seen that the articles [1-8], [11, 13, 14], and [15] discuss government policy regarding implementing a zoning system- in education. The implementation of the zoning system was chosen as the main topic raised by many articles, so that it indicates the significant impact it has on the school system in Indonesia, especially regarding the sense of justice in society and equal distribution of the quality of national education. For many schools, especially in the private school category, zoning policies have had quite a significant influence; they have to reconstruct relevant strategies so that they can still attract potential students, because this zoning system for private schools will suck up a lot of students both in quantity and quality.

Of the articles related to the topic of this discussion, seven articles discuss brand image, namely articles [9-12], [15, 16], and [24]. This shows that there are quite a number of writers who are aware of the importance of brand image during the zoning system implementation. Efforts to build school branding can be a solution for private educational institutions in dealing with zoning system policies. Schools that already

Table 1. Measuring the Branding of Islamic Schools in the Zoning Policy Era

No	Artikel Review	Indicator					
		Islamic identify transformation	Curriculum based on Islamic values	Brand image	Government policy	Equality education	Student safety zone
1	[9]			✓		✓	
2	[6]				✓	✓	
3	[5]				✓		✓
4	[7]				✓	✓	
5	[8]				✓	✓	✓
6	[10]			✓		✓	
7	[11]	✓		✓	✓		✓
8	[14]				✓	✓	✓
9	[16]	✓		✓			
10	[13]				✓	✓	✓
11	[1]				✓	✓	
12	[4]				✓		✓
13	[12]	✓	✓	✓			
14	[2]				✓	✓	
15	[3]				✓		✓
16	[15]	✓		✓	✓		
17	[24]			✓		✓	

have a good brand image will still have the attraction of the community to join their institution, brand image has a direct effect on decision value and customer memory impressions [19]. Therefore schools that have a strong brand image tend to be fine with the implementation of zoning rules in admitting new students. Therefore schools that have a strong brand image tend to be fine with the implementation of zoning rules in admitting new students.

The equality education variable is the choice of discussion by ten articles related to the topic of this discussion. The ten articles include [1, 2], [6-10], [13, 14], and [24]. The issue of equality education is a universal topic and an interesting discussion, especially about current government policies. The zoning system policy is very close to the community's sense of justice in getting educational services according to their wishes. There are two dimensions in the discussion of equality education, namely from the dimension of education service users, namely the community wants to get quality education services and according to expectations. Second, from the dimension of private education managers, they want to continue to get an ideal portion of potential students

in society. The second dimension of this sense of justice is felt to be quite a burden on the people managing private education in the country.

The student safety zone variable is discussed in seven articles, including articles [3-5], [8], [11, 13, 14]. The safe zone makes it easy for students to go to school every day feeling safe, avoiding traffic jams and unwanted incidents. The safe zone is one of the positive values obtained from the zoning system policy. This will be handled at the lowest level of education. The zoning policy aims to equalize the quality of education in various district/city zones. However, this still takes time because the disparities in the quality of education in several places are still quite wide; for the public school sector, even for the private school sector, the differences are more pronounced, so that for a while, the zoning system will first reduce the quality of education in schools [5]. This is because students accommodated in schools are not only potential students but also students with below-standard characteristics.

Articles highlighting the variable Islamic identity transformation were observed in only four articles discussing it. These articles include. [11, 12], [15, 16]. His shows that in terms of quantity, Islamic educational institutions still need to achieve the desired brand image in the face of the application of the educational zoning system. The results of Hanifah & Ali's research show that schools with an Islamic identity and at the same time also have a brand image for the influx of new students are not too affected by the implementation of the zonas system. Still, this policy is felt by Muhammadiyah schools which do not yet have a good brand in society [11]. The strength of the Islamic identity of an educational institution is often a guide for the community to choose it as a place to continue their children's studies. The results of Agus & Ummah's research found that Islamic educational institutions with good branding are increasingly in demand and are of concern to the public in choosing these institutions. This means that most people choose educational institutions by looking at their branding. Even so, a few Islamic-style educational institutions have achieved a good brand image in society, so many are affected by the zoning system whose implementation goes beyond preschool.

The curriculum variable based on Islamic values is only highlighted in one article [12]. The curriculum is the body of an educational program packaged in a school identity which is usually reflected in the school's vision and mission. So that the curriculum style and learning model are often not raised in discussions about the application of the zoning system in the education system. Society considers the decision to have a school based on the institution's brand image, not the curriculum or learning approach, meaning that it only pays attention to the outer shell..

4   Conclusion

The branding of Islamic private schools is still not much that has a positive or strong brand image in the minds of the public. This situation has caused many Islamic schools to be affected by the implementation of the zoning system in new student admissions. This is shown by the decrease in the inflow of new students to the school concerned, and the impact is even more pronounced if the location of the school concerned is close to a government-owned school. The implementation of the zoning system requires many Islamic private schools to reorganize relevant strategies in order to attract potential

students. Because this zoning policy attracts many prospective students in quantity and quality.

For some regional cases, the strength of the Islamic identity of an educational institution that already has a strong brand image is often a guide for the community to determine their choice as a place to continue their children's studies. The more positive the school's brand image, the stronger the community's impression and tendency to choose it. The condition of the school concerned is not affected by the implementation of the zoning system. Islamic schools in rural areas that have integrated with the social life of the local community still exist in the midst of the zoning policy, this is interesting to be studied by future researchers, especially to reveal the strength of the emotional relationship between the community and educational institutions during the implementation of zoning.

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