

The Influence Of Program Quality, Promotion Strategy, And Financial Support On Students' Decision To Choose SMKN 1 Berau Through School Image

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Abstract:

This study investigates the effect of program quality, promotion strategy, and financial support on students' decision to choose Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan / SMKN 1 Berau), with school image serving as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 200 alumni of SMKN 1 Berau (graduates of 2024 and 2025) and analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that program quality, promotion strategy, and financial support significantly influence students' school-choice decisions, both directly and indirectly through school image. Program quality emerges as the strongest determinant, while promotion strategy although significant has a negative effect on school image. Financial support not only reduces students' economic burdens but also strengthens perceptions of inclusivity. The results highlight the pivotal mediating role of school image in shaping student decisions.

Keywords: Program Quality, Promotion Strategy, Financial Support, School Image, Student Decision.

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I. Introduction

Educational institutions increasingly face competition in attracting students. Factors such as program quality, promotion strategy, and financial support influence school choice. However, students' perceptions of school image often mediate these effects. This research aims to analyze the direct and indirect influences of these factors on students' decision to enroll at Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan / SMKN 1 Berau).

II. Methodology

This research employed a quantitative design with a correlational approach to analyze the relationships among variables influencing students' decisions to choose Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan / SMKN 1 Berau). The study population consisted of 399 students, comprising graduates from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts. From this population, a total of 200 respondents were selected using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error and purposive sampling, ensuring that the sample represented the research objectives appropriately.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure respondents' perceptions of five main variables: program quality, promotion strategy, financial support, school image, and student decision. The instrument was developed based on relevant theories and previous studies, then translated into statements measured on a Likert scale.

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the aid of SmartPLS 4.0 software. This analytical method was chosen because it allows testing of complex models and the examination of both direct and indirect relationships among variables. The analysis process included an evaluation of the outer model, which assessed the validity and reliability of the indicators, and the inner model, which tested the strength of structural relationships using R^2 values, path coefficients, and hypothesis testing.

III. SEM-PLS Results

Table 1. Outer Model – Validity and Reliability

Construct	Loading Factor (>0.7)	Composite Reliability (>0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
Program Quality	0.78–0.85	0.89	0.62
Promotion Strategy	0.72–0.83	0.88	0.60
Financial Support	0.74–0.86	0.87	0.59
School Image	0.76–0.88	0.90	0.65
Student Decision	0.79–0.87	0.91	0.66

Table 2. Inner Model – R² and F²

Construct	R ²	F ²
School Image	0.58	0.32
Student Decision	0.64	0.41

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	Beta Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value
Program Quality → Student Decision	0.350	6.21	<0.001
Promotion Strategy → Student Decision	0.280	3.12	0.002
Financial Support → Student Decision	0.272	3.01	0.003
Program Quality → School Image	0.412	7.10	<0.001
Promotion Strategy → School Image	-0.210	2.15	0.032
Financial Support → School Image	0.295	3.45	0.001
School Image → Student Decision	0.325	4.82	<0.001

IV. Discussion

The results confirm that program quality strongly influences student choice, consistent with previous studies on vocational education competitiveness. Promotion strategy plays a dual role: it directly encourages enrollment but may harm the school's image if exaggerated. Financial support reduces economic barriers and builds inclusivity, aligning with findings by Dynarski et al. (2022). The mediating role of school image underscores its importance in linking institutional strategies to student decision-making.

V. Conclusion

Program quality, promotion strategy, and financial support significantly affect students' decisions to choose SMKN 1 Berau, both directly and indirectly via school image. Strengthening curriculum relevance, ensuring credible promotion, and expanding financial aid are recommended for sustaining school attractiveness. Future studies should include comparative samples across vocational schools and explore additional variables such as parental influence or digital media impact.

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