



THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF THE MADRASAH PRINCIPAL IN ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY OF MI PLUS DARUSSAADAH LIRBOYO

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ABSTRACT

This research is based on the significance of communication strategies employed by the head of the madrasah in enhancing the competitiveness of educational institutions within an increasingly competitive environment. MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo, as a relatively new institution under the auspices of a prominent Islamic boarding school, faces challenges in building a positive image and gaining community trust. This study aims to describe the implementation of the head of the madrasah's communication strategies and the outcomes achieved in strengthening institutional competitiveness. The study applied a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques. The findings reveal that the head of the madrasah implemented personal, social, persuasive, and collaborative communication strategies. These included open communication via social media and regular meetings, persuasive delivery of policies and vision, and collaborative efforts with teachers, parents, and the local community. The impact of these strategies was evident in the improved institutional image, increased student enrollment, and greater stakeholder participation in educational programs. In conclusion, the head of the madrasah's communication strategies play a crucial role in shaping an adaptive, competitive, and sustainable educational environment.

Keywords: *Communication Strategy, Head of Madrasah, Educational Institution Competitiveness*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial instrument in developing quality human resources capable of competing in the global era. Society demands that educational institutions not only focus on academic achievement but also play a role in character building and instilling strong religious values as a moral and spiritual foundation (Kurniawaty, December 2024). Therefore, education must truly teach character education, instilling morals from an early age so that simple routines can grow into habits, and from these habits, character is born that is inherent in students. (Ari Susetiyo BA, 2023)

The competitiveness of educational institutions is inextricably linked to the role of the madrasah principal as a strategic figure who serves not only as an administrative leader but also as a communicator who bridges the vision, mission, and educational programs to all stakeholders. Research by Zulfatul Iman et al. shows that a targeted communication strategy, including the use of social media like Instagram, can build a positive image of the institution and increase public trust. (Dian Zulfatul Iman et al., January 2025) This finding confirms that the success of a madrasah is not only determined



by academic quality, but also the effectiveness of the communication strategy implemented by the institution's leadership.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo was established in 2021/2022 under the auspices of the Darussaadah Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School. Although relatively new, this madrasa faces the challenge of building competitiveness amidst intense competition from both public and private madrasas. MI Plus Darussaadah's strength lies in the integration of formal and Islamic education, akin to the Lirboyo Main Boarding School. However, an effective communication strategy is still required to effectively convey this added value to the community. (Ildawati, 2025)

Various previous studies have highlighted the role of madrasah principals in communication strategies. For example, research by Muhammad Nurudin et al. discusses madrasah principals' communication strategies in fostering students' noble character, focusing on the formation of religious character. (Nurudin, December 2023) Livia Mutiara Hawa's research emphasizes the communication strategies of madrasah principals in supervision to improve the professionalism of educational staff, although the results show insignificant changes. (Hawa, May 2024) Meanwhile, Rabial Kanada et al. studied the principal's communication strategies in developing teacher performance. (Canada, July 2024)

Furthermore, Bastomi et al. examined communication patterns in Islamic educational leadership by comparing Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and madrasas. The results showed that formal communication patterns in madrasas tend to differ from interpersonal communication patterns in pesantren, which impacts leadership effectiveness and the learning environment. (Sirozi, December 2024) Rita Fitria's research focuses on branding communication strategies at SMA IT Ash-Shiddiiqi Jambi, which shows the importance of internal-external communication to attract new students.⁹ Meanwhile, Lidya Wulandari's research highlights the madrasah principal's strategy in increasing the competitiveness of output at MIN 1 Rejang Lebong, which includes aspects of planning, improving services, and developing student potential. (Fitria, March 2024)

From the above explanation, it is clear that previous research has focused more on communication aspects for moral development, teacher supervision, leadership patterns, school branding, and increasing the competitiveness of student output. However, there is still a research gap in the context of the communication strategy of madrasah principals in increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions, especially in madrasas that integrate formal curriculum with Islamic boarding school systems such as MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo. This is what makes this research new, namely emphasizing the communication strategy of madrasah principals in building the competitiveness of educational institutions based on formal and diniyah integration, because the principal plays a very crucial role in increasing the number of students, where the success of an educational institution is often determined by effective leadership and marketing strategies. (Ari Susetiyo MZ, 2025)

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. (Hayat, July 2024) A qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to deeply understand the phenomenon of the madrasah principal's communication strategy in increasing the



competitiveness of educational institutions at MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo. Qualitative research allows researchers to describe the setting, interactions, and communication dynamics naturally without any manipulation of research variables. The case study was chosen to reveal the uniqueness and characteristics of the case studied, so that the research focus is directed at the communication strategy implemented by the madrasah principal in the specific context of this institution.

The presence of the researcher in qualitative research serves as the primary instrument (the researcher is the key instrument). The researcher is directly involved in the field to determine the research focus, select informants, conduct interviews, observations, and test the credibility of the data. With this involvement, the researcher is able to capture the dynamics of communication that occurs between the madrasah principal, teachers, staff, students, and parents. The researcher's presence also ensures the validity of the data and produces a more comprehensive picture of the communication strategies used. (Sanusi, January 2021)

This research was conducted at MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo, Jalan KH. Abdul Karim No. 1, Lirboyo, Mojoroto District, Kediri City. This location was chosen purposively because it has unique characteristics and relevance to the research topic, namely the communication strategy of the madrasah principal in increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions. In addition, MI Plus Darussaadah is a new madrasah under the auspices of a large Islamic boarding school, so it is interesting to study in terms of its communication strategy. (Ildawati, 2025)

The data sources in this study are divided into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the madrasah principal, teachers, teaching staff, and the curriculum vice principal, selected using purposive sampling techniques. In addition, primary data was also obtained through direct observation and documentation studies. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from books, archives, journals, official documents, and relevant previous research. (Sugiyono, 2019)

Data collection techniques were carried out using three main methods: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore the views of informants regarding the madrasah principal's communication strategy, (2) direct observation at the research location to observe the interaction and implementation of communication strategies in madrasah activities, and (3) documentation in the form of archives, meeting reports, and madrasah communication media content. These three techniques were used simultaneously to obtain complete and complementary data. (Marinu Waruwu, 2023)

The obtained data was analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The reduction process was carried out to simplify and focus the data to make it more meaningful. The reduced data was then presented in narrative form, tables, or charts to facilitate interpretation. The final stage was drawing conclusions inductively based on the patterns and relationships found in the data. (Dian Muslimin Zuhur Alamin et al., 2024)

To ensure data validity, this study employed source and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various informants, while technical triangulation utilized interviews, observations, and documentation from the



same sources. This method ensured the reliability and validity of the research results. (Hayat, July 2024)

The research stages follow the Moleong guidelines which consist of three phases: (1) the pre-field stage, which includes proposal preparation, research permits, and location introduction; (2) the field work stage, in the form of data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation; and (3) the data analysis stage, which is carried out after the data has been collected and is then reviewed, interpreted, and compiled in the form of a research report. (Guba, 289-331)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Madrasah Principal's Communication Strategy in the Competitiveness of Educational Institutions at MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo

Based on the research results, the implementation of the communication strategy at MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo clearly reflects the stages in the strategic management model according to Fred R. David: strategic planning, strategic implementation, and strategic evaluation. In the strategic planning stage, the madrasah principal first formulated the vision and mission of "Religious and Genius" as the main pillars of the institution. This vision is not only a normative idea, but also serves as the basis for developing communication messages that will be conveyed to all stakeholders.

In the initial process of planning the communication strategy, the Principal of Madrasah MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo, Mr. Widada Hamid, not only conveyed the institution's vision and mission unilaterally, but also conducted an in-depth analysis of various strategic aspects that influence communication success. He actively considered the needs and expectations of students' guardians, as a vital part of educational stakeholders, to ensure that the communication direction developed was truly relevant and responsive to real conditions on the ground.

Based on the interview results, he also leveraged the madrasa's internal strengths, such as the well-known name and reputation of the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School, as an attractive and differentiating factor that strengthens the institution's image. On the other hand, external opportunities, such as the high public interest in religion-based education, particularly those that integrate the madrasa curriculum with the general curriculum, were also taken into consideration in determining an effective communication strategy. Based on this analysis, the madrasa principal then chose a multi-channel communication strategy as the most relevant and efficient approach.

Continued to the strategy implementation phase (Strategy Implementation) The Principal of MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo Madrasah, Mr. Widada Hamid, followed up the communication strategy planning with concrete steps by establishing a policy to socialize the vision and mission at the beginning of each academic year. This socialization is carried out systematically and continuously so that all members of the madrasah, including teachers, educational staff, students, and parents, understand the direction of the institution's goals and are involved in achieving them.

In the communication strategy implementation stage, the Principal of Madrasah MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo, Mr. Widada Hamid, actively applies the principles of effective communication as explained by Onong Uchjana Effendy and formulated in the elements of communication by Harold D. Lasswell as follows:



Communicator (*Sender*), The Head of Madrasah, Mr. Widada Hamid, acts as the main communicator. Based on the results of observations and interviews, he is the initiator in conveying the vision and mission, policies, and programs of the madrasah to all components of the institution, starting from teachers, education staff, students, to guardians of students. The head of the madrasah does not only convey one-way information, but also builds dialogic communication so that the message is not only received but also understood and applied by the audience. The communication built is formal through meetings and gatherings, as well as informal through digital media.

Based on observations, the principal encoded messages by designing easily understood communication messages tailored to the characteristics of his audience. For example, when communicating the school's vision and mission, he used clear, simple language that was relevant to the daily lives of teachers and parents. He also employed a visual approach, including short videos and written documents disseminated through the multimedia team, to make the messages more engaging and memorable.

The message delivered by the madrasah principal covers various strategic issues, such as the institution's vision and mission, rules and regulations, learning policies, and the importance of collaboration between the madrasah and students' guardians. This message is designed to not only inform but also inspire and mobilize participation from all parties.

Media (*Channel*). Based on the results of interviews and observations, the Principal of the Madrasah uses various communication media strategically, both direct media (face-to-face and committee meetings) and indirect media (class WhatsApp groups, short videos, pamphlets, bulletin boards). One of the innovations used is the use of class WhatsApp groups, which is considered efficient for conveying information quickly and reaching parents directly. In addition, the Madrasah also formed a multimedia team whose role is to produce digital content to be disseminated to Madrasah stakeholders on a regular basis.

Communicator (*Receiver*), The communicator is the recipient of the message, namely all parties targeted by the communication. In this madrasah principal's communication strategy, the communicators include teachers, educational staff, students, and guardians. Each has different characteristics, so the communication strategy is tailored based on the audience. In this case, the Madrasah Principal communicates with teachers and staff through a WhatsApp group and also conducts routine monthly coaching. In this forum, educational strategies and policies are conveyed directly and discussed together, while a participatory and persuasive approach is used with guardians.

Decoding Decoding is the process of translating messages by the recipient so they can be understood and interpreted contextually. Based on interviews and observations, the principal ensures that the decoding process is effective by providing additional explanations when needed, systematically organizing the material, and opening up a question-and-answer space in each forum. In practice, parents and teachers are given the opportunity to ask questions, provide input, or share their understanding of the policies presented. This aims to prevent miscommunication or misinterpretation.

Feedback: In this case, the principal actively encourages feedback as an essential part of two-way communication. The feedback forms developed include collecting responses from students' guardians in a WhatsApp group, requesting screenshots as proof



of involvement, and providing a post-activity discussion forum. This feedback is used not only to assess the extent to which messages are understood but also as a basis for evaluating and refining future communication strategies.

In practice, the principal of the madrasa consciously pays attention to the elements of communication as formulated by Harold D. Lasswell, namely who is delivering (the communicator), what message is being delivered, through what media, to whom, and with what expected impact. The implementation of the communication strategy carried out by the principal of MI Plus Darussaadah Madrasah shows a strong commitment to applying the principles of effective and targeted communication to achieve its goals.

Next, the evaluation stage, where the principal periodically evaluates the communication strategy, involves monitoring and analyzing responses. Indicators observed include responses from parents, the number of shares on social media, and increases or decreases in the number of applicants. This data serves as a benchmark for the effectiveness of the message. If ineffectiveness is found in any communication channel, corrective measures are taken immediately in a measured and planned manner.

Corrective actions included expanding the reach of information groups, updating social media content, and engaging alumni as promotional ambassadors. This demonstrates that the implemented communication strategy is flexible and continually adjusted. The madrasah principal doesn't simply wait for results but actively responds to changes. Internal input and external conditions are crucial considerations in the strategy adjustment process. In this way, the madrasah can maintain its relevance and strengthen its competitiveness amidst the challenges of the times. Communication strategy also serves as a crucial tool in building the institution's image and sustainability.

The Results of the Implementation of the Madrasah Principal's Communication Strategy in the Competitiveness of Educational Institutions at MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo.

The communication strategy implemented by the principal of MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo has proven to be very significant in increasing the competitiveness of the educational institution amidst fierce competition among similar institutions. The principal utilizes a planned, open, and participatory communication approach, which directly and indirectly impacts the school's image, public trust, and student enrollment. This strategy focuses not only on the technical aspects of information delivery but also encompasses relational dimensions and cultural values relevant to the character of the surrounding community.

Within Freud R. David's strategic management framework, the principal's communication strategy can be analyzed through three main stages: strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation. During the planning stage, the principal successfully identified the institution's internal strengths, including educators who are alumni of renowned Islamic boarding schools, and symbolic capital in the form of direct affiliation with the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School. Furthermore, he was able to identify external opportunities, such as the high public interest in Islamic educational institutions that integrate formal and Islamic systems. Thus, the designed strategy was able to address community needs while simultaneously highlighting the institution's differentiation compared to other madrasahs.



The communication strategy is implemented through democratic, collaborative, and values-based communication patterns. The principal creates an atmosphere of equal communication between senior and junior teachers, eliminating seniority barriers that can hinder cooperation. This is supported by the provision of open discussion forums, regular coordination, and the use of digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp groups to strengthen coordination among the madrasa community.

This approach aligns with Laswell and Onong Uchjana Effendy's communication theory, where the key elements of communication—who says what, through what channel, to whom, and with what effect—are optimally managed. The madrasah principal serves as the primary communicator, with messages built around the excellence of Islamic values, discipline, and educational quality. The media used are flexible, including direct communication, social media groups, and interactions with parents. The message targets teachers, students, parents, the community, and prospective students.

The impact of this communication was evident in the increased community enthusiasm, even without formal promotion through mass media. Interviews showed that the principal's communication strategy was able to mobilize all elements of the school to contribute to building the institution's reputation. Teachers felt valued, parents felt involved, and the community placed high trust in the quality of the school.

In the context of competitiveness, the research results obtained through interviews with madrasah principals, curriculum vice principals, and teachers, can be concluded that this communication strategy has been proven to provide a major contribution to increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions, which can be analyzed through four competitiveness indicators according to Sumihardjo, namely strengthening market position, connecting with the environment, continuously improving performance, and upholding a profitable position.

Based on research findings from interviews with the principal, curriculum vice principal, and teachers, it is understood that the communication strategy at MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo has been implemented systematically, adaptively, and comprehensively. The communication strategy implemented by the principal is oriented towards strengthening the institution's image by conveying the "religious and genius" vision and mission, which is consistently emphasized to the entire academic community. The emphasis on religiosity is the main foundation, as it is believed that intelligence and achievement will follow if religious character is well-formed.

The vision and mission are communicated through a parent forum at the beginning of the school year and followed up with ongoing communication through class-specific WhatsApp groups, facilitating the rapid, transparent dissemination of academic and non-academic information, which can be directly monitored by parents. This communication strategy is further strengthened by the formation of a multimedia team tasked with documenting all student activities and uploading them to social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Social media is positioned as the primary means of promotion and communication with the wider community.

Interestingly, this madrasah no longer relies on conventional promotions such as billboards or brochures, as digital publications have proven far more effective. This is evident in the achievement of new student admissions (PPDB), which consistently exceeds the quota, requiring registration to close early. In fact, the madrasah principal ensures the



involvement of parents in supporting promotions by requesting screenshots of their participation in distributing madrasah content, ensuring information reaches the community and ensuring parents monitor their children's progress.

In terms of curriculum, MI Plus Darussaadah integrates the formal Ministry of Religious Affairs curriculum with the Islamic religious curriculum of the Lirboyo Main Islamic Boarding School. This integration is intensively communicated to teachers and parents to avoid overlap. The principal utilizes monthly forums, WhatsApp groups, and informal meetings to convey direction, policies, and evaluations. Teachers are also given space to express ideas, complaints, and suggestions, either directly or through the vice-curriculum director. This open communication system enables the school to continuously improve its academics, management, and services to parents.

In terms of external relations, MI Plus Darussaadah benefits from the reputation of the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School. The principal leverages the alumni network and reunion forums to expand the reach of information. This advantage adds value because the wider community is already familiar with Lirboyo's reputation, thus fostering trust in the institution. The community response to the madrasah's existence has been very positive, particularly due to the integration of the boarding school system and Islamic religious learning, which is considered capable of meeting the needs of both religious and formal education.

The tangible results of this communication strategy are evident in the significant increase in student enrollment. Since its founding in 2021 with 62 students, the number of students has continued to grow annually, reaching over 700 by 2025. This achievement places MI Plus Darussaadah as one of the madrasahs with the largest student population in Kediri City, even competing with top public madrasahs such as MIN 1 and MIN 2 Kediri.

CONCLUSION

The communication strategy of the principal of MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo has proven effective in enhancing the institution's competitiveness through a structured and integrated approach. Communication is strategically executed, utilizing digital and visual media, and face-to-face forums to convey the "Religious and Genius" vision. This strategy is reinforced by participatory internal coordination and strategic management encompassing planning, implementation, and evaluation. The values-based approach, technology, and community engagement have enabled the school to build a positive image, enhance public trust, and increase student enrollment without conventional promotion.

The implementation of the communication strategy by the principal of MI Plus Darussaadah Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School has proven effective in increasing the educational institution's competitiveness. By referring to Sumihardjo's (2008) four competitiveness indicators, the school was able to strengthen its market position, establish relationships with its environment, continuously improve performance, and maintain a profitable position. This success was supported by open communication, the use of digital technology, the strengthening of religious values as the institution's identity, and the support of Lirboyo's extensive Islamic boarding school network.



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