



## Islamic and Senior High Schools in School Market in Indonesia

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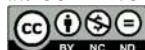
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**Abstract:** Madrasah and non-religious schools must compete for potential students. These two types of educational institutions compete to attract similar student markets. Therefore, this article aims to explore the strategies of madrasah aliyah (MA) and high school (SMA) in the school market in the local context. In addition, this article aims to explore the positioning, differentiation, and brand (PDB) strategies of MA and SMA in the local context. This research is qualitative. Data was collected using interviews with 16 participants: principals, vice principals, teachers, students, alumni, parents, and villagers. The study found that the number of MA students declined more than high school students in the past five years. Moreover, the findings of this study show that MA PDB's focus on Islamic religious learning and skills is different from the market's expectations: students/parents. In contrast, the GDP chosen by SMA focuses more on academic achievement and further study by the expectations of students and parents. This research suggests that madrasahs and schools analyze market needs for sustainable education as a basis for marketing strategies. The study also suggests a study to verify the effect of GDP on enrolment intention.

**Abstrak:** Madrasah dan sekolah umum (non-agama) harus berkompetisi dalam memperebutkan siswa potensial. Dua jenis institusi pendidikan ini bersaing untuk menarik pasar siswa yang tidak berbeda. Oleh karena itulah, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi strategi madrasah aliyah (MA) dan sekolah menengah atas (SMA) di pasar sekolah dalam konteks lokal. Selain itu, artikel ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi strategi positioning, differentiation, and brand (PDB) MA dan SMA dalam konteks lokal. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan wawancara terhadap 16 partisipan: kepala sekolah, wakil kepala sekolah, guru, siswa, alumni, orang tua, dan warga desa. Studi ini menemukan jumlah siswa MA menurun lebih besar daripada siswa SMA dalam lima tahun terakhir. Selain itu, temuan studi ini menunjukkan bahwa fokus PDB MA pada pembelajaran dan keterampilan agama Islam tidak sesuai dengan harapan pasar: siswa/orang tua. Sebaliknya, PDB yang dipilih SMA lebih fokus pada prestasi akademik dan studi lanjut sesuai dengan harapan siswa dan orang tua. Penelitian ini menyarankan madrasah dan sekolah melakukan analisis kebutuhan pasar terhadap pendidikan secara berkelanjutan sebagai dasar untuk strategy pemasaran. Penelitian ini juga menyarankan kajian untuk memverifikasi efek PDB terhadap enrolment intention.

### A. Introduction

Discussions about formal educational institutions in Indonesia cannot be separated from two forms of educational institutions: madrasah and public schools. Islamic schools (madrasah) are structurally under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In contrast, public schools (or secular/non-religious schools) are managed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, whose authority is delegated to local governments.

In the education system in Indonesia, Islamic high schools (madrasah aliyah) and non-religious high schools (SMA) are no different. Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education and Culture, and Ministry of Home Affairs Joint Decree number 6/1975, 037/U/1975, and 36/1975, Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree Number 7/1987 and National Education System Act Number 2/1989 are the basis that madrasahs are educational institutions that are equal and no different from schools. General both curriculum and standards (Supani, 2009). Specialization For example, these two schools have the same specialization: mathematics, natural science, social science, and language and humanities. The only different specialization is Islamic studies at madrasah aliyah (MA). In other words, the difference lies in the number of religious subjects, which are more than public schools. However, this is no longer a difference because non-religious high school (SMA) also adds religious learning activities outside the curriculum.

Therefore, MA and SMA compete in the school market in Indonesia. A comparison of the market share of schools and madrasah at the senior high school level and other levels can be seen in Figure 1 below.

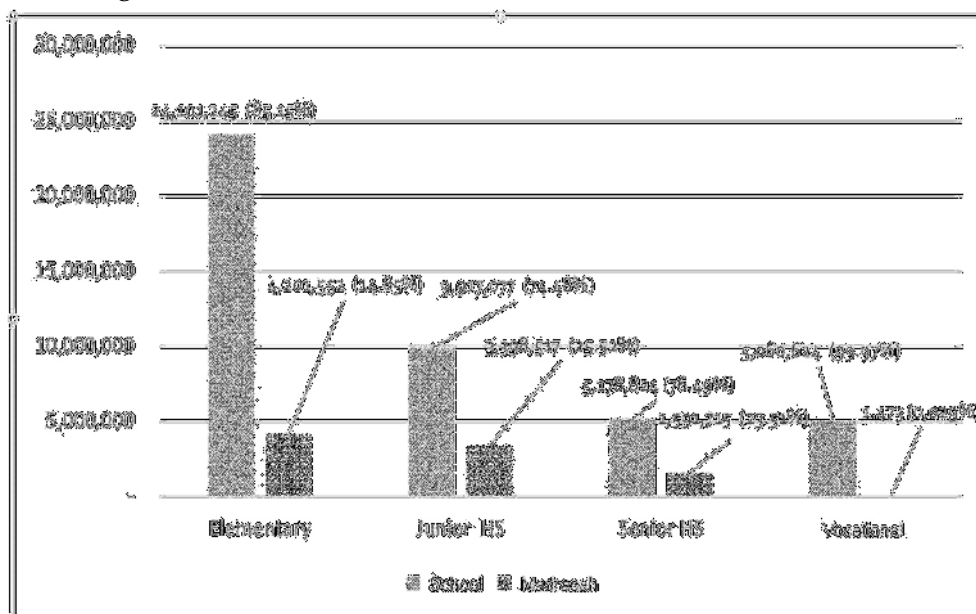


Figure 1. Market Share of Schools and Madrasah in Indonesia

The market share of madrasah at all levels of education, from primary to secondary, is only 17.20% of the total student population of 53,451,027. Public schools have a much

larger market share, with 82.0% of the total student population in Indonesia. The ratio of institutions to students in madrasah is 169 students per school (1: 169), while the ratio of schools to students is 201 students per school (1: 201). This poses a challenge for madrasah in terms of government funding, which is calculated based on the number of students and the reputation of the madrasah, which significantly impacts the number of students.

During competition for the market, madrasahs must be able to compete with non-madrasah schools in attracting the best students from various socio-economic circumstances. The best students will directly impact the reputation of the madrasah. Attracting the best students is closely related to the school's ability to demonstrate the academic achievements of its students.

Research on madrasah in various countries provides information on the characteristics of madrasahs that are similar from country to country. Madrasahs were born and developed in rural and low-income communities (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016). In line with this, madrasah need more infrastructure and learning resources, strong students, underpaid teachers, and cultural differences (Sali & Marasigan, 2020). Financing is an issue that the madrasah must face (Tan, 2009). As an Islamic educational institution, madrasah were judged do not prepare students for future careers (Jeffrey et al., 2008); otherwise, madrasah are required to build character, morals, humanity, and skills in the fields of religious and general sciences (Ainissyifa & Nurseha, 2022; Syah, 2015; Usman et al., 2017; Safitri et al., 2022). The government's standards must consider the curriculum in madrasah that prioritizes Islamic religious education. This is one of the factors why, before Law Number 2 of 1989, madrasah were not part of the national education system (Shaturae, 2021).

After including madrasahs as part of the national education system, madrasahs must teach Islamic religious and general sciences. In this manner, madrasahs can be competitive when entering the market (Subotina & Sergienko, 2021). To do so, the madrasah must choose a positioning that reflects Islamic and general sciences. Due to limited resources, these two demands are challenging for madrasah to fulfill, making it difficult to compete with public schools, plus the increasing number of integrated Islamic schools.

In the Indonesian context, Islamic high schools/madrasah aliyah (HIS/MA) and other schools use various strategies and methods that focus on image in the community to attract new students. These marketing strategies and methods aim to build a credible and attractive image in the market of educational institutions (Dâmaso & Lima, 2020). An attractive image or brand association will impact the desire to enroll in schools/madrasahs and vice versa.

Research that explores school marketing is increasingly being conducted as a form of awareness of competition between schools. The research focuses on marketing the school; the main element is promotion (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004). School marketing strategies are limited to promotional sources of information for people: exhibitions, flyers, phone calls, emails, advertising, billboards, and others (Jabbar, 2016; Lubienski, 2007). Through analysis of the school website, Wilson & Carlsen (2016) found patterns that

distinguish schools based on the categories of elite/international, culturally specific, result-oriented, and progressive. As written (Barnes, 1993), marketing strategies are determined by the characteristics of the school and the targeted students' or parents' objectives, so marketing strategies cannot be generalized to all schools.

Marketing strategies based on positioning, differentiation, and brand are known as the PDB triangle (Kartajaya et al., 2004). The concept of positioning was first proposed by Jack Trout in 1969 and became famous when he published a book with Al Ries entitled *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* in 1981. Positioning is designing product/service offerings and images to produce a distinctive place in consumers' memories (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The positioning stage can be done after the segmentation and targeting stages. The essence of strategic marketing is reflected in segmentation, targeting, and positioning (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Positioning is related to the targeted segment and the value different from other products (Burke, 2011; Hooley & Greenley, 2005).

Porter emphasized that differentiation and low cost are the most fundamental competitive advantages in the battle for the market (Porter, 1980; Porter, 1985). Differentiation is more attractive to consumers than low cost if the quality meets their expectations (Ze Ye et al., 2018). Differentiation is the school's ability to create unique and superior value in learning in the view of students/parents (Warman et al., 2022). Differentiation makes the product different from competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Differentiation of an innovative product is a crucial element that drives brand performance (Davicik & Sharma, 2015; Hossain & Azmi, 2020). A differentiation strategy that suits the segment's needs will impact organizational performance (Thukia, 2022).

The brand can be defined as a logo, name, design, symbol, or a combination that is identical to the product and distinguishes it from competitors (Maurya & Mishra, 2012). Thus, branding distinguishes a product from others (Kotler & Keller, 2012). In services, the company name is the brand for the service (Ročkutė et al., 2018). Branding can be done by making a difference in the services the school provides from competitors' services. Thus, schools become unique in the education services market.

Therefore, the study of marketing strategies at the local level is critical to find out the differences between schools. This article aims to explore and analyze madrasah and school marketing strategies (positioning, differentiation, and brand) in competing to attract students/parents at the local level. By doing so, empirical evidence will be found on which student PDB strategies attract more students or parents. This article contributes to the theory of madrasah marketing strategy, especially to understanding the positioning, differentiation, and brand in the context of competition at the local level.

## B. Method

This research is field research with a qualitative descriptive approach. In marketing, research on a few participants will provide in-depth understanding rather than provide answers to how many. It will be the basis for further studies to design new products that suit consumers (de Ruyter & Scholl, 1998).

The research participants were 11 from SMAN 1 Barito Kuala (SMA) SMA and seven from MAN 1 Barito Kuala (MA). Participants are determined using purposive sampling techniques. The selection of participants is people who are considered to have a hand and are involved in the marketing of the school and madrasah. The participants included the principal, vice principal, teachers, students, alums, and parents. The brief profile of participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Brief Profile

No	Initial	Sex	Age	Brief Profile
1	P1	M	50	Father of an MA student
2	P2	M	57	Villager
3	P3	M	19	MA alumni
4	P4	F	16	MA student
5	P5	F	17	SMA student
6	P6	M	41	Father of an SMA student
7	P7	M	45	Father of an SMA student
8	P8	F	16	SMA student
9	P9	F	16	SMA student
10	P10	M	47	School vice principal
11	P11	M	19	SMA student
12	P12	M	27	Teacher in MA
13	P13	M	53	School principal
14	P14	F	26	MA Teacher
15	P15	F	33	School principal
16	P16	F	16	SMA student

Data were collected using in-depth interviews with participants. After making an appointment, the researcher interviewed the participants at the agreed time and place. Generally, the interviews were conducted at the school/madrasah and the participant's home. The interview process was recorded using a recorder application on a smartphone and noted.

The trustworthiness of qualitative data is built with credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. The credibility and confirmability of data in this study were achieved by triangulating informants, members checking informants about interview notes, and the accuracy of interview notes. Triangulation was carried out by verifying the results of interviews with three participants. In this study, member checks were carried out by confirming the contents of the interview notes to the participants so that the accuracy of the interview results was guaranteed.

The collected data were transcribed into text and processed by (1) linking the data to the problem statement, (2) identifying patterns from the data through coding, (3) integrating the patterns to answer the research problem with a theoretical basis (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). The research process is shown in Figure 2 below.

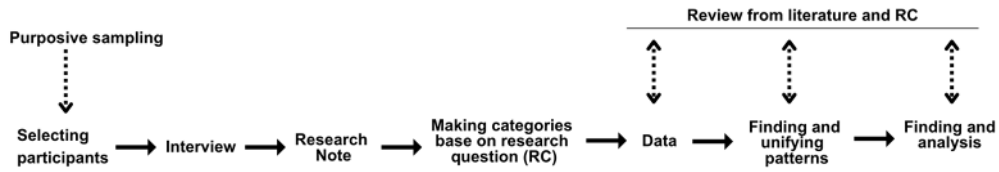


Figure 2. Research Process

### C. Result and Discussion

#### Result

##### *An Overview of the School Market at the Local Level*

The geographical condition of Marabahan City, Barito Kuala Regency, South Kalimantan, divided by the Barito River, causes the area to be relatively isolated from other cities. Therefore, education options are more limited than in other areas. It is difficult for students to choose a school outside the city because they must detour across the Barito River. The primary schools of choice at the secondary school level are MAN 1 Barito Kuala, SMAN 1 Barito Kuala, and SMKN 1 Barito Kuala.

Competitiveness in the school market can be seen from the growth in student numbers. This can be shown in Figure 3 below.

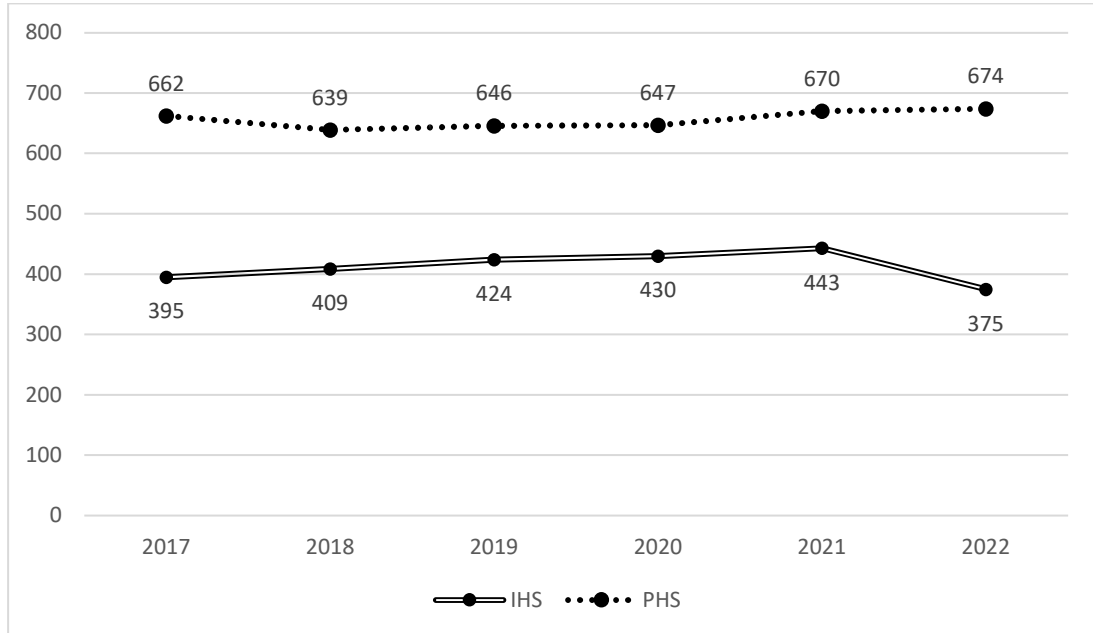
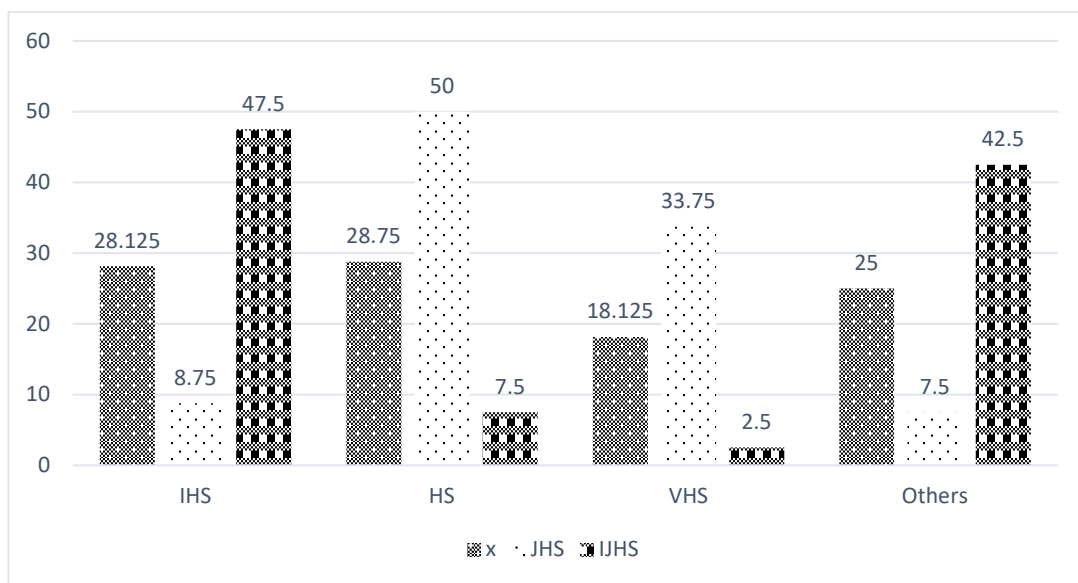


Figure 3. Increasing and Decreasing the Number of Students

Increasing the school's student numbers over the five years reflects the success of the school's marketing strategy. MA experienced a decrease in student numbers by 5.06%. In contrast, SMA experienced an increase in student numbers by 1.8%.

Regarding the quality of education as measured by school accreditation, SMKN 1 Barito Kuala is still accredited with a B rating. The other two schools, MAN 1 Barito Kuala and SMAN 1 Barito Kuala, have been accredited as A (Highest accreditation score possible). It shows that the last two schools, madrasah, and public schools, have the same quality.

The school's ability to do brand communication can be from the school's brand awareness, which is reflected in the memory of junior high school students (top of mind). Top of mind is the school that is mentioned first when students are asked about the school. MA/SMA/V top of mind can be seen in Figure 4 below.

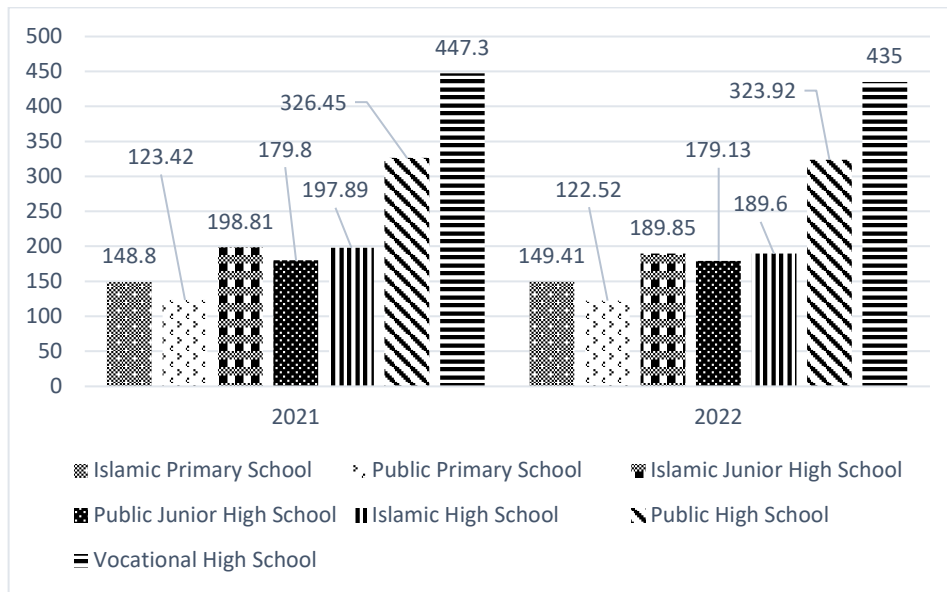


Source: Survey results of new student admissions MAN 1 Barito Kuala

**Figure 4.** Top of Mind

The majority of Islamic junior High schools (madrasah tsanawiyah/MTs/IJHS) are very aware of MA. In contrast, most Junior High School (JHS/SMP) students know SMA. A surprising finding from the survey is that other schools (outside MA) are top of mind for MTs students. We suspect that MTs students, especially private MTs students, remember more other Islamic education institutions (x) outside Marabahan City. The survey illustrates that the main segment of MA is MTs, and the main segment of SMA is SMP graduates. It shows two different groups in educational preferences.

The data on the increasing student numbers and top of mind above are relevant to the ratio of schools to students in South Kalimantan. The ratio of the number of schools to the number of students at all levels reflects the competition for students, as shown in Figure 5 below.



**Figure 5.** The Average Number of Students Per Public School and Madrasah

All school/madrasah levels in South Kalimantan generally experienced a decrease in the number of students. The ratio per type of school can be determined by comparing the number of students with the total number of schools. Compared to the previous year, in the 2022/2023 academic year, the lowest ratio decline was the ratio of Islamic elementary schools, which decreased by 0.26%, while the at the elementary school was 0.73%. The decrease in number was also seen in Islamic junior high schools by 2.49%. This is greater than the decrease of public junior high school students, which amounted to 0.38%. The most significant decrease in the ratio of students per school for all levels was in Islamic high school, which amounted to 4.2%. The percentage decrease in the number of students per madrasah is much more significant than the decrease in the ratio of vocational high school students, which decreased by 2.75%, and public high school, which decreased by 0.78%.

This shows that the competitiveness of madrasah ibtdaiyah (Islamic Primary school) against primary schools is better than madrasah at higher levels. However, at higher levels, HS is considered more capable of meeting parents' expectations for their children's educational future than madrasah aliyah (Islamic high school/MA). The higher the level of education, the weaker the competitiveness of madrasah compared to public schools. The empirical evidence shows that parents choose primary education more for religious/moral/moral attachment, so they prefer madrasah. However, when choosing the secondary school level, parents are likelier to choose the type of education that provides academic learning for their child's future career.

**Positioning**

Schools have different positioning in the minds of customers. Positioning in the minds of customers is depicted in Table 2 below.



**Table 2.** School Positioning

No.	School	P	Quote	Positioning
1	MA	P1	religious activities, such as daily Qur'an reading, <i>maulid habsyi</i> , and community service in mosques.	Reciting the Quran, Maulid Habsyi, devotion in mosques and mushalas
		P2	..enlivening mosques and mashallah, routine recitation of maulid habsyi verses ..also the existence of yellow book studies (kitab kuning; refers to classical Islamic textbook)	Reading the Yellow Book (kitab kuning; refers to classical Islamic textbook)
		P3	... I like <i>maulid habsyi</i>	<i>Maulid Habsyi</i>
		P4	Arabic lessons etc, Qur'an recitation activities, maulid habsyi, etc.	Arabic language, Quran recitation, <i>Maulid Hasbyi</i>
2	SMA	P13	religious activities are more embedded	Religious skills learning
		P5	...because of the achievements of students and schools	Academic achievement
		P6	..... also has many achievements	Academic achievement
		P7	pilot/model school...located in the city of	A model school located in the city
		P8	...the alums of this high school are highly qualified	Alums who can continue to higher education

The results of these interviews provide an overview of public perceptions of public schools and madrasas. Students' perceptions consider MA strongly related to the religious field with cheaper education costs. On the other hand, SMA is quite successful in positioning itself as a school with academic excellence, as reflected in the achievement of the highest final exam scores and achievements in science.

**Differentiation**

If positioning focuses more on customer perception, differentiation is the difference students have implemented and felt. The differences developed by the school are illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Schools Differentiation

No.	School	P	Quote	Differentiation
1	MA	P13	integrating religious and general sciences, ... a solution to the community's needs. ...religious activities are emphasized more	Religious and general science learning, religious activities
		P12	...many religious activities, ...we teach religious amaliyahs, get used to practicing ..can be a stronghold of faith.	Religious activities to equip students

No.	School	P	Quote	Differentiation
		P14	In MAN 1 Barito Kuala, many of the teachers or religious leaders are	Religious - Opinion Leader Role
2	SMA	P15	... continue to college, ... not only colleges in southern Kalimantan but also out of the Kalimantan region ... the field of science olympiads also has many achievements. ... In our school, there is such a thing as a superior class.	Continue to lead universities and excel in academic achievement.
		P16	Extra-curricular and a myriad of academic achievements	Extra-curricular activities by student needs and academic/non-academic achievements

**Brand**

The brand is closely related to the uniqueness developed by the school. The brand reflects the positioning and differentiation of the school. The school brand can be seen in Table 4 below.

**Table 4.** Schools Brand

No.	School	P	Quote	Brand
1	MA	P10	integration of general subjects, religious subjects, and practical skills	Teaching religion and science
		P12	Our school brand's slogan is "Madrasah Mandiri Berprestasi (Madrasas in excellent)".	Self-achieving
2	SMA	P15	students excel and can compete in competitions up to the national level, produce quality graduates, and continue to lead universities.	School of champions
			This high school is the oldest in Barito Kuala district.	Oldest school
		P11	SMAN 1 Marabahan is the oldest secondary school in Batola, currently the favorite school in Marabahan.	The oldest and favorite school
		P9	According to my family, SMAN 1 Marabahan has always been the most favorite school,	Favorite School

The MA brand, reflected in the tagline "Independent and Outstanding Madrasah", is not in line with the differentiation that focuses on religious learning and positioning as a madrasah known as a school that emphasizes religious activities and is cheap. In contrast to

MA, SMA is relatively more consistent between positioning, differentiation, and brand. PDB triangles of MA and SMA are shown in Figure 6 below.

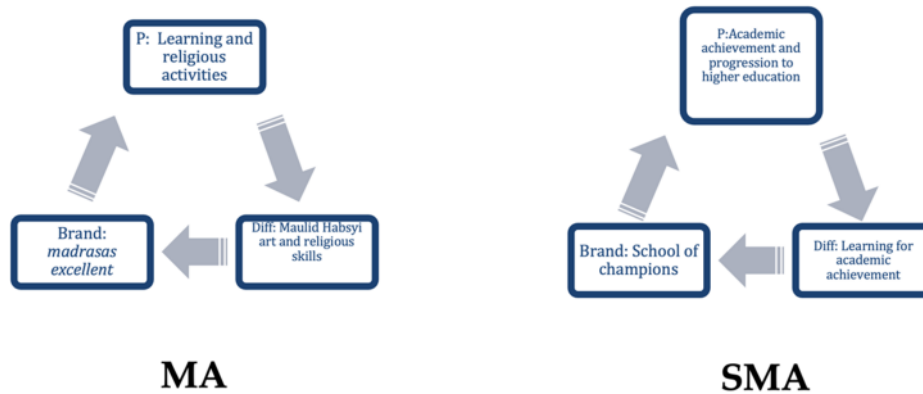


Figure 6. Positioning, differentiation, and brand triangle (PDB)

### Discussion

This study found that two types of schools in Indonesia experienced declining student numbers. The decline in student numbers is inseparable from the lower population growth. However, the decline in the birth rate has resulted in families becoming more concerned about their children's education. Family investment in children's education is increasing to open stable employment opportunities (Aggarwal et al., 2013). Therefore, parents will be more selective in choosing schools to prepare them to compete in the job market.

The above empirical facts are relevant to the other findings of this study. We found evidence that PHS's PDB strategy focusing on academic achievement that supports students' success in entering reputable educational institutions is empirically successful in attracting more new students. It shows that the largest segment of students are students who want to have academic achievement to continue their education. The empirical findings support the findings of (Haller, 2021) which suggests that educational institutions will succeed in capturing the market if they can continuously respond to the market. Educational institutions' learning development must be based on market needs (Guzovski & Smoljic, 2017). Thus, PDB is the result of analyzing market needs. Educational institutions that implement academic and other programs that meet the needs of students and parents will be more likely to be their choice for enrolment (Lowry & Owens, 2001). Educational institutions should be aware of the demands and needs of students/parents and their criteria in choosing an educational institution (Sia, 2013).

Students/parents choose schools based on different factors (Venketsamy & Miller, 2021). Argue that low-income parents do not choose schools based on academic quality, whereas middle-upper-class parents prefer schools based on academic quality. Proximity is also one of the reasons for choosing a school, especially elementary schools, that signaled that parents choose madrasah not because of necessity but rather because of trust despite

the relatively low quality, job opportunities, and future. On the other hand, affordability drives parents to choose a school for their children (Tarkhnishvili et al., 2022). Also, other factors such as school attributes such as cost, scholarships, distance from home, reputation, and the learning programs offered are why students and parents choose a school (Han, 2014). Cost-related reasons are one of the explanations why the low-income family segment chooses Islamic schools. In contrast, PHS tends to be chosen by middle-upper-income families because they perceive the academic quality to be better.

This research shows that more market-oriented schools will attract more students/parents. As (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2007) explain, market orientation has the characteristics of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination. However, prospective students' and parents' desires and expectations are dynamic and changing (Pires et al., 2006). Therefore, schools/madrasas must continuously develop marketing strategies that are relevant to these changes.

#### D. Conclusion

Madrasah aliyah/Islamic High School (MA) experienced a more significant decline in student numbers than other schools. The decline is related to positioning, differentiation, and brand strategies outside the majority segment of prospective students and parents. Strategies that emphasize mastery of religious skills at the secondary school level differ from the wishes of students and parents, so IHS enthusiasts tend to decline. Non-religious high school (SMA) strategy in marketing services must be by the wishes of students/parents in the future related to education and career.

Based on this, we recommend that MA reposition, review differentiation, and rebrand. Such efforts will make MA relevant to the market segment and attract potential students who can enhance the reputation of the madrasah. MA managers are advised to focus on Islamic teaching and academic achievement, which is what most students and parents want when choosing a secondary school. Thus, MA will attract potential students from all socio-economic levels. As written by Shocker et al (1994), the changing needs of the market must be recognized, MA and other schools should measure the changing needs of the market so that they can adapt their learning objectives to the needs of the market.

This research is confined to a local and limited area. However, the findings align with the general phenomenon of madrasah in Indonesia. Future research is recommended to measure the correlation or influence of PDB on enrolment intention. Such research can provide clues and generalizations about the positioning, differentiation, and brand most relevant to the trend of the school market.

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