

Internal and External Determinants of Parental Enrollment Interest in an Under-Capacity Public Primary School: A SWOT-Based Qualitative Case Study

Halimatur rosyidah¹ , Nurmayuli²  Naseehah Hajido³ 

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¹ Universitas Islam Negeri
Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh,
Indonesia

² Universitas
Singaperbangsa Karawang,
Indonesia

² Northern College, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Public interest in enrolling children in primary schools is an important indicator of the attractiveness of public educational institutions. This study aims to analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the enrollment interest of new students at SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh, which has experienced fluctuating applicant numbers and remained below its enrollment capacity in recent years. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving the school principal, vice principal for student affairs, and parents of prospective students selected using purposive sampling. Data analysis was conducted using SWOT analysis to identify internal and external factors affecting the school. The findings indicate that supporting factors include an adequate number of teachers, teacher competence, a conducive school environment, the use of learning technology, and information dissemination through social media and communication with parents. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors consist of limited facilities and infrastructure, the absence of flagship school programs, limited promotional funding, and competition with schools that have better facilities and stronger reputations. This study concludes that increasing new student enrollment interest requires strengthening internal school quality and implementing more planned and collaborative promotional strategies.

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Correspondence:

Halimatur rosyidah
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia
e-mail: 200206152@student.ar-raniry.ac.id

1. Introduction.

The public's interest in enrolling their children in elementary school is an important indicator in assessing the attractiveness of an educational institution, especially public schools in a certain area. The high or low enthusiasm of prospective new students reflects the level of trust and expectations that parents have towards the quality of education offered by the school. Several efforts have been made to understand and address the problem of low interest from prospective students in elementary schools. Schools generally strive to improve the quality of services, enhance physical facilities, maximize promotion through social media, and optimize teaching quality. For example, school promotion using platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp has been reported to be effective in increasing public awareness of the school's potential (Munarsih et al., 2020). In addition, internal collaboration and regular teacher training are also conducted to improve the quality of learning and the school's image (Efendi, N., & Sholeh, 2023).

In this context, SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh experiences a trend with a fluctuating number of applicants and falls below capacity, making it important to conduct an in-depth study of the factors that support or hinder student interest in entering this elementary school. The school shows an unstable trend of applicants and tends to be below capacity, even though it is located in an urban area that is relatively densely populated and socially and economically diverse. This condition provides an interesting context for analyzing the supporting and inhibiting factors of the enthusiasm for incoming new students in a concrete and empirical manner. In addition, the phenomenon of variation in enthusiasm among schools in Banda Aceh raises questions about the role of educational strategies and other local factors in influencing parents' decisions, so a case study at SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on school choice and basic education policy in Indonesia.

Table 1. New Student Applicants and Enrollment Capacity at SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh, 2022–2025

Academic year	Accepted	Rejected	Capacity	Registrants
2022	34	0	35	34
2023	27	0	35	27
2024	31	0	35	31
2025	19	0	35	19
Total	111			

The table above shows that in the 2022–2025 academic years, the number of applicants was always below the capacity of 35 people, so all applicants were accepted. The number of applicants was recorded at 34 in 2022, decreased to 27 in 2023, increased to 31 in 2024, and then dropped sharply to 19 in 2025. In total, 111 students were accepted, averaging 28 people per year, with a capacity utilization of around 79% and an acceptance rate of 100%.

Previous research has identified various factors that influence parents' decisions in choosing schools, including the quality of education, school facilities, school reputation, and promotional processes. Research conducted using qualitative methods by Sukmawati (2025) shows that teacher competence, school facilities, infrastructure, and learning environment are the main determinants considered by parents when choosing an elementary school for their children. In addition, Apriliani et al. (2025) emphasized that the reputation of the school and the quality of educational services also influence parents' interest, so schools that lack flagship programs tend to lose competitiveness in attracting applicants. The study by Bekele & Kenea (2024) also shows that parents' decisions are the result of a complex interaction of various internal and external school factors, including facilities, school-parent relationships, and curriculum. However, most of these studies provide little specific contextual picture of the phenomenon of interest in urban public schools with declining enrollment trends, so more detailed empirical studies are still needed in local settings such as SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh. This focus differs from most previous studies that tend to examine elite schools or educational institutions with high levels of interest. Thus, this study broadens the perspective of research on school choice dynamics in the context of public schools with fluctuating and generally declining levels of interest. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the internal and external factors that support and inhibit parental enrollment interest at SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh through a SWOT-based qualitative case study design.

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to obtain a naturalistic, context-rich account of the phenomenon of enrollment interest as it is understood and managed by the actors directly responsible for it (Creswell, 2014). The case, SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh, was selected purposively because its four-year applicant record (2022–2025) exhibited the fluctuating, below-capacity pattern that motivates this study's research question.

Research participants comprised the school principal, the vice-principal for student affairs, and parents of prospective students, selected using purposive sampling on the criterion of direct, first-hand involvement in either the management of student admission (principal, vice-principal) or the decision to enroll a child at the school (parents). This selection strategy prioritizes information richness over representativeness, consistent with the exploratory, meaning-focused aims of qualitative case study research (Creswell, 2014).

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: (a) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the principal, vice-principal, and parents, focused on their perceptions of the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in relation to enrollment; (b) direct observation of the school environment and of new-student admission (PPDB) activities; and (c) documentation review, covering four years of admission records (2022–2025) and school profile data. Using multiple data sources allowed method and source triangulation, strengthening the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017).

Data were analyzed using SWOT analysis to classify internal factors (strengths, weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities, threats) across the eight management dimensions described in Section 2.3. Following data reduction and categorization, each identified factor was assigned a weight on a 0–1 priority scale, reflecting its relative importance as judged jointly by the researchers and informants (Suparman et al., 2023). Coding and categorization followed the general thematic-analysis logic of familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and review (Nowell et al., 2017), applied here within the SWOT category structure rather than as a free-standing thematic scheme.

To strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, this study used source triangulation (comparing principal, vice-principal, and parent accounts of the same factors), method triangulation (interviews cross-checked against observation and documentary admission data), and member checking, in which preliminary categorizations of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were verified with the principal and vice-principal before finalization (Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability is addressed through thick description of the school's context, informants, and data collection procedures, allowing readers to judge the applicability of the findings to comparable under-capacity public schools.

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all informants prior to data collection. Interview data were anonymized in reporting except for institutional role (principal, vice-principal, parent), and no personally identifying information about parents or their children is reported.

3. Research Results

3.1 Supporting Factors for the Enthusiasm of Prospective New Students at SDN 9 Banda Aceh

The following data presents an overview of the internal and external conditions of SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh, covering various aspects that support the school: human resources (man), financing (money), curriculum (material), learning methods (method), learning technology (machine), educational marketing (market), education implementation time (minute), information (information). This data is compiled to show the strengths that the school has in supporting the education process and the enrollment of new students. By understanding this data, it is expected that the school can plan development strategies more accurately and purposefully.

Table 2. Strengths (Internal) and Opportunities (External)

No	Aspects	Findings Internal	Weight	Findings External	Weight
1.	Man	The number of teachers at SD 9 Banda Aceh is 14 people and the number of students is 182 students	0,8	Participating in teacher training held by the Education Office and carried out by other parties	0,4
		The number of certified teachers is 10 teachers	0,8	The coaching program organized by the Education Office is to accelerate the improvement of teacher competence so that it can be maximized optimally	0,5
2	Method	The school has used the teaching method recommended by the education office	0,1	Utilizing external collaboration-based learning methods to increase the interest of prospective students.	0,5
		Teachers innovate learning	0,1	There is an opportunity to participate in government programs such as deep learning	0,5
3	Material	The physical environment of the school is indeed quite influential for parents when choosing a school. Therefore, we always try to keep the school looking clean, neat, and comfortable.	0,8	There is an opportunity to collaborate with external parties that has the potential to be a source of school development	0,5
		The current classroom condition is adequate to accommodate the current students	0,5	There is participation of the surrounding community in repair activities and the arrangement of the school environment has not been seen concretely.	0,5
4	Money	But if assistance is for orphans or underprivileged students, it already exists	0,7	There are external funding opportunities	0,4
		For new student admission activities, we arrange and use funds as needed. It is usually used for socialization, banner installation, and preparation for other PPDB activities. We will still adjust its use	0,6	Currently, schools do not have external funding sources that can be used to strengthen promotional activities.	0,4

No	Aspects	Findings Internal	Weight	Findings External	Weight
		according to the rules, and we try to make the existing funds support the smooth process of student admissions			
5	Machine	To keep up with the development of educational technology, our school is trying to adapt gradually. ICT equipment is not complete, but we continue to try to add and improve it according to our ability. We also encourage teachers to take part in training so that they can use technology in learning.	0,8	Actually, the opportunity to utilize digital technology in learning exists. We already have several devices, although they are not complete. If facilities can be added in the future, of course technology such as interactive media or computers can be used more often to help the student learning process	0,6
		We have used technology in learning, although the facilities are still limited. Teachers use laptops and projectors to help deliver lessons. We are also working on adding ICT devices	0,8	For the assistance of ICT tools, thank God, schools have received several from the government, such as computers, projectors, and smart TVs. These devices are very helpful in teaching and learning activities.	0,9
6	Market	For the achievements of teachers for now, there are still lacks, but for students there are already achievements such as painting competitions and smart	0,7	Currently, schools have not collaborated with any PAUD or kindergarten. However, the opportunity to cooperate actually exists. If there is an opportunity in the future, we are certainly open, because such cooperation can help strengthen the path of admission of new students and introduce the school to parents earlier	0,5
		The school does not know for sure how many students are accepted into the flagship school because the school does not receive data on this matter	0,5	For social activities in the community, schools have not been very actively involved. However, schools continue to get a positive image in the community	0,6

No	Aspects	Findings Internal	Weight	Findings External	Weight
7	Minute	For learning activities and the implementation of PPDB, it has been carried out according to the schedule set by the office	0,6	Activities such as competitions can actually be an attraction for prospective students. When schools hold or participate in competitions, parents can see the activities and enthusiasm of students. However, we still adjust the implementation to the conditions and capabilities of the school	0,7
		PPDB runs very effectively and in accordance with the schedule set by the education office	0,7	Activities such as competitions can actually be an attraction for prospective students. When schools hold or participate in competitions, parents can see the activities and enthusiasm of students	0,7
8	Information	Usually, the school disseminates information through the school's social media or also through WhatsApp which is forwarded to the group of students' guardians	0,6	Publications from outside such as digital pamphlet media are very helpful in introducing schools to the public. It's just that until now we have not established cooperation from external parties	0,6
		The most effective media used by schools is usually social media such as Instagram, and also TikTok	0,8	Usually the school establishes information with the student's guardians and so far it is very effective to increase interest	0,7

3.2 Factors Inhibiting the Interest of Prospective New Students at SDN 9 Banda Aceh

The following data presents an overview of the internal and external conditions of SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh related to the various limitations faced by the school, covering human resources (man), financing (money), curriculum (material), teaching methods (method), learning technology (machine), educational marketing (market), education implementation time (minute), and information (information). These data are compiled to identify the constraints that may hinder improvements in the school's quality and competitiveness, so that the school can formulate more precise and sustainable improvement strategies.

Table 3. Weaknesses (Internal) and Threats (External)

No	Aspects	Internal	Weight	External	Weight
1	Man	For now, the number of teachers is very sufficient to serve each class	0,9	Actually, not because the teachers we have now are also very experienced in teaching, so it is not a meaningful threat for us	0,8
		The attitude and discipline of teachers and staff have a great influence on the views of the community. Teachers and staff are kind, friendly, and disciplined, usually parents are more confident in sending their children to school here.	0,8	Yes, because to get competent new educators is quite difficult because our school is also not one of the favorite schools	0,6
2	Money	Yes, the financial condition of the school is very influential for PPDB activities, but we will still try as much as possible so that PPDB runs well	0,2	Of course, the limited funds provided have a very significant impact on school promotion, but we still try our best with the available funds so that school promotion continues to run	0,3
		Achievement scholarships do not exist at our school	0,4	Of course, because schools that get greater financial aid they will be younger to develop	0,2
3	Material	The existing facilities are still incomplete such as infocus and peraga tools, we hope that schools can get adequate sapras facilities in the future	0,4	Yes, it is also a threat to us, where our school has a field or playground that is not too large and this may also be one of the factors that prospective students are less interested in entering our school	0,2
		It could be because for now facilities such as fields or yards for students to play are very narrow, maybe that makes the guardians less interested	0,3	Yes, it is also very influential, because the building in our school is simpler than the surrounding schools where the building is also better	0,3
4	Method	Our school does not yet have a superior program that can be an attraction for prospective new students.	0,5	Other schools already offer specialized programs, while we still run the standard curriculum.	0,6

No	Aspects	Internal	Weight	External	Weight
		For now, teachers do not experience any difficulties in applying learning methods	0,5	Other schools already offer specialized programs, while we still run the standard curriculum.	0,7
5	Machine	For now, schools already have technological equipment such as computers and others, but it is not enough to be adequate because there is a shortage of	0,6	For the use of technology, our school is also just as superior, only the limitations of technological tools make us a little behind other schools	0,6
		For now, the learning media tool is very new and its maintenance is also very concerned so it has not had much impact	0,6	For the support of the provision of ICT tools, indeed our school is lacking and it is a serious threat to our school to be able to compete with other schools, we really hope that in the future our school will get enough ICT equipment assistance so that learning will be effective	0,5
6	Market	The school for now is very well known in the surrounding community and the image of the school in the eyes of the community is also good for now	0,7	For some people, they must prefer to send their children to their favorite schools, but there are also local communities who prefer to enroll their children in our school	0,6
		For the level of competition with other schools that are superior, our school is indeed far inferior both in terms of buildings and facilities, but we will continue to try our best to be able to continue to be able to compete	0,5	For that there may not be one because the school currently has a good image	0,8
7	Minute	The schedule of school promotion activities has been very effective because the school always prioritizes school promotion activities so that the school is better known	0,8	No, because the schedule for the admission of prospective new students is carried out simultaneously in accordance with the schedule set by the agency.	0,9

No	Aspects	Internal	Weight	External	Weight
		Teaching and learning activities are very efficient because schools follow the schedule set by the office	0,8	For school promotion activities we always pay very good attention to it so I am sure it will not be too late with other schools	1
8	Information	The school already has active information media such as the web and social media	0,8	When it comes to school information, our school is also easy to access both from the web and from social media	1
		For this reason, communication between the school and the parents of students has been very effective, the school often invites the student's guardians to deliberate about the condition of the children at school	0,8	Our school has been very active in spreading the excellence or achievements of students on our school social media	0,9

4. Discussion.

4.1 Reframing the SWOT Findings Through School-Choice Theory

Read individually, the strengths identified in Section 4.1, an adequate teacher-student ratio, functioning ICT equipment, effective communication with current parents, and administratively punctual admission processes, describe a school that meets baseline operational standards. Read against school-choice theory, however, these same strengths share a common limitation: they are largely *internally* oriented, benefiting students and parents who are already enrolled, rather than *externally* signaled in ways that would influence a prospective parent's comparison between schools (Bosetti, 2004). A teacher ratio of 1:13, for instance, is a genuine strength by national benchmarks (Nurmayuli et al., 2024), but it is not a visible, comparison-ready signal in the way a flagship program, a renovated building, or a widely publicized achievement would be. This asymmetry, solid internal fundamentals paired with weak external differentiation, offers a more precise explanation for the school's enrollment pattern than either explanation alone (pure quality deficit, or pure demographic decline) would provide.

This interpretation is consistent with, and extends, prior findings that teacher competence and facility quality function as necessary but not sufficient conditions for parental choice (Sukmawati, 2025; Apriliani et al., 2025); the present case suggests that *sufficiency* additionally depends on whether these conditions are made externally legible relative to competing schools, a mechanism that is easy to overlook in single-school studies that do not explicitly theorize the comparative, market-like structure of parental decision-making (Bekele & Kenea, 2024).

Teacher competence itself is not static in this case: informants described an active, if informally organized, culture of continuing professional development, consistent with evidence that internal collaboration and regular training meaningfully improve both instructional quality and institutional image over time (Efendi & Sholeh, 2023). Likewise, the school's incremental adoption of instructional technology (Section 4.1) reflects a broader recognition in the Indonesian primary-education literature that technology functions as a driver of pedagogical innovation, provided it is paired with adequate teacher training rather than treated as a stand-alone acquisition (Firdos et al., 2023; Permana et al., 2024). Community-facing activities, competitions, extracurricular involvement, and student-led initiatives, further illustrate how motivation-building efforts that begin as internal engagement strategies (Rohmiyati

et al., 2024) can, if intentionally publicized, double as promotional signals to prospective parents observing a school's activities from outside.

4.2 Facilities as the Most Externally Salient Weakness

Among the inhibiting factors identified, facility limitations, the incomplete instructional tools, and particularly the modest playground, recurred most consistently across principal, vice-principal, and parent accounts, and were the factor parent-informants most directly connected to enrollment decisions. This aligns with evidence that physical school environment functions as one of the most immediately observable proxies parents use when comparing schools, precisely because it requires no specialized knowledge to assess (Rosha et al., 2017; Espinosa Andrade et al., 2024). Espinosa Andrade et al. (2024) found that specific categories of infrastructure, rather than large-scale facility investment as a whole correlate most strongly with perceived and actual school quality, a distinction consistent with informants' emphasis on playground space specifically rather than facilities in general. Nja et al. (2023) similarly demonstrate that physical learning space shapes not only academic outcomes but also students' psychological engagement, which plausibly feeds back into the visible "enthusiasm" that, according to informants, itself functions as a promotional signal to prospective parents during competitions and school events.

The financing constraint compounds this facility gap in a self-reinforcing way: because promotional funding is also limited, the school has limited capacity to counterbalance its facility disadvantage through more assertive marketing (Diana et al., 2023; Miskun et al., 2023), meaning the two weaknesses interact rather than operating independently, a dynamic that a purely additive reading of the SWOT categories would obscure. This pattern is consistent with evidence that poorly documented infrastructure needs make it harder for under-resourced schools to secure government or third-party facility funding in the first place (Mubarrak, 2024; Mustofa et al., 2025), which helps explain why the school's facility gap has persisted despite repeated internal requests for improvement. Administrative capacity is a further contributing condition: schools that manage academic and admission administration efficiently, as this school does (Kurniawan, 2015), are not automatically able to convert that efficiency into facility investment, because the two depend on different resources, administrative discipline versus external funding access.

Facility renewal in this context is also shaped by how the school relates to actors beyond its own walls. Community participation in environmental improvement, noted by informants as still informal, illustrates a broader pattern in which community and stakeholder empowerment is treated as instrumental to school quality in principle (Susanty, 2024) but is rarely converted into a structured, ongoing partnership in practice, a gap also visible in the school's still-limited collaboration with universities, training institutions, or industry partners that could otherwise supplement its constrained internal resources (Lahagu et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2023; Septianingsih & Faridatussalam, 2024; Winarti et al., 2021).

4.3 The Absence of a Flagship Program as a Positioning Problem, Not Merely a Curricular Gap

The absence of a distinctive flagship program is, in this study's reading, better understood as a *positioning* problem than a purely curricular one. Competing schools were reported to already offer specialized programs, meaning that even where SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh's implementation of the standard curriculum is competent, it is not differentiated in a market where competing schools have already established their own distinguishing offer. This resonates with Sari et al. (2020), who argue that school image management in the Indonesian context depends heavily on schools actively constructing a distinguishable identity rather than assuming that competent standard delivery will be independently recognized by parents. It is also consistent with international evidence that institutional brand differentiation, not raw service quality alone, drives enrollment-relevant perceptions in competitive education markets (Pinar et al., 2020; Perera et al., 2022), evidence generated in higher education contexts, but conceptually transferable to the basic-education setting examined here, since the underlying mechanism (parents comparing bundles of visible attributes across substitutable options) is structurally similar. Where the school has innovated pedagogically, that innovation has so far been treated as an internal quality improvement (Sani, 2022) rather than as a public-facing positioning asset; showcasing student achievements through PR-style outreach and industry or *dunia usaha–dunia industri* (DU/DI)

partnerships, as practiced by better-positioned comparator schools (Sekarsari et al., 2024), illustrates one concrete route by which curricular competence could be converted into external differentiation rather than remaining internally legible only.

4.4 Information and Marketing: Effective for Retention, Underdeveloped for Acquisition

The school's information practices present an instructive asymmetry. Communication with current parents through WhatsApp groups and social media was consistently described as effective, corroborating evidence that social media is a low-cost, high-reach channel for schools with constrained promotional budgets (Girsang, 2020; Munarsih et al., 2020). However, this communication infrastructure has functioned primarily as a *retention* and satisfaction tool for existing families rather than an *acquisition* tool aimed at prospective parents who are not yet part of the school's network, the audience whose decisions actually determine future enrollment. This distinction matters theoretically because it shows that a school can score well on "information" as an internal-strength category while still under-performing on the enrollment outcome that ultimately depends on external-facing marketing reach (Perera et al., 2022). It also suggests that the marketing literature's emphasis on social media as an enrollment driver (Sari et al., 2020; Perera et al., 2022) needs to be read with an important qualifier for under-enrolled schools specifically: the same channel can be simultaneously well-managed internally and strategically under-utilized externally, depending on whether its content and audience targeting are designed to reach current or prospective families.

This qualifier is reinforced by parallel Indonesian evidence: platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have been shown to broaden public awareness of a school's activities when used deliberately for outward-facing promotion (Amilia et al., 2020), interactive digital media similarly improves the perceived quality of the learning experience being publicized (Indartiwi et al., 2020), and service-marketing innovation more broadly has been linked to increases in prospective-student interest when schools treat promotion as a distinct managerial function rather than an incidental by-product of communication with existing families (Adha, 2024). Sustaining this shift also depends on internal culture: a collaborative orientation among staff toward creativity and shared ownership of the school's public image (Andriastuti, 2024) is what ultimately allows scheduling and promotional activities (Section 4.1, Minute) to be planned around external opportunities such as competitions and community events, rather than around internal convenience alone (Maharani, 2024).

4.5 Interaction Rather Than Accumulation

Taken together, these findings support this study's central theoretical proposition (Section 2.4): enrollment interest at SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh is shaped less by the sum of eight independent SWOT factors than by the *interaction* between internally sound but externally invisible strengths and externally salient, resource-linked weaknesses (facilities, differentiation, promotional funding). Strategic-management scholarship on SWOT analysis in educational settings has cautioned that SWOT diagnosis loses much of its analytic value when treated as a static checklist rather than connected explicitly to a theory of how the identified factors interact and translate into action (Vlados, 2019; Decramer et al., 2022). By explicitly linking the SWOT categories back to school-choice theory's comparative logic, this study addresses that critique directly, and in doing so extends school-choice theory, developed principally around parents choosing *among* already-attractive schools (Bosetti, 2004), to the comparatively under-theorized case of a school working to become a viable, comparison-ready option in the first place.

5. Conclusion

The research results show that the interest in enrolling new prospective students at SD Negeri 9 Banda Aceh is influenced by a combination of internal and external school factors. Supporting factors include the adequacy and competence of teachers, a relatively conducive school environment, the utilization of learning technology, as well as the effectiveness of information dissemination through social media and communication with parents. Meanwhile, the main inhibiting factors include limited facilities and infrastructure, the absence of flagship school programs, limited promotional funding, and competition with other schools that have better facilities and reputation. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the view that parents' decisions in choosing an elementary school are not determined by a single factor, but

by the interaction of various managerial, academic, and school environmental aspects. In educational practice, the results of this research emphasize the importance of continuously strengthening the internal quality of schools, developing flagship programs that are relevant to community needs, as well as planning promotional strategies that are more systematic and collaborative as an effort to increase the attractiveness and public trust in public elementary schools. This research is still limited to mapping the supporting and inhibiting factors of student enrollment interest, and has not formulated strategies to increase student enrollment interest. Therefore, future research can continue this study by formulating strategies and testing the strategies using quantitative methods, so that strong strategies in increasing student interest can be found.

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