



Islamic Character Formation through School-Based Habituation: The Roles of Islamic Education Teachers and the Family Environment

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Abstract

Extracurricular activities are frequently treated as peripheral to the core work of schools, although they can also function as visible expressions of institutional values and educational quality. This study examines how extracurricular activities are managed and how their management contributes to school branding and perceived institutional competitiveness at MI Nurul Iman Tanjung Morawa, an Islamic elementary school in Indonesia. A qualitative case-study design was used, drawing on observation, interviews with school leaders and extracurricular teachers/coaches, and institutional documents. The analysis focused on program architecture, management practices, public visibility, and the meanings attached to these practices in relation to school branding. The findings show that the madrasah organizes a portfolio consisting of compulsory Scouting and elective religious, sports, martial-arts, and arts programs. The programs are managed through planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring practices, including annual program formulation, coach assignment, scheduling, routine supervision, and periodic evaluation. Competitions, performances, exhibitions, and other public-facing activities provide occasions through which program outcomes become visible beyond the school. The case therefore supports an interpretive mechanism in which consistent extracurricular governance enables program quality and visible student outputs, which may contribute to institutional identity, public reputation, and perceived differentiation. However, the study does not establish causal effects on enrollment growth, accreditation results, or graduate outcomes because longitudinal and outcome-specific data were not available.

Keywords: *Extracurricular Activities; School Branding; Competitiveness; Management.*

Abstrak: Kegiatan ekstrakurikuler sering kali dianggap sebagai hal sekunder dibandingkan dengan kegiatan inti sekolah, padahal kegiatan tersebut juga dapat berfungsi sebagai wujud nyata dari nilai-nilai institusi dan kualitas pendidikan. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana kegiatan ekstrakurikuler dikelola dan bagaimana pengelolaan tersebut berkontribusi terhadap “branding” sekolah serta persepsi mengenai daya saing di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (sekolah dasar Islam) Nurul Iman Tanjung Morawa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan mengandalkan observasi, wawancara bersama pimpinan sekolah serta guru/pelatih ekstrakurikuler, dan dokumen institusi. Analisis difokuskan pada struktur program, praktik pengelolaan, visibilitas publik, dan makna yang dilekatkan pada praktik-praktik tersebut dalam kaitannya dengan “branding” sekolah. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa madrasah tersebut menyelenggarakan portofolio kegiatan yang mencakup Pramuka sebagai kegiatan wajib serta program pilihan di bidang

keagamaan, olahraga, seni bela diri, dan seni. Program-program ini dikelola melalui tahapan perencanaan, pengorganisasian, pelaksanaan, dan pemantauan, yang meliputi perumusan program tahunan, penugasan pelatih, penyusunan jadwal, supervisi rutin, dan evaluasi berkala. Berbagai kompetisi, pertunjukan, pameran, dan kegiatan publik lainnya menjadi sarana yang memperlihatkan hasil program kepada pihak di luar sekolah. Dengan demikian, studi kasus ini mendukung mekanisme interpretatif di mana tata kelola ekstrakurikuler yang konsisten memungkinkan terciptanya kualitas program dan capaian siswa yang terlihat nyata; hal ini dapat berkontribusi pada identitas institusi, reputasi publik, dan persepsi mengenai keunikan atau pembeda sekolah. Namun, penelitian ini tidak menetapkan adanya hubungan sebab-akibat terhadap pertumbuhan jumlah siswa, hasil akreditasi, atau capaian lulusan karena ketiadaan data longitudinal maupun data spesifik terkait hasil akhir tersebut.

Kata Kunci: *Ekstrakurikuler; School Branding; Daya Saing; Manajemen.*

INTRODUCTION

Competition among educational institutions increasingly involves more than academic performance alone. Families evaluate schools through multiple signals, including reputation, school climate, values, facilities, and the range of developmental opportunities available to children. Research on school choice has shown that reputation can become a major criterion through which parents interpret institutional quality, while more recent work also indicates that educational branding can influence how families make sense of the emotional and symbolic value of a school (Garganourakis et al., 2023; Bertotti, 2025). In this context, extracurricular activities can be strategically important because they are highly visible, involve direct student participation, and generate experiences and achievements that can be communicated to parents and the wider community.

In Indonesian educational management literature, school image and branding are increasingly associated with institutional attractiveness and public trust. Firmandani et al. (2023), for example, showed that school image, cost, and promotion are related to efforts to attract new students, while Azizah and Halwati (2023) emphasized the role of school branding in strengthening public awareness. In Islamic education, Nanda Pratama et al. (2025) discussed pesantren-based branding as a strategy for improving educational competitiveness, and Badarwan et al. (2026) showed that brand positioning, identity, and personality can shape stakeholder perceptions in Islamic educational institutions. These studies establish that image, identity, and reputation matter, but they do not fully explain how routine internal management practices turn student-development programs into credible and repeated signals of institutional distinctiveness.

Extracurricular activities are particularly relevant to this problem. In many schools, they remain administratively positioned as supplementary programs, even though they can develop discipline, leadership, creativity, religious commitment, social competence, and nonacademic achievement

(Sundari, 2021; Izzati et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2024). Their strategic value, however, cannot be assumed. A broad activity portfolio does not automatically create a strong school brand. The institutional effect depends on whether activities are systematically planned, resourced, implemented, evaluated, and connected to forms of public visibility that stakeholders can recognize as evidence of the school's educational values.

This distinction requires conceptual clarity. In this article, school branding refers to the strategic process through which an educational institution aligns its intended identity, service practices, and communication so that stakeholders can recognize a coherent institutional meaning. Brand identity refers to the attributes and values the institution seeks to project; brand image refers to stakeholders' current perceptions of those attributes; reputation refers to more accumulated evaluations formed through repeated experiences and information; and promotion refers to deliberate communication activities used to make programs or achievements visible. These constructs are related but not interchangeable (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2022). Recent reviews likewise emphasize that school branding is broader than visual promotion because it incorporates service quality, transparency, institutional reputation, and ongoing stakeholder trust (Khonsa et al., 2026).

The research gap is therefore more specific than a general lack of studies on school branding. Existing studies have documented relationships between image and student attraction (Firmandani et al., 2023), examined branding strategies in Islamic or pesantren-based institutions (Nanda Pratama et al., 2025; Badarwan et al., 2026), and demonstrated the importance of reputation in parental school choice (Garganourakis et al., 2023). What remains insufficiently explained is the organizational mechanism connecting the governance of extracurricular activities to visible program outcomes and, subsequently, to institutional identity, reputation, and perceived competitiveness at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level. This mechanism is important because it shifts analysis from branding as communication alone to branding as an outcome of consistent educational management.

Against this background, this study analyzes how extracurricular activities are organized at MI Nurul Iman Tanjung Morawa and how the observed management practices can be understood in relation to school branding and perceived institutional competitiveness. Rather than claiming that extracurricular activities directly cause enrollment growth or accreditation outcomes, the study asks how a managed extracurricular portfolio creates institutional signals that can support differentiation and public recognition. Its theoretical contribution is a case-derived governance-to-branding mechanism: governance consistency supports program quality and visible outputs; visible outputs provide material for institutional identity and public exposure; and repeated exposure can contribute to reputation,

trust, and perceived competitive positioning. The mechanism is presented as an interpretive proposition grounded in the case, not as a statistically tested causal model.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to examine extracurricular management as an institutional practice within its organizational context. MI Nurul Iman Tanjung Morawa was treated as the unit of analysis because the madrasah operates a varied extracurricular portfolio and integrates religious, character, sports, and arts development within its educational programs. The case-study approach was appropriate for examining not only what programs existed but also how managerial routines, program implementation, and public-facing activities were connected within the institution.

Data were drawn from three sources: observations of extracurricular implementation, interviews with key actors involved in program management, and institutional documentation. Informants were selected purposively from role categories with direct responsibility for planning, coordinating, or implementing extracurricular activities: the head of the madrasah, the vice principal for curriculum, and teachers or extracurricular coaches. Institutional documents included program plans, activity schedules, achievement records, and other supporting administrative materials described in the case record. The available field documentation identifies these informant categories but does not retain a complete enumerated interview list or exact fieldwork dates. Accordingly, the study does not use frequency-based claims that would depend on a documented sample count.

Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation at the level of the available case record: interpretations were checked against the convergence of interview summaries, observations, and institutional documents. The revised analysis gives greater evidentiary weight to practices that are concretely described across the case material, such as program classifications, weekly schedules, planning routines, role assignments, monitoring intervals, and evaluation criteria. No separate member-checking protocol or retained verbatim transcript archive was available in the case documentation; consequently, the article does not present reconstructed quotations as if they were verbatim interview evidence. This limitation is explicitly acknowledged.

Data analysis followed an interactive process of condensation, display, interpretation, and verification. In the first analytical cycle, descriptive codes were organized around program type, student-development purpose, management function, resource allocation, implementation routine, evaluation practice, achievement/visibility, and stakeholder-facing activity. In the second cycle, related codes were grouped into broader themes: (1)

extracurricular portfolio and institutional identity, (2) governance and program consistency, (3) public visibility and branding, and (4) perceived competitiveness. These themes were then interpreted through strategic educational management and school-branding concepts. Importantly, the revised analysis distinguishes between empirical observations documented in the case and interpretive links proposed by the researchers. Claims that require longitudinal enrollment data, accreditation component data, audience-response metrics, or graduate tracer evidence are not treated as demonstrated outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extracurricular Portfolio Based on Students' Talents and Interests

The extracurricular portfolio at MI Nurul Iman Tanjung Morawa was organized around both common character formation and student-specific interests. Scouting functioned as a compulsory activity, while elective activities were grouped into religious, sports and martial-arts, and arts/cultural domains. This structure indicates that the madrasah was not merely accumulating unrelated clubs; it was organizing extracurricular provision around multiple dimensions of student development that were consistent with its Islamic elementary-school identity.

Scouting was conducted regularly on Fridays and was used to support discipline, responsibility, leadership, independence, teamwork, and social awareness. In the elective religious domain, the case record describes a Pesantren Kilat program integrating Qur'an memorization (*tahfiz*), recitation (*tilawah*), and training for student preachers. These activities combine religious competence with public speaking and leadership. In sports and martial arts, the madrasah offered a football school program and pencak silat, while the arts program included angklung, nasyid, calligraphy, dance, and coloring activities. The case therefore shows a program architecture in which religious values coexist with physical, social, and creative development.

The empirical contribution of this program diversity should be stated carefully. The case supports the conclusion that students were given differentiated extracurricular options, but it does not directly measure changes in engagement, self-confidence, or learning motivation. Accordingly, such outcomes are treated as plausible educational benefits supported by prior literature rather than as measured effects in this case (McCabe et al., 2020; Supatmin & Hidayat, 2025). What the case directly demonstrates is institutional provision: the madrasah deliberately maintained compulsory and elective pathways, assigned coaches with relevant expertise, and scheduled activities in a recurring manner.

From a branding perspective, this portfolio contributes first to brand identity rather than automatically to brand image. The combination of Scouting, Islamic programs, sports, martial arts, and arts gives the institution

a set of observable attributes that it can consistently associate with holistic student development. The religious programs reinforce the madrasah's value-based identity, while sports and arts broaden the institutional proposition beyond classroom achievement. This identity becomes strategically relevant when the outputs of these programs are visible to stakeholders.

Extracurricular Program Governance as a Consistency Mechanism

The strategic significance of the extracurricular portfolio depended on its governance. The case record describes a management cycle corresponding to planning, organizing, implementation, and control. Planning occurred at the beginning of the academic year through deliberation involving the head of the madrasah, curriculum and student-affairs leadership, and administrative personnel. The process included identifying student interests, determining program needs, allocating budgets, and assigning teachers or coaches according to relevant competencies. This planning function linked student-development needs with institutional capacity and reduced the risk that activities would operate as isolated or purely incidental initiatives.

Organizing translated plans into operational arrangements. Programs were classified by annual and semester cycles, students were grouped according to ability where relevant, coaching ratios were considered, and schedules were arranged to avoid conflict with intracurricular learning. The case also notes the assignment of accompanying teachers so that activities could continue when the primary coach was unavailable. These arrangements are important analytically because reliability and continuity are prerequisites for any program to become a credible institutional signal. A school cannot sustain a recognizable brand around extracurricular excellence if programs are irregular, dependent on a single individual, or poorly coordinated.

Implementation was coordinated primarily through student-affairs leadership. Scouting was scheduled on Fridays, whereas sports, arts/cultural, and religious activities were conducted on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The significance of these schedules lies less in the particular days than in the evidence of routinization. Regular implementation converts a formal program list into repeated educational practice. Consistency also creates opportunities for students to produce visible outputs—performances, demonstrations, competition participation, and achievements—that can later enter stakeholder perceptions of the school.

Control and evaluation were also described as recurring practices. Monitoring occurred after activities, while evaluation was conducted at weekly, monthly, and quarterly intervals. The criteria mentioned in the case included attendance, program implementation, competency achievement, adequacy of practice time, and competition results. These concrete criteria provide stronger evidence of controlling than a generic statement that "evaluation occurred." They indicate that the madrasah used operational

information to review whether programs were being implemented and whether intended outputs were being achieved. The available case documentation does not reproduce the monitoring forms themselves, so the study limits its claim to the existence and described content of these routines.

The relationship between the management cycle and branding is therefore mediated rather than direct. Planning creates program-value alignment; organizing creates role clarity and continuity; implementation creates repeated educational experiences and visible student outputs; and control supports consistency and adjustment. Together, these functions can make the extracurricular proposition more credible. In this sense, POAC is not treated merely as a descriptive management framework but as a mechanism through which an intended school identity can be enacted consistently enough to become observable to stakeholders (Bayu Astra et al., 2024; Sahid et al., 2021).

Constructing School Branding through Visible Extracurricular Outcomes

The case suggests that extracurricular outcomes entered the school's public presence through competitions, arts festivals, community activities, auditions, exhibitions, and other school-hosted events. Participation in football, pencak silat, Qur'anic recitation, nasyid, angklung, and related activities placed students and the institution in settings where external audiences could observe program outputs. These are concrete channels of visibility documented in the case. The study did not, however, collect social-media analytics, audience surveys, or systematic records of public reactions; it therefore interprets these events as opportunities for institutional communication rather than as direct proof that public perception improved.

This distinction clarifies the branding mechanism. Promotion is the deliberate act of making information visible. Brand identity is the meaning the school intends to project—for this case, an Islamic elementary school that develops religion, character, sport, leadership, and creativity. Brand image is the perception held by stakeholders at a given time, whereas reputation is a more cumulative evaluation built through repeated information and experience (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016). Competitions and public performances can function as promotional or visibility events, but their branding value depends on whether stakeholders interpret the visible output as credible evidence of the school's identity.

The case provides several forms of what can be called observable institutional evidence: recurring activities, coached student preparation, participation in external competitions, performances, and the presentation of student work. These outputs are stronger branding materials than slogans alone because they are connected to actual educational processes. This interpretation is consistent with recent literature emphasizing that educational branding is sustained by service quality, stakeholder experience,

and institutional credibility rather than by promotion in isolation (Khonsa et al., 2026; Badarwan et al., 2026). It also aligns with research showing that parents often use school reputation and socially circulated information when making school choices (Garganourakis et al., 2023).

Although the madrasah hosted public-facing educational activities, the available data do not provide a verified count of hosted events, time-series information, or a complete stakeholder attendance record. The evidence therefore supports the narrower interpretation that the madrasah sometimes functioned as a host for educational activities that created opportunities for direct interaction with external stakeholders. The significance of hosting lies in exposure and interaction rather than in an unverified claim of regional hub status.

The evidence also does not support claiming that the extracurricular portfolio is “difficult to imitate” or constitutes a sustainable competitive advantage. No systematic comparison with neighboring schools was conducted. Instead, the case supports the narrower concept of perceived differentiation: the combination of religious, character, sports, and arts programs gives MI Nurul Iman a recognizable institutional profile that can distinguish it in stakeholder perceptions. Whether this differentiation produces a durable market advantage would require comparative and longitudinal evidence beyond the scope of this case.

A Case-Derived Mechanism Linking Extracurricular Governance and Perceived Competitiveness

The most important synthesis from the case is a governance-to-branding mechanism rather than a simple claim that extracurricular activities improve competitiveness. The mechanism can be represented as follows:

Table 1. Case-derived governance-to-branding mechanism and evidentiary status.

Stage	Empirical basis in the case	Analytical interpretation
Governance consistency	Annual planning; role allocation; recurring schedules; coach assignment; monitoring and periodic evaluation.	Internal management aligns resources and stabilizes delivery.
Program quality and visible outputs	Structured religious, Scouting, sports, martial-arts, and arts programs; competition participation;	Consistent programs create observable evidence of the intended institutional identity.

Public visibility	performances and student work. Competitions, festivals, community activities, exhibitions, auditions, and school-hosted activities.	Outputs become visible to stakeholders beyond the classroom; this is exposure, not proof of positive perception.
Reputation and trust	Not directly measured with stakeholder surveys; inferred from the repeated visibility mechanism and interpreted alongside school-choice literature.	Repeated credible signals may contribute to accumulated reputation and public trust.
Perceived competitiveness	No comparative market-share or longitudinal enrollment data were available.	Competitiveness is treated as perceived differentiation/positioning, not demonstrated causal advantage.

The first two stages of this mechanism are strongly grounded in the case record. Governance routines and program characteristics are directly described through planning procedures, role allocation, recurring schedules, coaching arrangements, monitoring, and public-facing activities. The transition from visible outputs to reputation and trust is more interpretive because the study did not administer stakeholder-perception measures. The final link to competitiveness is therefore treated as perceived institutional positioning, not as a measured increase in market share.

This distinction also constrains claims about accreditation, applicant trends, and graduate progression. First, accreditation status should not be presented as an outcome caused by extracurricular management. Accreditation is a multidimensional institutional assessment, and the supplied case record did not include an accreditation certificate, component scores, or evidence that would isolate extracurricular contributions. Accordingly, accreditation is not used as proof of the effect of extracurricular activities. Second, the study does not claim that the number of new applicants increased each year because no longitudinal enrollment series was supplied. Third, it does not attribute graduates' subsequent school admissions to extracurricular participation because no tracer dataset or admission records were available.

These changes reduce causal overstatement and keep the argument within the evidentiary limits of the case.

Within those limits, the case still offers a meaningful contribution. Competitiveness in this study is conceptualized as the institution's capacity to present a recognizable and credible educational proposition in a context where families compare schools. The relevant indicators are therefore qualitative: coherence of the extracurricular portfolio, consistency of delivery, visibility of student outputs, and the resulting potential for stakeholder recognition. This is compatible with research on school choice showing that reputation and perceived school characteristics influence how families differentiate among institutions, even when the underlying determinants of choice are complex (Garganourakis et al., 2023; Bertotti, 2025).

The case-derived mechanism also specifies organizational conditions under which extracurricular activities are more likely to function as branding assets: leadership coordination, alignment with institutional values, competent coaches, stable scheduling, resource support, monitoring, and opportunities for public visibility. Without these conditions, extracurricular activities may remain fragmented and promotional claims may exceed the educational evidence available to support them. With these conditions, activities can generate repeated, observable signals that make the school's intended identity more credible.

The theoretical contribution of the study is therefore modest but specific. It proposes that in an Islamic elementary-school context, school branding can be produced from inside the educational process rather than added afterward as external promotion. Strategic branding emerges when internal governance creates consistent service experiences and visible outcomes that stakeholders can associate with a distinctive institutional identity. This proposition extends studies that focus on image, promotion, or enrollment intention by highlighting the internal managerial work that precedes public reputation (Firmandani et al., 2023; Nanda Pratama et al., 2025; Badarwan et al., 2026).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study has several limitations that are material to the interpretation of its findings. The archived case documentation did not preserve the exact number of interviewees, precise fieldwork dates, a member-checking log, or a verbatim quotation archive. The study also did not include longitudinal applicant data, comparative data from neighboring schools, stakeholder-perception surveys, accreditation component records, audience-response metrics, or graduate tracer data. Consequently, the findings should not be read as causal evidence that extracurricular management increases enrollment, accreditation scores, or graduate progression. The study instead provides an analytically bounded explanation of how documented management and

visibility practices can support institutional identity, reputation formation, and perceived differentiation.

Future research should test the proposed mechanism with mixed methods and comparative designs. Useful extensions would include multi-year applicant and enrollment data, parent surveys, social-media or event-reach metrics, direct comparison with nearby schools, systematic documentation of awards, and graduate tracer data. Such evidence would allow researchers to determine which links in the proposed mechanism are merely plausible and which are empirically associated with measurable competitive outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study shows that extracurricular activities at MI Nurul Iman Tanjung Morawa are managed as a structured portfolio rather than as isolated supplementary events. Compulsory Scouting and elective religious, sports, martial-arts, and arts programs are supported by annual planning, role assignment, recurring schedules, coaching arrangements, monitoring, and periodic evaluation. Public-facing competitions, performances, exhibitions, and hosted activities provide occasions through which the outcomes of these programs become visible beyond the classroom.

The principal contribution of the study is a governance-to-branding mechanism: consistent governance supports program quality and visible outputs; visible outputs provide credible material for institutional identity and public exposure; repeated exposure can support reputation and trust; and these processes can contribute to perceived institutional differentiation. The model should be understood as a case-derived interpretive mechanism rather than a demonstrated causal chain. Claims regarding enrollment growth, accreditation outcomes, graduate progression, or sustainable competitive advantage require additional longitudinal and comparative evidence.

Practically, madrasah managers seeking to use extracurricular activities as strategic assets should begin with management quality rather than promotion. Programs should be aligned with institutional values and student needs, assigned to competent coaches, scheduled consistently, evaluated with explicit indicators, and documented in ways that make outcomes verifiable. Schools should also track stakeholder perceptions, applicant trends, participation data, achievements, and graduate outcomes so that future branding claims are supported by evidence. Under these conditions, extracurricular management can contribute not only to student development but also to a more coherent, credible, and recognizable institutional identity.

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