

# Leadership in Educational Benchmarking: A Case Study on Principal Leadership at Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Pekanbaru

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of principal leadership in implementing benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru, focusing on public relations. Unlike conventional benchmarking studies that compare multiple aspects between schools, this research adopts a targeted approach, emphasizing the impact of public relations on school performance and reputation. A qualitative descriptive research design was used, centering on the principal and deputy principal responsible for public relations. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed using data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion techniques. The findings were then compared with relevant theories and prior research on benchmarking in education. The study found that implementing benchmarking in collaboration with MAN 1 Pekanbaru significantly improved public relations performance at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru. One of the key improvements was in external communication, evidenced by a structured and effective communication strategy. This included the strategic use of social media and digital platforms to enhance outreach and engagement with stakeholders. The findings highlight the effectiveness of focused benchmarking in improving public relations. The structured approach enabled the adoption of best practices, leading to enhanced school visibility and reputation. These results suggest that targeted benchmarking can serve as a model for improving other aspects of school management. This study demonstrates that benchmarking in public relations can be a valuable strategy for school improvement. Principal leadership plays a critical role in facilitating this process, ensuring that best practices are identified and integrated effectively. This approach has the potential to be expanded to other areas to enhance overall school performance.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a structured effort to create a learning environment that enables students to develop their potential. According to the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003, education aims to

enhance national intelligence and improve the quality of human resources. To achieve these objectives, educational institutions operate through three main pathways: formal, non-formal, and informal education. Formal education consists of elementary (SD/MI), junior high (SMP/MTs), and senior high (SMA/SMK/MA) levels, which are further categorized into public and private schools. Public schools are managed by the government, ensuring financial support, facilities, and teaching staff, including school principals. In contrast, private schools are operated by non-governmental organizations or private entities.

In the era of globalization, improving the quality of education has become a pressing necessity for educational institutions. With increasing competition, schools must adopt strategies that enhance the effectiveness of their educational services. One such strategy is benchmarking, a method used to compare an institution's performance with best practices from other leading organizations. Benchmarking helps schools identify, analyze, and adopt proven strategies to improve their own performance. In the context of education, this approach allows institutions to enhance key areas such as teaching quality, administrative efficiency, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring continuous development and competitiveness (Mustafa M. Bodrick et al., 2024).

The leadership of the principal plays a key role in the implementation of benchmarking in schools (Aimang et al., 2024). As a leader, the principal must have a clear vision, the ability to move and inspire all components of the school, and the ability to manage change effectively. At MTS Fadhilah Pekanbaru, the application of benchmarking is one of the main focuses in efforts to improve the quality of education. The principal at MTS Fadhilah Pekanbaru is faced with the challenge of not only understanding and implementing the concept of benchmarking, but also to adapt it to the specific conditions and needs of the school.

Effective leadership in implementing benchmarking at MTS Fadhilah Pekanbaru involves a series of systematic strategic steps. First, the principal must be able to conduct a situation analysis to identify areas that need improvement. This step involves collecting accurate and relevant data regarding the current performance of the school. Furthermore, the principal must determine the standard or benchmark that will be used as a benchmark. This benchmark can be taken from other schools that have proven to excel in the same field or from applicable national and international standards.

The implementation of benchmarking does not only stop at the stage of identification and standard-setting. The principal must be able to communicate the vision and goals of benchmarking to all school residents, so that awareness and mutual commitment are created to achieve the targets that have been set. In addition, school principals must also ensure that there is a continuous monitoring and evaluation system to assess the extent of the achievements that have been achieved and to identify areas that still need improvement (Pasholikov, 2024).

In addition, the implementation of benchmarking at MTS Fadhilah Pekanbaru also requires support from various parties, both internal and external. The principal must be able to establish effective cooperation with the school committee, students' parents, and other interested parties. This collaboration is important to ensure that all the resources needed for the implementation of benchmarking are available and used optimally. Support from external parties, such as education offices and other educational institutions, is also very important in providing guidance, training, and other resources needed by schools.

School principals have a crucial role in implementing benchmarking to improve the quality of education. This study focuses on the application of benchmarking by school principals at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru, especially in the field of public relations. The benchmarking was carried out with MAN 1 Pekanbaru partners and aimed to identify best practices that can be adopted and adapted to improve school performance. Public relations is one of the significant areas that support the success of educational institutions (Malapa et al., 2023). Through an effective public relations strategy, schools can build a positive image, expand their network of cooperation, and increase participation and support from various stakeholders. In this context, this study explores how the leadership of school principals in

implementing benchmarking can have an impact on improving public relations performance at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru.

The implementation of benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru showed significant improvements in two main areas of public relations: external communication and cooperation with the community. More structured and effective external communication strategies, as well as increased cooperation with the community, have been shown to strengthen the relationship between the school and various stakeholders. This creates a more supportive environment for the growth and development of the school.

In general, the benefits obtained from benchmarking can be grouped into three: 1. Cultural change, namely benchmarking allows educational institutions to determine new, more realistic performance. Apart from that, benchmarking also plays a role in convincing every customer of the credibility of the target. For example, emphasizing the vision and mission of the educational institution. 2. Performance Improvement, that is, benchmarking helps educational institutions to identify certain gaps in performance to select processes to be improved. 3. Increasing human resource capabilities, namely, benchmarking provides a basis for training, various parties are aware of the gap between what they do and what other people in other institutions do (Khakimyanova, 2021). Involvement of all parties in solving problems so that human resources experience increased abilities and skills (Syme et al., 2021).

One concrete example of the benefits of benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru is the improvement of external communication strategies. After benchmarking with MAN 1 Pekanbaru, MTs Fadhilah realized the need to use social media more effectively to increase interaction with the school community. The principal is leading initiatives to develop more engaging and informative social media content, such as videos about school activities and student achievements. For example, before benchmarking, information about school activities and student achievement was often only conveyed through bulletin boards and circulars. After benchmarking, schools started posting videos and photos of activities on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. As a result, the involvement of the school community has increased dramatically. Parents become more informed and involved in school activities, such as attending school events and participating in school-held programs (Rodrigues & Reis Filho, 2023).

Another example is increased cooperation with the community. After observing the best practices at MAN 1 Pekanbaru, MTs Fadhilah developed a partnership program with various local institutions to hold workshops and social activities together. For example, partnering with local non-profit organizations in literacy programs helps increase students' interest in reading while strengthening the relationship between schools and communities. The principal plays a crucial role in coordinating and directing these initiatives, ensuring that each program runs smoothly and achieves the desired goals (Harris et al., 2019).

Benchmarking is a structured process that requires a series of steps to be effectively implemented. First, management commitment is crucial, as benchmarking demands resources, time, and institutional approval. A strong mandate and commitment from leadership, such as school principals, play a vital role in the success of benchmarking activities (Nurhuda, 2023).

Before initiating a benchmarking study or visit, an institution must thoroughly understand its own processes. This includes identifying strengths and weaknesses, recognizing areas that align with expectations, and determining which processes need improvement. Once the internal processes are analyzed, the next step is selecting the specific process to be benchmarked. Benchmarking can focus on various aspects, including institutional behavior, organizational processes, services, systems, and the quality of graduates.

To facilitate the benchmarking process, a dedicated benchmarking team must be formed (Harahap, 2020). This team is responsible for researching best-in-class practices and identifying institutions with superior processes that can serve as benchmarking partners. These partners should be selected based on their excellence in a particular domain and their willingness to engage in a benchmarking collaboration.

They do not necessarily have to be from the same type of institution but should demonstrate best practices in their respective fields.

Once a suitable benchmarking partner has been identified, it is important to establish an agreement with them. This involves contacting the partner and reaching mutual understanding regarding the benchmarking activities. After securing this agreement, the benchmarking team proceeds with data collection, where they observe, gather, and document information on the partner's processes, particularly focusing on key success factors (Henry H. Bi, 2018).

Following data collection, an in-depth analysis is conducted to compare findings with the institution's existing processes. This helps identify performance gaps and areas requiring improvement. Based on these findings, the team devises action plans to bridge these gaps or enhance existing practices. If the proposed changes are feasible, desirable, and have stakeholder support, they should be adopted and implemented effectively (Shalihin, 2023).

Once the changes are put into practice, continuous monitoring is essential to assess their impact. Typically, the institution's performance improves with the implementation of better practices. Through ongoing refinements and continuous improvement, organizations can enhance their competitiveness. Benchmarking is not merely about imitation; it aims to surpass existing best practices. Since leading institutions continuously develop and improve their processes, benchmarking efforts should be regularly updated. Maintaining strong relationships with other top-performing institutions helps ensure continuous progress and long-term excellence (Hakim et al., 2021).

The implementation of the 14-step benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru is relevant because it provides a systematic and structured framework for school principals to improve public relations performance. These steps include identifying areas for improvement, selecting the right benchmark partner, collecting comprehensive data, comparative analysis, and implementing and monitoring changes (Sunaengsih et al., 2019). This organized process allows the principal to effectively direct improvement efforts by leveraging the best practices of MAN 1 Pekanbaru.

By following these steps, school principals can ensure that each stage of benchmarking is carried out carefully and on target. These steps help identify performance gaps, set higher standards, and develop concrete strategies to achieve them. In addition, this systematic approach also allows for continuous evaluation and strategy adjustments based on the results obtained, so that improvements in public relations performance can be maintained and improved over time (Jannah & Wahyuningsih, 2024).

The implementation of these 14 benchmarking steps also highlights the important role of leadership in managing change and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in schools. Principals at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru can leverage this framework to lead more effectively, engage all staff, and ensure that all initiatives taken are in line with the goal of improving public relations performance. Thus, these benchmarking measures are not only relevant but also essential to achieve significant and sustainable results in the context of this study.

Many schools do not know about benchmarking, and in general, benchmarking implementation is widely applied in business and industry. Usually, the application of benchmarking in the world of education covers all areas of the school, not focusing on one area that has a big influence on the school. Some schools see that imitating other schools is not a good thing, especially without the school's knowledge, in this case, benchmarking can answer these allegations, benchmarking began to develop in Indonesia around 2010, especially in the world of education, schools can compare themselves with other schools to improve the quality of their schools (Prasetyo & Salabi, 2023).

Many schools are unaware of the concept of benchmarking and do not understand how to apply it, which is often accompanied by the assumption that imitation is a bad practice. This issue has become critical in research on the leadership of school principals in implementing benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru. This ignorance and misunderstanding can hinder the adoption and application of best practices that are essential to improving school performance, especially in the field of public relations. The leadership of the principal plays an important role in changing this paradigm. Without a clear understanding of the benefits of benchmarking, principals may not be able to motivate staff to accept and

implement the best practices identified through the benchmarking process. This lack of understanding can also lead to resistance to change, which ultimately hinders innovation and performance improvement in schools (Khakimyanova, 2021).

A negative perception of benchmarking as mere imitation can undermine the effectiveness of performance improvement initiatives. In the case of MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru, such a viewpoint may create obstacles in adopting external communication strategies and community collaboration efforts that have already yielded success at MAN 1 Pekanbaru. Without benchmarking, schools risk missing valuable opportunities to elevate their standards and learn from the achievements of other institutions. This underscores the necessity of effective education and communication about the true purpose and benefits of benchmarking. It is crucial for school principals to take a proactive role in reshaping these perceptions by demonstrating that benchmarking is not about copying but rather about learning from best practices to drive institutional excellence. This study aims to explore how benchmarking is implemented at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru and to examine the role of leadership in facilitating this process.

## 2. METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which focuses on studying natural settings without manipulating the research object. Descriptive research aims to provide a clear and comprehensive depiction of a situation as it exists (Wang, 2023). In this study, the principal of MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru, serves as the primary informant. Data collection is conducted through interviews, allowing for direct engagement with relevant stakeholders (Hakim et al., 2021).

A qualitative descriptive approach using interviews is particularly well-suited for addressing the research question explored in "Principal Leadership in Implementing Benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru." This method facilitates an in-depth investigation of complex educational phenomena, offering a nuanced understanding of how leadership influences benchmarking practices within the school (Furidha, 2024). By employing interviews, researchers can gather rich insights into the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of key stakeholders, including the principal, staff, and members of the school community (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024).

This approach also enables an assessment of the specific context within MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru, shedding light on internal school dynamics, organizational culture, and factors that contribute to the success or challenges of benchmarking implementation. Given that some schools lack awareness or hold negative perceptions of benchmarking, qualitative research allows for the exploration of underlying reasons for these attitudes and how leadership strategies can address them. The interview data provides detailed narratives that help identify key themes and patterns in the benchmarking process while offering concrete examples that reinforce the research findings (Zou & Xu, 2023).

Thus, the qualitative descriptive approach with interviews serves as a robust and relevant framework for obtaining comprehensive insights. It enables the identification of the principal's leadership role, an understanding of existing challenges, and the formulation of practical recommendations for improving benchmarking practices at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru.

The interviews used in this study are semi-structured interviews. This interview uses a pre-prepared question guide, but gives the interviewer the flexibility to explore the topic further based on the respondent's answers (Deckert & Wilson, 2023). This study uses the interview method as the main technique in data collection to explore the application of benchmarking by school principals at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing flexibility in exploring respondents' answers while maintaining focus on the main theme of the research. The interview guide is structured based on a theoretical framework of benchmarking and educational leadership, with questions designed to explore the implementation process, challenges, and impacts of benchmarking in the school.

The number of respondents was 2 people involving the principal and deputy principal of the public relations section, This selection was based on their involvement in the benchmarking process and

their knowledge of the dynamics of public relations at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru. This approach ensures that the data obtained reflects diverse perspectives and provides a comprehensive picture of the principal's leadership in this context.

In this qualitative research, ethical considerations are a top priority. Before the interview begins, all participants are provided with complete information regarding the purpose of the research, the interview procedure, as well as their rights as respondents, including the right to stop participation at any time without consequences. Consent is obtained from each participant to ensure their willingness to do so voluntarily. In addition, data confidentiality is ensured by maintaining the anonymity of respondents and storing data in a secure environment. The information collected will only be used for academic purposes and will not be shared with third parties without the participant's permission (Bell et al., 2022).

Data analysis in qualitative research is carried out during data collection and after data collection is completed within a certain period. Miles and Huberman, in Sugiyono's book, state that activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and continue continuously until completion so that the data is saturated (Pham, 2024). In this research, the data was analyzed by collecting data, reducing data, displaying data, and summarizing data. In the research of Principal Leadership in Implementing Benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru, the data collected through interviews will be analyzed comparatively with relevant theories, concepts, and previous research results. This analysis process aims to identify the suitability or difference between findings in the field and the existing conceptual framework, so that it can strengthen or develop the theory used. The selected theories and concepts come from literature that focuses on educational leadership, benchmarking, and public relations management (Kordel & Gruber, 2024). The selection of this theory is based on its direct relevance to the focus of research and its use in previous studies that have successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of the application of benchmarking in educational institutions (Gill, 2024).

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Findings

The findings of this study, based on interviews with key informants, reveal that benchmarking is a continuous self-evaluation process in which an educational institution compares itself with top-performing institutions to identify, adopt, and implement superior practices. Essentially, benchmarking allows schools to learn from the best institutions and apply successful strategies to enhance their own performance.

According to the principal of MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru, Ustadz Muhammad Fadhil, the school has engaged in benchmarking activities with other advanced madrasas in Pekanbaru. He explained:

*"We once conducted benchmarking with one of the madrasas in Pekanbaru, carefully selecting a school that we considered highly advanced and well-developed to serve as a model. Before initiating the benchmarking process, I personally visited the selected school to establish rapport and build a collaborative relationship between MTs Fadhilah and the benchmark institution."*

A similar sentiment was expressed by Ustadz Bima, the deputy principal of MTs Fadhilah in charge of public relations and a teacher of Al-Qur'an Hadith. He shared:

*"The principal of MTs Fadhilah actively engages in benchmarking with other schools, and as the deputy head of public relations, I also participate in these activities. Specifically, MTs Fadhilah has benchmarked the public relations strategies of MAN 1 Pekanbaru, as we recognized that MAN 1 had made significant progress in this area. This motivated our principal to collaborate with them in the hope that MTs Fadhilah could also enhance its public relations initiatives in the future."*

These findings highlight the strategic approach taken by MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru in leveraging benchmarking to improve institutional performance. The proactive role of school leadership in selecting benchmarking partners, fostering collaborative relationships, and applying best practices from more advanced institutions plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of benchmarking strategies.

An explicit comparison between the practices of MTs Fadhilah before and after the benchmarking process with MAN 1 Pekanbaru provides a clear picture of the positive impact resulting from the implementation of this strategy. Prior to benchmarking, MTs Fadhilah had a public relations strategy that tended to be passive and limited to traditional approaches, such as the dissemination of physical brochures and the implementation of internal activities with minimal external promotion. As a result, the number of student enrolments per year stagnates at a figure that is only enough to form 2-3 classes.

On the contrary, MAN 1 Pekanbaru has implemented a more proactive and modern public relations approach before benchmarking began. They use social media intensively as the main platform to communicate with the wider community, promote school activities, and display academic and non-academic excellence consistently. In addition, MAN 1 also has a structured public relations team with a clear role in managing external communications, including partnerships with local communities and educational organizations.

Following the benchmarking process with MAN 1 Pekanbaru, MTs Fadhilah began implementing several best practices that had proven effective. One of the key improvements was strengthening its presence on social media by creating informative and engaging content that showcased the school's strengths. This included highlighting student achievements, extracurricular activities, and school facilities that support the teaching and learning process. Additionally, MTs Fadhilah established a dedicated public relations team responsible for managing external communication and fostering relationships with various stakeholders.

The principal of MTs Fadhilah, Ustadz Muhammad Fadhil, emphasized the importance of benchmarking in enhancing the school's reputation:

*"I observed that MAN 1 Pekanbaru is highly developed, particularly in the field of public relations. It is well-known not only within Pekanbaru but also in other regions, attracting many students from outside the city. Recognizing this success, I decided to benchmark MAN 1 Pekanbaru by personally visiting the school and meeting with its principal. Through these discussions, we mutually agreed to proceed with the benchmarking initiative."*

From these insights, it is evident that MTs Fadhilah focused its benchmarking efforts on improving its public relations strategies. The entire school community collaborated in this process, with a significant role played by the deputy principal in charge of public relations. This position carries substantial responsibilities beyond coordinating with the school committee; its primary task is to enhance the school's visibility and reputation both within and beyond the local community.

Benchmarking has proven to be a highly beneficial activity, particularly for schools seeking to accelerate their development. By adopting successful strategies from established institutions, schools across Indonesia can support each other in improving educational quality and institutional growth.

A key aspect of MTs Fadhilah's benchmarking implementation is its increased engagement on social media. The principal highlighted the influence of MAN 1 Pekanbaru's approach:

*"One of the key factors behind MAN 1 Pekanbaru's success is the active role of its deputy principal for public relations in managing social media. They created dedicated accounts for the school on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, consistently posting updates about student activities, teacher initiatives, and even leadership engagements. Inspired by this strategy, MTs Fadhilah is committed to strengthening its social media presence in a similar way."*

By leveraging social media as a tool for communication and outreach, MTs Fadhilah aims to enhance its public image and attract greater community engagement. The benchmarking experience with MAN 1 Pekanbaru has provided a clear framework for the school to adopt and adapt best practices, reinforcing the importance of leadership in driving institutional improvement.

A similar perspective was shared by Ustadz Bima, the deputy principal of MTs Fadhilah in charge of public relations. He emphasized the impact of benchmarking on the school's development and the importance of learning from MAN 1 Pekanbaru's success:

*"As the deputy principal for public relations at MTs Fadhilah, I have observed the significant progress made by MAN 1 Pekanbaru. Through benchmarking, we can adopt their successful strategies with their permission. As a result, I have taken the initiative to actively manage MTs Fadhilah's social media presence. Additionally, I established a content creation team consisting of several students, and together, we regularly post updates on all school activities, mirroring the approach taken by MAN 1 Pekanbaru."*

This initiative demonstrates how benchmarking has influenced MTs Fadhilah's approach to public relations, fostering a more dynamic and engaging online presence. By involving students in content creation, the school not only enhances its visibility but also empowers students with digital media skills. Through this structured effort, MTs Fadhilah aims to strengthen its outreach and further establish itself as a competitive educational institution.



**Figure 1.** Interview with the principal of MTs Fadhilah

Based on interviews with the principal and deputy principal of MTs Fadhilah in charge of public relations, it is evident that the school has actively engaged in benchmarking with MAN 1 Pekanbaru. MTs Fadhilah selected MAN 1 Pekanbaru as its benchmarking partner due to the latter's strong reputation and success in public relations. The significant progress of MAN 1 Pekanbaru, with approximately 1,500 students from various cities, demonstrates its ability to attract a diverse student body, making it an ideal model for benchmarking.

One of the key takeaways from this benchmarking process is the collective effort within MAN 1 Pekanbaru's school community to achieve its vision and mission. While the role of the school principal is crucial, the deputy principal for public relations also plays a vital part in managing the school's external communication. A critical dimension of public relations that was previously underutilized at MTs Fadhilah is the strategic use of social media.

At MAN 1 Pekanbaru, the deputy principal for public relations, along with a dedicated team, actively documents and shares school activities on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. This proactive approach ensures that all aspects of school life—including student achievements, teacher activities, and leadership initiatives—are consistently highlighted. The public relations team operates systematically, assigning roles such as photographers, content creators, and social media managers to ensure that every event is captured and shared promptly.

This constant social media presence not only serves as a record of school activities but also enhances public engagement and strengthens the school's visibility in the broader community. The transparency and accessibility of information through these platforms contribute to MAN 1 Pekanbaru's positive reputation and appeal to prospective students and parents.

By learning from this model, MTs Fadhilah recognizes the importance of an active and well-structured public relations strategy. Through benchmarking, the school aims to replicate and adapt MAN 1 Pekanbaru's best practices, particularly in utilizing social media as a tool for school promotion and community outreach. This initiative is expected to enhance MTs Fadhilah's recognition, attract more students, and foster stronger relationships with various stakeholders.

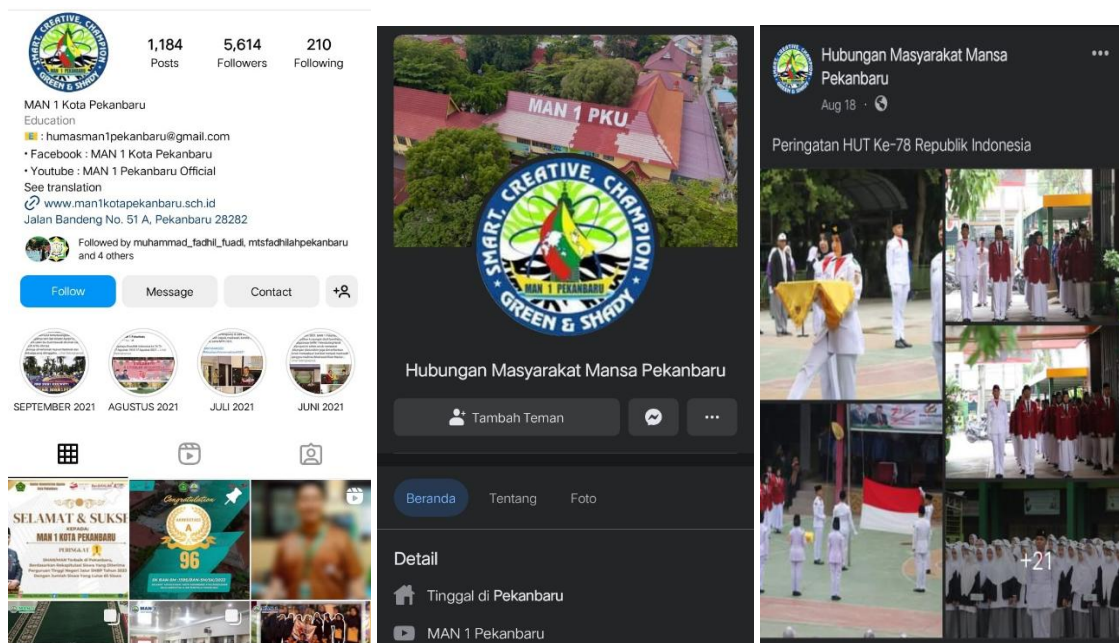


Figure 2. Evidence of MAN 1 Pekanbaru being active on social media

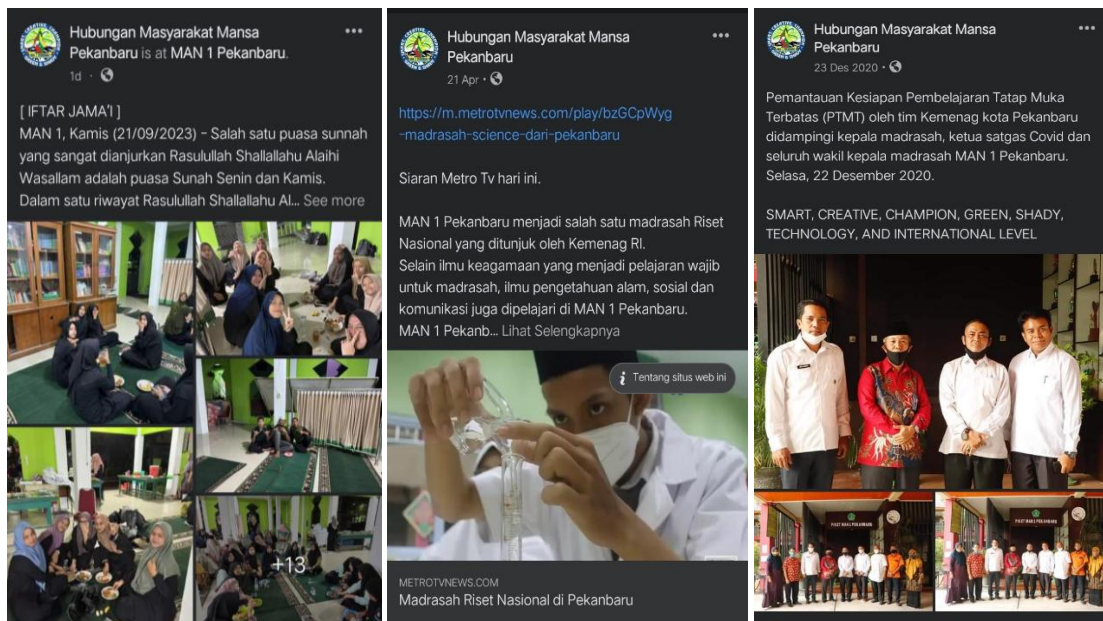


Figure 3. MAN 1 Pekanbaru Posting activities on MAN 1 Pekanbaru’s Facebook Social Media

By consistently uploading all school activities, MAN 1 Pekanbaru enables the public to gain insight into its programs, achievements, and daily operations without needing to visit the school in person. This digital presence makes it easier for prospective students, parents, and the wider community to access up-to-date information about MAN 1 Pekanbaru, strengthening its visibility and reputation.

Through benchmarking, MTs Fadhilah identified its weaknesses in the field of public relations and recognized the need to adopt similar strategies. Since Mr. Muhammad Fadhil’s appointment as principal on August 8, 2020, he has observed and evaluated various madrasahs in Pekanbaru, seeking opportunities for growth and improvement. Inspired by the success of MAN 1 Pekanbaru, the principal aspires to elevate MTs Fadhilah to a comparable or even higher level of development.

As a result of this benchmarking process, MTs Fadhilah has taken proactive steps to enhance its public relations efforts. The school has embraced social media as a key communication tool, regularly sharing updates and documenting school activities. By adopting these best practices, MTs Fadhilah aims to increase its visibility, engage with the community, and position itself as a leading educational institution in the region.

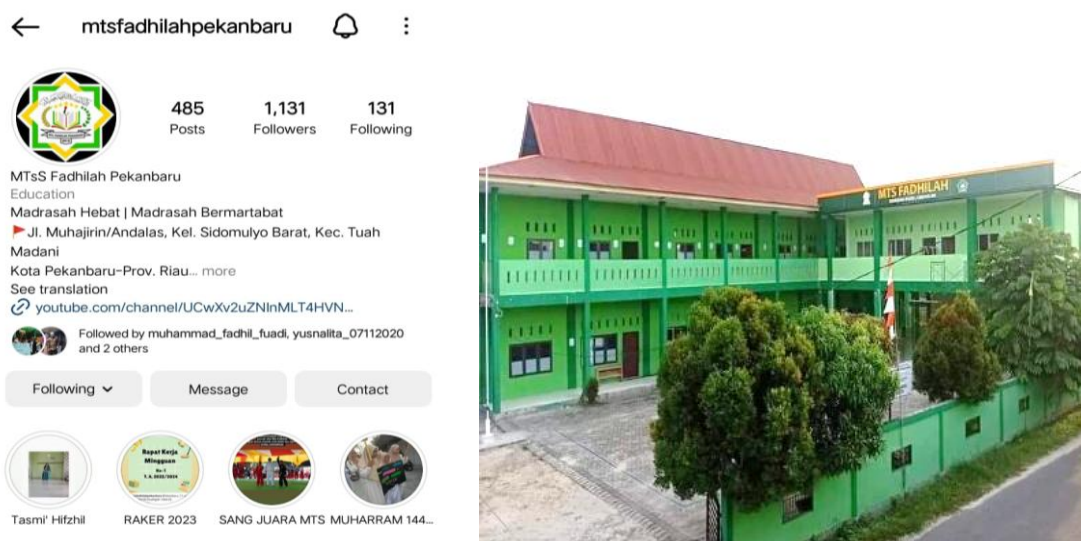
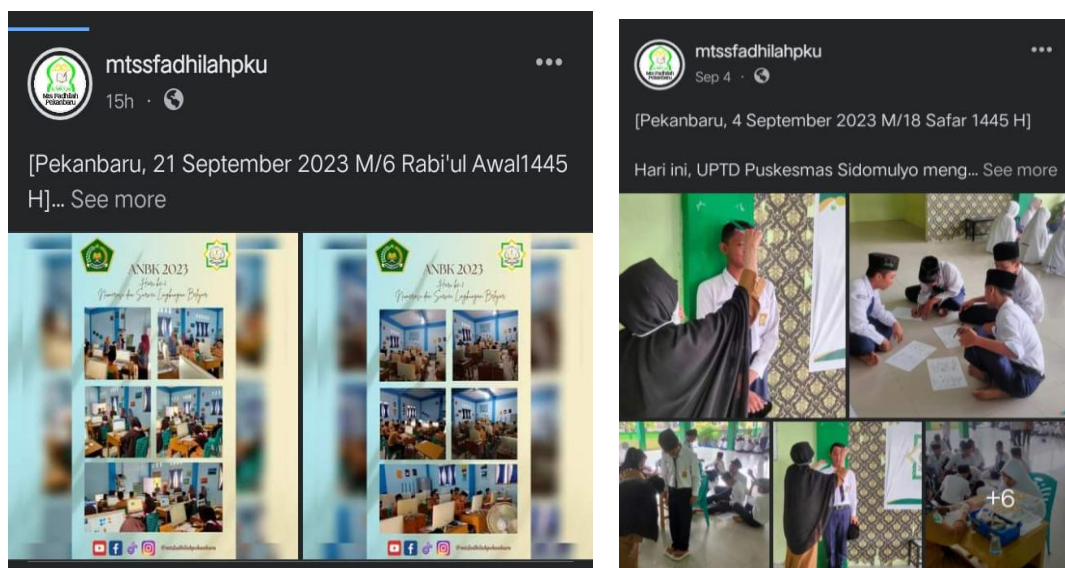


Figure 4. MTs Fadhilah Begins to Be Active on Social Media



**Figure 5.** MTs Fadhilah Posting activities on Mts Fadhilah's Facebook Social Media

### 3.2 Discussion

The benchmarking process at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru presented several significant challenges, testing the institution’s resilience while fostering innovation in overcoming these obstacles. One of the primary challenges encountered was internal resistance from staff and teachers, particularly those accustomed to traditional educational approaches. Many educators initially expressed skepticism toward the new strategies adopted from MAN 1 Pekanbaru, questioning whether these methods aligned with the unique culture and student demographics at MTs Fadhilah. According to Kotter (2012), resistance to change is a common issue in organizational transformation, often stemming from uncertainty, fear of failure, or attachment to existing practices.

Another major challenge was the limited availability of human resources and technology. MTs Fadhilah previously lacked a well-structured public relations team and had to establish one from scratch, requiring intensive training in external communication and social media management. Additionally, technological limitations—such as restricted access to digital tools and a lack of expertise in managing online platforms—posed initial obstacles to implementing the digital marketing strategies learned from MAN 1 Pekanbaru. Research by Fullan (2014) highlights that digital transformation in education is often hindered by inadequate technological infrastructure and insufficient digital literacy among educators and staff.

#### 3.2.1 Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

To address internal resistance, MTs Fadhilah facilitated a series of participatory discussions with all staff members and teachers. This collaborative approach allowed stakeholders to understand the long-term benefits of benchmarking and actively engage in the adaptation process. Studies by Senge (2006) emphasize that fostering a shared vision within an organization helps reduce resistance to change and promotes a culture of continuous learning. Through this strategy, MTs Fadhilah was able to cultivate a sense of ownership among staff, leading to increased commitment to the new initiatives.

To mitigate human resource and technological constraints, the school adopted a gradual and adaptive approach by leveraging external partnerships. MTs Fadhilah sought assistance from alumni with expertise in social media and digital marketing, providing targeted training sessions for staff and students. This aligns with research by Selwyn (2011), which underscores the importance of utilizing external resources to bridge technological gaps in educational institutions. Additionally, the school

prioritized phased investments in technology infrastructure, including upgrading internet connectivity and acquiring digital devices to support social media engagement.

### 3.2.2 Impact of Benchmarking Implementation

The implementation of benchmarking at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru yielded significant improvements, particularly in student enrollment numbers. Before adopting benchmarking strategies, the school struggled to attract enough students to form two or three classes per academic year. However, after implementing a structured public relations approach, including increased social media presence and enhanced external communication, student enrollment more than doubled. Within a short period, MTs Fadhilah was able to establish five to six classes per academic year, demonstrating a clear quantitative improvement in school competitiveness. This aligns with findings from Hargreaves & Fullan (2012), who argue that effective communication and branding strategies in education directly impact institutional growth and public perception.

A major driving factor behind this surge was the optimization of digital communication strategies. By actively engaging with the community through social media platforms, MTs Fadhilah expanded its reach and visibility, making information about the school's strengths more accessible to prospective students and parents. This aligns with research by Greenhow & Lewin (2016), which highlights the role of social media in enhancing educational institutions' outreach and fostering community involvement. As a result, increased transparency and accessibility of information improved public trust, reinforcing MTs Fadhilah's reputation as a progressive and innovative institution.

Beyond the quantitative growth, this transformation also reflects a qualitative shift in public perception. MTs Fadhilah, once perceived as a traditional madrasa with limited outreach, is now seen as a forward-thinking educational institution committed to continuous improvement. This success highlights benchmarking as not just a management tool but an effective strategy for institutional transformation, particularly in areas such as public relations and school promotion (Watson, 2020).

### 3.2.3 Key Lessons and Implications for Other Educational Institutions

MTs Fadhilah's benchmarking experience provides valuable insights for other educational institutions seeking to adopt similar strategies. Strong and committed leadership is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of benchmarking. The principal of MTs Fadhilah played a pivotal role in driving change, ensuring that all stakeholders were actively involved in the process. Research by Leithwood et al. (2020) confirms that visionary leadership is essential in fostering an open and adaptive school culture, particularly during institutional change.

The use of social media as a primary tool for public relations demonstrates that digital technology can be a powerful asset in increasing institutional visibility. Schools can leverage social media platforms to build a positive brand image, expand community engagement, and attract prospective students. Studies by Manca & Ranieri (2017) support this notion, emphasizing that educational institutions utilizing social media effectively can enhance stakeholder communication and foster a sense of community engagement.

The experience of MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru underscores that benchmarking can be successfully implemented across various educational settings, including institutions with limited resources. By adopting a structured and adaptive approach, schools can leverage benchmarking to improve educational quality, strengthen relationships with the community, and enhance institutional competitiveness.

This study provides a valuable reference for schools considering benchmarking as a tool for transformation and innovation. With careful planning, collaborative leadership, and strategic use of digital tools, educational institutions can achieve sustainable growth and position themselves as leaders in their respective fields. Future research could explore the long-term impact of benchmarking on student performance and institutional sustainability, further validating its role as a catalyst for continuous improvement in education.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted at MTs Fadhilah Pekanbaru regarding the implementation of benchmarking, it can be concluded that the principal successfully introduced benchmarking in collaboration with MAN 1 Pekanbaru, particularly in the field of public relations—an initiative previously unexplored by MTs Fadhilah. While often underestimated, the active dissemination of school activities through social media has proven to be a pivotal strategy in enhancing institutional visibility and fostering engagement with the community. The study found that implementing benchmarking significantly improved public relations at MTs Fadhilah, where school events are now consistently documented and shared through official social media platforms, managed in collaboration with the deputy principal for public relations and a dedicated content creation team. Strengthening public relations has not only enhanced the school's reputation but also contributed to increased student enrollment, improved educational facilities, and greater institutional competitiveness. These findings highlight that benchmarking serves not merely as an evaluation tool but as a catalyst for innovation and sustainable development in education. The case of MTs Fadhilah exemplifies how visionary leadership, strategic adaptation, and collaborative engagement can transform challenges into opportunities, ensuring long-term educational excellence. This research not only provides practical insights for MTs Fadhilah but also serves as an inspiration for other educational institutions seeking to leverage benchmarking as a strategic tool for sustainable growth.

Future research on benchmarking in education can be expanded by exploring different institutional settings, levels of education, or specific benchmarking indicators. By applying this research framework to other schools or educational institutions, researchers can develop more comprehensive strategies to enhance institutional quality at various educational levels. Additionally, further studies could examine the long-term impacts of benchmarking on student learning outcomes, teacher performance, and school sustainability, providing deeper insights into its role as a transformative tool in education.

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