



## Educational Service Quality for Madrasah Branding: SERVQUAL Analysis in Private Islamic Schools

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** - This study investigates the role of educational service quality in shaping madrasah branding through five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, within the context of private Islamic junior secondary schools.

**Methodology** - A qualitative multisite approach framed the investigation across two private madrasahs in *Majalengka*. Empirical data were obtained through in-depth interviews involving principals, teachers, students, parents, and community representatives, supported by participatory observation and institutional documentation. Data were interpreted through an interactive analytical process consisting of reduction, categorization, and conclusion development.

**Findings** - Tangibles influence first impressions through physical facilities and institutional visibility. Reliability strengthened public confidence through stable academic practices and consistent instructional delivery. Responsiveness enabled the schools to adapt their educational services to changing social and pedagogical demands. Assurance contributed to institutional credibility through both formal recognition and social trust, while empathy emerged as the strongest element in sustaining emotional attachment among students and parents. Service experience across these dimensions played a greater role in shaping institutional reputation than promotional activities alone.

**Contribution** - The study proposes a conceptual pattern in which service quality develops into trust, forms institutional image, and gradually strengthens branding. This perspective extends SERVQUAL beyond service evaluation and positions it as a strategic framework for institutional reputation development in Islamic educational management.

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## INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are increasingly judged not only by academic outcomes but by the quality of service experienced by students and families in daily school life. Academic achievement, accreditation status, and curriculum structure remain important indicators, yet public trust in schools is often shaped more directly through everyday interactions. Parents observe how teachers communicate, how school administrators respond to problems, how facilities are maintained, and how institutions create an atmosphere that supports learning and personal development. In many educational contexts, service experience serves as the primary analytical lens for stakeholders evaluating institutional quality, directly reflecting the daily operationalization of educational values. Recent studies show that educational institutions capable of maintaining service consistency are more likely to build stable public confidence than those that rely mainly on institutional claims or formal reputation (Clemons & Jance, 2024; Toscano-Hernández et al., 2024).

Changes in parental expectations have strengthened this tendency. Educational decisions are no longer based solely on location, historical reputation, or institutional identity. Families increasingly compare schools through practical indicators that can be observed directly, such as classroom comfort, teacher accessibility, communication patterns, discipline, and responsiveness to student needs. This development reflects a broader shift in educational choice. Within this framework, repeated daily interactions—rather than official information alone—dictate how stakeholders evaluate and interpret the quality of educational service institutions. Research in recent years confirms that parents often place greater trust in institutions where educational routines appear stable, communication is clear, and institutional care can be experienced directly (Hai, 2022; Simek & Stewart, 2024).

Private educational institutions are more directly affected by this condition because their continued existence depends heavily on public trust. Unlike public schools that often benefit from administrative enrolment patterns, private schools must continuously maintain legitimacy in the eyes of surrounding communities. Every interaction with students and parents can influence future enrolment decisions, as social recommendations often shape educational choices (Poole et al., 2023; Romito, 2023). Positive experiences are quickly shared among families, while service weaknesses may reduce institutional confidence within a short time. Educational quality in private institutions, therefore, cannot be separated from the way services are perceived and remembered by users.

Private madrasahs face a more complex institutional situation because they operate within two expectations simultaneously. They must simultaneously uphold academic standards and preserve Islamic values, moral discipline, and social credibility. Parents who choose madrasahs generally expect more than instructional effectiveness. Religious atmosphere, ethical guidance, teacher attentiveness, and institutional character often become equally important considerations (Akmalludin et al., 2025). This means that madrasahs are assessed not only through formal educational performance but also through whether institutional behavior reflects the values they represent.

This situation creates an important tension within private madrasahs. On one hand, educational institutions must actively fortify their branding and sustain market competitiveness within an increasingly saturated academic landscape. On the other hand, madrasahs must actively preserve traditional Islamic educational ethics that prioritize sincerity, moral responsibility, and community service over institutional commercialization. As competition intensifies, educational service quality may serve not only to improve learning experiences but also as a strategic instrument for attracting public attention and sustaining enrolment. This tension raises important questions regarding how private madrasahs balance educational values, social trust, and institutional competition within contemporary educational environments.

Competition among private madrasahs has intensified in many regions, including *Majalengka* Regency, where private Islamic junior secondary schools operate within relatively close social and educational catchment areas. Field observations conducted in this study indicate that several madrasahs actively compete to maintain student enrolment by approaching surrounding villages, strengthening relations with elementary schools, and improving institutional communication with parents. Some institutions rely on social trust

developed through long-standing community relations, while others strengthen institutional visibility through digital communication and facility improvement. Parents in this regional context often compare schools not primarily through official academic rankings, but through practical indicators such as teacher accessibility, school responsiveness, learning atmosphere, and visible institutional order. These local dynamics show that educational competition at the madrasah level increasingly depends on how surrounding communities interpret service quality.

The case of private madrasahs in *Majalengka* also illustrates that institutional sustainability is closely related to the ability to maintain trust in a socially competitive environment. Islamic educational institutions must aggressively cultivate strategic partnerships with feeder schools and local communities, recognizing that religious identity alone no longer guarantees enrollment stability. Community trust develops gradually through repeated educational experiences. Parents frequently rely on informal recommendations, previous family experiences, and direct observations of school practices before deciding where to enroll their children. In this setting, institutional branding emerges not from strategic promotions but from how stakeholders socially encounter and evaluate the school's daily climate.

Educational service quality provides a robust analytical framework for understanding this phenomenon, as it explicitly evaluates how service users directly interpret institutional quality. One of the most widely applied frameworks in educational service studies is SERVQUAL, which explains quality through five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Shi & Shang, 2020). These dimensions remain relevant because they describe educational quality from the perspective of everyday institutional interaction rather than from internal administrative standards alone (Ricka et al., 2024; Wider et al., 2024).

Tangibles refer to physical and visible institutional conditions, such as classrooms, facilities, the school environment, and visual organization (Kadri et al., 2022). Physical appearance often serves as the earliest basis for educational judgment because parents and students interpret visible order as a reflection of seriousness and readiness. Reliability concerns the institution's ability to deliver academic services consistently, including teaching schedules, classroom continuity, and instructional discipline (Singun, 2025). Responsiveness reflects how schools respond to educational needs, family concerns, and changing social conditions (Zembylas et al., 2022). Assurance relates to institutional credibility, competence, and the confidence generated through organizational performance (Zeqiri, 2026). Empathy refers to the personal attention and relational care that teachers and school personnel provide to students and families (Doğan et al., 2024).

Previous studies generally show that these dimensions influence educational satisfaction and institutional trust (Bartolo & Tinmaz, 2024; Bwachele et al., 2023; Ramovš & Milfelner, 2023). Reliability and assurance are frequently dominant dimensions because users associate them with educational competence and stability. Tangibles influence first impressions, while empathy and responsiveness often strengthen relational attachment over time. Research conducted across different educational settings also shows that service quality contributes to loyalty when institutions sustain positive educational experiences repeatedly (Abu-Rumman & Qawasmeh, 2022; Bwachele et al., 2023).

Despite these findings, most existing studies continue to view service quality mainly as a determinant of satisfaction, loyalty, or learning preferences. The possibility that service quality gradually shapes institutional branding has received less attention, especially in Islamic educational contexts. Educational branding is often discussed through promotion, digital visibility, or communication strategy, whereas the role of daily service experience in forming institutional image remains insufficiently explained (Bahadur et al., 2024; Peña-Lang et al., 2023).

This gap becomes particularly significant in private madrasahs, as organic social reputation often precedes the conscious articulation of formal branding strategies. Parents frequently trust schools because they hear positive accounts from other families, observe consistent teacher behavior, or experience responsive communication over time. Institutional image, therefore, may begin from accumulated service encounters rather than from symbolic institutional messaging.

Despite growing attention to educational service quality, limited studies have examined how service experiences contribute to institutional branding within Islamic educational settings. Existing research tends to focus on satisfaction, loyalty, or service effectiveness, while the relationship between service quality, public trust, and branding formation in private madrasahs remains insufficiently explored.

This situation also reflects a broader tension within contemporary Islamic educational institutions. On one side, private madrasahs are expected to strengthen competitiveness and institutional branding in increasingly competitive educational environments. On the other side, madrasahs are also expected to maintain Islamic educational ethics that emphasize sincerity, moral responsibility, and social service rather than institutional commercialization. Under these conditions, educational service quality may serve not only to improve learning experiences but also as a strategic instrument for sustaining institutional visibility and enrolment. Based on these concerns, this study addresses the following research question: How do the five SERVQUAL dimensions contribute to the formation of institutional branding in private Islamic junior secondary schools?

This study examines how educational service quality contributes to branding in two private Islamic junior secondary schools in *Majalengka* Regency. Attention is directed to how the five SERVQUAL dimensions appear in everyday institutional practice and how these experiences gradually influence trust and institutional image. The study assumes that educational service quality is not merely an internal quality indicator but a practical managerial mechanism through which institutional reputation develops.

The conceptual perspective proposed here suggests that consistent educational service first generates trust among students, parents, and surrounding communities. Trust then influences how institutions are perceived, gradually forming institutional image and strengthening branding over time. In the context of Islamic educational management, this perspective extends SERVQUAL beyond service satisfaction analysis. It places it within a broader understanding of how private madrasahs build institutional reputation through daily educational practice.

## METHODOLOGY

This study examines how stakeholders experience and interpret educational service quality in relation to institutional branding within private Islamic junior secondary schools. The methodological framework developed is to capture service practices, institutional interactions, and social meanings emerging from daily educational activities. We considered a qualitative orientation appropriate because the study's focus required detailed interpretation of institutional processes, participant experiences, and contextual meanings that could not be adequately explained by numerical measurement alone (Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2022). To provide a systematic explanation of the research procedure, the methodology is presented through research design, participant selection, data collection, the instrument, and data analysis. This study employed a qualitative multisite design to examine how educational service quality contributes to madrasah branding in private Islamic junior secondary schools. We selected a qualitative approach because the study focused on understanding institutional practices, service experiences, and social meanings emerging from everyday educational interactions. The multisite design enabled comparisons between two institutions with different managerial characteristics while identifying recurring patterns in service quality and institutional image. This design was considered appropriate because branding in educational institutions develops through context-specific service experiences that require in-depth interpretation rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2018).

### Participants

This research focuses on two private Islamic junior secondary schools in *Majalengka* Regency, Indonesia: *MTs Al Hidayah* and *MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka*. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in educational service processes and institutional interactions. A total of 14 participants were involved: two school principals, four teachers, two administrative staff members, two students, two

parents, and two community representatives. These participants were chosen to provide perspectives from institutional managers, service users, and the surrounding social environment, allowing a broader understanding of how service quality is experienced and interpreted across institutional contexts.

### Data collection

We collected data through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with each participant group to explore perceptions of educational service quality related to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. We used Participatory observation to examine physical facilities, classroom activities, institutional communication, and daily service practices. Document analysis included school profiles, academic reports, promotional materials, and institutional records relevant to service delivery and public communication.

### Instrument

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation checklists. Interview guidelines were developed based on the five SERVQUAL dimensions to ensure consistency across participants while allowing flexibility during data exploration. Observation sheets were used to record institutional conditions, interaction patterns, and service practices, while documentation checklists helped organize institutional records relevant to the research focus.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were first organized into thematic categories based on recurring patterns across the five SERVQUAL dimensions. The themes were then compared across both research sites to identify similarities and contextual differences. Trustworthiness was maintained through source and technique triangulation and member checking, confirming major interpretations with selected participants. The analytical process referred to the interactive framework developed by Miles et al. (2014), which enables the systematic interpretation of qualitative findings across multiple sources of evidence.

## FINDINGS

The five SERVQUAL dimensions structure the presentation of these findings, elucidating how educational service quality shapes madrasah branding at *MTs Al Hidayah* and *MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka*. Data were generated through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and institutional document analysis, enabling comparison across two institutional contexts with distinct service characteristics. Each dimension reflects a distinct form of service experience, yet all contribute to the gradual formation of institutional trust and public perception. Cross-site analysis indicates that service quality is not expressed through identical practices, but through contextual strategies shaped by institutional capacity, social environment, and managerial orientation. Table 1 summarizes the main empirical patterns identified across both research sites, followed by a detailed description of each dimension.

**Table 1.** Cross-Site Comparison of Educational Service Quality Across SERVQUAL Dimensions

Dimension	MTs Al Hidayah	MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka	Supporting Evidence
Tangibles	Basic facilities are available, but limited	More complete and visually managed facilities	841 m <sup>2</sup> land area; 3 digital media platforms
Reliability	Stable instruction with internal adaptation	Quality management based on 8 national standards	8 quality standards applied
Responsiveness	Community-based social response	Structured digital communication	9 villages targeted; 14 feeder schools
Assurance	Social trust through religious consistency	Formal legitimacy and institutional recognition	Accreditation B; pilot institutional status

Dimension	MTs Al Hidayah	MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka	Supporting Evidence
Empathy	Strong personal interaction	Intensive student and parent support	Five participant groups confirmed similar patterns

### Tangibles as the Initial Source of Institutional Perception

Tangibles emerged as the most immediately visible dimension through which participants assessed institutional quality. At *MTs Al Hidayah*, physical facilities were described as limited but functionally maintained. The principal explained that the school occupies approximately 841 square meters, including classrooms, teachers' rooms, administrative offices, and basic internet access to support everyday instructional activities. Teachers emphasized that although technological resources remain limited, available facilities are continuously optimized to maintain learning continuity.

*"The facilities are not complete, but every available space is used to support learning activities effectively" (T1).*

Observation confirmed that classrooms were clean, adequately ventilated, and arranged to support daily teaching activities. Students also described the school environment as sufficiently comfortable for regular learning.

A stronger visual institutional presentation was observed at *MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka*. Physical facilities were complete and accompanied by consistent visual communication through brochures, banners, and digital platforms, including the school website and social media accounts. Parents associated this visual consistency with institutional seriousness and educational readiness.

These findings indicate that tangibles function not merely as physical assets but as an early signal through which the community interprets institutional quality.

### Reliability and Consistency in Academic Services

Reliability appeared through stable instructional routines and the institution's ability to maintain academic consistency over time. At *MTs Al Hidayah*, teachers reported that learning activities followed regular schedules despite infrastructural limitations. Classroom practice showed adaptation through contextual teaching strategies and the integration of Islamic values into everyday instruction.

*"We try to keep learning stable because parents judge us based on whether classes run consistently every day" (T2).*

Observation demonstrated stable classroom attendance, consistent lesson delivery, and active teacher-student interaction.

A different form of reliability was found at *MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka*, where service consistency was strengthened through formal quality management. The school implemented eight national education standards as the basis for academic supervision, teacher development, and annual planning. Institutional documents also showed regular evaluation meetings and structured pedagogical monitoring. Reliability, therefore, appeared as a central dimension through which academic trust was developed in both schools, although institutional mechanisms differed.

### Responsiveness in Social and Institutional Communication

Responsiveness reflected how each institution adjusted educational services to surrounding social needs. At *MTs Al Hidayah*, responsiveness was closely related to community accessibility. The school actively reached nine surrounding villages and maintained communication with 14 elementary schools as part of its enrolment strategy. Fee support and school uniform assistance were identified as practical responses to local socio-economic conditions.

*"The school understands community needs, especially when many families need educational support" (PR1).*

Observation also showed frequent informal interaction between teachers and parents during religious and school-related activities.

At MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka, responsiveness was expressed through structured digital communication. Academic schedules, school events, and institutional information were regularly shared through official digital channels, allowing parents to access information more efficiently.

The findings suggest that responsiveness was developed through different service models: direct social engagement in one school and formal digital communication in the other.

### **Assurance through Social and Formal Legitimacy**

Assurance emerged from the ways institutions generated confidence and credibility among stakeholders. At MTs *Al Hidayah*, trust was closely linked to religious consistency and long-standing social relations with the surrounding community. Community representatives described the school as institutionally disciplined and socially present in local religious activities.

*“People trust the school because it consistently maintains religious activities and discipline” (C1).*

MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka reinforced institutional assurance by securing formal professional recognitions. The school-maintained Accreditation B and held pilot institutional status within the PUI educational network for four consecutive years. Parents interpreted these recognitions as indicators of educational credibility.

Assurance, therefore, developed through two complementary forms: social legitimacy and formal institutional recognition.

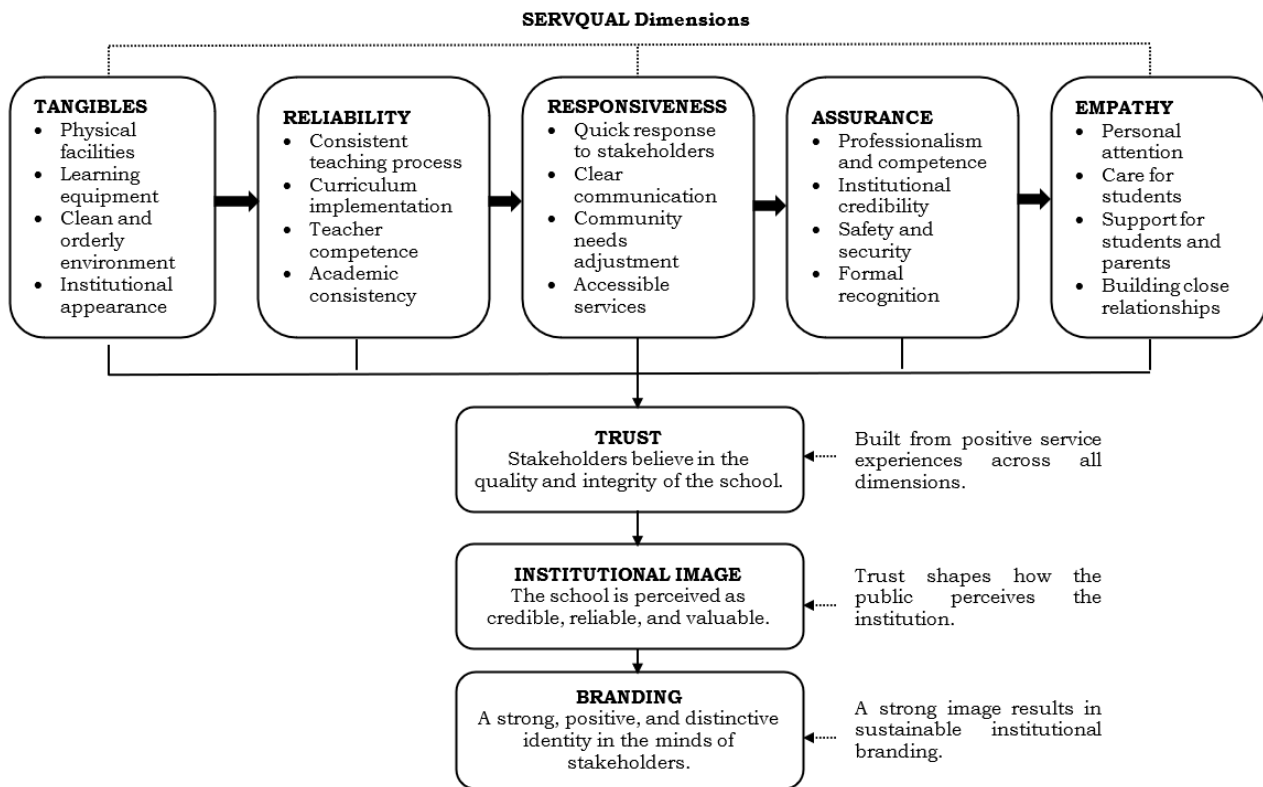
### **Empathy as the Strongest Driver of Social Loyalty**

Empathy emerged as the most consistently emphasized dimension across all participant groups. Students in both institutions described teachers as approachable and attentive not only to academic matters but also to personal development.

*“Teachers not only teach lessons but also ask about our difficulties” (S1).*

Parents also reported that communication with teachers remained open, particularly when discussing student progress or personal challenges. Observation showed that teacher-student interaction frequently extended beyond formal classroom instruction, creating a relational atmosphere that strengthened emotional attachment. Empathy emerged as the strongest factor sustaining institutional loyalty, as service users interpreted personal attention as evidence of genuine educational commitment.

The overall relationship among the five dimensions indicates a sequential pattern through which service experiences gradually develop into institutional branding. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual relationship between the five SERVQUAL dimensions and the formation of institutional branding in private madrasahs. The model shows that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy function as interconnected dimensions of educational service quality that shape stakeholders' experiences in everyday school interactions. Positive experiences across these dimensions gradually build trust among students, parents, and the surrounding community. Trust then shapes how the institution is perceived, leading to a positive institutional image characterized by credibility, reliability, and educational value. Over time, this positive image contributes to stronger and more sustainable institutional branding. The figure also demonstrates that branding in private Islamic schools is not formed solely through promotional activities but develops through consistent educational service experiences that are socially interpreted and repeatedly reinforced within the community.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Pattern of Educational Service Quality in Madrasah Branding

## DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that educational service quality in private madrasahs develops through a layered institutional process in which everyday educational experiences shape how schools are perceived by students, parents, and surrounding communities. Although each SERVQUAL dimension appeared differently across the two schools, all dimensions contributed to the formation of school credibility and public recognition. Educational service quality, therefore, functions not only as an operational aspect of schooling but also as a social mechanism through which institutions gain legitimacy within competitive educational environments.

Tangibles served as the primary immediate baseline for stakeholders evaluating institutional quality. Participants frequently associated physical conditions with institutional seriousness, educational readiness, and organizational discipline. At MTs Al Hidayah, limited infrastructure did not automatically undermine public perception, as classrooms and school facilities were kept clean and functional. A different pattern appeared at MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka, where stronger visual presentation and more organized institutional facilities reinforced perceptions of educational professionalism. These findings support previous studies showing that physical environments influence educational judgment because visible order is often interpreted as evidence of managerial competence (Clemons & Jance, 2024; Toscano-Hernández et al., 2024). What becomes important in the madrasah context is that tangibles do not operate only as infrastructure but also as social signals through which institutional identity is first interpreted.

The role of tangibles in private Islamic schools also carries cultural meaning. Educational institutions with an Islamic identity are often expected to foster not only instructional readiness but also a moral atmosphere through their physical spaces. Prayer facilities, cleanliness, visual order, and disciplined school layout contribute to a broader reading of whether religious values are reflected institutionally. This explains why physical arrangements in madrasahs often carry more interpretive weight than in ordinary school settings. Tangibles, therefore, function simultaneously as material support, symbolic communication, and moral representation.

Reliability became closely associated with academic consistency. Parents and students interpreted stable learning schedules, teacher discipline, and instructional continuity as indicators of school dependability. At MTs Al Hidayah, reliability was sustained through teacher commitment despite infrastructural limitations, while *MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka* strengthened reliability through formal quality management and structured academic supervision. These findings confirm that reliability does not always emerge from sophisticated institutional systems but may also develop through sustained professional commitment in everyday educational practice. Previous research similarly identifies reliability as a dominant factor influencing educational confidence because users assess school quality through continuous academic experience rather than isolated institutional claims (Peña-Lang et al., 2023; Wider et al., 2024). The present findings support this view, yet they also show that reliability acquires a stronger meaning in private madrasahs because parents often associate consistent instruction with institutional honesty. A school that delivers on its academic promises is perceived as trustworthy beyond classroom matters. Trust, therefore, begins not from branding language but from repeated evidence that institutional commitments are fulfilled.

Responsiveness reflected the schools' ability to adapt educational services to social and institutional needs. At MTs Al Hidayah, responsiveness was expressed through direct social accommodation, including educational fee support, communication with surrounding villages, and assistance for students from economically vulnerable families. At *MTs Daarul Uluum PUI Majalengka*, responsiveness was evident through structured communication systems and the use of digital media for disseminating academic information. These findings demonstrate that responsiveness is strongly shaped by institutional context and community characteristics. In educational settings, responsiveness becomes meaningful when stakeholders perceive that schools understand and respond appropriately to practical educational needs (Darawong & Widayati, 2022; Rasheed & Rashid, 2024). In educational institutions, responsiveness becomes meaningful when users feel that their practical needs are recognized and addressed appropriately.

Assurance is developed through both formal and social legitimacy. Formal recognition, accreditation, institutional discipline, and educational competence strengthened public confidence in the schools. At the same time, long-standing community engagement and religious consistency also contributed to educational credibility, particularly in Islamic schools. These findings suggest that assurance in private madrasahs cannot be reduced solely to technical competence, because public confidence is also shaped by moral consistency and institutional behavior within community life. Similar findings have been reported in previous educational management studies, emphasizing that institutional credibility grows stronger when professionalism is supported by ethical and social legitimacy (Dangaiso et al., 2022; Seitova et al., 2024). The present study adds that in Islamic educational settings, assurance is often strengthened when formal legitimacy and moral legitimacy overlap. A school becomes more credible when it is recognized institutionally while also maintaining social consistency in religious conduct. This dual legitimacy is especially relevant in madrasahs, where educational credibility is often understood through both academic and moral expectations.

Empathy emerged as the strongest relational dimension across both institutions. Students and parents consistently emphasized teachers' attentiveness, accessibility, and willingness to provide support beyond formal classroom instruction. Educational quality was therefore interpreted not only through academic delivery but also through the quality of interpersonal relationships experienced within the school environment. This finding is particularly relevant in Islamic educational settings where relational care and moral guidance remain central expectations of educational practice. Previous studies also demonstrate that empathy strengthens emotional attachment and long-term educational loyalty because stakeholders associate personal attention with authentic institutional care (Bwachele et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). The present study confirms this and also shows that empathy directly contributes to institutional branding. In both schools, many positive perceptions held by parents and students stemmed from stories about teachers' attentiveness rather than from formal institutional achievements.

The broader pattern emerging from these findings suggests that the five SERVQUAL dimensions function as interconnected educational experiences rather than separate service indicators. Tangibles shape initial

impressions, reliability strengthens academic confidence, responsiveness maintains institutional relevance, assurance reinforces legitimacy, and empathy deepens relational attachment. Educational service quality, therefore, develops cumulatively through everyday interactions that gradually influence how schools are socially recognized within their communities.

The findings also expand the discussion of branding within Islamic educational institutions. In many educational contexts, branding is often associated with promotional visibility, institutional slogans, or digital marketing strategies. However, the present study indicates that branding in private madrasahs is primarily shaped by the lived educational experiences of students, parents, and surrounding communities. Stakeholders do not simply evaluate institutional claims; they also interpret everyday educational interactions, such as teacher responsiveness, communication quality, learning consistency, and interpersonal care. Branding, therefore, emerges as a cumulative social perception built from educational experiences rather than from symbolic promotion alone.

This perspective is particularly important in Islamic educational institutions because branding cannot be separated from moral credibility and educational ethics. A madrasah may achieve strong visual promotion, yet public recognition will remain weak if its service experiences contradict the institutional values it represents. Under these conditions, educational branding develops not merely through market visibility but through the consistency between institutional values and educational practices experienced directly by stakeholders. This finding reinforces the argument that branding in Islamic schools is socially constructed through trust-based educational relationships rather than purely commercial communication strategies.

The findings also carry important implications for Islamic educational management. Madrasah leaders need to position educational service quality as part of long-term institutional development rather than as a short-term administrative performance measure. Strengthening branding requires not only promotional activity but also consistent management of stakeholder experiences across academic, social, and relational dimensions. School leaders should therefore prioritize teacher professionalism, responsive communication systems, supportive learning environments, and relational engagement with parents and surrounding communities. In addition, branding strategies in private madrasahs should remain aligned with Islamic educational values so that institutional competitiveness does not lead to excessive commercialization of education.

The conceptual relationship identified in this study shows that educational service quality develops gradually through a sequence of institutional processes. Consistent service experiences first generate trust among students, parents, and the surrounding community. Trust then shapes how the institution is perceived, forming a positive institutional image that eventually strengthens branding. Within the context of Islamic educational management, service quality therefore functions not only as an internal quality indicator but also as a managerial strategy through which institutional reputation is built over time (Bartolo & Tinmaz, 2024). This finding contributes to educational management literature by demonstrating that branding in private madrasahs emerges from sustained service consistency before it is recognized as a formal institutional identity. The limited regional scope of this study suggests that the findings should be interpreted within comparable private madrasah contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educational service quality plays a strategic role in shaping branding within private Islamic junior secondary schools. The five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy operate through different institutional practices, yet collectively influence how stakeholders perceive school credibility and educational value. Tangibles contribute to initial institutional impressions; reliability strengthens trust through consistent academic delivery; responsiveness reflects the institution's adaptation to users' needs; assurance reinforces legitimacy; and empathy is the strongest dimension in sustaining emotional attachment among service users. The findings indicate that branding in private madrasahs is shaped by repeated service experiences rather than by formal promotion

alone. Institutional reputation develops when service consistency builds trust, gradually shaping the institutional image and strengthening public recognition. This study extends the SERVQUAL perspective by positioning educational service quality as a social mechanism through which institutional branding is gradually constructed in private Islamic schools. The findings also suggest that branding in Islamic educational institutions is not primarily developed through symbolic visibility or promotional strategies, but through the consistency between educational values and everyday service practices experienced directly by stakeholders. The study further provides practical implications for Islamic educational management. Madrasah leaders need to strengthen educational branding by consistently delivering high-quality service, fostering teacher professionalism, maintaining responsive communication, and engaging with parents and communities relationally. Branding strategies should remain aligned with Islamic educational ethics to ensure institutional competitiveness without shifting the educational orientation toward excessive commercialization. In this context, educational service quality should be understood not only as an internal quality standard but also as a managerial strategy that supports long-term institutional positioning in Islamic education. The limited regional scope of this study suggests that the findings should be interpreted within comparable private madrasah contexts. We recommend further research to examine similar patterns in broader educational settings and to test the relationship between service quality and institutional branding using quantitative or mixed-method approaches.

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