



Institutional Adaptation to Zoning-Based School Admission Policy: A Qualitative Case Study of a Public Senior High School

Paiman*, Abdul Malik Ramadhan, Peti Alawiyah

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Indonesia

Email : paiman@uinbanten.ac.i

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ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding Author

This study aims to examine the implementation of a zoning-based school admission policy and its implications for institutional adaptation, leadership practices, and organizational management in public secondary education. The research employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, and administrative staff, complemented by observations and document analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including coding, categorization, and synthesis to identify patterns of institutional adaptation. The findings reveal three major themes: (1) institutional adaptation through organizational restructuring and strategic leadership, (2) instructional adjustments to address increasingly diverse student characteristics, and (3) stakeholder engagement to sustain institutional legitimacy and public trust. Leadership played a pivotal role in coordinating adaptive strategies, strengthening internal management, and ensuring policy compliance while maintaining educational quality. The study concludes that zoning policy implementation represents a multidimensional institutional transformation process rather than merely an administrative admission mechanism. The findings provide theoretical contributions to the literature on educational policy implementation and offer practical implications for policymakers and school leaders seeking to enhance institutional capacity and promote sustainable educational equity.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational equity remains a central concern in contemporary societies because unequal access to quality schooling perpetuates socio-economic disparities and limits social mobility. The importance of this issue lies in education's role as a primary mechanism for promoting social justice and

inclusive national development. When access to reputable schools is unevenly distributed, structural inequality becomes institutionalized, disadvantaging students from marginalized backgrounds. Empirical studies demonstrate that disparities in school quality, teacher distribution, and institutional reputation significantly affect long-term academic and life outcomes (Ouyang et al., 2025; Parvin, 2025). Moreover, inequitable access undermines broader national efforts to foster cohesion and economic competitiveness (Islamiah & Maulidiah, 2024; Sanjani & Safitri, 2024). These findings confirm that educational equity is not merely a pedagogical issue but a societal imperative. Therefore, policy interventions designed to redistribute opportunities more fairly across schools are crucial for strengthening democratic values and ensuring sustainable development.

Despite widespread recognition of equity as a policy priority, many education systems continue to struggle with persistent school stratification. Selective admission mechanisms, academic ranking systems, and competition for high-performing schools often intensify inequality rather than reduce it. In such contexts, advantaged families strategically secure access to prestigious institutions, while disadvantaged students are concentrated in under-resourced schools. This pattern reinforces achievement gaps and weakens the integrative function of public education. Research consistently indicates that stratified school systems exacerbate disparities in academic performance and institutional reputation (Templeton & Korchagin, 2025). Consequently, governments have sought regulatory mechanisms to correct imbalances in student distribution. However, policy reforms intended to promote fairness frequently generate new organizational challenges for schools. Thus, while equity-oriented reforms aim to solve structural inequality, they simultaneously require institutions to adapt to new regulatory and demographic realities within increasingly complex educational environments.

In Indonesia, the zoning-based school admission policy (*sistem zonasi*) was introduced as a structural reform to address unequal access and reduce disparities between high- and low-performing schools (Rohman et al., 2023; Sulistyosari et al., 2023). Implemented through the national student admissions system (PPDB) and institutionalized by the Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, the policy prioritizes geographic proximity over purely academic selection criteria. This reform represents a substantial shift in student allocation patterns, compelling schools to serve more heterogeneous student populations. Internationally, place-based admission policies are similarly associated with efforts to reduce segregation and enhance inclusivity (Gibson et al., 2025; Khotimah et al., 2024). In practice, however, schools must navigate regulatory compliance, public perception, and

internal organizational adjustments. These dynamics illustrate that zoning policy implementation extends beyond administrative procedures and entails complex institutional responses at the school level.

Previous scholarship has extensively examined the impact of zoning and equity-oriented reforms on access distribution and segregation patterns. Studies highlight how place-based admissions can mitigate spatial inequality and promote more balanced enrollment across schools (Deaton & Ghazanfari, 2025; (Mustafa & Maulana, 2024). Other research underscores the importance of leadership and organizational capacity in responding to policy-driven change (Abas & Kholidah, 2025; Putri et al., 2024). Furthermore, educational leadership studies emphasize adaptive strategies and collaborative practices as key determinants of reform success (Harris & Jones, 2020). While these studies provide valuable macro-level insights into policy outcomes and leadership dynamics, they primarily focus on system-wide effects rather than in-depth institutional processes. As a result, the internal organizational transformation triggered by zoning implementation remains insufficiently explored, particularly in relation to school-level strategic adaptation (Aini et al., 2024; Sain et al., 2024).

Although research has documented equity outcomes and regulatory implications, limited attention has been given to zoning policy as a multidimensional institutional transformation process. Existing studies often prioritize quantitative assessments of enrollment shifts or performance indicators (Posselt et al., 2025; Val & Quintas, 2025), overlooking qualitative dimensions such as organizational restructuring, stakeholder negotiation, and strategic management responses. Moreover, literature on school management under regulatory constraints suggests that institutional legitimacy, communication strategies, and internal quality assurance are critical in maintaining effectiveness. However, empirical exploration connecting these management perspectives with zoning implementation remains scarce. This gap is significant because policy effectiveness ultimately depends on how schools interpret, internalize, and operationalize regulatory mandates. Therefore, a deeper qualitative investigation into institutional adaptation at the school level is necessary to advance theoretical and practical understanding of equity-based reforms.

This study advances the state of the art by conceptualizing zoning policy implementation as a process of institutional adaptation encompassing leadership practice, organizational restructuring, and strategic stakeholder engagement. Rather than viewing zoning solely as a regulatory admission mechanism, this research positions it as a catalyst for organizational transformation within public secondary schools. By integrating perspectives from educational policy, leadership theory, and organizational management, the study offers a multidimensional analytical framework. Such an approach addresses the

identified research gap by examining how schools strategically respond to demographic shifts, regulatory pressures, and public accountability demands. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on institutional agency and adaptive capacity as mediating factors between policy design and educational outcomes. Understanding these dynamics is essential for strengthening policy implementation strategies and ensuring sustainable equity in increasingly diverse educational contexts.

Based on the identified gaps, this study investigates how zoning-based admission policy is implemented at the school level and how it shapes institutional adaptation, leadership practices, and organizational management. The central research problem concerns how schools strategically respond to equity-oriented regulatory frameworks while maintaining educational quality and institutional legitimacy. This study argues that successful zoning implementation depends not only on policy design but also on adaptive leadership, coordinated organizational restructuring, and proactive stakeholder engagement. It hypothesizes that institutional transformation mediates the relationship between zoning regulation and educational effectiveness. By examining zoning as an institutional process rather than a technical admission reform, this research contributes to educational policy literature and provides practical insights for policymakers and school leaders seeking to strengthen institutional resilience and promote sustainable educational equity.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of strategic marketing management within a zoning-based student admission system. A qualitative approach was chosen to generate an in-depth and contextualized understanding of organizational processes, strategic decision-making, and institutional adaptation in a regulated public education environment. The case study design allowed for comprehensive examination of strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation within a single institutional setting. The research was conducted at SMAN 6 in Kabupaten Pandeglang, a public secondary school implementing the national zoning-based admission policy. The school was purposively selected due to its active strategic marketing initiatives and its relevance in examining how public schools adapt to enrollment regulation constraints within an equity-oriented policy framework. Data collection was carried out from July to December 2022.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis to ensure methodological triangulation. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their strategic roles in institutional governance and marketing management, including the

school principal, vice principal for student affairs, public relations coordinator, and teachers involved in marketing and recruitment activities. Semi-structured interviews explored strategic planning, marketing implementation, digital media utilization, and perceived supporting and inhibiting factors. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Non-participant observations captured marketing-related activities, coordination meetings, and institutional communication processes, while document analysis examined strategic plans, organizational structures, promotional materials, admission policies, and institutional reports to corroborate findings across data sources.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, encompassing data condensation (reduction), data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the research process. Data condensation involved coding interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to identify categories related to strategic planning, digital adaptation, regulatory alignment, and organizational responses. These codes were refined into broader themes through axial coding. Data display was conducted using thematic matrices and narrative structuring to facilitate pattern recognition and cross-case comparison among participants and sources. Finally, conclusions were drawn through continuous verification and triangulation to ensure consistency and analytical rigor. Trustworthiness was strengthened through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability procedures, including systematic documentation, triangulation, and reflexive evaluation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study uses thematic qualitative analysis, employing open, axial, and selective coding, to examine the implementation of strategic marketing management within the zone-based student admission system at SMAN 6, Pandeglang Regency. Data from interviews, observations, and institutional documents were analyzed iteratively to identify structural patterns and adaptive mechanisms, which were then synthesized and coded. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Synthesis of Qualitative Coding

Open Codes	Axial Categories	Selective Themes
SWOT analysis, segmentation	Strategic planning mechanism	Structured Strategic Marketing Governance
Committee formation, task delegation	Organizational structuring	Structured Strategic Marketing Governance

Social media promotion	Digital promotion strategy	Digital-Driven Market Adaptation
Extracurricular differentiation	Value proposition strategy	Digital-Driven Market Adaptation
Weekly evaluation meetings	Monitoring and evaluation	Structured Strategic Marketing Governance
Zoning revision	Policy instability	Regulatory-Constrained Competitiveness
Enrollment quota limitation	Market restriction	Regulatory-Constrained Competitiveness
Alumni and community support	External legitimacy	Regulatory-Constrained Competitiveness

The coding process resulted in three main themes, namely: (1) structured strategic marketing governance, (2) digitally driven market adaptation, and (3) regulatory-constrained institutional competitiveness.

Structured Strategic Marketing Governance

The findings indicate that marketing management is embedded within the formal governance cycle of planning, implementation, and control. Rather than operating as an informal promotional activity, marketing is integrated into institutional strategic management.

Strategic Planning

The planning phase begins with a SWOT analysis to evaluate internal capacities (infrastructure, human resources, institutional programs) and external conditions (competition and zoning regulations). The zoning policy significantly reshaped the segmentation strategy, shifting the focus toward geographically close students. The planning procedure includes: (1) Alignment with the institutional vision and mission, (2) Formation of a new student admissions committee, (3) Determination of marketing objectives, (4) Identification of superior academic and non-academic programs, and (5) Development of a scholarship scheme (based on merit and need). The SWOT analysis serves as a strategic alignment tool that connects institutional strengths with regulatory constraints.

Strategy Implementation

Implementation is structured through formal task delegation. A marketing mix approach is adopted, emphasizing program differentiation, promotional channels, and service positioning. Promotional channels combine traditional and digital media, namely print (banners, brochures) and digital platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). Digital platforms, intensively

adopted since 2016, have become dominant due to their broader reach, efficiency, and responsiveness to time-sensitive information. Marketing content includes academic achievements, extracurricular activities, scholarship information, and character development initiatives. These programs are positioned as institutional value propositions.

Strategic Control

The multi-layered control mechanism includes: (1) initial control, namely coordination meetings before campaign implementation, (2) concurrent control, namely direct supervision during implementation, and (3) feedback control, namely weekly evaluation meetings and performance reporting. This multi-layered monitoring system strengthens strategic coherence and enables rapid response to operational challenges.

Digitally Driven Market Adaptation

The second theme highlights digitalization as a key adaptive strategy. Digital platforms serve not only as communication channels but also as branding instruments that build institutional legitimacy. Uploading daily activities and student achievements increases public visibility and engagement. Informants emphasized that digital media increases access to admissions information and enables real-time updates during the registration period. The transition from print-dominated promotion to integrated digital marketing reflects institutional adaptation to the competitive dynamics of the education sector. Thus, digital media operates as promotional infrastructure and symbolic capital in the education market.

Institutional Competitiveness Constrained by Regulation

The zoning policy significantly altered competitive dynamics. While schools maintained strong extracurricular participation, the level of academic competition shifted. Before the zoning policy, achievement was mainly at the provincial level in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and debate competitions. After the zoning policy, achievement was more concentrated at the district and sub-district levels, although extracurricular performance remained relatively stable. Internal supporting factors include: adequate infrastructure (classrooms, laboratories, administrative offices, sports facilities), strategic geographic location, qualified teaching and administrative staff, scholarship programs, and strong graduate outcomes. External supporting factors include alumni networks, parental trust, and community support. Furthermore, there are obstacles, including annual zoning policy revisions, enrollment quota restrictions, increased competition between schools, communication gaps within

management, technical instability in the online admissions system, and difficulty attracting high-achieving students due to geographic limitations. Among these factors, regulatory volatility emerged as a dominant structural constraint affecting strategic consistency.

The research findings were then visualized to make them more appealing. Figure 1 below shows the integrative conceptual model obtained from this qualitative research synthesis.

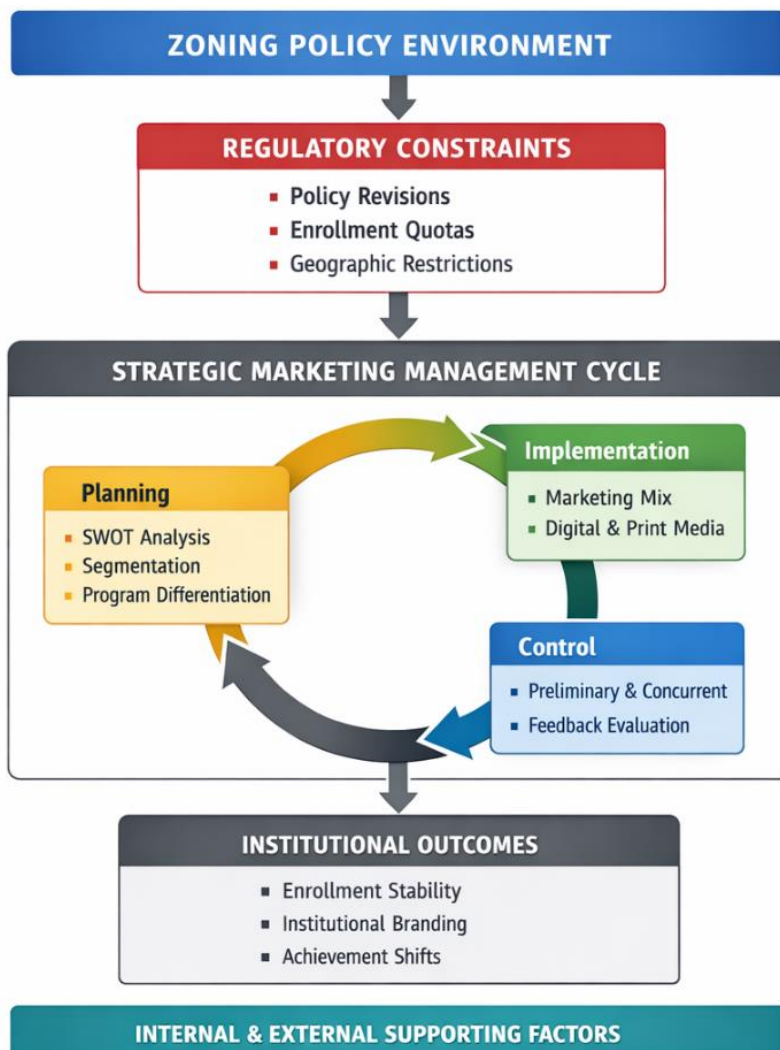


Figure 1. Strategic marketing flowchart for zoning policy

The findings suggest that strategic marketing management operates as an adaptive governance mechanism in a policy-governed education ecosystem. The institutionalization of planning, implementation, and control demonstrates managerial maturity. Simultaneously, digitalization enhances competitiveness through visibility and symbolic legitimacy. However, the volatility of zoning

policies limits long-term strategic predictability, affecting enrollment composition and the distribution of academic achievement. Thus, educational marketing in this context goes beyond promotion; it functions as an institutional adaptation to regulatory transformation.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that strategic marketing management is embedded within a formal governance structure characterized by systematic planning, structured implementation, and continuous evaluation. This confirms that marketing operates as an institutional capability integrated into organizational management rather than as an isolated technical function. Strategic tools such as SWOT analysis and organizational alignment enable schools to respond effectively to environmental constraints while leveraging internal strengths. This supports Kiarie & Kinyua, (2025), who argues that organizational performance depends on alignment between internal resources and external demands. Similarly, structured coordination and evaluation mechanisms enhance institutional coherence and decision-making quality, reinforcing long-term sustainability (Ganon-Shilon et al., 2023). From this perspective, strategic marketing becomes part of institutional governance, strengthening responsiveness and adaptive capacity within regulated educational systems.

From an institutional theory perspective, zoning policy generates coercive pressures that shape organizational priorities and strategic behavior. Schools must adjust recruitment, communication, and positioning strategies to comply with regulatory requirements while maintaining legitimacy. Regulatory environments significantly influence leadership decisions and institutional performance (Li et al., 2024). The integration of marketing into formal governance structures therefore reflects institutional adaptation to policy constraints. Moreover, the increasing reliance on digital platforms indicates strategic responsiveness to evolving stakeholder expectations. Digital communication enhances institutional visibility and stakeholder trust, strengthening competitiveness in regulated environments (Huda, 2024). Thus, marketing practices represent not merely promotional tools but institutional responses to regulatory and reputational pressures.

Digital marketing further functions as a dynamic organizational capability that strengthens institutional resilience. Pitelis et al. (2024) emphasizes that dynamic capabilities depend on the integration of technological resources into strategic processes. The use of social media and digital communication platforms reflects schools' ability to adapt to technological transformation and shifting patterns of stakeholder engagement. Empirical evidence confirms that digital

engagement enhances institutional legitimacy and recruitment effectiveness. Additionally, online presence serves as a signaling mechanism that reduces information asymmetry between institutions and prospective students. Eum (2025) demonstrate that digital visibility significantly influences institutional attractiveness and student decision-making. Therefore, digital marketing constitutes a strategic intangible resource that supports transparency, trust, and sustainable enrollment stability.

The findings also reveal that zoning policies reshape institutional competitiveness by restricting geographic recruitment flexibility and reducing academic selectivity. While extracurricular performance remains a competitive asset, academic competition shifts toward localized benchmarks. Institutional theory explains that regulatory frameworks limit organizational autonomy and redefine strategic options. Empirical studies confirm that regulatory reforms substantially influence school management practices and performance outcomes (Parveen et al., 2024). Equity-oriented admissions policies often require schools to move from selective recruitment toward internal capacity building and quality enhancement (Thomas, 2025). From a resource-dependence perspective, organizations respond to constraints by optimizing internal resources and strengthening institutional differentiation. These adaptive strategies reflect efforts to sustain institutional performance under structural limitations.

However, policy instability and technical disruptions introduce uncertainty that complicates long-term strategic planning. Regulatory volatility increases organizational complexity and leadership challenges (Krasnopevtseva et al., 2024). In this context, internal resources such as infrastructure quality, teacher competence, and program diversity become critical strategic assets. Consistent with the resource-based view, valuable and inimitable resources enhance institutional sustainability (El Nemar et al., 2025). Furthermore, alumni networks and community trust function as social capital that strengthens institutional legitimacy. Institutional sustainability therefore depends on the interaction between internal capacity and external legitimacy. By integrating resource-based theory, institutional theory, and dynamic capabilities perspectives, this study positions educational marketing as an institutional capability that supports visibility, legitimacy, and long-term sustainability in regulated educational environments.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that strategic marketing management in public secondary education functions as an adaptive governance mechanism rather than merely a promotional activity. The most important finding is that marketing becomes institutionalized through structured planning, coordinated

implementation, and continuous evaluation, enabling schools to maintain legitimacy and competitiveness within zoning-based regulatory constraints. A key lesson derived from this research is that institutional resilience depends on the alignment between internal capacity, digital communication capability, and regulatory compliance. Digital marketing, in particular, emerges as a strategic intangible asset that strengthens stakeholder trust and institutional visibility despite geographic enrollment limitations. These findings underscore that sustainability in regulated educational environments requires strategic integration of marketing within formal governance structures and long-term institutional capacity building.

The study contributes theoretically by positioning educational marketing as an institutional adaptation capability shaped by regulatory pressures, organizational resources, and dynamic capacities. By integrating institutional theory, the resource-based view, and adaptive governance perspectives, this research enriches the conceptual understanding of how schools respond strategically to equity-oriented admission policies. However, this study is limited to a single case and a qualitative design, which may restrict broader generalization. Future research should employ comparative multi-site studies, mixed-method approaches, or longitudinal designs to examine variations in institutional adaptation across different regulatory and socio-cultural contexts.

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