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Higher Education Marketing Strategy: Comparative Study of State Islamic Universities and State Universities

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HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING STRATEGY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES AND STATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The increasing of State Islamic Universities (PTKIN) in Aceh is contradictory with the minimum interest of Acehnese to study at PTKIN. This phenomenon shows an anomaly in Acehnese religiosity level. This paper aimed to seek Higher Education (HE) marketing strategies in Aceh and to describe the reason for Acehnese low interest in PTKIN. A mixed method was used in this research; meanwhile, an explanatory sequential design was chosen to be the research design. This research was done in 3 PTKIN and 3 State Universities (PTU) in Aceh, where 60 Acehnese students were chosen as respondents. Besides quantitative data, qualitative research was done by interviewing, observing, and studying documentation to get more information. The result showed that the products (departments and accreditation) significantly affected students' interest in HE. This article suggested that PTKIN add more departments to present many choices for society as a place to study at a high education level.

Keywords: *Marketing Strategy; Interest in Entering; Higher Education; PTKIN.*



A. Introduction

The existence of State Islamic universities (*Perguruan et al./ PTKIN*) does not necessarily mean that Acehnese prefers to choose it over State universities (*Perguruan Tinggi Umum/ PTU*), even though Islam is the dominant religion in Aceh. Additionally, Acehnese society is known for its religiousness.

The recent data on new students at PTKIN institutions are as follows: UIN Ar-Raniry 3.506 students, IAIN Lhokseumawe 1.375 students, IAIN Langsa 752 students, IAIN Takengon 290 students, and STAIN Meulaboh 256 students. Meanwhile, the new students at PTU institutions are as follows: Universitas Samudra, 1.520 students; Universitas Malikussaleh, 4.411 students; Universitas Syiah Kuala, 7.625 students; Universitas Teuku Umar, 865 students. Based on this data, Acehnese students show more interest in PTU institutions than PTKIN institutions. The low interest of prospective students in PTKIN institutions can be attributed to the need for more applicants. An effective marketing strategy is needed (Bock et al., 2014; Pizarro et al., 2017).

Previous research on students' interest in choosing higher education (HE) has mainly focused on academic quality, neglecting non-academic factors such as the internalization of Islamic values. There are non-academic factors, such as Islamic internalized values (Asnawi & Setyaningsih, 2020; Cho et al., 2008; Ghafar, 2023). However, the new HE policy in Aceh requires the integration of Islamic values, general knowledge, and the needs of the local society (Habiburrahim et al., 2016). This study provides an opportunity for PTKIN institutions to attract prospective students. Therefore, employing an effective marketing technique is crucial to increase people's interest in education (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014; Judson et al., 2008; Oeppen Hill, 2020).

This paper aims to find, compare, and analyze the marketing strategies of PTKIN and PTU institutions to determine why Acehnese students show lower interest in PTKIN than PTU. The primary purposes of this study are as follows: (a) identifying the factors that Acehnese students consider when choosing a higher education institution, (b) examining the marketing strategies

employed by PTKIN institutions (including the media used), (c) identifying the constraints in PTKIN marketing, and (d) comparing the marketing approaches of PTU and PTKIN institutions in terms of differences, similarities, and strengths. By understanding why PTKIN fails to attract Acehnese students compared to PTU, it is possible to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy to enhance students' interest.

This paper is based on the argument that Acehnese students exhibit low interest in choosing PTKIN institutions for higher education. The lack of interest among Acehnese students can be attributed to ineffective marketing strategies. Prospective students need to receive comprehensive information about PTKIN institutions, and the limited information available is influenced by PTKIN's marketing strategy. When the strategy is inappropriate, it results in low interest among prospective students and hinders societal participation in higher education (Kadir et al., 2023).

Students' choices of higher education have various reasons and different supporting factors. Researchers commonly use the three-phase decision-making model developed by Hossler & Gallagher (1987), which includes the trend, search, and choice phases. In the trend phase, students make their own decisions on whether to pursue further education. Factors such as social-economic status, parental support and encouragement, extracurricular activities, and school guidance and counselling play a role in this phase. The search phase involves students collecting information about the institutions they are considering. Finally, in the choice phase, students decide which institution will be their place of study.

Initial research on high school students choices of higher education identifies four main factors: (1) intellectual emphasis of the target institution (Hagel & Shaw, 2010; Kumar et al., 2014; Ismail et al., 2021), (2) practical factors such as proximity to home and cost (Hagel & Shaw, 2010), (3) advice from others (e.g., high school guidance counsellors, parents/family) (Kumar et al., 2014), and (4) campus social atmosphere (Cho et al., 2008). However, Thuong & Thu (2020) argue that behaviour realization control significantly impacts students' decision-making process, even more so than their awareness



of the advantages and prestige of the institution. Surprisingly, the factor of tuition fees has the lowest impact. While academic scores in high school remain a major factor in students' decisions, institutional characteristics and psychosocial aspects also play significant roles in university selection.

1. Higher Education Marketing Strategy

Marketing strategy is vital in attracting new students to choose universities for their higher education. The application of marketing strategies in the education sector has become an important topic in international marketing, despite receiving little attention in recent years. This study aims to understand better the implementation of marketing strategies in higher education institutions for student recruitment. The paradigm of educational institutions has shifted, treating students, parents, staff, and society as "customers" who make choices based on their preferences and abilities. The public perception of different educational institutions influences these choices.

In the realm of education marketing, particularly in higher education, the main focus is to explain the quality of education based on market demand, the function and role of higher education, the various services and advantages offered, and alignment with the needs of the institution (Gajic, 2012). Higher education institutions are responsible for providing relevant information to prospective students to meet their information needs, particularly regarding specific study programs (Moogan, 2001). Effective marketing strategies in higher education can help increase the number of prospective students amid intense competition (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011; Helgesen, 2008; Lim et al., 2020).

2. Islamic Higher Education

Islamic higher education has long existed and plays a significant role in developing education in Indonesia. However, the quality of education remains a significant concern in making State Islamic universities (PTKIN) institutions the preferred choice for prospective students. These institutions are still engaged in theological and philosophical discussions dating back



centuries, exploring the relationship between revelation and reason and addressing the historic monotheism that has shaped them (Lukens-Bull, 2013). Furthermore, students' interest in entering PTKIN institutions has yet to be a top priority, particularly in Aceh.

In general, society desires the integration of Islamic values with general knowledge in PTKIN institutions. The primary aim of PTKIN is to integrate science and technology with Islamic values and local wisdom (Asnawi & Setyaningsih, 2020; Muluk et al., 2019; Ninsiana & Dacholfany, 2017; Tolchah & Arfan Mu'ammam, 2019). Research by Idris et al. (2019) found that successfully integrating Islamic knowledge with modern science helps create a balanced society and contributes to national development.

PTKIN institutions in Indonesia have a dual role: not only do they enhance the quality of human resources, but they also act as guardians of the integration of Islamic and Indonesian ideological values, addressing issues related to religious politicization and social conflicts (Lukens-Bull, 2016; Kraince, 2007; Riza, 2021). It means that PTKIN has a double role besides increasing the quality of society sources, but also to be the guardians of the integration of Islamic and Indonesian values ideology.

Despite the importance of the subject, there needs to be more research on students' interest in choosing Islamic higher education and limited discussion on the implementation of marketing strategies for PTKIN institutions. Therefore, this study analyses the marketing strategies that increase students' interest in choosing PTKIN institutions.

B. Method

This research used a mixed methods approach, employing an explanatory sequential design. The initial step involved collecting and analyzing quantitative data, which was then used to develop qualitative instruments for obtaining in-depth findings (Creswell, 2015; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Leavy, 2017) (see picture 1). The research was conducted at PTKIN and PTU institutions in the Aceh region. The research schedule spanned from April to October 2021.



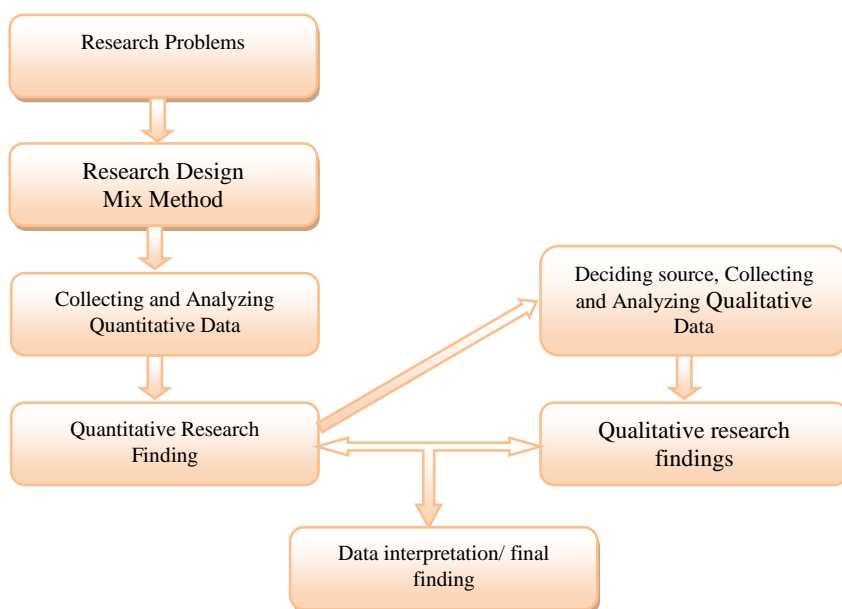


Figure 1. Research design

The first step in the data collection techniques employed in this research was qualitative. A questionnaire instrument was developed to measure students' interest in choosing PTU and to assess its marketing strategy. The questionnaire utilized a rating scale format. It was administered to Acehnese students, with 60 undergraduate students selected as participants. The participants were chosen from three State Islamic Universities (UIN Ar-Raniry, IAIN Lhokseumawe, and IAIN Langsa) and three State Universities (USK Banda Aceh, Unimal, and Unsam).

The subsequent step involved qualitative data collection, conducted through interviews with key respondents, including Acehnese students from PTKIN and PTU institutions. Additionally, a documentation study was conducted to gather information on the number of study programs and scholarships each campus offers. For quantitative data analysis, version 20 of SPSS was used to describe the data. For qualitative data analysis, an interactive model consisting of data condensing, data presentation, and concluding and verification was employed (Miles et al., 2014).

C. Result and Discussion

Following the aim of this research, the study uncovered several findings regarding higher education marketing strategies in Aceh.

1. Result

Based on the research findings, below is a data description from the research variables, such as product, price, place, and promotion, including students' interest in choosing HE. In addition, overall data fulfil the requirements to analyze. It is shown in Table 1 as a basic statistical calculation of the research variable data:

Table 1. Data description

| | | Statistics | | | | |
|----------------|---------|------------|--------|--------|-----------------|-------------|
| | | Product | Price | Place | Promotion | HE Interest |
| N | Valid | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| | Missing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mean | | 21.10 | 14.90 | 11.12 | 17.95 | 63.75 |
| Median | | 21.00 | 15.00 | 11.50 | 18.00 | 63.50 |
| Mode | | 24 | 16 | 15 | 17 ^a | 63 |
| Std. Deviation | | 2.967 | 3.219 | 3.179 | 4.040 | 7.888 |
| Variance | | 8.803 | 10.363 | 10.105 | 16.319 | 62.225 |
| Range | | 10 | 11 | 11 | 16 | 40 |
| Minimum | | 15 | 9 | 4 | 9 | 44 |
| Maximum | | 25 | 20 | 15 | 25 | 84 |
| Sum | | 1266 | 894 | 667 | 1077 | 3825 |

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Next, the hypothesis is tested for the quantitative method. Based on Pearson correlation test is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Correlation test result

| | | Correlations | | | | |
|---------|---------------------|--------------|--------|--------|-----------|-------------|
| | | Product | Price | Place | Promotion | HE Interest |
| Product | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .395** | .416** | .509** | .613** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .002 | .001 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |

| | | Correlations | | | | HE Interest |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------|--------|--------|-----------|-------------|
| | | Product | Price | Place | Promotion | |
| Price | Pearson Correlation | .395** | 1 | .409** | .226 | .333** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .002 | | .001 | .082 | .009 |
| | N | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| Place | Pearson Correlation | .416** | .409** | 1 | .370** | .582** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | .001 | | .004 | .000 |
| | N | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| Promotion | Pearson Correlation | .509** | .226 | .370** | 1 | .399** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .082 | .004 | | .002 |
| | N | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| HE Interest | Pearson Correlation | .613** | .333** | .582** | .399** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .009 | .000 | .002 | |
| | N | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From Table 2 above, it is known that N = 60; therefore, the score of the label is 0,254. Hence, it significantly impacts students' candidate interest in choosing HE; the score is 0,613, followed by place, promotion, and price.

To confirm and strengthen the quantitative finding, be continued by a qualitative method by interviewing some participants. The result of the interview is shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3. PTU Participants' Answers

| No. | Interview Description | Code |
|-----|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. | I want to continue my study at IAIN, but there is no program study that I want. (Participant 2) | No program study to choose |
| 2. | My parents suggested I choose IAIN, but there is no program study that I wanted. (Participant 3) | No program study to choose |
| 3. | My family suggested I choose UNIMAL because easy to get a job. (Participant 4) | Easy to get a job |
| 4. | When I chose program study in USK, I checked the program study and university accreditation to purpose easy to find a job. (Participant 5) | Accreditation, Easy to get job |



Based on the interview data presented above, it is evident that Acehese students have various reasons for choosing higher education. These reasons include the absence of desired study programs in PTKIN, the perception that graduates from PTU have better job prospects, and the belief that PTU universities have superior accreditation.

In order to compare the decision-making process of Acehese students when choosing higher education, interviews were also conducted with PTKIN students. Based on these interviews, it was discovered that PTKIN was not their first choice. They opted for PTKIN primarily because it was closer to their homes and offered more affordable costs. The interviews revealed multiple reasons confirming that PTKIN was not the preferred choice for Acehese students.

Table 4. PKIN participants' answer

| No. | Interview Description | Code |
|-----|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. | "Initially, I chose UNIMAL, but I did not pass the admission process. As a result, I decided to study here at IAIN". (Participant 1). | Second choice |
| 2. | "I chose to study here because it is close to my parents' house, and the tuition fees are more affordable". (Participant 2). | Location and School Tuition |
| 3. | "Actually, I wanted to enroll in UNSAM, but my parents advised me to study at IAIN (Langsa) due to the more affordable tuition fees". (Participant 3). | School Tuition |
| 4. | "At first, I was hesitant to choose between USK and UIN since my desired study program (psychology) is offered at UIN. Eventually, my parents recommended me to choose UIN". (Participant 4) | Study Program Availability |

To further enhance the research data, a study documentation process was conducted. Table 5 presents the data, indicating that PTU offers 163 study programs, whereas PTKIN only offers 95. This difference in the number of study programs demonstrates that PTU provides a broader range of options for prospective students seeking to pursue their studies.



Table 5. The Comparison between PTU and PTKIN in Aceh

| No. | Data Description | PTU | | | PTKIN | | |
|-----|---|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | USK | Unimal | Unsam | UIN Ar-Raniry | IAIN Lhokseumawe | IAIN Langsa |
| | The amount of faculty (fac) and study program (SP). | Fac/S2/S3 = 3 speci alist = 13 SP = 103 | Fac/S2/S3 = 9 SP = 25 35 | Fac = 5 SP = 25 | Fac/S2/S3 = 10 SP = 52 | Fac/S2/S3 = 5 SP = 22 | Fac/S2/S3 = 5 SP = 21 |
| | Promotion Method | | | | | | |
| | Professional Management of HE Social Media | Youtu be IG Face book WA | Youtu be IG Facebo ok | Youtu be IG Faceb ook | Youtube IG | Youtube IG Facebook | Youtube IG Facebook |
| | Bidik Misi/KIP (2021) Scholarship | 853 stud ents ¹ | 2050 studen ts ² | 534 stude nts ³ | 430 students ⁴ | 140 students ⁵ | 180 students ⁶ |

Data source attached

2. Discussion

Based on the research findings, higher education (HE) products emerged as a fundamental factor influencing students' choices. This implies that the availability of various programs (study options) increases the opportunities for students to choose an HE. The marketing strategies employed by HE also play a significant role in generating students' interest in selecting a HE. However, the impact of these strategies is contingent upon the presence of study programs within the HE. Consequently, it is concluded that HE needs to align its marketing strategies with the needs and preferences of prospective students (Durkin et al., 2016). By presenting diverse options in higher education, HE can achieve better outcomes and appeal to prospective students. The competitive landscape among HE,



particularly in Aceh, necessitates offering various products and services to attract prospective students (Callender & Dougherty, 2018).

Competition has created a strong demand for higher education, prompting HE to adopt strategic approaches to managing its product offerings. Lim et al. found that several utilitarian elements, namely excellence, prospects, program variety, and price, directly impact students' choices when selecting a HE (Lim et al., 2020). Additionally, Durkin et al. noted that the tuition fees of a school do not constitute the primary factor influencing students' choice of HE. However, parental attention remains focused on the pros and cons of the offered products. (Durkin et al., 2016).

Based on the analysis, the findings of this research indicate that the university's product is a critical factor in increasing the interest of prospective students in choosing a HE. Consequently, universities need concrete actions to develop higher education products that align with market demands (see Figure 2). Several strategies can be employed to enhance the quality of higher education products, including 1) conducting market research, 2) utilizing technology, 3) offering more flexible class schedules, 4) providing opportunities for learning and practice, 5) developing partnerships with industry partners, 6) developing relevant curricula, 7) enhancing the professionalism of faculty members, and 8) providing career services.

These actions are necessary for universities to attract and retain students as the competition among higher education institutions grows. Universities can increase enrollment rates and reputation by improving their products and services. Therefore, it is crucial for universities to continually assess and improve their educational products to meet the market's changing demands and remain competitive in the higher education industry.

1. Conducting market research; educational institutions are responsible for fulfilling the three pillars (tri dharma) of higher education, making it imperative for universities to conduct research. Universities must gather feedback from active students, prospective students, alumni, and industry representatives to better understand their orientations,



needs, and preferences (Büscher-Touwen et al., 2018). This will help identify areas where the institution's programs or services can be improved (Wilkins, 2020), thus narrowing the gap between the institution's offerings and the market demands.



Figure 2. *Develop higher education products*

2. Use technology; the use of technology is not a new phenomenon in higher education. Recently, universities have faced the challenge of utilizing AI, which has led to introducing new policies. Incorporating technology to enhance the student experience and improve the delivery of educational content has become necessary. This may include online and blended learning options and tools for communication and collaboration (Faridi & Ebad, 2018; Kuleto et al., 2021).
3. In modern technology, universities must offer prospective students flexible scheduling options, such as evening and weekend classes, to accommodate their busy schedules. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several positive impacts, including flexible scheduling, the convenience of learning from home, opportunities for self-improvement, and time management related to online education, while still maintaining the same mode, objectives, and learning outcomes (Chernikova & Varonis, 2016; Ngo & Hinojosa, 2021; Weldon et al., 2021).

4. Providing hands-on learning opportunities, the *Merdeka Belajar* policy allows students to combine learning opportunities both on and off campus. Universities can offer various programs, including internships, community service projects, and research opportunities, to give students practical experience and prepare them for their future careers (Gavillet, 2018; Leary & Sherlock, 2020).
5. Developing partnerships with industries, universities should not neglect their community as part of society. After completing their education, university graduates will return to society. Therefore, creating partnerships with the community, businesses, and other organizations can provide students with networking opportunities and real-world experience (Khayati & Selim, 2019; Trinidad & Leviste, 2021).
6. Continuously reviewing and updating the curriculum; after conducting market research and establishing partnerships with communities and businesses, the next step is to adjust the curriculum to meet their needs and increase its relevance. Regular curriculum reviews must remain relevant, up-to-date, and aligned with industry standards (Fomunyam, 2020; Komenda et al., 2015; Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2021).
7. Professional development of faculty; investing in the professional development of faculty is crucial for universities. By staying up-to-date with the latest developments in methodology and teaching technology, faculty can provide high-quality education to students. (Kemal et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2020; Wardoyo et al., 2020). Reducing the administrative burden on faculty is essential to developing their competencies and allows them to focus on their primary responsibilities (Rahmah & Fadhli, 2021; Žeravíková et al., 2015).
8. Providing career services; establishing a career development centre is essential for universities to assist students in their career paths. Career services, such as job placement assistance, resume writing,



and networking opportunities, help students prepare for their future careers. Developing career services aligns with efforts to improve the quality of universities themselves (Bradley et al., 2021; Fickling et al., 2018; Simon, 2014).

Implementing a strategy for educational product development through these changes will provide students with a better educational experience that prepares them for their future careers.

D. Conclusion

The central aspect of the marketing strategy for higher education is the product (study program and accreditation). This means that if a higher education institution has various study programs, it will significantly impact students' decision to choose that institution. Therefore, PTKIN, which has yet to transform into a university, has limited authority to add new study programs due to numerous regulations restricting PTKIN.

A mixed-method approach was used in this research to provide more comprehensive information. The researcher aimed to confirm students' reasons for choosing higher education over other options. By employing a mixed-method approach, the findings offer a comprehensive description, highlighting that the quality of higher education products is the primary consideration for students in their decision-making process.

However, this research has limitations in exploring the marketing strategies and understanding the needs and considerations of the Acehnese society when choosing higher education. Therefore, it is suggested that higher education institutions develop study programs aligned with the digital era, such as digital business, scientific data, and other areas related to technology and information development. Additionally, for PTKIN, transforming into a university should be a priority to enhance study programs' quality and product offerings. Transformed PTKIN institutions will provide more options for students to choose from.

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Appendix Data Source Table 5.

1. <https://unsyiah.ac.id/en/akademik/853-cama-masuk-daftar-calon-penerima-bidikmisi>
2. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14bDAkkWq9yy10zlGz3ldlYEWjhmUKkJD/view>
3. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/164YpbetJWva8Q96H5fRLfKvqOp530OjU/view>
4. <http://kmhs.uin-ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/id/pengumuman/lainnya/pengumuman-kelulusan-beasiswa-kartu-indonesia-pintar-tahun-20211636462814>
5. <https://www.iainlhokseumawe.ac.id/pengumuman-kelulusan-penerima-beasiswa-kip-angkatan-tahun-2020/>
6. <https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2020/11/25/180-mahasiswa-baru-iain-langsa-berstatus-miskin-dan-berprestasi-peroleh-beasiswa-kip-k>