
Strategies for Constructing an Image of Elementary School Excellence through School Culture Transformation

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of elementary education in an era of global competition requires schools not only to pursue academic achievement but also to cultivate an image of excellence. This study highlights the importance of institutional strategies for shaping public perceptions of an excellent school through contextual and participatory cultural transformation. A qualitative approach with a single-case-study design was employed. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Six informants were selected purposively based on their level of involvement, representing the principal, teachers, education staff, students, and parents. The findings identified five strategies used to construct an image of excellence at SDN Pasar Lama 1 Banjarmasin: (1) internalizing environmental-cultural values within the school vision and mission; (2) integrating cultural habituation through the mission, goals, and school regulations; (3) establishing consistent communication and collaboration with relevant stakeholders to support school culture; (4) consistently updating information through social media, the school website, and other informative platforms; and (5) sustaining the transformation of a quality culture through principal leadership. The findings imply that consistently embedding cultural values in school goals, programs, and regulations can shape collective behavior and make school culture a visible institutional identity in everyday practice. Continuous communication and collaboration with stakeholders further strengthen community support and trust, contributing to a positive and sustainable social construction of the school's image of excellence.

Keywords: *school image, school culture transformation, school branding, elementary school, case study*

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of elementary education in an era of global competition requires schools not only to pursue academic achievement but also to build an image of excellence (school brand image) rooted in strong and sustainable school-culture values. Within contemporary competition for educational quality, elementary schools can no longer be understood solely as institutions that deliver instruction; they also function as social institutions that construct identity, reputation, and public trust ([Chotimah et al., 2024](#); [Warta et al., 2024](#)). Communities have become increasingly selective when choosing schools, considering service quality, graduate characteristics, the learning environment, school leadership, and the reputation formed through stakeholders' collective experiences. In this context, an excellent school image should not be regarded merely as the outcome of promotional activities, but as a consequence of consistent cultural practices embedded in everyday organizational life. Previous studies indicate that school culture provides a foundation for institutional identity, stakeholder loyalty, and school differentiation within an increasingly competitive educational environment ([Jukić, 2025](#)).

Conceptually, school culture comprises the system of values, beliefs, norms, traditions, and behavioral patterns shared by members of the school community and used to guide decision making, educational-service provision, and social interaction within the organization. Maryamah ([2016](#)) describes school culture as the distinctive characteristics, character, and image by which a school is recognized in the wider community, positioning culture as a basis for institutional image formation. Edgar H. Schein's organizational-culture perspective further explains that culture extends beyond visible artifacts to include espoused values and basic assumptions that indirectly shape organizational behavior ([Fu et al., 2022](#)). School-culture transformation can therefore be understood as a deep process of change through which values are internalized into governance, leadership, policy, and instructional practice, thereby supporting sustainable changes in collective behavior.

Field conditions indicate that many elementary schools still treat image building primarily as an external or administrative concern rather than as a substantive strategy integrated into the school's cultural system. As a result, institutional strengths are often not managed systematically or sustainably and therefore generate limited differentiation among competing educational institutions. School-culture transformation consequently becomes a key strategy for developing an authentic and competitive image of excellence. Environmental culture, work culture, and quality culture function not only as normative values but also as strategic instruments for shaping a distinctive institutional identity and reputation.

From an educational-management perspective, school reputation develops through the accumulation of stakeholders' direct experiences of service quality. Parents, teachers, students, alumni, school committees, local government, and the wider community form perceptions of a school based on the consistency between the values it communicates and the practices they observe. An image of excellence is therefore a social construction arising from interactions among multiple actors rather than merely an outcome of institutional marketing communication. Recent research suggests that a strong school culture can create emotional attachment, strengthen stakeholder trust, and increase community loyalty toward the school ([Jukić, 2025](#)).

Previous studies have confirmed the relationship between school culture and institutional image formation. Hidayatun ([2017](#)) argues that cultural branding is an important strategy for strengthening schools' relationships with communities through local values, thereby enabling schools to develop a distinctive position within their social environment. Jukić ([2025](#)) extends this perspective by showing that school culture forms a primary foundation for the school brand because culture creates an organizational identity that is subsequently translated into positive stakeholder perceptions. Together, these studies suggest that successful educational branding depends more strongly on the quality of organizational culture than on promotional activities alone.

A culture-based excellent public elementary school is an institution that builds excellence not only through academic achievement but also through the internalization of values, habits, character, and a collective identity embedded in the daily life of the school community. Such

excellence can be reflected in cultures of discipline, quality, literacy, religiosity, environmental responsibility, collaboration, and service, all of which consistently shape students' character and the school's positive public image. From the perspective of educational organizational-culture theory, school culture is understood as a system of values, norms, beliefs, traditions, and habits that guides the behavior of school members in pursuing educational quality ([Schein, 2010](#); [Suriansyah et al., 2020](#)). In public elementary schools, an excellent culture may be developed through distinctive and sustainable positive habits, for example, friendliness, cleanliness, literacy, nationalism, religiosity, technological adaptability, and environmental awareness, which can subsequently become part of the school's branding.

Research on constructing an image of elementary-school excellence through school-culture transformation is important because school image does not emerge instantaneously; it is constructed continuously through managerial, pedagogical, and cultural processes. Kalkan et al. ([2020](#)) identified relationships among principals' leadership styles, school culture, and schools' organizational image, indicating that school image is influenced by the ways in which leadership mobilizes organizational values, norms, and cultural practices. This finding reinforces the assumption that principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members are important actors in building an image of excellence through the internalization of positive culture, quality culture, work culture, environmental culture, and achievement culture. Principals, in particular, can serve as transformational leaders who build a work culture capable of strengthening teachers' commitment, motivation, and discipline, thereby contributing to quality-culture transformation and the construction of an excellent school image ([Aslamiah et al., 2023](#); [Jati, 2023](#); [Putriningsih et al., 2023](#); [Syahminan & Suriansyah, 2024](#)).

School-culture transformation is especially relevant in elementary education because this stage provides a foundation for students' character, learning habits, discipline, environmental awareness, and orientation toward quality. A healthy school culture can contribute to educational quality, teacher performance, and students' holistic development. Husni ([2011](#)) argues that educational quality can be improved through interventions in school culture because changes in school culture influence teacher culture and teaching-learning practices. This view is reinforced by Suriansyah ([2014](#)), who found a significant relationship between school culture and teacher performance, both directly and indirectly through work commitment as a mediating variable.

Recent studies from the past five years position school culture as both a strategic foundation for character formation and a managerial instrument for constructing an image of school excellence through value internalization, leadership, collaboration, and the integration of local culture to strengthen institutional identity ([Nurannisa et al., 2026](#); [Aspiani et al., 2025](#); [Hasan et al., 2025](#); [Ulah et al., 2024](#)). At the same time, research identifies persistent implementation challenges, including inconsistent habituation, differences in teachers' understanding, and incomplete internalization of character values, resulting in a gap between ideal concepts of school culture and empirical practice ([Solekhah & Muhroji, 2025](#); [Nurannisa et al., 2026](#)). School culture also makes an important contribution to educational quality, student character, and institutional identity. Siregar and Siregar ([2024](#)) emphasize its role in creating a conducive learning environment and improving educational quality; Suhendra et al. ([2024](#)) describe school culture as representing a school's distinctive character and public image; and Mintarini ([2025](#)) shows that integrating local cultural values and character education can provide an effective branding strategy for differentiating elementary schools and strengthening competitiveness.

At the elementary level, school-culture transformation is increasingly regarded as an important strategy for building an image of institutional excellence amid intensifying competition among schools. Nevertheless, studies from the last five years continue to show a gap between ideal conceptualizations of school culture and empirical implementation. Nurannisa et al. ([2026](#)) report that school culture in many elementary schools is implemented only partially and has not been integrated into school quality-management systems, limiting the development of character and school identity. Other research emphasizes that contemporary schools are expected not only to produce high-quality graduates but also to establish a strong institutional identity through adaptive and collaborative organizational cultures ([Aspiani et al., 2025](#)). These conditions indicate a

mechanism gap between public expectations of excellent schools and the realities of school-culture management.

Earlier studies have also tended to examine school culture primarily from the perspectives of character education, discipline, or the learning environment, whereas research specifically connecting school-culture transformation with strategies for constructing an image of elementary-school excellence remains relatively limited. Hasan et al. (2025) show that systematically managed school culture can strengthen public trust and institutional identity, while Ulah et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of integrating local culture into student character development. However, much of the earlier literature either focuses on a direct relationship between school culture and institutional branding or discusses educational-marketing strategies more generally. These studies do not comprehensively explain the internal mechanisms through which cultural values are embedded in school governance, how stakeholders interpret the image of excellence constructed by the school, or how cultural transformation produces a sustainable institutional reputation. A conceptual gap therefore remains regarding the social processes connecting cultural transformation to school reputation through stakeholders' collective experiences.

This research gap is particularly relevant to public elementary schools, which often face challenges in building institutional advantage under resource constraints and increasing competition with private schools. At the same time, public elementary schools have substantial potential to differentiate themselves through school cultures grounded in local values, student character, high-quality public service, and collaboration with the community. Understanding cultural transformation as a strategy for constructing an image of excellence is therefore important for developing school-improvement models that are sustainable, contextually grounded, and potentially replicable in other elementary-school settings.

SDN Pasar Lama 1 Banjarmasin provides one example of this phenomenon. The school is known not only for academic achievement but also for its efforts to develop school culture by embedding cultural values within its vision, mission, regulations, character-building routines, collaboration with parents and the community, and consistent publication of school activities. These practices suggest that the school's image of excellence is constructed through a systematic process of cultural transformation that contributes to positive community perceptions of school quality.

Criteria for a culture-based excellent public elementary school can be observed in the school's ability to establish a value system that functions not merely as a slogan but is internalized in the behavior of school members, institutional governance, the academic climate, and the school's institutional identity. Such excellence is generally characterized by: (1) distinctive core values that are understood collectively; (2) consistent habituation of positive cultures such as discipline, literacy, religiosity, environmental awareness, and collaboration; (3) active involvement of school members and the community in sustaining school culture; (4) student character and behavior that reflect the school's cultural values; (5) a conducive, clean, safe, and quality-oriented school environment; and (6) a positive school image or reputation in the community as an outcome of sustainably developed culture (Wulandari & Nugroho, 2020).

This study is based on the assumption that consistently transforming school culture through stronger work culture, quality culture, discipline, and collective values contributes to the construction of an image of excellence in the community. This assumption is supported by Tawa et al. (2025), Riani et al. (2025), and Nurannisa et al. (2026), who emphasize the importance of school culture, leadership, and value internalization in developing character, achievement, and institutional identity. Accordingly, this study aimed to analyze strategies for constructing an image of elementary-school excellence through school-culture transformation, using SDN Pasar Lama 1 Banjarmasin as a case. The study addressed three questions: (1) How are cultural values internalized into school governance? (2) How do stakeholders interpret the school's image of excellence? and (3) What mechanisms connect school-culture transformation with the formation of school reputation? The findings are expected to enrich educational-management scholarship, particularly understanding of the relationships among organizational culture, school governance, and reputation building in elementary education through a contextual case-study approach.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single-case-study design to explore in depth the construction of a school image grounded in school culture within the specific context of SDN Pasar Lama 1 Banjarmasin. The site was selected purposively because the public school demonstrates a strong cultural character, institutional strengths recognized by the community, a record of academic and nonacademic achievement, sustained school-culture practices, and a high level of community trust. It was therefore treated as an information-rich case relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The single-case design was considered appropriate as an initial exploratory stage for understanding the phenomenon contextually and holistically before developing research on a broader scale.

The study was conducted over four months, from February to May 2026. Data collection included 12 in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately 45–90 minutes, producing about 14 hours of recorded interview data. A semistructured interview guide addressed several key questions: (1) How are school-culture values internalized into the vision, mission, regulations, and school governance? (2) What strategies does the school use to sustain this culture? (3) How do school members and the community interpret the excellent image of SDN Pasar Lama 1? and (4) What factors strengthen or constrain school-culture transformation in building school reputation?

Moderate participant observation was conducted during 18 field visits, each lasting approximately 3–4 hours. Observations focused on instructional activities, school-culture routines, interactions among school members, implementation of school regulations, religious activities, literacy culture, school services, and collaborative activities involving parents and the community.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews explored participants' perceptions and experiences and the strategies used by the school to construct and sustain a culture that contributes to institutional image. Six informants were selected purposively on the basis of their involvement, experience, and knowledge of school-culture implementation. The informants comprised one principal, two teachers, and three parents. Inclusion criteria were: (1) involvement in school activities for at least two years; (2) understanding of school-culture implementation and institutional governance; (3) willingness to provide information openly; and (4) direct participation in activities related to school-culture development. Participant observation was used to examine cultural practices directly, including social interaction, routines, symbols, and everyday activities. Document analysis covered the school vision and mission; the Operational Curriculum of the Education Unit (KOSP); school-culture programs; school regulations; Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) documents; activity reports; academic and nonacademic achievement data; activity documentation; school social-media publications; the school website; and partnership documents involving stakeholders. [Table 1](#) presents the coding scheme used for interview data.

Table 1. Research data coding scheme

Data Source	Focus	Code
Principal	Focus 1	KS-01
Teacher 1	Focus 1	G1-01
Teacher 2	Focus 3	G2-03
Parent 1	Focus 2	OT1-02
Parent 1	Focus 3	OT1-03
Parent 2	Focus 2	OT2-02
Parent 3	Focus 2	OT3-02

To establish trustworthiness, the study employed methodological, source, and time triangulation together with confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Data credibility was supported through triangulation across techniques, sources, and time. Triangulation is an

important strategy for strengthening the validity of qualitative findings (Golafshani, 2003). [Figure 1](#) presents the qualitative single-case-study research procedure.

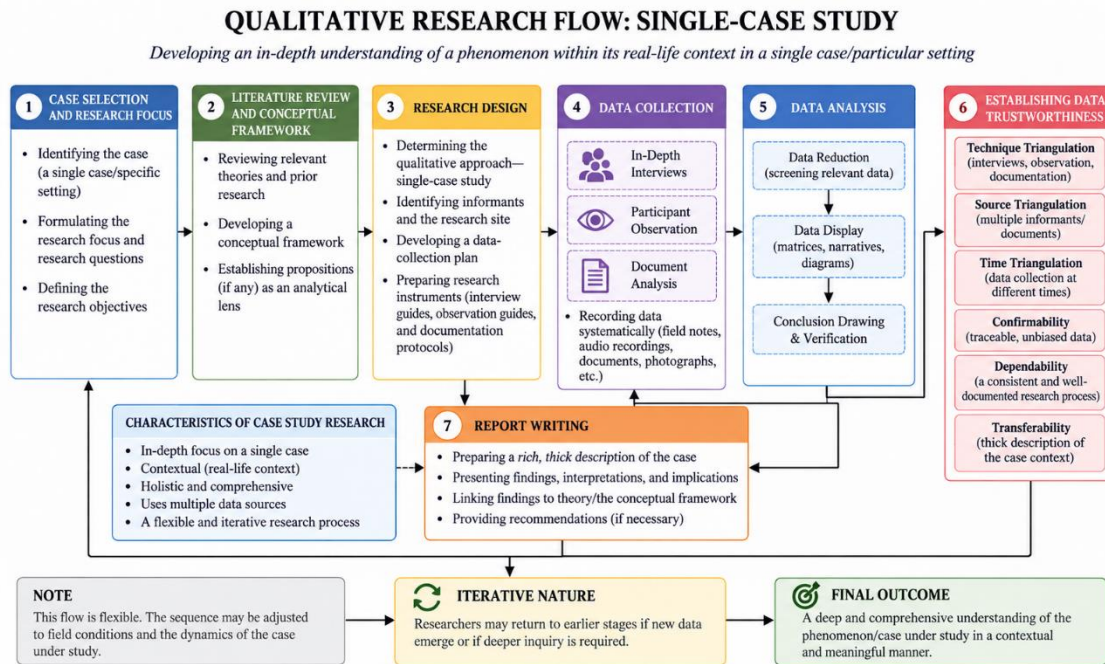


Figure 1. Research procedure

Data analysis was conducted interactively and concurrently with data collection, drawing on the Miles and Huberman analytical model, which comprises three principal stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (see [Figure 2](#)).

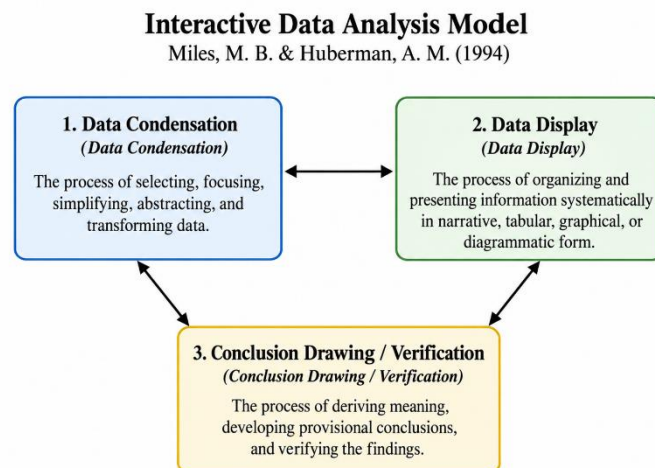


Figure 2. Data analysis model

The analysis focused on identifying key patterns related to school culture and its contribution to the formation of school image. Through this approach, the study sought to produce an in-depth initial account of how school culture contributes to institutional image formation within the case examined (see [Figure 3](#)).

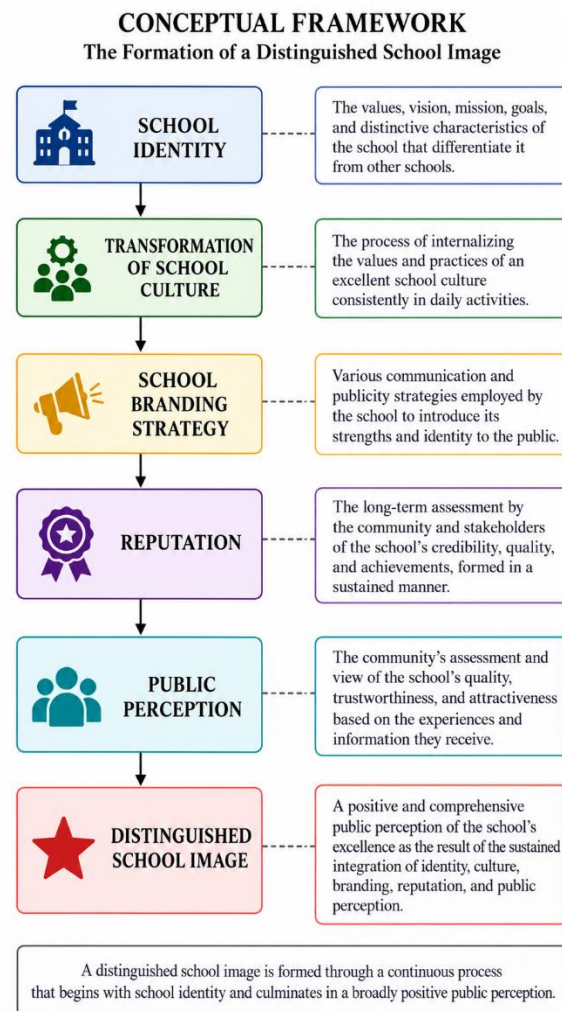


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The image of school excellence was positioned as the central construct and analyzed through indicators of school identity, school-culture transformation, branding strategy, institutional reputation, and public perception. Findings from this small-scale study may provide a conceptual and empirical basis for subsequent research of broader scope and greater comprehensiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Internalization of Cultural Values in School Governance

The findings indicate that the construction of an image of excellence at SDN Pasar Lama 1 is supported by an integrated transformation of environmental culture, work culture, and quality culture. The school's identity is shaped not only by academic achievement but also by character development, preservation of local culture, and commitment to environmental sustainability. Informant KS-01 emphasized the school vision: 'Creating a generation that is characterized by strong character, achievement, and environmental awareness.' This vision is translated into the school mission through the reinforcement of discipline, honesty, environmental care, quality, and cooperation. School-culture transformation is implemented systematically through routines, school programs, self-development activities, and the integration of cultural values into learning. Environmental culture is developed through, among other initiatives, the Adiwiyata Mandiri program, the routine use of reusable drinking bottles, plastic reduction, structured cleaning schedules, and the provision of cleaning facilities in each classroom. Observations further indicated that environmental culture, teachers' work culture, quality culture, school-image

symbols, and school publicity were visible in everyday school activities. This finding is consistent with Suriansyah et al. (2020), who argue that a quality work culture in elementary schools is built on a foundation of vision, mission, organizational values, school strategy, transformational leadership, strengthened commitment, professional competence, empowerment, participation, recognition, and continuous improvement. A strong quality culture can support high-quality educational processes and ultimately increase public trust in educational institutions. The school culture reflected in the vision and mission of SDN Pasar Lama 1 therefore corresponds to the first indicator of a culture-based excellent school: distinctive core values that are collectively understood. These values function not only as an internal management mechanism but also as a social identity that shapes positive public perceptions of the school. Figure 4 shows how the school seeks to establish consistency in positive daily habits through school regulations.



Figure 4. School vision, mission, and regulations displayed at SDN Pasar Lama 1

Indicators such as discipline, literacy, religiosity, environmental awareness, collaboration, and the creation of a conducive, clean, safe, and quality-oriented environment are incorporated into the school's vision, mission, and objectives.

The transformation of work culture at SDN Pasar Lama 1 did not occur instantaneously but developed through a gradual process of organizational change. Interview findings indicated that, before the school strengthened its culture, teachers' professional development was largely individual and had not yet become a shared learning culture. Professional-development activities were conducted intermittently, and reflective practice, sharing of instructional experience, and performance evaluation had not become institutional routines.

Change began when the principal initiated the strengthening of work culture. The school developed teacher collaboration and professionalism through the Teacher Working Group (Kelompok Kerja Guru, KKG), practitioner communities, seminars, workshops, and In-House Training (IHT). The principal also conducted periodic monitoring and evaluation of instruction to maintain educational quality. Informant G1-01 stated that teaching practice was evaluated directly by the principal every three months as a form of instructional quality control. During early implementation, several teachers tended to maintain established work patterns, particularly with respect to reflecting on instruction and openly sharing teaching practices. This resistance gradually decreased through participatory leadership, sustained mentoring, modeling by the principal, and the creation of a culture of mutual learning among teachers. These strategies helped build trust and strengthen teachers' commitment to collective professional development.

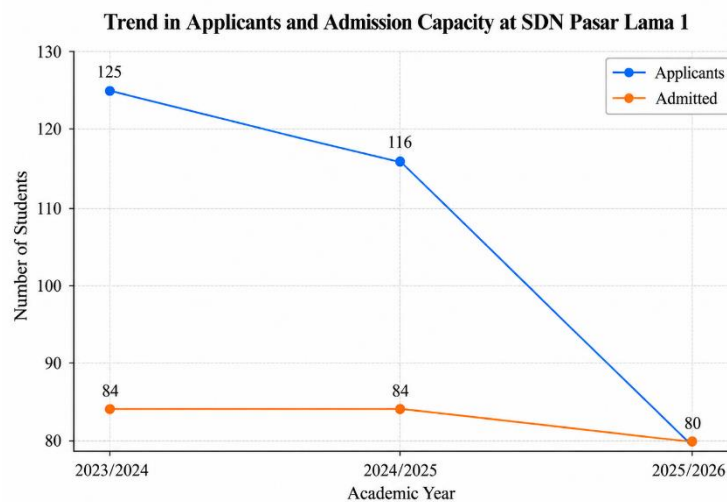
As the transformation progressed, changes became visible in more intensive teacher collaboration, more consistent instructional evaluation, the development of reflective practices within learning communities, and a stronger collective orientation toward continuous improvement. The school's quality culture was also evident in its emphasis on academic and nonacademic achievement. Students were actively encouraged to participate in competitions, and additional support was provided for high-achieving students. This orientation was reinforced by

the school's receipt of the Adiwiyata Mandiri award, one manifestation of its school-culture transformation, and by achievements in the Festival Tunas Bahasa Ibu at the South Kalimantan provincial and national levels. The school's quality culture is consistent with principles of Total Quality Management, in which stakeholders participate in recurring cycles of planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement to strengthen educational services and public trust ([Halimah et al., 2022](#); [Lasno et al., 2019](#); [Puspaningtyas et al., 2022](#); [Sulistiyanana et al., 2019](#); [Suriansyah, 2017](#)).

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the School's Image of Excellence

The school-community relationship is developed through active involvement of the school committee and parents, as well as collaboration with community health centers, universities, businesses, and government agencies. Informant OT1-02 stated that the school has a strong reputation because of its achievements, comprehensive facilities, and high community interest. The findings also indicate that local culture functions as a source of school differentiation. Banjar language and culture are not treated merely as local-content subjects; they are incorporated into school culture through the use of school-specific sasirangan fabric, the habituation of Banjar cultural practices, and the reinforcement of local identity in school activities. The school's image of excellence is therefore shaped not solely by formal branding but by the consistency of cultural practices embedded in everyday school life. Systematic value internalization through leadership modeling, participation by school members, collective habituation, and lived experience can shape members' character while strengthening institutional identity and an enduring image of excellence ([Luh et al., 2023](#); [Nurannisa et al., 2026](#); [Rifa'i, 2026](#); [Syahrani et al., 2026](#)).

One indicator of the strength of a school's image is community interest, as reflected in the number of applicants for new-student admission. Field data for SDN Pasar Lama 1 over the last three years show the following pattern. [Figure 5](#) shows that, in the 2025/2026 academic year, the number of applicants declined until it equaled the school's admission capacity.



Source: School Documentation (PPDB Committees for 2023/2024 and 2024/2025); preliminary data from the 2025/2026 PPDB Committee as of June 2025.

Figure 5. Trends in applicants and admission capacity at SDN Pasar Lama 1

Despite this decline, admission capacity remained relatively stable and the school continued to fill its available places each year. This pattern may indicate that SDN Pasar Lama 1 has maintained its attractiveness amid growing competition among elementary schools and changing demographic conditions. The data may therefore be interpreted more appropriately as evidence of relatively stable community trust rather than simply as an indicator of applicant growth. The school's service capacity remained filled. The pattern may also reflect external dynamics such as

demographic factors, zoning policy, or increased competition among elementary schools. According to informant G1-01, the decline did not directly represent a decrease in school quality but was more closely related to external factors influencing student distribution. From an educational-management perspective, this finding suggests that an image of excellence cannot be assessed solely through annual increases in applicant numbers, but also through an institution's capacity to sustain community trust under increasingly competitive conditions. Consistently filling the available admission capacity suggests that school-culture transformation, institutional-identity strengthening, and public communication continued to support the school's social legitimacy. This finding extends the understanding of school-image construction by suggesting that an image of excellence may be reflected not only in applicant growth but also in the school's ability to maintain community preference despite expanding school choice and changing characteristics of prospective students.

Separate parent interviews further confirmed how the school is perceived. Informant OT1-03 stated, 'We chose SDN Pasar Lama 1 not only because of its achievements, but also because its school culture is very good, the teachers are disciplined, and communication with parents is open.' This statement reflects a perception of the school as a disciplined, safe, comfortable, and supportive educational environment attentive to students' development. Informant OT1-02 also regarded the school as having competent teachers who support both character formation and student achievement. OT2-02 stated, 'SDN Pasar Lama 1 has a good and disciplined environment and pays attention to students' development,' while OT3-02 emphasized that 'the school has competent teachers, a safe environment, and is able to develop children's character and achievement.' Observational data further showed that students earned 15 non-academic achievements between January and May 2026, and these achievements were consistently publicized through the school's Instagram account. These findings indicate that the image of excellence at SDN Pasar Lama 1 is reinforced both through communication on social media and through community members' direct experiences of educational-service quality. The school image is not produced instantaneously but emerges from collective perceptions of the culture experienced in the school environment. Community trust develops as the school provides a conducive, safe learning environment oriented toward students' development. This finding is consistent with Schein's organizational-culture theory, in which organizational culture is understood as a pattern of basic assumptions that develops within an organization and guides members' behaviour ([Schein, 2010](#)).

At SDN Pasar Lama 1, cultures of discipline, environmental responsibility, and quality have developed into shared values that shape school identity. This finding aligns with Taajamo et al. (2023), who identify school culture as a central element in constructing educational-institution identity and influencing public perceptions of school quality. A strong school culture promotes alignment among organizational values, behavior, and goals and can thereby strengthen school reputation ([Jukić, 2025](#); [Jukić & Ph, 2023](#); [Taajamo et al., 2023](#)). Interview data from OT2-02 indicated that the most visible strengths of SDN Pasar Lama 1 include student discipline, environmental cleanliness, and improved school achievement. Parents also reported that discipline, character, and environmental-care values were visible in changes in their children's behavior after attending the school. OT3-02 stated, 'The culture can be seen in children becoming more disciplined, polite, independent, and environmentally aware.' These data suggest that school culture has been internalized at the individual level rather than remaining confined to formal programs. This condition indicates that school culture functions simultaneously as an instrument of character education and as a mechanism for shaping school image. Positive school culture can develop student character through the repeated practice of discipline, responsibility, social concern, and ethical conduct. Because culture is enacted continuously through everyday school interaction, it becomes a strategic medium for character development. Other research similarly shows that school culture contributes to character formation, positive learning environments, and values of tolerance and togetherness ([Azizah et al., 2024](#); [Yuliana & Riswanto, 2025](#)). School cultures built through habituation, modeling, and constructive social interaction can create educational climates that support students' academic and nonacademic development. Positive

school culture has also been associated with effective learning environments, a stronger sense of belonging, active participation by school members, and the development of integrity, empathy, responsibility, discipline, and social character through sustained routines and modeling ([Aspiani et al., 2025](#); [Azizah et al., 2024](#); [Feriana & Ulfatun, 2024](#); [Juliana et al., 2023](#); [Maulana et al., 2026](#); [Wanti & Darmawan, 2024](#)). School-culture transformation can therefore be understood as a fundamental strategy that supports not only educational quality but also institutional identity, reputation, and an image of excellence through the creation of a high-quality, collaborative, and character-oriented learning environment.

Mechanisms Linking Cultural Transformation to School Reputation

Another indicator of culture-based school excellence is active participation by school members and the community in sustaining school culture. The findings show that the school actively communicates with parents through regular meetings, class communication groups, and periodic information sharing. Informant G2-03 reported that teachers collaborate through routine meetings, instructional discussions, mutual assistance in school activities, and joint development of educational programs. Parents participate in various school activities and support children's learning at home. OT1-03 explained that 'the school maintains communication through parent meetings, class communication groups, and regular information sharing.' Such involvement indicates a collaborative relationship between SDN Pasar Lama 1 and its community.

Open communication encourages a sense of school ownership, positioning community members not only as users of educational services but also as strategic partners in school development. Observations also indicated active open communication through the school's Instagram account, which had more than 2,600 followers, as well as through its TikTok account and website. Conceptually, these conditions show that an image of excellence is constructed through social interaction among multiple stakeholders rather than instantaneously. Branding strategies can help disseminate school information to broader audiences through social media and other digital platforms ([Bungai et al., 2024](#); [Hidayati & Susilo, 2026](#); [Manurung & Siagian, 2021](#); [Matin et al., 2024](#); [Wahyunto et al., 2024](#)).

Institutional image and reputation are likewise understood as socially constructed perceptions formed through experience, communication, and continuing interaction between an organization and its stakeholder environment ([Gotata & Sojkin, 2020](#); [Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando et al., 2018](#); [Langrafe et al., 2020](#)). Chotimah et al. (2024) further explain that school reputation develops through active stakeholder engagement in supporting the school's vision, programs, and growth. School image can therefore be viewed as an outcome of exchanges of meaning, lived experience, communication, and collective participation among principals, teachers, students, parents, alumni, and the community in shaping perceptions of educational quality ([Munjin, 2022](#); [Noorhapizah et al., 2025](#); [Pratiwi et al., 2025](#)). The stronger the collaborative and participatory relationships established with stakeholders, the stronger the school's social legitimacy, identity, and image of excellence.

Interview findings indicate that SDN Pasar Lama 1 has developed a strong identity as a disciplined, clean, child-friendly school oriented toward both academic and nonacademic achievement. These data were grouped under the category 'image of school excellence.' Data concerning school culture were then condensed into several principal themes: discipline, religiosity, mutual cooperation, courtesy, and environmental awareness. Environmental culture was reflected in concrete practices such as the use of reusable drinking bottles, classroom cleaning duties, routine collective cleaning, and the habit of disposing of waste appropriately. These practices indicate that environmental culture is not merely symbolic but is integrated into students' daily activities. In relation to work culture, interviews revealed collaborative patterns among teachers through routine meetings, instructional discussions, and cooperation in developing educational programs ([Astuti & Syafitri, 2024](#); [Baars et al., 2018](#); [Bayar, 2021](#); [Feriana & Ulfatun, 2024](#); [Johns-Klein, 2020](#); [Jukić, 2025](#); [Pabalan & Pabalan, 2020](#); [Raju, 2024](#)). With respect to quality culture, teachers sought to improve instruction through active methods, interactive media, digital interactive boards, teacher training, and periodic evaluation

(Noorhapizah, et al., 2023b; Noorhapizah et al., 2022; Noorhapizah, et al., 2023a; D. A. Pratiwi et al., 2021; D. Ayu Pratiwi & Noorhapizah, 2022; Sugiarto & Pratiwi, 2023). Other condensed data included teacher modeling, student routines, instructional innovation, principal support, and the effects of school culture on student behavior and community trust. Figure 6 presents the resulting model of strategies for constructing an image of excellence through school-culture transformation at SDN Pasar Lama 1 Banjarmasin.



Figure 6. Model of Strategies for Constructing an Image of Excellence through School Culture Transformation at SDN Pasar Lama 1 Banjarmasin

The data display indicates that the image of excellence at SDN Pasar Lama 1 is constructed through school-culture transformation implemented consistently and in an integrated manner. A culture of discipline is reflected in teachers' modeling of punctuality, cleanliness, and responsibility in school activities. Religious culture and courtesy are enacted through shared prayer, habitual polite behavior, and routine religious activities that support character formation. Environmental care has also become a dominant aspect of school identity through sustained ecological practices. The findings further show that quality culture is supported through technology-based instructional innovation. Teachers use interactive media and digital interactive

boards to improve instructional quality and student interest ([Noorhapizah et al., 2022](#); [Rahmatullah et al., 2020](#); [Sugiarto & Pratiwi, 2023](#); [Sumardi et al., 2023](#)). These practices suggest that the school focuses not only on character formation but also on adaptation to developments in twenty-first-century education. At the managerial level, the principal acts as a driver of school culture through direction, motivation, supervision, and support for school programs. This leadership support strengthens collective implementation of positive culture. Its effects are visible in students' greater discipline, environmental awareness, and courtesy, as well as in increased community trust in the school.

The analysis indicates that SDN Pasar Lama 1 constructs its image of excellence through systematic and sustained school-culture transformation involving the wider school community. Cultures of discipline, religiosity, environmental care, cooperation, and quality provide important foundations for the school's identity. The school's positive image is shaped not only by formal programs but also by teacher modeling, student routines, instructional innovation, and principal leadership that supports positive culture. Data verification indicated consistency across informants' accounts, particularly concerning the relationship between school culture, student behavior, and growing community trust. The findings imply that consistently integrating cultural values into school objectives, programs, and regulations can shape collective behavior and make school culture a visible identity in daily practice. Continuous communication and collaboration with stakeholders further strengthen community support and trust, allowing an image of excellence to develop through positive and sustainable social construction. The study therefore proposes a conceptual model in which the image of excellence of a public elementary school is constructed primarily through school-culture transformation rather than promotional branding alone. In the case examined, this transformation is rooted in local Banjar identity, mediated by the principal's transformational leadership, and reinforced through public-communication strategies that contribute to social legitimacy and community trust. School culture at SDN Pasar Lama 1 thus functions not only as a set of institutional habits but also as a strategy for strengthening school reputation.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that an image of elementary-school excellence is not formed through promotional activity alone but through school-culture transformation that is systematically embedded in institutional governance. Five principal strategies were identified: (1) internalizing environmental-cultural values in the school vision and mission; (2) integrating cultural habituation through the mission, objectives, and school regulations; (3) establishing sustained communication and collaboration with stakeholders; (4) consistently disseminating school information through social media and other public-communication channels; and (5) principal leadership that consistently mobilizes cultural change. Together, these strategies support an excellent school culture characterized by environmental responsibility, discipline, service, collaboration, and quality orientation. In the case examined, these cultural practices were associated with stronger community trust, school reputation, student attractiveness, recognition of school achievement, and institutional identity.

Theoretically, the study extends research on school culture by showing how cultural transformation can function as a mechanism linking school governance with the construction of an image of excellence. The findings complement perspectives on organizational culture and educational branding by suggesting that school reputation accumulates through continuing processes of value internalization, leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and institutional communication. The study therefore proposes that an image of excellence can be understood as an outcome of organizational culture that is consistently transformed through participatory and adaptive school governance.

Practically, the findings suggest that principals can position cultural transformation as a central strategy in developing the school vision, policy, and value-based decision making. For teachers, the findings underscore the importance of modeling, character habituation, and integrating cultural values into instruction as part of strengthening school identity. For school committees

and parents, the study highlights sustained partnership, open communication, and active participation in school programs as important factors in building public trust and institutional reputation.

This study has several limitations. It was conducted in only one public elementary school using a single-case-study design; consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to schools with different organizational cultures, leadership characteristics, and social environments. In addition, the study emphasized internal school perspectives and did not quantitatively measure broader community perceptions or the long-term influence of cultural transformation on indicators of school reputation.

Future research should consider multiple-case designs involving public and private schools with diverse characteristics in order to develop a more comprehensive model of school-culture transformation. Further studies may also develop conceptual or structural models testing relationships among school-culture transformation, leadership, stakeholder engagement, public communication, school reputation, and community trust through mixed-methods approaches or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), thereby generating stronger empirical evidence and greater generalizability for elementary-education management.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Conceptualization, D.A.P. and A.S.; methodology, D.A.P. and A.S.; validation, A.S.; formal analysis and interpretation, D.A.P. and A.S.; data collection, D.A.P.; writing, original draft preparation, D.A.P.; writing, review and editing, A.S.; supervision, A.S. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) during the preparation of this manuscript for language refinement, grammatical correction, improvement of academic writing clarity, and assistance in organizing the manuscript structure. The tool was not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, independently interpret research findings, or make substantive scientific decisions. After using the tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed, verified, and edited all generated content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and content of the publication. All research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, conclusions, and scholarly judgments were carried out by the authors.

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