
Principal's strategy in managing new student admissions in vocational secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

Implementation of strategic management is believed to influence achieving institutional goals significantly. This study aims to reveal the principal's strategy in implementing strategic management in the New Student Admissions (NSA) program in Bantul region. This research was conducted using a qualitative case study model approach, the research subjects were 21 (twenty-one) people, including the principal, vice principal, and the head of the NSA team. Test the validity of the data using triangulation of data sources. The credibility of the data is obtained by comparing the data obtained through interviews with data from the document review results, the results are then confirmed through focus group discussions. The data obtained were then analyzed using the interactive technique of the Miles & Huberman model. The results of the study revealed that the new student admissions management strategy of Vocational Secondary Schools (VSS) in Bantul region was carried out two following stages. Firstly, the Strategic Environmental Analysis, including the advantages of the school, the economic background of the prospective student, geographical location, family background, and the origin of the prospective student's school; Secondly, the Strategy Formulation, including school promotion teams, fees, collaboration between institutions, strong partnerships between schools and the world of industry, relevance of majors based on prospective students' areas, to the clarity of information provided by the school. 3) Strategy implementation, including increasing teacher and employee commitment, cost transparency, involvement of students and parents, ease of registration, excellent service, and promotional programs. 4) Evaluation and monitoring, periodically observing the level of interest of the registrants and the level of achievement of targets. It is concluded that the findings of this study have revealed the importance of consistently implementing NSA strategic management, which includes strategic environmental analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Keywords: prospective student interest, strategic management, new student admissions

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INTRODUCTION

The New Student Admission (NSA) is an annual activity held by each school. The NSA program is a medium to introduce schools to recruit new students. Some schools, especially those in the suburbs, always face a problem: the low number of students enrolling. The NSA program is an opportunity for principals to introduce their schools to the public, and devise strategies to get as many new students as possible. At the beginning of each academic year, the school always arranges an attractive promotional activity program to gain the trust of prospective new students (Ali, 2022; Heryati & Herdiansyah, 2020). Various kinds of promotions are carried out

through print and electronic media. In some vocational schools, every time a new student admission program takes place, the results are always unsatisfactory, even though the number of applicants in other schools, especially high schools is always abundant. In Bantul region, apparently such a thing does not apply, the Vocational High School (VSS) has actually become one of the attractive destinations for prospective new students to continue their studies (Sari, 2019). Vocational schools accept a large number of new students, because they open up opportunities for students to enter the industrial world, but it is possible that some students can also continue their studies to higher education (Ayu & Trihantoyo, n.d.; Cahyanti & Indriayu, 2018; Rukmana, 2021; Sasmito et al., 2015). Based on basic education data at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology in 2021, the number of vocational and high school students in Bantul Region is 18,673 for the number of vocational students, greater than those who enter high school, which is 14,989 students. Figure 1 below compares the number of VSS and VSS students in the Bantul region in 2021-2022.

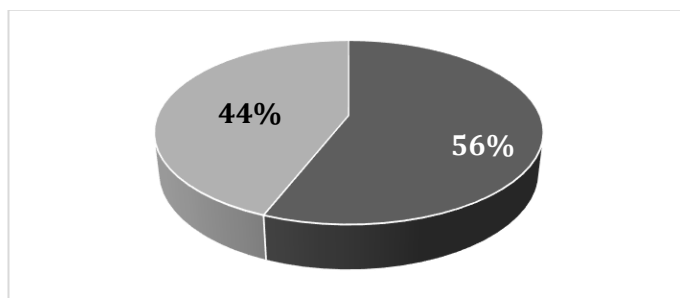


Figure 1. Comparison of the Number of Vocational and Senior High School Students, 2021-2022 (Source: Basic Education Data, Ministry of National Education, 2022)

High public trust in VSS needs to be balanced with serious efforts from the school to improve its quality and absorption in the business and industrial world. Vocational schools are required to continue to develop strategies in managing the NSA, as well as improve the quality of their schools. The phenomenon of the number of private Vocational Schools in Bantul Region which is more than public schools, certainly has a greater chance of accepting new prospective students. Moreover, private vocational schools are much more flexible, and even have greater opportunities to innovate and collaborate with the industrial world, which is a reference for job seekers from vocational school graduates (Pradana & Izzati, 2019; Widaningsih, 2016). The enthusiasm of prospective new students in Bantul region is large enough to continue their studies to VSS, this is because VSS has various advantages of facilities, such as workshops, teaching factories, and it is easier to establish cooperation with the industrial world. The total number of vocational students in Bantul region in 2021 will reach 3880 students, some VSSs even have more than 1000 students, including VSS Muhammadiyah Imogiri and VSS Muhammadiyah 1 Bantul, but some have difficulty recruiting new students, as shown in Figure 2 below this:

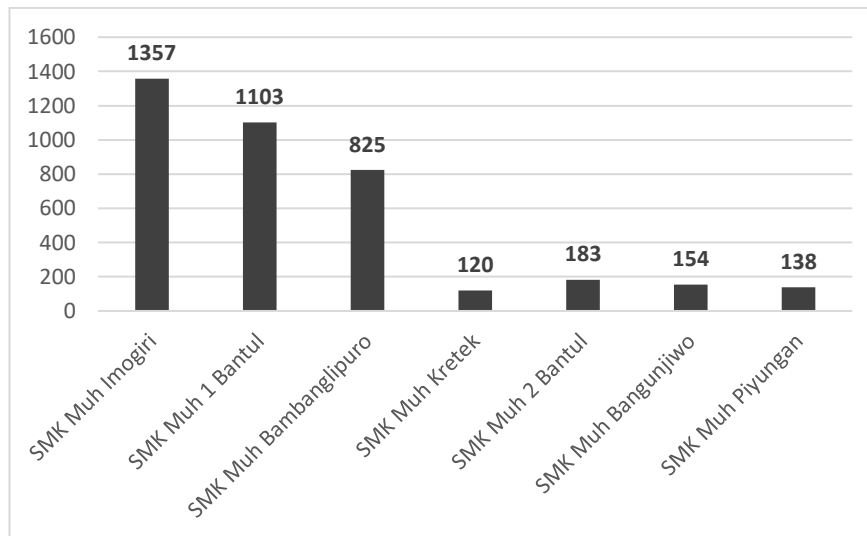


Figure 2. Number of Students of Muhammadiyah Vocational School in Bantul Region, 2021

Several studies discussing strategic management in the admission of new students in VSS explain that the success of NSA requires the involvement of all school members, principals, teachers, and employees. Their involvement starts with planning activities, forming committees, determining program objectives, venues, scheduling, budgets, and vision and mission as well as conveying messages (Irmayani & Wardiah, 2017). In line with that opinion, Ridwan & Lailasari (2020), stated that the increase in the number of new students was also due to optimal efforts in placing the role of the principal as a role model, manager, and supervisor. Meanwhile, a different opinion mentioned that what cannot be ignored is the efforts of schools to consider the ability of students to pay the registration fee so that it can be affordable, or completely waived, and even with tuition fees that can be paid in installments. This policy will certainly be a strategic management model with its charm, especially for less fortunate students. Good and efficient NSA management makes it an alternative for the success of the new student admission program (Lestari et al., 2020). According to Rahmanto (2018), Ridwan & Lailasari, (2020), effective principal strategies to increase NSA targets, namely by using the advantages of institutional products for promotion, reducing or even freeing registration fees, forming work teams, implementing promotional targets, collaborating with school stakeholders, implementing a pick-up ball system, and publishing through print media as well as electronics. Meanwhile, according to Efferi (2019), an effective NSA strategy is to provide various facilities to prospective students in continuing their studies, this is one of the success factors for NSA. Some of the previous articles focused more on one school, this cannot be a reference for looking at strategic management in general in the NSA program (Cahyanti & Indriayu, 2018; Mardiyah & Supriyadi, 2013; Pamungkas & Roniwijaya, 2016). This study aims to reveal what steps must be taken in formulating a strategy for implementing strategic management, especially in the NSA program based on experiences that several vocational schools in Bantul region have carried

out. The acquisition of new students is quite significant in each NSA program, and the observed school diversity is sufficient to explain the successful implementation of effective NSA strategic management in VSS.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study model. The research location is in the Bantul region, represented by 7 (seven) Muhammadiyah Vocational Secondary Schools (VSS). The research subjects were 21 (twenty-one) people; each school consisted of 3 (three) people, including the principal, vice principal for student affairs, and the chairman of the NSA committee. Data were collected through interviews, observation and document review. Meanwhile, the documents studied include the documents of the NSA preparatory meeting, the results of the social environment analysis, the partnership documents with the business world, and the results of the previous year's NSA evaluation. Test the validity of the data using the data source triangulation technique, the credibility of the data is obtained by comparing the results of interviews with documentary evidence, and confirming the findings through focus group discussions. Through in-depth interviews, the questions posed to participants were initiated by revealing the main problems, namely the gap in the acquisition of new students in several schools, and the implementation of strategic management at the NSA. All data obtained during the research process were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al., (2018), so that gradual reduction and conclusion drawing have started since the beginning of data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews with school principals (R1, R2, R4, R5, and R7) as the main participants revealed that an environmental analysis has been carried out in the context of preparing NSA strategic planning, each school considers its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Meanwhile, participants R3 and R6 stated that the school had not fully implemented the NSA program as the concept of strategic management. What has been done so far has always collided with weak human resources. During implementation, there were always obstacles, especially at stage 3 (three) of strategic management, namely excellent service, cost transparency, and employee/teacher commitment. However, an environmental analysis has been carried out regarding the potential and weaknesses. Also, the opportunities and constraints can be used to determine the strategy. As stated by Wheelen et al., (2017), the implementation of strategic management in each policy is very important to consider the results of environmental analysis. According to one deputy principal, before making a strategy, schools need to understand what the community expects, and accommodate aspirations so that they become a consideration in formulating a strategy. According to him, one of the successes of NSA is understanding, understanding and taking the right steps according to the potential of the school.

According to the NSA committee, in its explanation, it was stated that schools really need to conduct an environmental analysis before planning and formulating strategies in NSA, so that the school's weaknesses, strengths, challenges, and opportunities can be known. Strategic planning begins with identifying and analyzing every potential and opportunity that exists, this really depends on the ability of the team formed. Meanwhile, sources from different schools stated that one of the advantages of the school is that the location is quite supportive, making it easier for the face of the school to be recognized by the community. The interview with the principal revealed that the school has collaborated with several industries such as ASTRA Honda Motor and Daihatsu, according to him this is important because it will be a branding in promoting the school. In general, people understand that a quality school is a school that already has a good network of cooperation with the industrial world (Arifin, 2012; Ixtiarto, 2016; Kurniasari & Isnani, 2015). According to one school principal, many vocational schools are competing and trying to establish cooperation with industry players. Another school principal stated that the achievement of success was not always in all fields, according to him his school often faced obstacles every time the NSA program took place every year, according to him that because the main task and obligation of teachers was to teach, so it was difficult to arrange a schedule that had to involve teachers. in team activities, such as home visits, opening registration booths, program presentations, etc. However, in general, the NSA program in VSS has carried out environmental analysis and various collaborative activities with the industrial world, especially with business actors within the Muhammadiyah foundation who have also encouraged the realization of strategies for achieving goals. The data analysis process that has been carried out regarding the strategic management of NSA VSS in Bantul Region is generally divided into 4 aspects: strategic environmental analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation.

According to R1, R2, R3, R5, and R7, the NSA strategic management process should begin by analysing its internal and external environmental advantages. This is an effort to explore the potential and utilize school branding which will be the basis for determining strategic policies. This statement is in line with that expressed by Lee (2018); Muhfahroyin et al. (2022), that school branding significantly influences the NSA program's success. Schools need to carry out checks and supervision, understand environmental conditions, the condition of the community's economic background, as well as the family conditions of prospective students, as consideration for formulating policies related to NSA. This is to anticipate mistakes in decision making, as the results of research conducted by Khaerunnisa & Fajarwati (2019), who argues that the low level of supervision causes prospective new students who come from parents with low economic backgrounds to receive less attention. The lack of supervision over the implementation of the NSA regulations can result in children from underprivileged families dropping out of school

(Mahlangu, 2019). The geographical location and distribution of the school's origin should also be a matter of concern for schools to map the market share of prospective students, so that special promotion treatment needs to be given in an effort to achieve educational goals successfully. This was also expressed by Khaerunnisa & Fajarwati (2019), who stated that the biggest obstacle in the student recruitment strategy was the geographical location and the origin of the school for the prospective students. This can be overcome when making preparations in the mapping need to use more valid data. The aspects of environmental analysis can be seen in Figure 3 below:

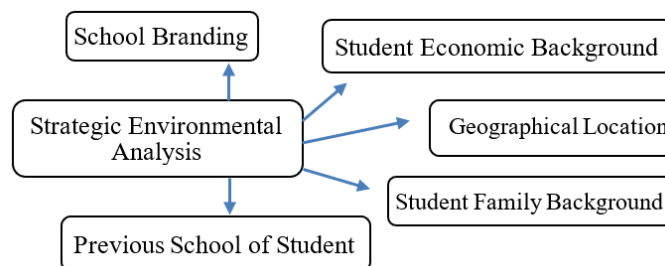


Figure 3. Strategic Environmental Analysis

Based on the observations and reports from the resource persons (R1, R3, R4, R5, NSA committee) the next step that needs to be done is to formulate the NSA strategy. Schools need to develop several programs that can provide clearer information and explanations to prospective students, such as creating a promotion team that aims to display all the information available at the school in order to attract prospective students to register themselves. The information displayed must be clearly understood by prospective students so that misunderstandings do not occur in the future so that students can establish themselves to join. This is reinforced by research from Daini (2021), who stated that the role of the school promotion team was very influential in increasing public interest in registering children to school, this was because the information obtained was clearer and direct interaction occurred quickly and efficiently. Then regarding the making of education financing policies, it should be adjusted to various factors that have been previously analyzed to influence prospective new students who will register significantly. Because with a rational cost, according to the condition of the community's ability, it is hoped that the interest in registering will increase further. According to Prastiwi & Dwikurnaningsih (2021), their research shows that many parents want free schools, so education financing policies that are in line with parents' abilities can be an effective thing to do. Good collaboration between all parties, both schools and foundations, greatly affects the speed of acceptance of prospective new students. With good collaboration with foundations, the expected goals will be the same and complement each other. According to Ridwan & Lailasari (2020), the role of foundations is very important in the success of NSA, because the policies set will be more real and have a clear position. Meanwhile, according to Zuhairoh & Pattinasarany (2021), in his research he concluded

that strong partnerships with the business world and industry have a very large role as the selling point of VSS. The ability of schools to collaborate with the business world will affect public trust in schools. The formulation of an effective NSA strategy is carried out by considering the relevance of the available majors, because prospective students are very concerned about the available majors. When students choose a major, various factors are very influential in this case such as geographical location, social & cultural conditions of the community and so on. This is reinforced by research from Firza & Sarjono (2020), who stated that the specialization of the majors was adjusted by the interests of students' talents, in accordance with the cultural conditions that developed in the community. An in-depth analysis is needed to obtain the appropriate data so that the effectiveness in the acceptance of prospective students develops better. The steps for formulating the NSA strategy can be seen in Figure 4 below:

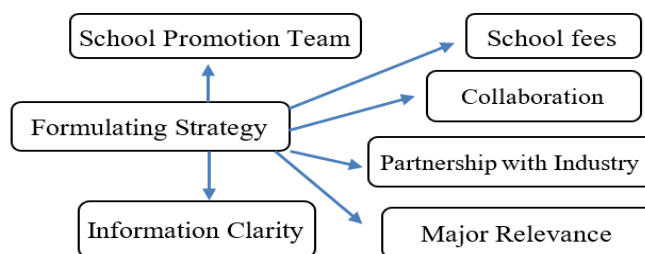


Figure 4. NSA Strategic Formulation

The next step that is no less important is the implementation of the strategy. According to the NSA committee, the implementation of an effective NSA strategy must be carried out in various ways,, including through efforts to increase teacher and employee loyalty to the success of the NSA program, by encouraging teachers and employees to be actively involved in the NSA program. Encouraging promotion by reposting various school flyers, being actively involved in finding new students, either directly through official school programs, or personally, to involving family members, is quite influential on the success of the program. This is in accordance with research from Rahmanto (2018), who stated that the role of teachers and employees was very high in making an effective NSA strategy, because their contribution was a force in increasing the NSA target coordinated by the principal. The transparency of education costs also significantly impacts the public's interest in choosing schools. A transparent and accountable explanation of the use of aid funds from the government such as School Operational Funds (BOS), School Operational Funds from Local Governments (BOSDA), and Financing Funds from the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) can increase public trust. The realization of school transparency in the management field has a good effect, especially to realize the effective use of the education budget in private schools. This is reinforced by the results of research Syafita, D. N. A., Kholifah, S. N., & Sasomo, B (2021), which states that the transparency of accountable costs can affect the implementation of NSA policies and the interest of students who want to continue their studies. Students' and

parents' involvement in supporting schools to succeed in the NSA target need to be considered. Every student who posts promotional flyers, invites neighbors, relatives, and guardians of students who participate in promoting the school becomes a very big force in every NSA program. The same thing was also conveyed by Budiastuti (2022), in his research which shows a significant increase in registrants or prospective students if it involves students and parents in the promotion of NSA. The ease of registration of prospective students also contributes to community satisfaction with the services provided. For example, the simple registration flow, friendly service, and speed in service are some of the indicators that make prospective students feel comfortable. A simple registration mechanism is an important factor being developed by several schools in Bantul region to make new student admissions more transparent and accountable (Dewi et al., 2022). Various innovative promotional programs are added value and attractiveness for prospective new students, such as low registration fees, reduced tuition fees, educational scholarships, free automotive service, free ambulance services, outbound services, etc., have increased absorption and enthusiasm student. The services of various promotional programs to excellent services such as one day service are a distinctive feature for schools in the success of the NSA program. As explained by Wianti (2019), excellent service is a simple and easy service for registrants to understand so that the quality of service becomes fast and efficient. The steps for implementing the NSA strategy that have been carried out are as shown in Figure 5 below:

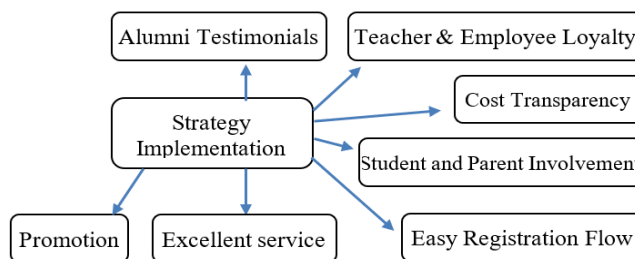


Figure 5. NSA Strategy Implementation

The last step that is no less important is to carry out evaluation and monitoring. According to resource persons (R2, R3, R5, and R7), evaluation and supervision are carried out continuously and involve all teachers and employees to succeed the NSA program. The principal is responsible for every activity and always monitors the NSA development process both at 1 weekly and 2 weekly intervals, plus encouragement and rewards from the principal significantly affect achieving the predetermined targets. Continuous and tiered monitoring and periodic monitoring are the keys to the effectiveness of the NSA program. Presented by Istiqomah & Wahyono (2018), who conducted research on the registration of prospective new students, that continuous monitoring to find out how far the program has been running can encourage the effectiveness of the NSA program. This monitoring is also a form of early anticipation when things are still lacking

and need improvement. The evaluation and supervision that have been carried out are as shown in the following figure 6:

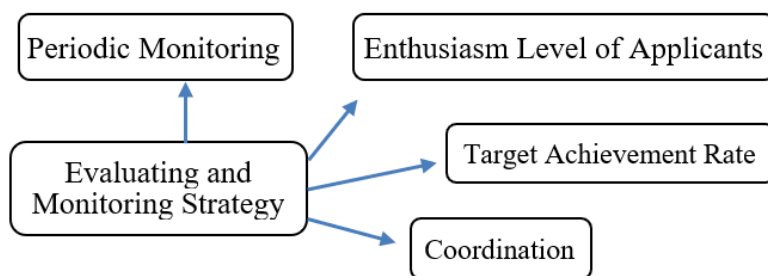


Figure 6. Strategic Evaluation and Monitoring

All of the steps that have been taken in the acceptance of new prospective students above, are a series of activities that are intact and neatly coordinated to form a unified system that is solid and not separated (Yunus, 2016). They form a cycle whose results become feedback for the improvement of the implementation of NSA the following year. The steps in the overall strategic management of the NSA are shown in Figure 7 below:

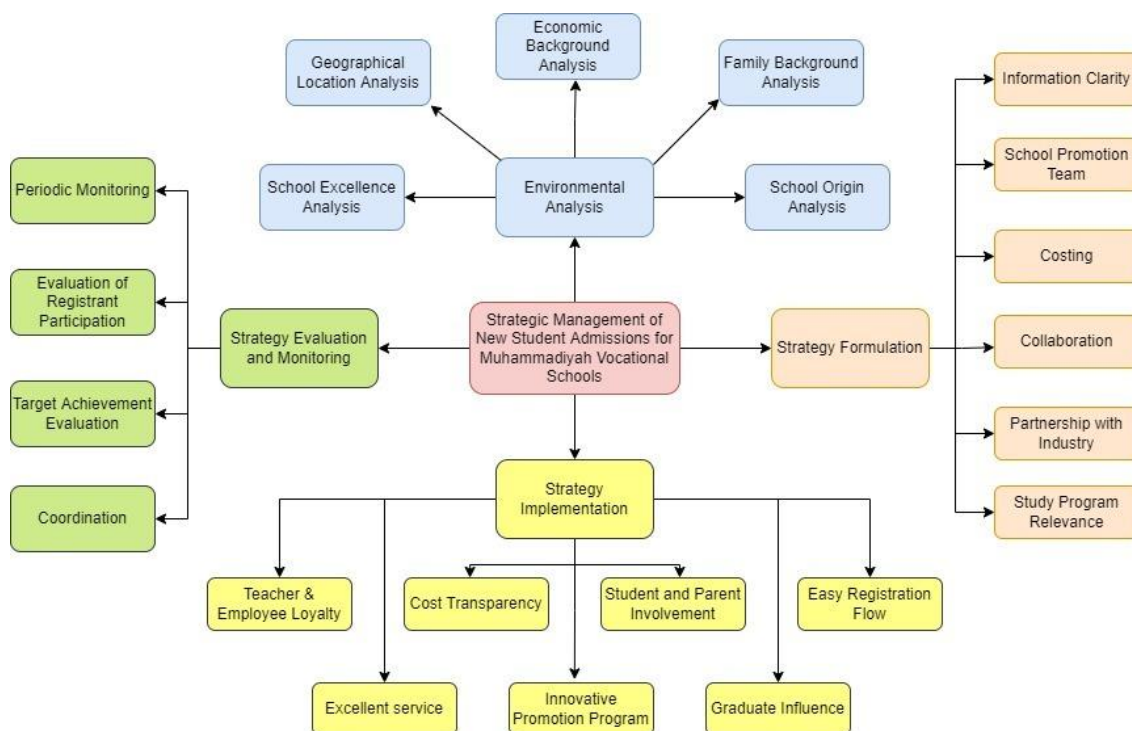


Figure 7: NSA Strategic Management

The four strategic steps described above show that the principal's strategy in the NSA program needs to consider a humanist approach, by always coordinating routinely with all school stakeholders (Effendi, 2020; Hidayah & As-shodiq, 2020; Putri et al., 2019). Schools that have success in the strategic management of NSA can be seen from two factors, namely the level of enthusiasm of applicants and the achievement of targets in accepting new prospective students.

Number of applicants registered by the school shows that all decisions and programs that have been set have been successful and have a significant impact on the interest of prospective students to enter a school (Syamsa, 2020; Wardhana, 2018). The closer to 100% achievement, the more effective the decisions in the NSA. It is reinforced by the opinion of Jivet et al. (2018); Hidayat & Asyafah (2019), in their research suggests that an effective evaluation is to look at the absorption or achievement of targets by those that have been previously determined to be the key to the success of the evaluation and monitoring obtained.

CONCLUSION

The principal's strategy for the success of the NSA VSS program in the Bantul area is to conduct a strategic environmental analysis, namely social background, including family background, geographical conditions, to the prospective student's school of origin. The second step is to do school branding, the school must be able to show what its advantages are. The third stage is to formulate an appropriate and effective strategy. Through forming a solid promotion team, formulating educational costs in accordance with the results of environmental analysis, building partnerships with the industrial world, and the relevance of the majors offered must be adjusted to the culture and interests of the community. The fourth stage is implementing the NSA strategy, which requires the commitment of teachers and employees to be actively involved in the NSA program. Having an attractive program can have a significant impact on the success of the NSA program. The testimony of alumni's success also needs to be shown, because it affects public trust. The last is evaluation and monitoring, evaluation and monitoring must be carried out regularly, this is important so that the effectiveness of the program and the level of achievement of targets can be continuously improved, in this way the NSA program can run optimally.

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