

Exploring management strategies for Private Islamic Schools in the deep south of Thailand using the PMDG guidelines: An application of Fuzzy Delphi method

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Abstract: Developing educational institution strategies empowers them to capitalize on strengths and opportunities, addressing gaps for advancement. Private Islamic schools in southern Thailand, nearly 500 in number, can enhance their performance by adopting management strategies inspired by the successful Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG) boarding school model. This study aims to develop such strategies and activities for these schools, guided by PMDG principles and selected through the Fuzzy Delphi method. The study employed mixed methods research with an exploratory sequential design. It began by formulating strategies based on PMDG guidelines, followed by expert-led discussions involving 10 individuals. Activities were then developed for each strategy, deliberated upon in a workshop with 89 participants. Strategies and activities were presented to expert groups and PMDG faculty, comprising 21 individuals. Finally, the Fuzzy Delphi method was used to select the top three activities for each strategy, with input from 18 experts. The research produced 12 strategies and 79 activities, with 36 emerging as top choices. These strategies and activities aim to empower private schools to provide Islamic education, not only in Thailand but also internationally. Their adaptability ensures they align with the unique context of each school and its surroundings.

Keywords: Dual education, Educational management, Management strategies, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG), Private Islamic school, The Fuzzy Delphi method.

1. Introduction

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG) was founded on September 20, 1926, on Java Island, Indonesia, by three brothers collectively known as "Trimurti." PMDG integrates Pesantren and Madrasah systems, influenced by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's modern educational concepts [1-2]. Envisioned as a center for Islamic learning since its inception, PMDG employs an innovative management system based on values such as sincerity, simplicity, and Islamic brotherhood. These values, aligned with Pancasila, shape its integrated education system, emphasizing monotheism. PMDG promotes community-school integration through a comprehensive 24/7 curriculum and mosques as spiritual centers. Its mission focuses on preparing quality students to contribute positively as Khairu Ummah across generations, embodying noble character and broad knowledge as envisioned in the Mukmun-muslim generation [3-5].

PMDG is renowned for its multidimensional excellence, supported by numerous studies. These studies emphasize the integration of religious and general sciences through the KMI curriculum. Teaching activities at PMDG align with its mottos, emphasizing the cultivation of spirit guided by the principles of Panca Jiwa [3, 6]. The institution employs the role model method to instill values, implementing guidelines for behavior and penalties for infractions [7]. The LA TANSA brand embodies Islamic principles across diverse audiences, evolving into a significant enterprise [8]. Best practices from PMDG highlight ten key elements, including effective leadership, integrated curriculum, student-designed extracurricular activities, and robust student support systems [9].

Efficient operation of driving schools has been widely studied in academia. Shannon and Bylsma [10] identified nine essential elements for high-performing schools, including clear focus, high standards, effective leadership, collaboration, aligned curriculum, monitoring, professional development, supportive environment, and community engagement. Waheed, et al. [11] highlighted adaptive leadership, winning hearts, ICT integration, and knowledge sharing as key practices in Malaysian schools. Additionally, management strategies play a vital role in school effectiveness, with Songpayome [12] proposing seven strategies for the new normal era, and Tangtragulpaisan, et al. [13] suggesting three strategies for managing private school brands to ease the burden on national education budgets.

Private Islamic schools in southern Thailand (Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, Songkhla, and Satun) face management challenges, including unclear strategic direction and missions. These issues include undefined duties, rigid adherence to original visions, lack of operational calendars, professionalism, and task follow-up [14-15]. Challenges also stem from ineffective plan execution, inadequate personnel knowledge, and time constraints for teacher supervision [16-17]. Various strategies have been proposed to address these challenges. Lateh, et al. [9] advocate for seven strategies, including international learner development, competency-based teacher training, integrated learning management, welfare stability, network building, excellence promotion, and income generation through business. Saree, et al. [18] propose a four-component strategy for achieving international standards in school management, focusing on leadership development, service quality, curriculum enrichment, and personnel growth.

The Delphi technique is a collaborative method used to gather expert opinions and facilitate group communication to tackle complex problems. It's particularly valuable when experts cannot meet due to constraints like time or distance [19]. However, drawbacks include potential misinterpretation of opinions, lack of clear rules, declining expert interest, and data loss due to time consumption, leading to increased study costs [20-21]. The Fuzzy Delphi Method, akin to the Delphi technique, ensures transparency, regulatory feedback, and statistical group analysis. Its strength lies in diversifying empirical data collection techniques and obtaining expert consensus. Applied in real-life scenarios, it streamlines survey rounds, enhances item recovery rates, and promotes opinion consistency. Additionally, it facilitates consensus while preserving original opinions and accurately records expert reactions without bias [22-23].

The objective of this study is to delineate management strategies for private Islamic schools based on the PMDG administration guidelines. This aims to provide these schools with a thorough grasp of the practical application of PMDG best practices in conjunction with school administration. The research further incorporates a detailed depiction of activities aligned with each strategy, meeting the criteria of the Fuzzy Delphi method. This offers a tangible framework for educational institutions to implement these strategies effectively.

2. Objectives

1. To develop management strategies for private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand according to PMDG guidelines
2. To develop activities in each strategy for the management of private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand according to PMDG guidelines
3. To select activities in each strategy of the management of private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand according to the PMDG guidelines using Fuzzy Delphi method

3. Methods

The study was conducted following ethical standards and was certified for research ethics in human subjects by Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus (Code: psu.pn.2-078/66). The research utilized mixed methods research structured in four steps with exploratory sequential design [24]. The qualitative research in the initial stages facilitated the collection of in-depth insights, and the application of the Fuzzy Delphi method in the final step introduced a quantitative dimension to the analysis. The steps were as follows:

In the first step, a management strategy for private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand, in accordance with the PMDG guidelines, is formulated by studying pertinent documents and research. This includes incorporating the seven strategies proposed in the introduction during the initial phase [9]. The aim is to draft suitable strategies aligned with the PMDG guidelines for private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand. Furthermore, a group discussion involving experts, comprising school administrators, lecturers from higher education institutions, and supervisors, totaling 10 individuals, is organized to critique the developed draft strategy.

In the second step, activities within each strategy for managing private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand, following the PMDG guidelines, are crafted. This involves conducting a workshop involving executives from the Office of Private Education and administrators from educational institutions. The participants are organized into five groups, each representing a province: Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, Songkhla, and Satun, totaling 77 individuals. Additionally, a student group consisting of 12 people is included in the workshop.

In the third step, the strategies and corresponding activities for managing private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand, following the PMDG guidelines, are presented. This presentation occurs through a connoisseurship that includes experts from the management field and three groups of PMDG faculty members: UNIDA, Gontor Putri, and Gontor Putra, amounting to a total of 21 participants.

In the fourth step, the selection of activities within each strategy for administering private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand, following the PMDG guidelines. Within this step, a total of 79 activities from all strategies are chosen using the Fuzzy Delphi method. This process entails evaluating the input from 18 experts, adhering to the criteria delineated by Jones and Twiss [25]. The panel includes higher education faculty members, educational institution directors, provincial education officers, and educational supervisors. Collectively, these individuals boast substantial experience of 15 years or more in roles connected to private Islamic schools. Two methods were employed in this study to assess whether the results exhibited variations. Each method possesses distinct calculation strengths, as illustrated below.

The Fuzzy Delphi method as proposed by Chen [26] are outlined as follows.

1. Gather scores for each activity provided by experts. The importance rating criteria range from 1 to 7, where 1 signifies the least importance, and 7 denotes the most importance.

2. Determine the triangular fuzzy number of each score obtained from experts, which is set to $\tilde{w} = (a_i, b_j, c_k)$, $i, j, k = 1, 2, \dots, n$ the triangular fuzzy number of each score outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.
The triangular fuzzy number of each score obtained from experts [27].

Score	Triangular fuzzy number
7	(0, 0, 0.1)
6	(0, 0.1, 0.3)
5	(0.1, 0.3, 0.5)
4	(0.3, 0.5, 0.7)
3	(0.5, 0.7, 0.9)
2	(0.7, 0.9, 1)
1	(0.9, 1, 1)

3. Calculate fuzzy average value denote as $\bar{w} = (\bar{a}, \bar{b}, \bar{c})$
4. S score is calculated using the simple center of gravity method to defuzzify the fuzzy weight \bar{w} with $S = \frac{\bar{a} + \bar{b} + \bar{c}}{3}$
5. Calculate the threshold value which is the distance between two fuzzy numbers using $d = \sqrt{\frac{1}{3}[(\bar{a} - a_i)^2 + (\bar{b} - b_j)^2 + (\bar{c} - c_k)^2]}$, then calculate average threshold value denote as $\bar{d}_i, i = 1, 2, \dots, n$. A value of $\bar{d} \leq 0.2$ means that all experts reached a consensus or agreement on the item. The Fuzzy Delphi method as proposed by Hsu, et al. [28] are outlined as follows.
 1. Gather scores for each activity provided by experts. The importance rating criteria range from 1 to 7, where 1 signifies the least importance, and 7 denotes the most importance.
 2. Determine the triangular fuzzy number of each score obtained from experts, which is set to $\tilde{w} = (a_i, b_j, c_k), i, j, k = 1, 2, \dots, n$ with fuzzy weighting \bar{w}_i of no. j element is $w = (a, b, c)$, Among which $a = \min\{a_i\}, b = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{j=1}^n b_j, c = \max\{c_k\}$, the triangular fuzzy number of each score outlined in Table 2.
 3. S score is calculated using the simple center of gravity method to defuzzify the fuzzy weight \bar{w}_j with $S = \frac{a+b+c}{3}$
 4. Select activities using the condition that $S \geq \alpha$ If any activity has a value of $S < \alpha$, that activity is eliminated. (The researcher has set $\alpha = 5.5$, which means that the activity has a higher level of importance score)

Table 2.

The triangular fuzzy number of each score obtained from experts [29].

Score	Triangular fuzzy number
7	(6, 7, 7)
6	(5, 6, 7)
5	(4, 5, 6)
4	(3, 4, 5)
3	(2, 3, 4)
2	(1, 2, 3)
1	(1, 1, 2)

4. Results and Discussion

The findings from document studies, relevant research, group discussions with experts, workshops, and the determination of importance weights through the Fuzzy Delphi method are documented to derive management strategies for private Islamic schools in the deep south of Thailand, aligning with PMDG guidelines. Results obtained from the two methods mentioned earlier produce divergent outcomes regarding the first and second positions of Strategy 7. Conversely, there are no noteworthy differences among the results for the other strategies. The summarized strategies, along with the top three activities for each, are presented in Table 3-5.

Table 3 highlights the importance of establishing a unified vision in schools to drive development, aligning stakeholders' perspectives [30]. Key elements for success include a clear focus and involving personnel in shaping the school's vision and brand identity [10, 13]. Effective resource management and conflict resolution strategies are crucial, with communication strategies playing a pivotal role in boosting teacher confidence and reducing misunderstandings [31]. Building trust, promoting respect and teamwork are essential for fostering a positive organizational culture [32]. The consensus among experts, executives, and PMDG faculty members underscores the importance of this strategic approach. The research suggests that private Islamic schools in the southern border region may lack clearly

defined shared values, hindering goal achievement. Establishing shared values is thus identified as a catalyst for achieving tangible and positive outcomes.

Educational institutions necessitate administrators possessing vision, leadership, and initiative, dedicated to enhancing student learning. Administrators should offer academic counseling, prioritize education, and ensure full-time engagement based on evaluation and research findings [33]. They must adapt work concepts, design plans, and modify structures [12]. Flexibility in vision, problem analysis skills, and policy creation are essential for administrators [34-35]. Regular evaluation of management, ideally quarterly, is crucial for substantive change, aligning with McGee [36] advocacy for strong, visible leadership. High-performing schools must incorporate effective leadership elements, as emphasized by Shannon and Bylsma [10].

Multiple studies suggest that administrators should establish clear supervision schedules, provide media and equipment support, and offer guidance on teaching techniques [31]. Encouraging regular self-development among teachers is recommended to boost confidence and motivation [35]. Teachers are advised to articulate their learning design and technology needs, conducting evaluations for student development [33, 37]. Additionally, teachers' responsibilities significantly contribute to school quality and success [38]. Teacher development involves integrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes into learning activities, emphasizing student potential discovery [10, 36]. High-performing schools must align curriculum, standards-based instruction, and regular teaching and learning monitoring [10].

Another strategy involves developing an integrated learning management process that incorporates active learning practices connecting general and religious subjects. This includes using thought-provoking questions, interactive actions, and individual knowledge summarization to enable students to apply acquired knowledge in their daily lives. Implementing this strategy may require integrating learning units, managing study time structure, and aligning subjects, standards, and indicators to ease the learning burden on students. This approach aligns with Khaengraeng's [33] findings, recommending curriculum structures that align with vision, goals, and desired characteristics. It entails integrating content, offering additional courses based on student aptitudes and interests, and incorporating internal supervision to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. This strategy is also consistent with Bell and Cordingley [39], identifying four key elements in exceptional schools and strong Teach First schools, one of which focuses on teaching and learning.

Table 3.

Executing activities that align with the selection criteria using the Fuzzy Delphi method for the strategy 1 to 4.

	The defuzzification value [26]			The defuzzification value [28]	
	Score	Thres hold value	Rank	Score	Rank
Strategy 1: The strategy of the establishment of shared values					
- Activities to share values with all parties	0.907	0.095	1	6.204	1
- Shared values setting activities	0.898	0.112	2	5.852	2
- Activities to apply shared values in teaching and organizing activities	0.881	0.131	3	5.796	3
Strategy 2: The strategy of executive potential development					
- Self-analysis activities to adjust guidelines for developing educational institutions	0.922	0.056	1	6.278	1
- Activities to evaluate effective management	0.922	0.056	1	6.278	1
- Activities to manage every classroom to be	0.911	0.089	3	6.222	3

outstanding according to the potential of students					
Strategy 3: The strategy for developing teachers' competencies					
- Competency-based teaching practice activities and reflection	0.922	0.056	1	6.278	1
- Muhasabah (ideology) activities of being a teacher	0.904	0.099	2	6.185	2
- Activity to design a competency-based active learning plan	0.904	0.099	2	6.185	2
Strategy 4: The strategy for developing an integrated learning management process					
- Integrated measurement and evaluation design activities	0.906	0.100	1	5.889	1
- Activity to synthesize indicators of the core curriculum and Islamic curriculum to combine indicators	0.898	0.112	2	5.852	2
- Integrated learning plan design activities	0.898	0.112	2	5.852	2
- Halaqah (knowledge exchange) activities reflect the results of integrated learning management	0.898	0.112	2	5.852	2

Table 4 emphasizes the importance of fostering stable welfare benefits to improve workplace morale, including equitable compensation, career advancement opportunities, housing assistance, welfare provisions, loans, and access to medical care and insurance. These findings resonate with Rwigema [40] on the correlation between education quality in African schools and comprehensive welfare provision. Similarly, Arthaisong, et al. [41] propose strategies for retaining personnel, stressing attractive remuneration and substantial benefits.

Promoting collaboration to establish academic networks and facilitate knowledge exchange is a pivotal initiative for educational institutions. Another crucial focus is developing quality by comparing and benchmarking against high-performing schools [35]. This aligns with Shannon and Bylsma [10], emphasizing the importance of robust collaboration and communication in high-performing schools. The results highlight the significance of prioritizing network establishment between schools and higher education institutions to cultivate academic strength and foster innovative ideas. Building networks with universities strengthens academic capabilities and facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge or technology to adapt to evolving situations.

Establishing distinctiveness entails shaping the school's image to be unique and contemporary, focusing on efficient learning management to attract students and parents. This involves analyzing the school's strengths or unique features and providing opportunities for community and external organization involvement for student benefit. Tangtragulpaisan, et al. [13] recommend defining a vision encompassing leadership, trustworthiness, relevance, and differentiation. Strategies should enhance school brand management planning, identifying competitive areas and establishing a reference framework for competitive advantage. This includes communicating distinct aspects of the school brand to stakeholders and evaluating competing schools. Aligning with Khaengraeng [33], it involves embodying the institution's identity in line with its goals, vision, philosophy, and focus. Suwanwong and Trakulkasemsuk [42] advocate for an advertising strategy via online media, encouraging teachers to showcase school activities weekly on Facebook and expanding public relations channels through Twitter and Instagram.

Generating income for educational institutions through business is a strategy implemented within PMDG using the Gontor Social Enterprise Model, covering educational and welfare expenses through various business ventures such as plantations, agriculture, livestock, services, trade, and factories [3, 43-44]. Similarly, Islamic Boarding School Sido Giri in Indonesia has adopted income generation through a restaurant and supermarket, facilitating student learning about various occupations [45]. This

initiative, registered as a legal entity according to Islamic Shariah principles, is proposed as a financial strategy for self-reliance [12]. Experts emphasize the importance of creating income for educational institutions through business ventures, as government funding is often primarily allocated to personnel compensation, posing challenges in supporting teaching and learning activities. Generating income through business offers a solution, allowing institutions to use revenue for development, enhance teacher welfare, morale, job satisfaction, and address personnel turnover issues.

Table 4.

Executing activities that align with the selection criteria using the Fuzzy Delphi method for the strategy 5 to 8.

	The Defuzzification Value [26]			The Defuzzification Value [28]	
	Score	Threshold value	Rank	Score	Rank
Strategy 5: The strategy for providing stable welfare					
- Activities to set up a fund to support teaching equipment and further education	0.878	0.128	1	5.778	1
- Health fund establishment activities (Takaful Insurance)	0.870	0.114	2	5.741	2
- Activities to set up a fund to reserve medical expenses	0.861	0.129	3	5.722	3
- Activities to set up welfare groups for teacher friends	0.861	0.129	3	5.722	3
- Activities to help children with school supplies or occupational equipment for the spouse	0.861	0.129	3	5.722	3
Strategy 6: The strategy for building a strong and sustainable network					
- Student exchange activities between schools	0.891	0.115	1	5.815	1
- School activities in the network of higher education institutions	0.887	0.113	2	5.796	2
- Activities to exchange knowledge through open classes	0.883	0.108	3	5.778	3
Strategy 7: The strategy for differentiating					
- Public relations content creation activities	0.891	0.115	1	5.815	2
- Activities to create the identity of the educational institution	0.889	0.130	2	5.833	1
- Brainstorming activities to build a brand	0.881	0.131	3	5.796	3
Strategy 8: The strategy for generating school income with businesses					
- Activities to establish Islamic cooperatives or financial institutions savings fund	0.885	0.132	1	5.815	1
- Store establishment activities cooperatives and services in schools	0.872	0.147	2	5.778	2
- Income generating activities for teachers and students	0.852	0.184	3	5.741	3

Table 5 highlights the importance of establishing strong relationships among schools, parents, and communities by disseminating relevant information to parents through online channels and encouraging community involvement in educational policy decisions [46]. Collaborative efforts with

parent networks, associations, and clubs are essential to support education [35]. Knowledge exchange among personnel within educational institutions and with families, communities, and relevant organizations is integral to this strategy [33]. The overarching goal is to nurture youth according to religious principles, fostering their development as responsible citizens. This strategy aligns with Ghimire and Koirala [38] findings, emphasizing the importance of monitoring parental involvement for quality and successful schools. Bell and Cordingley [39] identified fostering relationships with students, parents, and the community as key elements in exceptional schools. Similarly, McGee [36] and Shannon and Bylsma [10] highlighted parental involvement and community engagement as crucial for success in U.S. and high-performing schools, respectively.

Nurturing students in Al-Islam involves developing their self-direction skills, self-awareness, and social acumen, emphasizing the application of knowledge and fundamental practices according to Islamic principles. This strategy aligns with Tassaneeyakorn, et al. [37], who advocate cultivating life skills and vocational capabilities in students to enhance education quality. McGee [36] also highlighted the importance of allocating extra time for academic activities in U.S. schools. Experts emphasize the significance of students developing self-awareness and understanding the changing world. Embracing the Islamic way provides students with a grounding in faith principles, guiding their behavior and instilling self-worth, respect for others, and awareness of themselves and their surroundings. This fosters their ability to navigate life for personal and societal well-being in the future.

Table 5.

Executing activities that align with the selection criteria using the Fuzzy Delphi method for the strategy 9 to 12.

	The defuzzification value [26]			The defuzzification value [28]	
	Score	Thres hold value	Rank	Score	Rank
Strategy 9: The strategy for fostering positive relationships among schools, parents, and the community					
- Activities to exchange knowledge on raising children in Gen Z according to Islamic principles	0.902	0.107	1	5.870	1
- Halaqah (knowledge exchange) activities with parents	0.887	0.113	2	5.796	2
- Class visiting activities by parents	0.872	0.147	3	5.778	3
- Activities to care for children from the hearts of parents	0.872	0.147	3	5.778	3
Strategy 10: The strategy for developing students to keep up with the Islamic world					
- Activities to analyze the problems of Muslim society	0.911	0.089	1	6.222	1
- Sunnah activities/Sunnah prayers/Mayyit bathing demonstration	0.889	0.089	2	6.111	2
- Quran Tafseer activity, 1 verse per day/Hadith recitation activity, 1 Hadith per day	0.889	0.130	3	5.833	3
- Analytical activities and design self-development according to Islamic principles	0.889	0.130	3	5.833	3
Strategy 11: The strategy for promoting communication skills in English, Malay and Arabic					
- One-day foreign language activity (English, Malay, Arabic, Chinese)	0.879	0.149	1	5.815	1

- Camp activities in 5 languages (English, Malay, Arabic, Thai, Chinese)	0.879	0.149	1	5.815	1
- International exchange student activities	0.879	0.149	1	5.815	1
Strategy 12: The strategy for developing public consciousness and leadership among students					
- Activities to cultivate good people following the Prophet's footsteps	0.922	0.056	1	6.278	1
- Activities for teenagers to invite to do good deeds	0.904	0.099	2	6.185	2
- Halaqah (knowledge exchange) activities to strengthen leadership	0.887	0.113	3	5.796	3

Encouraging students to engage with multiple languages not only broadens their career opportunities but also deepens their understanding of religion for practical application in their lives. This involves developing students to communicate proficiently in both Thai and English, possessing effective communication skills and the ability to creatively present their work [35]. It also emphasizes enhancing Arabic language proficiency through curriculum alignment with international standards, teacher training in professional learning management, and creating innovative Arabic language learning materials [47]. Expert recommendations highlight the crucial role of language development in accessing knowledge across languages, enabling students to engage with global knowledge through English and religious education in Arabic. This underscores the importance of using Arabic for effective communication.

Students with leadership skills possess a clear understanding of how to contribute to public welfare, recognizing their own value and adeptly handling matters, including building strong teams. Schools play a vital role in cultivating students with active leadership qualities, including situational awareness, understanding stakeholders, and reflective judgment [48]. Teachers, as mentors, should set positive examples by actively listening to students, praising their efforts, and identifying strengths [49]. Students should be developed as both intelligent and virtuous individuals through learning experiences beyond the classroom [12]. Expert emphasis lies in instilling leadership qualities in students, prioritizing public welfare and teamwork for broader social development.

5. Conclusion

Developing a management strategy for private Islamic schools in southern Thailand, guided by PMDG principles, taps into the potential of religious schools in the region. This entails adopting PMDG-inspired methods adaptable to the specific context, aiming to achieve set objectives. The research delineates 12 strategies encompassing shared values, leadership harnessing, curriculum adaptation, welfare establishment, networking, visibility creation, and income generation. Each strategy suggests various activities for integration into educational institutions' operational plans, ensuring practical utility. These activities underwent stakeholder scrutiny and quantitative evaluation via the Fuzzy Delphi method, demonstrating consistent ranking results, affirming their relevance. Collaborative efforts among relevant agencies, such as the Office of the Private Education Commission, are vital for implementing strategic management guidelines. These guidelines should harmonize the presented research strategies with each institution's unique approaches, with careful consideration of activity feasibility. While focused on southern Thailand, the research's insights extend to educational institutions in similar contexts globally, offering adaptable guidelines to enhance strategic management practices in private Islamic or boarding schools.

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