

Research Article

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Synthesizing Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Best Practices for Managing Islamic Private Schools in Thailand

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG) is widely recognized for its effective integration of religious and general education, as well as for its instructional practices that reflect the institution's core mottos. This study aimed to synthesize PMDG's administrative best practices for managing Islamic private schools in Thailand.

Materials/methods. Data were gathered from 20 relevant articles on PMDG published in international journal databases between 2009 and 2022, along with in-depth interviews involving three administrators, three teachers, 15 Thai alumni, and five Thai parents whose children were studying or had studied at PMDG, selected through purposive sampling. Content analysis was employed to identify key themes, supported by illustrative interview excerpts.

Results. The findings revealed 10 components of PMDG's administration excellence: 1) effective school leadership, 2) curriculum integration between religious and general sciences, 3) student-designed co-curricular activities, 4) mandatory teaching practicum for upper secondary students, 5) outstanding social enterprise, 6) waqf management, 7) teacher development through mentorship, 8) welfare based on life balance principles, 9) peer mentorship student support system, and 10) supportive learning environment.

Conclusion. By utilizing these components, policies can be formulated for Islamic private schools in Thailand to foster the adoption of best practices and promote excellence in the future.

1. Introduction

Islamic private schools have become a favored option for Muslim parents seeking primary and secondary education for their children. These schools strive to provide a comprehensive education that encompasses both Islamic and secular subjects, aiming to cultivate future generations of committed Muslims. In Thailand, Islamic private schools offer a dual curriculum system that includes the Islamic Studies Curriculum (BE 2546, Revised BE 2555) and the Basic Education Core Curriculum (BE 2551, Revised BE 2560), both taught in parallel. The Islamic Studies Curriculum serves as the Islamic track and is designed to impart knowledge in eight subjects, including Al-Quran and At-Tafsir, Al-Hadith, Al-Fiqh, Aqidah, At-Tariq, Al-Akhlaq, Arabic, and Malay. (Ministry of Education, 2012). In contrast, the Basic Education Core Curriculum serves as the Saman (also known as government or general education) track and covers eight subjects, including Thai Language; Mathematics, Science and Technology; Social Studies, Religions, and Cultures; Health and Physical Education; Arts; Occupations; and Foreign Languages (Ministry of Education, 2008; 2017). According to Waehama et al. (2021), the most critical traits expected of students were related to religious leadership, followed by the ability to maintain a strong connection with Islam and demonstrate proficiency in Quranic literacy, adherence to Islamic ethics (Akhlaq), fulfilling Islamic duties (Ibadah), maintaining a steadfast faith (Aqidah), and following a moderate interpretation of Islam, respectively [4]. Furthermore, Lateh et al. (2023) reported that the primary expectation of graduates from Islamic private schools is to develop the ability to become devout Muslims and apply the knowledge acquired from their education to their daily lives. The study also found that schools were expected to primarily prioritize instilling moral and ethical values and providing practical experiences that align with the principles of the Muslim way of life for their students, followed by organizing Islamic learning activities that cater to the needs of the Islamic way of life and Islamic experience activities for future application.

Despite the considerable value that Islamic private schools provide, their management has been persistently scrutinized on various grounds. These questionable flaws include the lack of a uniform direction in managing strategies to drive their missions, the absence of well-defined scopes for assigned duties, the perpetuation of unchanged traditional visions (Salae, 2015), the lack of an operational calendar, unprofessional personnel, and inconsistent follow-ups on work (Wanglee, 2013). Furthermore, some studies reported that Islamic private school administrators could not perform their duties as planned and failed to assign the appropriate tasks to the right individuals. This mismanagement resulted in operations being handled by practitioners who had a limited understanding of the spirit of such implementation (Chemee, 2015). Additionally, some administrators were found not to allow teachers to work autonomously or delegate decision-making power to them (Malee, 2017). Furthermore, certain administrators could not allocate sufficient time to supervise and monitor teachers' instructional management. It is also worth noting that curriculum and instructional management issues were identified in Islamic private schools (Hayeedoloh, 2018).

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG) has been committed to becoming a leading center of Islamic learning and Islamic science. The institution employs a dynamic and innovative management system, grounded in school and Islamic values, to achieve this goal. These values are embodied by the Panca Jiwa, which consists of five spirits: sincerity, simplicity, independence, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom. Furthermore, these values align with the Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational ideology comprising five pillars. The first precept of the Pancasila, which asserts the belief in One Godhead, is interpreted as monotheism and is fundamental to the integrated education system, spreading throughout every aspect of school activities (Bahroni, 2012; Fasa, 2017). In addition to integrating education within the school, PMDG also integrates education with the community through an integrated curriculum that operates 24/7. Furthermore, the institution has a mosque on its premises, serving as a spiritual center. PMDG's mission is to cultivate quality students who become Khairu Ummah from generation to generation while also providing knowledge and

promoting development for the next generation of Mukmin-Muslims under mottos embodying the development of noble character, a sound body, broad knowledge, and an independent mind (Bahroni, 2012; Fasa, 2017; Rofiq et al., 2019).

PMDG's exceptional performance across multiple dimensions has been widely recognized and documented in numerous studies. For instance, the institution has successfully integrated religious and general sciences into the KMI curriculum, ensuring that instructional activities align with the institution's motto (Bahroni, 2012). In addition, PMDG strongly emphasizes spiritual development, with learning activities both within and outside the classroom aligned with the principles of Panca Jiwa (Heriyudanta & Hakim, 2020). Furthermore, the institution's approach to education, known as the role model method (*Al-uswah Al-hasanah*), focuses on instilling values and meaningful experiences among students while imposing penalties on violators (Hardoyo, 2009). In addition to its academic pursuits, PMDG has successfully incorporated Islamic principles into its business operations under the La Tansa brand. This business has become a resounding success, catering to target groups from all levels of society (Anggara & Ulumuddin, 2021). Furthermore, Saifulloh and Neoh (2022) have demonstrated the efficacy of assigning tasks in providing student support and the habituation strategy as rigorous discipline practices.

Given the impact of Islamic private schools in Thailand on management, academics, the spirituality of teachers, the balance between religious and general education, and other areas, coupled with PMDG's nearly 100 years of successful school management, the two contexts share many similarities. A synthesis of PMDG's best practices in management should reveal how the management has achieved empirical goals in specific areas, which can then be applied as management guidelines for Islamic private schools in Thailand, particularly those in the deep south provinces, which number as many as 300.

2. Literature Review

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG)

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG) is an educational institution located in Java, Indonesia. It was established on Monday, 12 Rabi al-Awwal 1345 (20 September 1926) by three brothers, including K. H. Ahmad Sahal, K. H. Zainuddin Fannani, and K. H. Imam Zarkasyi, who are commonly referred to as the "Trimurti" (Dacholfany, 2015). Pondok Gontor combines the Pesantren and Madrasah education systems based on K. H. Imam Zarkasyi's modern education philosophy (Zarkasyi, 2020). Initially founded as a school in the 18th century and subsequently passed down to the third generation, Pak Sahal's father, Pondok Gontor, experienced a decline in student enrollment, ultimately resulting in its abandonment. Upon establishing the new Pondok Gontor, Pak Sahal drew inspiration from several renowned universities, such as Al-Azhar University in Egypt, Syanggit University in Mauritania, Aligarh Muslim University, and Santiniketan College in India. His vision for the institution included teaching in both Arabic and English, an opportunity he had firsthand when he attended a parliamentary meeting during the World Islamic Congress in Makkah, Saudi Arabia (Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, 2020).

In 1936, when diplomats proficient in both languages were required to participate. Considering Pak Sahal's vision, *Kulliyatul Muallimin al-Islamiyyah* (KMI), a lower and upper secondary program, was launched to provide a comprehensive education that combines both religious and general education subjects, including arts and sports, over a six-year period. To ensure a dedicated learning environment, all students must reside within the school premises 24 hours a day. These changes marked a significant transformation for the institution, which was subsequently renamed Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG). Presently, the University of Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA Gontor) offers seven undergraduate programs, namely: 1) Ushuluddin, 2) Education, 3) Syariah, 4) Economics and Management, 5) Humanities, 6) Health Sciences, and 7) Science and Technology. Additionally, it

offers three graduate programs: 1) Aqidah, 2) Teaching Arabic, and 3) Islamic Law (Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, 2020). PMDG has produced over 25,000 successful alumni across various professions and has established eight parallel KMI programs domestically and internationally in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Moreover, the institution has established UNIDA on a 1,600-hectare waqf land. K. H. Imam Zarkasyi's exemplary leadership and management of PMDG have been highly praised, earning him the title of caretaker of students and manager of Panca Jiwa (five spirits).

PMDG's Management Structure

The management framework of PMDG is derived from its vision, mission, mottoes, and the five spirits. The details are as follows: The vision of PMDG as an educational institution, with a cadre of printer people, became a place of worship, Thalab al-ilmu, and a center of Islamic knowledge, the language of the Qur'an, and General Science, with boarding at its heart. The missions of PMDG: 1) to prepare a generation of superior quality and leading to the formation of *khairu ummah*, 2) to educate and develop next-generation Mukmun-Muslim able-bodied high, virtuous, knowledgeable, and free-thinking, as well as serving to the community, 3) teaching the science of religion and the public in a balanced way towards the formation of the scholars intellect, and 4) to prepare the citizens of faith and piety to Allah SWT (Fasa, 2017).

The Mottoes of PMDG, including 1) noble character, virtuous or moral education, the main runway is *karimah* to the whole Islamic boarding school, realization of planting this motto is done through all the elements of education, 2) sound body, the establishment and maintenance of a healthy body is at stake in education in Modern Cottages. Therefore, students can carry out the tasks of living, learning, and worship to the best of their ability. 3) broad knowledge, the students were educated systematically to have intellectual independence and are able to expand their knowledge and insights. Students are not only taught science, but also how to learn as well as provided with the keys that can be used to unlock the storehouse of knowledge, and 4) an independent mind, which must remain free, value-based, active, and positive, free of charge, and remain within the framework of laws and norms. This motto is embedded after the student has become high, able-bodied, and well-rounded (Fasa, 2017).

The five spirits are values that must be instilled in anyone who has been in PMDG. These include soul-senses, the sincerity, simplicity, *Ukhuwah Islamiyah*, Autonomy, and freedom. The PMDG administration's action plan comprises five key components: 1) education and teaching focusing on the organizational management handbook, student affairs, curriculum, and educational programs; 2) cadre building aimed at forming religious leaders; 3) building and maintaining educational facilities; 4) waqf or *Khizanatullah*, involving finances, investments, and funds; and 5) family welfare that addresses the needs of leaders, students, special services, and community partners (Fasa, 2017; Mighwar et al., 2021). Therefore, PMDG has laid a solid foundation for school management to align with the stated vision. There will be no exceptions for not following the stated mission. This includes the comprehensive operational planning of the four components and the conduct of teachers, students and administrators to uphold the stated mottos and five spirits.

Key Features of Effective Educational Management

School administrators strive to lead their institutions toward excellence, aiming to meet the required quality benchmarks. The administration components toward excellence may vary slightly depending on the context of the school or region but should generally consist of similar elements. Shannon and Bylsma (2007) proposed that high-performing schools should include nine key elements, which are 1) a clear and shared focus, 2) high standards and expectations for all students, 3) effective school leadership, 4) a high level of collaboration and communication, 5) curriculum and instruction aligned with standards, 6) frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, 7) focused

professional development, 8) a supportive learning environment, and 9) high levels of community and parent engagement.

Various research also presents the effects of best practice components for each school. Several studies have discussed the effects of best practices on schools. For instance, McGee (2009) revealed standard components that constitute best practices for schools in the United States, including 1) strong and visible leadership, 2) emphasis on early literacy through the significant allocation of financial and human resources, 3) competent, hardworking, and talented teachers, 4) extra time for academic activities, and 5) teamwork and parental involvement. Bell and Cordingley (2014) identified four critical issues in exceptional schools and schools affiliated with the Teach First program, including the need for 1) a professional learning environment, 2) effective leadership, 3) quality teaching and learning, and 4) strong relationships with students, parents, and the community. Waheed et al. (2017) presented a synthesis of best practices for schools in Malaysia with four components, namely 1) adaptive and multidimensional leadership, 2) winning the hearts of stakeholders, 3) extensive use of ICT in school operations, and 4) a culture of acquiring and sharing professional knowledge.

Wang et al. (2025) investigate several key aspects contribute to effective educational management including 1) leadership and governance, 2) teacher professional development, 3) curriculum innovation and student-centered Learning, 4) data-driven decision-making, and 5) technology integration. Abdullah and Haroon (2024) outlined three major benefit for university leaders, which include: 1) increased efficiency and consistency of the process of identifying talent for institutional strategic posts, 2) the provision of comprehensive competency and job-fit report on one's leadership potential and standing, and perhaps most significantly, and 3) move the process of decision-making on a candidate's suitability from intuition-based to one that is data-driven. Therefore, school administration towards excellence requires a core strategy or model leading to administrative success. This may involve principles, theories, or excellent practices that provide guidelines for school administrators to follow or implement correctly and clearly, avoiding haphazard administration that makes it impossible to determine which principles or strategies are being adhered to.

3. Methodology

This descriptive and explanatory study aimed to synthesize the best practices of PMDG's administration from the perspective of Thai researchers, specifically identifying administration practices that met stakeholder expectations and generated satisfaction for all parties involved. The study also investigated the comprehensive systematic process of implementing these practices and how they resulted in consistently higher quality outcomes. Data were collected from 20 relevant articles on PMDG from international journal databases (2009–2022), along with in-depth interviews with three administrators, three teachers, 15 Thai alumni, and five Thai parents whose children were studying or had studied at PMDG, selected through purposive sampling. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, with notes taken and audio recorded for further analysis. Interviews with administrators and teachers were conducted at PMDG Indonesia, while those with alumni and parents taken place in Thailand. The selection of key informants is concluded when it is certain that no new information will be obtained at the data saturation point. Content analysis was used to identify key themes, supported by sample interview statements. Irrelevant data were truncated, leaving only the core content. The data was categorized into subcategories and main categories, grouped by relationship and consistency, and classified by meaning, describing specific behaviors to enhance understanding of the context studied. To verify the credibility of the data, data providers verified its accuracy. Methodological triangulation was also conducted, involving key informants, including administrators, teachers, and alumni, who provided the same information to confirm the accuracy of the data. Furthermore, two experts provided credentials, provided comments, and made observations on the data to verify the accuracy and consistency of the analyzed data.

Sample questions for administrators and teachers included: What do you see as the strengths of PMDG, and why? How are teaching and extracurricular activities managed at PMDG? What makes their approach stand out from other schools? For alumni and parents, questions included: Why did you choose to send your children to a PMDG? How did studying at the PMDG impact you? And What distinguishes the PMDG from other schools?

4. Results

The outcomes of the synthesis of best practices in PMDG's administration, from Thai researchers' perspective, are subdivided into 10 components as outlined below:

1. Effective School Leadership

PMDG is an integrated boarding school that goes beyond the traditional Pesantren model of instruction, utilizing the Kitab Kuning (Islamic Classical Reference) as its foundation, with unique characteristics, values, mottos, and an effective system (Bahroni, 2012). The institution's strength lies in its ability to cater to the needs of all groups, as reflected in its motto of providing equal growth opportunities to all students (Wisnu, 2020). Moreover, the institution's ideology, which prioritizes the development of students' personality, instructional knowledge, freedom of thought, and citizenship, is perpetuated across generations to nurture the Khaira Ummah (the best people) (Utomo & Pawito, 2019). To promote effective communication, instructional activities at PMDG were conducted using Arabic and English. Additionally, the dormitory system played a crucial role in fostering the religious spirit of students, thereby contributing to Gontor's global recognition and acceptance (Fasa, 2017). In addition, PMDG's emphasis on effective communication was evident in its requirement that students achieve proficiency in Arabic and English for daily conversation within six months of study, as K. H. Imam Zarkasyi stated, "the method was more important than the subject matter, while the teacher was more important than the method" (Rofiq et al., 2019).

The institution's successful maintenance of sustainability in cultivating community leaders can be attributed to various elements, including the presence of Kyais (esteemed scholars), Santris (boarding students), the mosque, the dormitory, and Islamic religious education that focuses on the soul, mental education, and character development. Additionally, efficient waqf administration, modern curriculum and teaching methods, and core leadership and community studies subjects have all played crucial roles (Mighwar et al., 2021). Furthermore, Saifulloh and Neoh (2022) found that PMDG has aligned with the core principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), which includes 1) customer satisfaction, 2) respect for everyone, 3) fact-based management, and 4) continuous quality improvement. In terms of the main effects, the focus was on 1) customer satisfaction, 2) obsession with quality, 3) scientific approach, 4) long-term commitment, 5) teamwork, 6) controlled freedom, and 7) the involvement and empowerment of teachers and students. These findings were supported by data obtained from interviews conducted with teachers, parents, and alumni, as elaborated below:

"The Gontor alumni network is global, and their alumni are present in almost every country. It is well-known what the administration here is like. Administrators have been highly dedicated since the very first generation. Those who study at Gontor know the school's founding history and journey so far" (Alumnus 4)

"The teachers at Gontor take care of their students 24 hours a day. They remain at the school. Students are free to visit and ask for advice. We feel good to talk. This should be our strength" (Teacher 2)

"Administrators at Gontor meet with teachers every week, and the schedule is always clear on dates and times. Despite many students and teachers, things are managed remarkably well" (Alumnus 1)

“The administration has implemented a strong system to facilitate the development of every child, despite the school’s size and large student population. This has resulted in a uniform direction of personality development for all students” (Parent 3)

2. The Curriculum Integration of Religious and General Sciences

PMDG has implemented a unique curriculum called Muallimin, which encompasses not only religious sciences but also social and natural sciences. This approach involves teaching Islamic studies using modern social and natural science methods alongside religious approaches. According to K. H. Imam Zarkasyi, the “Muallimin curriculum consists of 100% religious subjects and 100% social-natural sciences subjects” (Zarkasyi, 2020; Mighwar et al., 2021). This curriculum offers a comprehensive understanding of both subjects, rather than a 50:50 split between each subject. Implementing the Muallimin curriculum at PMDG involves five key elements: Pesantren life, 24 hours of education, a school for teachers, the Kyai (a distinguished scholar) as the center, and language skills (Pratiwi, 2020). The curriculum aims to produce superior humans who become scholars, pious, Solih (virtuous), and useful individuals. To ensure quality, a panel of eight senior teachers screens projects and activities to be undertaken by students (Heriyudanta & Hakim, 2020). These projects and activities must align with the four school mottos and are subject to review by the Islamic Teachers Training College (ITTC) as PMDG emphasizes the values and philosophy of the institution as a standard for all students, creating equality for students of different ethnic groups (Bahroni, 2012; Utomo & Pawito, 2019).

According to data obtained from interviews with PMDG administrators, the course administration was categorized into formal, informal, and non-formal education, aligning with K. H. Imam Zarkasyi’s vision of whole education (Zarkasyi, 2022) as follows:

1. Formal education comprises the main subjects divided into five subject groups. Group I: Islamic Studies including Theology, Al-Qur'an, Al-Hadith, Science of Hadith, Islamic Law, School of Thought, Legal Philosophy, Inheritance, Islamic Worldview, Comparative Religion, Islamic History. Group II: Social Sciences including Psychology, Civic Education, World History, Indonesia History, Education, Bahasa Indonesia, Geography. Group III: Arabic, including Grammar, Literature, Composition, and Translation. Group IV: English, including Reading, Grammar, and English Composition. Group V: Science including Mathematics, Physics, Arithmetic, Logic, Biology.

2. Informal education comprises extra-curricular activities that students may select based on their interests. These activities are divided into two types: Type I, which is mandatory, including Public Speaking, Scout, Prayer, Campus Discipline, Language Discipline, and Type II, which is preferentially selective. Type II is further categorized into three subgroups: 1) Sports including Football, Volleyball, Basketball, Takraw, Martial Art, Body Building, Badminton, Table Tennis, 2) Skills including Sewing, Handicraft, Binding, Electronic, Computer, Language course, Journalistic, Publication, and 3) Arts including Group discussion, Calligraphy, Drama, Music. Responsible teachers and senior students supervise these activities.

3. Non-formal education refers to students' free choice of special activities, such as club activities and school property management (available only to grade 6 students). The student union assigns tasks to various administrative areas, including the laundry, kitchen, bookstore, and shop departments. Teachers and senior students also supervise these activities.

Table 1. Class timetable for Grade 7 of PMDG

Day/Period	06.45 - 07.30	07.30 - 08.15	09.00 - 09.45	09.45 - 10.30	10.30 - 11.15	11.15 - 12.00	13.00 - 22.00
Saturday	Reading English	Al-Fiqh	Arabic Practices	Mathematics	Geography	Reading Al-Qur'an	Informal and non-formal activities
Sunday	Islamic History	Al-Hadith	Arabic Essay	Al-Tawhid	Reading English	Bahasa Indonesia	
Monday	Physics	Mathematics	Geometry	Arabic Practices	Arabic Dictation	World History	
Tuesday	Reading English	Arabic Practices	Al-Fiqh	Mathematics	Al-Qur'an	Biology	
Wednesday	Physics	Geometry	Arabic Practices	Mathematics	Arabic Dictation	Arabic Calligraphy	
Thursday	Proverb Memorize	Arabic Practices	Islamic History	Al-Qur'an Translation	Public Speaking		
Friday	Informal and non-formal activities						

The instructional activities at PMDG are organized, with formal classes for the five subject groups commencing at 6:45 a.m. and concluding at 12:00 p.m. In the afternoon, informal activities are conducted from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, followed by a break for Salat and religious activities from 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Subsequently, non-formal starts from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Table 1 presents a sample Grade 7 class timetable, as provided by a PMDG teacher.

The academic administration described above has been confirmed through interviews with administrators, teachers, and alumni, as follows:

“The integration of the education system with Madrasah is a religious school, but not formal; they teach religious and science. Gontor is integrate with Madrasah and Pondok. Pondok is a student who lives in a dormitory, staying with Tuan Guru. They study with Tuan-Guru in the mosque. With Integrate Madrasah is study in the class but no dormitory. that is become integration formal, in-formal, non-formal education, All in one system” (PMDG Administrator 1)

“The curriculum is religious, general science and natural science are integrated in school, students learn Islam and learn math, physics, biology, and so on. Intellectual and moral the student is trained to be knowledgeable, and they also train to be morally good its integration means” (PMDG Administrator 1)

“Gontor is spread widely without any advertisement of student admission, but every year student enroll about 3,000 and we can accept around 700 students per year” (PMDG Administrator 3)

“We have six classes in the morning and one in the afternoon. Then, we return to the dormitory and resume activities after Salat at about 3:30 pm. We change from Salat clothes to sports clothes and participate in activities until about 5:00 pm. Afterward, we prepare for Salat and begin studying again at 8:00 pm. This is called Muwaja, an Arabic word that means meeting. Bedtime is at 9:30 pm, and we wake up around 3:00 am to read the Quran and study for the next day” (Teacher 1)

"I wake up at 3:00 am to read the Quran, perform Salat Subh, and practice languages. Afterward, I exercise at 6:00 a.m. and attend classes from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. In the afternoon, Gontor has seven class periods. The first two start at 6:55 am and end at 8:30 am, with a 30-minute break in between. This is followed by periods 3 and 4 from 9:00 am to 10:30 am, the second break, periods 5 and 6 from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm, and a lunch break. After lunch, we continue with Period 7 from 1:55 pm to 2:55 pm. We study from Monday to Thursday. Friday is a holiday, but club activities and exhibitions are on schedule" (Alumnus 8)

"They learn Arabic for daily use, and the language is only explained in Arabic. Teachers use examples to help the children understand, and their hard work and dedication make learning possible. It feels great to see the children have the opportunity to learn, even though it can sometimes be challenging. The teachers always do their best to help the children understand" (Teacher 3)

The results obtained from this approach have enabled PMDG to develop a referral-based student recruitment strategy that has been passed down from generation to generation. This approach relies on a group of individuals who possess unwavering confidence in the quality of PMDG and actively promote the institution to potential students. As a result, a significant number of domestic and international students submit applications each year, but only a limited number are accepted. This notion is confirmed through the following interviews conducted with administrators, teachers, and alumni:

"Children come from many parts of the world, and the basics are English and Arabic. For foreign students, the use of Indonesian is allowed, but for Indonesian people, they do not allow it" (Alumnus 11)

"From the same country, if many people come together, no more than two people can stay together in a room. No more than two people of this nature can go out, eat, or walk. If Indonesian people come from the same province, they cannot stay together in groups of more than two people either" (Alumnus 4)

"Final year students have to pass the comprehensive examination that includes all subjects there studied from year 1 to 6" (PMDG Administrator 2)

"My child has exams each year, and the teacher looks at the children's overall progress. The teacher has determined that my child must get at least 50 percent in all subjects to be promoted to the next class. Although my child only scored 42 percent in the first semester and 44 percent in the second semester, the teacher noted progress and allowed them to pass, as they were well-behaved. On the other hand, some students may get more than 50 percent in the first semester, but if they get less than 50 percent in the second semester, they may not pass that year" (Parent 5)

"All assessments are in written format, with questions typically less than one page long. However, students are provided with two to three sheets of answer paper for each assessment" (Alumnus 10)

"Knowledge about Gontor, including its founding, philosophy, and history, is assessed even though these topics are not taught in class" (Alumnus 15)

"If you attend that school, you must start from the beginning and study Grade 7 again. Even if you had completed Grade 9 or higher, you would still need to take a four-year curriculum by redoing Grades 7-9 again within a year and a half. And if you had completed P6 in your home country, you would have to attend a six-year curriculum instead" (Alumnus 3)

"The language aspect is clear. For Arabic language skills, my child is confident in using it, and he has also become more confident in English; however, this improvement is much more noticeable in Arabic. He stayed there for about five to six months, during which time he read Arabic books and watched Arabic content, which seemed easier for him to comprehend. He knows that something should follow the grammar rules and what is supposed to be in the past tense. He seems to grasp languages better, especially Arabic" (Parent 1)

"There are no advertisements at Gontor, and the school places more emphasis on quality" (Alumnus 3)

"My parents, who work in Brunei, and an Indonesian teacher who graduated from Gontor and is close to my family, suggested that I study at Gontor after finishing Grade 9. Therefore, I decided to pursue my further studies at Gontor, where I have been studying for around fifteen years now, including my current Master's" (Alumnus 14)

"I learned about Gontor from a friend, and my parents have connections in Indonesia. The school does not heavily promote student recruitment, and most students come through word of mouth" (Parent 4)

3. Extra-Curricular Activities Designed by Students

PMDG prioritizes the development of competencies that align with the national educational goals of Islamic Shariah, fostering the growth of students who embody qualities such as virtue, health, knowledge, open-mindedness, and devoutness. Hence, the institution has successfully produced graduates with Islamic characteristics, adequate competence, good morality, and intellectual prowess (Rofiq et al., 2019). Furthermore, PMDG also emphasizes mental, spiritual, and affective education, instilling a fundamental value of dedication and perseverance that underpins all aspects of Pesantren life. This approach is reinforced by the Panca Jiwa principles, which are deeply internalized by young students and heavily emphasized by the institution's Islamic teachers and leaders (Heriyudanta & Hakim, 2020). The continued vitality of PMDG today is based on three core principles: 1) the creation of empirical value for the institution through a value-oriented approach, 2) the institution serving as the center of an educational system that integrates formal (system), informal (family), and off-system (community) education, and 3) Meteri, including both revealed (Islamic) and acquired knowledge (Kwiyah) (Ismail, 2011). To facilitate knowledge acquisition and experiential learning, the institution employs various instructional methods, including 1) leading by example, 2) creating a conducive milieu, 3) providing guidance and counseling, 4) promoting habituation, 5) doing assignments, 6) enforcing discipline, and 7) fostering enthusiasm (Bahroni, 2012).

At PMDG, the student council plays a crucial role in managing various school activities, including the preparation and execution of events. With the guidance of teachers, the council members are given the freedom to propose and implement their ideas. However, they are expected to adhere to specific qualities that reflect the demands of their respective roles. For example, the head of the council is expected to be responsible, patient, fair, open-minded, and possess strong interpersonal skills. On the other hand, the secretary must demonstrate confidentiality, caution, and reliability, while the treasurer is expected to display caution, accuracy, knowledge, and hard work. Moreover, the photocopying person must exhibit patience, friendliness, artistic skills, and proficiency in camera work and photo editing. Similarly, the receptionist is expected to possess excellent interpersonal skills, be accurate, hardworking, and able to organize the Sauwal committee that prepares for significant events such as Eid al-Fitr, new student admission, transportation, admission examination, and other activities. Currently, the student council requires 866 members to oversee various activities. In addition to overseeing various school activities, PMDG has organized a compulsory Boy Scout activity, which is considered beneficial for the students' development. The activity is designed

to improve the students' health and wellness, self-help, and life skills, such as cooking, life-saving techniques, foraging for food in the forest, hunting, tying various knots, and communicating using flags and mascots. As noted by Mariyat (2011), the successful implementation of this activity requires 43 students to take charge of its various aspects. Additionally, PMDG hosts a grand art performance called Panggung Gembira every year, which is organized by students in Grade 5. The event is open to participation from students in Grades 1 to 4, with more than 500 students participating in 2017. The event's motto is "With the Spirit of Gontor Struggle, Unite the People, Creating Islamic Life" (Fajar, 2018). The impact of these extra-curricular activities was reflected through interviews with PMDG alumni as follows:

"Students in Grade 7 will have a club selected for them by teachers, but once they reach Grade 8, they are free to choose their own" (Alumnus 3)

"At Gontor, activities are organized with seriousness and extravagance. No outsiders are hired for any activity; instead, the students handle everything themselves, from setting up the stage background and arranging flowers in front of the stage to operating the speakers and lights, and utilizing the materials and equipment provided by the school. Grade 10 has eight events, while Grade 11 and Grade 12 have two major events each year. Each year, events may be organized differently. Some events take place during the day and some at night, and most outsiders who attend are alumni" (Alumnus 5)

"The children at Gontor have many talents, including graphic design and guitar playing. There is even a music contest, and students are not banned from playing music. In fact, they can even release their own music album or compose their own music. There are plenty of activities for children to explore and try out." (Alumnus 4)

4. Compulsory Teaching Practicum for Upper Secondary Students

To promote its ambition of producing competent teachers, PMDG provides additional teaching practicum subjects to prepare Grade 11 students for the teaching practicum examination in Grade 12. Moreover, the school requires all students to complete a year of volunteer teaching after completing Grade 12 before obtaining their upper secondary education certification. As indicated by administrators, teachers, and alumni during the interviews, Grade 12 students at PMDG are required to pass the following subjects to complete their upper secondary education: Comprehensive Examination, Teaching Practice, Economic Study Tour, Courses on Islamic Society, Courses on Issues of Da'wah, Practice of Public Speech, Reading Classical Books (Kutub Turath), Legal Discussion (Bahthal-Masa'il al-Fiqhiyyah), and Writing Papers (Zarkasyi, 2022).

"Final year activity students have to teaching one year, we sent many Pondok who request student for teach" (PMDG Administrator 1)

"All students at Gontor must receive teaching practice training starting from Grade 11 and will have to pass a teaching practicum examination to become a teacher after finishing M6. Every Gontor graduate who completes Grade 12 must teach others" (Teacher 3)

"After finishing Grade 12 at Gontor, we were required to teach for a year. Each of us was assigned to a different location and had to pass a qualifying exam. The committee selected us, and we were sent to teach in various Gontor schools, some of which were run by Gontor alumni" (Alumni 7)

"Gontor graduates are required to join the teaching practicum for one year without salary. However, there are several benefits, such as free dormitories, food, and tuition fees for an undergraduate program in exchange for working for Gontor" (Alumni 10)

5. A Prominent Social Enterprise

PMDG has established a social enterprise to provide financial resources for education and welfare expenses. The SE generates revenue by managing six types of businesses, including farmland, agriculture, livestock, service business, trading, and factory. All profits from these businesses are directed toward education management (Bahroni, 2012; Syamsuri et al., 2020; Susilo et al., 2021). With over 31 businesses, including shops, bookstores, drugstores, ice factories, transportation services, inns, and palm oil gardens, PMDG's annual revenue is approximately Rp 60 billion (Bahroni, 2012). PMDG's total assets in 2019 amounted to Rp 49.2 billion, which includes various sources such as palm oil, goat farms, factories, hotels, resorts, construction materials stores, financial institutions (Shariah Micro Finance Institutions; Baitul Maal wa Tamwii), petrol stations, and a forest concession spanning 50,000 hectares (Syamsuri et al., 2020; Susilo et al., 2021; Daniar & Zarkasyi, 2019). Consequently, PMDG had 1600 hectares of waqf land as of 2021 (Mighwar et al., 2021).

PMDG has established the La Tansa brand, derived from the Quranic verse “Wa laa tansa nashibaka min ad-dunya,” which translates to “not to forget your fate in the world” or “do not forget” in short. The brand embodies Islamic principles in all its activities, including adhering to employee dress codes that align with Islamic values, using polite language when interacting with customers, selecting appropriate Islamic music to play in stores, and stopping service during Salat times. La Tansa aims to instill Islamic values among its employees, staff, and consumers in an educational atmosphere through two main assertions. Firstly, the brand provides essential products for people's everyday lives, particularly for lower- and higher-education students, with food products produced solely by Muslims. Secondly, it strives to sell all types of products at lower prices than general stores, offering a 10% discount. La Tansa's management policy is to listen to the opinions and suggestions of its consumers, which has contributed to its success as a significant business with target groups covering all levels of society (Anggara & Ulumuddin, 2021), as elaborated by administrators and parents in the interviews:

“We are private education, we manage by ourself, we not receive budget from government, we have Business Enterprise, we have factory, we have restaurants, we have factory of bread, ice cream, pharmacy, we have rice field, we have also land of Palm oil, This is waqf enterprise is not in the university, this is outside university. All business project is only for education” (PMDG Administrator 1)

“Their management is entirely internal, without relying on external budgets” (Parent 1)

“After graduating from Grade 12, students donate cash to build things and make improvements in the school, and they report how the donations are used each year. For example, the year my daughter graduated, they used the donations to buy an ambulance for the hospital on campus. They have everything” (Parent 2)

6. Waqf Management

PMDG operates under the principle of self-reliance, with waqf management under the school treasury investment program known as “Chizanatullah” (Bahroni, 2012). The Waqf management, also known as the Gontor Waqf Cooperative Governance, has a board of 15 directors and is responsible for developing assets donated for education by adhering to the following five working principles: 1) for religious purposes, 2) as academic advisors for both religious and ordinary matters, 3) working for the nation, 4) maintaining and developing to build a quality Islamic university, and 5) strictly complying with the law. This committee not only manages revenue generation from Waqf but also plays a part in determining the direction of school management and establishing short-term and long-term instructional programs (Bahroni, 2012; Syamsuri et al., 2020; Susilo et al., 2021). In addition, PMDG's management follows six principles for revenue generation, namely, 1) Comprehension -

striving to understand and embody the values of Panca Jiwa, working to the best of one's ability, and prioritizing giving for the sake of Islam over personal gain (such as salary); 2) Creation - utilizing the Quran and creative thinking to develop new business models that are in line with the globalized world; 3) Connection - building business relationships for growth and survival while adhering to the Islamic principle of Silaturahmi; 4) Capability Building - PMDG is committed to developing the abilities and management skills of its managers to ensure they have the necessary capabilities to handle changes within the business environment, including providing further training for employees under their supervision; 5) Education - teaching Islamic business administration and seeking business opportunities; and 6) Trust - building trust within society, which facilitates significant business growth (Susilo et al., 2021; Daniar & Zarkasyi, 2019). According to interviews with administrators and parents, these principles were considered fundamental to PMDG's management practices.

"We adhere to the waqf principle in our operational approach when recruiting administrators for each level of management" (PMDG Administrator 1)

"All of The buildings were constructed by ourself because we have our revenue from the business for example goat and cow farm, rice field, bread factory. Behind this building is palm plantation" (PMDG Administrator 3)

"Gontor has a waqf board that oversees its public assets. The boards do not receive any government funding. They rely on their own businesses, such as school bookstores, stores for non-personal belongings, stationery stores, printing houses, and bakery production factories. They have everything. Gontor's tuition fees are around 8000 to 9000 baht" (Parent 3)

"They have an annual summary meeting to discuss each division's activities and budget. They create a sense of Ikhlas" (Alumnus 2)

7. Developing Teachers Through a Mentorship System

PMDG employs a cadre recruitment strategy, which includes a recruitment process called Uswah Hasanah, considering the direction, methods, motivation, assignments, and assessments of potential candidates (Bahroni, 2012; Fasa, 2017). To foster the development of its teachers, PMDG has implemented a teacher mentorship system that aligns with the following philosophy: 1) the method of teaching is more critical than the subject matter, 2) the teacher is more crucial than the method, 3) the teacher's spirit is more crucial than the teacher, and 4) sincerity is the most crucial factor in the instructional process (Zarkasyi, 2022). According to interviews with teachers, senior teachers, known as Kyais, are considered the forerunners and staple elements of Islamic boarding schools. These schools apply the principles of Tasamuh (tolerance), Tawasuth wal i'tidal (simplicity), Tawazun (full consideration), and Ukhuwah (fraternity), as stated by Syawaludin (Fasa, 2017).

"Training is provided by senior teachers, who offer tutoring on difficult subjects such as mathematics, history of Islam, or Hadith studies. Most of the tutoring takes place in the morning, for example, on Saturdays, where we teach periods 5 to 6 and receive training in periods 1 to 2 or periods 3 to 4 before teaching" (Teacher 3)

"Students who graduate from Grade 12 and demonstrate outstanding performance may be selected as volunteer teachers and supervised by senior teachers. New teachers must submit their lesson plans to senior teachers for review before teaching in the first period of every day before 6:45 am. They are also randomly inspected in a class by administrators appointed to supervise. Appointed administrators supervise senior teachers at every campus" (Teacher 1)

"I prepare a lesson plan and submit it to the senior teacher's room, which is their designated workspace. Every teacher is required to submit a lesson plan every day before teaching. We must prepare lesson plans from the beginning until the end of the semester. At this stage, we only submit the topic and not the content yet" (Teacher 2)

"To select teachers, we first investigate their discipline, etiquette, leadership personality, and academic background. Then, the school conducts seven rounds of selection, starting in Grade 12, where candidates are evaluated by their class teachers, the disciplinary department, the education department, and a selection committee. About 1,300-1,400 students who have graduated from Grade 12, across all branches, including men and women, are considered for selection. For example, in my branch, there were 800 Grade 12 graduates, and 120-150 were selected, but the number depends on the year. This is only for one branch, and each branch would announce the number of teachers to be recruited. The remaining students either go through the second round of selection to be admitted directly to the university or are selected for the third time to teach at a Gontor branch belonging to the alumni. In the fourth round, graduates are free to teach anywhere. All graduates are required to teach after graduating from Gontor, and they would receive the graduation certificate after one year of teaching. While teaching, they are required to perform three duties: teaching, helping the school with various tasks and studying in a bachelor's program" (Teacher 1)

8. The Provision of Welfare Based on Life Balance Principles

PMDG's business and waqf management enabled the provision of adequate teacher welfare for administrators, teachers, and students. In fact, it could even provide special services and formed community partnerships to create products from investment (Bahroni, 2012; Al Mighwar et al., 2021). In 2011, Gontor provided 69 housing units for teachers with families, two health centers, and 49 shared vehicles (Mariyat, 2011). Teachers, alumni, and parents confirmed this information in the following interviews.

"In renewing Gontor's teachers' contracts, they offered facilities including free meals, accommodation, and education. Additionally, they provided everyone with general essentials, such as soap, shampoo, and toothbrushes, on a monthly basis. Additionally, teachers receive a shirt, suit, or shoes each year, depending on the school's offer. Furthermore, haircuts were still free of charge, and teachers received a coupon for a free one. Everything provided was free of charge, and the money given was considered a gift rather than a salary. This practice is called Ihsan. Ihsan is given to teachers yearly in varied amounts based on their grade level" (Teacher 1)

"Teachers at Gontor do not receive a salary. Instead, they are given pocket money from the school's income. It is unclear whether the school generates a profit, but teachers receive benefits such as clothing, as well as support for Hajj and Umrah. They are also provided with a house to live in, a car to drive, and necessities such as rice, fish, and toothpaste" (Parent 4)

"Administrators at Gontor do not receive a salary. There is no competition for positions or properties because Gontor operates as a charitable organization. However, they may have their own businesses outside of the school and donate profits to the school to further its charitable mission. At the heart of Gontor's mission is the development of students' hearts and minds. The school emphasizes purity following Panca Jiwa's five principles, and everyone is encouraged to strive for purity and self-sufficiency" (Parent 5)

"Every income generated is used to support the students' education. Teachers at Gontor do not receive a salary, but they are provided with free accommodation and transportation. They encourage us to practice Waqf with ourselves. I personally received 300 per month for teaching training. If they choose to, teachers can also own a house or business, such as baking and selling" (Alumnus 7)

“Teachers are encouraged to practice Waqf with themselves, and even a wife will be provided. However, when male teachers are ready to start a family, typically around the age of 25, they may be sent to Gontor Putri to find a suitable partner” (Alumnus 5)

9. Student Support Through Peer Mentoring System

PMDG has implemented a peer-to-peer student support system that empowers senior students to care for their junior counterparts by assigning them duties and responsibilities. The system involves assigning M5 students to care for students in M1 to M4 in designated rooms within the dormitory, with each room accommodating 30 mixed-grade students and overseen by the M5 students. The system also includes a punishment and reward scheme to instill etiquette values and enhance student experiences (Hardoyo, 2009). The student support system is implemented using a task-based approach within the whole-school development method of character education. This approach covers areas such as cleaning, safety, administration, work management, and fund management, with habituation strategies that include praying five times a day, waking up at 3:30 am, attending classes on time, speaking Arabic and English, wearing prescribed clothing, and helping others (Saifulloh & Neoh, 2022). Further details regarding this subject matter can be found in the following interviews with alumni and parents.

“Five to six teachers stay in each accommodation building and act as dormitory caretakers for the students. Each student room houses 25 people and is divided into six sections, with one section designated for students in Grade 11 and Grade 12 to serve as senior students responsible for taking care of the room” (Alumnus 15)

“They are taught to respect their seniors and follow the guidance of the leaders. But they are also taught to understand their position within the hierarchy..., so they can comprehend that in the future, when they grow older, they will be the ones to control the younger ones while also being pressured by the older ones. And once they become the oldest, they will have the power to care for the younger ones. So, they will understand the situation if they are to be here” (Parent 1)

“If we used any language other than English, including Indonesian, we could be punished. This rule even applied in the bathrooms, so I had to be careful. I remember a friend who forgot his soap and asked for it in a different language. His close friend was the one who reported him. The friend who reported the case was an inspector, so he wrote down the time, the class, and the place where my friend made a mistake. The next day, my friend was punished and had to become the next inspector. I liked the idea, and it was fun. It was like being a spy. The rules were divided into two categories: discipline and language. For example, we would be punished if we did not store the Quran after use, pick up trash, or forget our Kapiyo on the cabinet. The inspectors would report any violations to the language department, which was responsible for punishment. On Fridays, they would announce the names of the students who had violated the rules, and we would tune in to see if our names were called” (Alumnus 12)

“Before going to bed, there is a name check five times a day during the Salat times, which are Subuh (dawn), Dzuhur (midday), Ashar (afternoon), Maghrib (sunset), and Isya (evening). In addition, after each Salat, seniors sharing the same room would check the students’ names” (Alumnus 6)

10. Supportive Learning Environment

PMDG employs an institutional funding strategy to manage its facilities. As of 2011, PMDG's main campus reportedly spans 12 hectares and accommodates around 4,266 students and 448 teachers. PMDG has been able to provide sufficient facilities, including buildings, rooms, and equipment, to support both academic and non-academic programs. The facilities include two mosques, 160 living

rooms, 115 classrooms, 210 bathrooms, 205 lavatories, 481 taps, 35 drying places, 497 drying cords, 69 housing units for married teachers, 65 shops and offices, two laboratories, 41 vehicles, two health centers, and more than 33 units of funding sources (Mariyat, 2011). This institutional funding strategy aligns with PMDG's school plan, which the administrators have implemented to achieve the institution's infrastructure goals. The plan calls for having buildings, classrooms, or equipment based on the number of students (Bahroni, 2012). The practical implementation of this plan has enabled PMDG to summarize the development of peaceful leadership. Syam et al. (2020) outlined four processes through which PMDG students develop life skills and character traits. 1) The teaching process occurs 24 hours daily, as reflected in the curriculum, management systems, and in-dormitory activities. 2) Students are assigned tasks and activities to practice leadership skills and build strength through a robust and systematic practice process. 3) Personal life goals are set, requiring students to understand their chosen goals and reflect on their own life goals. 4) Students participate in various activities and continually practice each activity quickly to participate in other activities and play a role in creativity and innovation throughout the continuous activities. Based on Mu'minah (2016) and Fatihah (2018), PMDG was able to cultivate leadership among its students through the 7P process, which includes *Pengarahan* (direction), *Pelatihan* (training), *Penugasan* (giving tasks), *Pembiasaan* (habituation), *Pengawasan* (supervision), *Pemberian teladan* (giving role models), and *Pendekatan* (approach). The interview data with teachers and alumni supports these findings.

"There, students are trained in personal development, manners, and the school environment. The teachers serve as examples for the students to follow. After staying for a couple of years, the students automatically absorb the culture and values of the school" (Alumnus 6)

"Gontor can produce leaders, trainers, and senior teachers from its students, starting from the early stages of Grade 7-8" (Alumnus 1)

"Meetings are held regularly to remind each other about our goals and to keep ourselves focused. During these meetings, everyone was cultivated and warned to stay on track. Teachers also hold meetings weekly. As the saying goes, I will tell you a thousand times to follow this advice for teachers and students. I am not tired of telling and warning" (Teacher 1)

"Good management and control are cultivated from the senior teachers down to the teenage teachers and students since their Grade 11. As they reach Grade 12, students would begin to dream about working in various departments, such as the language or cleaning department. Each department has its own organization and hierarchy, with students having the opportunity to learn about leadership and management. It is unique to see students as young as Grade 11 and Grade 12 being able to manage and lead other students in the dormitory. Students are taught to act as fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters to one another. In the dormitories, the elder students in Grade 12 take care of the younger kids, while Grade 11 is governed by the Grade 12 students and the disciplinary department. Students in Grade 11 and Grade 12 also participate in various management activities" (Teacher 1)

"A stable system is one that must go through a good process. Let me try to explain. This process involves having a clear and unchanging structure in place. While we may emphasize activities more, the fundamental structure of the system remains the same. We strive to cultivate high standards in every child, much like the Quran encourages everyone to strive for excellence in doing good deeds. As seniors, students strive to make the next generation better than themselves and to continuously develop the system" (Teacher 1)

"The arrangement of the rooms started from B to P, as there was no Room A which was reserved for native speakers. Although we may become proficient, we cannot be compared to native speakers, so we should not become arrogant" (Alumnus 15)

"I had the opportunity to welcome delegates from five southern provinces of Thailand. There was a schedule and queue arrangement in advance, with the whole year's schedule divided into various sections such as hotels, teaching, and learning. These sections are clearly supervised by students in each department, which is why students must take entrance exams to ensure that they are suitable for their aptitudes" (Alumnus 9)

"Gontor focuses on developing people first and materials later. That is what makes Gontor what it is today. Typically, people in our country tend to create materials first and people later, but this approach often leads to the destruction of these materials. Instead, Gontor strongly emphasizes building strong relationships between teachers and students, fostering a sense of brotherhood and family. As a result, students naturally respect their teachers and look up to them as exemplary role models" (Alumnus 13)

"Gontor has a cultural system that promotes competition in doing good. Everyone wants to participate and show off their good deeds" (Alumnus 10)

5. Discussion

PMDG has established commendable practices in academic administration, providing a holistic and integrative system that encompasses both religious and general sciences, as well as extracurricular activities, integrating the Islamic way of life on a 24-hour basis. These practices align with Shannon and Bylsma (2007), suggesting that high-performing schools must have a clear and shared focus, and their curriculum and instruction must align with established standards. Similarly, Kannapel et al. (2005) emphasized the significance of academic and instructional focus in high-performing schools, where a shared and clear focus on academic goals is common in such institutions. According to Crum et al. (2010), administrators who adopt best practices must possess a vision of instructional awareness and involvement. Furthermore, McGee (2009) identified the best practice co-component in schools: allocating extra time for academic activities. In Thailand, Islamic private schools continue to operate to a limited extent, providing separate instruction based on two distinct curricula. In light of the separate curricula being taught in Islamic private schools in Thailand, students are required to learn more than 16 subjects. The Basic Education Core Curriculum focuses on general subjects, while the Islamic Studies Curriculum concentrates on religious subjects. However, the integration of Islamic principles into daily life is only emphasized in Islamic boarding schools. Jahwae (2018) consistently highlighted that the educational curriculum is inconsistent with the learning activities in private schools, leading to students spending significant time studying and lacking in life skills. Moreover, the measurement and evaluation of religious subjects integrated into the general curriculum are not yet aligned. To address the issue of the learning burden on students in Islamic private schools in Thailand, it is suggested that the two curriculums be integrated. Furthermore, this integration can be achieved by synthesizing indicators and designing integrated learning units. Additionally, Islamic private schools are encouraged to design Halaqah activities (a religious gathering or study circle in Islam, where Muslims sit in a circle to learn about Islam and the Quran from a speaker or scholar) and organize extra-curricular activities that emphasize the Islamic way of life. For example, they could design self-development programs based on Islamic principles, analyze news and events in the Muslim world, and allow students to take on leadership roles in Prayer (Salat) and deliver sermons (Khutbah).

PMDG follows budget management based on the Waqf principles and seeks income by operating various businesses to bring in profits that can be used for expenses and welfare management. This approach serves as a good model for management, but it may require a visionary leader to manage it effectively. The findings are consistent with several studies, including those by Kannapel et al. (2005), Crum et al. (2010), Bell and Cordingley (2014), and Waheed et al. (2017). Furthermore, McGee (2009) identified a co-component of best practices in schools in the United States, which

included the emphasis on early literacy through significant financial and human resource allocation. In contrast, Islamic private schools in Thailand receive government funding income for administration but with limited academic flexibility. Moreover, the budget is mainly utilized for personnel management and general missions rather than academic pursuits. As Wangli (2013) and Salae (2015) indicated, these schools still lack a uniform direction in managing strategies to drive their missions. They also lack well-defined scopes for assigned duties and perpetuate unchanged traditional visions. Additionally, the implementation of management strategies lacks planning, and there is a lack of an operational calendar. The personnel may also be inexperienced and unprofessional, lacking teamwork skills, and follow-ups on work can be inconsistent. To strengthen capabilities in financial management in Islamic private schools in Thailand, it is suggested that they generate income through various businesses and incorporate Waqf principles into their management, as this approach can provide greater liquidity for managing expenses and welfare.

PMDG has a personnel management system based on expertise and seniority, with a reliable mentorship system and a teacher selection process that considers teaching ability and a passion for the profession. This approach corresponds to Shannon and Bylsma (2007), which suggested that high-performing schools prioritize frequent monitoring of teaching and learning and focused professional development. Kannapel et al. (2005) also found that high-performing schools have certain commonalities, including well-planned teacher recruitment, hiring, and assignment processes, while McGee (2009) identified competence, hard work, and talent as co-components of best practices. Similarly, Bell and Cordingley (2014) noted that exceptional schools and those affiliated with the Teach First program prioritized a professional learning environment for their teachers. Waheed et, al. (2017) synthesized the best practices for schools in Malaysia and identified a culture of acquiring and sharing professional knowledge as a key component. However, Islamic private schools in Thailand have a teacher recruitment process primarily based on the school's needs, lacking systematic teacher development and career advancement opportunities due to administrators' limited vision and budgetary constraints. Moreover, there has been a consistent outflow of teachers into the public system, resulting in instructional management discontinuity. As indicated by Churngchow and Sittichai (2014), Jahwae (2018), Malee (2017), and Bakoh and Assalihee (2020), it was found that teachers in Islamic private schools in Thailand could not provide diversity to maintain student-centered learning. They also did not attempt to develop themselves or increase their knowledge, skills, and techniques to provide more adaptive teaching management. Additionally, they had difficulty designing teaching materials and were not allowed to work independently. Administrators often enjoyed absolute power when running the schools, did not treat school workers fairly and rationally when considering salary promotions, and did not allocate appropriate remuneration to compensate for the workload. Moreover, many resigned from Islamic private schools due to heavy workloads and exhaustion. To address these issues, it is suggested that Islamic private schools incentivize their teachers with benefits and salaries comparable to those offered by public schools. It is also recommended that schools establish regular academic development programs for their teachers, enabling them to continually improve their knowledge and teaching techniques.

PMDG's administrative system prioritizes well-being, including providing proper infrastructure and career opportunities. The school also has a comprehensive student affairs management system involving peer mentoring for senior students to nurture their younger ones. This approach is consistent with Bell and Cordingley (2014), highlighting the importance of developing strong relationships between schools, students, parents, and the wider community. On the other hand, Islamic private schools in Thailand often struggle with general administration due to inadequate classroom facilities and instructional materials. To attract more students, these schools have prioritized public relations over creating effective student support systems. Additionally, teachers may be solely responsible for student care, leading to burnout and potential neglect of other essential

duties. As indicated by Jahwae (2018), Vasinayanuwatana et. al. (2019), and Bakoh and Assalihee (2020), it was found that Islamic private schools in Thailand were not adequately prepared for science education with insufficient science laboratories, outdated teaching materials, and a lack of technology integration. Moreover, these schools were found to have inadequate support for media technology. To solve these dilemmas, administrators of Islamic private schools are suggested to prioritize the development of school facilities and instructional materials to ensure they sufficiently match the number of students admitted. Furthermore, a peer mentoring system, from seniors to juniors, should be developed along with cultivating the sense of Murobbi (a person who nurtures, educates, or guide another person, embodying qualities of wisdom, knowledge, piety, and kindness) among students.

The PMDG's synthesis of best practices is expected to yield ten compelling issues that could serve as models for the management of private Islamic schools in Thailand. These include developing administrators' potential to manage in a timely manner and meet stakeholder needs; designing an integrated curriculum between religious and general subjects to reduce the number of periods and foster learning that connects students' real-world situations; organizing extra-curricular activities that meet students' interests and linking knowledge to future entrepreneurship; establishing an administrative system that responds to waqf principles; consistently enhancing teachers' learning management skills; and providing reasonable welfare to ensure a balanced life in this world. However, achieving the same results as PMDG is likely to involve factors that contribute to its success, including economic, political, or cultural factors. Clearly, PMDG has an advantage over private Islamic schools in Thailand in that it was established before the declaration of independence of Indonesia, is a conglomerate of spiritual leaders from at least three eras and is managed based on the principle of waqf by raising funds and assets to expand the business, which is the common property of PMDG.

Despite the PMDG's best practices in ten components, Thai researchers who visited and exchanged knowledge during interviews noted that students were rather fatigued with the tight schedule of classes and extra-curricular activities, as well as the additional responsibilities imposed by the PMDG. Regarding teaching, the PMDG organized a system for teaching and training to junior students. Concerns arose that the senior students, who were close in age and lacked sufficient teaching skills, continued to rely on a chock-and-talk format, with no active learning activities, potentially leading to the transmission of traditional teaching methods from generation to generation. Another issue related to the integration of religious and general education subjects remained unclear, as not all subjects were included. Understandably, this may be difficult to achieve in some subjects. Furthermore, students demonstrated limited performance on the PMDG's assigned inter-institutional affairs and coordination tasks. They appeared to have a limited understanding of the work procedures, possibly due to the frequent student rotations, which disrupted the continuity of work.

6. Conclusion

Considering PMDG's successful implementation of best practices, there is potential for Islamic private schools in Thailand to achieve comparable quality by adapting PMDG's approach to fit the local context. Nonetheless, it remains crucial for school administrators to recognize the value of aligning management strategies with the goal of producing morally upright and exemplary Islamic individuals. To achieve the desired outcomes, enhancing integrative learning skills and fostering Islamic life skills may be necessary, as evident in the success story of PMDG. Additionally, the study suggests that a practical approach to school leadership involves integrating the curriculum between religious and general sciences, implementing a peer mentorship system, and providing support to enhance the learning environment for students. Furthermore, designing teacher training programs that align with the founding aspirations of K. H. Imam Zarkasyi as a teacher training school can yield positive results in improving the quality of education in Islamic private schools. Such desirable results

might not have been achieved if PMDG had not implemented its operations to generate income and utilize the Waqf management principles. Evidently, by balancing the provision of welfare for students and personnel, PMDG has obtained and retained its desirable results.

7. Suggestion

The synthesis of PMDG best practices offers valuable insights into effective school administration aimed at achieving tangible outcomes. If adopted—particularly by administrators of private Islamic schools in Thailand or other countries—these practices could support administrative development and help identify areas for improvement. Future research could build on these findings by further refining each component of PMDG's best practices into concrete action plans or strategic models for practical implementation.

Declarations

Author Contributions. Afifi Lateh: Literature review, conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation. Jarunee Thongsuk: Literature review, conceptualization, data analysis, original manuscript preparation. Daniya Machae, Abdunkareem Masae, Alawee Lateh, Narida Khongpheng, Rohani Pooteh: Literature review, data analysis, original manuscript preparation. All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval. The study adhered to ethical research standards and received ethical approval for research involving human subjects from Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus (Approval Code: psu.pn.2-058/65). The submission for research ethics approval included the following documents: a research proposal, a proposal for ethical review of human research, a self-assessment ethics assessment form, a research volunteer information statement, a statement of informed consent for research volunteers, a request for waiver of consent from volunteers, the background and expertise of the researcher and co-researchers, and research instruments. The confidentiality of the informants' identities was maintained. Prior to interviewing key informants, the researchers requested permission from each informant and informed them of their rights. After data collection, the researchers had key informants review the records. The researchers presented the research findings to key informants who were studied and provided feedback to determine the accuracy of the researchers' conclusions and interpretations.

Data Availability Statement. The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to the risk of identifying study participants.

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