THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION QUALITY AND SELF-ABILITY ON STUDENTS' DECISIONS TO CHOOSE AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE

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ABSTRAK

Institusi pendidikan yang berhasil membangun brand image positif, menyediakan mutu pendidikan yang tinggi, dan mendukung perkembangan kemampuan diri mahasiswa akan memiliki keunggulan dalam menarik calon mahasiswa dan mempertahankan loyalitas mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran brand image sebagai mediator dalam pengaruh antara mutu pendidikan, kemampuan diri, dan keputusan mahasiswa. Metode survei digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data berdasarkan probability sampling dari 457 mahasiswa program studi Pendidikan Agama Islam angkatan 2021 di IAIN Ponorogo. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan kuesioner yang terdiri dari skala likert dengan 4 alternatif jawaban. Analisis PLS-SEM digunakan untuk menganalisis data dan menguji model konseptual. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa mutu pendidikan tidak berpengaruh signifikan terhadap keputusan mahasiswa memilih program studi Pendidikan Agama Islam. Penemuan ini menitikberatkan pada pentingnya memperkuat brand image lembaga pendidikan sebagai mediator yang memengaruhi hubungan antara mutu pendidikan, kemampuan diri, dan keputusan mahasiswa. Dengan demikian, lembaga pendidikan perlu memperhatikan strategi untuk memperkuat brand image mereka agar dapat meningkatkan daya tarik bagi calon mahasiswa serta memberikan pengalaman pendidikan yang lebih bermakna.

Kata-kata kunci: Brand Image, Mutu Pendidikan, Kemampuan Diri, Keputusan Mahasiswa.

ABSTRACT

Educational institutions that succeed in building a positive brand image, providing quality education, and supporting the development of student's self-ability will have an advantage in attracting prospective students and maintaining their loyalty. This research aims to explore the role of brand image as a mediator on the influence of educational quality, self-ability, and student decisions. The survey method was used to collect data based on probability sampling of 457 students of the 2021 IAIN Ponorogo Islamic Religious Education study program. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire consisting of a Likert scale with 4 alternative answers. PLS-SEM analysis was used to analyze data and test the conceptual model. The results of the analysis show that the quality of education does not have a significant effect on students' decisions to choose the Islamic Religious Education study program. These findings emphasize the importance of strengthening the brand image of educational institutions as a mediator that influences the relationship between educational quality, self-ability, and student decisions. Therefore, educational institutions need to pay attention to strategies to strengthen their brand image in order to increase their attractiveness in the eyes of prospective students and provide a more meaningful educational experience.

Keywords: Brand Image, Education Quality, Self-Ability, Student Decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Choosing a college study program is an important decision that can influence a person's academic and career journey. Universities in Indonesia, including IAIN Ponorogo, compete to attract students. Understanding how the brand image of a particular study program influences student decisions can help institutions improve marketing strategies and study program differentiation (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando et al., 2018; Rosanti et al., 2021). Several factors that can be considered in choosing a college study program include reputation, location, cost, word of mouth, promotion, brand image, personal potential, and quality of education. From these factors, researchers took three factors to study in choosing a college study program, namely brand image, personal potential, and quality of education (Kaushal & Ali, 2020).

The increase in interest is caused by one of the brand image factors. Foxall, Goldsmith, and Brown stated that brand image is a combination of impressions formed, a representation that can trigger a strong emotional reaction to a quick mental impression, emotions to differentiate one brand from others and become the basis for consumers in making purchases (Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2018; Benhardy et al., 2020). Brand image is a strategy for advertising schools or educational institutions to the public.

In every institution or educational institution, the educational services provided have unique characteristics that always emphasize quality. As a result, the public or consumers of educational services will form a special perception or view of this institution, which is known as brand image (Berndt & Hollebeek, 2019; Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando et al., 2018). With this brand image, it will influence the decisions of consumers of educational services in choosing to use educational services at an institution. The brand image of a university or educational institution has a significant influence on the perception of students and society in general regarding the quality of education offered (Carless & Boud, 2018; Ismail et al., 2022).

Educational quality is a combined term of "quality" and "education" which refers to the quality of products produced by educational institutions or schools. This can be recognized from the number of students who achieve achievements, both academically and in other

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fields, as well as the suitability of graduates to educational goals (Hwang & Choi, 2019; Panda et al., 2019). The quality of education is not only relevant at the school level but also in tertiary institutions, where the quality of tertiary education is regulated by Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education, especially in Article 52 paragraph (3) which regulates the quality assurance system for Higher Education and Standards. National Higher Education. Education quality standards at IAIN Ponorogo have been determined in a decree on internal educational standards which include graduate competency standards, curriculum, learning processes, teaching staff, facilities, and infrastructure, as well as management and financing (Boldureanu et al., 2020; Rawashdeh et al., 2021).

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), personal potential refers to the abilities and qualities that a person has, but has not yet fully utilized. Purwanto explained that potential is the diverse abilities or opportunities within each individual to explore new things that can be realized. Self-potential can be thought of as a special strength that exists within a person but has not yet been fully realized (Ajat et al., 2019; Kamil & Munadi, 2023). This potential can develop to become stronger and more effective with the right support, such as confidence and help from those closest to you, as well as a suitable environment for learning and honing skills. Personal abilities can be developed through the learning process. Vocational education is considered a means that facilitates individuals in strengthening their abilities and reaching the peak of their potential through learning experiences (Mauludiana et al., 2020; Miles & Naumann, 2019).

The intervention variable is used as a link to test whether the quality of education and potential or personal abilities have an impact on students' decisions in choosing an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) study program through brand image. The IAIN Ponorogo brand image functions as an intervention variable to evaluate the relationship between educational quality and ability and its influence on students' decisions in choosing a PAI study program at IAIN Ponorogo. Based on a study Sudaryanto et al, (2019) reputation, education costs, and location together have a significant influence on the preferences of the 2019 class of students in higher education. This shows that internal and external factors greatly influence a prospective student in choosing the desired study program and college.

As an effort to improve students' decisions in choosing study programs, universities can focus on improving the quality of their education, by providing curricula that are relevant to industry demands, strengthening collaboration with business and industry, improving the quality of teaching and learning. Comprehensive academics for students. Research conducted by (Hutabarat, 2018) states that there is a significant relationship between the quality of education and students' decisions in choosing a study program. Investing in improving the quality of education is an important strategy for universities in attracting student interest and improving their decisions in choosing study programs.

Furthermore, universities can strengthen their brand image as superior educational institutions that are able to help students develop their academic potential and abilities to be successful in the future. The brand image of an educational institution not only influences external perceptions but can also influence the quality of education directly and indirectly through various mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening a positive brand image must be a priority for educational institutions that want to improve the quality of their education.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT
The Influence of Education Quality on Brand Image and Student Decisions
The influence of educational quality on brand image and student decisions has great urgency in improving the reputation of universities and their attractiveness to prospective students, as well as in influencing the academic and career choices made by students when completing their studies. The quality of education is also important in forming a positive image

of educational institutions in the eyes of the public and other stakeholders, which can have an impact on financial support, industrial collaboration, and relationships with alumni. In addition, this influence can influence the ranking of universities in various international and national rankings, which in turn can affect the competitiveness of these institutions in the global higher education market (Alzafari & Ursin, 2019; Galante et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding and improving the quality of education, as well as strengthening the brand image of higher education institutions is very important.

H-DIR1: The quality of education has an influence on student decisions.

H-DIR3: The quality of education influences brand image.

The Influence of Self-Ability on Brand Image and Student Decisions

Self-ability has a significant urgency in improving students' decisions in choosing an Islamic Religious Education study program. A student's decision to choose an Islamic Religious Education study program must be based on interests, values, and personal goals which are the right keys in choosing a study program. Interest arises from a student's ability to recognize and explore their interests and talents. Self-ability provides a strong foundation for individual and professional self-development. When a person has a good understanding of their abilities, they can direct their energy and effort in the appropriate direction (Annur & Trisnawati, 2023; Lin et al., 2018).

H-DIR2: Self-ability influences students' decisions.

H-DIR4: Self-ability influences brand image.

The Influence of Brand Image on Student Decisions

The urgency of the influence of brand image on students' decisions to choose the Islamic Religious Education study program is very significant. The brand image reflects the reputation and quality of the education offered. Students tend to choose educational institutions with a strong brand image because they believe they will provide good opportunities after graduating. A positive brand image builds trust and a sense of security among prospective students and parents. Students and parents will feel more confident in choosing an institution that has a strong brand image (Benhardy et al., 2020; Hermanda et al., 2019).

H-DIR5: Brand image has an effect on influences student decisions.

The Mediating Role of Brand Image on the Quality of Education and Self-Ability on Student Decisions

The mediating role in the brand image functions as an intermediary or mediator between students' perceptions about the quality of education of an institution and their decision to choose that institution. Mediators help between students' perceptions of the quality of education and their decisions to choose or not choose the institution. In this case, a positive brand image can strengthen students' perceptions about the quality of an institution's education, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will choose that institution. Students' decisions to choose an educational institution are influenced by their perception of the quality of education and the institution's brand image. If students believe that an institution has high educational quality and a strong brand image, they are more likely to enroll at that institution (Dollinger et al., 2018; Hermanda et al., 2019).

H-IND1: Brand image mediates a positive influence on the influence of educational quality of student decisions

H-IND2: Brand image mediates a positive influence on the influence of self-ability on student decisions

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Participants

This research applies a quantitative approach with survey research methods (Apriliani et al., 2023; Putra et al., 2022; Widayanto et al., 2021). The survey method was chosen because this research aimed to retrospectively examine the construction of student decision variables. This research uses probability sampling with a stratified random sampling technique, then uses proportionate stratified sampling. This technique was chosen to ensure a good representation of the population studied. The sample in this research was 457 students of the 2021 Islamic Religious Education study program at IAIN Ponorogo.

Measures

The data collection technique uses a questionnaire via Google Forms, for research with four variables, namely the independent variable (quality of education and personal abilities), the mediating variable (brand image), and the dependent variable (student decisions). This research uses a Likert scale consisting of 4 alternative answers, namely from 1 = disagree, to 4 = strongly agree (Daryono et al., 2020; Widyastuti et al., 2023). Research instrument variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Construct of the Research Variables

No	Variable	Indicators	Construct	References
1	Quality of Education (X1)	Educational personnel	QE1	(Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2018; Arisandi, 2022; Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018; Rosanti et al., 2021; Subbarayalu, 2022)
2		Learning material	QE2	
3		Library	QE3	
4		Feedback	QE4	
5		Facilities and infrastructure	QE5	
6		Graduate of	QE6	
7		Mahad	QE7	
8		Accreditation	QE8	
9	Self-Ability (X2)	Desire	SA1	(Ajat et al., 2019b; AKamil & Munadi, 2023; Lin et al., 2018; Mauludiana et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020)
10		Interest and talent	SA2	
11		Skill	SA3	
12		Capacity	SA4	
13		High curiosity	SA5	
14		Mindset	SA6	
15		Adaptation	SA7	
16		Goals	SA8	
17	Brand Image (Z)	Rank	BI1	(Ali, 2021; Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2018; Hwang & Choi, 2019; Nabi et al., 2018; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021)
18		Reputation	BI2	
19		Scholarship	BI3	
20		Extracurricular	BI4	
21		Curriculum	BI5	
22		Service	BI6	
23		Lifestyle	BI7	
24	Student Decisions (Y)	Professional	SD1	(Alzafari & Ursin, 2019; Bashir, 2019; Carless & Boud, 2018; Fidalgo et al., 2020; Galante et al., 2018; Ritter et al., 2018)
25		Socialization	SD2	
26		Follow friends	SD3	
27		Cost	SD4	
28		Religion teacher	SD5	
29		Rejected	SD6	

No	Variable	Indicators	Construct	References
30		Public speaking	SD7	
31		Graduate	SD8	

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis of this research uses the PLS-SEM measurement technique. The outer model testing stage is a measurement model testing stage that aims to prove the validity and estimate the reliability of indicators and constructs. Several requirements that must be met are the indicator loading factor ($\lambda > 0.70$), and the reflective construct AVE (>0.50) (Apriliani et al., 2023; Daryono et al., 2024; Fauzan et al., 2023; Supriyanto et al., 2022). Reliability estimates use cronbach Alpha, Rho_A, and CR values (>0.70). The goodness of fit model testing stage aims to test the predictive power of the model and the feasibility of the model. The criteria that must be met include predictive relevance to see the predictive power of the model on the blindfolding output (Daryono et al., 2023; Hariyanto et al., 2022). The inner model testing stage is to test the significance of the direct (H-DIR1-5) and indirect effects (the mediating role of H-IND1-2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
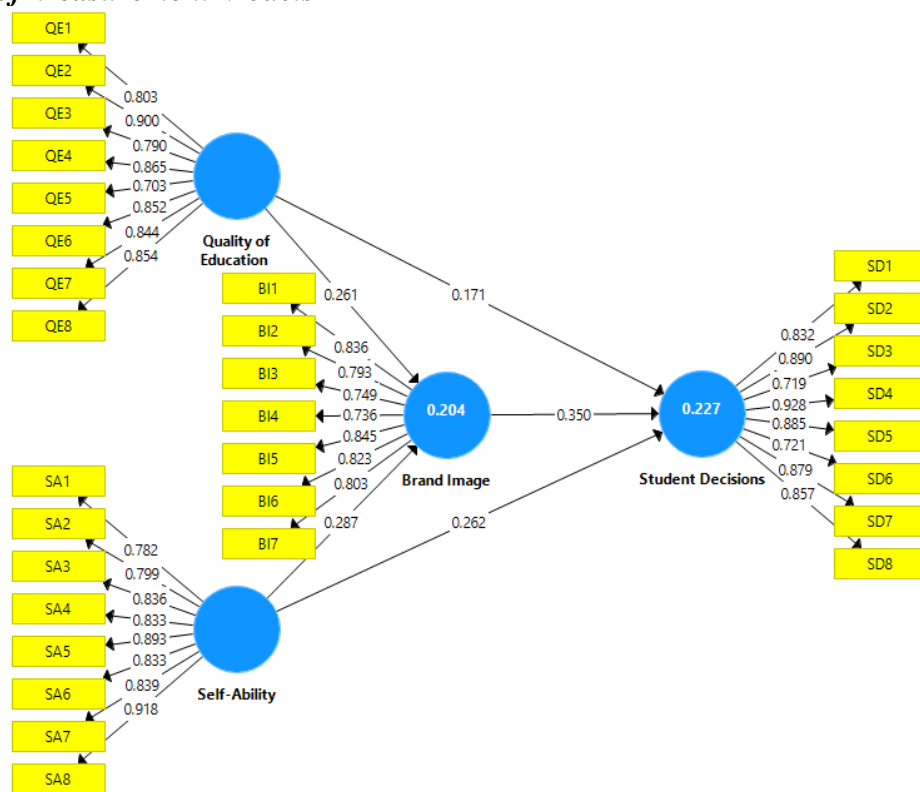### *Evaluation of Measurement Models*

Figure 1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The convergent validity measurement uses a factor loading value limit of 0.70. Based on Table 2, the overall loading factor value for each sub-variable is >0.70 (0.703- facilities and infrastructure to 0.900- learning materials). This can be interpreted as meaning that the level of correlation between sub-variables and variables that can be explained is 71.20% to 89.00%. The Average Extracted Variance (AVE) value for each variable has a value of >0.50 (0.709- student decision (Y) to 0.710- self-ability (X2)). So it can be concluded that each sub-variable

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and variable in the instrument in the research model has supported the requirements for convergent validity. Based on the loading factor coefficient value, the most dominant statement item in measuring student decisions is the Goal construct of 0.918 (SA8). This can be interpreted as the construct of self-efficacy can measure student decisions by 91.80%. Meanwhile, the weakest item is the desire construct at 0.782 (SA7 or 78.20%).

Table 2. Outer Model: Convergent Validity and Reliability

| No | Variable | Indicator | Conver Validity | | Consistency Reliability | | |
			FL (λ>0.70)	AVE (>0.50)	CA (α>0.70)	rho_A (φ>0.70)	CR (δ>0.70)
1	Quality of	QE1	0.803	0.686	0.934	0.948	0.946
2	Education (X1)	QE2	0.900				
3		QE3	0.790				
4		QE4	0.865				
5		QE5	0.703				
6		QE6	0.852				
7		QE7	0.844				
8		QE8	0.854				
9	Self-Ability (X2)	SA1	0.782	0.710	0.942	0.957	0.951
10		SA2	0.799				
11		SA3	0.836				
12		SA4	0.833				
13		SA5	0.893				
14		SA6	0.833				
15		SA7	0.839				
16		SA8	0.918				
17	Brand Image (Z)	BI1	0.836	0.638	0.907	0.922	0.925
18		BI2	0.793				
19		BI3	0.749				
20		BI4	0.736				
21		BI5	0.845				
22		BI6	0.823				
23		BI7	0.803				
24	Student Decisions	SD1	0.832	0.709	0.942	0.961	0.951
25	(Y)	SD2	0.890				
26		SD3	0.719				
27		SD4	0.928				
28		SD5	0.885				
29		SD6	0.721				
30		SD7	0.879				
31		SD8	0.857				

A variable is declared reliable if it has CA, Rho_A, and CR values >0.70. The SmartPLS output in the table below shows that all variables have CA values (0.907 to 0.942) rho_A (0.922 to 0.961) and CR (0.925 to 0.951). Thus, it can be concluded that the internal consistency of the instrument's reliability in 3 aspects has a value of >0.70, so it has good reliability in measuring decisions.

The Fornell Larcker value is explained by looking at the correlation value of the latent variable itself with the correlation variables of other latent variables. Based on Table 3 Brand Image correlation value → Brand Image has a value of 0.799, which is greater than the

correlation value of Education Quality (X1) with other variables (Personal Ability → 0.379; Education Quality → 0.362; and Student Decision → 0.440). And so on for assessing correlation with other variables.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity: The Fornell Larcker

Variable	Z	X1	X2	Y
Brand Image (Z)	**0.799**			
Quality of Education (X1)	0.362	**0.828**		
Self-Ability (X2)	0.379	0.352	**0.843**	
Student Decisions (Y)	0.440	0.264	0.323	**0.842**

The PLS-Algorithm test results in Table 4 show that the HTMT value in all dimensions has a value of <0.90 (0.255 to 0.431). So, it can be concluded that Fornell-Larcker and HTMT in the correlation of all variables in this research data instrument fulfill the discriminant validity test in measuring the influence on student decisions.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity: The HTMT

Variable	Z	X1	X2	Y
Brand Image (Z)				
Quality of Education (X1)	0.364			
Self-Ability (X2)	0.383	0.381		
Student Decisions (Y)	0.431	0.255	0.308	

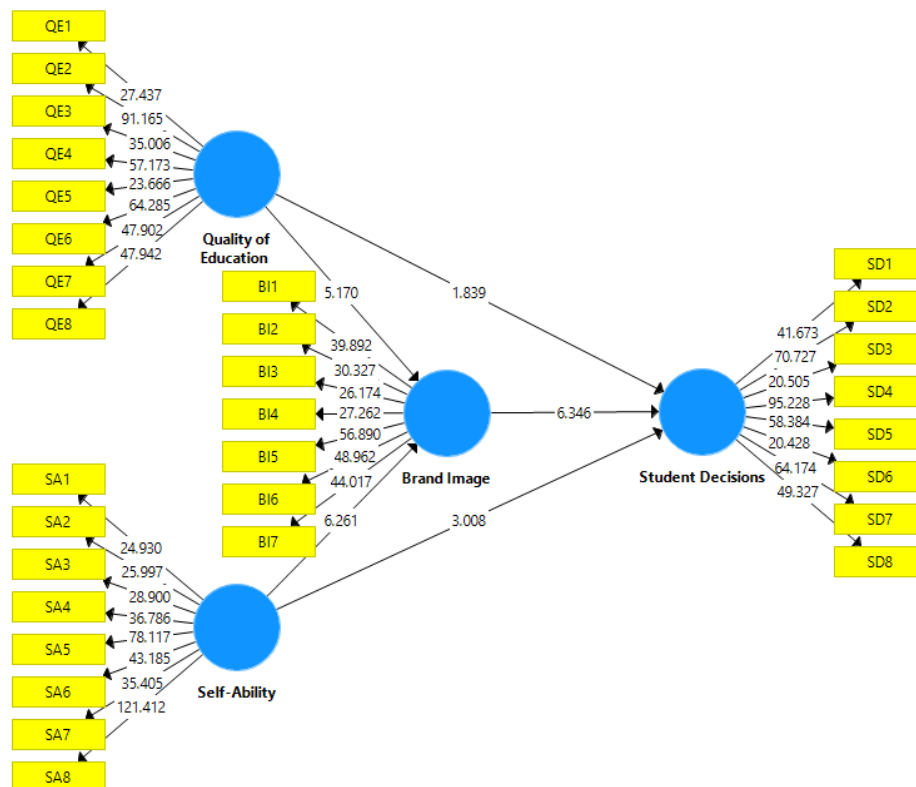***Evaluation of Structural Models***

Figure 2. Evaluation of Structural Model

The R^2 coefficient on the student decision variable obtained a value of 0.227 (Table 5). This can be interpreted as Brand Image, Quality of Education, and Self-Ability influencing the student decision variable by 22.70%, and the remaining 77.30% is influenced by other variables outside the research model. So, the output effect size shows that the most dominant variable influencing student decisions is the quality of education ($f2 = 0.075$ in the strong category and other variables, self-ability, are the same as in the strong category ($F2 = 0.091$).

Table 5. Measurement of Structural Model: R2, F2, Q2

Varia-bel	R2		F2		Construct Cross-validated (Q2)				
	Va-lue	Decision	Val-ue	Decisi-on	Redundancy		Communali-ty		Predictive
					SSE	Q2	SSE	Q2	Power
Brand Image	0.204	Weak	-	-	2817.023	0.119	1549.385	0.516	Strong
Quality of Educatin	-	-	0.075	Large	3656.000	-	1487.657	0.593	Strong
Self-Ability	-	-	0.091	Large	3656.000	-	1369.701	0.625	Strong
Student Decisions	0.227	Weak	-	-	3111.296	0.149	1363.455	0.627	Strong

The next test by looking at the predictive relevance value (Q2) aims to validate the predictive ability of the model according to the reality in the field. Based on the table above, all Q2 values exceed the cut point (greater than zero). The results of calculating the predictive relevance of Q2 obtained values of 0.149 to 0.119 on the Redundancy Construct Crossvalidated and 0.516 to 0.627 on the Communality Construct Crossvalidated. So, the model in measuring student decisions as a whole is able to explain the model analysis by 14.90% to 62.70% of the phenomenon studied. The results of both procedures indicate that student decisions have strong predictive power.

Table 6. Results of Path Cooficient: Dirrect Effects

Hypothesis	Path Analysis	β-Values (+/-)	Sample Mean	SDV	T-Statistics (>1,96)	P-Values (<0,05)	Decision
H-DIR$_1$	QE → SD	0.080	0.080	0.043	1.839	0.067	Rejected
H-DIR$_2$	SA → SD	0.162	0.163	0.054	3.008	0.003	Accepted
H-DIR$_3$	QE → BI	0.261	0.264	0.051	5.170	0.000	Accepted
H-DIR$_4$	SA → BI	0.287	0.287	0.046	6.261	0.000	Accepted
H-DIR$_5$	BI → SD	0.350	0.349	0.055	6.346	0.000	Accepted

Measurement of Direct Effects

A hypothesis can be accepted with significant criteria if it has a T statistic value above 1.96. Meanwhile, the hypothesis can be accepted with positive or negative influence if the B-value coefficient value shows the direction of positive or negative influence. Based on the Table 6, the hypothesis H1 (Quality of Education (X1) → Student Decision (Y) obtains β-values = 0.080 and P values = 0.067 (0.05). This shows that the variable quality of education (X1) has no positive effect, but is not significant for student decisions (Y). This can be

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interpreted that when the education quality variable (X1) increases, the student decision variable also does not increase. In hypothesis H3 (Quality of Education (X1) → Brand Image (Z) the β-values = 0.261 and P values = 0.000 (0.05). This shows that the variable Quality of Education (X1) has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image (Z). This can be interpreted as meaning that when the Education Quality variable (X1) increases, the Brand Image variable will also increase significantly.

Table 7. Results of Path Coefficients: Indirect Effects

Hyp.	Path Analysis	β-Values (+/-)	SDV	T-Statistics (>1,96)	P-values	Decision	Mediating Role
H-IND$_1$	QE → Z → SD	0.100	0.021	4.356	0.000	Accepted	Full mediation
H-IND$_2$	SA → Z → SD	0.091	0.024	4.240	0.000	Accepted	Partial mediation

The Mediating Role of Brand Image on the Quality of Education and Self-Ability on Student Decisions

Based on the Table 7, in the H-IND1 hypothesis, the results of testing the mediating effect of the Brand Image (Z) variable can be concluded that there is a positive (β-values = 0.100) and significant influence (T statistic 4.356 > 1.96 and P values 0.570 <0, 05) between the Education Quality factor (X1) on student decisions (Y). So, H-IND1 states "There is a positive and significant influence on the role of brand image in mediating the quality of education on student decisions". In the H-IND2 hypothesis, the results of testing the mediating effect of the Brand Image (Z) variable can be concluded that there is a positive (β-values = 0.091) and significant (T-statistic 4.240 > 1.96 and P values 0.000 <0.05) influence. between the Self-Ability factor (X2) on student decisions (Y). So, H-IND2 states "There is a positive and significant influence on the role of brand image in mediating self-ability on student decisions".

Discussion

Education quality has a positive influence on improving student decisions. However, even though it is not statistically significant, this does not mean that the quality of education does not influence at all. It is possible that the effect may be present, but not strong enough to significantly influence students' decisions in this testing context. This research is in line with research Hwang & Choi (2019) which states that the quality of education is more about complex and multifactorial factors. The quality of education does not only depend on internal factors such as curriculum, teachers, and facilities. Therefore, further analysis needs to be carried out to understand holistically how the education quality can influence student decisions.

However, this is not in line with research conducted by Bashir (2019) which states that Education Quality can improve student decisions due to certain factors that have been identified. Previous research may highlight certain aspects of educational quality that significantly influence students' decisions, such as the quality of teaching, a relevant curriculum, or good internship opportunities. This is also in accordance with research Iwu et al, (2021)which states that in this research, student respondents consistently stated that the quality of education was the main factor they considered in choosing a study program. Respondents emphasized that quality learning experiences are critical to their academic and professional development. One way to improve the quality of education is to receive feedback from students. Feedback received from students can provide educational institutions with valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of programs, as well as provide insight into the student's learning experience. By receiving good feedback and implementing continuous

improvements based on that feedback, the quality of education can be significantly improved, which can ultimately help students make better decisions in their educational journey (Carless & Boud, 2018; Fidalgo et al., 2020).

Self-ability contributes to the decision to choose a study program because it influences an individual's perception, interest, and needs for an appropriate study program. This statement is supported by research Ajat et al, (2019)which highlights that students who have a good understanding of their interests, talents, and career goals tend to make more informed decisions in choosing a study program. To develop one's abilities to the maximum, one needs high self-awareness and a commitment to continuous learning and growth. Through personal reflection, receiving feedback from others, and seeking new, challenging experiences. Apart from that, having a mentor or coach who can provide guidance and support can also help in the journey of self-development. Investing in developing individual abilities can be a very effective strategy for brand image to strengthen reputation, build consumer trust, differentiate oneself from competitors, and build closer relationships with consumers (Annur & Trisnawati, 2023).

Brand image is a significant factor in the decision to choose a study program because it influences the perception and reputation of an educational institution. This statement is supported by research Benhardy et al, (2020) which found that prospective students tend to be more interested in study programs that have a strong and positive brand image. A strong brand image can reflect the academic reputation of an Islamic Religious Education study program. Students tend to be attracted to widely recognized study programs because they believe that they will receive a quality and reliable education. The brand image of an educational institution also reflects the values it upholds and the level of satisfaction of existing students (Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2018; Hwang & Choi, 2019). Students tend to choose institutions with a brand image that aligns with their own values and expectations, thereby increasing their potential satisfaction during their studies.

In line with research Carless & Boud (2018) states that prospective students tend to consider the brand image when choosing a study program because they believe that an institution with a good reputation will provide a quality educational experience and provide additional benefits in a future career. Research Ismail et al, (2022) reveals that a positive brand image can increase the interest and motivation of prospective students to enroll in certain study programs. Students tend to look for educational institutions that have a good image in the eyes of society because this can provide confidence and trust in choosing a study program that suits their interests and goals.

Mediators as a bridge between the educational reciprocity of an institution and student decisions. A positive brand image can increase students' trust and interest in the institution, which in turn can influence their decision to join the institution. Therefore, strengthening the brand image of educational institutions is an important strategy for attracting quality students and maintaining the institution's reputation (Benhardy et al., 2020; Sudaryanto et al., 2019). Mediators help bridge the gap between students' self-ability and their decision to choose a PAI study program. This allows students to make smarter and more meaningful choices about their education, considering how the program of study can help them achieve their academic, professional, and personal goals in the study of religion.

Based on the research results above, it can be concluded that this research shows that although there is no statistically significant relationship between the quality of education and student decisions in the context of this test, this does not indicate the possibility that the quality of education has an influence on student decisions (Ritter et al., 2018; Subbarayalu, 2022). There is complexity and multifactoriality in the factors that influence the quality of education, which includes not only internal factors such as curriculum and teachers but also external factors such as the social, cultural, and economic environment. Quality of education, self-ability, and brand image are factors that are interrelated and influence each other in the decision

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to choose a student's study program. It is important to holistically understand the factors that influence students' decisions in order to improve the quality of their education and learning experience at higher education institutions (Boldureanu et al., 2020; Nabi et al., 2018).

CLOSING

This research shows that the quality of education does not have a significant influence on students' decisions in choosing a study program. These results suggest that other factors, such as self-ability and brand image, may have a more dominant role in influencing students' decisions. In particular, understanding the quality of education directly influences students' decisions in choosing study programs, and brand image acts as a mediator in the relationship between education quality, self-ability, and student decisions. In addition, it explains the extent to which students' self-ability influences their decisions in choosing a study program. This is done to understand the role of individual internal factors in the decision-making process, especially in the context of the match between personal interests, talents, and career goals and the chosen study program.

Furthermore, educational institutions should not only focus on improving the quality of education but also pay attention to strategies to strengthen their brand image. By strengthening their brand image, educational institutions can increase their attractiveness to prospective students, thereby influencing their decisions in choosing a study program. Understanding the role of brand image as a mediator in the relationship between educational quality, self-ability, and student decisions, it is hoped that educational institutions can design more effective strategies to increase their attractiveness and provide a more meaningful educational experience for students.

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