

The Role of Customer Loyalty in Mediating Relationship Marketing and Brand Image Effects on Customer Retention in Non-Formal Education

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effect of Relationship Marketing (RM) and Brand Image (BI) on Customer Loyalty (CL) and Customer Retention (CR) in English language courses. Specifically, this study analyzes the direct influence of RM and BI on CL and CR, as well as the mediating role of CL in the relationship between antecedent variables and CR. The research approach used is quantitative, with data obtained through a survey of 421 parents of active students using an online questionnaire at twenty learning centers of LKP Build Better Communication e. Data analysis was performed using the Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) method. The results showed that Brand Image had a significant positive effect on Customer Loyalty ($\beta = 0.533$; $p < 0.000$) and Customer Retention ($\beta = 0.102$; $p = 0.037$). Relationship Marketing also has a significant effect on Customer Loyalty ($\beta = 0.314$; $p < 0.000$) and Customer Retention ($\beta = 0.128$; $p = 0.006$). In addition, Customer Loyalty has a strong and significant effect on Customer Retention ($\beta = 0.727$; $p < 0.000$). The mediation analysis results show that Customer Loyalty significantly mediates the relationship between Brand Image and Customer Retention ($\beta = 0.402$; $p < 0.000$), as well as between Relationship Marketing and Customer Retention ($\beta = 0.228$; $p < 0.000$). Overall, Brand Image and Relationship Marketing play an important role in increasing Customer Loyalty and maintaining Customer Retention, with Customer Loyalty as the main explanatory mechanism. These findings indicate that training institutions need to prioritize relationship-based strategies and brand image strengthening to increase long-term customer retention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency has become an essential competence for individuals to enhance their academic and professional competitiveness. As a global lingua franca in international communication, business, and technology, English plays a crucial role in providing access to global opportunities (Le et al., 2025). This condition has driven increasing public demand for English language training institutions, including non-formal education providers that offer flexible, adaptive, and practice-oriented learning programs.

The multi-entry multi-exit system, which characterizes non-formal education institutions, allows students to begin and discontinue learning at any level without the obligation to complete the entire program. While this flexibility constitutes a major attraction, it also poses a significant challenge for institutions in sustaining student

participation over time. Data from the Electronic Administration System (EASY) of LKP Build Better Communication indicate substantial variation in student continuity: out of 4,747 active students in early December 2025, only 47.9% persisted through four levels or more, while 52.1% remained at early levels and were at risk of discontinuation. This pattern is further confirmed by enrollment data showing that of 2,536 new students registered in 2024, only 1,277 (50.4%) remained active by the end of 2025. These findings underscore the importance of understanding the factors influencing parents, as the primary decision-makers (Firdausiyah & Ghofur, 2024; Ramadhani et al., 2024), in deciding whether to continue or discontinue their children's enrollment.

Parents' decisions to maintain their children's participation in English courses are influenced not only by academic factors such as teaching methods, but also by emotional, social, and perceptual aspects related to the institution. Perceptions of service quality, interpersonal relationships, institutional image, and overall learning experience are key determinants in fostering customer loyalty and retention. In this context, the concepts of Relationship Marketing, Brand Image, and Customer Loyalty provide a relevant theoretical foundation for explaining consumer continuity behavior in educational services (John & De Villiers, 2022; Mujahidin et al., 2022).

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), Relationship Marketing emphasizes the development of mutually beneficial long-term relationships through trust, commitment, and effective communication. In the educational context, intensive communication and personalized attention from institutions have been shown to foster long-term customer loyalty (John & De Villiers, 2022). Meanwhile, Brand Image plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward an institution. A positive brand image can cultivate trust and emotional attachment, thereby encouraging consumers to continue their learning engagement (Khoshtaria et al., 2020; Mourad et al., 2021). As an English language training institution operating twenty branches across Java Island, LKP Build Better Communication has the potential to strengthen customer retention through its reputation for high-quality instruction and communicative learning approaches.

Customer Loyalty serves both as an outcome and a linking mechanism between Relationship Marketing and Brand Image on the one hand and Customer Retention on the other. Loyalty is reflected in parents' consistency in continuing their children's enrollment as well as their willingness to recommend the institution to others (Long & Lijia, 2024; Utami et al., 2023). Previous studies indicate that customer loyalty in training institutions is shaped by satisfaction, perceived value, and service quality (Long & Lijia, 2024), all of which are highly relevant in the context of English language courses.

Although the concepts of Relationship Marketing, Brand Image, Customer Loyalty, and Customer Retention have been widely examined in service sectors such as banking, tourism, and hospitality (Al-Hazmi, 2021; Rebiazina et al., 2024), empirical studies investigating the interrelationships among these variables in the context of non-formal education in Indonesia remain limited. Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by analyzing the effects of Relationship Marketing and Brand Image on Customer Retention, with Customer Loyalty serving as a mediating variable, within the context of the English language course institution LKP Build Better Communication.

The findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for the management of LKP Build Better Communication in strengthening student retention strategies. Retaining existing students has been shown to be more cost-efficient than acquiring new ones (Albérico & Joaquim, 2023); thus, improving retention can enhance operational efficiency, revenue stability, and institutional reputation. Academically, this study contributes to the extension of service marketing theory by affirming the relevance of Relationship Marketing and Brand Image in the non-formal education sector, while

reinforcing the mediating role of Customer Loyalty in explaining the relationship between relational marketing strategies and Customer Retention.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Model

This study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory developed by Russell and Mehrabian (1974) within the framework of communication psychology (Asyraf et al., 2023). The SOR theory explains that external stimuli (Stimulus) influence individuals' internal states (Organism), which subsequently lead to behavioral responses (Response). This model has been widely applied in consumer behavior research because it effectively captures the linkage between environmental factors, psychological processes, and customer actions (Wijayanti, 2023; Yang et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2020). In the context of service marketing, prior studies demonstrate that stimuli such as relationship quality and brand image shape customers' perceptions, trust, and emotions, which ultimately influence loyalty and retention (Albérico & Joaquim, 2023; Gómez-Rico et al., 2023a; Rehman et al., 2022).

In this study, Relationship Marketing (X_1) and Brand Image (X_2) are positioned as Stimuli (S), Customer Loyalty (Y) as the Organism (O), and Customer Retention (Z) as the Response (R). This framework illustrates that stimuli in the form of relationship quality and brand perceptions influence customers' internal psychological processes—namely loyalty—which subsequently generate observable behavioral outcomes in the form of customer retention (Albérico & Joaquim, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Relationship Marketing functions as a Stimulus (S) because, through trust, commitment, and communication, institutions create interaction experiences that influence customers' psychological evaluations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sin et al., 2005). Previous studies have shown that strong relational ties with customers foster positive perceptions and loyal attitudes (Albérico & Joaquim, 2023; Rehman et al., 2022). Similarly, Brand Image serves as an important Stimulus (S) because perceptions of an institution's reputation, quality, and credibility affect customers' emotional and cognitive responses (Gómez-Rico et al., 2023a; Khoshtaria et al., 2020; Long & Lijia, 2024).

Customer Loyalty is positioned as the Organism (O) because it reflects customers' internal evaluations of the stimuli received. Loyalty is formed through trust, satisfaction, and positive experiences provided by the institution, indicating emotional attachment and customer commitment. As such, loyalty acts as a mediating mechanism that bridges external stimuli and behavioral responses (Artha et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2025).

Finally, Customer Retention is conceptualized as the Response (R), representing customers' actual behavior in continuing to use the institution's services. Retention emerges as a consequence of previously established loyalty and satisfaction (Larsson & Broström, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). In the context of English language course institutions, customer retention reflects parents' decisions to continue enrolling their children, serving as a response to positive experiences, trust, and loyalty developed through sustained interactions with the institution.

Relationship Marketing

Relationship Marketing (RM) is a strategic approach aimed at building and maintaining mutually beneficial long-term relationships between organizations and customers through open communication, trust, and commitment (John & De Villiers, 2022; Mora Cortez et al., 2023; Ndubisi, 2007). This approach emphasizes the development of sustainable relationships that focus on customer value and satisfaction rather than short-term transactional exchanges (Akbar et al., 2024; Rebiazina et al., 2024).

The primary theoretical foundation of Relationship Marketing is the Commitment–Trust Theory proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), which posits that the success of marketing relationships depends largely on trust and commitment, both of which foster customer loyalty and retention. When these elements are established, customers are more likely to maintain long-term relationships with service providers despite the availability of alternative options (Khan & Fatma, 2023; Ndubisi, 2007).

Numerous studies indicate that key dimensions of Relationship Marketing—such as trust, commitment, satisfaction, and communication—play a critical role in fostering customer loyalty and enhancing customer retention (Artha et al., 2022; Rehman et al., 2022). In the context of non-formal education institutions, the implementation of RM through intensive communication and personalized attention toward parents is believed to strengthen emotional attachment and commitment to the institution.

Accordingly, Relationship Marketing can be viewed as a primary stimulus within the SOR framework, shaping customers' perceptions and loyalty (organism) and ultimately generating retention behavior (response). Through mechanisms of trust, commitment, effective communication, and conflict resolution, Relationship Marketing serves as a strategic foundation for institutions such as LKP Build Better Communication in enhancing customer loyalty and sustaining long-term customer retention.

Brand Image

Brand Image refers to the perceptions and impressions formed in customers' minds about an institution based on their experiences, communications, and the attributes associated with the institution (Khan & Fatma, 2023; Khoshtaria et al., 2020). Brand image encompasses not only visual elements such as logos or symbols, but also perceptions of service quality, institutional reputation, and interaction experiences with staff and educational facilities. In the context of language course institutions, Brand Image reflects how parents evaluate the credibility and reliability of an institution in supporting their children's educational development.

According to Keller (1993), Brand Image is formed through associations stored in customers' memory related to brand attributes, benefits, and attitudes. These associations create meanings that influence customer evaluations and decision-making processes. The stronger, more positive, and more distinctive the brand image, the greater its impact on customer loyalty and the decision to continue using the institution's services (Gómez-Rico et al., 2023a; Wijaya, 2013). A favorable brand image fosters trust and pride, which ultimately strengthens customers' commitment to maintaining long-term relationships with the institution.

From the perspective of the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) theory (Keller, 1993), Brand Image represents a core component of brand knowledge that determines how customers respond to an institution's marketing strategies. A positive brand image creates differentiation and emotional value, forming the foundation for customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Gómez-Rico et al. (2023) emphasize that brand image is multidimensional, consisting of functional image (quality and benefits), affective image (emotional associations), and reputation (overall evaluation of the institution).

For parents whose children attend English language courses at institutions such as LKP Build Better Communication, Brand Image serves as a signal of trust, assuring them that their children receive high-quality education with tangible outcomes. Positive perceptions of teacher reputation, communicative teaching methods, and service consistency are key factors shaping parents' confidence in continuing their children's enrollment. Accordingly, in this study, Brand Image is positioned as an external stimulus within the SOR model that influences internal evaluations in the form of Customer Loyalty and ultimately leads to Customer Retention.

Customer Loyalty

Customer Loyalty reflects customers' emotional attachment and commitment to maintaining a long-term relationship with a service provider despite the availability of alternatives (Akbar et al., 2024; Cardoso et al., 2022). Loyalty is not only manifested through repeat purchase behavior but also through customers' willingness to recommend the institution and their sense of pride in being associated with it. In the context of English language course institutions, parental loyalty is reflected in decisions to continuously enroll their children in subsequent levels and to recommend the institution to others. According to Nguyen et al. (2021), customer loyalty represents a long-term commitment between customers and service providers and comprises two main dimensions: behavioral loyalty (such as recommendations and continuation decisions) and attitudinal loyalty (emotional attachment and affective closeness to the institution). This highlights that loyalty is not merely habitual behavior, but rather an expression of trust and psychological attachment to a trusted educational institution.

Previous studies indicate that satisfaction and relationship quality serve as the primary foundations of customer loyalty. Rehman et al. (2022) emphasize that relationship quality—comprising trust, satisfaction, and communication—has a significant effect on customers' intention to continue their relationship with service providers. These findings are supported by Artha et al. (2022) and Albérico and Joaquim A (2023), who demonstrate that relational commitment plays a critical role in fostering customer loyalty and retention. Furthermore, Miao et al. (2022) show that positive experiences and perceived service value directly contribute to the formation of loyalty, which subsequently becomes a key determinant of Customer Retention.

Accordingly, customer loyalty develops through continuous interactions that generate satisfaction, trust, and emotional commitment. In the context of institutions such as LKP Build Better Communication, parental loyalty functions as the *organism* within the SOR framework, representing the psychological evaluation of Relationship Marketing and Brand Image, which ultimately determines the *response* in the form of parents' decisions to retain their children at the same institution.

Customer Retention

Customer Retention refers to an institution's ability to retain customers and encourage them to continue using its services over time (Artha et al., 2022). In the context of English language course institutions, retention is reflected in parents' decisions to repeatedly enroll their children in subsequent learning levels. Retention is influenced not only by academic benefits but also by emotional relationships, trust, and overall satisfaction with the institution (Albérico & Joaquim A, 2023; Rehman et al., 2022).

According to Long and Lijia (2024), customer retention can be understood as repurchase intention driven by perceived value, satisfaction, and service quality. When parents perceive their children's learning experience as valuable, they are more likely to maintain a long-term relationship with the institution. This perspective aligns with Pereira et al. (2025), who emphasize that loyalty and positive experiences are key determinants of long-term retention.

In the educational context, retention serves as an important indicator of institutional success, reflecting the sustainability of student participation (Alzen et al., 2021). Accordingly, Customer Retention is conceptualized as the outcome of parental satisfaction and loyalty, developed through positive learning experiences, effective communication, and sustained relationship quality.

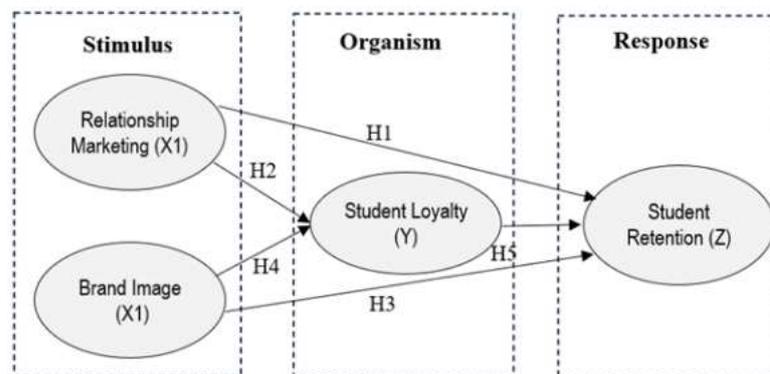
Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Research Conceptual Framework

This study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework developed by Russell and Mehrabian (1974) to explain the effects of Relationship Marketing and Brand Image on customer loyalty and customer retention. In the context of the English language course institution LKP Build Better Communication, this model positions parents as the primary decision-makers who respond to the stimuli provided by the institution. Within this framework, Relationship Marketing (X_1) and Brand Image (X_2) function as Stimuli (S) that trigger parents' perceptions and psychological responses toward the institution. Relationship Marketing practices that emphasize trust, commitment, and effective communication (Albérico & Joaquim A, 2023; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Rehman et al., 2022), along with a positive and credible Brand Image (Gómez-Rico et al., 2023a; Khoshtaria et al., 2020; Long & Lijia, 2024), are expected to shape an internal condition in the form of Customer Loyalty (Y), which represents the Organism (O).

Furthermore, Customer Loyalty reflects parents' emotional attachment and commitment to maintaining a long-term relationship with the institution (Nguyen et al., 2021; Pereira et al., 2025). This loyalty subsequently leads to a Response (R) in the form of Customer Retention (Z), namely parents' decisions to continuously enroll their children in subsequent course levels (Alzen et al., 2021; Artha et al., 2022). Thus, loyalty serves as a key mediating mechanism that explains how Relationship Marketing and Brand Image strengthen student retention in non-formal education institutions.

Conceptually, the relationships among the variables examined in this study are illustrated as follows:



Picture 1. Research Model

This model emphasizes that strengthening relationship quality and brand perceptions not only fosters customer loyalty but also enhances parents' decisions to continuously retain their children in the institution.

Research Hypotheses

Relationship Marketing emphasizes the development of long-term relationships through trust, commitment, and effective communication between service providers and consumers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Ndubisi (2007) further argues that relational bonds create emotional attachment that strengthens consumers' willingness to maintain relationships over time. In the service sector, including education services, prior studies consistently demonstrate that effective relationship marketing enhances customer loyalty by fostering trust and relational satisfaction (Rehman et al., 2022). Moreover, previous research indicates that relationship marketing also influences customer retention, as relational commitment reduces consumers' propensity to switch providers (Albérico & Joaquim A, 2023). Based on this discussion, this study proposes that relationship marketing influences both customer loyalty and customer retention.

H1: Relationship Marketing (X_1) has a significant effect on Customer Retention (Z).

H2: Relationship Marketing (X_1) has a significant effect on Customer Loyalty (Y).

Brand Image reflects consumers' perceptions, associations, and evaluations of a brand, serving as a critical indicator of quality and credibility, particularly in service industries (Keller, 1993). Khoshtaria et al. (2020) assert that a strong brand image enhances consumers' confidence in service providers. Empirical evidence shows that a positive brand image significantly contributes to customer loyalty by fostering favorable attitudes and emotional attachment (Gómez-Rico et al., 2023). Previous studies also confirm that Brand Image has a direct effect on Customer Retention, as consumers are more likely to continue with institutions perceived to have a strong and reputable image (Khan & Fatma, 2023; Long & Lijia, 2024). Accordingly, this study proposes that Brand Image positively affects Customer Loyalty and Customer Retention.

H3: *Brand Image (X2) has a significant effect on Customer Retention (Z).*

H4: *Brand Image (X2) has a significant effect on Customer Loyalty (Y).*

Customer Loyalty refers to consumers' attitudinal and behavioral commitment to continuously use a service and resist switching to competitors. In service and educational contexts, loyalty is recognized as a key determinant of customer retention, as loyal customers engage in repeat usage and demonstrate long-term commitment (Artha et al., 2022; Larsson & Broström, 2020). Prior studies indicate that loyalty functions as a mediating mechanism linking Relationship Marketing and Brand Image to Customer Retention (Long & Lijia, 2024; Rehman et al., 2022). In other words, marketing efforts and brand perceptions influence retention primarily through the formation of customer loyalty. Therefore, this study proposes both the direct effect of Customer Loyalty on Customer Retention and its mediating role.

H5: *Customer Loyalty (Y) has a significant effect on Customer Retention (Z).*

H6: *Customer Loyalty mediates the relationship between Relationship Marketing and Customer Retention.*

H7: *Customer Loyalty mediates the relationship between Brand Image and Customer Retention.*

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a survey method to test the proposed hypotheses. Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms in December 2025 to parents of active students across 20 branches of LKP Build Better Communication located in Banten, DKI Jakarta, West Java, and Central Java. A convenience sampling technique was applied, whereby respondents consisted of parents who voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey. From a total population of 4,747 parents, 429 questionnaires were returned; however, 8 responses were incomplete and subsequently excluded. As a result, the final sample comprised 421 respondents. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirement recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for populations approaching 5,000 individuals, which is 357 respondents, and is therefore considered adequate for analysis using SEM-PLS.

Based on respondent characteristics, the majority of participants were female (86%) and fell within the productive age ranges of 31–40 years (47%) and 41–50 years (45%), indicating the predominance of parents with mature decision-making capacity regarding their children's education. Most respondents had two children (52%) and came from diverse income backgrounds, predominantly representing the middle-income group. The children enrolled in the courses were mostly aged 10–12 years (39%) and had attended the program for 1.1–2 years (24%) or 1–6 months (25%). In terms of geographic distribution, most respondents were from DKI Jakarta (47%), followed by West Java (32%), Central Java (14%), and Banten (7%), reflecting a distribution consistent with the locations of the institution's learning centres.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Characteristics	Total	%	Characteristics	Total	%
Number of Respondents	N 421	100%	Number of Children	421	100%
Gender			Genre		
Male	60	14%	Male	173	41%
Female	361	86%	Female	248	59%
Age Range			Age Range		
20 - 30 years	7	2%	7 - 9 years	114	27%
31 - 40 years	197	47%	10 - 12 years	163	39%
41 - 50 years	189	45%	13 - 15 years	103	24%
51 - 60 years	27	6%	16 - 18 years	41	10%
> 60 years	1	0%	Study Duration		
Number of Children			1 - 6 months	106	25%
1 child	61	14%	7 - 12 months	67	16%
2 children	217	52%	1,1 - 2 years	102	24%
3 children	115	27%	2,1 - 3 years	74	18%
> 3 children	28	7%	3,1 - 4 years	44	10%
Family Income (Rp)			> 4 years	28	7%
<4.000.000	68	16%	Provinces		
4.000.000 - 5.900.999	115	27%	Banten	29	7%
6.000.000 - 7.900.999	76	18%	DKI	198	47%
8.000.000 - 10.000.000	73	17%	West Java	135	32%
>10.000.000	89	21%	Central Java	59	14%

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 4 software to evaluate both the measurement model and the structural model. The initial stage of the analysis focused on assessing the reliability and validity of all research constructs. This evaluation included indicator reliability assessed through outer loadings, internal consistency reliability measured using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, convergent validity examined through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

After the measurement model met the required criteria, the analysis proceeded to the structural model to test the hypothesized relationships among the variables. The primary results analyzed included path coefficients, t-values, and p-values obtained through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of two main sections. The first section captured respondents' demographic information measured using nominal scales. The second section addressed the main research variables, comprising four constructs with a total of 31 measurement items. All items were measured using a six-point Likert-type scale, where a score of one indicated "strongly disagree" and a score of six indicated "strongly agree."

All constructs in this study were measured using instruments adapted from previously validated and widely used scales, with appropriate modifications to ensure their relevance for assessing Relationship Marketing, Brand Image, Customer Loyalty, and Customer Retention.

Table 2. Measurement scales with references

Variable	Items	Reference
Relationship Marketing	17	RM1-17 (Ndubisi, 2007)
Brand Image	4	BI1-4 (Chen, 2019)
Customer Loyalty	5	CL1-5 (Li & Hung, 2009)
Customer Retention	5	CR1-5 (Mahmoud, 2019)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Results

Measurement Model Evaluation

The results of the reliability and convergent validity assessments indicate that all constructs in this study meet the measurement model adequacy criteria in accordance with the rule of thumb proposed by Hair et al. (2019). The Composite Reliability (CR) values for Relationship Marketing (0.966), Brand Image (0.919), Customer Loyalty (0.958), and Customer Retention (0.955) all exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency among the indicators. Similarly, Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.882 to 0.962, well above the minimum acceptable level of 0.70, confirming high reliability and strong measurement stability for each construct.

In terms of convergent validity, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, namely 0.654 for Relationship Marketing, 0.740 for Brand Image, 0.851 for Customer Loyalty, and 0.840 for Customer Retention. This indicates that more than 50% of the variance of the indicators is explained by their respective latent constructs. Furthermore, all indicators exhibit outer loadings above 0.70, confirming that each item contributes significantly to the construct it measures, except for CL4, CR3, RM1, and RM16, which did not meet the minimum outer loading criterion of 0.70 and were therefore removed from the model. Based on these criteria, all constructs are deemed reliable and convergently valid, allowing the model to be confidently used for subsequent structural model analysis to examine the causal relationships among the study variables.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Outer loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Brand Image	0.782 - 0.924	0.882	0.919	0.740
Customer Loyalty	0.914 – 0.938	0.941	0.958	0.851
Customer Retention	0.912 – 0.924	0.937	0.955	0.840
Relationship Marketing	0.712 – 0.875	0.962	0.966	0.654

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which indicates that each construct in the model is empirically distinct from the others. The analysis shows that the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct—Relationship Marketing (0.809), Brand Image (0.860), Customer Loyalty (0.922), and Customer Retention (0.917)—are greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. For example, the square root of the AVE for Brand Image (0.860) exceeds its correlations with Relationship Marketing (0.808), Customer Loyalty (0.806), and Customer Retention (0.792). These results demonstrate that all constructs exhibit satisfactory discriminant validity in accordance with the rule of thumb proposed

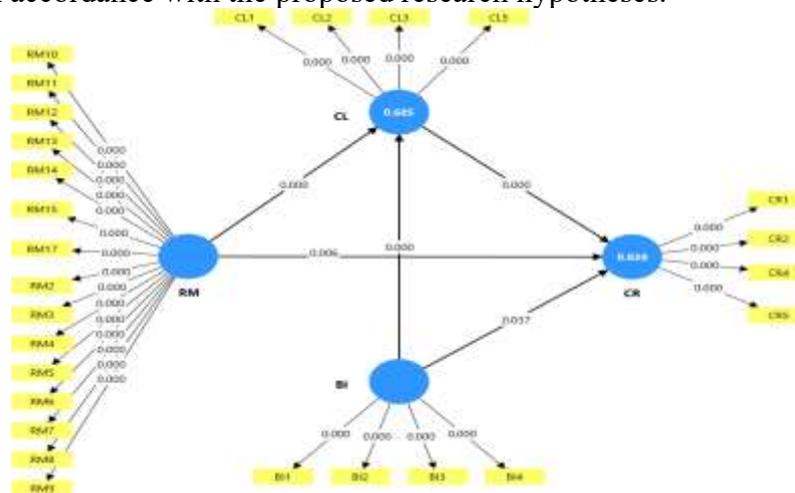
by Hair et al. (2019), indicating that the measurement model is appropriate for subsequent structural model testing.

Table 4. Forbell-Lacker Criterion

Items	BI	CL	CR	RM
BI	0.860			
CL	0.806	0.922		
CR	0.792	0.907	0.917	
RM	0.808	0.760	0.763	0.809

Structural Model Evaluation

After all research constructs were confirmed to meet the validity and reliability criteria during the measurement model evaluation, the next step was to assess the structural model. This stage aims to evaluate the strength and direction of the relationships among the latent variables (Hair et al., 2019). In the PLS approach, structural model evaluation is conducted by examining the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2) to assess the relative contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable, and path coefficients as indicators of the strength of direct effects (Hair et al., 2022). In this study, the structural model assessment was performed using SmartPLS4 software, beginning with the specification of relationships among variables in accordance with the proposed research hypotheses.



Picture 2. Model Bootstrapping T Value Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and Effect Size (f^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the extent to which endogenous constructs can be explained by exogenous constructs. According to Chin (1998), R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 are classified as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. The results show that the R-square value for Customer Loyalty is 0.685, with an adjusted R-square of 0.683, indicating that Relationship Marketing and Brand Image collectively explain 68.5% of the variance in Customer Loyalty. This value falls within the substantial category, suggesting that the research model adequately explains the formation of customer loyalty.

Furthermore, the R-square value for Customer Retention (CR) is 0.838, with an adjusted R-square of 0.837, indicating that Relationship Marketing, Brand Image, and Customer Loyalty jointly explain 83.8% of the variance in Customer Retention. This result is classified as very strong, confirming that the model demonstrates excellent predictive power in explaining customer retention behavior within the context of non-formal education services.

Table 5: R-Square (R^2)

	R-square	R-square adjusted
CL	0.685	0.683
CR	0.838	0.837

Meanwhile, the effect size (f^2) analysis indicates varying strengths of influence among the constructs. According to Sarstedt et al. (2017), f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively. Brand Image exhibits a large effect on Customer Loyalty ($f^2 = 0.337$), whereas Relationship Marketing shows a small to moderate effect ($f^2 = 0.108$). With respect to Customer Retention, Customer Loyalty demonstrates a very large effect ($f^2 = 1.029$), while the direct effects of Relationship Marketing ($f^2 = 0.032$) and Brand Image ($f^2 = 0.017$) are classified as small. These findings underscore that Customer Loyalty is the most dominant construct in explaining Customer Retention.

Table 6: f-Square (f^2)

	BI	CL	CR	RM
BI		0.337	0.017	
CL			1.029	
CR				
RM		0.108	0.032	

Direct Effects Analysis

The analysis results indicate that all direct relationships among the variables are statistically significant. Brand Image ($\beta = 0.553$; $t = 8.552$; $p < 0.001$) and Relationship Marketing ($\beta = 0.314$; $t = 4.301$; $p < 0.001$) have positive and significant effects on Customer Loyalty, while Customer Loyalty exerts the strongest influence on Customer Retention ($\beta = 0.727$; $t = 14.511$; $p < 0.001$). In addition, Brand Image ($\beta = 0.102$; $t = 2.088$; $p = 0.037$) and Relationship Marketing ($\beta = 0.128$; $t = 2.735$; $p = 0.006$) also have direct effects on Customer Retention, although the magnitude of these effects is relatively small.

Table 7: Path coefficients – Mean, STDEV, T values, p values

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Hypothesis	Hypothesis Support
BI → CL	0.553	0.549	0.065	8.552	0.000	H1	Supported
BI → CR	0.102	0.103	0.049	2.088	0.037	H2	Supported
CL → CR	0.727	0.725	0.050	14.511	0.000	H3	Supported
RM → CL	0.314	0.319	0.073	4.301	0.000	H4	Supported
RM → CR	0.128	0.129	0.047	2.735	0.006	H5	Supported

Indirect Effects Analysis

The indirect effect analysis indicates that Customer Loyalty significantly mediates the relationships between Brand Image ($\beta = 0.402$; $t = 6.684$; $p < 0.001$) and Relationship Marketing ($\beta = 0.228$; $t = 4.443$; $p < 0.001$) on Customer Retention. These findings suggest that loyalty serves as a key psychological mechanism through which perceptions of brand image and relationship quality influence parents' decisions to continuously enroll their children in the language course institution.

Table 8: Specific indirect effect – Mean, STDEV, T values, p values

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Hypothesis	Hypothesis Support
BI → CL → CR	0.402	0.399	0.060	6.684	0.000	H6	Supported
RM → CL → CR	0.228	0.231	0.051	4.443	0.000	H7	Supported

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study support the conceptual framework grounded in Relationship Marketing theory, Brand Image theory, and the Customer Loyalty–Customer Retention relationship. Overall, the results demonstrate that Relationship Marketing and Brand Image play crucial roles in shaping Customer Loyalty, which in turn significantly influences Customer Retention. This pattern of relationships is consistent with prior empirical studies and reinforces the relevance of relational and perceptual factors in sustaining long-term customer relationships.

H1: Relationship Marketing has a positive effect on Customer Retention

The results reveal that Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Customer Retention. This finding aligns with the Commitment–Trust Theory, which emphasizes trust and commitment as fundamental elements in maintaining long-term customer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It is further supported by Albérico and Joaquim A (2023), who identified Relationship Marketing as a key determinant of Customer Retention. Empirically, this result is consistent with previous studies by Yusuf et al. (2022), John and De Villiers (2022), and Chen (2019), which confirm that effective Relationship Marketing practices directly contribute to higher customer retention.

H2: Relationship Marketing has a positive effect on Customer Loyalty

The findings confirm that Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty. This result is consistent with the Commitment–Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and the Relationship Marketing framework proposed by Ndubisi (2007), which highlight the importance of trust, commitment, communication, and effective complaint handling in fostering customer loyalty. Empirical support for this relationship is also found in prior studies by Akbar et al. (2024) and Chen (2019).

H3: Customer Loyalty has a positive effect on Customer Retention

This study confirms that Customer Loyalty has a significant positive effect on Customer Retention. This finding aligns with loyalty theory as proposed by Pereira et al. (2025) and Artha et al. (2022), which identify loyalty as a primary predictor of long-term retention. The result is further supported by empirical evidence from Akbar et al. (2024), Larsson and Broström (2020), and Albérico and Joaquim A (2023).

H4: Brand Image has a positive effect on Customer Loyalty

The findings indicate that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty. This result supports brand equity theory (Keller, 1993), which

positions brand image as a signal of quality and credibility, particularly in service industries such as education. The finding is consistent with previous studies by Khoshtaria et al. (2020), Yang et al. (2022), and Long and Lijia (2024).

H5: Customer Loyalty has a positive effect on Customer Retention

The results demonstrate that Customer Loyalty has a positive and significant effect on Customer Retention. This finding is consistent with consumer behavior theory, which conceptualizes loyalty as a sustained commitment to maintaining relationships with service providers, as reflected in repeat purchase decisions and the continuity of service usage (Nguyen et al., 2021). Empirically, this result aligns with the findings of Artha et al. (2022) and Larsson and Broström (2020), who emphasize that loyalty is a primary predictor of customer retention in service contexts and long-term relationships.

H6: Customer Loyalty mediates the effect of Relationship Marketing on Customer Retention

H7: Customer Loyalty mediates the effect of Brand Image on Customer Retention

The findings indicate that Customer Loyalty mediates the effects of Relationship Marketing and Brand Image on Customer Retention. This result is consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) (Asyraff et al., 2023), in which Relationship Marketing and Brand Image function as stimuli, loyalty represents the organism, and retention constitutes the response. Empirically, these findings are in line with prior studies by Chen (2019), Akbar et al. (2024), and Long and Lijia (2024), which confirm customer loyalty as a key mechanism linking marketing efforts to customers' retention behavior.

Overall, all research hypotheses (H1–H7) are empirically supported, consistent with established theories and prior empirical findings, and they reinforce the central role of Customer Loyalty in explaining Customer Retention. The empirical evidence indicates that student retention at LKP Build Better Communication is influenced by a set of interrelated factors involving Relationship Marketing, Brand Image, and Customer Loyalty. As reflected in internal data from the Electronic Administration System (EASY), 47.9% of active students have continued their studies for four levels or more. This finding suggests that retention does not occur spontaneously, but rather emerges from parents' ongoing evaluations of relationship quality and institutional reputation.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that Relationship Marketing and Brand Image exert both direct and indirect effects on Customer Retention through Customer Loyalty, which functions as the primary mediating mechanism. In the context of LKP Build Better Communication, consistent communication with parents, transparent information, reliable services, and a strong institutional reputation foster trust and commitment, which in turn enhance parental loyalty and lead to long-term decisions to continue their children's learning at the institution. Overall, these findings confirm that strengthening relational strategies and institutional image is more effective when directed toward building and enhancing parental loyalty, thereby enabling marketing efforts to generate sustainable student retention and long-term institutional stability.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that all proposed hypotheses are empirically supported. Hypothesis H1 is accepted, demonstrating that Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Customer Loyalty. This finding confirms that trust, commitment, and the quality of long-term relationships play a crucial role in enhancing customer loyalty, consistent with Relationship Marketing theory and prior empirical studies.

Furthermore, H2 is supported, showing that Brand Image has a positive and significant influence on Customer Loyalty. A strong and positive brand image is proven to shape customer perceptions and attitudes that foster loyalty, in line with Brand Image theory and previous research findings.

In addition, H3 is accepted, indicating that Customer Loyalty has a significant effect on Customer Retention. Customer loyalty plays a vital role in sustaining long-term relationships with organizations, as explained in customer loyalty theory and supported by prior empirical evidence. Hypothesis H4 is also supported, confirming that Relationship Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Customer Retention. This result underscores that relational bonds built through trust and commitment directly encourage customers to remain with the organization. Likewise, H5 is accepted, demonstrating that Brand Image positively and significantly affects Customer Retention, where a credible and consistent brand image strengthens customers' confidence to continue their relationship with the institution. Moreover, hypotheses H6 and H7 are supported, indicating that Customer Loyalty mediates the relationships between Relationship Marketing and Brand Image and Customer Retention. This finding suggests that the effects of both variables on customer retention operate more effectively through the formation of customer loyalty.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with the underlying theoretical framework and supported by previous empirical research, thereby reinforcing the strategic role of Relationship Marketing and Brand Image in enhancing Customer Retention through Customer Loyalty.

The findings of this study offer important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the results contribute to the development of Relationship Marketing and brand equity models within the context of non-formal education services. The positive effects of Relationship Marketing and Brand Image on Customer Loyalty reaffirm the relevance of relational marketing theory and brand equity theory in this sector. Furthermore, the mediating role of Customer Loyalty in the relationship between Relationship Marketing, Brand Image, and Customer Retention enriches the literature by emphasizing loyalty as a key psychological and behavioral mechanism linking marketing strategies to relationship sustainability.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that managers of English language course institutions should position Relationship Marketing as a core strategic approach by emphasizing long-term relationship development through trust, commitment, intensive communication, and personalized attention to parents. Consistent implementation of Relationship Marketing practices not only strengthens emotional bonds but also directly contributes to increased customer loyalty and retention. In addition, the development of a positive Brand Image—through institutional reputation, instructor professionalism, and consistent service quality—should be integrated with relational strategies. Given that Customer Loyalty plays a central role in driving Customer Retention, institutions are encouraged to design retention strategies based on relationship building and sustainable customer experiences, rather than relying solely on short-term promotions or transactional approaches.

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