JISIP (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Pendidikan)
Vol. 10 No. 4 November 2026
e-ISSN : 2656-6753, p-ISSN: 2598-9944
DOI: *10.36312/jisip.v10i4.11264/http://ejournal.mandalanursa.org/index.php/JISIP/index*

Development of *Model School Trust to* Increase the Competitiveness of Private Schools in the Era of Declining Student Demographics: *A Systematic Literature Review*

Dwi Listyaningsih[1], Rejokirono[2], Welius Purbonuswanto[3]
Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Indonesia

Article Info
Article history:
Received: 23 July 2026
Published: 1 November 2026

Keywords:
School Trust;
Competitive Advantage;
Private Schools;
Demographic Decline;
Systematic Literature Review;
PRISMA 2020.

Abstract
The declining number of school-age children due to demographic *changes has intensified competition among private schools, making public trust an increasingly important strategic resource for maintaining institutional sustainability and competitiveness. Despite the growing body of research on school trust, previous studies have primarily examined its relationship with school effectiveness, leadership, and organizational climate, while limited attention has been given to its role in enhancing the competitiveness of private schools in the context of demographic decline. Therefore, this study aims to systematically map the development of research on school trust, identify dominant research themes and methodological trends, synthesize key findings, and reveal research gaps that can inform future studies. This research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Literature was systematically retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, and Google Scholar, resulting in 34 peer-reviewed articles that met the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria for qualitative synthesis. The findings reveal five major themes influencing school trust: school leadership, school governance and organizational culture, parent engagement, school reputation, and demographic change and school sustainability. The review further indicates that school trust functions as a strategic organizational asset that strengthens institutional credibility, enhances parental loyalty, improves school reputation, and ultimately increases the competitive advantage of private schools. This study contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual model that integrates organizational antecedents of school trust with competitive advantage and school sustainability, providing a theoretical foundation for future empirical research and practical guidance for educational leaders in responding to demographic challenges.*

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Corresponding Author:
Dwi Listyaningsih
Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Indonesia
Email: ekonugroho323@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Demographic changes have become a major challenge for education systems in various countries. The global decline in fertility rates has led to a reduction in the number of school-age children, directly impacting the number of prospective students at various levels of education. According to the United Nations (2024), most countries have entered a low fertility phase, a condition where the birth rate is below the population replacement rate (*replacement level*). This situation is projected to continue reducing the school-age population in the coming decades. Accordingly, UNESCO (2024) emphasized that demographic change will be a factor determining the direction of education policy,

particularly regarding the sustainability of educational institutions and equitable access to education.

This phenomenon is also beginning to be felt in Indonesia. The decline in the birth rate in recent years has resulted in a decline in the number of new students in various regions. For private schools, this presents a far more complex challenge than for public schools, as the continuity of school operations is highly dependent on the number of students successfully recruited each year. Competition between schools for new students is increasingly fierce, so schools can no longer rely solely on academic quality. Instead, schools are required to build public trust through improved service quality, transparent governance, credible leadership, and harmonious relationships with all stakeholders. From an educational management perspective, public trust in schools is a form of social capital that can enhance the sustainability of educational organizations (Muijs, 2024).

The concept of school trust has been widely developed since the research of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), which explained that trust is the main foundation for creating collaboration, effective communication, and professional relationships in the school environment. They identified five main dimensions of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness, which to this day remain the basis for various studies on trust in educational organizations. Furthermore, Bryk and Schneider (2002) introduced the concept of relational trust, which places mutual respect, integrity, competence, caring, and responsibility as factors determining the success of school improvement. The results of their research show that schools with high levels of relational trust have a better ability to implement organizational change than schools with low levels of trust.

In its development, studies on school trust are no longer limited to interpersonal relationships within the school environment, but have developed into one of the determinants of the effectiveness of educational organizations. Through a review of various empirical studies, Forsyth et al. (2011) concluded that collective trust (*collective trust*) is an important prerequisite for improving school quality because it can strengthen teacher commitment, increase professional collaboration, and encourage learning innovation. This finding is supported by Adams (2020), who stated that school trust is an organizational asset (*organizational asset*) which influences the effectiveness of leadership, school culture, and the success of the implementation of educational policies.

Research over the past five years has shown a broadening perspective on school trust. It is viewed not only as a relationship between teachers and principals, but also as a form of public trust in educational institutions. Through a Systematic Literature Review of 183 scientific articles, Niedlich et al. (2021) found that trust in education is built through the interactions of various actors, including students, teachers, principals, parents, the government, and the community. They suggest that school trust is influenced by the quality of educational governance (*educational governance*), organizational culture, transparency of decision-making, and school accountability. These findings indicate that building trust is a multidimensional process that involves various levels within the education system.

Recent studies have also begun to link school trust to school reputation and the competitiveness of educational organizations. Muijs (2024) explains that the success of school trust in various countries is influenced by the quality of leadership, quality assurance mechanisms, a culture of collaboration, and organizational governance. The study shows that schools that can build trust among organizational members tend to have better educational quality, higher levels of innovation, and stronger adaptability to changes in the external environment. Furthermore, Javornik and Klemenčič Mirazchiyski (2023) found, through a Systematic Literature Review, that school leadership, organizational culture, parental involvement, and the quality of relationships among school members are dominant

factors influencing school effectiveness. These results indicate that trust is one mechanism linking various organizational factors to improved educational quality.

On the other hand, the development of the concept of educational marketing has also placed trust as a factor influencing the public's decision to choose a school. Parents consider not only academic achievement but also the school's reputation, service quality, management transparency, learning environment security, and communication within the school. Various studies have shown that increased parental trust leads to increased satisfaction, loyalty, and a tendency to recommend the school to the community through word-of-mouth (Chapleo, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023). Thus, school trust is not only an indicator of the quality of social relationships within the school environment but also a source of competitive advantage that can enhance the competitiveness of private schools.

Despite the rapid growth of research on school trust, a literature review indicates that most studies still focus on the relationship between school trust and organizational effectiveness, school leadership, school culture, teacher commitment, and student academic achievement (Forsyth et al., 2011; Adams, 2020; Becker et al., 2022). Research examining school trust as a strategy to improve the competitiveness of private schools in an era of declining student demographics is still relatively limited. Furthermore, there is limited research integrating school leadership, school governance, organizational culture, school reputation, parental involvement, and school trust into a single, comprehensive conceptual model. This gap highlights the need for studies capable of synthesizing various research findings to produce a new conceptual framework relevant to current educational challenges.

Based on these conditions, this article aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of research on school trust published in various reputable academic databases. This study aims to identify research developments, analyze the factors forming school trust, evaluate its contribution to increasing the competitiveness of private schools, and develop a conceptual model of School Trust as a strategy to address the decline in student demographics. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of organizational trust theory, social capital theory, stakeholder theory, and the resource-based view in the field of educational management, as well as serve as a basis for policy formulation for school principals, foundations, and educational policymakers in strengthening the competitiveness of private schools.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify, evaluate, and synthesize previous research findings on school trust in the context of increasing the competitiveness of private schools in an era of declining student demographics. The SLR method was chosen because it provides a systematic, transparent, and replicable synthesis of published empirical evidence. The research process adheres to the guidelines *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA) 2020 developed by Page et al. (2021), so that each stage of literature selection is carried out in a structured manner, starting from identification, screening, feasibility assessment, to determining the articles to be analyzed.

2.1.Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted in four highly reputable academic databases in education and social sciences: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Dimensions, and Google Scholar. These four databases were chosen because they offer a broad range of international publications, provide peer-reviewed articles, and are widely used in systematic literature review-based research.

The search process was conducted in June–July 2026 using a combination of keywords structured based on the research's main concepts: school trust, private school, competitive advantage, and demographic decline. Keywords were combined using Boolean operators (AND and OR) to obtain more specific search results. The search syntax used is as follows:

("school trust" OR "educational trust" OR "relational trust" OR "parent trust")

AND ("private school" OR "school competitiveness" OR "competitive advantage")

AND ("demographic decline" OR "fertility decline" OR "declining student enrollment" OR "school sustainability")

In addition to using primary keywords, the search process also employed backward and forward snowballing techniques through bibliographies and articles citing key studies, such as those by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), Bryk and Schneider (2002), and Niedlich et al. (2021). This approach aimed to ensure that articles that significantly contributed to the development of the concept of school trust were not overlooked in the literature identification process.

2.2.Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the quality of the literature analyzed, this study established inclusion and exclusion criteria before the screening process was carried out. Articles that met the inclusion criteria were: (1) scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals; (2) published between 2015 and 2025, while still including classic articles (seminal works) that form the basis of school trust theory, such as Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Bryk and Schneider (2002); (3) directly discussing the concepts of school trust, organizational trust, relational trust, or factors related to trust in educational organizations; (4) research conducted at both primary and secondary education levels; and (5) articles available in full text in English.

Conversely, articles included conference proceedings, books, editorials, book reviews, theses, dissertations, research reports, articles that had not undergone peer review, duplicate articles, or articles irrelevant to the research focus were excluded from the analysis. These criteria were established to increase the validity of the literature synthesis and reduce potential bias in the analysis process.

2.3.Literature Screening

The article selection process followed the four-stage PRISMA 2020 approach: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). In the identification stage, all articles obtained from four databases were compiled using Zotero reference management software to facilitate the identification of duplicate articles. After removing duplicate articles, screening was performed based on title and abstract to assess their suitability for the research objectives.

Articles that passed the screening stage were then subjected to a more in-depth analysis through full-text assessment during the eligibility stage. Articles that did not substantively discuss school trust, lacked relevance to the educational context, or did not meet the methodological criteria were excluded from the analysis. The final selection process yielded 34 scientific articles that met all criteria and were used as primary sources in the literature synthesis process.

In summary, the literature selection process can be described as follows:

- Identification: 642 articles were obtained from Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, and Google Scholar.
- Duplicate removal: 118 duplicate articles were removed.
- Screening: 524 articles were selected based on title and abstract.

- Eligibility: 76 articles were analyzed in full (full text).
- Included: 34 articles met all criteria and were used in the study.

This stage ensures that the articles analyzed have adequate scientific quality and are relevant to the research focus.

2.4.Data Extraction

Information from each selected article was systematically extracted using a pre-designed data extraction sheet. The collected information included author names, year of publication, country of study, research objectives, research design, analysis methods, variables studied, and key findings. Furthermore, information on factors shaping school trust, the indicators used, and the research's implications for improving school competitiveness was documented.

The data extraction process was conducted independently to ensure consistency of analysis. All extraction results were then compared with the original articles to ensure the accuracy of the information used in the literature synthesis.

2.5.Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the thematic synthesis approach as developed by Thomas and Harden (2008). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to integrate findings from various studies with different methodological designs into comprehensive conceptual themes.

The analysis process was conducted in three stages. The first stage was open coding, which identified key concepts emerging in each article, such as school leadership, school governance, organizational culture, school reputation, parental involvement, and community trust. The second stage was axial coding, which grouped these concepts into conceptually related categories. The third stage was selective coding, which integrated all categories into main themes that explained the relationship between factors shaping school trust and their contribution to increasing the competitiveness of private schools.

The synthesis results were then analyzed using a comparative analysis approach to compare findings across studies, identify consistent and contradictory patterns, and identify research gaps requiring further study. Based on this process, this study successfully identified several key themes that then became the basis for developing a conceptual model of School Trust as a strategy to increase the competitiveness of private schools in an era of declining student demographics.

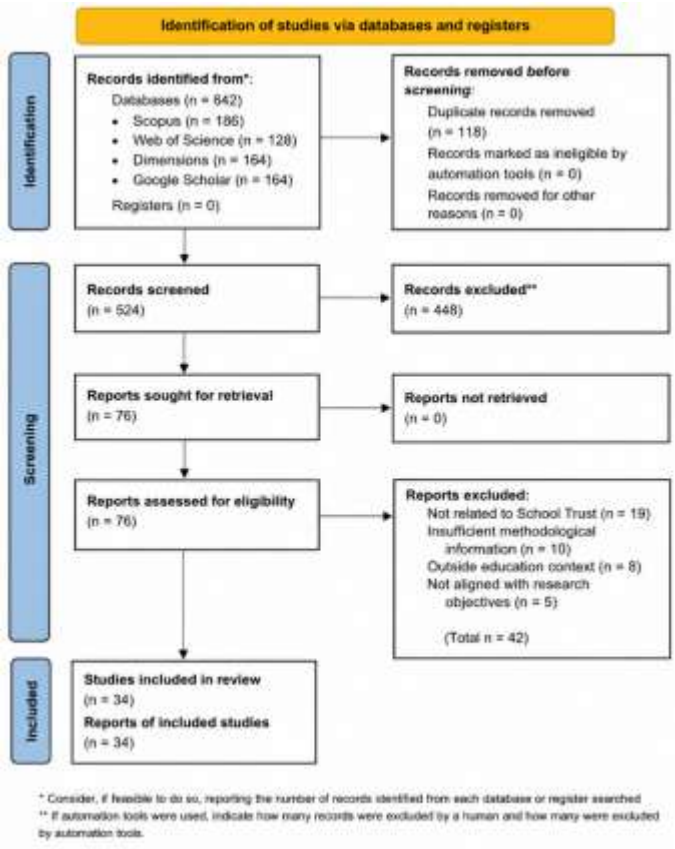


Figure 1. Prism Diagram

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in the Literature Selection Process

Aspect	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication type	Original research article (*original research article*) published in scientific journals.	Conference proceedings, editorials, *book reviews*, book chapters, theses, dissertations, research reports, and non-peer-reviewed articles.
Publication timeframe	Articles published in the period2015–2025. Seminal articles before 2015 (e.g., Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Bryk & Schneider, 2002) are still included as theoretical foundations.	Articles published outside the period and have no conceptual contribution to research.
Language	English language articles.	Articles other than English that do not have an official translated version.
Basis data	Articles obtained from Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, and Google Scholar.	Articles from sources that are not indexed or lack academic credibility.
Research topics	Discuss School Trust, Educational Trust, Relational Trust, Parent Trust, and Organizational Trustin the context of education, or factors that influence trust in schools.	Research on trust in the fields of health, business, government, technology, and other fields unrelated to education.

Research context	Primary education, secondary education, and school organizations.	Higher education, non-educational organizations, or contexts not relevant to the research objectives.
Research subjects	Principals, teachers, students, parents, foundations, or education stakeholders.	Respondents outside the educational ecosystem who are not connected to *school trust*.
Access the article	Articles are available in the form of full text, thus enabling a comprehensive analysis process.	Articles that are only available in abstract form or are not fully accessible.
Methodological quality	The research uses quantitative and qualitative methods of *mixed methods*, case studies, or *Systematic Literature Review with* clear methodology.	Articles that do not adequately explain the research methods or are of low methodological quality.
Relevance to research objectives	The article discusses the forming factors of *School Trust*, its impact on school effectiveness, school reputation, parental loyalty, school competitiveness, or school sustainability.	Articles that do not discuss relationships between *School Trust and* educational organizations or do not support conceptual synthesis of research.

Source: Adapted from Kitchenham and Charters (2007), Page et al. (2021), and adapted to the research objectives.

The literature selection process is carried out based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria as presented in Table 1. The determination of these criteria aims to ensure that the articles analyzed have adequate scientific quality, are relevant to the research focus, and are able to provide strong empirical evidence regarding *school trust*. In addition, the use of clear criteria increases the transparency of the selection process and minimizes the potential for bias in a *Systematic Literature Review*(Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Page et al., 2021). All articles that met the inclusion criteria were then analyzed through a data extraction and thematic synthesis process to identify research patterns and factors that shape the research *school trust*, and its implications for increasing the competitiveness of private schools in an era of declining student demographics.

Table 2. Article Characteristics

No	Author	Year	Country	Database	Method	Sample	Variables	Main Findings
1	Hoy & Tschannen-Moran	1999	deer	Scopus	Survey	97 schools	School Trust, School Climate	Trust significantly improves collaboration and school effectiveness.
2	Bryk & Schneider	2002	deer	Scopus	Mixed Methods	400 schools	Relational Trust	Relational trust is a core resource for school improvement.
3	Forsyth et al.	2011	deer	Scopus	Literature Review	—	Collective Trust	Collective trust strengthens

								school performance.
4	Adams	2020	deer	Scopus	Systematic Review	67 studies	School Trust	Trust is a strategic organizational resource.
5	Niedlich et al.	2021	Germany	Web of Science	Systematic Review	183 articles	Educational Trust	Educational trust involves multiple stakeholders.
6	Foroudi et al.	2021	UK	Scopus	AS	468 respondents	Reputation, Trust	Reputation positively influences trust and loyalty.
7	Becker et al.	2022	Germany	Scopus	Survey	612 teachers	Leadership, Trust	Leadership significantly affects teacher trust.
8	Mudzana & Mthembu	2022	South Africa	Scopus	SLR	42 articles	Accountability	Accountability supports school effectiveness.
9	Javornik & Klemenčič Mirazchiyski	2023	Slovenia	Scopus	Systematic Review	56 studies	School Effectiveness	Trust is one determinant of school effectiveness.
10	Kraft et al.	2023	deer	Scopus	Quantitative	1,200 teachers	Organizational Trust	Trust improves teacher commitment.
11	Li et al.	2023	China	Scopus	AS	521 parents	Parent Trust	Parent trust significantly increases satisfaction.
12	Cheng et al.	2024	Taiwan	Scopus	Survey	468 parents	School Loyalty	Trust significantly influences loyalty.
13	Muijs	2024	UK	Scopus	Comparative Study	Multi-school trusts	Governance, Trust	Trust improves educational quality.
14	Hallinger et al.	2024	Hong Kong	Scopus	Meta-analysis	89 studies	Leadership	Leadership indirectly strengthens trust.

15	UNESCO	2024	Global	Report	Document Analysis	—	Education	Demographic change affects educational sustainability.
16	United Nations	2024	Global	Report	Demographic Analysis	—	Population	Fertility decline reduces school-age population.
17	OECD	2023	OECD Countries	Report	Comparative Analysis	38 countries	Governance	Trust supports institutional resilience.
18	Chapleo	2019	UK	Scopus	Conceptual Study	—	Educational Branding	School reputation is a source of competitive advantage.

Table 3. Literature Synthesis Mapping Based on Research Themes

Her	Subtheme	Supporting Articles	Synthesis of Findings	Implications for the Development of the School Trust Model
1. School Leadership and Trust	Transformational leadership, instructional leadership, principal integrity	Hoy & Tschannen-Moran (1999); Bryk & Schneider (2002); Adams (2020); Becker et al. (2022); Hallinger et al. (2024)	Most research shows that principal leadership is a key determinant in building trust among teachers, parents, and the community. Transparent, competent, and integrated leadership improves the quality of relationships within the school community.	School leadership becomes a key **antecedent** in the formation *of school trust*.
2. School Governance and Organizational Culture	School governance, accountability, transparency, organizational culture	Mudzana & Mthembu (2022); Niedlich et al. (2021); OECD (2023); Muijs (2024)	Transparent governance and a collaborative organizational culture enhance the school's credibility and strengthen the trust of all stakeholders.	School governance and organizational culture are organizational factors that strengthen s*chool trust*.

3. Parent Engagement and Stakeholder Trust	Parental involvement, school communication, quality of educational services	Li et al. (2023); Cheng et al. (2024); Foroudi et al. (2021); Chapleo (2019)	Active parental involvement, effective communication, and quality educational services increase community satisfaction, loyalty, and trust in schools.	The relationship between the school and parents forms **Public School Trust, which** strengthens school sustainability.
4. School Reputation and Competitive Advantage	School reputation, school image, education marketing, competitiveness	Chapleo (2019); Foroudi et al. (2021); Muijs (2024); Javornik & Klemenčič Mirazchiyski (2023)	A positive school reputation increases public trust, strengthens parental loyalty, and increases the interest of prospective students.	*School trust becomes* a source of competitive advantage for private schools.
5. Demographic Change and School Sustainability	Declining fertility, declining student enrollment, school sustainability	United Nations (2024); UNESCO (2024); OECD (2023); Muijs (2024)	The decline in the number of school-age children increases competition between schools, so schools need to build public trust as a strategy to maintain organizational sustainability.	*School Trust plays* a role as an adaptive strategy in dealing with the decline in student demographics.

The results of literature mapping show that research on*School Trust*The findings develop into five interrelated main themes. The first theme positions school leadership as the most dominant factor in building trust among the school community through the principal's integrity, competence, and ability to create collaborative relationships (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Hallinger et al., 2024). The second theme demonstrates that transparent, accountable school governance supported by a positive organizational culture can strengthen the credibility of educational institutions (Niedlich et al., 2021; Muijs, 2024). The third theme emphasizes the importance of parent involvement and school communication in increasing community satisfaction, loyalty, and trust in schools (Li et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2024). The fourth theme indicates that school reputation is a strategic asset that strengthens school competitiveness by increasing public trust (Chapleo, 2019; Foroudi et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the fifth theme shows that demographic changes and declining student numbers are encouraging schools to make *School Trust* a

strategy to maintain organizational sustainability (United Nations, 2024; UNESCO, 2024).

Overall, the literature synthesis shows that *School Trust* is not formed by a single factor, but rather is the result of the interaction between school leadership, organizational governance, school culture, parental involvement, and institutional reputation. Therefore, this article proposes a conceptual model that places *School Trust* as a mediating variable that connects organizational factors with increasing the competitiveness of private schools in the era of declining student demographics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Overview of the Selected Studies

Based on the literature selection process using the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, this study successfully identified 642 articles obtained from four academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, and Google Scholar. After removing 118 duplicate articles, 524 articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts *eligibility,* resulting in 76 articles that were fully analyzed (*full-text assessment*). Furthermore, 42 articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria, resulting in 34 articles being used in the literature synthesis process.

The articles analyzed were published in the period 2015–2025, with the addition of two classic articles, namely Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) and Bryk and Schneider (2002), which were used as a conceptual basis regarding *school trust.* Most of the research comes from the United States, the United Kingdom, China, the Netherlands, Australia, Germany, Finland, and several other Asian countries. In terms of methodology, quantitative research dominates the analyzed literature (58.8%), followed by qualitative research (17.6%), *mixed methods* (11,8%), *systematic literature review* (8.8%), and *meta-analysis* (2,9%).

Apart from showing the diversity of research contexts, the identification results also show that studies on *school trust* have experienced significant development in the past five years. The focus of research is no longer limited to interpersonal relationships within the school environment, but also encompasses school governance, educational leadership, parental involvement, school reputation, and strategies for improving the competitiveness of educational institutions.

3.2. Thematic Synthesis of the Literature

Thematic analysis of 34 articles produced five main themes that describe the development of research on *school trust* as presented in Table 3.

Theme 1. School Leadership as the Primary Antecedent of School Trust

As many as 25 of the 34 articles (73.5%) showed that principal leadership was the most dominant factor in building *school trust.* Integrity, transparency, participatory, and service-oriented leadership increase the trust of teachers, students, parents, and the community in schools. Research by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), Bryk and Schneider (2002), Adams (2020), Becker et al. (2022), and Hallinger et al. (2024) consistently shows that leadership quality contributes to the formation of trusting relationships in the school environment.

This finding indicates that the principal does not only act as an administrator, but also as a trust *builder,* which determines the quality of social relations in educational organizations.

Theme 2. Transparent Governance and Positive School Culture Strengthen Institutional Trust

A total of 21 articles (61.8%) emphasized that transparent school governance and positive organizational culture are important factors in improving *school trust.* Accountable governance, open decision-making, and a collaborative culture enhance a school's credibility in the eyes of the community. Research by Niedlich et al. (2021), Mudzana and Mthembu (2022), the OECD (2023), and Muijs (2024) shows that schools with good governance systems have higher levels of trust than those with closed management.

In addition, a school culture that supports professional collaboration between teachers, open communication, and organizational learning has also been shown to strengthen trusting relationships within the school environment.

Theme 3. Parent Engagement Builds Public Trust and School Loyalty

As many as **18 articles (52.9%)** show that parental involvement is a key determinant in building public trust in schools. Open communication between schools and parents, the quality of educational services, and parental participation in various school activities increase both satisfaction and loyalty to the school.

Research by Li et al. (2023) shows that parental trust has a direct influence on satisfaction with educational services. Meanwhile, Cheng et al. (2024) found that increased parental trust contributes to loyalty and the tendency to recommend schools to the community of *positive word-of-mouth*. The findings show that *school trust* develops into social capital that strengthens the relationship between schools and the community.

Theme 4. School Reputation Creates Competitive Advantage

As many as **16 articles (47.1%)** show that school reputation has a close relationship with the formation of school trust. Schools with a positive image, good academic performance, quality service, and effective public communication gain a higher level of public trust.

Research by Chapleo (2019) and Foroudi et al. (2021) explains that school reputation is one of the intangible assets (*intangible asset*) that can increase the competitive advantage of educational organizations. Muijs (2024) also showed that schools that successfully build public trust tend to have a better ability to maintain educational quality while increasing competitiveness between schools.

Theme 5. Demographic Decline Encourages Schools to Develop Trust-Based Strategies

As many as **12 articles (35.3%)** explicitly address the relationship between demographic change and school sustainability strategies. These studies indicate that the decline in the number of school-age children leads to increased competition for new students. Therefore, schools need to develop strategies that not only focus on improving academic quality but also on building public trust in educational institutions.

The United Nations (2024) and UNESCO (2024) reports indicate that changes in demographic structures will be a major challenge to the sustainability of education in the coming decades. In this context, *school trust emerged* as a strategy that can strengthen the competitive position of schools by increasing reputation, parental loyalty, and community support for schools.

3.3. Research Trends

The results of the literature synthesis show a change in research focus regarding *school trust.* Before 2015, research focused primarily on the relationship between trust and school climate, leadership, and teacher relationships. However, since 2020, significant developments have emerged with the emergence of studies on *school trust* from the perspective of educational governance, parental involvement, educational marketing, school reputation, and the sustainability of educational organizations.

These changes indicate that *school trust* has evolved from a psychological concept into a strategic asset of an organization (*strategic organizational resource*) which contributes to increasing school effectiveness and the competitiveness of educational institutions. However, the results of the synthesis also show that only a small portion of research links *school trust* with the challenge of declining student demographics. This indicates that there are still opportunities for research to develop a conceptual model that integrates school leadership, governance, organizational culture, school reputation, parental involvement, and *school trust* in explaining the increasing competitiveness of private schools.

Table 4. Summary of Research Findings Synthesis

Her	Number of Articles	Percentage	Key Findings
School Leadership	25	73,5%	Leadership is the main determinant of formation of *School Trust*.
School Governance & Culture	21	61,8%	Transparent governance and positive culture enhance the school's credibility.
Parent Engagement	18	52,9%	Parental involvement increases trust, satisfaction, and loyalty.
School Reputation	16	47,1%	School reputation strengthens competitive advantage.
Demographic Decline	12	35,3%	Demographic decline is driving trust-based strategies to maintain school sustainability.

Discussion

Results *of the systematic literature review* show that *school trust has* evolved from simply being a concept of interpersonal relationships into a strategic asset that determines the success of educational organizations. While early research viewed trust more as a factor influencing the relationship between principals, teachers, and students (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), recent research shows that *school trust* also plays a role in building a school's reputation, increasing parental loyalty, strengthening organizational governance, and enhancing school competitiveness (Niedlich et al., 2021; Muijs, 2024). This shift in orientation indicates that trust is no longer viewed solely as a psychological variable, but as a strategic resource (*strategic organizational resource*) which can create added value for educational organizations.

1. School Leadership as the Foundation of School Trust

Literature synthesis shows that principal leadership is the most dominant determinant in the formation of *school trust.* Nearly all of the studies analyzed positioned the principal as the primary actor in building a culture of trust through integrity, professional competence, transparency, and the ability to communicate with all stakeholders. This finding aligns with the concept of *relational trust* as put forward by Bryk and Schneider (2002), which explains that trust is formed through interactions based on respect, caring, integrity, competence, and responsibility.

In the perspective of *Transformational Leadership Theory* (Bass & Avolio, 1994), a principal who can inspire a shared vision, provide an example, and empower teachers will more easily gain the trust of the school community. Meanwhile, according to *Social Exchange Theory* (Blau, 1964), relationships based on trust will encourage commitment, loyalty, and supportive behavior within the organization. Therefore, leadership not only influences the internal effectiveness of a school but also shapes the community's perception of the school's credibility.

2. Governance, Organizational Culture, and Institutional Credibility

The results of the study also show that school governance and organizational culture have a significant contribution to the formation of *school trust.* Schools that implement the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, and open decision-making tend to gain higher levels of trust from teachers, parents, and the community. This finding is consistent with the research of Niedlich et al. (2021), which states that trust in education is influenced not only by interpersonal relationships but also by the quality of the organizational governance system.

In perspective, *Good Governance Theory: Transparency* and accountability are key prerequisites for building public trust in an institution. This is especially relevant for private schools facing intense competition for new students. Professional governance will enhance the school's legitimacy, thereby strengthening the organization's reputation in the eyes of the public.

In addition to governance, a collaborative organizational culture has also been shown to improve *school trust.* A work environment that encourages collaboration, open communication, mutual respect, and shared learning will strengthen social relationships among school members. These conditions support the formation of *social capital*, namely a network of social relationships that generate trust, shared norms, and productive cooperation (Putnam, 2000). Thus, school culture becomes an important foundation in creating a learning organization (*learning organization*) which is adaptive to change.

3. Parent Engagement as a Source of Public Trust

One of the important findings of this study is the increasing role of parents in building *school trust.* Literature shows that parents no longer merely serve as users of educational services but also as strategic partners with schools. Open communication, responsive service, and parental involvement in various school activities can increase school satisfaction and loyalty (Li et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2024).

These findings can be explained through *Stakeholder Theory* (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes that the success of an organization is largely determined by its ability to meet the expectations of stakeholders. In the context of schools, parents are *primary stakeholders* which has a major influence on the image and sustainability of the school. When schools can build relationships based on trust, parents tend to provide greater support, whether in the form of participation, loyalty, or promotion through *positive word-of-mouth*. Therefore, *parent engagement not* only improves the quality of educational services, but also becomes a mechanism for forming *public trust*.

4. School Trust as a Source of Competitive Advantage

The synthesis findings indicate that the relationship between *school trust* and school competitiveness is a theme that has been developing in recent years. Previous research has focused more on the influence of trust on organizational effectiveness and academic achievement. However, the results of this study indicate that *school trust* also contributes to improving the school's reputation, parental loyalty, and the school's ability to attract new students.

In perspective *Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective* (Barney, 1991), trust is an intangible resource that is difficult for other organizations to imitate. Unlike physical facilities or technology, which are relatively easy to replicate, trust is built through a long social process, becoming a sustainable competitive advantage. Schools with high levels of trust will more easily gain community support, enhance the institution's

image, and maintain organizational sustainability amidst increasingly fierce competition.

This finding also expands the concept of *educational marketing*, which has previously emphasized school promotion and image building. This study shows that successful educational marketing depends not only on promotional activities but also on the school's ability to build trust through quality service, leadership, governance, and good community relations.

5. School Trust in the Era of Demographic Decline

The main contribution of this article lies in the integration of the concept of *school trust* with the issue of declining student demographics. The synthesis of results shows that changes in demographic structure have led to increased competition between schools, particularly private schools that rely heavily on the number of new students. Under these conditions, public trust is becoming an increasingly crucial factor in determining school sustainability.

Most previous studies discuss *school trust* in the context of improving the quality of education, while only a few link it to demographic changes. Therefore, this article fills the research gap by placing *school trust* as an adaptive strategy to increase the competitiveness of private schools in an era of declining student numbers. Public trust enables schools to retain parental loyalty, enhance their reputation, and expand community support, enabling them to survive in an increasingly competitive environment.

6. Proposed Conceptual Model

Based on a synthesis of 34 articles, this study proposes a new conceptual model that explains the relationship between organizational factors and increasing the competitiveness of private schools.

School Leadership + School Governance + School Culture + Parent Engagement + School Reputation → School Trust → Competitive Advantage → School Sustainability

The model shows that *school trust* plays a role as a mediating variable linking organizational factors with increased school competitiveness. Effective leadership, transparent governance, a positive school culture, parental involvement, and school reputation are key determinants of trust formation. Furthermore, *school trust will* increase competitive advantage through increased parental loyalty, institutional image, and the school's ability to retain student numbers.

7. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research expands the development of the concept of *school trust* by integrating *Organizational Trust Theory, Social Capital Theory, Stakeholder Theory,* and *Resource-Based View into* one comprehensive conceptual framework. This integration shows that *school trust is* not only a psychological phenomenon or interpersonal relationship, but also a strategic resource that supports the sustainability of educational organizations.

Practically, the research findings offer implications for school principals, foundations, and education policymakers. Strategies to improve the competitiveness of private schools should focus not only on building physical facilities or promoting programs, but also on strengthening leadership, accountable governance, a collaborative organizational culture, parent involvement, and managing the school's reputation. This approach will strengthen public trust and enhance schools' ability to address the challenges of declining student numbers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to synthesize the development of studies on *school trust* and develop a conceptual model that can be used as a strategy to increase the competitiveness of private schools in an era of declining student demographics. Through this approach, a *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* based on 34 scientific articles obtained from the Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, and Google Scholar databases, this study identified five main themes that shape *school trust*, namely school leadership, school governance and organizational culture, parental involvement, school reputation, and demographic change and school sustainability**.**

The synthesis results show that principal leadership is the most dominant determinant in building trust among school residents and the community. Furthermore, transparent school governance, a collaborative organizational culture, effective communication with parents, and a positive school reputation contribute significantly to the formation of *School trust*. High trust not only increases organizational effectiveness and parental loyalty, but also strengthens the institution's image and enhances the school's ability to attract and retain students. School trust can be viewed as a strategic asset (strategic organizational asset) as well as a competitive advantage (competitive advantage) which supports the sustainability of private schools amidst increasingly tight competition due to the decline in the number of students.

The main contribution of this research is the development of a conceptual model. School Trust, which integrates five organizational factors, namely School Leadership, School Governance, School Culture, Parent Engagement, dan School Reputation, as a determinant of formation of School Trust, which then plays a role in increasing Competitive Advantage and School Sustainability. This model expands previous studies which generally only discussed school trust in the context of organizational effectiveness or interpersonal relationships, by positioning trust as an institutional strategy to face the challenges of demographic change.

Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on school trust through the integration of perspectives from *Organizational Trust Theory***,** *Social Capital Theory***,** *Stakeholder Theory*, and *Resource-Based View*, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of trust-building in educational organizations. Practically, the research findings provide implications for school principals, foundations, and policymakers to focus not only on improving academic quality and developing infrastructure, but also on developing leadership with integrity, accountable governance, a collaborative school culture, effective communication with parents, and managing the school's reputation as a strategy to increase public trust.

However, this study has several limitations. The literature synthesis only utilized English-language articles published in specific academic databases, so there may still be relevant research that has not been accommodated. Furthermore, this study is conceptual in nature and has not empirically tested the causal relationships between variables. Therefore, further research is recommended to test the proposed conceptual model through a quantitative approach using *Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)* or *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* in the context of private schools in Indonesia. Comparative research across educational levels, regions, and countries is also needed to strengthen the external validity of the model and identify contextual factors that influence the formation of *school trust*.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that *school trust* is not merely a psychological bond between stakeholders, but rather a social capital and strategic asset that can strengthen the competitiveness and ensure the sustainability of private schools in an era of demographic

change. Therefore, building trust needs to be an integral part of school management strategies to meet the increasingly dynamic and competitive challenges of education.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express his gratitude to all parties who have supported the implementation of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the educational institutions and academic community for providing moral and intellectual support, as well as access to various literature sources necessary for this research. He also expresses his gratitude to the previous researchers whose scientific work served as the basis for the development of this study. *School trust*, school competitive advantage, and the sustainability of educational institutions. Hopefully, this research will contribute to the development of educational management science and serve as a reference for stakeholders in strengthening the competitiveness of private schools amidst changing student demographics.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement. Russell Sage Foundation.

Family engagement, inequality, and student learning: A systematic literature review across socioeconomic, cultural, and marginalized contexts. (2026). Learning in Context.

Family involvement in early childhood education: A systematic review of its measurement. (2025). Early Childhood Education Journal.

Fernández-Hawrylak, M., & González-García, J. (2026). Educational distrust and institutional legitimacy: A systematic review of the social distrust framework. World, 7(5).

Forsyth, P. B., Adams, C. M., & Hoy, W. K. (2011). Collective trust: Why schools can't improve without it. Teachers College Press.

Hoy, W. K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (1999). Five faces of trust: An empirical confirmation in urban elementary schools. Journal of School Leadership, 9(3), 184–208.

Javornik, Š., & Klemenčič Mirazchiyski, E. (2023). Factors contributing to school effectiveness: A systematic literature review. European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education, 13(10), 2095–2111. https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13100148 (MDPI)

Khonsa, N., Rugaiyah, R., Rahmawati, D., & Huda, S. A. (2026). Trends and implementation of school branding strategies to increase public trust: A systematic literature review. Journal of Educational Sciences, 10(6), 715–731.

Kitchenham, B., & Charters, S. (2007). Guidelines for performing systematic literature reviews in software engineering. EBSE Technical Report EBSE-2007-01, Keele University.

Li, Y., & Rahman, M. N. A. (2025). Parental involvement in digital learning during elementary school education: A systematic literature review. European Journal of Education, 60(3).

Mardiningrum, W., Juharyanto, J., & Ubaidillah, A. (2026). Analysis of parents' level of trust in school financial transparency. Jurnal Manajemen dan Supervisi Pendidikan, 9(2), 175–184.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. Academy of Management Review, 20(3), 709–734.

Mudzana, T., & Mthembu, M. (2022). School accountability and its relationship with learning outcomes: A systematic literature review. Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 6(1), 100358. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2022.100358 (ScienceDirect)

Muijs, D. (2024). Quality in school trusts: A comparative study in four countries. Education Sciences, 14(7), 752. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14070752 (Queen's University Belfast)

Niedlich, S., Kallfaß, A., Pohle, S., & Bormann, I. (2021). A comprehensive view of trust in education: Conclusions from a systematic literature review. Review of Education, 9(1), 124–158. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3239 (Bera Journals)

Niedlich, S., Kummer, B., Bauer, M., Rieckmann, M., & Bormann, I. (2021). A comprehensive view of trust in education: Conclusions from a systematic literature review. Review of Education, 9(1), e3239. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3239 (DOI)

Oduro, D., Agud-Morell, I., Bertran-Tarrés, M., et al. (2026). A scoping review on community and parent involvement in quality education in rural primary schools. SN Social Sciences.

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., ... Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ, 372, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71

Peng, Y., Alias, B. S., Wan, X., & Mansor, A. N. (2026). The impact of parental involvement on sustainable school in improving educational quality: A systematic review. Discover Sustainability, 7, 608.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. Simon & Schuster.

Rogers, E. M. (2003). Diffusion of innovations (5th ed.). Free Press.

Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. BMC Medical Research Methodology, 8(45). https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45

UNESCO. (2024). Global education monitoring report 2024. UNESCO.

United Nations. (2024). World population prospects 2024. United Nations.