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Implementation of customer relationship management at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School

De Elsa Agustiani

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Darussalam Kunir

Email: agustianielsa181@gmail.com

Dr. Riema Afriani Kusumadewi, S.P., M.M.

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Darussalam Kunir

Email: riema.afriani.k@gmail.com

Dr. Putri Anggraeni, M.Ak.

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Darussalam Kunir

Email: ptr.anggraeni1983@gmail.com

Abstract

Customer relationship management (CRM) offers a data-driven approach for managing interactions with prospective and current students. For Islamic boarding schools, CRM systems serve as a strategic tool to strengthen relationships with students and their families, improve communication and engagement, personalize educational experiences, track progress and satisfaction, and enhance institutional branding to attract new students. This study aims to identify CRM programs currently implemented at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School, assess the potential benefits and challenges associated with CRM adoption, and analyze strategies for effective CRM implementation. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach, the study utilizes interviews, observations, and documentation as data collection methods. The data were then analyzed through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that CRM has not yet been fully optimized in the school; several initiatives exist but lack systematization and digital support. The study identifies key benefits such as improved stakeholder trust, communication, and service personalization. However, challenges include limited technological infrastructure, insufficient human resource capacity in IT, and underdeveloped promotional strategies. To ensure CRM success, the study recommends developing IT-based CRM infrastructure, training professional human resources, and conducting regular evaluations. These strategies will support improved recruitment, retention, and student satisfaction, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience.

Keywords: CRM; Islamic education; boarding school; student retention; digital strategy

INTRODUCTION

Entering the era of Society 5.0, competition across various sectors, particularly in the education industry, has become increasingly intense. In Indonesia, the landscape of Islamic education—especially Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*)—has been experiencing significant growth and diversification. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia*), as of the 2023/2024 academic year, there were 39,551 registered Islamic boarding schools with approximately 4.9 million students across the country (Kemenag, 2023). This growth

has created heightened competition among institutions, urging them to strengthen strategies for student recruitment and retention.

Traditionally, Islamic boarding schools have relied heavily on word-of-mouth promotion and personal networks to attract prospective students. However, such approaches are limited in their effectiveness amid increasing competition. For example, students (*santri*) and alumni of Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School have promoted the institution by sharing testimonials and school-related content on their social media platforms. Yet, this method has shown minimal impact on improving enrollment rates. In fact, some students have discontinued their studies without providing clear reasons (Kusumadewi & Ramdan, 2022).

Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School, established in 1989 by KH. Saefullah Hidayat and Hj. Zulfa Bai'ah, is located in Simpar Village, Subang Regency, West Java. Internal school records indicate a drop in student enrollment between 2021 and 2022, with only a slight increase observed in subsequent years. These trends highlight the need for a more structured and technologically supported approach, such as the implementation of customer relationship management (CRM), to improve both recruitment outcomes and student loyalty.

CRM offers a structured, data-driven method for managing interactions with both prospective and current students—viewed here as educational service customers. It supports institutions in fostering meaningful relationships, enhancing communication, personalizing services, monitoring student satisfaction, and ultimately improving institutional branding to attract new students (Seeman & O'Hara, 2006).

Campbell and Roberts, as cited in Gaffar (2008), delineate CRM into three strategic components: (1) *contact management*, which involves systematic tracking of interactions and data, such as updated address records; (2) *campaign management*, which includes scheduling and tracking of marketing activities such as social media promotions; and (3) *data-driven decision making*, where reliable data informs educational and operational decisions.

Previous research, such as Fatoni (2021) and Seeman and O'Hara (2006), emphasized CRM's effectiveness in higher education by improving student-centered services, data handling, and institutional reputation. However, these studies did not fully examine the challenges or provide insights into the complete CRM implementation framework, particularly in religious educational settings. Likewise, Badwan *et al.* (2017) concluded that electronic CRM enhances customer satisfaction and retention, but did not address the complexities involved in its implementation within Islamic institutions.

Implementing CRM within the context of Islamic education presents unique challenges and opportunities. Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School, like many other institutions, must align CRM strategies with its religious values and educational objectives. A contextualized understanding of CRM's potential can significantly enhance the school's efforts in improving recruitment, retention, and the overall student experience.

Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What CRM programs have been implemented by Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School?
2. What are the potential benefits and challenges of CRM implementation within this institution?

3. What strategies can be employed to ensure successful CRM implementation?

Based on these questions, the objectives of this study are:

1. To identify CRM initiatives currently practiced at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School;
2. To explore both the benefits and barriers associated with CRM implementation;
3. To analyze strategic approaches to enable successful CRM adoption in the institutional context.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore and understand the implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School. As defined by Creswell (2014), qualitative methods are employed to explore and comprehend the meaning constructed by individuals or groups in relation to social or human problems. In this study, the selected qualitative strategy is a case study, which allows for a detailed and in-depth examination of a particular program, activity, institution, or group of individuals.

The case study method facilitates the collection of comprehensive data using systematic procedures. Accordingly, this study investigates a specific context—the CRM practices at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School—through various data sources and techniques. Both primary and secondary data were utilized to enrich the analysis. Primary data were gathered through interviews with key stakeholders, including the school principal, the head of the student admission committee, the IT team, teaching staff (*ustadz* and *ustadzah*), current students (*santri*), alumni, and several student guardians (*wali santri*). Secondary data were obtained from institutional documents and related references.

Data Collection

Data collection in this research was conducted through observation, interviews, documentation, and a combination of these methods. Sugiyono (2018) emphasizes that qualitative data can be collected from various settings, sources, and methods. In this case, data collection was performed in a natural setting to ensure contextual accuracy. The researchers applied triangulation by integrating multiple techniques—direct observation of school activities, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and analysis of internal school documents—to ensure data credibility.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, they underwent a multi-step analysis process. The data analysis technique used in this study involved organizing data into categories, describing them into units, synthesizing information, identifying patterns, selecting relevant themes, and drawing conclusions. This process aligns with the framework proposed by Sugiyono (2018), which advocates for a structured approach to make data comprehensible and actionable. The analysis included reducing raw data, presenting them in descriptive formats, interpreting findings, and drawing insights that could support strategic decision-making related to CRM implementation at the institution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CRM Programs at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School

Based on the results of interviews, direct observation, and document analysis, several forms of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) practices have been identified at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School. These initiatives, although still conventional in nature, reflect efforts to maintain and build relationships with students (santri), alumni, and parents (wali santri). The CRM programs identified include:

1. Maintaining a manual database for students and alumni, without any digital or web-based CRM platform.
2. Providing a 15% discount on tuition for male and female students residing in the Cipunagara area, which aligns with the school's geographic location.
3. Offering a 30% discount on monthly fees for two students from the same household who can present a copy of a Family Card (Kartu Keluarga).
4. Implementing special tuition discounts for siblings attending the school simultaneously.
5. Running a Foster Parent Program for orphaned students to ensure continuity of their education.
6. Coordinating with external schools for registration assistance; partner schools receive an incentive of IDR 150,000 per registered student.
7. Awarding special tuition discounts to students who achieve excellence in academic and non-academic fields.

Despite these initiatives, the school has not actively promoted them through social media or its official website. This lack of digital communication has resulted in limited public awareness of the CRM programs.



Figure 1 Instagram Display of Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School
(Accessed April 2024)

The absence of CRM information on social media platforms such as Instagram indicates a promotional gap that undermines the effectiveness of the CRM strategy. As Kusumadewi (2023) explains, digital platforms are essential in the marketing of educational services to ensure institutional sustainability. This observation is supported by Kusumadewi and Ramdan

(2022), who found that the application of the 7P marketing mix at Darussalam Kunir remains suboptimal, particularly in terms of promotion.

Enrollment data from internal school documentation also reveal fluctuations in student numbers over recent years:

Table 1 Number of Students at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School

Academic Year	Number of Students
2021	306
2022	272
2023	288

(Source: Internal documents, 2024)

The figures show a decline in student enrollment from 2021 to 2022, followed by a modest increase in 2023. However, this increase is not considered significant. These trends highlight the urgent need for the school to optimize its CRM approach in order to improve recruitment, retention, and overall institutional competitiveness.

Benefits and Challenges of CRM Implementation

The implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School—although still at an early stage—demonstrates a number of strategic advantages for managing relationships with students, parents, and alumni. These benefits have the potential to improve both internal operations and external perceptions of the institution. However, several structural and technological challenges also hinder the full realization of CRM's potential.

Benefits

1. Strengthening stakeholder trust and student satisfaction

CRM enables the institution to maintain consistent and personalized communication with its stakeholders. By analyzing student needs, preferences, and histories, the school can offer services that meet expectations, which in turn increases satisfaction. A CRM system also facilitates better retention, as it helps identify and address issues before they escalate into dropouts. Satisfied students and families are more likely to continue their affiliation with the school (Seeman & O'Hara, 2006).

2. Promoting institutional growth through network effects

When CRM is effectively implemented, satisfied customers—students, alumni, and guardians—become informal ambassadors who recommend the institution within their social networks. These endorsements enhance the school's public image and attract new students organically.

3. Providing timely and transparent information

CRM supports the dissemination of accurate and up-to-date information to internal and external audiences. By using CRM systems that are integrated with digital technology, schools can efficiently respond to inquiries, publicize academic schedules, tuition programs, and alumni engagement initiatives. This capability helps build credibility and transparency (Rais, 2022).

4. Enhancing operational efficiency

A key feature of CRM is automation. CRM can streamline repetitive administrative tasks, such as student registration, tuition management, attendance records, and communication flows. Although these functions are still handled manually at Darussalam Kunir, future implementation of CRM software would allow the school to allocate human resources more strategically.

5. Enabling data-driven decision-making

With CRM, the institution can collect and analyze data regarding student performance, satisfaction levels, marketing campaign effectiveness, and service delivery. These insights are vital for continuous improvement and strategic planning.

Challenges

Despite its benefits, the implementation of CRM at Darussalam Kunir faces significant challenges, including:

1. Limited technological infrastructure and digital competency

The school currently lacks a well-developed information technology (IT) infrastructure. Its website remains under construction, and there is no dedicated IT team to manage digital platforms or data security.

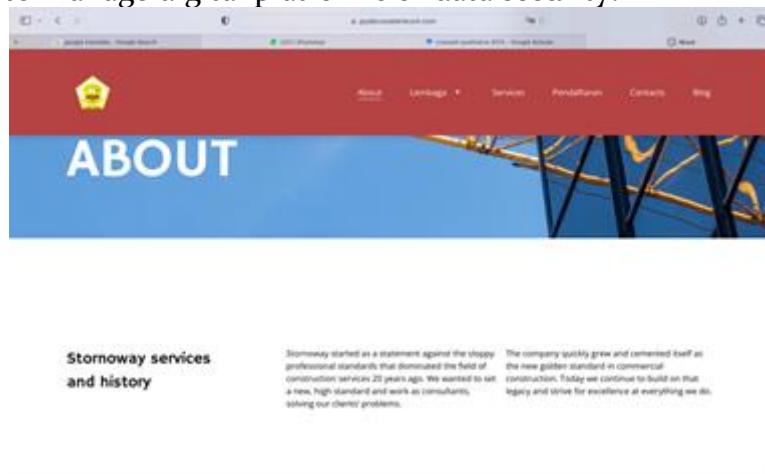


Figure 2 Website Display of Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School
(Accessed April 2024)

2. Lack of real-time and accessible data

CRM requires complete, structured, and updated databases. However, the school's current data system is largely paper-based, making it difficult to implement advanced CRM features such as student tracking, automated messaging, or analytics.

3. Diversity of stakeholder backgrounds

Darussalam Kunir serves a highly diverse population with varied socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. This heterogeneity poses challenges in designing CRM programs that are both inclusive and effective in meeting diverse needs.

4. Competition from other institutions

The emergence of Islamic and private schools offering more sophisticated digital services and scholarship schemes increases the pressure on Darussalam Kunir to improve its offerings. CRM could be a differentiating factor if implemented

properly, but currently, the lack of visibility and digital strategy hampers its effectiveness.

5. Institutional readiness and leadership commitment

Successful CRM adoption requires strong leadership, financial investment, and cultural change. At present, there is insufficient support in terms of budgeting, training, and governance to sustain a CRM initiative.

Strategic Implementation of CRM at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School

For Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School to achieve optimal benefits from Customer Relationship Management (CRM), it is essential to adopt a strategic and systematic implementation approach. Based on field data, literature reviews, and institutional readiness, three primary strategies are proposed to support successful CRM adoption:

1. Development of IT-Based CRM Infrastructure

The first and most urgent step is to build a CRM system that is rooted in the use of digital technology. Currently, the school lacks a functioning website, integrated data systems, and a stable internet network. These limitations obstruct the automation of key CRM features, including data management, campaign tracking, and digital communication with stakeholders.

The integration of digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube can enhance outreach and branding. Furthermore, using WhatsApp Groups (WAG) to facilitate parent-teacher communication—managed by class coordinators—can strengthen relational engagement.

However, infrastructure development should extend beyond connectivity. A fully functional CRM system requires secure data storage, server reliability, integrated platforms, and consistent IT maintenance. Without these components, the system remains vulnerable to data loss, inefficiencies, and cybersecurity threats. This aligns with Rababah *et al.* (2011), who emphasize that people, processes, and technology are the three foundational pillars of successful CRM initiatives.

2. Human Resource Development and Digital Culture Building

A robust CRM system is only as effective as the people who operate it. Therefore, the school must invest in training and capacity-building for teachers, administrative staff, and IT personnel. These training programs should not only cover technical skills, such as CRM software usage and data analytics, but also emphasize the value of digital transformation in education.

In addition to training, it is important to foster an organizational culture that is adaptive to digital innovation. This includes:

1. Developing clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for CRM use;
2. Conducting regular workshops and case-based learning;
3. Involving staff and students in system testing and feedback loops;
4. Providing incentives for innovation and digital engagement.

Leadership development is also critical. Designating CRM coordinators or appointing a dedicated IT task force can ensure continuous improvement and system accountability.

3. Continuous Evaluation and Strategic Monitoring

CRM is not a one-time deployment; it is an ongoing process that requires periodic evaluation and refinement. Evaluations should cover both **quantitative indicators**, such as:

1. Engagement metrics;
2. Retention rates;
3. Response times;
4. Customer satisfaction scores;

and **qualitative insights**, gathered through:

1. Stakeholder surveys;
2. Focus group discussions;
3. Exit interviews with alumni or parents.

These evaluations should be used not only to measure success but also to identify gaps and inform future CRM refinements (Lavenia, 2017; Resya, 2023). A robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system can ensure that CRM stays aligned with institutional goals and responds effectively to evolving stakeholder needs.

Furthermore, CRM systems must be customized to reflect the unique characteristics of the pesantren environment. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach. The system should reflect the size of the school, the diversity of its student body, and the cultural-religious context of Islamic education (Basuki & Cahyani, 2022).

Leadership commitment is also a key driver of success. School management must allocate adequate resources, oversee implementation, and foster collaboration between departments (Nurhidayat, 2024). Without top-level support, CRM systems are likely to fail due to fragmentation, lack of coordination, and insufficient adoption.

Implementing CRM is not merely a technological upgrade—it is a long-term strategic investment in institutional quality, service excellence, and sustainable development. When properly executed, CRM will improve data governance, stakeholder communication, and evidence-based decision-making, ultimately enhancing the educational experience and competitiveness of Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. **CRM programs at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School have been implemented, yet remain suboptimal.** Although various initiatives exist—such as fee discounts, alumni engagement, and localized recruitment incentives—they are not integrated into a centralized system and lack adequate digital and technological support. Most CRM-related activities are still managed manually, with no dedicated IT team or fully operational website.
2. **The implementation of CRM offers numerous strategic benefits,** including strengthened stakeholder trust, improved communication, enhanced data management, operational efficiency, and increased institutional appeal. These benefits align with broader educational goals such as student satisfaction, loyalty, and academic retention.

3. **However, several challenges hinder the effective execution of CRM.** These include the absence of a reliable IT infrastructure, lack of technical human resources, limited financial capacity, and underdeveloped promotional strategies. Additionally, the school faces competitive pressure from other institutions offering more advanced CRM-integrated services.
4. **To ensure the successful implementation of CRM,** Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School must adopt a comprehensive strategy that includes:
 - a. Building an IT-based CRM infrastructure with proper hardware, secure data systems, and integrated platforms;
 - b. Developing human resources through continuous training, leadership development, and digital literacy initiatives;
 - c. Conducting periodic evaluations that include both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights to assess progress and inform improvements.

CRM should not be viewed as a technological tool alone but as a long-term strategic framework that supports institutional resilience, innovation, and service excellence. If implemented effectively, CRM will play a critical role in enhancing the quality of education, institutional competitiveness, and long-term stakeholder engagement at Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed for Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School to enhance the implementation and sustainability of Customer Relationship Management (CRM):

1. **Strengthen the Use of Information Technology (IT)**

The school should prioritize the development of a digital infrastructure that supports CRM integration. This includes:

- a. Building a comprehensive, secure, and user-friendly website;
- b. Establishing a digital student information system (SIS);
- c. Integrating communication channels such as email, WhatsApp, and social media into the CRM system;
- d. Ensuring reliable internet connectivity and server availability.

These improvements will facilitate automation, information accessibility, and better data governance.

2. **Conduct Intensive Training for Human Resources**

All personnel—including administrative staff, teachers, and student services—should receive ongoing training in:

- a. CRM software and data entry practices;
- b. Digital communication tools and etiquette;
- c. Data analysis for decision-making;
- d. Cybersecurity and information ethics.

This will enhance digital literacy and operational efficiency throughout the institution.

3. **Integrate CRM with Other Institutional Systems**

CRM should not operate in isolation. It must be integrated with other administrative systems such as:

- a. Financial information systems (for tuition, donations, and budgeting);

- b. Academic management systems (for grading, attendance, and curriculum tracking);

- c. Alumni networks and outreach platforms.

Integration will ensure data accuracy and streamline cross-departmental processes.

4. Implement Periodic Monitoring and Evaluation

The school should establish a framework for evaluating CRM implementation at regular intervals. Evaluations should include:

- a. Quantitative indicators such as enrollment trends, satisfaction scores, and response times;

- b. Qualitative inputs from students, parents, alumni, and staff through surveys and interviews.

These evaluations will help identify areas for improvement and ensure continuous innovation.

5. Promote Institutional Commitment and Stakeholder Engagement

Leadership must demonstrate active commitment to CRM through:

- a. Clear policy directives and budgeting for CRM projects;

- b. Appointing a dedicated CRM implementation team;

- c. Encouraging collaboration across departments;

- d. Involving parents, alumni, and students in CRM strategy discussions.

Strong institutional support is essential for system adoption and long-term success.

By implementing these recommendations, Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School can maximize the benefits of CRM in building stronger relationships, improving educational services, and securing its position in a competitive educational landscape.

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