

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN BUILDING SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONAL COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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Abstract:

Strategic management is one of the processes of managing an institution that is very interactive and communicative, which can be done adaptively and collaboratively between the components within it. In strategic management, the main factor needed is the role of a leader in coordinating effectively and efficiently in forming and building the environment or culture within it. The purpose of this study is to examine in depth the strategic role and important factors for the progress of an educational institution. The research method used is qualitative, and the technique chosen is literature review. The results of the study are: (1) The concept of strategic management in educational institutions, especially Islamic academic institutions, can be done by preparing a framework that integrates Islamic values with the institution's needs. (2) The role of the principal who plays an active role and acts as a role model in forming an Islamic performance environment, (3) The principal implements the strategic framework that has been prepared seriously and synergizes with stakeholders. It is hoped that with this framework, every educational institution/institution has a frame of reference in implementing work programs effectively and an Islamic work culture to achieve the goals of the institution or institution optimally.

Abstract:

Manajemen strategik merupakan salah satu proses pengelolaan suatu lembaga yang sangat interaktif dan komunikatif, yang dapat dilakukan secara adaptif dan kolaboratif antar komponen di dalamnya. Dalam manajemen strategik, faktor utama yang dibutuhkan adalah peran seorang pemimpin dalam melakukan koordinasi secara efektif dan efisien dalam membentuk dan membangun lingkungan atau budaya di dalamnya. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji secara mendalam peran strategik dan faktor-faktor penting bagi kemajuan suatu lembaga pendidikan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif, dan teknik yang dipilih adalah telaah pustaka. Hasil penelitian adalah: (1) Konsep manajemen strategik pada lembaga pendidikan khususnya lembaga akademik Islam dapat dilakukan dengan menyusun suatu kerangka kerja yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam dengan kebutuhan lembaga. (2) Peran kepala sekolah yang berperan aktif dan bertindak sebagai panutan dalam membentuk lingkungan kinerja Islami, (3) Kepala sekolah mengimplementasikan kerangka kerja strategik yang telah disusun secara sungguh-sungguh dan bersinergi dengan para pemangku kepentingan. Diharapkan dengan adanya kerangka kerja ini, setiap lembaga/institusi pendidikan memiliki kerangka acuan dalam melaksanakan program kerja secara efektif dan budaya kerja Islami untuk mencapai tujuan lembaga atau institusi secara optimal.

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic management is a highly interactive process that requires a leader to coordinate effectively and efficiently. The main activities in management, such as marketing, finance/accounting, production/operations, development, services and information systems are important factors for the progress of an institution/agency, especially educational institutions. Strategic management is an effort to plan or develop a strategic framework through serious thinking from leaders together with stakeholders. The process of implementing the framework must also be monitored and evaluated comprehensively. The success of an Educational Institution can be assessed, among others, from the role or involvement of a principal who acts as a manager who can work together with various functional areas and build teamwork with brilliant and visionary ideas (Altaf Syauqy Iqbal Saifani et al., 2024).

A great principal is a principal who can lead by mobilizing all his energy, thoughts and time to formulate strategic planning for his institution. Principals like this have the talent to see the direction and opportunities in the future. They also have anticipation with accuracy where the direction of community interest is in accordance with the development of the times (Castillo et al., 2024a). The principal plays a role in providing a relationship between the formulation of planning and implementation. Strategic planning is a logical, rational process and method that involves people to achieve set goals (George, 2021). Planning and organization use consistent, efficient, systematic and precise steps to meet goals. Great leaders are able to create and use strong planning in their institutions to cope with all possibilities that will occur (Yarangga et al., 2023).

According to David, the key to organizational success is to coordinate effectively and stand between leaders from all areas within a functional framework. The principal's strategy in building a school/madrasah framework is a very important foundation (Widat et al., 2022). (Lestari et al., 2023), in his research, showed that the quality of education and image of the school/madrasah have a positive influence on increasing the number of students. In other words, the better the quality of education and other comprehensive promotions will have an impact on increasing the number of students. (Qingyan et al., 2023), in his research, stated that good teacher quality, various products, affordable prices, and strategic locations can increase student interest in learning/choosing schools. (A. Fauzi et al., 2021) stated that improving the quality of school services can be done by developing a strategic development plan which includes a vision, mission and goals, as well as programs with a clear division of tasks and framework. The right strategy in improving the quality and promotion of schools can improve the image and number of enthusiasts of a school (Hasanudin et al., 2024). In reality, there are still many schools that do not design strategic plans seriously. There are two possibilities,

namely: the principal does not understand the main tasks and functions inherent in it, and does not know how to compile or create a strategic plan (renstra) for the school organization he leads. This anxiety can be the basis for the importance of a principal to study strategic management comprehensively.

Institutional competitive advantage can be built well if the principal has a systemic, effective, and easy-to-understand framework. The principal should build an organizational culture that focuses on the relevance of strategy formulation in educational institutions and how the development of competitive advantage can become a key element in achieving the desired effectiveness and learning outcomes (Halima & Suprapti, 2022).

Barney in (Adamides & Karacapilidis, 2020) argues that the strategy of educational institutions must be based on the most effective use of assets, capabilities, organizational processes, and other resources owned by the institution or agency. This means that the success of the planned strategy does not only depend on the main position in the educational realm, such as Porter's opinion, which includes cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Through this view, it becomes clear that the strategic approach in educational institutions cannot be separated from the competitive advantage that is built from within. Smart strategy formulation and a deep understanding of the assets owned can open the door to optimal effectiveness and results.

Formulating a strategy for an educational institution or agency becomes essential after the management has a deep understanding of the identity of the institution or agency. Knowing who they are as an educational institution is an important first step, because through this understanding, the uniqueness of the institution can be identified properly and carefully. This uniqueness, which is based on competitive advantage, will then become an attraction for further service to school customers. Thus, the strategy that is built on an understanding of identity and advantage is what provides a strong foundation for achieving the goals of educational effectiveness in the institution and the desired results.

From the explanation above, it is necessary to examine in depth how to formulate a strategy for the principal in building institutional competitive advantages of Islamic Educational Institutions at the elementary and secondary levels in a sustainable manner so that they can be adapted to the progress of the times.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study design to analyze the principal's strategic management in building sustainable institutional competitive advantages in Islamic Educational Institutions (Thoyib et al., 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore complex phenomena in the context of Islamic educational institutions at elementary and secondary levels, which involve several aspects, such as the role of the principal, in building strategies that lead to competitive advantages and strategic steps to

achieve competitive advantages (Thohirin et al., 2024).

This type of research is explorative descriptive research that aims to reveal and understand the phenomena that occur in the field and identify the role of the principal in building the competitive advantage of the institution. This research focuses on the study of several books and articles for data collection through observation, interviews with principals and other related parties, and documentation studies of strategic plans that exist in institutions or institutions (Dian et al., 2023). The validity and credibility of the data in this study were carried out using several data validation techniques aimed at ensuring that the findings obtained were accurate, consistent, and reliable. In this qualitative study, data validity testing was carried out through data credibility, data transferability, data dependability, and data confirmability (Hayashi et al., 2019)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussion present the research results and analysis obtained. Various important facts and phenomena can be further explained in this section. After that, it continued with an in-depth discussion by conveying the findings and pioneering ideas and their significance. The results contain answers to research problems quantitatively and/or qualitatively clearly, precisely, and completely which can use information in the form of images/graphs/tables/descriptions in an actual manner. The discussion contains a summary of the research results, the relationship with concepts or theories and other relevant research results, interpretation of findings, research limitations, and their implications for the development of concepts or science.

The public's desire for educational institutions must be a primary concern that can be realized by managing existing educational institutions properly and in a targeted manner. Institutional decisions taken by leaders in improving the quality of education have a significant contribution to the process of improving the quality and competitiveness of these educational institutions. The ability of a leader to make their institution quality can be measured through institutional empowerment, infrastructure, macroeconomic conditions and situations, health and educational qualifications, training, efficiency of enthusiasts, efficiency of existing resources, technological readiness, social environment, and innovation.

Based on the adaptation of (Rangga Hasibuan et al., 2024) thinking, education as a place for the teaching and learning process needs to set clear criteria following the characteristics and objectives of the Institution in the form of a vision and mission. Several criteria, which can be used as a reference, are the first to be considered including aspects of the significance of the institution, where social benefits are considered significant if the strategy proposal can guarantee compliance with functions that have a real impact on school customers. The second criterion involves specificity or difference, where competitive advantage is achieved if educational institutions can offer different quality and approaches from competitors, creating clear differences that are appreciated by customers. By

understanding and applying these criteria, academic institutions can build strategies that not only meet the needs of school customers, but also provide added value that differentiates them from competitors. Competitive advantages that are chosen wisely, based on clear criteria, can be the foundation for achieving a strong strategic position in the world of education.

Third, strategic advantage in educational institutions must prioritize superior elements from competitors, by providing clear instructions on how these advantages can be obtained and maintained. Fourth, justifiability is a crucial factor, that competitive advantage must be difficult for competitors to imitate. However, in the environment of similar educational institutions, sharing methods and recipes for success is still possible, encouraging joint progress among similar institutions. Fifth, uniqueness of strategy is an important element, guaranteeing long-lasting success and becoming one of the essential conditions for achieving a strong strategic position. Sixth, efficiency related to the implementation of competitive advantages should provide benefits that are also available to customers on the subject of service. This ensures efficiency in the use of resources and supports the sustainability of the strategy implemented by educational institutions.

By understanding and complying with the six criteria above, educational institutions are expected to be able to choose and implement competitive advantages that follow the characteristics of their institutions. This approach will not only increase competitiveness but also help institutions achieve strategic goals more effectively. During an era of global competition, a mature and targeted school development strategy will be the main key to achieving long-term success in the world of education. The steps needed to build institutional competitive advantages are:

Strengthening Leadership Strategy

Competitive Intelligence(CI) is one of the tools in strategic management, which allows institutions or organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This has been tested and researched by exploring the state of Competitive Intelligence (CI) in educational services at SMP Kanisius Jakarta. The purpose of the study was to empirically determine the impact of implementing the CI process in academic institutions for sustainable competitive advantage. The CI process that has been implemented and developed shows a real impact on the competitive advantage of the institution. The CI process that has been implemented and developed shows a real impact on the competitive advantage of the institution. The results obtained indicate that the characteristics of the environment and organization that influence CI efforts, and vice versa, CI efforts affect the use of CI. This study provides implications and recommendations to help the principal as a leader develop a sustainable competitive advantage through the potential offered by CI in educational services. Leadership Strategy is also able to bring about changes in the organizational culture in the school that he leads. The results of the study also show that the competitive intelligence process carried out in educational

institutions has a positive impact on sustainable competitive advantage, which affects its implementation and effectiveness. The main factors that are considered to play a very important role are the environment and organizational culture of the Institution (Supardi & Herawan, 2020).

The above study is in line with Hitt's theory, which states that a leader's strategy can create a quality and effective educational institution. From the results of Prim Masrokan's research, one of the keys to the success of effective schools is effective learning and visionary leaders (M. I. Fauzi et al., 2024). According to Goleman in (Mascareño et al., 2020) Visionary leaders will articulate a goal that for them is the right goal and in line with the shared values of the people they lead. They believe in the vision, they can guide people towards the vision firmly. Visionary leaders have a primary role that must be carried out in carrying out their leadership, namely, as agents of change. Agents of change hold the mandate so that the institutions they lead continue to advance and bring the organization to be well-received by continuing to exist in the community. Not enough that, a visionary leader must be able to coordinate and collaborate with existing human resources to realize the vision that has been created by building trust and providing hope for a bright future for the institution, as in the chart below.

Figure 1 Strategy and Strategic Planning



Source: Slideplayer

Another study that has also been released is research by Agus & Rusdiah, which aims to understand and analyze competitive advantage through the use of human resources to improve competitiveness at MA Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo. This study is based on the fact that madrasahs are the second alternative choice due to the inability of human resources or customer doubts about the ability of teachers at madrasahs. In the data collection process, data is obtained and then collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with the data analysis technique used being the data analysis technique suggested by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and verification. The study found that strategic human resource management in improving competitive advantage at MA Nurul Jadid, which is attempted, namely: 1) formulation of HR policies and procedures; 2) development and training; 3) integrated performance

management, and 4) periodic evaluation and adjustment. Strategic human resource management, including policy formulation, development, training, and performance management, improves competitive advantage in educational institutions such as MA Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo (Agus R & Rusdiah, 2024).

From the results of the research above, with a literature review, the author can conduct an analysis and study further about the HR factors that have an important role in building a competitive advantage. As the theory explained by Burt, today's leaders must have a brilliant strategy for the progress of their institutions in the future. The formulated strategy will be successful if it is designed and formulated strategically and implemented seriously. The concept of strategic management and strategic leadership can be presented in the chart below:

Figure 2 Strategy and Strategic Planning



Source: Slideplayer

Strategy Competitiveness Above-Average Return, which are implemented, are strategic actions that can create institutional competitive advantages, so that the role of a principal who has a strategic plan in building institutional advantages can be implemented optimally. This is by the explanation Muhammad Walid said that in education there is a process of actions or deeds carried out consciously so that there is a change in attitude and behavior by the values taught through a strong and civilized character education framework for both leaders and all of their citizens (framework of strong nation's character and civilization) (Walid & Uyun, 2020).

Prepare Strategic Steps

Strategic management, which includes the process of three organizational activities that need to be studied, namely: strategy development, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation (Wohlgezogen, 2021). Strategic management is more about developing a business or organization. Strategic planning decisions bind companies or organizations with certain products, markets, resources, and technologies over time. However, with the development of Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs today, a competent strategy formulation is needed in managing Islamic educational institutions. Strategy itself creates long-term competitive advantages. Whatever happens, strategic decisions have a

significant functional and long-term impact on an Islamic educational institution. Implementing a strategy requires an educational institution to set annual goals, provide guidelines, motivate teachers and employees, and allocate resources so that the formulated strategy can be implemented (Faizin, 2023).

In formulating institutional strategies in this case, Educational Institutions, a principal should be able to plan the steps to be taken. One way is by developing David's Strategic Management (Castillo et al., 2024b), which includes: 1) Identify the environment you want to enter and determine the organization's mission to achieve the vision you have created. 2) Conduct internal and external environmental analysis to measure the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by the organization in fulfilling its mission. 3) Formulate important success factors of the strategy designed based on previous analysis. 4) Determine measurable goals and objectives, consider available resources and external conditions, and evaluate alternative strategies. 5) Choose the most appropriate strategy to achieve short-term and long-term goals.

The five steps above can ultimately determine the competitive advantage that will be owned and become the characteristic of an Educational Institution. The five analyses explained by David are able to become one of the efforts of leaders and stakeholders to build competitive advantage from within the Institution.

In line with the above steps, the results of Alfawaire and Atan's research have found that the higher education sector faces quite a lot of competition worldwide. Therefore, universities need to make more efforts to improve their competitive advantage. Organizational innovation, knowledge management, and strategic management of human resources have a positive impact on sustainable competitive advantage in Jordanian universities. The study aims to measure and empirically examine the effect of Organizational Innovation (OI), Knowledge Management (KM), and Strategic Management of Human Resources (SHRM), on Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA) in Jordanian Universities. For this purpose, a specially designed questionnaire was distributed to study a convenience sample of 400 academic and administrative staff in Jordanian private and public universities, to obtain the necessary quantitative data. The hypothesis of this study was verified by the Baron and Kenny mediation regression approach using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The results of the study indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between the following pairs of variables: KM and SCA; SHRM and SCA; SHRM and OI; KM and OI; and OI and SCA, while OI was found to have a partial and indirect significant mediation effect on the direct relationship between KM and SHRM and universities (organizations) acquiring SCA. Finally, it is concluded that more attention needs to be paid to the OI aspect in organizations and integrate it with KM and SHRM in a way that promotes SCA. In addition, we propose that similar studies should be conducted in the education industry or education sectors in different countries in a way to obtain general and representative results (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021).

From the explanation above, the author can provide an overview that the

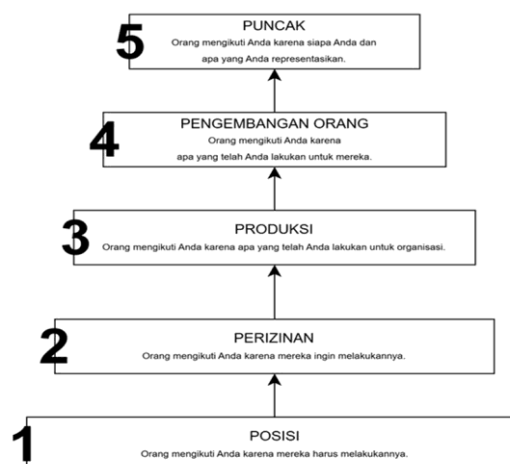
leader of an Islamic educational institution, in this case the principal, must be able to develop his/her managerial competence well and comprehensively, focusing on Leadership Strategy. This development can be done through a strategy for developing learning opportunities, a strategy for quality control, and a strategy for increasing knowledge and information competence efficiently. Leaders who can manage existing resources well and in a focused manner will be able to realize the ideals of the Institution together (Han et al., 2021).

Principals who strive to make their institutions have a competitive advantage must have the ability or competence to build and form the characteristics of resources in the Institution. How to make teachers have higher performance and loyalty, and students who have a high love for the Institution. Not only that, the principal should know the factors that influence the success of the planned strategy, and it will be implemented within an appropriate and mutually agreed framework.

Level Leadership Stages

John Maxwell, in his book titled "The Five Levels of Leadership," explores the various stages of leadership. Maxwell explains the advantages, disadvantages, and best behaviors for each level. He further explains the principles that help a leader move to the next level, and their relationship to the laws of leadership (Maxwell, 2014).

Figure 3 The 5 Levels of Leadership



Source: WordPress.com

Having "Rights" as an entry level. Maxwell suggests that the position/position is the lowest level of leadership, or the beginner level, is at 1. At this level, a leader is often called a boss and will not be considered a leader. They have subordinates, but not team members. The boss relies on rules, regulations, policies, and organizational structures to control subordinates. In educational institutions, many principals act as "Bosses". At this level, teachers will only follow what the principal says because they must be within the limits of their stated authority. The "Position/position" level is the only level that does not require ability and effort to

achieve it. (Maxwell, 2013). The principal can be appointed by the Foundation or a designated community figure. This means that anyone can be nominated to become a principal. And this often happens in private schools/madrasas, so it can hinder the progress of the institution itself.

Permission: based on influence or relationship from the “position” level to the Permission level. This means that it is the first real step towards leadership. Leadership is influence built on relationships; thus, when a leader learns to function at the Permission level, followers not only act by command but also begin to follow. They follow because they want to, since the leader begins to influence members by relationship, not just by position. When a principal shows concern for teachers and staff, involves them in decision making, values their opinions When deliberates in a meeting forum, builds trust, and works together as a strong team, then these conditions can become energy in the entire work environment.

Production based on results. At the production level, leaders make a significant impact on the organization by obtaining results. Leaders at this level are more productive and able to help team members who produce as well. The level of production owned by the principal in obtaining achievements for teachers and students will bring a good image of the Institution in the community. This cannot be faked because a leader who truly produces for the organization will be able to be assessed by his environment. On the other hand, if the principal fails and is considered not to produce results, the trust of subordinates/teachers and even parents of students will decrease. In reality, many principals are only at levels 1 and 2 and find it difficult to move to level 3. A principal who has been in office for too long will find it difficult to produce results because they lose their creativity and are in a comfort zone. So that at some point there will be a turning point that lowers the image of the Institution and the public's interest in the school.

Human Resource Development through Reproduction. At this level, leaders transition from producers to developers. Leaders must be able to develop existing resources because they are strategic assets for the organization. Good leaders devote their time, energy, money, and thoughts to grow and develop their competencies. Maxwell also shows that leaders at the human resource development level are more about leadership methods to make changes to achieve goals together. Principals who are able to pay more attention to developing existing human resources will be able to bring about changes and improvements in the quality of the Institution because the growth of its potential will produce brilliant achievements. Maxwell provides a formulation that 20% of leaders should place a burden on individual productivity, but 80% focus on team development productivity together.

The Peak Level of Leadership is Respected. This is rare and only a few reach this level, the Pinnacle. This level of leaders is not only experienced in leading at the other four steps, but also has the talent to manage the organization and everything in it well and wisely. Principals at this level have several natural leadership skills. Individuals who reach Level Five, The Pinnacle, can lead very well for a longer

period. These leaders can provide and teach their leadership model in the organizations they serve. Leadership at this level will bring all members of the organization together and create a favorable environment for all so that they can contribute to achieving success together (Ismatul Izzah, 2025; Maxwell, 2014)

Maxwell's five levels of leadership offer a comprehensive framework for evaluating school principals' leadership effectiveness. Beginning with the foundational level of Position, where authority is granted by title, effective leadership requires progression through increasingly impactful stages: Permission (relationship-based influence), Production (results-oriented leadership), People Development (empowering others), and finally, Pinnacle (leadership by respect and legacy). Each level represents a deeper and more sustainable form of influence. For school principals to drive meaningful and lasting improvements in their institutions, it is essential that they move beyond positional authority and cultivate authentic relationships, deliver measurable outcomes, invest in developing human resources, and ultimately become role models who inspire and transform their educational environments.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the pivotal role of school principals as strategic leaders in fostering sustainable institutional competitive advantage within educational institutions. Through the application of strategic management principles, principals are not only tasked with operational oversight but are also responsible for formulating long-term visions, mobilizing resources, and implementing innovative strategies that align with institutional goals and environmental demands. The research identifies four key components that form the foundation of strategic leadership: strengthening leadership strategies, developing human resources, designing strategic actions, and enhancing leadership capacity across institutional levels.

These interconnected elements contribute significantly to the institution's ability to adapt, compete, and thrive in a dynamic educational landscape. The findings underscore that sustainable competitive advantage is not an incidental outcome, but a deliberate product of visionary leadership and systematic strategic planning. Thus, the effectiveness of school management in the current era is largely determined by the principal's capacity to act as a strategic change agent, one who not only responds to challenges but also anticipates and shapes the future of the institution. This study affirms that strategic leadership is a critical determinant of institutional success, sustainability, and educational excellence.

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