



Strategic Leadership of Madrasah Principals in Strengthening Institutional Image and Enhancing Community Interest

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Abstract: This study examines the strategic leadership of madrasah principals in strengthening institutional image and enhancing community interest through a multisite investigation conducted at MAN 1 Jombang and MAN 1 Mojokerto, East Java, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative multisite case study design, the research explored how principals formulate, implement, and evaluate strategic initiatives that contribute to institutional competitiveness and sustainable public trust. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis involving principals, vice principals, teachers, students, parents, and institutional documents. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including within-site and cross-site analyses, while trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability procedures. The findings reveal that strategic formulation emphasizes competitiveness through environmental analysis, institutional vision, flagship programme development, benchmarking, and stakeholder-oriented planning. Strategy implementation is characterized by the integration of competitive strength, competitive area, and competitive result, supported by selective student recruitment, curriculum innovation, teacher professionalism, service excellence, digital communication, and community partnerships. Furthermore, strategic evaluation is conducted collaboratively through continuous performance assessment, stakeholder participation, gap analysis, quality assurance, and programme revision to ensure sustainable institutional improvement. Cross-site synthesis demonstrates that strengthening institutional image is not merely the result of promotional activities but emerges from an integrated strategic management process linking strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The study proposes a conceptual strategic management model that contributes to educational leadership literature by positioning institutional competitiveness as the primary mechanism through which strategic leadership enhances institutional image and community interest in Islamic secondary education.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, Institutional Image, Community Interest, Madrasah Principal, Strategic Management, Multisite Case Study.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has fundamentally transformed the way educational institutions communicate, compete, and establish their public reputation. Digital transformation has shifted public access to educational information from conventional media toward digital platforms, enabling prospective students and parents to evaluate school quality through websites, social media, online news, and digital reviews. Consequently, educational institutions are no longer evaluated solely based on academic achievement but also on their ability to build a positive institutional image that reflects quality, innovation, and public trust.



This phenomenon has intensified competition among schools and madrasahs, requiring educational leaders to adopt strategic approaches that integrate educational quality with institutional branding. In this context, the principal or madrasah head assumes a pivotal role in formulating strategic policies capable of strengthening institutional competitiveness while simultaneously attracting greater public interest. This condition is increasingly evident in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions, where competition extends beyond academic performance to include institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and the ability to communicate educational excellence effectively.

Institutional image has increasingly become one of the most influential intangible assets in educational management. A positive image enhances public confidence, encourages parental engagement, strengthens stakeholder relationships, and contributes significantly to student recruitment. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasize that organizational image represents the cumulative perception held by stakeholders regarding an institution's credibility and value proposition. Within educational settings, this image is shaped not only by learning outcomes but also by leadership quality, educational services, infrastructure, student achievements, organizational culture, and effective public communication. Likewise, Qomar (2007) argues that public relations constitute an essential managerial function responsible for developing mutually beneficial relationships between educational institutions and society, thereby strengthening institutional legitimacy and sustainability. These perspectives suggest that image management should not be perceived merely as promotional activity but rather as a strategic leadership responsibility embedded within educational governance.

Recent studies demonstrate that institutional branding significantly influences school competitiveness and public decision-making. Research by Chapman et al. (2022) found that educational branding positively affects parents' trust and school selection decisions through perceptions of educational quality and institutional credibility. Similarly, Hallinger (2020) emphasizes that strategic school leadership has shifted from internal instructional management toward external stakeholder engagement, where school leaders actively shape institutional reputation through collaborative governance and effective communication. In Indonesia, studies on educational marketing also indicate that institutional image contributes substantially to



increasing enrolment rates, particularly in highly competitive educational environments. These findings reinforce the notion that branding has evolved into a strategic component of educational leadership rather than merely a marketing instrument.

Madrasahs face unique challenges in developing institutional image because they operate within dual expectations of maintaining Islamic educational values while simultaneously demonstrating academic excellence and innovation. Unlike commercial organizations, madrasahs must communicate not only educational quality but also religious identity, moral values, and community service. Consequently, the success of branding initiatives depends largely on leadership strategies capable of integrating educational innovation, organizational culture, stakeholder participation, and digital communication into coherent institutional policies. As educational leaders, madrasah principals are expected to formulate strategic visions, mobilize organizational resources, encourage innovation, and establish sustainable partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. Such leadership determines whether institutional strengths can be transformed into a positive public image that ultimately influences community interest in choosing particular educational institutions.

Community interest in selecting educational institutions is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including institutional reputation, perceived educational quality, service satisfaction, peer recommendations, alumni success, and digital information dissemination. Previous marketing literature explains that purchase intention—or, within educational contexts, enrolment intention—is strongly associated with organizational image and stakeholder trust. Corporate image mediates the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), customer experience, and institutional credibility on decision-making processes. Similar patterns occur in education, where parents increasingly rely on online information, social media content, institutional websites, and public reviews before deciding where to enrol their children. Therefore, strengthening institutional image through systematic communication strategies becomes an indispensable component of educational management in the digital era.

Several empirical studies have examined educational marketing, school branding, public relations, and leadership effectiveness separately. However, existing literature rarely integrates strategic leadership processes with institutional image development and community interest within



Islamic senior secondary education. Most previous studies focus primarily on marketing practices, customer satisfaction, educational services, or public relations without comprehensively exploring how madrasah principals formulate, implement, and evaluate institutional image strategies across different organizational contexts. Moreover, comparative multisite investigations remain relatively limited despite their potential to reveal contextual similarities and distinctive leadership practices among high-performing madrasahs. This gap indicates the necessity for research that simultaneously investigates strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation of institutional image development as an integrated leadership process.

The present study addresses this gap by conducting a multisite investigation at MAN 1 Jombang and MAN 1 Mojokerto, two public Islamic senior secondary schools recognized for their academic achievements, innovative educational programs, and consistently high student enrolment. Both institutions demonstrate strong institutional competitiveness reflected in diverse flagship programs, outstanding academic and non-academic achievements, broad community recognition, and sustained public trust. These characteristics provide valuable opportunities to understand how strategic leadership contributes to institutional image formation and increasing community interest under different organizational contexts.

Accordingly, the novelty of this research lies in the development of a comprehensive understanding of madrasah leadership strategies by integrating strategic management, institutional branding, and community engagement within a multisite qualitative framework. Unlike previous studies that emphasize marketing or public relations independently, this research conceptualizes institutional image as a strategic outcome of leadership processes involving policy formulation, implementation mechanisms, and continuous evaluation. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how madrasah principals formulate, implement, and evaluate strategic initiatives to enhance institutional image and strengthen community interest in two leading public madrasahs in East Java. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to educational leadership literature and practically to the development of strategic management models for strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions.

METHODS



Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a multisite case study design to explore the strategic leadership practices implemented by madrasah principals in strengthening institutional image and enhancing community interest in public Islamic secondary education. The qualitative paradigm was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of complex social and organizational phenomena by examining participants' experiences, interpretations, and interactions within their natural institutional settings rather than testing predetermined hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Such an approach facilitates comprehensive exploration of leadership processes, organizational dynamics, and contextual factors that shape institutional reputation and public trust.

The selection of a multisite case study design was based on the intention to investigate similar leadership phenomena across two educational institutions with comparable organizational characteristics but distinct contextual conditions. According to Yin (2018), multisite case studies enable researchers to compare findings across different settings, thereby enhancing analytical generalization through the identification of recurring patterns and contextual variations. Similarly, Stake (2006) argues that multiple-case inquiry provides richer theoretical insights by examining similarities and differences across cases while preserving the uniqueness of each institutional context. Consequently, this study focused on analysing how principals formulate, implement, and evaluate strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening institutional image, increasing stakeholder confidence, and improving student enrolment.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at MAN 1 Jombang and MAN 1 Mojokerto, two prominent public Islamic senior secondary schools located in East Java Province, Indonesia. Both institutions were selected through purposive sampling because they have consistently demonstrated outstanding institutional performance, educational innovation, and high levels of public demand for student admission. Furthermore, both madrasahs have successfully developed institutional branding strategies that integrate academic excellence, religious education, vocational competencies, and community engagement.



MAN 1 Jombang has implemented an integrated educational system comprising academic and vocational programmes in Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Religious Studies, Language Studies, Culinary Arts, Fashion Design, and Multimedia. To reinforce institutional competitiveness, the madrasah has introduced several flagship programmes, including the Madrasah Literacy Movement (GEMALIS MANSAJO), student scientific research initiatives, Qur'an memorization programmes (Tahfiz), entrepreneurship education, and diverse extracurricular activities. Student recruitment is further strengthened through regular admission mechanisms and a Golden Ticket pathway designed to attract high-achieving prospective students.

Similarly, MAN 1 Mojokerto has established various innovative educational programmes, including the Semester Credit System (Sistem Kredit Semester/SKS), the Religious Excellence Programme (MAN Program Keagamaan), and vocational education in Mechatronics Engineering, Visual Communication Design, Culinary Arts, Fashion Design, and Beauty Studies. The institution is additionally supported by Ma'had Al-Hanif, an Islamic boarding facility that complements formal education through intensive religious instruction and character development. Both institutions actively disseminate institutional achievements and educational programmes through official websites, digital media, and social networking platforms, thereby strengthening public visibility and institutional reputation. These characteristics rendered the two madrasahs appropriate research settings for examining leadership strategies in institutional image development.

Participants and Data Sources

Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they possessed substantial experience, authority, and knowledge regarding institutional leadership, educational management, strategic planning, and public relations. Purposive sampling enables qualitative researchers to identify information-rich participants capable of providing comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015).

The primary human data sources consisted of principals, vice principals, teachers, students, and parents. At MAN 1 Jombang, interviews were conducted with the principal, the vice principal for public relations, and the vice principal for student affairs. At MAN 1 Mojokerto, participants included the principal and the vice principal for curriculum. Additional perspectives were obtained



from teachers, students, and parents to capture diverse stakeholder perceptions concerning institutional image, educational quality, and community trust.

Secondary data were obtained from documentary sources, including institutional strategic plans, school profiles, annual reports, accreditation reports, student enrolment statistics, institutional achievement records, promotional materials, policy documents, meeting minutes, official correspondence, archival records, and digital publications available through institutional websites and social media platforms. Documentary evidence served not only to complement interview and observational data but also to enhance data triangulation and strengthen the credibility of the research findings (Bowen, 2009).

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary qualitative techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The integration of multiple data collection methods enabled methodological triangulation and facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

Semi-structured interviews constituted the principal method of data collection. This technique provided sufficient flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while allowing the researcher to maintain consistency across interview sessions. Interview questions focused on strategic leadership practices related to institutional planning, implementation of branding programmes, stakeholder engagement, promotion strategies, and evaluation mechanisms employed to strengthen institutional image and increase community participation.

Participant observation was conducted throughout institutional activities to examine leadership practices, organizational culture, educational programmes, public relations activities, stakeholder interactions, and school promotional events within their natural settings. Observational data enabled the researcher to document behavioural patterns and institutional practices that were not always explicitly articulated during interviews.

Document analysis was undertaken to examine institutional strategic plans, annual reports, accreditation documents, promotional brochures, student admission records, achievement reports, official correspondence, photographs, social media publications, and other institutional archives relevant to the research objectives. The integration of interviews, observations, and documentary



evidence facilitated data triangulation, thereby enhancing the depth, consistency, and credibility of the findings (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analytical framework developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which comprises four interconnected processes: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These analytical activities were iterative rather than linear, occurring continuously throughout the research process.

Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, coding, categorizing, and interpreting raw qualitative data into meaningful analytical units. The coding process was performed inductively through repeated examination of interview transcripts, observational field notes, and documentary evidence to identify emerging themes associated with strategic leadership, institutional branding, stakeholder engagement, and community trust.

Subsequently, the condensed data were systematically organized through narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, comparison tables, and conceptual displays to facilitate interpretation and identify relationships among categories. Data display enabled the researcher to compare patterns across participants and institutional contexts while maintaining the integrity of the original empirical evidence.

The final analytical stage consisted of conclusion drawing and verification. Emerging interpretations were continuously examined against multiple sources of evidence through iterative comparison and analytical reflection. This verification process ensured that theoretical interpretations remained firmly grounded in empirical data and accurately represented participants' experiences.

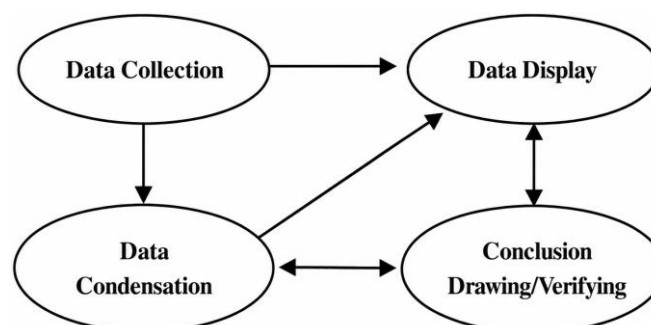


Figure 1. Interactive Model of Qualitative Data Analysis (Miles et al., 2020)



Given the multisite nature of this investigation, data analysis was undertaken in two sequential stages. The first stage involved within-site analysis, whereby data collected from MAN 1 Jombang and MAN 1 Mojokerto were analysed independently to identify institutional characteristics, leadership strategies, and emerging themes unique to each research setting.

The second stage comprised cross-site analysis, during which findings from both institutions were systematically compared to identify similarities, differences, contextual influences, and transferable leadership practices. Cross-site synthesis facilitated the refinement of conceptual categories and contributed to the development of broader theoretical propositions regarding strategic leadership for strengthening institutional image within Islamic secondary education (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018).

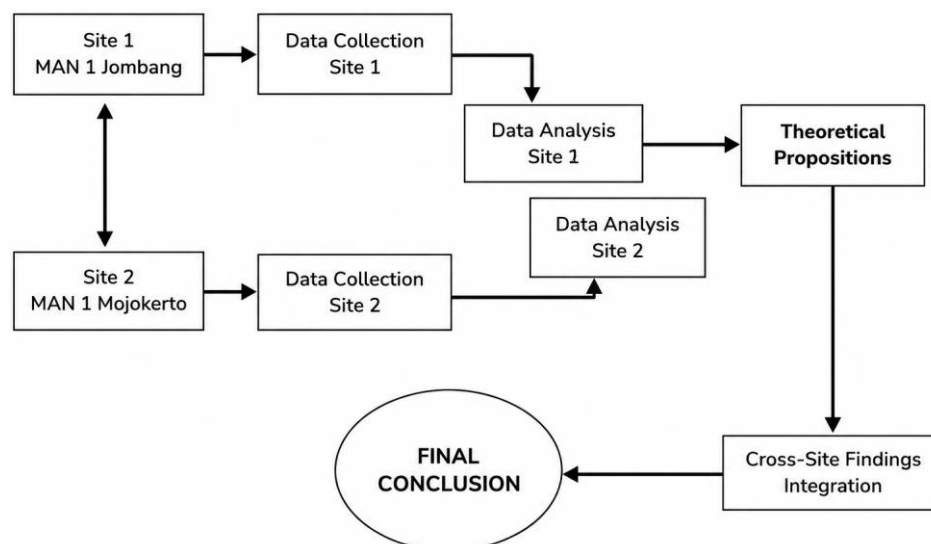


Figure 2. Cross-Site Analysis Procedure

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established following the evaluative framework proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four criteria were systematically addressed to ensure the rigor and integrity of the qualitative inquiry.

Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement in the research settings, persistent observation, member checking, peer debriefing, methodological triangulation, source triangulation, and the use of adequate referential materials. Source triangulation involved



comparing information obtained from principals, vice principals, teachers, students, parents, observations, and documentary evidence. Methodological triangulation was achieved by comparing findings generated through interviews, participant observations, and document analysis to ensure consistency across multiple forms of evidence.

Transferability was strengthened through the provision of rich, contextualized descriptions of the research settings, institutional characteristics, participant profiles, and leadership practices, thereby enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational contexts. Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of a comprehensive audit trail documenting research procedures, data collection activities, coding decisions, analytical processes, and methodological reflections. Finally, confirmability was achieved by maintaining reflexive field notes, preserving documentary evidence, and continuously verifying interpretations against empirical data to minimize researcher bias and ensure that findings accurately reflected participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strategic Formulation for Strengthening Institutional Image and Community Interest

The findings of this study reveal that the formulation of strategies for strengthening institutional image and increasing community interest primarily focused on enhancing the competitiveness of the madrasah at the local, regional, and national levels. The rapid growth of public and private madrasahs has intensified competition among educational institutions, providing parents with increasingly diverse educational choices. Consequently, institutional competitiveness has become an important determinant of community interest in selecting educational institutions. Participants explained that institutional image is no longer established solely through promotional activities but is primarily developed through educational quality, institutional performance, and sustainable competitive advantages.

The findings indicate that parents' decisions to enroll their children in a madrasah are influenced by several factors, including educational quality, learning facilities, graduate achievements, accessibility, and educational costs. These findings suggest that institutional image develops from stakeholders' perceptions of the overall educational experience rather than from



promotional activities alone. This finding is consistent with the marketing perspective proposed by Kotler and Armstrong (2012), who argue that brand image significantly influences consumer preferences and organizational loyalty. Likewise, Cheung and Thadani (2010) explain that electronic word-of-mouth has become an increasingly influential factor in shaping public perceptions and decision-making processes in the digital era. In the context of Islamic education, Roziqin and Rozaq (2018) emphasize that institutional accreditation, teacher professionalism, student behaviour, flagship programmes, student achievement, graduate quality, and alumni networks collectively contribute to strengthening the institutional image of madrasahs.

The study further found that enhancing institutional competitiveness requires comprehensive strategic planning supported by competitive advantages. Participants stated that madrasahs should continuously improve organizational productivity while developing both comparative and competitive advantages to remain attractive in an increasingly competitive educational environment. Comparative advantage enables educational institutions to maximize their existing resources, whereas competitive advantage reflects their ability to provide educational services that are superior to those offered by competing institutions. These findings support Porter's theory of competitive advantage (Porter), which emphasizes that organizational sustainability depends on the ability to create unique value compared with competitors. Similarly, Tambunan argues that competitiveness reflects an institution's capability to transform available resources into strategic strengths that generate long-term organizational performance (Tambunan). Furthermore, the Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 41 of 2007 concerning Process Standards states that educational institutions should possess distinctive excellence capable of producing educational outcomes that are better, faster, and more meaningful than those of competing institutions.

Another important finding concerns the translation of the institutional vision, mission, and objectives into competitive flagship programmes. Participants explained that the vision and mission function as strategic guidelines directing institutional development and organizational decision-making. Rather than remaining formal statements, they are translated into measurable educational programmes designed to strengthen institutional competitiveness and public trust. These findings support the strategic management framework proposed by Wahyudi (1996), who



argues that strategic formulation involves developing organizational missions, identifying opportunities and threats, analysing institutional strengths and weaknesses, and selecting appropriate strategic alternatives. Likewise, Akdon explains that effective strategic management begins with establishing institutional vision and mission, understanding organizational environments, and positioning institutions strategically to ensure long-term sustainability (Akdon, 2011).

The findings also demonstrate that strategic formulation was closely associated with identifying changing community expectations. Participants reported that parents increasingly prefer educational institutions capable of integrating Islamic values with science, technology, and twenty-first-century competencies. Consequently, the participating madrasahs continuously analysed community preferences before introducing new educational programmes. Community interest was found to be influenced by institutional accreditation, teacher professionalism, student discipline, flagship programmes, academic achievement, graduate quality, and alumni reputation (Roziqin & Rozaq, 2018). To respond to these expectations, both institutions adopted diversification and differentiation strategies by developing unique educational programmes that distinguished them from competing schools.

Another significant finding indicates that competitive benchmarking formed an integral component of strategic formulation. The principals regularly studied successful practices implemented by leading madrasahs throughout Indonesia and adapted these practices according to their institutional contexts. Benchmarking was viewed not as imitation but as a continuous organizational learning process aimed at improving educational quality and institutional performance. These findings support Zayadi (2005), who argues that institutional excellence depends upon the integration of educational inputs, instructional processes, professional teachers, management systems, and supporting facilities. Similarly, Thoifur (2008) explains that excellence programmes are designed to produce students with higher educational quality and stronger institutional competitiveness.

Finally, the findings indicate that strategic formulation incorporated breakthrough strategies, gap analysis, and branding-oriented programme development. Rather than maintaining conventional educational programmes, both institutions continuously evaluated programme



relevance by identifying obsolete practices, emerging educational opportunities, and changing community needs. New programmes were introduced only after demonstrating their potential to strengthen institutional reputation and increase public trust. This continuous improvement approach supports the perspective of Bafadal (2006), who emphasizes that educational excellence requires adequate facilities, professional human resources, and sustainable institutional development. Likewise, Qomar (2007) argues that flagship programmes should reflect a shared institutional vision capable of encouraging the participation of all educational stakeholders. Therefore, this study concludes that strategic formulation for strengthening institutional image should be understood as an integrated strategic management process combining competitiveness, educational innovation, stakeholder expectations, and sustainable institutional branding.

Strategy Implementation for Strengthening Institutional Image and Community Interest

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of strategies for strengthening the institutional image of the madrasah was carried out through the systematic development of organizational competitive strengths. The principals emphasized that institutional competitiveness is not merely reflected in promotional activities but is primarily demonstrated through the quality of educational services, organizational management, human resources, curriculum innovation, and stakeholder engagement. This finding indicates that institutional image is the outcome of sustainable organizational performance that consistently delivers educational value to students, parents, and the wider community. Consequently, the implementation of strategic management was directed toward creating a competitive educational environment capable of differentiating the madrasah from other educational institutions.

The first implementation strategy identified in this study concerns the development of competitive strengths through a selective student admission system. Both participating madrasahs implemented multiple admission pathways, including achievement-based, affirmative, and regular admission schemes. The achievement pathway emphasized academic and non-academic excellence through document verification and interviews, while the affirmative pathway provided educational opportunities for economically disadvantaged students with strong learning potential. This strategy reflects the institutional commitment to maintaining educational quality while ensuring equitable access to education. According to Maimun and Fitri (2010), one of the



fundamental characteristics of an excellent madrasah is the implementation of a rigorous and accountable student selection process capable of identifying learners with high academic potential. Such an admission system contributes significantly to institutional reputation because educational quality is strongly influenced by the quality of student input (Maimun & Fitri, 2010). Furthermore, competitive organizational strength is fundamentally derived from valuable institutional resources that enable organizations to generate sustainable competitive advantages (Wandrial, 2011).

Another important finding concerns future-oriented institutional development through continuous improvement of educational facilities, professional human resources, and learning environments. The participating madrasahs consistently invested in digital learning infrastructure, achievement-supporting facilities, and comfortable educational environments to enhance the overall learning experience. These investments were complemented by the development of professional teachers through the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based lesson planning, team-based learning, lesson study, peer teaching, and data-driven instructional evaluation. Participants emphasized that teacher professionalism represents one of the most influential factors in strengthening institutional competitiveness because teachers directly determine instructional quality and student achievement. These findings support Maimun and Fitri's (2010) assertion that excellent educational institutions require highly professional teachers who possess strong pedagogical competence, subject mastery, and organizational commitment. Likewise, organizational image is significantly influenced by educational quality, teacher professionalism, student behaviour, and institutional achievements, all of which contribute to positive public perceptions of educational institutions (Roziqin & Rozaq, 2018).

The study also found that curriculum innovation constituted a major strategy for strengthening institutional competitiveness. Rather than relying solely on the national curriculum, both madrasahs developed curriculum enrichment programmes emphasizing local wisdom, twenty-first-century competencies, digital literacy, boarding education, and character development. The curriculum was further supported by continuous quality improvement programmes, integrated service systems, standardized operating procedures, and intensive religious activities aimed at strengthening students' academic and moral development. These findings are consistent with the characteristics of excellent madrasahs proposed by Maimun and



Fitri (2010), who argue that curriculum innovation, extended learning opportunities, and responsible educational processes represent essential dimensions of institutional excellence. Similarly, research conducted by Rahman et al. (2016) demonstrates that positive educational experiences communicated through word-of-mouth significantly enhance institutional brand image. This relationship is further reinforced by Roziqin and Rozaq (2018), who identify institutional accreditation, flagship programmes, student achievement, graduate quality, and alumni engagement as major determinants of institutional branding within Islamic educational institutions.

Another significant implementation strategy involved strengthening institutional services and communication with stakeholders. The findings indicate that both madrasahs established transparent academic information systems, organized regular parent–teacher consultations, and developed integrated complaint-handling mechanisms to improve stakeholder satisfaction. Beyond internal services, the institutions also strengthened relationships with surrounding communities through educational outreach programmes, community service activities, and religious partnerships. Educational marketing was further reinforced through systematic publication of student achievements, open-house programmes, and data-driven reporting of students' learning progress. These findings support Mundiri's (2016) argument that institutional branding should be developed through continuous public engagement, educational events, community participation, and systematic dissemination of institutional achievements. Building institutional awareness, recognition, and perceived quality requires consistent communication strategies capable of creating positive educational experiences for stakeholders.

The implementation of competitiveness strategies also extended to strengthening institutional competition areas through the development of distinctive flagship programmes. The participating madrasahs introduced research classes, Tahfidz programmes, Olympiad classes, Adiwiyata environmental education, digital literacy initiatives, robotics, journalism, entrepreneurship, visual communication design, culinary education, and fashion programmes. These programmes were complemented by extensive extracurricular activities and promotional strategies reaching communities beyond the local district. Such diversification reflects an institutional strategy to address diverse educational needs while simultaneously strengthening



organizational differentiation. Syadzili and Zulfa (2022) argue that educational institutions should accurately identify their competitive domains to formulate effective institutional development strategies. Likewise, Bafadal (2006) emphasizes that educational excellence requires adequate facilities, professional educators, and sufficient financial support, while Qomar (2007) argues that flagship programmes should consistently reflect the institution's long-term educational vision. The present findings also corroborate Asrori's (2018) study, which concluded that stakeholder trust is strengthened through strategic student recruitment, flagship programme development, systematic performance evaluation, and collaborative partnerships.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the implementation of strategic management in the participating madrasahs extends beyond improving institutional visibility. Instead, it represents a comprehensive process integrating competitive student recruitment, professional teacher development, curriculum innovation, service excellence, stakeholder engagement, and flagship programme development. These integrated strategies collectively strengthened institutional competitiveness, enhanced public trust, and reinforced the institutional image of the madrasah as a high-quality Islamic educational institution capable of competing at regional and national levels.

Strategy Evaluation for Strengthening Institutional Image and Community Interest

The findings of this study demonstrate that the evaluation of strategies for strengthening the institutional image of the madrasah was implemented as a continuous and participatory management process involving multiple internal and external stakeholders. Rather than functioning merely as an administrative activity, strategic evaluation was positioned as an integral component of institutional quality assurance aimed at measuring programme effectiveness, identifying organizational weaknesses, and ensuring continuous improvement. The participating principals emphasized that institutional image can only be sustained when strategic implementation is consistently monitored and adjusted according to changing educational demands and community expectations. This finding indicates that strategy evaluation plays a crucial role in maintaining institutional competitiveness while simultaneously reinforcing public trust in the madrasah.

One of the principal findings of this study is that strategic evaluation was conducted through collaborative discussions involving the madrasah committee, vice principals, teachers, programme



coordinators, quality assurance teams, and parents. This participatory approach enabled the institutions to collect comprehensive feedback from various stakeholders regarding programme implementation and institutional performance. The involvement of parents and the madrasah committee also strengthened organizational transparency and accountability by ensuring that educational policies reflected community expectations. Such collaborative evaluation demonstrates that institutional image is not solely determined by internal managerial decisions but is also shaped through continuous interaction with stakeholders who directly experience educational services. These findings reflect the principles of participatory educational management, in which stakeholder engagement contributes significantly to organizational improvement and institutional legitimacy.

The study further found that strategic evaluation emphasized the application of breakthrough strategies and gap analysis to identify programmes that were no longer relevant to current educational needs or that generated limited institutional impact. Rather than maintaining existing programmes without critical review, both madrasahs systematically assessed the effectiveness of each programme by comparing expected outcomes with actual achievements and emerging market opportunities. Gap analysis was therefore used as a strategic instrument to identify organizational weaknesses, revise underperforming programmes, and formulate new initiatives capable of responding to changing educational environments. This continuous evaluation process enabled the institutions to maintain organizational adaptability while strengthening their competitive position in increasingly dynamic educational markets. Such findings indicate that successful educational institutions require continuous innovation supported by evidence-based decision-making and systematic programme review.

Another important finding concerns the organizational structure established to support strategic evaluation. The evaluation process involved four major institutional components, namely vice principals, programme coordinators, evaluation teams, and the madrasah quality assurance unit working collaboratively with the public relations division. This organizational arrangement ensured that evaluation activities were conducted systematically and comprehensively across all institutional programmes. Rather than concentrating responsibility solely on the principal, evaluation became a shared organizational responsibility involving multiple managerial levels.



This finding demonstrates that effective strategic evaluation requires institutional collaboration and distributed leadership capable of promoting organizational learning and continuous quality improvement. Such an approach strengthens institutional governance while ensuring that strategic decisions are based on comprehensive organizational evidence rather than individual managerial judgement.

The findings also reveal that strategic evaluation was implemented through a structured schedule consisting of weekly, monthly, semester, and annual evaluation meetings. Weekly evaluations primarily focused on reviewing operational activities, solving emerging problems, and coordinating short-term programme improvements. Monthly meetings involved all teachers and educational staff in reviewing programme implementation during the previous month and preparing institutional development plans for subsequent periods. Subject teacher forums (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran*—MGMP) were also utilized to evaluate instructional practices and improve pedagogical quality through professional collaboration. Semester and annual evaluations focused on broader institutional achievements, including programme effectiveness, organizational performance, and strategic planning for future institutional development. This multilevel evaluation system enabled the madrasahs to identify problems at an early stage while maintaining continuous organizational improvement. According to Akdon (2011), strategic evaluation is intended to review internal and external strategic factors, assess organizational performance, and formulate corrective actions to improve institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, effective performance measurement functions as an essential managerial instrument for improving organizational accountability and decision-making quality (Akdon, 2011.).

Another significant finding concerns the evaluation indicators used by the participating madrasahs. The evaluation process focused on four primary dimensions, namely programme coordinators' performance, programme implementation, supporting facilities and infrastructure, and the achievement of predetermined institutional targets. By evaluating these interconnected dimensions, the institutions were able to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for future development comprehensively. The findings indicate that programme evaluation was not limited to measuring administrative completion but also emphasized programme quality,



institutional effectiveness, and long-term strategic contributions to strengthening institutional image. This comprehensive evaluation system reflects the principles of strategic management, whereby organizational performance is continuously monitored through measurable indicators linked to institutional objectives.

The findings suggest that strategy evaluation constitutes a fundamental mechanism for sustaining institutional competitiveness and strengthening the public image of the madrasah. Continuous evaluation involving stakeholder participation, systematic performance measurement, programme revision, and quality assurance enables educational institutions to respond effectively to changing educational challenges while maintaining organizational excellence. These findings support the proposition developed in this study that institutional image and community interest are significantly strengthened when strategic evaluation is implemented collaboratively across all organizational levels with a primary focus on programme achievement, organizational learning, and continuous improvement. Such an evaluation model ensures that institutional branding is supported not only by innovative programmes but also by sustainable organizational quality and accountable educational governance.

Research Propositions

Based on the findings obtained from the stages of strategic formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation, this study proposes several conceptual propositions regarding the relationship between strategic management and the enhancement of the institutional image of madrasahs and community interest. These propositions synthesize the empirical evidence collected from the participating madrasahs and represent theoretical explanations of how strategic leadership contributes to institutional competitiveness and public trust. The propositions are expected to serve as a conceptual foundation for future empirical studies on strategic management in Islamic educational institutions.

Proposition 1

The findings indicate that institutional competitiveness constitutes the primary strategic orientation in strengthening the image of the madrasah. Institutions that consistently develop their competitiveness through academic excellence, innovative educational programmes, quality services, and organizational performance at the local, regional, and national levels tend to establish



stronger institutional reputations and attract greater public attention. Continuous efforts to improve competitiveness encourage positive public perceptions and increase community confidence in the quality of educational services provided by the madrasah.

Proposition 1. The stronger the strategic orientation toward improving institutional competitiveness at the local, regional, and national levels, the greater the improvement in the institutional image of the madrasah and community interest.

Proposition 2

The implementation stage demonstrates that institutional image is strengthened through the integration of three dimensions of competitive advantage: competitive strength, competitive area, and competitive result. Competitive strength refers to the internal capabilities of the institution, including qualified human resources, curriculum innovation, educational facilities, and organizational culture. Competitive area reflects the institution's ability to develop flagship programmes that differentiate it from competing schools, while competitive result is represented by measurable achievements, stakeholder satisfaction, and graduate outcomes. The integration of these three dimensions forms a sustainable competitive advantage that strengthens institutional branding and increases community trust.

Proposition 2. The integration of competitive strength, competitive area, and competitive result in strategy implementation positively contributes to strengthening the institutional image of the madrasah and increasing community interest.

Proposition 3

The findings further reveal that continuous strategic evaluation plays a significant role in sustaining institutional competitiveness. Effective evaluation involves the participation of all organizational components, including school leaders, vice principals, programme coordinators, quality assurance teams, teachers, and school committees. Evaluation focuses not only on measuring programme performance but also on identifying organizational weaknesses, revising ineffective programmes, and developing continuous improvement strategies. Such a systematic evaluation process ensures that institutional development remains responsive to changing educational needs and stakeholder expectations.

Proposition 3. Collaborative and continuous strategic evaluation focused on programme achievement, organizational performance, and continuous improvement strengthens the institutional image of the madrasah and enhances community interest.



Conceptual Synthesis

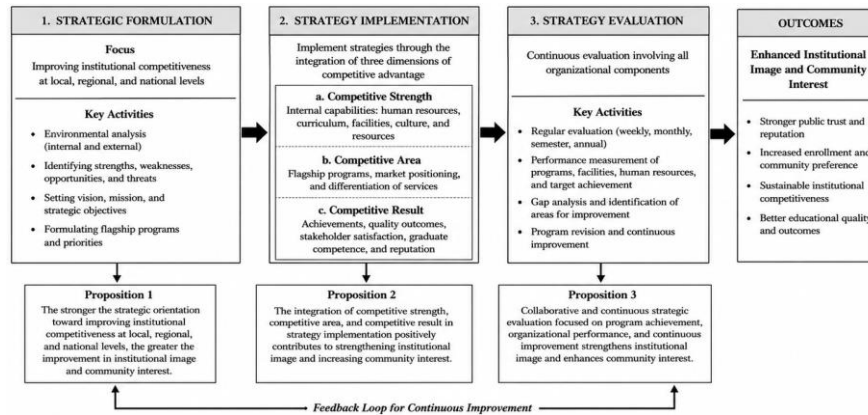


Figure 3. Conceptual Strategic Leadership Model for Strengthening Institutional Image and Enhancing Community Interest

The three propositions collectively indicate that strengthening the institutional image of a madrasah is a dynamic strategic management process comprising strategic formulation, strategy implementation, and continuous strategy evaluation. These stages operate as an integrated management cycle in which strategic planning establishes institutional direction, implementation transforms strategic plans into organizational practices, and evaluation ensures continuous improvement through systematic feedback. Consequently, institutional image and community interest are not merely influenced by promotional activities but are primarily determined by sustainable organizational quality, effective leadership, and continuous institutional innovation. This conceptual model provides a theoretical contribution to the literature on strategic educational management by emphasizing that institutional competitiveness serves as the principal mechanism linking strategic leadership to public trust and community preference for Islamic educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this multisite study demonstrate that strengthening the institutional image of a madrasah and increasing community interest constitute an integrated strategic leadership process rather than isolated promotional activities. Strategic formulation was found to provide the institutional direction through environmental analysis, stakeholder need assessment, benchmarking, competitive positioning, and the development of flagship programmes aligned with



the institutional vision and mission. These activities enabled the participating madrasahs to establish distinctive institutional identities while responding to changing educational demands and increasing competition among educational institutions. The study further confirms that institutional image is fundamentally constructed through educational quality, organizational performance, innovation, and stakeholder trust rather than through communication strategies alone. Consequently, strategic planning serves as the foundation for sustainable institutional competitiveness and long-term public confidence.

The implementation phase demonstrates that institutional competitiveness is strengthened through the integration of three complementary dimensions, namely competitive strength, competitive area, and competitive result. Competitive strength is reflected in professional human resources, curriculum innovation, selective student admission, and organizational culture. Competitive area is developed through flagship academic and non-academic programmes that differentiate the madrasah from competing institutions, while competitive result is demonstrated through measurable educational achievements, graduate quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and institutional reputation. Furthermore, continuous strategic evaluation involving principals, teachers, programme coordinators, quality assurance teams, parents, and school committees ensures that organizational performance remains adaptive to changing educational environments. The implementation of participatory evaluation, gap analysis, systematic performance measurement, and continuous programme improvement enables institutional branding to be supported by evidence-based management and sustainable organizational quality. These findings highlight that institutional image is reinforced through the synergy between strategic leadership, organizational innovation, stakeholder engagement, and continuous quality improvement.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the development of a Strategic Management Model for Strengthening Institutional Image and Community Interest, which integrates strategic formulation, strategy implementation, and continuous strategic evaluation into a single conceptual framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined educational marketing or public relations independently, this research conceptualizes institutional image as the cumulative outcome of strategic leadership processes that generate sustainable institutional competitiveness. Practically, the findings provide an evidence-based framework for madrasah principals and



educational policymakers to strengthen institutional branding through integrated strategic management rather than short-term promotional approaches. Future research is recommended to validate the proposed conceptual model quantitatively across broader educational contexts, investigate the mediating role of digital institutional branding and stakeholder trust, and examine the influence of strategic leadership on long-term institutional sustainability and educational competitiveness. These efforts will further enrich the theoretical development of educational strategic management and strengthen the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions in an increasingly dynamic educational landscape.

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