



## **The Management Of Innovation Initiation In Islamic Education And Its Implications For Madrasah Competitiveness: A Multisite Qualitative Study**

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**Abstract:** This study examines the management of innovation initiation in Islamic education and its implications for strengthening madrasah competitiveness, using MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kota Kediri as multisite cases. While existing studies on Islamic educational innovation primarily focus on implementation and outcomes, the initiation phase of innovation remains underexplored, particularly in the context of madrasah management. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach within a naturalistic paradigm, this research explores how innovation initiation is strategically managed across three domains: curriculum, student development, and human resources (teachers). The findings indicate that innovation initiation is driven by benchmarking, internal awareness building, and systematic identification of student potential through psychological and talent–interest assessments. MAN 2 Tulungagung initiated innovation through talent-based superior classes and differentiated instruction aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, supported by structured teacher development. In contrast, MAN 2 Kota Kediri adopted an integrative model that connects intrakurikuler, kokurikuler, and ekstrakurikuler programs through its “Red Carpet” philosophy, emphasizing holistic talent development and character formation. Across both sites, innovation initiation is characterized by collaborative decision-making, curriculum flexibility, professional learning communities, and strong leadership commitment. This study contributes novel insights by conceptualizing innovation initiation as a strategic managerial process that precedes implementation and directly shapes institutional competitiveness. It demonstrates that innovation initiation grounded in Islamic educational values functions as a foundational driver of academic excellence, institutional differentiation, and sustainable competitive advantage in contemporary madrasahs.

**Keywords:** Innovation Initiation, Management, Islamic Education, Madrasah Competitiveness.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The increasing demand for high-quality education in the 21st century has pushed Islamic educational institutions to develop strategic innovations that strengthen academic performance, institutional identity, and global competitiveness. In the context of Indonesian madrasahs, innovation is no longer merely an option but a necessity, as advances in digital technology, talent differentiation, and curriculum transformation require institutions to adapt and redesign their learning ecosystems. Islamic education, as conceptualized by Al-Attas (Muhammad Naguib Al-



Attas, 1991), emphasizes holistic human development encompassing intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Within this philosophical framework, innovation is positioned not as an external intervention, but as an inherent mechanism of *tathwīr al-tarbiyah* (educational development), enabling Islamic institutions to adapt while preserving their normative foundations. Consequently, innovation initiation emerges as a decisive managerial phase, marking the moment when ideas are recognized, legitimated, and transformed into institutional commitment. (Fullan, 2015)

The existing literature highlights several significant innovation dimensions in Islamic education, including curriculum redesign aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka, integration of digital literacy, teacher professional development, and quality assurance mechanisms (Sallis, 2014) and (Muhdi et al., 2024). Recent studies also emphasize the role of character-based pedagogy and differentiation based on students' potential (Warsah et al., 2024). However, the majority of these studies concentrate on implementation outcomes and institutional performance indicators, while giving limited analytical attention to the initiation phase of innovation, namely the processes through which innovative ideas are generated, negotiated, and institutionally legitimized within madrasahs. As a result, innovation initiation remains conceptually underdeveloped in Islamic education scholarship, despite its strategic importance.

This gap is substantial because the initiation stage often determines whether innovation is accepted, resisted, or sustained over time, particularly within Islamic educational institutions where organizational change must align with religious values, collective leadership, and cultural legitimacy. Furthermore, most existing studies rely on single-site research designs, limiting comparative insight into how innovation initiation unfolds across different institutional ecosystems. Equally important, prior research tends to treat Islamic educational philosophy, innovation theory, and competitiveness frameworks as separate analytical domains, resulting in fragmented explanations of how innovation contributes to institutional advantage. The theoretical linkage between innovation initiation, Islamic educational values, and competitiveness perspectives, such as Porter's strategic differentiation (Porter, 1985) and Sallis's quality-based competitiveness (Sallis, 2014), remains insufficiently articulated. Sallis

Addressing these limitations, this study examines the management of innovation initiation in two leading Indonesian madrasahs: MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kota Kediri. MAN 2



Tulungagung represents a systematic and academically oriented initiation model, characterized by talent-based superior classes, differentiated instruction, and structured curriculum governance. In contrast, MAN 2 Kota Kediri adopts a cultural-collaborative initiation model, grounded in its “Karpet Merah” philosophy, which emphasizes holistic student development, character formation, and extensive partnerships with higher education and professional institutions. Comparing these two sites enables a multisite analytical perspective that captures how innovation initiation is shaped by leadership orientation, organizational culture, and strategic priorities within different Islamic educational ecosystems (Muzakki et al., 2023).

The novelty of this study lies in three interrelated contributions. First, it formulates an integrated analytical framework that synthesizes Fullan’s theory of educational change, Islamic educational reform principles (tathwir al-tarbiyah), and institutional competitiveness theory, offering a conceptual model that has not been systematically developed in previous Islamic education studies (Fullan, 2015). Second, by employing a multisite qualitative design, the study reveals variations in how innovation initiation is enacted across madrasahs, an area that remains underrepresented in existing research. Third, the study demonstrates empirically that innovation initiation itself functions as a strategic driver of madrasah competitiveness, shaping curriculum differentiation, strengthening teacher capacity, enhancing institutional branding, and expanding collaboration networks.

Therefore, this research contributes to the discourse on Islamic education and educational innovation by explaining the mechanisms of innovation initiation and by demonstrating its relevance to the competitiveness of madrasahs in the contemporary educational landscape. It also offers a conceptual and empirical foundation for developing more adaptive and future-oriented Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative multisite research design to examine the management of innovation initiation in two leading Islamic senior high schools, MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kota Kediri, which were purposively selected based on their recognized reputations as innovation-oriented madrasahs, consistent academic achievement, and institutional differentiation



strategies. Both institutions have demonstrated sustained competitiveness at regional and national levels through curriculum innovation, student achievement, and organizational development, making them theoretically relevant cases for examining innovation initiation in Islamic education contexts. The multisite approach enabled cross-case comparison and captured variations in cultural, managerial, and structural conditions shaping innovation practices. As Creswell (John W. Creswell, 2014) explains, qualitative inquiry facilitates in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena by interpreting participants' experiences within natural settings, while a multisite design strengthens analytical rigor through pattern matching across cases, thereby enhancing the transferability of findings.

Data collection was conducted using three complementary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. A total of 26 participants were involved across both sites, selected through purposive sampling based on their strategic roles in innovation processes. Participants included two principals, six vice principals (curriculum, student affairs, and public relations), ten teachers, four guidance and counseling staff, and four students actively involved in flagship programs. Semi-structured interviews were employed to ensure consistency across sites while allowing flexibility to explore emergent issues related to innovation initiation. Observations were conducted during classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, leadership meetings, and institutional events to capture the contextual enactment of innovation. Documentary sources (including curriculum frameworks, strategic planning documents, psychometric test results, teacher training modules, and institutional reports) were systematically analyzed to support data triangulation and analytical validation.

Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (Matthew B. Miles, et al., 2013) interactive model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The coding process was conducted inductively through three stages: initial open coding to identify meaningful units (e.g., benchmarking practices, talent mapping, leadership deliberation), axial coding to cluster related codes into broader categories (such as curriculum innovation initiation, student development strategies, and teacher professional empowerment), and selective coding to integrate these categories into overarching themes explaining innovation initiation management. To minimize researcher bias, reflexive journaling was employed



throughout the research process, allowing the researcher to critically examine assumptions and interpretations. Trustworthiness was further ensured through prolonged engagement, method and source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Consistent use of methodological terminology (such as innovation initiation, multisite qualitative design, and institutional competitiveness) was maintained throughout analysis to ensure conceptual clarity. The systematic comparison across the two sites enabled the formulation of an integrated understanding of how innovation initiation is managed within Islamic educational institutions and how these practices contribute to strengthening madrasah competitiveness. (Muzakki et al., 2025).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Islamic Education Innovation Initiative**

Empirical findings indicate that the initiation of Islamic education innovation in both MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kota Kediri begins with institutional awareness of the need to enhance competitiveness and respond to twenty-first-century educational challenges. This awareness emerged primarily through benchmarking activities conducted at leading madrasahs, including MAN 2 Kudus, MAN 2 Malang, MAN Insan Cendekia Serpong, and MAN 1 Yogyakarta. These visits functioned as empirical triggers for innovation, enabling both institutions to observe best practices related to curriculum restructuring, talent-based class organization, and integrated student development models. The insights gained informed the adoption of differentiated learning strategies and flexible curriculum arrangements aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka, allowing instructional practices to adapt to local contexts and student potential, as conceptually illustrated in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Initiation of Islamic Education Innovation*

At MAN 2 Tulungagung, the empirical pattern of innovation initiation is characterized by a structured and academically oriented approach. Innovation begins with psychometric assessments, particularly IQ testing, to map students' abilities upon entry. These assessments form the basis for placing students into specialized "kelas unggulan" that emphasize curriculum differentiation, structured learning trajectories, and targeted academic development. In contrast, empirical findings from MAN 2 Kota Kediri show that innovation initiation follows a broader and more inclusive pathway, integrating intrakurikuler, kokurikuler, and ekstrakurikuler programs within a unified ecosystem of talent development. This approach is guided by the "Red Carpet Philosophy", which frames innovation as an institutional commitment to providing equal access to excellence for all students, supported by a wide range of extracurricular programs.

A key similarity across both madrasahs lies in the central role of teachers and leadership during the initiation stage, particularly through internal discussions, workshops, and collaborative



planning forums. These empirical practices foster shared ownership of innovation and encourage teachers to engage actively in curriculum refinement and pedagogical experimentation. However, the difference lies in emphasis: MAN 2 Tulungagung prioritizes academic structuring and specialization, while MAN 2 Kota Kediri emphasizes cultural integration and holistic participation. Analytically, these findings align with Islamic educational principles of *musyārakah* (collective responsibility) and *tathwīr at-tarbiyah* (continuous educational development), which emphasize collaborative decision-making and holistic human development (Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, 1991) and al-Abrasyi (M. Athiyah al-Abrasyi, 1993).

From a theoretical perspective, the initiation processes observed in both institutions reflect strategic differentiation as described by Porter (Porter, 1985) and correspond with Fullan's (Fullan, 2015) framework of educational change, which emphasizes adaptability and responsiveness during early innovation stages. Figure 1 analytically represents this initiation phase as a convergence of institutional awareness, benchmarking, and participatory decision-making, establishing a foundational platform for sustained innovation and competitiveness.

### **Curriculum Innovation Initiation as the Foundation of Madrasah Competitiveness**

Empirical findings reveal that curriculum innovation serves as the primary entry point for strengthening competitiveness in both madrasahs, albeit through distinct models. At MAN 2 Tulungagung, curriculum restructuring is initiated through a strong emphasis on specialization. The madrasah developed a system of structured "kelas unggulan" such as class research, class academic, class arts, class sports, class multimedia, and class culinary programs, each equipped with differentiated syllabi, learning outcomes, and pedagogical strategies. Curriculum design in this institution is oriented toward directing students into well-defined fields of excellence, enabling the madrasah to produce competitive outputs aligned with each specialization. This model empirically positions curriculum as a strategic instrument for directing students into clearly defined excellence pathways, enabling the madrasah to generate measurable academic and non-academic achievements that reinforce institutional identity.

Conversely, MAN 2 Kota Kediri empirically initiates curriculum innovation through an integrative and inclusive framework, linking intrakurikuler, kokurikuler, and ekstrakurikuler components into a coherent learning ecosystem. Curriculum planning in this context emphasizes



equal access, flexibility, and diversity of learning experiences rather than deep specialization. Curriculum planning is designed to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to explore and nurture their talents. Instead of deep specialization, the institution prioritizes breadth, diversity, and accessibility of learning experiences. This model positions curriculum innovation not as segmented specialization but as an integrated system that connects academic, social, moral, and creative competencies. The structure of curriculum innovation is thus designed to expand learning pathways and enable a broader range of student achievements (Efendi & Sholeh, 2023).

These empirical patterns confirm theoretical perspectives asserting that curriculum innovation is a crucial driver of institutional competitiveness. Fullan argues that sustainable educational improvement often begins with changes in curricular structure, which can trigger broader pedagogical and cultural transformation (Fullan, 2015). MAN 2 Tulungagung's specialization-driven model aligns with this perspective by developing focused, high-impact innovations that produce measurable academic and non-academic achievements. Meanwhile, the broader, integrative model in MAN 2 Kota Kediri aligns with the holistic curriculum theory proposed by Ornstein (Allan C. Ornstein, 2018), emphasizing interconnected learning domains and inclusive access to talent development opportunities. Their model also resonates with contemporary global frameworks such as UNESCO's four pillars of education and OECD's 21st-century competencies, positioning the curriculum as a vehicle for adaptive and comprehensive student development.

Within the framework of Islamic educational thought, these innovations reflect two complementary philosophical orientations: *islâh al-ta'lîm* (educational reform), which emphasizes quality improvement and structured competitiveness, and *tarbiyah syamilah* (holistic development), which promotes the inclusive development of students' intellectual, spiritual, and social capacities. The specialization model at MAN 2 Tulungagung operationalizes *islâh* through performance-oriented innovation. In contrast, the integrative model at MAN 2 Kota Kediri operationalizes *tarbiyah* through broad-based talent development embedded within an Islamic moral framework. Both approaches, although different in focus, confirm Porter's thesis that institutional competitiveness can be built either through differentiation or broad-based development strategies (Porter, 1985, p. 171). Thus, the initiation of curriculum innovation in both



madrasahs serves as a strategic mechanism that synthesizes modern innovation theory with Islamic educational philosophy, enabling the institutions to strengthen their competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic educational environment.

## **Student Development Innovation as a Strategic Mechanism for Enhancing Madrasah Competitiveness**

Empirical evidence indicates that innovation in student development constitutes a second core pillar of competitiveness in both madrasahs, implemented through contrasting but complementary strategies. At MAN 2 Tulungagung, the initiation of student development innovation is structured through psychological assessments, diagnostic tests, and early talent identification. These mechanisms place students in specialization tracks that align with their potential, ensuring the learning environment supports individualized growth. Student development is thus framed as a targeted process that channels learners into specific domains of excellence, enabling the institution to achieve highly competitive outcomes in academic competitions, research, the arts, sports, and vocational skills. This empirical model reinforces competitiveness through elite performance outputs, particularly in academic competitions, research activities, and skill-based achievements.

In contrast, MAN 2 Kota Kediri empirically adopts an inclusive student development model, structured around three interconnected pathways: intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular. With more than two dozen active extracurricular units, supported by character-building initiatives such as the P5RA (Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Islam Rahmatan lil' Alamin), student development is designed to cultivate not only cognitive skills but also moral, social, and creative competencies. This creates an ecosystem in which broad-based learner participation becomes the foundation of institutional competitiveness. Rather than focusing on specialized elite tracks, the model promotes collective empowerment, ensuring that the entire student body contributes to the institutional reputation through multidimensional achievements.

The contrast between the two institutions reflects broader theoretical debates on student development in competitive educational environments. The individualized and specialized approach of MAN 2 Tulungagung aligns with Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) (Gagné, 2009), which emphasizes structured talent identification and domain-



specific cultivation. Such an approach positions talent development as a deliberate, planned intervention that converts natural abilities into exceptional performance. On the other hand, the inclusive and ecosystem-based model of MAN 2 Kota Kediri is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, wherein the interconnectedness of classroom practices, school culture, community involvement, and extracurricular engagement influences student development. This model frames competitiveness as the outcome of a supportive and participatory environment that nurtures diverse forms of excellence.

From the perspective of Islamic education, both models embody complementary values. The specialization approach in MAN 2 Tulungagung reflects the Islamic principle of *takwîn al-insân al-mutakhassis* (the development of specialized human resources), emphasizing excellence, discipline, and mastery. Meanwhile, the inclusive model in MAN 2 Kota Kediri reflects *at-tarbiyah al-kâmilah* (holistic education), which prioritizes balanced development of intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional capacities. These orientations collectively support the goal of producing *insan unggul*, graduates who embody both competitive skills and Islamic values. In modern competitiveness frameworks such as Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory, both models represent legitimate pathways: one through focused differentiation (specialization) and the other through broad-based capability expansion (holistic engagement). (Porter, 1985)

Overall, the findings indicate that while MAN 2 Tulungagung strengthens student competitiveness through depth and specialization, MAN 2 Kota Kediri achieves competitiveness through breadth and ecosystem-based talent development. Both models contribute significantly to institutional reputation, community recognition, and student achievement profiles, confirming that student development innovation is a strategic pillar of madrasah competitiveness in contemporary Islamic education. The cross-site comparison confirms that student development innovation enhances competitiveness either through depth or breadth, depending on institutional strategy.

### **Teacher (Human Resource) Innovation as the Driver of Instructional and Institutional Competitiveness**

Empirical findings demonstrate that teacher innovation plays a decisive role in sustaining competitiveness across both madrasahs. At MAN 2 Tulungagung, teacher innovation is developed through structured competency enhancement aligned with the



specialization-based curriculum model. Teachers assigned to "kelas unggulan" are required to master differentiated instruction and advanced pedagogical strategies, including project-based learning, research-oriented teaching, and blended learning. Their professional responsibilities extend beyond classroom instruction, encompassing curriculum design, mentoring student research, and integrating digital learning tools. This creates a professional culture in which teachers function as instructional innovators who directly contribute to competitive student outcomes in academic competitions, research exhibitions, and performance-based assessments. The expectation for teachers to customize learning for each specialization track positions teacher innovation as an essential mechanism for sustaining the madrasah's competitive identity.

Meanwhile, MAN 2 Kota Kediri empirically develops teacher innovation through collaborative professionalism. Professional innovation is designed to support the institution's three-pathway system (intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular), requiring teachers to play multiple roles as educators, facilitators, character builders, and activity supervisors. The madrasah emphasizes sustained mentoring, performance-based evaluation, and collaborative training with universities, educational organizations, and industry partners (Sholeh, 2023). This model cultivates an ecosystem in which teacher innovation emerges through collective engagement rather than specialization. Teachers are encouraged to initiate new cocurricular projects, develop extracurricular coaching programs, and integrate Islamic values into daily learning routines such as P5RA and character-building activities. Through this approach, teacher innovation becomes a cultural practice that strengthens institutional competitiveness by producing students who excel in academic, social, and creative domains.

These findings align with contemporary theories emphasizing the central role of teacher innovation in educational competitiveness. The specialization-driven teacher model at MAN 2 Tulungagung aligns with Shulman's concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Lee S. Shulman, 1986), which holds that teacher expertise must integrate deep subject-matter knowledge with refined pedagogical skills. Teachers in specialization tracks embody this integration by designing instruction that matches the unique cognitive and affective characteristics of their students. Conversely, the collaborative, ecosystem-based model at



MAN 2 Kota Kediri aligns with Hargreaves & Fullan's concept of Professional Capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), which emphasizes the role of social capital and collaborative professionalism in enabling sustainable innovation. By fostering a culture of teamwork, shared responsibility, and cross-program coordination, the institution strengthens teacher capacity as a collective resource that drives competitiveness.

From the perspective of Islamic education, teacher innovation in both institutions resonates with the concept of al-mu'allim al-mujaddid, the teacher as an innovator capable of guiding learners toward excellence while embodying moral integrity (Kasmar et al., 2019). MAN 2 Tulungagung operationalizes this through a focus on mastery, expertise, and structured instructional improvement, whereas MAN 2 Kota Kediri emphasizes character, collaboration, and community-based professional development. Both orientations reflect Islamic pedagogical principles that position teachers not only as transmitters of knowledge but as role models who cultivate intellectual and moral excellence.

Overall, the findings affirm that teacher innovation functions as a strategic driver of madrasah competitiveness. MAN 2 Tulungagung achieves competitiveness through teacher specialization and instructional refinement, while MAN 2 Kota Kediri strengthens its competitive advantage through collaborative professionalism and culturally grounded teaching practices. These two models illustrate how human resource innovation, when aligned with institutional vision and curriculum strategy, becomes a powerful determinant of educational quality and institutional reputation in Islamic secondary education (Sholeh et al., 2024). Thus, teacher innovation emerges as a strategic driver linking instructional quality to institutional competitiveness.

### **Implications for Madrasah Competitiveness**

The findings of this study indicate that innovation in curriculum, student development, and teacher professionalism collectively strengthen madrasah competitiveness at both MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kota Kediri. Curriculum innovation creates clear pathways for talent differentiation and holistic competency development, enabling madrasahs to produce graduates who meet contemporary academic and non-academic demands. As stated by scholars such as Fullan and Hargreaves (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), curriculum restructuring



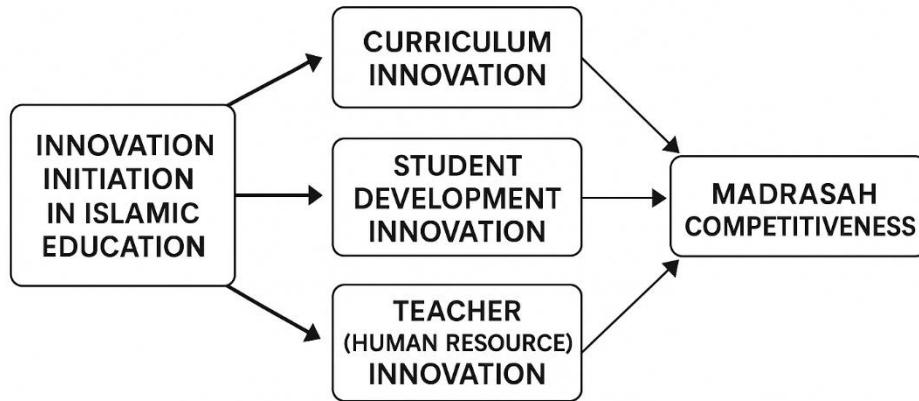
that aligns institutional goals with learner needs functions as a strategic instrument for developing competitive advantage in dynamic educational ecosystems. In both sites, curriculum innovation strengthens brand identity, increases community trust, and elevates student achievement profiles, leading to broader recognition at regional and national levels (Sholeh, 2023).

Student development innovation also contributes directly to institutional competitiveness by expanding opportunities for learners to explore, cultivate, and demonstrate their potential. Programs such as talent mapping, structured mentoring, project-based learning, and extensive extracurricular activities allow madrasah to nurture multidimensional excellence. This aligns with Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) and with modern Islamic education principles that emphasize the holistic formation of intellect, character, and capability (Gagné, 2009). As a result, students from both madrasahs demonstrate higher levels of motivation, adaptability, and achievement-readiness, which significantly strengthen the institutional reputation and attractiveness in public perception.

Teacher innovation, particularly in pedagogical competence, collaborative culture, and continuous professional development, further amplifies the institutions' competitive strength. The strategic role of teachers as change agents, as outlined in Hall and Hord's Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) (Kuntadi, 2010), has proven crucial for sustaining innovation cycles. At both madrasahs, the presence of structured training, collegial support, and supervision ensures that innovation is not situational but embedded in teaching routines. This directly enhances instructional quality, elevates learning outcomes, and supports long-term institutional differentiation. As in the following picture:



## **SYNTHESIS MODEL**



**Figure 2.** *Synthesis Model Innovation Initiation in Islamic Education*

Overall, the implication of this study confirms that madrasah competitiveness cannot rely on a single dimension of innovation. Instead, competitiveness emerges from the integrated reinforcement of curriculum design, learner development, and teacher capacity within a coherent managerial framework. When innovation is systematically managed across these three domains, madrasahs are better able to respond to educational challenges, enhance academic prestige, meet societal expectations, and position themselves as leading Islamic educational institutions at local, national, and global levels.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that curriculum innovation constitutes the primary entry point in strengthening madrasah competitiveness. Both MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kota Kediri demonstrate that innovation begins with curriculum restructuring aligned with the principles of Merdeka Belajar and the development of talent-based educational pathways (Nur 'Azah et al., 2024, p. 1051). While MAN 2 Tulungagung emphasizes specialization through structured excellence classes, MAN 2 Kota Kediri adopts an integrative three-track curriculum (intrakurikuler, kokurikuler, and ekstrakurikuler) designed to broaden students' opportunities. This shows that curriculum innovation serves not only as a pedagogical necessity but as a strategic tool for positioning Islamic educational institutions in a competitive educational landscape.



The initiation of student development innovation further reinforces the institutional strategy to enhance competitiveness. Both madrasahs use talent mapping, psychological testing, and structured student placement to personalize learning pathways. Student development is then strengthened through differentiated instruction, enrichment programs, leadership training, and extensive extracurricular systems. These mechanisms demonstrate that student-oriented innovation in Islamic education must be grounded in accurate identification of learners' potentials, systematic guidance, and sustained character-building processes to produce graduates with multifaceted competencies.

Teacher innovation emerges as the third pillar that ensures the continuity and sustainability of the innovation ecosystem. The initiation process involves capacity building, pedagogical transformation, and the development of a collaborative professional culture. Across both sites, teacher development is implemented through workshops, in-house training, peer-review practices, and the adoption of creative, student-centered learning methods. Teachers not only serve as content deliverers but also function as curriculum designers, mentors, and innovation agents, translating institutional vision into classroom realities. This confirms that human resource innovation is central to maintaining the quality and effectiveness of Islamic educational innovation.

Collectively, these three forms of innovation generate significant implications for madrasah competitiveness. The institutions show measurable gains in student achievement, strengthened institutional branding, expanded partnerships with universities and industry, and improved public trust. Innovation in curriculum, students, and teachers produces a synergistic effect that enhances organizational agility, responsiveness, and long-term sustainability. This study affirms that innovation initiation, when managed holistically, drives Islamic educational institutions toward greater academic excellence, character formation, and competitive advantage in both national and global contexts.

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