



Strategic Management for Achieving Competitive Advantage: A Multiple Case Study

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Abstract : This study explores how strategic management contributes to achieving sustainable competitive advantage in Islamic educational institutions through a comparative multiple-case study of MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng. A qualitative research approach with a multiple-case study design was employed to examine strategic environmental analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic evaluation in two institutions operating under different governance structures and educational philosophies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing supported by cross-case analysis. The findings reveal that MAN 1 Jombang develops competitive advantage through bureaucratic legitimacy, structured strategic planning, systematic implementation, and performance-oriented evaluation, while SMA Trensains Tebuireng achieves competitiveness through intellectual differentiation, philosophical coherence, collaborative implementation, and reflective organizational learning. Despite these differences, both institutions demonstrate that sustainable competitive advantage emerges from the integration of strategic environmental analysis, strategic positioning, strategic resource utilization, implementation supported by leadership and organizational culture, and continuous evaluation. The study proposes the Strategic Competitive Advantage Model of Islamic Education, which explains that institutional competitiveness is strengthened through the dynamic interaction of these four strategic management processes, resulting in enhanced institutional reputation, academic excellence, public trust, organizational legitimacy, and long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Competitive Advantage, Islamic Educational Institutions, Strategic Competitive Advantage Model, Organizational Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly dynamic educational landscape, driven by globalization, digital transformation, and intensified institutional competition, has fundamentally reshaped how educational organizations establish and sustain their existence. Educational institutions are no longer evaluated solely based on their legal status or historical reputation but rather on their capacity to provide high-quality educational services, develop innovative programs, and continuously respond to the evolving expectations of society. In this competitive environment, educational institutions are required to formulate strategic policies that not only ensure organizational sustainability but also create distinctive value capable of differentiating them from competitors. Consequently, strategic management has become an indispensable managerial



approach that enables educational organizations to identify environmental opportunities and challenges, optimize organizational resources, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (David et al., 2020; Wheelen et al., 2018). This transformation is particularly evident in Islamic educational institutions, where academic excellence must be harmonized with religious values and character education to meet the expectations of increasingly selective stakeholders.

Within the educational sector, the concept of competitive advantage, originally developed in business and industrial management, has gained considerable attention as a framework for improving institutional performance. According to Porter (1985), competitive advantage emerges when an organization successfully creates superior value through differentiation or cost leadership strategies that competitors cannot easily imitate. Complementing this perspective, the Resource-Based View (RBV) argues that sustainable competitive advantage originates from valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable organizational resources (Barney, 1991). In educational institutions, these strategic resources encompass visionary leadership, competent teachers, innovative curricula, institutional culture, technological capability, stakeholder collaboration, and organizational reputation. Rather than pursuing competition merely for enrollment growth, educational institutions increasingly employ strategic management to strengthen institutional quality, improve educational outcomes, and enhance public trust.

For Islamic educational institutions, strategic management possesses broader significance because these organizations simultaneously pursue academic excellence and religious missions. Islamic schools and madrasahs are expected to produce graduates who demonstrate intellectual competence alongside moral integrity and spiritual commitment. This dual responsibility requires educational leaders to formulate strategies that integrate curriculum innovation, organizational development, resource management, and stakeholder engagement while preserving Islamic values. Consequently, educational competitiveness within Islamic institutions cannot be interpreted solely through academic achievement but must also reflect institutional credibility, character development, and community trust (Qomar, 2007). Therefore, strategic management becomes an essential mechanism through which Islamic educational institutions adapt to rapid environmental changes without compromising their philosophical and religious foundations.



The importance of strategic management has been emphasized by numerous contemporary studies. Syahrudin (2025) demonstrated that the performance of madrasah principals significantly contributes to developing competitive advantage through participatory strategic planning involving teachers, students, and parents. Similarly, Rahmah (2025) found that marketing management and institutional branding significantly strengthen the competitiveness of educational institutions by integrating academic excellence with religious values. Yekti (2024) further argued that school branding strategies become more effective when institutions clearly communicate their unique educational identity and continuously innovate educational programs. These findings collectively suggest that competitive advantage in educational institutions is increasingly determined by the ability to formulate and implement comprehensive strategic management rather than relying solely on traditional administrative practices.

Recent studies have also highlighted the growing role of innovation and digital transformation in strengthening institutional competitiveness. Restarie et al. (2026) identified school reputation, service quality, digital branding, and stakeholder satisfaction as dominant themes influencing the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. Likewise, Jazilah et al. (2023) reported that the integration of pesantren innovation into madrasah management significantly enhances institutional differentiation through systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Furthermore, Al-Ariqi and Alhakimi (2025) confirmed that generic business strategies—including differentiation, focus, and cost leadership—positively influence organizational performance through competitive advantage as a mediating variable. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that strategic management within educational institutions has evolved beyond operational management toward comprehensive organizational transformation capable of sustaining institutional excellence amid increasingly complex educational competition.

Despite the expanding body of literature, several important research gaps remain unresolved. Existing studies primarily investigate isolated dimensions of strategic management, such as leadership, marketing strategies, school branding, organizational culture, or digital promotion. Limited attention has been given to examining strategic management as an integrated process encompassing environmental analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic evaluation. Moreover, comparative investigations involving different types of Islamic



educational institutions remain scarce. Most previous studies focus exclusively on either public madrasahs or private Islamic schools without systematically comparing how differences in institutional governance, organizational culture, leadership structures, and educational philosophies influence strategic management practices and competitive advantage.

This research addresses these limitations by conducting a comparative multi-case study involving MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng, two prominent Islamic secondary educational institutions that have successfully established strong institutional reputations through different organizational characteristics. MAN 1 Jombang represents a public Islamic senior high school operating within the regulatory framework of the Ministry of Religious Affairs while consistently demonstrating outstanding academic achievements through its institutional branding of "One Man, One Achievement." Conversely, SMA Trensains Tebuireng represents an innovative pesantren-based private secondary school integrating Qur'anic values with natural sciences to develop scientifically competent and religiously grounded graduates. Although both institutions share Islamic educational values, they differ substantially in governance structures, curriculum design, organizational flexibility, leadership patterns, and strategic orientations, making them highly relevant cases for comparative investigation.

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic examination of strategic management processes across two distinct organizational contexts within Islamic education. Unlike previous studies emphasizing individual managerial components, this research integrates environmental scanning, strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation into a unified analytical framework for understanding how educational institutions establish sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, by comparing public and pesantren-based educational institutions, this study contributes new empirical evidence regarding the influence of institutional characteristics on strategic management practices. Such comparative insights are expected to enrich strategic management theory within educational contexts while providing practical guidance for educational leaders seeking to strengthen institutional competitiveness without neglecting educational values and organizational identity.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore how strategic management is designed, implemented, and evaluated in MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng to achieve



sustainable competitive advantage. Specifically, the study investigates environmental analysis, strategy formulation, implementation mechanisms, and evaluation practices employed by both institutions. The findings are expected to contribute not only to the advancement of strategic management literature in Islamic education but also to provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educational leaders, and practitioners seeking to improve institutional competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic educational environment.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple-case study design to investigate how strategic management contributes to achieving competitive advantage in Islamic educational institutions. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding strategic management practices within their natural organizational settings rather than measuring predetermined variables quantitatively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The multiple-case study design enabled an in-depth understanding of strategic management processes across two different institutional contexts while allowing cross-case comparisons to identify similarities, differences, and emerging patterns (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at MAN 1 Jombang, a leading public Islamic senior high school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and SMA Trensains Tebuireng, a pesantren-based private secondary school recognized for integrating Qur'anic values with natural sciences. These institutions were purposively selected because both have demonstrated outstanding institutional performance and sustained competitive advantage despite operating under different governance structures and educational philosophies. The contrast between public and private Islamic educational institutions provides an appropriate context for examining variations in strategic management practices.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to identify additional information-rich informants who possessed substantial knowledge regarding institutional strategic management. The participants consisted of principals, vice principals, teachers, school committee members, students, and administrative personnel directly involved in



strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Selection criteria included active involvement in strategic decision-making, extensive institutional experience, and willingness to participate voluntarily in the research. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, where no substantially new information emerged from subsequent interviews (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected using three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source, enabling participants to describe their experiences while allowing the researcher to explore emerging issues through probing questions. Interview protocols focused on four strategic management dimensions: environmental analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic evaluation. Each interview was audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Participant observation was conducted throughout the research period to understand naturally occurring organizational practices related to strategic management. The researcher adopted a passive participant role by observing leadership practices, academic activities, institutional culture, strategic meetings, student development programs, and interactions among school stakeholders without actively intervening in organizational processes. This approach allowed the researcher to gain contextual understanding while minimizing observer influence on participants' behavior (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Document analysis complemented interview and observational data by examining institutional strategic plans, annual work programs, curriculum documents, accreditation reports, organizational profiles, achievement records, meeting minutes, school regulations, promotional materials, and official publications. Documentary evidence was used to verify participants' statements and strengthen the credibility of research findings through methodological triangulation.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection, allowing continuous refinement of emerging categories and themes. Initially, each institution was analyzed independently through



within-case analysis to identify its unique strategic management characteristics. Subsequently, a cross-case analysis was performed to compare both institutions and identify common strategic patterns, contextual differences, and explanatory propositions regarding how strategic management contributes to sustainable competitive advantage. This iterative analytical process facilitated theory development grounded in empirical evidence (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement, source triangulation, methodological triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking with key participants. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of institutional contexts and research procedures. Dependability was ensured through maintaining a comprehensive audit trail documenting methodological decisions throughout the study, while confirmability was strengthened by maintaining reflective field notes and systematically documenting analytical decisions to minimize researcher bias.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Analysis in Achieving Competitive Advantage

The findings indicate that environmental analysis at MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng represents two distinct organizational responses to institutional legitimacy and competitive positioning. Although both institutions continuously monitor internal and external environments to sustain organizational performance, the mechanisms through which environmental information is collected, interpreted, and transformed into strategic decisions differ substantially. These differences are primarily shaped by institutional governance, organizational mission, and the source of organizational legitimacy. This finding supports the proposition of Contingency Theory that strategic management practices are context dependent rather than universally applicable (Donaldson, 2001).

Environmental analysis at MAN 1 Jombang reflects the principles of institutional isomorphism proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). As a public Islamic senior high school operating under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the institution functions within a highly regulated bureaucratic environment characterized by coercive and normative institutional



pressures. Environmental scanning is consequently directed toward monitoring ministerial regulations, accreditation standards, curriculum reforms, and official educational policies. Strategic decisions emerge through formal administrative mechanisms such as coordination meetings, institutional reports, and policy evaluations. Organizational legitimacy is maintained through conformity with governmental expectations while institutional performance is continuously improved within nationally prescribed educational standards. This organizational pattern corresponds with institutional theory, which explains that organizations operating in regulated environments tend to pursue legitimacy through compliance with established norms and regulations (Scott, 2014).

Environmental analysis at SMA Trensains Tebuireng follows a markedly different strategic orientation. The institution demonstrates characteristics associated with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and Porter's (1985) focus strategy. Organizational legitimacy depends largely on intellectual credibility and the ability to maintain a distinctive educational identity rather than on bureaucratic conformity. Strategic information is generated through academic discussions, scholarly networks, alumni feedback, scientific publications, and collaboration with universities. These knowledge networks continuously enrich curriculum development while preserving the philosophical commitment to integrating Qur'anic epistemology and contemporary science. Institutional legitimacy consequently derives from intellectual authority, educational innovation, and the capacity to sustain a highly differentiated educational niche.

The contrast between the two institutions becomes evident in the sources from which environmental information is obtained. MAN 1 Jombang relies predominantly on formal and hierarchical information channels, including ministerial circulars, EMIS databases, accreditation documents, and structured coordination meetings. These mechanisms facilitate administrative accountability and policy alignment across organizational units. SMA Trensains Tebuireng develops environmental intelligence through professional relationships, scholarly dialogue, alumni experiences, research findings, and informal intellectual forums (*halaqah*). Organizational structure therefore shapes the ecology of institutional information and determines how knowledge is generated and interpreted for strategic purposes.



The scope of environmental scanning also differs considerably between both institutions. MAN 1 Jombang observes a broad range of environmental factors that include educational regulations, competing schools, demographic trends, and community expectations. Such comprehensive scanning enables continuous adaptation within the national educational system while maintaining institutional competitiveness. SMA Trensains Tebuireng concentrates its attention on developments in contemporary science and Islamic scholarship that directly influence its educational philosophy. Mainstream educational competition receives relatively limited attention because institutional competitiveness depends primarily on preserving authenticity and strengthening intellectual specialization.

Interpretation of environmental information follows equally distinctive patterns. Strategic analysis at MAN 1 Jombang adopts an administrative orientation in which environmental information is translated into operational programs through planning meetings and strategic planning instruments such as SWOT analysis. Institutional priorities remain closely aligned with governmental policies and organizational objectives. Strategic interpretation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng adopts a reflective and philosophical orientation. Scientific discoveries, educational trends, and contemporary Islamic discourse are collectively examined to determine their compatibility with the institution's overarching vision of integrating science and Islam. Environmental analysis consequently functions as an intellectual process that safeguards institutional identity while stimulating educational innovation.

Leadership occupies a central position within both environmental analysis processes. The principal of MAN 1 Jombang functions primarily as a strategic gatekeeper responsible for filtering information according to institutional priorities and regulatory requirements. Strategic decisions emerge from balancing organizational aspirations with bureaucratic accountability. Leadership at SMA Trensains Tebuireng emphasizes preservation of institutional philosophy. The principal ensures that every strategic response remains consistent with the school's intellectual and spiritual mission. Strategic sense-making occurs in both institutions, although the underlying sources of authority differ substantially. Bureaucratic legitimacy dominates decision-making at MAN 1 Jombang, whereas intellectual and spiritual legitimacy characterize leadership at SMA Trensains Tebuireng.



Strategic Formulation in Achieving Competitive Advantage

The findings demonstrate that strategic formulation at MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng reflects two distinct strategic orientations shaped by different sources of institutional legitimacy. Although both institutions formulate strategic programs to strengthen competitive advantage, the underlying logic guiding decision-making differs substantially. Strategic formulation at MAN 1 Jombang is primarily directed toward maintaining institutional legitimacy within the governmental education system, whereas SMA Trensains Tebuireng formulates strategies to reinforce its philosophical identity and strengthen its position within a specialized educational niche. These differences indicate that strategic formulation is not merely a technical planning process but a context-dependent organizational capability influenced by institutional environment and organizational identity.

Strategic formulation at MAN 1 Jombang closely aligns with the principles of Institutional Theory, particularly the concept of institutional isomorphism proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Operating as a public Islamic senior high school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs requires the institution to continuously adapt to governmental regulations, accreditation policies, curriculum reforms, and national education standards. Programs such as *Mansa Jaya* and *Adiwiyata Mandiri* were formulated not simply to respond to educational competition but to strengthen institutional legitimacy by demonstrating excellence within the existing bureaucratic framework. Strategic formulation therefore translates external expectations into feasible institutional programs while identifying opportunities for innovation without departing from regulatory requirements. This organizational behavior illustrates how public educational institutions balance innovation with compliance to maintain organizational legitimacy (Scott, 2014).

Strategic formulation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng follows a substantially different organizational logic. The institution demonstrates characteristics associated with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and Porter's (1985) focus strategy, where competitive advantage originates from distinctive organizational resources and specialized market positioning. Educational programs, including scientific expeditions, interdisciplinary Qur'anic-science studies, and the integration of natural sciences with *kitab kuning*, emerge through continuous intellectual



reflection rather than external regulatory demands. Strategic formulation functions as a collective pedagogical *ijtihad*, where educational innovation results from philosophical inquiry concerning the integration of Islamic epistemology and contemporary scientific knowledge. Such a process illustrates that organizational strategy can actively construct new educational markets rather than merely adapting to existing competitive environments.

Differences also emerge in the strategic planning processes adopted by both institutions. MAN 1 Jombang formulates institutional strategies through structured and periodic strategic planning supported by SWOT analysis. Internal strengths and weaknesses are systematically synthesized with external opportunities and threats to produce strategic programs that remain realistic within bureaucratic constraints and available organizational resources. Strategic alternatives are evaluated through institutional meetings where proposed programs are examined according to their feasibility, alignment with institutional vision, and compliance with governmental regulations. This planning process reflects the rational planning model frequently associated with strategic management in public-sector organizations (Bryson, 2018).

Strategic formulation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng develops through reflective academic dialogue rather than formal strategic planning instruments. Intellectual discussions among school leaders, *asatidz*, researchers, and educational practitioners become the principal arena for generating strategic initiatives. Questions concerning the contribution of educational programs to the integration of science and Islam, the strengthening of *tauhid*, and the development of scientific civilization guide collective decision-making. Strategic programs consequently exhibit strong philosophical coherence despite being less formally documented than those of MAN 1 Jombang. Organizational learning becomes embedded within everyday academic interaction, allowing educational innovation to emerge organically from institutional culture.

The origin of strategic ideas further distinguishes both institutions. Program initiatives at MAN 1 Jombang predominantly originate from institutional leaders responding to ministerial policies and organizational priorities. Consultation with teachers, committees, and other stakeholders contributes additional perspectives, although final strategic decisions remain under the authority of school leadership because of bureaucratic accountability. Strategic formulation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng develops through continuous interaction among teachers, religious



scholars, and students. Educational innovation frequently emerges from collaborative intellectual discussions rather than hierarchical directives. Such participatory processes reflect a learning-community culture in which organizational knowledge is collectively constructed and continuously refined. This finding supports the argument of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) that organizational innovation depends upon the continuous creation and sharing of knowledge among organizational members.

Islamic values function as the principal strategic compass within both institutions, although their roles differ considerably. Strategic formulation at MAN 1 Jombang positions Islamic values primarily as ethical and normative boundaries ensuring that institutional programs remain consistent with religious principles and character education. Strategic decisions are evaluated according to their compatibility with Islamic morality while simultaneously fulfilling governmental educational standards. Strategic formulation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng assigns Islamic values a broader epistemological function. Educational innovation is expected not merely to comply with Islamic principles but to emerge directly from the philosophical paradigm integrating revelation and scientific inquiry. Islamic values therefore become the intellectual foundation from which new educational programs are continuously developed.

These contrasting formulation processes generate different forms of competitive advantage. MAN 1 Jombang achieves competitiveness through adaptive innovation within institutional conformity. Programs successfully integrate national educational priorities, including the Independent Curriculum, environmental sustainability initiatives, and character education, with the institution's established religious culture and organizational strengths. Competitive advantage emerges from the institution's ability to implement governmental reforms creatively while preserving organizational identity. This capability reflects the concept of dynamic capability, whereby organizations continuously reconfigure internal resources to respond effectively to environmental changes (Teece, 2018).

Competitive advantage at SMA Trensains Tebuireng develops through deep philosophical specialization. Educational programs are designed to strengthen the institution's distinctive identity as a center for integrating Islamic scholarship and modern science. This strategic positioning creates a highly specialized educational ecosystem characterized by unique curriculum design,



organizational culture, intellectual networks, and pedagogical practices that remain difficult for competing institutions to replicate. Such findings reinforce the Resource-Based View, which emphasizes that sustainable competitive advantage originates from organizational resources possessing value, rarity, inimitability, and non-substitutability (Barney, 1991).

The findings enrich contemporary strategic management literature in several respects. Institutional context emerges as the primary determinant shaping strategic formulation processes, supporting both Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and Contingency Theory (Donaldson, 2001). Resource mobilization also follows distinct organizational logics. MAN 1 Jombang mobilizes organizational resources to exceed externally established educational standards, whereas SMA Trensains Tebuireng orchestrates resources to preserve internally constructed standards derived from its philosophical mission. These contrasting approaches illustrate alternative forms of resource orchestration, both capable of generating sustainable organizational performance (Sirmon et al., 2011).

The findings also suggest that competitive advantage within Islamic education should be interpreted beyond conventional institutional performance indicators. Sustainable competitiveness depends upon meaningful alignment between strategic programs, organizational identity, institutional values, and stakeholder expectations. Competitive advantage therefore becomes an expression of institutional authenticity rather than merely organizational efficiency. Such an interpretation extends Porter's (1985) generic strategy by demonstrating that differentiation within educational institutions may originate from philosophical coherence as much as from operational excellence.

Practical implications arise from these findings for educational leaders responsible for strategic planning. Strategic formulation should begin with careful diagnosis of institutional context before selecting planning mechanisms or designing educational innovations. Public Islamic schools operating under strong governmental regulation may benefit from structured planning systems emphasizing policy alignment and administrative accountability. Institutions serving specialized educational markets require more flexible and reflective planning processes capable of sustaining organizational uniqueness through continuous knowledge creation. Strategic formulation ultimately becomes most effective when organizational identity, institutional values,



environmental conditions, and educational innovation evolve in a coherent and mutually reinforcing manner.

Strategic Implementation in Achieving Competitive Advantage

The findings indicate that the implementation of strategic programs at MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng represents two contrasting yet equally effective models of organizational execution. These implementation models reflect differences in governance structure, organizational culture, institutional legitimacy, and leadership orientation. Strategic implementation at MAN 1 Jombang is characterized by a bureaucratic and highly structured approach, whereas SMA Trensains Tebuireng adopts an organic, reflective, and community-based implementation model. The coexistence of these contrasting approaches demonstrates that effective strategy implementation depends primarily on organizational context rather than adherence to a single universal implementation model.

Strategic implementation at MAN 1 Jombang closely reflects the principles of Weberian bureaucracy and classical management theory, where organizational effectiveness is achieved through formal authority, specialization, standardization, and hierarchical coordination (Weber, 1978). Every strategic program is supported by official decrees, clearly defined organizational responsibilities, periodic reporting systems, and systematic supervision conducted by institutional leaders. Such administrative arrangements provide legal certainty while ensuring that institutional programs remain aligned with governmental regulations and accountability requirements established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Strategic implementation consequently becomes a mechanism for translating institutional plans into measurable organizational performance through disciplined administrative execution.

Strategic implementation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng follows a substantially different organizational logic. Educational programs are implemented through collaborative learning communities where responsibility is distributed according to expertise, professional interest, and intellectual contribution rather than hierarchical position. Coordination develops through continuous dialogue, collective reflection, and shared commitment to institutional philosophy. Leadership functions primarily as a facilitator of learning rather than as a controller of organizational processes. This implementation model reflects the characteristics of a learning



organization proposed by Senge (2006), in which organizational adaptation emerges from continuous knowledge sharing and collective learning. The findings also correspond with the concept of distributed leadership, which emphasizes shared responsibility, collaborative decision-making, and collective organizational capacity rather than centralized authority (Spillane, 2006).

Resource mobilization also illustrates substantial differences between both institutions. Resource allocation at MAN 1 Jombang follows systematic planning through the Madrasah Work Plan and Budget, ensuring that every strategic program possesses clearly identified financial resources, personnel assignments, and operational responsibilities. Organizational resources are orchestrated through careful optimization of internal capabilities, including teachers, educational facilities, and government funding, while maintaining compliance with financial regulations. This planning process enhances implementation consistency and minimizes operational uncertainty.

Resource mobilization at SMA Trensains Tebuireng relies more extensively on intellectual and social capital than on formal organizational resources. Institutional networks involving alumni, university scholars, researchers, pesantren communities, and educational practitioners function as strategic assets supporting program implementation. Organizational capabilities are continuously expanded through collaboration and knowledge exchange rather than through financial investment alone. Such findings reinforce the Resource-Based View, which argues that sustainable competitive advantage frequently originates from intangible organizational resources, including knowledge, social relationships, organizational culture, and intellectual capability (Barney, 1991).

Strategic programs become embedded within organizational routines through different institutional mechanisms. MAN 1 Jombang institutionalizes strategic initiatives by integrating them into academic calendars, teachers' job descriptions, performance evaluation systems, and administrative procedures. Environmental sustainability programs, character education, and academic excellence initiatives become routine organizational activities supported by formal performance indicators and operational guidelines. Institutionalization ensures consistency across organizational units while strengthening accountability throughout implementation.

Strategic integration at SMA Trensains Tebuireng develops primarily through organizational enculturation. Educational values, scientific inquiry, and religious reflection become inseparable elements of everyday academic life within classrooms, dormitories, and informal learning



environments. Scientific discussions, Qur'anic interpretation, and interdisciplinary dialogue are experienced as continuous educational practices rather than isolated institutional programs. Organizational culture consequently functions as the principal mechanism sustaining strategic implementation, enabling educational innovation to emerge naturally from everyday interactions among teachers and students.

Leadership occupies a decisive position within both implementation models while demonstrating distinct organizational functions. Leadership at MAN 1 Jombang emphasizes coordination, supervision, and administrative problem solving. The principal ensures that institutional programs proceed according to established plans while removing bureaucratic obstacles that may hinder implementation. Organizational authority is exercised to maintain compliance with regulations and strengthen institutional accountability. Leadership at SMA Trensains Tebuireng prioritizes intellectual facilitation and preservation of institutional philosophy. The principal mobilizes professional networks, encourages scholarly dialogue, and maintains commitment to the integration of science and Islamic knowledge. Organizational authority therefore derives not merely from formal position but from intellectual credibility and shared educational vision.

Feedback mechanisms also differ significantly between both institutions. MAN 1 Jombang employs structured monitoring through periodic reports, scheduled evaluation meetings, and formal performance reviews. Organizational adaptation generally occurs incrementally through procedural adjustments, resource reallocation, or improvements in implementation efficiency. SMA Trensains Tebuireng develops feedback continuously through classroom interaction, scholarly discussion, and reflective dialogue among educational stakeholders. Program modifications frequently occur during implementation as new scientific perspectives, student responses, or intellectual debates generate opportunities for curriculum refinement. Such adaptive learning illustrates the institution's capacity for continuous organizational renewal.

These contrasting implementation models generate different forms of competitive advantage. Strategic implementation at MAN 1 Jombang strengthens institutional competitiveness through organizational reliability and public accountability. Consistent execution enables the institution to produce measurable educational outcomes, including academic achievement,



environmental certification, character development, and successful implementation of governmental educational initiatives. Stakeholder confidence grows because institutional programs are implemented systematically, transparently, and responsibly. Competitive advantage therefore originates from the institution's demonstrated capacity to execute strategic programs consistently while maintaining administrative excellence.

Strategic implementation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng generates competitive advantage through transformative educational experiences and intellectual authority. Collaborative learning, scientific exploration, interdisciplinary research, and continuous dialogue between Islamic scholarship and contemporary science create a distinctive educational ecosystem that cannot easily be replicated by competing institutions. Students experience learning as a process of intellectual transformation rather than simple knowledge acquisition. Institutional competitiveness consequently derives from the uniqueness, authenticity, and depth of the educational experience offered to its stakeholders. This finding supports Porter's (1985) argument that differentiation becomes sustainable when competitors face substantial barriers to imitation.

The findings also demonstrate that both institutions have developed dynamic capabilities appropriate to their respective organizational environments. Dynamic capability refers to an organization's capacity to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to environmental change (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2018). MAN 1 Jombang exhibits dynamic capability through regulatory responsiveness, administrative flexibility, and systematic adjustment to evolving governmental policies while maintaining operational stability. SMA Trensains Tebuireng demonstrates dynamic capability through continuous intellectual renewal, curriculum innovation, and reinterpretation of scientific and Islamic knowledge in response to contemporary educational developments. Different manifestations of dynamic capability ultimately produce comparable organizational resilience despite contrasting implementation mechanisms.

These findings reinforce the central proposition of Contingency Theory that organizational effectiveness depends on achieving alignment between organizational structure, implementation processes, available resources, and environmental demands (Donaldson, 2001). Strategy implementation cannot be separated from institutional identity, governance structure, or sources



of legitimacy. Educational organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage when implementation mechanisms remain coherent with their organizational values, resource configurations, and stakeholder expectations.

The practical implications emphasize that educational leaders should avoid replicating implementation models developed by other successful institutions without considering their own organizational context. Strategic implementation becomes effective when execution systems correspond with institutional characteristics, leadership capacity, organizational culture, and available resources. Sustainable competitive advantage is ultimately constructed through coherent implementation processes that translate organizational vision into everyday educational practices while preserving institutional identity amid continuous environmental change.

Strategic Evaluation in Achieving Competitive Advantage

The findings indicate that strategic evaluation at MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng reflects two distinct organizational philosophies shaped by different institutional contexts and sources of legitimacy. Although both institutions employ evaluation as an essential component of strategic management, the underlying purposes, evaluation mechanisms, and criteria for success differ substantially. Strategic evaluation at MAN 1 Jombang primarily functions as an accountability mechanism that ensures organizational compliance and institutional legitimacy within the national education system. Strategic evaluation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng serves predominantly as an organizational learning process designed to preserve philosophical coherence while stimulating continuous educational innovation. These contrasting orientations demonstrate that evaluation extends beyond performance measurement and becomes an integral organizational capability that sustains competitive advantage.

Strategic evaluation at MAN 1 Jombang reflects the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which emphasizes accountability, transparency, efficiency, and performance measurement within public-sector organizations (Hood, 1991). Evaluation activities are conducted systematically through periodic reports, internal audits, management review meetings, and performance monitoring systems. These procedures enable the institution to demonstrate accountability to the Ministry of Religious Affairs while maintaining public trust among parents,



school committees, and the wider community. Evaluation outputs are documented formally as evidence of institutional performance, regulatory compliance, and continuous quality improvement. Such documentation strengthens institutional legitimacy and reinforces the school's reputation as a leading public Islamic secondary school.

Strategic evaluation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng demonstrates a fundamentally different orientation. Evaluation is positioned as a continuous learning process through reflective dialogue, scholarly discussion, and communal *halaqah*. Evaluation activities are not designed primarily to generate administrative reports but to examine philosophical consistency, educational relevance, and the extent to which institutional programs continue to embody the integration of Islamic knowledge and contemporary science. This approach closely resembles formative evaluation, where feedback is utilized immediately to improve educational processes rather than merely assessing outcomes (Scriven, 1967). The evaluation process also reflects the characteristics of a learning organization in which continuous reflection serves as a mechanism for organizational renewal and knowledge creation (Senge, 2006).

Differences become particularly visible in the evaluation frameworks adopted by each institution. MAN 1 Jombang applies predominantly quantitative and administrative performance indicators. Educational achievement is assessed using measurable indicators such as student competition awards, national assessment results, accreditation outcomes, participation rates, budget utilization, and institutional performance reports. The evaluation framework demonstrates characteristics of the Balanced Scorecard, where organizational performance is assessed across financial management, stakeholder satisfaction, internal organizational processes, and institutional learning and development (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). Such multidimensional evaluation enables organizational leaders to monitor strategic implementation comprehensively while maintaining alignment with national educational standards.

Evaluation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng emphasizes qualitative and interpretive indicators that capture intellectual and philosophical development rather than administrative performance alone. Educational success is interpreted through the quality of scientific dialogue, students' critical questions, originality of interdisciplinary thinking, depth of Qur'anic interpretation, and the maturity of students' intellectual and spiritual development. These indicators recognize that



educational transformation cannot always be adequately represented through quantitative measurement. Institutional success therefore becomes closely associated with meaningful changes in students' ways of thinking, scholarly curiosity, and the integration of scientific reasoning with Islamic values.

The methods employed to collect and analyze evaluation data further illustrate these contrasting orientations. MAN 1 Jombang utilizes standardized instruments including achievement tests, institutional reports, financial documentation, administrative records, teacher performance assessments, and statistical analyses of institutional performance. Quantitative evidence provides organizational leaders with measurable indicators that facilitate strategic planning, performance monitoring, and institutional accountability. Evaluation findings become the basis for subsequent planning cycles and continuous organizational improvement.

Evaluation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng adopts a more interpretive methodology resembling ethnographic inquiry. Classroom observation, reflective interviews, portfolio assessment, documentation of scholarly discussions, and analysis of students' scientific writing provide rich qualitative evidence concerning educational development. Data interpretation seeks to understand the meaning embedded within educational experiences rather than merely describing measurable outcomes. Such an approach allows organizational leaders to identify conceptual innovation, philosophical consistency, and emerging educational needs that may not be captured through standardized performance indicators.

Stakeholder participation also demonstrates significant differences between the two institutions. Evaluation at MAN 1 Jombang is coordinated primarily by institutional management, supported by quality assurance teams, school supervisors, and the school committee. Students and parents contribute mainly as providers of evaluation data through surveys, academic results, and institutional feedback. Evaluation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng involves broader collaboration among teachers, students, alumni, university scholars, and external educational experts. Students actively participate as reflective partners who contribute ideas regarding curriculum development, learning experiences, and institutional improvement. Alumni provide perspectives concerning educational relevance after graduation, while external scholars contribute academic critiques that



strengthen institutional innovation. Such collaborative participation resembles a 360-degree feedback model that enriches organizational learning through multiple perspectives.

These contrasting evaluation models generate different mechanisms for sustaining competitive advantage. MAN 1 Jombang preserves competitiveness through structured continuous improvement supported by systematic performance evaluation. Evaluation data become the principal foundation for preparing subsequent strategic plans, improving educational programs, and strengthening institutional accountability. Positive evaluation outcomes, including accreditation achievements, environmental certifications, academic awards, and documented institutional performance, accumulate into organizational reputation that reinforces stakeholder confidence. Competitive advantage is consequently sustained through the institution's demonstrated ability to consistently meet and exceed nationally recognized educational standards.

Strategic evaluation at SMA Trensains Tebuireng contributes to competitive advantage through continuous regeneration of institutional meaning and pedagogical innovation. Reflective evaluation prevents educational routines from becoming static by encouraging continuous questioning regarding the relevance, depth, and philosophical coherence of institutional programs. Educational innovation consequently emerges through ongoing reinterpretation of scientific knowledge, Islamic scholarship, and contemporary educational challenges. The institution continuously refines its distinctive educational identity while preserving the authenticity of its integration between science and Islam. Competitive advantage therefore evolves through conceptual innovation rather than administrative optimization alone.

The findings suggest that evaluation systems function as reflections of organizational identity. Evaluation practices at MAN 1 Jombang embody the characteristics of a public educational institution operating within bureaucratic accountability and regulatory compliance. Evaluation seeks evidence demonstrating whether institutional obligations have been fulfilled according to nationally established standards. Evaluation practices at SMA Trensains Tebuireng represent the identity of an intellectual and spiritual learning community where organizational effectiveness is judged according to the authenticity of educational experiences and the depth of philosophical transformation achieved by students. Evaluation therefore answers fundamentally



different organizational questions despite serving the same strategic purpose of sustaining institutional excellence.

The findings extend strategic management theory by demonstrating that organizational evaluation should be interpreted as a context-dependent capability rather than a universally standardized managerial process. Institutional effectiveness depends upon the congruence between evaluation mechanisms, organizational values, strategic objectives, and stakeholder expectations. This perspective aligns with Contingency Theory, which argues that organizational processes achieve effectiveness only when appropriately aligned with environmental conditions and institutional characteristics (Donaldson, 2001). The findings also reinforce organizational learning theory by illustrating that evaluation functions simultaneously as an accountability mechanism and as a source of organizational knowledge capable of stimulating continuous strategic renewal (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Practical implications emerge from the recognition that educational leaders should avoid adopting standardized evaluation systems without considering institutional identity and strategic objectives. Public educational institutions require evaluation systems capable of demonstrating accountability, regulatory compliance, and measurable organizational performance. Educational institutions operating within specialized philosophical or intellectual niches require evaluation mechanisms that capture conceptual development, organizational learning, and educational transformation. Strategic evaluation ultimately becomes most valuable when it not only measures organizational achievement but also strengthens institutional wisdom, stimulates continuous innovation, and reinforces the unique competitive advantage that distinguishes an educational institution from its competitors.

Conceptual Framework of the Research Findings

The findings of this study lead to the development of a conceptual framework explaining how strategic management contributes to the development of sustainable competitive advantage in Islamic educational institutions. The framework illustrates that competitive advantage is not generated by isolated strategic activities but emerges from the integration of environmental analysis, strategic formulation, strategic implementation, and strategic evaluation as an interconnected and continuous management cycle. Each stage strengthens the subsequent stage,



creating a dynamic organizational process that continuously reinforces institutional competitiveness.



Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

The framework begins with strategic environmental analysis, which functions as the foundation of organizational decision-making. The capacity to accurately interpret internal and external environments determines the quality of subsequent strategic decisions. Internal environmental analysis encompasses human resources, organizational culture, institutional leadership, educational programs, infrastructure, and organizational capabilities. External environmental analysis includes educational policies, demographic changes, technological development, stakeholder expectations, and competition among educational institutions. The interaction between these two dimensions enables educational institutions to identify strategic opportunities while anticipating organizational constraints. Environmental analysis therefore becomes the primary mechanism through which institutions establish strategic direction consistent with both organizational capacity and environmental demands.

The second component consists of strategic positioning through differentiation. Findings indicate that institutions develop competitive positions according to their organizational characteristics rather than adopting uniform competitive strategies. MAN 1 Jombang demonstrates



a broad differentiation strategy by providing diverse educational services designed to accommodate the heterogeneous expectations of society. SMA Trensains Tebuireng adopts a focused differentiation strategy by positioning the integration of science and the Qur'an as its distinctive institutional identity. These alternative positioning strategies illustrate that competitive advantage originates from the ability of educational institutions to define and maintain a unique value proposition that cannot easily be replicated by competing organizations.

Strategic positioning subsequently guides the mobilization of organizational resources. The findings indicate that successful implementation depends upon the institution's ability to transform strategic resources into organizational capabilities. Human resources, institutional culture, leadership, curriculum innovation, organizational networks, and educational facilities become strategic assets when they are effectively integrated into organizational practice. Competitive advantage is strengthened when these resources become institutional competencies that are difficult for competing organizations to imitate. Strategic resources therefore function not only as organizational inputs but also as the foundation upon which sustainable institutional differentiation is constructed.

The implementation stage represents the transformation of strategic plans into organizational practice. Strategic implementation occurs through leadership, organizational culture, collaborative governance, program execution, and institutional partnerships that collectively operationalize organizational objectives. Leadership provides strategic direction, organizational culture strengthens collective commitment, and stakeholder collaboration facilitates institutional adaptability. The interaction among these organizational elements enables strategic programs to become embedded within everyday educational activities rather than remaining as formal planning documents. Strategy implementation consequently becomes the mechanism through which institutional vision is translated into measurable organizational performance.

Strategic evaluation constitutes the final component of the framework while simultaneously initiating a new cycle of organizational improvement. Evaluation extends beyond monitoring organizational performance by functioning as a continuous organizational learning process. Information generated through monitoring, stakeholder feedback, institutional reflection, and performance assessment provides the basis for improving educational programs, strengthening



institutional capacity, and refining future strategic decisions. Continuous evaluation ensures that organizational strategies remain relevant to changing environmental conditions while preserving institutional identity. Organizational learning generated through evaluation therefore creates a self-renewing cycle that continuously enhances institutional competitiveness.

The interaction among these four strategic processes ultimately generates competitive advantage as the principal organizational outcome. The findings demonstrate that competitive advantage is reflected not only in academic achievement but also in institutional reputation, organizational legitimacy, stakeholder trust, educational quality, student attraction, and long-term organizational sustainability. These outcomes emerge collectively through continuous alignment among strategic analysis, strategic positioning, resource mobilization, implementation effectiveness, and organizational learning. Competitive advantage should therefore be understood as a cumulative organizational capability rather than the result of a single successful program or isolated managerial intervention.

The conceptual model developed in this study is designated as the Strategic Competitive Advantage Model of Islamic Education. The model explains that sustainable competitive advantage in Islamic educational institutions is constructed through the integration of four strategic management processes. Strategic environmental analysis provides the informational foundation for organizational decision-making. Strategic positioning establishes institutional differentiation according to organizational identity and stakeholder expectations. Strategic resources are transformed into organizational capabilities through effective implementation supported by leadership and institutional culture. Continuous evaluation maintains organizational learning and strategic adaptation, enabling institutions to preserve competitiveness amid changing educational environments.

The conceptual contribution of this model lies in its contextualization of strategic management within Islamic educational institutions. Competitive advantage is interpreted not merely as superior organizational performance but as the integration of institutional identity, educational values, organizational capability, and continuous strategic renewal. The model demonstrates that sustainable competitiveness is achieved when strategic management processes remain coherent with organizational characteristics and educational philosophy. Such integration



enables Islamic educational institutions to maintain legitimacy, strengthen public trust, enhance educational quality, and sustain long-term institutional development within increasingly competitive educational environments.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that strategic management serves as the primary mechanism through which Islamic educational institutions establish and sustain competitive advantage in increasingly dynamic educational environments. Comparative analysis between MAN 1 Jombang and SMA Trensains Tebuireng reveals that sustainable competitiveness is achieved not through identical managerial practices but through strategic alignment between institutional characteristics, organizational resources, leadership orientation, and environmental conditions. MAN 1 Jombang develops competitive advantage by emphasizing institutional legitimacy, regulatory responsiveness, structured planning, systematic implementation, and accountability-based evaluation. SMA Trensains Tebuireng constructs competitiveness through philosophical differentiation, intellectual specialization, collaborative organizational culture, adaptive implementation, and reflective evaluation. These findings indicate that different strategic pathways can produce equally sustainable competitive outcomes when organizational strategies remain coherent with institutional identity and stakeholder expectations.

The study also contributes to the development of strategic management theory within Islamic education by proposing the Strategic Competitive Advantage Model of Islamic Education. The model explains that sustainable competitive advantage is generated through the continuous interaction of four integrated strategic management processes: strategic environmental analysis, strategic positioning through differentiation, utilization of strategic resources, and implementation supported by leadership, organizational culture, and continuous evaluation. Rather than functioning as isolated managerial activities, these processes form an integrated organizational cycle that continuously strengthens institutional capability and adaptability. Competitive advantage is therefore interpreted as a cumulative organizational capability reflected not only in academic achievement but also in institutional reputation, public trust, organizational legitimacy, stakeholder confidence, and long-term sustainability. The proposed model extends existing



strategic management perspectives by contextualizing competitive advantage within Islamic educational institutions, where organizational effectiveness is inseparable from educational values, institutional identity, and continuous organizational learning.

The practical implications suggest that educational leaders should avoid adopting standardized strategic management practices without considering their institutional context. Effective strategic management requires educational institutions to design environmental scanning mechanisms, differentiation strategies, implementation systems, and evaluation frameworks that correspond with their governance structures, organizational culture, available resources, and educational philosophy. Public Islamic schools operating within highly regulated environments may benefit from structured managerial systems emphasizing accountability and compliance, whereas institutions serving specialized educational niches require greater organizational flexibility, intellectual collaboration, and continuous innovation. Future research may further validate the proposed conceptual model through quantitative studies involving broader institutional contexts or mixed-method approaches that examine causal relationships among strategic management dimensions and competitive advantage. Such investigations would strengthen the generalizability of the model while enriching the growing body of knowledge concerning strategic management and sustainable competitiveness in Islamic educational institutions.

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