



Madrasah Principals' Adversity Intelligence and Competitive Advantage

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Abstract: This study investigates madrasah principals' adversity intelligence and its contribution to competitive advantage through a multisite qualitative study at MA Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and MA Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo. The study responds to the increasing competitive pressures experienced by Islamic educational institutions, particularly challenges involving human resources, technological adaptation, educational policy, institutional resources, student continuation, and public expectations. A phenomenological approach with a multisite design was employed to examine how principals experience, interpret, and respond to institutional adversity. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving principals, vice principals, teachers, and administrative personnel. Data analysis involved within-site analysis followed by cross-site analysis to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between the two research sites. The findings reveal five interconnected dimensions of adversity intelligence: self-control, self-awareness, resilience, problem-boundary management, and motivation. Self-control was particularly evident through cognitive regulation, behavioral regulation, and strategic decision-making. These processes enabled principals to reinterpret limitations as opportunities, regulate interpersonal responses, utilize institutional networks, and formulate adaptive strategies. The findings indicate that adversity intelligence functions not merely as an individual psychological capacity but as a leadership resource that supports institutional adaptability, stakeholder trust, resource efficiency, curriculum differentiation, partnerships, student achievement, and sustained public confidence. The study proposes a Self-Control–Adversity Intelligence–Competitive Advantage Framework positioning adversity intelligence as a strategic leadership mechanism for strengthening sustainable competitive advantage in Islamic educational institutions. Keywords: Adversity Intelligence, Madrasah Principals, Competitive Advantage, Islamic Education, Educational Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The growing complexity of educational competition in contemporary society has compelled educational institutions to strengthen their organizational capacity, distinctive characteristics, and responsiveness to changing social expectations while maintaining public trust and institutional sustainability. Madrasahs, as Islamic educational institutions with distinctive religious, cultural, and pedagogical characteristics, operate within an educational environment where institutional reputation, academic quality, leadership capacity, innovation, and responsiveness to community needs increasingly influence their ability to attract and retain students (Hartati et al., 2024; Widyasa



& Mukhibat, 2020). Competitive advantage in this context extends beyond academic performance because educational institutions are required to demonstrate distinctive value through effective resource management, relevant educational programs, institutional partnerships, student achievement, alumni contribution, and adaptive leadership. The sustainability of a madrasah consequently depends substantially on its capacity to transform internal resources and external challenges into institutional strengths that are recognized by society.

The competitive environment experienced by educational institutions is shaped by multiple internal and external factors that influence community preferences and institutional sustainability, including school conditions, infrastructure, leadership quality, geographical accessibility, educational policies, school zoning arrangements, and the expansion of public educational services (Kamur et al., 2025; Susiani et al., 2022; Widyastuti, 2020). These conditions create substantial pressures for private madrasahs because parents increasingly evaluate educational institutions according to diverse considerations involving quality, accessibility, educational outcomes, institutional reputation, technological responsiveness, and opportunities for students' future development. Research concerning competitive advantage in educational organizations has identified organizational management and performance as important dimensions in sustaining institutional competitiveness (Estetika et al., 2022). The persistence of competition among schools and madrasahs therefore requires institutional leaders to possess the capacity to formulate strategic responses while maintaining organizational stability under conditions of uncertainty and pressure.

Leadership occupies a central position within this competitive environment because the head of a madrasah determines strategic direction, mobilizes organizational members, manages institutional resources, develops educational programs, and responds to challenges affecting institutional performance and public confidence. Qomar (2007) emphasizes the substantial influence of leadership on the progress or decline of Islamic educational institutions, while Wahyuni and Maunah (2021) describe leadership as an important mechanism for directing organizational transformation within Islamic education. The leadership function of a madrasah principal consequently involves more than administrative coordination because leaders must interpret complex situations, make decisions under pressure, manage competing interests, and maintain organizational commitment when institutional objectives encounter substantial obstacles.



The capacity to remain psychologically resilient while dealing with adversity becomes particularly relevant for leaders responsible for sustaining educational institutions within increasingly competitive environments.

The concept of Adversity Quotient (AQ) provides a relevant theoretical perspective for examining how educational leaders respond to difficult circumstances, organizational pressure, and challenging situations that may threaten institutional performance. Stoltz (2000) conceptualizes adversity intelligence as an individual's capacity to respond constructively to difficulties and transform obstacles into opportunities for development. Intellectual ability, emotional competence, educational background, talent, motivation, health, and other personal resources may contribute to achievement, yet these characteristics do not necessarily determine how individuals respond when confronted with persistent adversity. Adversity intelligence offers a complementary perspective by emphasizing the individual's capacity to control responses, understand the extent of problems, sustain resilience, and maintain motivation during challenging circumstances. Such characteristics are particularly relevant to madrasah principals because institutional leadership frequently requires continuous decision-making amid resource limitations, policy changes, human-resource challenges, technological demands, and competitive pressures.

Empirical studies have established meaningful relationships between adversity-related capacities and educational leadership performance, providing an important foundation for investigating the concept within madrasah leadership contexts. Jimenez (2021) examined adversity and emotional quotients among public elementary school heads and demonstrated the relevance of these psychological capacities within educational leadership. Tansiongco and Ibarra (2020) examined educational leaders' adversity quotient in relation to management style and job performance, demonstrating the potential significance of adversity intelligence for leadership practices and organizational functioning. These studies provide evidence that leaders' responses to challenging circumstances deserve attention when examining leadership effectiveness. Existing research identified in the present study, nonetheless, provides limited explanation of how specific dimensions of adversity intelligence contribute to the development and maintenance of competitive advantage within Islamic educational institutions.



The research gap becomes particularly meaningful when examined through the experiences of madrasahs that have demonstrated institutional sustainability despite facing complex internal and external challenges. Preliminary findings from Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and Madrasah Aliyah Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo indicate that both institutions continue to maintain public confidence while confronting challenges related to teacher qualifications, student continuation, technological adaptation, administrative demands, educational policy, and competition among secondary educational institutions. These circumstances demonstrate that competitive advantage cannot be separated from the leadership processes through which institutional challenges are interpreted, managed, and transformed into strategic responses. The ability of principals to maintain organizational direction under pressure provides an important analytical entry point for understanding the relationship between adversity intelligence and institutional competitiveness.

The institutional trajectories of the two selected madrasahs provide empirical indications of competitive advantage through several observable dimensions, including student enrollment, student achievement, institutional partnerships, alumni contribution, and curriculum differentiation. Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Joresan increased its student enrollment from 240 students in 2023 to 252 students in 2024 and 262 students in 2025, while Madrasah Aliyah Wali Songo Putra Ngabar increased from 230 students in 2023 to 240 students in 2024 and 243 students in 2025. Both institutions also developed distinctive curricular characteristics, maintained partnerships with higher education institutions, demonstrated student achievements, and produced alumni who contribute across various professional and social fields. These institutional characteristics indicate that competitive advantage may be manifested through sustained community trust, educational differentiation, student outcomes, external collaboration, and long-term social contribution.

The distinctive characteristics of these institutions provide a basis for investigating the leadership capacities underlying their ability to sustain competitiveness despite persistent organizational challenges. The preliminary study identifies several dimensions of adversity intelligence that warrant closer examination, namely self-control, self-awareness, resilience, the capacity to limit the scope of problems, and motivation. These dimensions provide an analytical



framework for understanding how principals perceive adversity, regulate their responses, prevent individual problems from expanding into broader organizational crises, sustain persistence, and mobilize themselves and organizational members toward institutional goals. The focus is relevant because competitive advantage is not merely an outcome of organizational resources but can also emerge from leadership processes that determine how those resources are interpreted and strategically utilized under difficult conditions.

This study therefore investigates the adversity intelligence of madrasah principals in enhancing competitive advantage, using a multisite qualitative study of Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and Madrasah Aliyah Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo. The study specifically explores how principals demonstrate self-control, self-awareness, resilience, problem-boundary management, and motivation when confronting internal and external challenges that influence institutional competitiveness. The study contributes to the literature by positioning adversity intelligence not only as an individual psychological capacity associated with leadership performance but also as a potentially significant leadership resource for strengthening institutional competitive advantage in Islamic education. The findings are expected to provide a more contextual understanding of how madrasah principals convert adversity into strategic leadership responses and how such responses support institutional sustainability, differentiation, and continued public trust.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach with a multisite design to explore how madrasah principals experience and respond to adversity while strengthening the competitive advantage of their institutions. A phenomenological orientation was selected because the study sought to understand the meaning of leadership experiences from the perspectives of individuals who directly encounter organizational challenges within their institutional settings. Phenomenological research is appropriate for investigating lived experiences and the meanings participants attribute to those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The multisite design enabled



the researchers to examine the phenomenon in two madrasahs with different institutional contexts and to identify both shared and distinctive patterns of leadership responses.

The study focused on five dimensions of adversity intelligence identified from the research framework: self-control, self-awareness, resilience, the ability to limit the scope of problems, and motivation. These dimensions were examined in relation to how principals responded to internal and external challenges and how their responses supported the development and maintenance of institutional competitive advantage. The qualitative design allowed the researchers to examine leadership practices within their natural contexts and to interpret the meanings emerging from participants' experiences rather than reducing the phenomenon to predetermined numerical indicators.

Research Sites and Participants

The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and Madrasah Aliyah Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. The two research sites were selected purposively because both institutions have demonstrated sustained competitive advantage despite operating within highly competitive educational environments. MA Al-Islam Joresan was established in 1966 under the Al-Islam Joresan Islamic boarding school foundation. The institution has demonstrated increasing student enrollment, student achievements, institutional partnerships, alumni contributions, and curriculum differentiation. MA Wali Songo Putra Ngabar was established in 1961 under the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic boarding school foundation and has maintained student enrollment, developed national and international partnerships, produced alumni working in diverse professional fields, and implemented a modern pesantren-oriented curriculum. These characteristics provided information-rich contexts for examining the relationship between principal adversity intelligence and institutional competitiveness.

Participants were selected purposively based on their knowledge of institutional leadership, direct involvement in school management, and experience with programs related to competitive advantage. The madrasah principals served as the primary informants, while supporting informants consisted of the vice principals for curriculum, public relations, student affairs, and facilities and infrastructure, teachers, and the head of administration. These participants were selected because they interacted directly with the principals and could provide complementary perspectives



concerning leadership decisions, organizational responses, institutional programs, and competitive strategies. Documentary materials and institutional activities were also examined as additional sources of evidence. The use of multiple participant categories enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon from different organizational perspectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The combination of these techniques was intended to generate rich and contextualized evidence concerning the experiences of madrasah principals and the institutional processes associated with competitive advantage. The researcher served as the primary research instrument and was directly involved in collecting, interpreting, and verifying the data. This position is consistent with qualitative inquiry, in which researchers engage directly with participants and the research setting to understand the meaning of social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In-depth interviews were conducted with principals and supporting informants. The interviews began with broad questions concerning institutional challenges and leadership experiences and subsequently developed into more focused questions concerning the five dimensions of adversity intelligence. The interviews explored how principals controlled their responses to difficult situations, developed awareness of their own capacities and limitations, maintained resilience, prevented specific problems from expanding into broader institutional difficulties, and sustained motivation when pursuing organizational goals. Interviews were documented, transcribed, organized according to the research focus, and compared across participants. The interview procedure followed the research protocol described in the original study, which emphasized repeated engagement with relevant informants to obtain detailed information.

Participant observation was conducted within the natural settings of both madrasahs. The observations focused on leadership activities, decision-making processes, interactions between principals and organizational members, institutional program implementation, responses to organizational problems, and activities associated with maintaining competitive advantage. Field notes were prepared to document observed events, interactions, institutional conditions, and relevant researcher reflections. Observation data were subsequently compared with interview



accounts to identify consistencies, differences, and additional patterns that might not have emerged through interviews alone.

Document analysis was used to examine documentary evidence relevant to leadership practices and competitive advantage. The documents included institutional records, administrative materials, program documentation, student achievement records, curriculum-related documents, photographs, activity records, partnership documentation, and other materials relevant to the research questions. Documentary evidence was examined alongside interview and observation data to strengthen the interpretation of institutional practices and outcomes. Data collection and analysis were conducted iteratively, with additional information sought when emerging findings required clarification or verification.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The model provides a systematic approach for organizing qualitative evidence while maintaining an iterative relationship between data collection and interpretation. SAGE identifies the fourth edition of *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* as a major methodological reference for qualitative data analysis and data display.

Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. The researchers repeatedly reviewed the transcripts and field notes to identify statements relevant to the five dimensions of adversity intelligence and indicators of competitive advantage. Initial codes were assigned to meaningful units of data and subsequently grouped into categories and broader themes. The coding process was conducted systematically to maintain a clear relationship between empirical evidence and emerging interpretations.

Data display involved organizing the condensed information into thematic matrices, comparative categories, and narrative displays. Data were initially displayed separately for each research site to preserve the contextual characteristics of the two madrasahs. The displays were organized around self-control, self-awareness, resilience, problem-boundary management, and motivation, together with evidence of competitive advantage such as student enrollment, public



trust, student achievement, curriculum differentiation, institutional partnerships, and alumni contribution.

Conclusion drawing and verification involved identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings from the displayed data and continuously testing emerging interpretations against the empirical evidence. Interview findings were compared with observation notes and documentary evidence, while contradictory information was examined through further verification. Conclusions were considered sufficiently supported when similar patterns were identified across relevant sources and when alternative interpretations had been carefully examined.

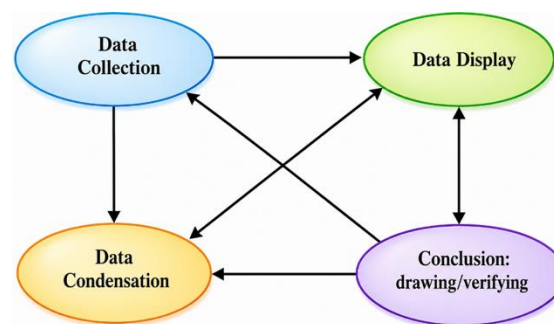


Figure 1. Data Analysis Technique

Cross-Site Analysis

Following the site-specific analysis, the researchers conducted a cross-site analysis to compare findings from MA Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and MA Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo. The purpose of cross-site analysis was to identify patterns that were shared across the two institutions, distinguish contextual differences, and develop an integrated interpretation of how adversity intelligence contributed to competitive advantage.

The analysis began by organizing findings from each site into categories and themes related to the five dimensions of adversity intelligence. Findings from MA Al-Islam Joresan were analyzed independently before the same analytical procedure was applied to MA Wali Songo Putra Ngabar. Site-specific findings were subsequently compared to identify similarities and differences in leadership responses, organizational challenges, problem-solving strategies, and competitive advantage practices. The comparison focused on the meaning and function of adversity intelligence rather than merely comparing institutional outcomes.

The final stage involved synthesizing the findings from both sites into an integrated interpretation. Similar findings were used to identify common patterns, while divergent findings



were retained to explain the influence of institutional context. The synthesis generated the final findings concerning the role of self-control, self-awareness, resilience, problem-boundary management, and motivation in the principals' efforts to strengthen institutional competitive advantage. The analytical structure is presented in Figure 2.

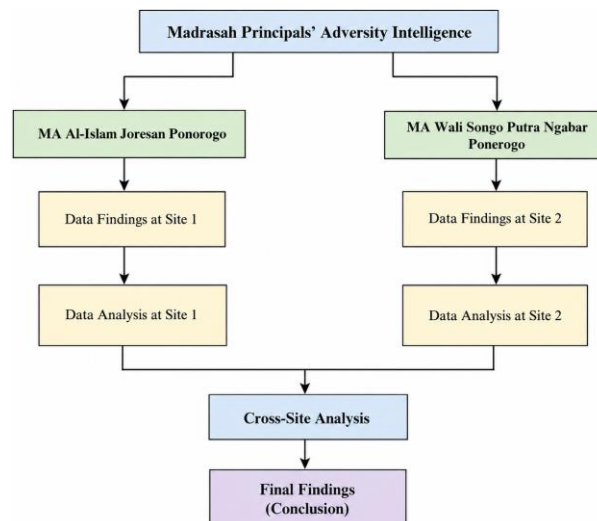


Figure 2. Cross-Site Analysis Process

The cross-site procedure consisted of the following analytical sequence: findings from Site 1 → Site 1 analysis; findings from Site 2 → Site 2 analysis; comparison of site-specific findings → cross-site synthesis → final findings. This procedure allowed the study to preserve the uniqueness of each institutional context while developing an integrated explanation of the phenomenon under investigation. The approach is consistent with the original research design, which specifies separate site analysis followed by systematic comparison and synthesis across the two research sites.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the findings was established using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These criteria are widely used to demonstrate the rigor of qualitative research, while systematic documentation of analytical decisions strengthens the traceability and credibility of qualitative findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer discussion, triangulation, adequate referential materials, and member checking. The researcher



maintained sufficient engagement with the research settings to develop an understanding of institutional practices and leadership processes. Information obtained from principals was compared with information provided by vice principals, teachers, and administrative personnel. Interview findings were also compared with observation and documentary evidence. Selected findings were communicated to key informants to verify whether the interpretations accurately represented their experiences.

Transferability was addressed through detailed descriptions of the research sites, institutional contexts, participants, data collection procedures, and analytical processes. Such contextual descriptions enable readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other Islamic educational institutions operating under comparable competitive conditions. The research sites were described in sufficient detail to clarify their institutional characteristics and the circumstances surrounding their competitive advantage.

Dependability was established by maintaining systematic documentation of the research process, including the development of the research focus, site selection, participant selection, data collection, coding, analysis, cross-site comparison, and verification procedures. An audit-oriented record of methodological decisions was maintained to ensure that the research process could be examined consistently.

Confirmability was strengthened by linking interpretations to empirical evidence obtained from multiple sources. The researchers distinguished participants' statements, observational records, documentary evidence, and analytical interpretations throughout the research process. Peer discussion and cross-source comparison were used to reduce the possibility that conclusions were based primarily on researcher assumptions. The original research procedure also incorporated theoretical triangulation to strengthen the interpretation of findings through relevant theoretical perspectives.

Research Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The research procedure consisted of preliminary field engagement, research preparation, fieldwork, data analysis, cross-site comparison, verification, and formulation of conclusions. Preliminary engagement was conducted through observations and initial interviews at both madrasahs to establish the research focus and understand the institutional context. The subsequent



fieldwork involved systematic interviews, participant observation, and document collection. Data analysis was conducted concurrently and iteratively with fieldwork, allowing emerging interpretations to guide further data collection and verification.

Institutional access was obtained through communication with the respective madrasah authorities, and the purpose of the research was explained before substantive data collection was undertaken. The researcher maintained confidentiality of information obtained from participants and used the data solely for research purposes. The researcher also maintained reflexive awareness throughout the research process because the researcher functioned as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation. These procedures were intended to ensure that the research process respected the institutional context and the perspectives of participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that self-control represents a fundamental dimension of adversity intelligence manifested by the principals of MA Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and MA Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo when responding to complex institutional challenges. Self-control was not manifested merely through emotional restraint but through an integrated process involving cognitive regulation, behavioral regulation, and strategic decision-making. The principals demonstrated the capacity to evaluate information selectively, regulate interpersonal responses, and formulate institutional decisions through consultation and consideration of alternative solutions. These practices enabled the principals to transform potentially disruptive circumstances into opportunities for institutional improvement and competitive positioning. The empirical evidence indicates that self-control functions as a leadership capacity through which principals maintain institutional direction while responding constructively to adversity.

The empirical findings reveal three interconnected forms of self-control: controlling the thinking process, controlling behavior, and controlling decisions. These three forms demonstrate that adversity intelligence operates as a leadership mechanism through which principals interpret challenges, regulate their responses, and determine strategic actions. This pattern is consistent with Averill's (1973) conceptualization of personal control, which distinguishes cognitive, behavioral, and decisional dimensions of control in individuals' responses to stressful circumstances. The



findings also correspond with the Control (C) dimension of Stoltz's (1999) adversity quotient framework, which concerns the extent to which individuals perceive their ability to influence their responses when confronting adversity. Research involving educational leaders further indicates that adversity quotient is associated with leadership practices and school management, providing empirical support for understanding control as a capacity with organizational implications (Aya et al., 2022; Tansiongco & Ibarra, 2020).

Controlling the Thinking Process

The findings indicate that the principals demonstrated selective and reflective thinking when responding to changes in educational technology, curriculum policy, institutional facilities, and community expectations. One prominent manifestation was the selective use of digital learning platforms for educational activities. Rather than adopting every available platform as an indicator of institutional modernization, the principals considered human resource competence, technological readiness, financial capacity, and actual educational needs before determining which platforms were appropriate. This approach indicates that technological development was interpreted through institutional priorities rather than through imitation of external trends. The principals consequently treated digital transformation as a strategic issue requiring contextual analysis rather than as an obligation to adopt every innovation available in the educational environment.

The selective evaluation of digital platforms demonstrates that cognitive control was connected with resource management. The principals assessed whether particular technologies could realistically be implemented by teachers, supported by existing facilities, and sustained within available financial resources. This practice prevented technological adoption from becoming a symbolic activity disconnected from institutional needs. Such strategic selectivity is important for madrasahs because institutional competitiveness cannot always be achieved through the accumulation of expensive technologies. Effective leadership may instead depend on the ability to identify technologies that provide meaningful educational value while remaining compatible with institutional capacity.

This finding is supported by Aya et al. (2022), who found a relationship between the Control dimension of adversity quotient among school heads and school-based management practices,



particularly leadership and governance, accountability and continuous improvement, and management of resources. Their findings suggest that adversity control can extend beyond an individual psychological response and become relevant to organizational management. The present study provides a qualitative explanation of this relationship by demonstrating how principals exercise cognitive control through information filtering, contextual evaluation, and selective allocation of institutional resources. Cognitive control therefore becomes visible through concrete managerial choices rather than remaining an abstract psychological characteristic.

The principals also demonstrated cognitive reframing when dealing with limitations in institutional facilities. Limited infrastructure was not interpreted exclusively as an organizational weakness but was transformed into an opportunity to develop cooperation with external parties. This response illustrates a shift from a deficit-oriented interpretation toward an opportunity-oriented interpretation of institutional adversity. Such a process enabled the principals to mobilize external resources while preserving the institution's existing financial capacity. The finding demonstrates that the meaning of an adverse condition can be transformed through the leader's cognitive interpretation.

This pattern corresponds with Averill's (1973) concept of cognitive control, through which individuals interpret, evaluate, and cognitively organize potentially stressful events. Cognitive control enables individuals to establish an interpretive framework through which difficult circumstances can be understood and managed. In the present study, the principals' cognitive control was evident in their ability to reinterpret institutional limitations as opportunities for collaboration and resource mobilization. A condition that could potentially weaken institutional competitiveness was therefore reconstructed as a stimulus for institutional networking and resource development.

The same cognitive pattern was identified in the principals' responses to curriculum changes. The findings show that new curriculum policies were not adopted mechanically or implemented without contextual consideration. The principals adapted external curriculum requirements while maintaining the distinctive characteristics of modern pesantren education that constitute part of the institutional identity of the madrasahs. Curriculum adaptation therefore became a process of selective integration rather than simple policy compliance. The principals recognized that



curriculum reform could provide opportunities for educational improvement while simultaneously maintaining characteristics that differentiated their institutions from other educational providers.

Infrastructure development followed a similar principle because decisions were based on institutional needs rather than prestige, competition, or the desire to follow institutional trends. The principals considered whether facilities were necessary for improving educational processes before allocating institutional resources. This approach demonstrates that cognitive control also operates through strategic prioritization. Institutional development was directed toward areas with educational and organizational value rather than toward symbolic investments intended primarily to improve institutional image.

The ability to maintain institutional identity while selectively responding to environmental change represents an important dimension of competitive advantage. Institutions operating with limited resources cannot necessarily compete by replicating all facilities, technologies, or programs developed by better-resourced competitors. Competitive advantage may instead emerge when leaders distinguish between changes that are strategically relevant and changes that merely represent external trends. The principals' ability to filter information and maintain institutional identity while responding to environmental change therefore becomes an important leadership resource.

The findings strengthen the theoretical relevance of Stoltz's (1999) Control dimension. Control does not imply that leaders possess complete power over external circumstances; rather, it concerns their perceived capacity to determine how they respond to circumstances that cannot be completely controlled. In this study, the principals could not eliminate technological change, curriculum reform, resource limitations, or competition among educational institutions. They could determine how these conditions were interpreted and what institutional responses were subsequently developed. This distinction demonstrates that adversity intelligence becomes strategically valuable when leaders transform external pressure into purposeful institutional action.

The qualitative evidence also complements Tansiongco and Ibarra's (2020) research concerning educational leaders' adversity quotient, management style, and job performance. Their study demonstrated the relevance of adversity quotient to school leadership, particularly in contexts requiring leaders to respond to organizational challenges. The present findings extend this



perspective by showing that the Control dimension becomes observable through selective information processing, cognitive reframing, curriculum adaptation, and needs-based resource allocation. Cognitive control consequently provides a bridge between adversity intelligence and strategic institutional management.

Controlling Behavior

The findings further demonstrate that self-control was manifested through the principals' ability to regulate their behavior and emotional responses during interactions with teachers, students, and other members of the madrasah community. The principals adjusted their communication and interpersonal responses according to situational conditions while maintaining their institutional objectives. Emotional responses were not allowed to dominate interactions with organizational members. Such behavioral regulation contributed to the development of a more conducive organizational climate and supported cooperation among members of the madrasah community.

The principals' behavioral control was particularly evident in their interactions with teachers. Differences in individual characteristics, professional competence, and responses to institutional policies required the principals to adjust their communication strategies. Rather than relying on a uniform interpersonal approach, they demonstrated situational adaptability. This pattern indicates that self-control was not synonymous with passivity but involved the capacity to determine appropriate behavioral responses according to organizational circumstances. The principals maintained their leadership responsibilities while adapting their interpersonal approaches to the characteristics of people and situations.

The principals' ability to regulate their responses is particularly relevant to educational organizations because interpersonal interaction constitutes a substantial component of institutional management. Teachers and staff may respond differently to changes in curriculum, organizational policies, technological requirements, and performance expectations. An emotionally uncontrolled response from a principal could potentially transform an operational problem into an interpersonal conflict. The principals' behavioral control reduced this possibility by allowing difficult situations to be managed through communication and adjustment rather than impulsive reaction.



Behavioral regulation was also evident in interactions with students. The principals demonstrated awareness of situations that could potentially generate negative emotional reactions and regulated their responses accordingly. This anticipatory capacity reduced the possibility of impulsive reactions and enabled the principals to function as behavioral models for students and teachers. Within an educational institution, such leadership behavior has significance beyond interpersonal relationships because the principal's conduct becomes part of the organizational culture experienced by members of the institution.

Averill's (1973) concept of behavioral control provides an appropriate interpretation of these findings because personal control involves the ability to regulate one's actions and responses in relation to environmental circumstances. In the present study, behavioral control was demonstrated through adaptive communication, emotional regulation, and situationally appropriate leadership behavior. The principals did not attempt to control every external condition, but they maintained control over their behavioral responses to those conditions.

The finding also corresponds with Jimenez's (2021) study of public elementary school heads, which examined adversity quotient and emotional quotient among school leaders. Jimenez identified self-awareness, emotional management, motivation, empathy, and social skills as relevant characteristics of educational leaders and reported a significant relationship between adversity quotient and emotional quotient. The present study extends this finding by demonstrating how emotional and behavioral regulation is expressed through everyday leadership interactions in madrasah settings.

Behavioral control contributes to competitive advantage through the development of social and relational capital within the institution. Principals who consistently regulate emotional responses and demonstrate adaptive communication can strengthen trust among teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Trust facilitates cooperation, communication, and collective participation in institutional programs. These relational resources can support institutional competitiveness because educational programs depend substantially on the willingness of organizational members to cooperate with leadership initiatives.

This interpretation is consistent with Waruwu et al. (2022), who examined authentic leadership and human resource practices in Indonesian private madrasahs and identified their



relevance to competitive advantage. Their study demonstrates the importance of leadership that maintains institutional values while managing human resources in competitive educational environments. The present findings complement this perspective by identifying behavioral self-control as an interpersonal mechanism through which principals can preserve constructive relationships and institutional values. Emotional regulation and adaptive communication therefore contribute to the human-resource conditions necessary for sustaining institutional competitiveness.

The competitive advantage generated through behavioral control is consequently indirect but strategically important. A conducive organizational climate can support teacher collaboration, student engagement, program implementation, and stakeholder participation. When principals demonstrate consistency and emotional maturity, organizational members may experience greater confidence in leadership and become more willing to participate in institutional development. Behavioral control thus becomes an organizational resource because it strengthens the relational conditions through which other forms of competitive advantage can be developed.

Controlling Decisions

The findings demonstrate that self-control was also expressed through participatory and strategic decision-making. When confronted with the challenge of relatively low continuation rates of graduates to higher education, the principals did not immediately impose individual solutions. The issue was discussed with vice principals and relevant organizational members before institutional interventions were determined. The resulting strategies included disseminating information concerning higher education admission pathways such as SPAN and UM-PTKIN and facilitating students' participation in Campus Expo activities organized through the Musyawarah Guru Bimbingan Konseling (MGBK).

This practice illustrates decisional control because the principals followed a process involving problem identification, consultation, consideration of alternatives, and selection of an appropriate response. Averill (1973) conceptualizes decisional control as the ability to exercise choice among alternative courses of action. Leadership control therefore does not require complete control over the final outcome but involves the capacity to select and implement appropriate responses to circumstances that cannot be fully controlled.



The challenge of graduate continuation to higher education illustrates the importance of this form of control because students' decisions are influenced by academic preparation, family circumstances, financial considerations, access to information, and individual aspirations. The principals could not directly determine whether graduates would continue to higher education. They could influence the institutional conditions surrounding students' decisions by improving information access and connecting students with available higher education opportunities. The decision to strengthen socialization concerning SPAN and UM-PTKIN therefore represents an effort to influence controllable aspects of a broader institutional challenge.

The participatory nature of the decision-making process is particularly significant. Consultation with vice principals allowed the problem to be examined from different organizational perspectives before an intervention was selected. This approach reduced the possibility of impulsive decision-making and increased the organizational legitimacy of the resulting policy. Participation also created shared responsibility for implementation because the selected strategy was not treated as an individual initiative belonging exclusively to the principal.

The decision to utilize Campus Expo further illustrates strategic decisional control. Rather than developing a completely new program that would require additional resources, the principal utilized an existing forum organized through MGBK to expose students to information concerning higher education opportunities. The decision reflects strategic resource utilization because an existing institutional network was mobilized to address a specific organizational challenge. This practice demonstrates that strategic decision-making can involve recognizing the value of existing opportunities rather than continuously creating new institutional programs.

The findings correspond with Dian et al. (2023), who identified leadership, commitment, work ethic, strategic action, and partnerships as relevant factors in developing competitive advantage among educational institutions. The use of Campus Expo illustrates this principle because the principal connected an existing external network with an institutional objective. The decision demonstrates that competitive advantage can be strengthened through the ability to identify and mobilize existing resources rather than relying exclusively on additional financial investment.



The findings also complement Wijayanti et al. (2022), who found that visionary leadership and managerial accountability significantly influenced competitive advantage in educational institutions. Their findings demonstrate that leadership characteristics can become organizational determinants of competitiveness. The present study provides a more specific explanation by positioning decisional control as a mechanism through which principals convert leadership capacity into institutional action. Consultation, alternative evaluation, strategic resource utilization, and deliberate decision-making become practical expressions of this mechanism.

Decisional control also contributes to organizational adaptability because educational institutions frequently face problems for which there is no single predetermined solution. Principals must evaluate alternatives according to institutional values, available resources, stakeholder needs, and long-term objectives. The findings show that the principals exercised this capacity by considering institutional circumstances before determining the most feasible response. Decision-making consequently became an adaptive process rather than a purely administrative function.

Self-Control as a Strategic Mechanism for Competitive Advantage

The findings across the two research sites demonstrate that self-control operates as an integrated leadership mechanism rather than as an isolated psychological characteristic. Cognitive control enables principals to interpret adversity and identify opportunities within constraints. Behavioral control enables them to regulate interpersonal and emotional responses while maintaining constructive relationships with organizational members. Decisional control enables them to translate interpretations of adversity into strategic and participatory institutional actions. These dimensions interact to produce a leadership process through which adversity can be transformed into organizational opportunity.

The relationship can be understood as a sequence in which adversity is initially encountered as an external challenge, cognitively interpreted by the principal, regulated through appropriate behavior, and subsequently translated into institutional decisions. The resulting decisions can strengthen institutional resources, organizational relationships, program effectiveness, partnerships, and institutional differentiation. Such a process explains how adversity intelligence



can contribute to competitive advantage without assuming that leaders possess complete control over the external environment.

The findings indicate that the competitive advantage generated through self-control is multidimensional. Cognitive control contributes to institutional adaptability and identity preservation through selective adoption of technology and curriculum policies. Behavioral control contributes to trust and relational capital through emotional regulation and adaptive communication. Decisional control contributes to strategic responsiveness and resource efficiency through participatory decision-making and utilization of existing networks. These mechanisms correspond with competitive characteristics identified in the two madrasahs, including student enrollment, student achievement, institutional partnerships, alumni contribution, public trust, and distinctive institutional identity.

Previous research reinforces this interpretation from complementary perspectives. Aya et al. (2022) connect adversity quotient and control with school-based management practices; Tansiongco and Ibarra (2020) associate educational leaders' adversity quotient with leadership performance; Jimenez (2021) identifies the relationship between adversity quotient and emotional quotient among school heads; Waruwu et al. (2022) demonstrate the relevance of authentic leadership and human resource practices to competitive advantage in private madrasahs; while Dian et al. (2023) and Wijayanti et al. (2022) demonstrate the contribution of leadership, partnerships, managerial accountability, and strategic practices to educational competitiveness. These studies provide converging evidence that leadership capacities become strategically meaningful when they influence organizational processes and institutional outcomes.

The present study extends this body of research by proposing that self-control functions as a strategic conversion mechanism between adversity intelligence and competitive advantage. The contribution does not lie merely in confirming that principals with stronger adversity intelligence can manage challenges more effectively. The qualitative findings explain how such control becomes observable in practice: principals filter information, reinterpret limitations, regulate interpersonal responses, consult organizational members, evaluate alternatives, and mobilize available resources. These processes transform an internal leadership capacity into an institutional mechanism.



Proposed Conceptual Model

Based on the empirical findings from MA Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and MA Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo, this study proposes the Self-Control–Adversity Intelligence–Competitive Advantage Framework. The framework positions self-control as the operational mechanism through which adversity intelligence is translated into institutional competitive advantage. The model integrates the three empirical forms identified in this study—controlling the thinking process, controlling behavior, and controlling decisions—with the broader adversity intelligence framework developed by Stoltz (1999).

The proposed model conceptualizes cognitive control as the mechanism supporting strategic interpretation, behavioral control as the mechanism supporting relational stability, and decisional control as the mechanism supporting strategic action. These processes subsequently contribute to institutional outcomes associated with competitive advantage, including student trust and enrollment, student achievement, institutional partnerships, alumni contribution, resource efficiency, and distinctive institutional identity.

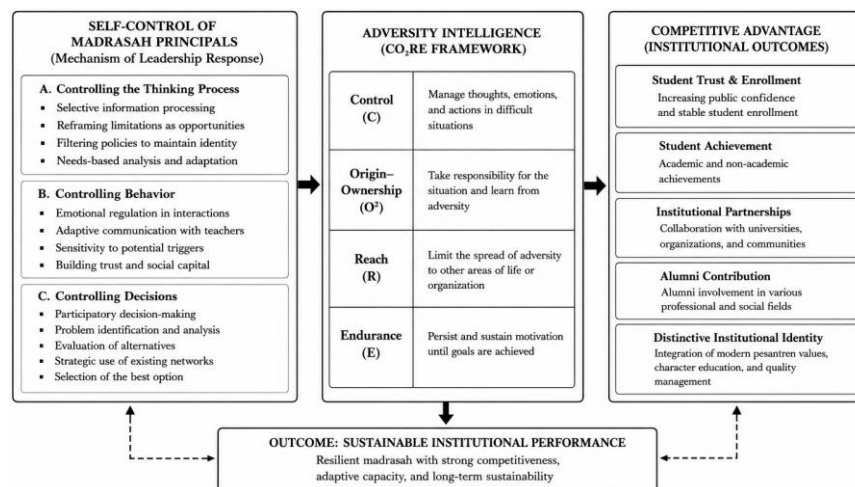


Figure 3. Proposed Self-Control–Adversity Intelligence–Competitive Advantage Framework

The proposed model does not imply that adversity automatically produces competitive advantage. The findings instead indicate that the consequences of adversity depend substantially on how principals interpret the situation, regulate their responses, and select strategic actions. Self-control therefore functions as a mediating leadership process through which adverse circumstances can be transformed into opportunities for adaptation, collaboration, and institutional development.



The conceptual contribution of the model lies in repositioning self-control from an individual psychological attribute toward an organizational leadership mechanism. Cognitive control provides the interpretive foundation, behavioral control supports relational stability, and decisional control converts interpretation into institutional action. The interaction of these processes offers an empirically grounded explanation of how adversity intelligence can contribute to competitive advantage within Islamic educational institutions operating in dynamic and resource-constrained environments.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that adversity intelligence constitutes an important leadership capacity through which madrasah principals respond to complex institutional challenges and sustain competitive advantage. The multisite investigation at MA Al-Islam Joresan Ponorogo and MA Wali Songo Putra Ngabar Ponorogo indicates that adversity intelligence is manifested through five interconnected dimensions: self-control, self-awareness, resilience, problem-boundary management, and motivation. These dimensions enable principals to interpret organizational difficulties, regulate their responses, maintain persistence, prevent specific problems from developing into broader institutional disruptions, and sustain commitment toward institutional objectives. The findings confirm that adversity intelligence should not be understood solely as an individual psychological attribute. Within the context of madrasah leadership, it functions as a practical leadership resource that influences how institutional challenges are interpreted and transformed into organizational responses. The findings are particularly significant because both madrasahs demonstrate sustained competitiveness through student enrollment, student achievement, curriculum differentiation, institutional partnerships, alumni contribution, and public trust despite facing resource limitations, technological changes, policy demands, and competitive pressures.

The most prominent finding concerns the role of self-control as an operational mechanism connecting adversity intelligence with competitive advantage. Self-control was manifested through controlling the thinking process, controlling behavior, and controlling decisions. Cognitive control enabled principals to evaluate technological platforms selectively, adapt



curriculum policies while preserving institutional identity, interpret infrastructure limitations as opportunities for collaboration, and allocate resources according to institutional priorities. Behavioral control enabled principals to regulate emotional responses, adjust interpersonal communication, and maintain constructive relationships with teachers and students. Decisional control was demonstrated through consultation, alternative evaluation, and strategic utilization of existing institutional networks, particularly when addressing challenges related to students' continuation to higher education. These practices demonstrate that principals do not necessarily eliminate adversity but exercise control over how adversity is interpreted, managed, and translated into institutional action. The study therefore proposes the Self-Control–Adversity Intelligence–Competitive Advantage Framework, positioning cognitive regulation, behavioral regulation, and strategic decision-making as mechanisms through which adversity intelligence contributes to institutional adaptability, relational capital, resource efficiency, and strategic responsiveness.

The theoretical and practical contribution of this study lies in repositioning adversity intelligence from an individual capacity for coping with difficulties toward an organizational leadership mechanism for developing sustainable competitive advantage. The findings suggest that madrasah competitiveness is strengthened when principals can transform adversity into opportunities for institutional differentiation, collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement while maintaining organizational identity and stakeholder confidence. The study provides an empirical basis for integrating adversity intelligence into leadership development programs for madrasah principals, particularly through training in reflective thinking, emotional regulation, strategic decision-making, resilience, and adaptive problem management. Future research may examine the proposed framework across a wider range of madrasahs and educational contexts using comparative qualitative or mixed-method approaches to determine whether the identified mechanisms operate consistently across different institutional, geographical, and organizational conditions. Such research would strengthen the generalizability of the conceptual framework while providing further evidence concerning the contribution of adversity intelligence to sustainable competitive advantage in Islamic education.

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