



Principal Self-Control as Adaptive Leadership in Strengthening Madrasah Competitive Advantage

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Abstract: Educational competitiveness in madrasah increasingly requires principals to regulate their responses to institutional challenges while maintaining organizational identity and developing contextually relevant educational programs. This study examines principal self-control as an adaptive leadership capacity in strengthening competitive advantage at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Ponorogo. A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed to examine each madrasah as a bounded case and subsequently compare findings across sites. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, observations, and institutional documents involving principals, teachers, and educational staff selected purposively based on their knowledge and involvement in leadership and program development. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, within-case analysis, and cross-site comparison. The findings reveal three interconnected dimensions of principal self-control: cognitive, behavioral, and decisional control. Cognitive control was reflected in selective technology adoption, contextual curriculum adaptation, needs-based facility development, and the reframing of resource limitations as opportunities for external collaboration. Behavioral control appeared through emotional regulation and adaptive interpersonal relationships with teachers and students. Decisional control was demonstrated through problem identification, consultation with organizational actors, evaluation of alternatives, and strategic responses to students' continuation to higher education. The findings indicate that these dimensions operate within institutional contexts and support adaptive leadership practices, program innovation, institutional differentiation, and competitive positioning. The study contributes a context-sensitive understanding of principal self-control as an internal leadership capacity supporting institutional adaptability and educational competitiveness.

Keywords: Principal Self-Control, Cognitive Control, Behavioral Control, Decisional Control, Adaptive Leadership, Program Innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Educational competitiveness is increasingly shaped by leadership processes that transform institutional resources, collective capacities, and strategic initiatives into distinctive educational value. Strategic leadership provides an important conceptual foundation for understanding how educational leaders respond to organizational complexity and competitive pressures. Rowe (2001) distinguishes managerial, visionary, and strategic leadership, with strategic leadership integrating long-term organizational direction with effective operational control. This perspective emphasizes the leader's capacity to create organizational value through strategic choices and sustained



institutional development. Yukl's (2013) Multiple-Linkage Model complements this perspective by explaining leadership as a process in which leader behavior influences organizational processes and outcomes through intervening mechanisms and situational conditions. Within madrasah, such a framework directs attention toward how principals communicate institutional vision, make strategic decisions, mobilize organizational members, and develop innovative programs that strengthen institutional positioning.

Intensifying competition among madrasah creates organizational pressures requiring principals to develop distinctive strategies that respond continuously to changing educational expectations. Kabupaten Ponorogo provides a relevant setting because the number of Madrasah Aliyah operating within the same educational environment creates substantial competition for students, community trust, achievement, and institutional recognition. Kim and Mauborgne (2005) describe highly competitive organizational environments through the concept of the "red ocean," where organizations compete within established boundaries and face pressure to differentiate their offerings. Porter (1985) argues that sustainable competitive advantage depends on organizational differentiation and the creation of superior value. Within educational institutions, competitiveness consequently involves more than academic achievement; it encompasses the capacity to develop distinctive programs, strengthen institutional identity, respond to stakeholder expectations, and sustain organizational quality through strategic leadership.

Differences between MAN 1 and MAN 2 Ponorogo offer an important empirical setting for exploring how similar institutional environments can generate contrasting patterns of educational development. Both institutions operate under comparable national educational regulations, Ministry of Religious Affairs policies, and governmental supervision. Preliminary documentation indicates that MAN 1 Ponorogo has developed CIBI classes, specialized skills programs, and the Prodistik program, while MAN 2 Ponorogo has developed an International Class Program, accelerated learning groups, official-school preparation classes, achievement programs, and other flagship initiatives. Their institutional achievement records also demonstrate substantial differences. Such differences invite qualitative investigation into the processes through which principals interpret institutional challenges, communicate strategic priorities, involve organizational members, and determine the direction of flagship programs. The central concern is



therefore not merely the existence of different programs but the leadership processes that produce, sustain, and differentiate those programs.

Leadership communication represents a critical organizational process through which principals construct shared understanding, coordinate institutional action, and create conditions supporting educational innovation. De Vries et al. (2010) identify six dimensions of leader communication styles: expressiveness, preciseness, verbal aggressiveness, questioningness, emotionality, and impression manipulation. These dimensions provide a useful conceptual basis for examining communication as an organizational practice rather than simply an individual interpersonal characteristic. Communication within madrasah may occur through formal meetings, informal interactions, vertical communication, horizontal collaboration, and other organizational channels. Rengkaningtias and Siswantoyo (2022) demonstrate the importance of effective organizational communication in school management. A qualitative perspective enables examination of how principals communicate strategic visions, respond to teachers' ideas, negotiate differences, distribute information, and establish communication patterns that either facilitate or constrain innovation.

Strategic decision-making constitutes a leadership process through which principals interpret institutional circumstances and translate organizational priorities into concrete educational programs. Rowe and Boulgarides (2011) conceptualize decision-making styles through directive, analytical, conceptual, and behavioral orientations. Simon's (1997) theory of bounded rationality recognizes that organizational decisions occur under limitations involving information, time, and cognitive capacity. Mintzberg (2007) emphasizes that organizational strategies can also emerge through responses to changing circumstances rather than solely through predetermined plans. These perspectives are particularly relevant to madrasah because decisions regarding flagship programs frequently involve competing priorities, resource limitations, stakeholder expectations, institutional traditions, and changing educational demands. Qualitative inquiry can reveal how principals gather information, involve teachers and staff, assess risks, negotiate competing interests, and justify decisions concerning institutional innovation.

Flagship-program innovation provides a visible organizational expression of leadership processes through which madrasah seek to construct distinctive educational identities and



institutional value. Damanpour (1991) conceptualizes organizational innovation as the adoption and implementation of new ideas or practices that significantly influence organizational functioning. Innovation in madrasah extends beyond introducing new program names because meaningful innovation requires organizational adaptation, collective participation, implementation capacity, and continuous evaluation. Kim and Mauborgne (1996) conceptualize value innovation as the creation of new value through strategic differentiation. This perspective encourages examination of whether flagship programs genuinely respond to stakeholder needs and institutional capabilities rather than merely reproducing programs implemented elsewhere. Qualitative exploration is particularly appropriate for understanding how ideas emerge, how programs are selected and developed, how organizational members participate in implementation, and how institutional leaders evaluate program value.

Previous studies have established important insights into educational innovation, organizational communication, and institutional competitiveness while leaving significant processes insufficiently explored across comparable madrasah. Ambarwati (2022) examined the management of flagship-program innovation in relation to graduate quality, while Mawardi (2023) investigated innovation management in excellent madrasah classes and its relationship with learning achievement. Rengkaningtias and Siswantoyo (2022) examined organizational communication management within an excellent school context. Nwabueze and Mileski (2018) highlighted effective communication as an organizational resource for achieving competitive advantage, while Ada et al. (2018) examined relationships between innovation-management competencies and organizational communication. Ekaale et al. (2017) investigated innovation strategies and competitive advantage in public secondary schools. These studies provide relevant foundations but offer limited explanation of the lived organizational processes through which leadership communication and decision-making become innovation and distinctive institutional practices.

A qualitative research gap remains concerning how principals' communication, strategic decisions, and organizational contexts interact during the development of flagship programs and institutional competitiveness. Existing studies tend to emphasize outcomes, relationships, or individual organizational dimensions, while less attention has been directed toward the processes



connecting leadership practices with institutional differentiation. Yukl's (2013) Multiple-Linkage Model highlights the importance of intervening organizational processes and situational conditions in explaining leadership outcomes. Such conditions may include organizational culture, teacher responses, resource availability, institutional history, stakeholder expectations, and the competitive environment. Investigating these dimensions requires attention to participants' experiences, organizational practices, decision narratives, communication patterns, and contextual meanings that cannot be adequately represented through numerical indicators alone.

This study therefore explores the strategic leadership processes underlying flagship-program innovation and institutional competitiveness at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Ponorogo. A qualitative comparative case-study approach is employed to examine how principals communicate strategic visions, make decisions, mobilize teachers and educational staff, develop flagship programs, and respond to institutional competition. The comparative design enables the study to identify similarities and differences in leadership practices across two madrasah operating within a broadly similar regulatory environment but demonstrating different institutional trajectories. The study seeks to contribute theoretically by extending the application of Strategic Leadership Theory and the Multiple-Linkage Model to the context of Islamic secondary education. Empirically, it seeks to explain how leadership communication, strategic decision-making, organizational innovation, and contextual conditions interact in shaping distinctive institutional practices and madrasah competitiveness.

METHOD

Research Design

A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed to examine leadership processes underlying flagship-program innovation and madrasah competitiveness. The design was selected because the study sought to understand leadership practices, organizational interactions, decision-making processes, and program development within their natural institutional contexts. The research involved two bounded cases, namely MAN 1 Ponorogo and MAN 2 Ponorogo. Each madrasah was initially examined as an individual case to develop a comprehensive understanding of its leadership practices and institutional processes, followed by cross-site analysis to identify



similarities, differences, and contextual patterns. The multiple-case design is appropriate when a contemporary phenomenon is investigated within its real-world context and when contextual conditions are integral to understanding the phenomenon (Yin, 2003).

The qualitative approach was aligned with the purpose of exploring meanings, experiences, practices, and institutional processes rather than testing statistical relationships. The investigation focused on how principals communicate strategic priorities, make institutional decisions, involve organizational members, develop flagship programs, and respond to competitive educational conditions. The study consequently treated communication, decision-making, innovation, and competitiveness as interconnected organizational processes rather than isolated measurable variables.

Research Setting and Case Selection

The study was conducted at MAN 1 Ponorogo and MAN 2 Ponorogo as two purposively selected and contextually comparable cases. Both institutions are public Islamic senior secondary schools operating under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and located within the same regency. Their shared regulatory and educational context provided an appropriate setting for examining differences in leadership practices and institutional development.

The cases were selected purposively because of their distinctive flagship programs and contrasting institutional achievement trajectories. MAN 1 Ponorogo has developed CIBI classes, specialized skills programs, and the Prodistik program. MAN 2 Ponorogo has developed an International Class Program, accelerated learning groups, official-school preparation programs, achievement-oriented classes, and other flagship initiatives. These differences provide an empirical basis for examining how leadership practices and institutional contexts shape the formulation, implementation, and development of flagship programs.

Case selection was therefore based on the comparative value of the two institutions rather than geographical proximity alone. The study considered each madrasah as a bounded institutional case and examined its leadership processes within the specific organizational, historical, and competitive context in which those processes occurred.

Participants and Data Sources



Participants were purposively selected based on their knowledge and direct involvement in leadership and flagship-program development within each madrasah. The principals served as key informants because the research specifically examined leadership communication and strategic decision-making. Teachers and educational staff were included because they directly experience leadership practices, participate in organizational processes, and contribute to the implementation of flagship programs.

Participant selection emphasized information richness rather than statistical representativeness. Individuals were considered eligible when they possessed substantive experience concerning institutional communication, decision-making, program development, implementation, or organizational responses to competitive conditions. Additional participants could be identified during fieldwork when emerging findings indicated the need for clarification or deeper contextual information.

Three complementary sources of qualitative evidence were used: semi-structured interviews, observations, and institutional documents. The use of multiple sources enabled the researcher to compare participants' accounts with observed practices and documentary evidence, thereby strengthening the interpretation of institutional processes.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences of leadership communication, strategic decision-making, organizational participation, and flagship-program development. The interview protocol contained common areas of inquiry for both research sites while allowing participants to elaborate on experiences and issues that were particularly significant within their institutional contexts. Interviews focused on how strategic priorities were communicated, how decisions were formulated, how teachers and staff participated in program development, and how flagship programs were implemented and evaluated.

Observations were conducted to examine naturally occurring organizational practices related to leadership communication, decision-making, collaboration, meetings, and flagship-program implementation. Field notes were used to record relevant interactions, activities, institutional conditions, and contextual information that could support interpretation of interview findings.



Documentary evidence was collected from institutional policies, program documents, organizational records, achievement documentation, reports, and other materials relevant to leadership and flagship-program development. Documents were examined as complementary evidence rather than as independent indicators of institutional performance. The integration of interviews, observations, and documents enabled methodological and source triangulation throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), in which data collection and analysis proceed through interconnected analytical activities. The model consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The approach treats qualitative analysis as an iterative process in which emerging interpretations can inform subsequent data collection and refinement of analytical categories. The third edition of the sourcebook explicitly develops these analytical procedures and retains the emphasis on drawing and verifying conclusions.

Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, coding, categorizing, and organizing information relevant to the research questions. Initial coding focused on leadership communication, strategic decision-making, organizational participation, flagship-program development, implementation processes, institutional responses, and contextual conditions. Codes with conceptual similarities were grouped into categories and subsequently developed into broader themes.

Data display was undertaken through thematic matrices, case summaries, comparison tables, and narrative representations. These displays enabled the researcher to examine recurring patterns, divergent experiences, and relationships among themes within each madrasah. The displays were revised throughout the analytical process as additional evidence emerged from interviews, observations, and documents.

Conclusion drawing and verification involved identifying patterns, interpreting their meanings, comparing evidence across data sources, and examining emerging explanations against the empirical record. Interpretations were repeatedly checked against interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents. Conclusions were considered sufficiently supported when



convergent evidence was established across relevant sources and alternative explanations had been examined.

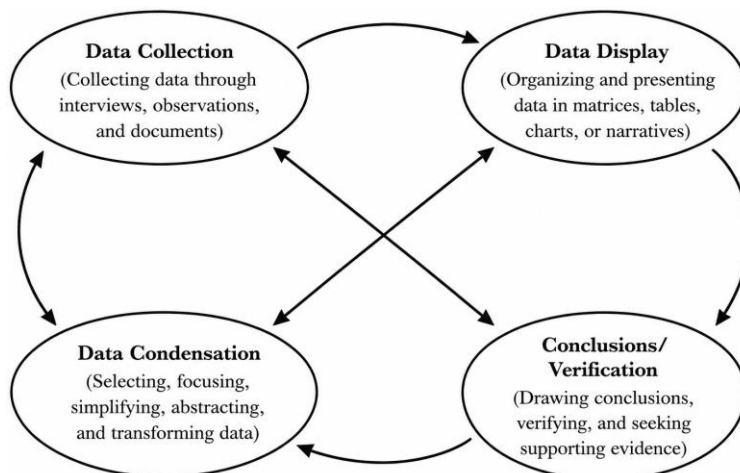


Figure 1. *Interactive Data Analysis Model*

Figure 1 illustrates the interactive relationship among data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The model emphasizes that qualitative analysis is cyclical rather than strictly linear, allowing the researcher to return to earlier data and analytical stages when new information requires further examination (Miles et al., 2014).

Within-Case and Cross-Site Analysis

Within-case analysis was conducted separately for MAN 1 Ponorogo and MAN 2 Ponorogo before the findings were systematically compared across the two sites. Within-case analysis generated a comprehensive account of leadership communication, strategic decision-making, organizational participation, flagship-program development, and contextual conditions in each madrasah. This procedure preserved the distinctive characteristics of each institution before comparative interpretation.

Cross-site analysis was subsequently conducted using the multiple-case study logic described by Yin (2003). The findings from both cases were compared to identify convergent patterns, divergent practices, contextual differences, and possible explanatory propositions. The comparison focused on how principals communicated strategic priorities, how decisions concerning flagship programs were developed, how organizational members participated in implementation, and how institutional contexts shaped program development.

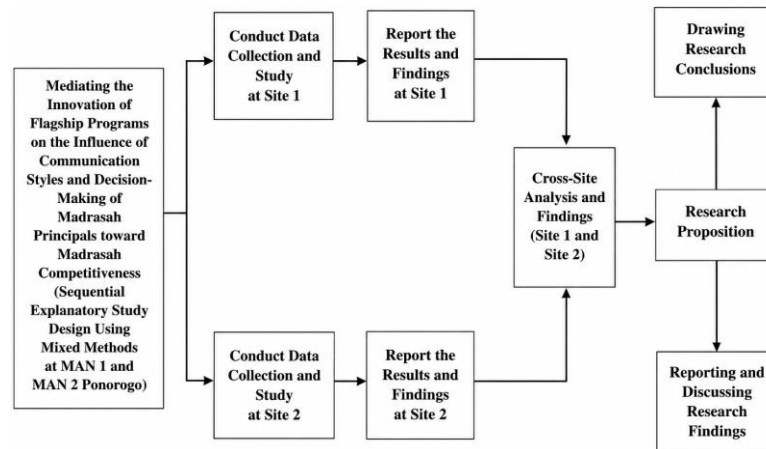


Figure 2. Qualitative Cross-Site Analysis Process.

Source: Adapted from Yin (2003).

The cross-site analysis consisted of individual case interpretation, identification of case-specific themes, systematic comparison of themes and patterns, and development of cross-site interpretations. The analysis did not assume that either madrasah represented a universally superior model. Instead, it examined how different leadership practices and contextual conditions contributed to distinctive institutional processes and outcomes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, supported by triangulation and systematic documentation. These four criteria are widely used to assess rigor in qualitative research and provide an appropriate framework for demonstrating that qualitative interpretations are grounded in empirical evidence.

Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement with the research setting, and member checking. Information obtained from principals, teachers, and educational staff was compared with observational and documentary evidence. Member checking was used to clarify selected participant statements and confirm the accuracy of relevant interpretations.

Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research setting, institutional characteristics, participants, data-collection procedures, and analytical processes. Such contextual description allows readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other educational settings rather than assuming statistical generalization.



Dependability was addressed through systematic documentation of the research process. Interview protocols, observation records, coding procedures, thematic matrices, analytical decisions, and revisions were maintained as an audit trail. Confirmability was strengthened by linking interpretations to interview evidence, observation records, and institutional documents and by examining alternative interpretations during analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were maintained throughout the research to protect participants, institutional confidentiality, and the integrity of the research process. Institutional permission was obtained before fieldwork commenced, and participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and use of research data. Participation was voluntary, and participants were given the opportunity to provide information within the boundaries of their consent.

Confidentiality was maintained when reporting information that could identify individual participants or disclose sensitive institutional information. Research records were managed for academic purposes, while interpretations were developed from documented evidence rather than assumptions or researcher expectations. The comparative presentation of the two cases was designed to preserve institutional context without unnecessarily exposing confidential information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative findings demonstrate that principal self-control operates as an adaptive leadership capacity through cognitive regulation, behavioral regulation, and strategic decision-making within challenging institutional conditions. The three dimensions emerged from the principal's responses to digital learning platforms, limited institutional facilities, curriculum changes, interpersonal interactions, and students' relatively low continuation to higher education. The findings indicate that self-control was not restricted to emotional restraint but encompassed the capacity to interpret situations, regulate responses, evaluate alternatives, and determine appropriate institutional actions. This interpretation corresponds with Averill's (1973) framework, which differentiates personal control into behavioral control, cognitive control, and decisional control. Averill conceptualizes these forms of control as distinct but interconnected ways through



which individuals respond to challenging circumstances and regulate their relationship with environmental conditions.

The findings further suggest that self-control becomes organizationally meaningful when the principal translates personal regulation into adaptive leadership practices and context-sensitive institutional decisions. Cognitive regulation was reflected in the selective evaluation of digital platforms and the interpretation of resource limitations as opportunities for external collaboration. Behavioral regulation appeared in the principal's ability to manage emotions and adapt interactions with teachers and students. Decisional regulation was demonstrated through consultation with vice principals, evaluation of alternatives, and the selection of strategies addressing students' progression toward higher education. Such processes are consistent with social-cognitive perspectives that position self-regulation as an interaction between personal processes, behavior, and environmental conditions (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000).

Cognitive Control: Reframing Constraints as Strategic Opportunities

Cognitive control emerged most clearly through the principal's selective processing of information, contextual appraisal of alternatives, and ability to reinterpret institutional limitations as opportunities for organizational development. The findings indicate that the principal did not automatically adopt every digital platform available for educational purposes. Decisions regarding digital learning were considered in relation to human-resource capacity and institutional cost efficiency. The principal's approach demonstrates that technological adoption was treated as a matter of institutional relevance rather than as an obligation to follow every emerging educational trend. Such selective information processing represents an important form of cognitive regulation because it enables leaders to distinguish between innovations that are strategically useful and those that may impose unnecessary organizational burdens.

The principal's interpretation of limited institutional facilities provides particularly strong evidence of cognitive reframing as an adaptive response to organizational adversity. Rather than interpreting inadequate facilities exclusively as weaknesses, the principal perceived these limitations as opportunities to establish collaboration with external parties. This finding is compatible with Averill's (1973) explanation of cognitive control as the interpretation of events within a cognitive framework that influences how individuals respond to potentially stressful



conditions. The significance of the finding lies in the change of meaning attached to the constraint: a limitation became a stimulus for partnership and resource mobilization rather than a justification for organizational stagnation.

Strategic information filtering also reflects the bounded nature of organizational decision-making because institutional leaders must evaluate alternatives under limitations of information, resources, time, and cognitive capacity. Simon's (1997) theory of bounded rationality explains that decision-makers rarely possess complete information or unlimited cognitive resources when selecting organizational alternatives. The principal's selective consideration of digital platforms demonstrates such bounded but purposeful rationality because available technologies were evaluated according to institutional resources and practical needs. The finding suggests that effective leadership under resource constraints does not necessarily depend on adopting the greatest number of innovations but on identifying innovations that provide sufficient institutional value.

Curriculum adaptation represents another manifestation of cognitive control because external educational policies were interpreted through the established identity and distinctive characteristics of the modern pesantren-oriented madrasah. The principal did not implement curriculum changes mechanically but adapted them by integrating institutional characteristics that constituted part of the madrasah's identity. This finding reflects the broader understanding of educational change as a process requiring interpretation, organizational learning, adaptation, and internalization rather than simple policy compliance (Fullan, 2007). The principal's approach therefore demonstrates cognitive control through selective adaptation, allowing the institution to respond to external policy changes while maintaining distinctive organizational characteristics.

Needs-based facility development further demonstrates that cognitive control influences how institutional resources are interpreted, prioritized, and converted into strategic organizational investments. The principal's decision to develop facilities according to institutional needs rather than trends or institutional prestige reflects a process of strategic appraisal. Porter (1985) argues that competitive advantage is generated through organizational activities that create distinctive value rather than through resource accumulation alone. The finding suggests that cognitive control



can support competitive positioning by helping leaders distinguish between investments that contribute to educational value and investments primarily motivated by symbolic competition.

The cognitive findings also correspond with Stoltz's conception of adversity response, particularly the capacity to maintain perceived control when confronting circumstances that could otherwise restrict organizational action. Stoltz (1997) conceptualizes adversity through the individual's response to difficult circumstances and emphasizes control as an important dimension of how people respond to challenges. Within the present case, the principal's reframing of resource limitations, selective adoption of technology, and contextual curriculum adaptation demonstrates a consistent orientation toward maintaining agency. The principal therefore appears to respond to adversity by identifying controllable aspects of the situation and mobilizing available alternatives.

Behavioral Control: Emotional Regulation and Adaptive Interpersonal Leadership

Behavioral control was reflected in the principal's capacity to regulate emotional responses, adjust interpersonal conduct, and maintain constructive interactions with teachers and students across different institutional situations. The findings indicate that the principal did not employ an identical interactional pattern in every circumstance but adjusted behavior according to the characteristics of the situation and the individuals involved. Such adaptive conduct demonstrates that self-control was translated into observable leadership behavior. The principal's behavioral regulation consequently became relevant to organizational relationships because emotional responses could influence communication, cooperation, and the working atmosphere within the madrasah.

The principal's interactions with teachers indicate that emotional regulation supported a more adaptive organizational climate and reduced the possibility of interpersonal responses becoming sources of institutional tension. Averill (1973) distinguishes behavioral control from cognitive and decisional control by emphasizing the capacity to act upon and respond to environmental circumstances. In the present context, behavioral control was visible through the principal's ability to adjust responses rather than react impulsively to interpersonal situations. Such regulation is particularly important in schools because organizational activities depend substantially on continuous interaction among principals, teachers, educational staff, students, and other stakeholders.



Leadership communication research provides additional support for interpreting behavioral regulation as an important component of effective organizational leadership and relational functioning. de Vries et al. (2010) demonstrate that leadership communication styles are associated with leadership outcomes, knowledge sharing, commitment, satisfaction with leaders, and perceived leader performance. The present findings extend this perspective by showing that communication effectiveness may be supported by the principal's capacity to regulate emotional and behavioral responses during interpersonal interactions. The ability to communicate constructively therefore depends not only on the content of communication but also on how leaders manage themselves while communicating.

The principal's emotional regulation during interactions with students demonstrates another dimension of behavioral control through anticipatory awareness of situations capable of generating negative emotional reactions. The findings indicate that the principal was able to manage responses in situations that could potentially provoke emotional reactions. This pattern is consistent with Zimmerman's (2000) social-cognitive perspective, which conceptualizes self-regulation as a process involving personal, behavioral, and environmental interaction. Such regulation allows leaders to maintain behavioral consistency even when institutional situations create emotional pressure.

Behavioral control may consequently contribute to institutional competitiveness by strengthening trust, cooperation, and relational stability among organizational members within the madrasah environment. Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasize that successful school leadership contributes to organizational conditions that support improvement and collective capacity. The present findings suggest that emotional and behavioral regulation can constitute part of those conditions because teachers and students interact with leaders whose responses influence their willingness to communicate, cooperate, and participate in institutional activities. Competitive advantage therefore involves intangible relational resources in addition to visible programs and physical facilities.

Decisional Control: Participatory and Strategic Decision-Making

Decisional control emerged through systematic problem identification, consultation with organizational actors, consideration of alternatives, and selection of strategies aligned with the



specific challenges confronting the madrasah. The clearest evidence concerned the challenge of relatively low graduate continuation to higher education. The principal did not monopolize the response by relying exclusively on personal judgment but discussed the issue with vice principals before determining an institutional strategy. The decision to socialize opportunities through SPAN and UM-PTKIN pathways illustrates how an identified institutional challenge was translated into a concrete educational intervention.

The decision-making process corresponds closely with Averill's conceptualization of decisional control as the capacity to exercise choice among alternative courses of action under particular circumstances. Averill (1973) identifies decisional control as one of three major forms of personal control and emphasizes the importance of having alternatives from which an individual can choose. The principal's consultation with vice principals indicates that decision-making was not merely an act of personal authority but involved information gathering and consideration of alternative responses before institutional action was selected.

Consultation with vice principals also demonstrates the practical relevance of bounded rationality because organizational leaders require information and perspectives distributed across different positions within the institution. Simon (1997) explains that organizational decision-makers operate under cognitive and informational limitations, making the use of available knowledge and feasible alternatives essential to practical decision-making. The principal's discussion with vice principals can therefore be interpreted as an organizational mechanism for expanding the informational basis of strategic decisions. This process reduces dependence on individual judgment while retaining the principal's responsibility for final institutional decisions.

The decision to involve students in Campus Expo activities organized through the Musyawarah Guru Bimbingan Konseling demonstrates another form of strategic decisional control based on the utilization of existing institutional and inter-institutional opportunities. The principal responded to the same challenge of limited graduate continuation to higher education by considering an existing forum that could provide students with broader information concerning university opportunities. This decision indicates that the principal did not necessarily seek to construct a completely new institutional mechanism but evaluated the relevance of an existing opportunity and incorporated it into the madrasah's strategic response.



Participatory decision-making of this kind is consistent with leadership perspectives emphasizing the strategic value of involving organizational members who possess relevant knowledge and contextual information. Yukl and Gardner (2020) explain that effective leadership involves adapting influence processes to organizational circumstances and utilizing the knowledge and capabilities available among organizational members. The principal's consultation with vice principals therefore represents more than administrative coordination; it demonstrates an approach to decision-making that combines leadership responsibility with distributed organizational knowledge.

The findings indicate that decisional control strengthens competitive positioning when institutional decisions directly respond to stakeholder needs and generate opportunities for students to achieve valued educational outcomes. The initiatives concerning SPAN, UM-PTKIN, and Campus Expo demonstrate that the principal connected institutional decision-making with students' educational aspirations and future progression. Such responsiveness can strengthen the perceived value of the madrasah among students and families. Competitive advantage consequently emerges through the capacity to identify stakeholder concerns and translate them into strategically relevant institutional services.

Integration of Cognitive, Behavioral, and Decisional Control

The three dimensions of self-control function as interconnected leadership capacities through which the principal interprets institutional conditions, regulates organizational interactions, and translates challenges into strategic decisions. Cognitive control provides the interpretive foundation for understanding problems and filtering information. Behavioral control regulates the principal's interpersonal responses during organizational interaction. Decisional control converts interpreted situations and available alternatives into concrete institutional action. The findings therefore suggest an integrated process rather than three independent dimensions operating separately.

The integrated pattern extends Averill's personal-control framework by demonstrating how cognitive, behavioral, and decisional regulation can operate simultaneously within educational leadership practices. Averill (1973) originally conceptualized these forms of control as distinct dimensions of personal control related to individuals' responses to environmental circumstances.



The present findings demonstrate their organizational relevance by showing that interpretation, behavioral regulation, and choice are repeatedly connected in the principal's response to institutional challenges. Self-control therefore functions as a bridge between individual psychological regulation and organizational leadership practice.

The relationship among these dimensions also corresponds with Bandura's social-cognitive perspective, which emphasizes reciprocal interactions among personal factors, behavior, and environmental conditions during self-regulatory processes. Bandura (1997) positions human agency within a framework in which individuals regulate their behavior while responding to environmental circumstances and perceived capabilities. The principal's response to institutional limitations demonstrates this interaction because environmental constraints were interpreted cognitively, interpersonal responses were regulated behaviorally, and institutional alternatives were selected through decisional processes.

Zimmerman's self-regulation framework further clarifies why principal self-control should be understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed personal characteristic operating independently of institutional circumstances. Zimmerman (2000) conceptualizes self-regulation as a cyclical process involving personal cognition, behavioral performance, and environmental interaction. The present findings show a comparable pattern: the principal evaluates institutional conditions, regulates responses during implementation, and develops subsequent decisions based on available information and organizational circumstances.

The integrated findings therefore support the interpretation of principal self-control as adaptive strategic self-control, connecting personal regulation with organizational adaptation and institutional innovation. This conceptualization does not suggest that self-control directly determines competitive advantage. Instead, self-control creates conditions through which leadership practices become more deliberate, adaptive, participatory, and context-sensitive. The resulting organizational processes provide a pathway through which individual leadership capacities may contribute to institutional differentiation.

Principal Self-Control and Madrasah Competitive Advantage

The findings indicate that principal self-control contributes to madrasah competitive advantage indirectly through strategic adaptation, relational capacity, resource utilization, and



responsiveness to stakeholder needs. The evidence does not indicate that self-control automatically produces competitive advantage; rather, competitiveness emerges when regulated leadership behavior is transformed into institutional practices that create distinctive educational value. This interpretation is important because educational competitiveness should not be reduced to the possession of superior facilities, greater financial resources, or a larger number of programs.

Cognitive control contributes to competitive positioning by enabling the principal to differentiate strategically relevant innovations from practices adopted primarily because they are fashionable or institutionally prestigious. The selective adoption of digital platforms, contextual curriculum adaptation, and needs-based facility development demonstrate an orientation toward strategic relevance. Damanpour's (1991) meta-analysis identifies managerial attitudes toward change, technical knowledge resources, communication, and other organizational conditions as significant determinants associated with organizational innovation. The finding suggests that leadership cognition can influence how organizational resources and innovations are selected and translated into institutional practice.

Behavioral control contributes through the development of relational conditions that enable teachers and students to participate in organizational activities and support institutional programs. The principal's emotional regulation and adaptive interaction patterns provide an interpersonal foundation for cooperation. Research by de Vries et al. (2010) demonstrates the importance of communication styles for knowledge sharing, commitment, satisfaction, and perceived leadership outcomes. Relational quality therefore represents an organizational resource that may strengthen the implementation capacity of flagship initiatives.

Decisional control contributes by enabling the principal to convert institutional challenges into strategically selected actions that address students' needs and strengthen the educational value offered by the madrasah. The responses involving SPAN, UM-PTKIN, and Campus Expo illustrate how decision-making was connected to students' progression toward higher education. Such actions reflect a form of value creation because the institution responds to a specific stakeholder concern through available organizational and external opportunities. Kim and Mauborgne (1997) describe value innovation as a strategic logic in which organizations create greater value through differentiated approaches rather than simply competing according to established assumptions.



The findings consequently position competitive advantage as an emergent organizational capability rather than a static institutional possession that can be explained solely through resources or achievement indicators. Porter (1985) argues that competitive advantage stems from the activities through which organizations create and sustain distinctive value. Within the madrasah context, the relevant activities include strategic technology selection, contextual curriculum adaptation, external collaboration, constructive interpersonal leadership, and student-oriented strategic decision-making. The principal's self-control supports these activities by enabling more deliberate and adaptive responses to institutional conditions.

Theoretical Contribution

The principal theoretical contribution of these findings lies in conceptualizing principal self-control as an internal leadership capacity that enables adaptive responses to institutional challenges within educational organizations. Existing leadership perspectives frequently emphasize vision, communication, decision-making, organizational change, and school improvement, while the present findings highlight the importance of the principal's capacity to regulate cognition, behavior, and decisions as an underlying condition supporting those leadership practices. Self-control therefore represents not merely an individual psychological characteristic but a leadership resource that becomes meaningful when translated into contextually appropriate organizational actions.

Cognitive control can be understood as a mechanism of strategic sense-making, behavioral control as a mechanism of relational regulation, and decisional control as a mechanism of strategic action within the leadership process of the madrasah. These dimensions operate as interconnected capacities that enable the principal to interpret institutional conditions, manage interpersonal responses, evaluate available alternatives, and determine appropriate courses of action. Their interaction provides a more comprehensive explanation of how personal regulation can contribute to organizational adaptability, particularly when educational institutions encounter resource limitations, technological changes, curriculum demands, and evolving stakeholder expectations.

The findings further demonstrate that the meaning and effectiveness of principal self-control are strongly shaped by the institutional context in which leadership practices are enacted. Available resources, institutional identity, external partnerships, organizational relationships, and



environmental pressures influence how the principal interprets challenges and translates personal regulation into institutional responses. Harris (2020) emphasizes that leadership and school improvement need to be understood in relation to the contexts in which they occur. The present findings reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that the principal's self-control acquires organizational significance through its interaction with the particular conditions and challenges experienced by the madrasah.

The study consequently contributes to leadership theory by explaining how an individual-level regulatory capacity can support organizational adaptation without assuming a direct or deterministic relationship with institutional competitiveness. The findings suggest that self-control becomes consequential when it enables leaders to interpret challenges constructively, maintain productive interpersonal relationships, make considered decisions, mobilize available resources, and preserve institutional identity while responding to environmental change. Such a perspective places principal self-control within a broader organizational process in which personal regulation is transformed into adaptive leadership practice and subsequently reflected in institutional innovation and differentiation.

This interpretation provides a theoretical bridge between personal control theory and educational leadership by demonstrating that cognitive, behavioral, and decisional regulation can function as complementary foundations for strategic institutional responses. Averill's (1973) personal control framework primarily explains how individuals exercise control over aversive or challenging circumstances, while the present findings demonstrate how these forms of control can be observed within the everyday leadership practices of a madrasah principal. The study therefore extends the relevance of personal control beyond individual psychological adjustment toward the organizational domain of educational leadership.

The theoretical implication is particularly important for understanding competitive advantage in madrasah because institutional competitiveness depends not only on tangible resources but also on the capacity to respond intelligently and consistently to changing educational environments. Principal self-control may support this capacity by enabling selective technology adoption, contextual curriculum adaptation, constructive interpersonal interaction, strategic use of external opportunities, and considered responses to student-development challenges. Competitive



advantage thus emerges as an organizational condition shaped by the quality of leadership responses rather than as an automatic consequence of possessing particular institutional resources.

The resulting conceptual interpretation positions principal self-control as an important internal foundation of adaptive leadership, with its organizational significance emerging through interaction among leadership behavior, institutional context, innovation, and stakeholder needs. This interpretation avoids reducing competitiveness to a single leadership characteristic and instead emphasizes the complex process through which leaders regulate themselves while navigating institutional challenges. The findings consequently offer a more context-sensitive explanation of how principals can transform constraints into opportunities and develop organizational responses that strengthen the distinctiveness and adaptive capacity of madrasah.

Conceptual Model of the Findings

The qualitative findings indicate that principal self-control represents an integrated leadership capacity through which cognitive, behavioral, and decisional regulation are enacted within the specific institutional context of the madrasah. Cognitive control enables the principal to interpret institutional conditions, selectively process information, assess potential consequences, and reframe limitations as opportunities for organizational development. Behavioral control is reflected in the regulation of emotional responses and the adjustment of interpersonal behavior when interacting with teachers and students. Decisional control is demonstrated through problem identification, consultation with relevant organizational actors, consideration of alternative strategies, and selection of responses that correspond to institutional needs.

These three dimensions of self-control operate in continuous interaction with institutional conditions, including resource availability, technological developments, curriculum changes, institutional identity, external partnerships, and stakeholder expectations. The findings demonstrate that the principal's leadership responses cannot be separated from these contextual conditions because institutional challenges are interpreted and addressed according to the opportunities and constraints available within the madrasah. This interpretation is consistent with Harris (2020), who emphasizes that educational leadership and organizational improvement should be understood within the contexts in which leadership practices are enacted.



The interaction between principal self-control and institutional context is reflected in adaptive leadership practices that emphasize selective innovation, contextual adaptation, collaborative engagement, and strategic utilization of available resources. The empirical findings illustrate this process through the selective adoption of digital learning platforms, curriculum adaptation that maintains the identity of the modern pesantren, needs-based facility development, collaboration with external parties, and the utilization of educational opportunities to support students' continuation to higher education. These practices indicate that innovation is not understood as the adoption of every new practice but as the capacity to identify and implement initiatives that are relevant to institutional needs.

Flagship-program innovation consequently represents an important organizational expression of these adaptive leadership practices, particularly when institutional resources and environmental demands require context-sensitive responses. Damanpour (1991) explains that organizational innovation is influenced by managerial and organizational conditions, indicating that the emergence and implementation of innovation depend partly on the capacity of organizational leaders and structures to support change. In the present study, the principal's cognitive, behavioral, and decisional regulation provided a leadership foundation for developing and implementing initiatives that corresponded with the needs and characteristics of the madrasah.

Institutional differentiation develops through the interaction of leadership regulation, organizational innovation, resource utilization, institutional identity, and responsiveness to stakeholder needs. Porter (1985) explains that competitive advantage is associated with activities through which organizations create distinctive value, while Kim and Mauborgne (1997) emphasize differentiated value creation as an important basis for organizational growth. Within the present findings, differentiation is not primarily represented by the quantity of programs or facilities but by the ability of the madrasah to develop responses that are relevant to its institutional identity and stakeholder needs.

Madrasah competitive advantage therefore emerges as an organizational condition supported by the interaction of regulated leadership, adaptive institutional practices, program innovation, and contextual responsiveness rather than as the direct consequence of a single leadership characteristic. The principal's self-control enables the interpretation of challenges, regulation of



interpersonal responses, and selection of strategic alternatives, while institutional context determines the resources and opportunities through which these capacities can be translated into organizational practices. Competitive positioning consequently develops through an ongoing process of adaptation, differentiation, and institutional value creation.

The conceptual model emphasizes that the relationship among these elements is dynamic and contextual rather than linear or deterministic. Institutional challenges influence how the principal exercises cognitive, behavioral, and decisional control, while leadership responses subsequently shape organizational practices, innovation, collaboration, and institutional differentiation. This reciprocal relationship is consistent with Bandura's (1997) social-cognitive perspective, which emphasizes the interaction among personal factors, behavior, and environmental conditions. The model therefore positions principal self-control as an important internal leadership capacity whose organizational significance emerges through interaction with the institutional environment.

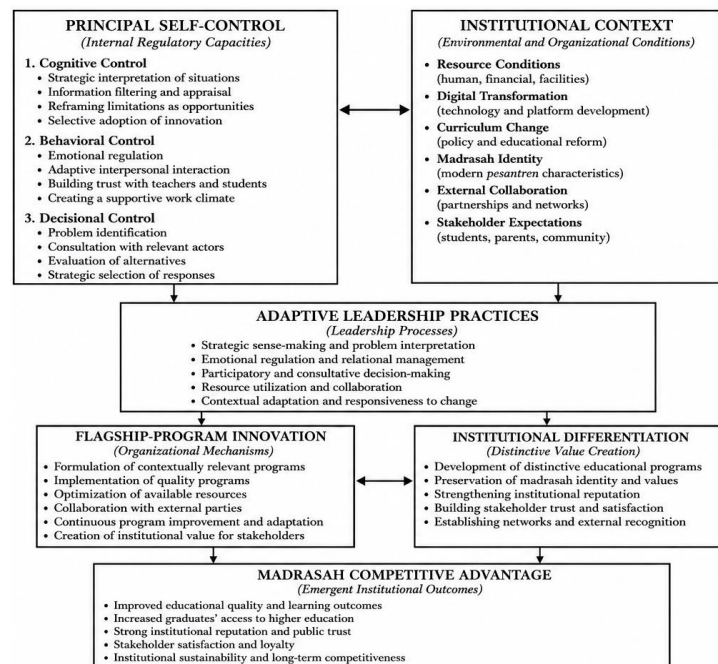


Figure 3. Conceptual Model of Principal Self-Control and Madrasah Competitive Advantage

The model places principal self-control at the center of the leadership process, comprising cognitive control, behavioral control, and decisional control, while institutional context functions as the contextual environment in which these capacities are enacted. The interaction among these



elements is reflected in adaptive leadership practices, flagship-program innovation, institutional differentiation, and the development of madrasah competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that principal self-control constitutes an important internal leadership capacity for navigating institutional challenges and strengthening the adaptive capacity of madrasah. The comparative examination of MAN 1 and MAN 2 Ponorogo indicates that self-control is manifested through interconnected cognitive, behavioral, and decisional dimensions. Cognitive control enables principals to interpret institutional circumstances selectively, evaluate technological alternatives, adapt curriculum changes to existing institutional identity, and perceive limited facilities as opportunities for collaboration. Behavioral control is reflected in the ability to regulate emotional responses and maintain adaptive interactions with teachers and students. Decisional control appears through systematic problem identification, consultation with relevant organizational actors, consideration of alternative strategies, and selection of responses addressing students' continuation to higher education. These findings demonstrate that self-control extends beyond emotional restraint and represents a broader leadership capacity involving interpretation, behavioral regulation, and strategic choice. The findings consequently strengthen the relevance of personal-control theory within educational leadership by demonstrating how individual regulatory capacities can become embedded in everyday organizational practices.

The study further establishes that the organizational significance of principal self-control depends upon its interaction with institutional context and the specific challenges confronting each madrasah. Resource availability, technological developments, curriculum changes, institutional identity, external partnerships, and stakeholder expectations influence how principals interpret situations and determine appropriate responses. The findings show that competitive positioning is not pursued through indiscriminate adoption of innovations or through the accumulation of facilities alone. Instead, principals demonstrate selective and contextual approaches by adopting relevant digital platforms, adapting curriculum while preserving institutional characteristics, developing facilities according to identified needs, mobilizing external collaboration, and utilizing available educational opportunities to support students' higher-education progression. Such



practices indicate that institutional differentiation develops through the strategic interpretation and utilization of available opportunities. The findings therefore suggest that madrasah competitive advantage is an emergent organizational condition associated with adaptive leadership, program innovation, resource utilization, stakeholder responsiveness, and preservation of institutional identity rather than the direct consequence of any single leadership characteristic.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in offering a context-sensitive interpretation of self-control as an internal foundation of adaptive educational leadership within competitive madrasah environments. Cognitive control functions through strategic sense-making and information filtering, behavioral control through emotional and relational regulation, and decisional control through participatory and context-sensitive strategic action. These dimensions should be understood as interconnected capacities whose organizational significance emerges through interaction with institutional conditions. The study consequently provides a qualitative explanation of how principals can maintain strategic orientation while confronting resource limitations, technological transformation, curriculum demands, interpersonal complexity, and student-development challenges. Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of leadership development programs that strengthen reflective thinking, emotional regulation, contextual decision-making, collaborative communication, and strategic resource utilization among madrasah principals. The proposed interpretation also provides a foundation for future comparative research involving different madrasah contexts, educational levels, and institutional environments to examine the applicability and refinement of the identified dimensions of principal self-control.

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