Strategic Management of the School Principal in Enhancing Academic Competitiveness at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan

Amaliyatus Shofiyah[1], Moh. Muslim[2], Kukuh Santoso[3]

[1,2,3]Islamic Education Study Program, Master's Program in Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Malang, Indonesia

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Corresponding Author:
Author Name*: Amaliyatus Shofiyah
Email*: amaliya100401@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examined the strategies of the school principal in enhancing competitiveness at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan, with the aim of achieving successful implementation and application of strategies that directly impacted the strengthening of public trust and the improvement of student quality, This study tries to describe in detail the school principal's strategies at the operational level, encompassing the stages of formulation, implementation, and evaluation, which were specifically designed to respond to challenges related to geographical conditions and local inter-school competition in rural areas, by integrating the general and religious curriculum within the context of school strategic management. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach using observation, interviews, and documentation methods. The data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model through the processes of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study showed that the implementation of integrated strategies had a positive impact on the increase in student enrollment, students' academic achievement, and public trust. The school successfully established a competitive advantage based on Qur'anic values, which served as a distinctive feature compared to other schools.

Keywords: management, strategy, competence

INTRODUCTION

Education in the era of globalization has undergone a significant transformation in line with developments in technology, the economy, and socio-cultural conditions. These changes require educational institutions to adapt rapidly through innovation in the management and delivery of education. Competition among educational institutions, at both the national and local levels, has become increasingly intense and complex due to rising public expectations regarding the quality of educational services [1]. Therefore, the success of educational institutions is determined not only by the quality of the learning process, but also by the capacity for strategic management exercised by school leadership in responding to the dynamics of both external and internal environments [2].

In the context of educational management, the school principal holds a strategic role as the primary driving force in determining policy direction, development strategies, and the effectiveness of educational program implementation. The principal functions as a human capital manager who is responsible for optimizing human resources to support the achievement of the school's vision and mission [3]. Meanwhile, strategic human resource management in the field of education plays an important role in strengthening learning practices and improving student

learning outcomes [4]. The visionary leadership of the school principal becomes a determining factor in building school competitiveness amid increasingly intense competition among institutions [5]. Thus, the principal's strategic management is a key element in maintaining the sustainability and competitiveness of educational institutions amid changing times.

Several studies have shown that school principal leadership significantly affects the quality and competitiveness of educational institutions. The characteristics of school principal leadership contribute to improvements in students' academic achievement [6], play an important role in strategic human resource management [7], and support the management of school organizational strategies [8]. However, most of these studies have primarily focused on public schools or specific educational levels, while research on the strategic management of school principals in Islamic elementary schools remains relatively limited. However, Islamic elementary schools possess distinctive characteristics, including the integration of the national curriculum and religious education, which require adaptive and strategic leadership, particularly amid increasingly intense competition among Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, there is a need for research that specifically examines how the school principal's strategic management is formulated,

implemented, and evaluated in efforts to enhance the academic competitiveness of Islamic elementary schools.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive analytical approach to the school principal's strategic management in Islamic elementary schools that integrate the national curriculum with *pesantren*-based education (Islamic boarding school). This study does not merely highlight leadership aspects in general, but rather explores in depth how school principals integrate religious values with modern managerial strategies to build and sustain institutional competitiveness. In addition, this study addresses gaps in previous research that tended to focus on outcomes or leadership styles by emphasizing the contextual integration of strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes to enhance competitive advantage and public trust in Islamic elementary schools.

This study was grounded in field observations conducted at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan, an Islamic elementary school that integrates the national curriculum with. Situated within an environment characterized by relatively intense school competition, the school has developed strategies centered on *diniyah* learning, memorization programs, and Islamic-oriented educational services. One of its main strategies is the implementation of the *Madrasah Diniyah (MADIN)* program, which has been in operation since 2019 with religious learning materials customized to students' needs. Through a balanced integration of general education and Islamic Religious Education, SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan seeks to strengthen academic quality while simultaneously fostering students' religious character.

Based on the description above, this study specifically aims: first, to explore the formulation of the school principal's strategic management in enhancing academic competitiveness at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan. Second, to examine the implementation of the school principal's strategic management in enhancing academic competitiveness at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan. Third, to evaluate the execution of the school principal's strategic management in enhancing academic competitiveness at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan, so that this study is expected to provide both theoretical and empirical contributions to the development of strategic management in Islamic elementary educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative case study approach. This approach was selected because it can portray the phenomenon of school principal leadership in depth within the context of enhancing the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions. The qualitative approach provides the researcher with space to understand participants' meanings, perceptions, and subjective experiences in natural settings. The case study method was employed because it allows the

researcher to examine holistically and contextually a particular event or process within real-life settings, thereby making it relevant for analyzing the school principal's leadership strategies in managing school competitiveness [9], [10].

This study was conducted at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan, an Islamic educational institution that integrates the national and religious curriculum. The school was purposively selected because it possesses unique characteristics in developing competitiveness through innovative programs grounded in Qur'anic values, as well as in strengthening academic and spiritual quality. The research subjects included the school principal, teachers, and educational staff who were directly involved in the processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation of strategies to enhance institutional competitiveness. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques to ensure the representation of data that are relevant to the research focus [11].

The research data were collected through three main methods: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted in a participatory manner, focusing on the activities of the school principal, teachers, and school community members in implementing flagship programs that support institutional competitiveness. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to allow the researcher to explore the school principal's perspectives, motivations, and managerial practices in the context of improving quality and school competitiveness. Documentation was used to complement and strengthen the empirical data, including school activity archives, annual reports, photographs, and relevant internal publications. The use of these three techniques was carried out in a triangulative manner to obtain credible and in-depth data [12].

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously from the data collection stage to the conclusion drawing. The analysis process encompassed the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying field data to align with the research focus. The data display stage involved organizing the analytical results into a systematic narrative form to illustrate relationships among concepts and emerging patterns. Conclusion drawing was conducted inductively by interpreting the meaning of the obtained data and verifying it through cross-checking across different data sources. This analytical model follows the interactive analysis concept developed in qualitative research [13].

Data trustworthiness was examined through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing interview findings across informants, while technique triangulation was conducted by contrasting data from observations, interviews, and documentation. The member-checking process involved seeking clarification and confirmation from informants

to ensure alignment between the collected data and the researcher's interpretations. These efforts were implemented to ensure the validity, reliability, and credibility of the research findings [14].

The research stages were carried out systematically, starting with the pre-field phase, followed by field data collection, and concluding with data analysis. During the pre-field stage, the researcher prepared the research design, determined the research site and subjects, and developed observation instruments and interview guidelines. The data collection stage was conducted through direct interaction with participants in the field, while the analysis stage was carried out simultaneously with the data collection process to ensure the findings remained contextual and authentic. An inductive approach was employed to build interpretations derived directly from empirical data, enabling the research findings to provide an in-depth understanding of school principal leadership practices in enhancing the competitiveness of educational institutions [15].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Formulation of the School Principal's Strategic Management in Enhancing Academic Competitiveness

The formulation of the school principal's strategic management at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan shows a pattern of systematic planning grounded in Qur'anic values. Based on the research findings, the school principal initiated the strategy formulation by analyzing the school's internal conditions, including teachers' potential and competencies, students' academic achievements, and the availability of learning facilities and infrastructure. In addition, the principal also considered external factors, including the development of Islamic schools, the dynamics of educational competition, and the community's needs and expectations. The results of this analysis were subsequently articulated in the vision "Excellence in Academics and *Tahfidz*," which serves as the policy direction for all school programs. This formulation is aligned with planning theories that emphasize the importance of alignment between an organization's internal and external environments in achieving competitive advantage [16], [17]. Thus, the principal's formative process was not merely administrative in nature, but also reflective of the school's social and cultural context [18], [19].

The strategy formulation at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan demonstrates school principal leadership oriented toward value-based strategic design. The school's vision and mission are implemented through its flagship programs, *Hifdzil Qur'an* (memorization, recitation, and internalization of the Qur'an) and *Diniyah* (learning core Islamic knowledge, values, and practices), which serve as the school's distinctive characteristics. Interview findings indicate that strategies to enhance competitiveness were formulated around three main pillars: integrative curriculum innovation, strengthening teacher competencies, and cultivating Islamic character values through the *Madrasah Diniyah (MADIN)* program. Curriculum innovation is realized through the integration of the national curriculum and *Diniyah* education, with subjects such as Al-Qur'an, *Fiqh*, and *Aqidah Akhlak* positioned as the core of learning. This approach reflects the principles of value-based management, whereby the effectiveness of educational strategies is determined by the integration of moral values into managerial policies [20], as well as by the alignment of moral leadership and strategic orientation in building the competitiveness of educational institutions [21].

In the strategy formulation process at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro, a collaborative approach was adopted by involving teachers, the school committee, and parents. Deliberative forums were used to formulate academic performance indicators and annual targets, reflecting the practice of participative strategic planning that emphasizes the importance of organizational actors' involvement in strategy development to foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility [22]. Active participation of the school community in decision-making has a significant impact on the improvement of school quality [23]. This collective involvement explains the emergence of a high level of teacher commitment to the school's vision at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro.

The school principal strengthened the strategy formulation process by adopting a data-driven approach. The results of students' academic evaluations and parental satisfaction surveys were used to determine school program priorities. This practice demonstrates the application of evidence-based management, in which strategic decisions are not solely grounded in managerial intuition but are informed by measurable empirical data [24]. The capacity and performance of educational organizations tend to improve when decision-making is based on valid and reliable data [25]. Thus, this approach explains why the strategies formulated at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro possess a realistic, focused direction and allow their outcomes to be evaluated effectively.

The strategy to enhance competitiveness implemented by the school principal at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan has been carried out comprehensively and systematically through three main stages: formulation, implementation, and evaluation. These three stages are aligned with the concept of strategic management [26]. The application of these strategic stages enables the school to respond appropriately to community needs, as reflected in the increase in student enrollment from 150 students in 2014 to 320 students in 2025, as well as in the achievement of both academic and non-academic accomplishments. These findings affirm the role of visionary school principal leadership as an agent of change in

enhancing school competitiveness, as reflected in the principal competency framework stipulated in Regulation of the Minister of National Education (Permendiknas) Number 13 of 2007 [27], through the development of the *Hifdzil Qur'an* program and *Diniyah* learning, as well as the strengthening of the school's Qur'anic institutional image [28].

Thus, the strategic management formulation implemented by the principal of SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan shows strengths in systematic, participatory, and Qur'an value–based planning, supported by the use of data in decision making, thereby contributing substantially to the enhancement of school competitiveness [29], [30]. Nevertheless, the strategy still has limitations because it has not yet fully accommodated the dynamics of external factors and the level of competition among educational institutions [31]. Therefore, strengthening school competitiveness requires visionary, adaptive, and sustainability-oriented school principal leadership as an *agent of change* to ensure quality and public trust [32], [33].

2. Implementation of the School Principal's Strategic Management in Enhancing Academic Competitiveness

The implementation of strategic management at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan emphasizes the school principal's central role in directing, coordinating, and integrating all school resources systematically to achieve sustainable academic competitiveness. The research findings indicate that the school principal does not merely function as an administrative decision-maker but also serves as a transformational leader who can internalize religious vision and strategic values into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school programs. Pola kepemimpinan ini selaras dengan pandangan bahwa efektivitas kepemimpinan pendidikan ditentukan oleh integrasi visi moral, kepemimpinan instruksional, dan kapasitas manajerial strategis [34].

The managerial strategies implemented by the school principal include strengthening academic excellence grounded in Islamic values through three main focuses, namely spiritual development, curriculum innovation, and the reinforcement of institutional image through digitalization of information. The *Hifdzil Qur'an* program serves as a symbol of strategic differentiation, distinguishing SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan from other elementary schools. This program is implemented through structured and regularly monitored activities of *ziyadah* (addition of memorization) and *takrir* (repetition of memorization). The implementation of this program has improved students' academic abilities and shaped disciplined religious character. These findings reinforce the view that the effectiveness of strategy implementation can be measured through an institution's success in creating sustainable behavioral change at both the individual and organizational system levels [35].

In the context of religious learning through the *Madrasah Diniyah (MADIN)* program, the school principal demonstrated a high level of adaptability to students' conditions. Learning materials on *kitab kuning* and the fundamentals of *fiqh* were adjusted to students' cognitive developmental levels without reducing the substantive value of the religious content [36]. This adaptation reflects a contextual strategy that aligns with the concept of tailoring implementation strategies, which emphasizes that effective implementation strategies must consider social and cultural conditions as well as organizational characteristics to achieve change objectives optimally [37].

In the public services domain, the school principal developed an innovation, namely a student shuttle service. This program not only fulfills aspects of convenience and safety but also represents a service differentiation strategy that strengthens the school's competitiveness. This is in line with the view that educational institutions adopting community needs–based service approaches tend to possess higher value in the eyes of the public [38]. These findings reinforce the concept of customer-oriented education management, in which schools function as providers of social services that must be responsive to community preferences and satisfaction [39].

In the promotional aspect, the school principal implemented a management digitalization strategy by utilizing platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook as channels for public communication. This strategy demonstrates the school's capacity to adapt to technological developments and contemporary social interaction patterns. The use of digital media in strategic educational management can expand promotional reach, enhance public trust, and strengthen the institutional image [40]. This also reflects the principle of dissemination strategy, in which systematic information dissemination is considered a crucial element in the successful implementation of policies [41].

The implementation of strategies at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan, viewed through the perspective of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), reflects an integration of three key components, namely leadership engagement, organizational readiness, and process monitoring [42]. The school principal consistently involves teachers, the school committee, and parents at every stage of program planning and evaluation. The evaluation process is conducted regularly to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the implemented strategies.

From the perspective of competitive advantage theory [43], the strategies implemented at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan have successfully created a unique value proposition, namely the integration of academic quality, religious character, and humanistic public services. The school principal serves as an agent of change, integrating

spiritual values with modern managerial strategies. Schools managed through a value-based approach tend to have stronger institutional resilience in the face of the competitive challenges of modern education [44].

Thus, the implementation of strategies at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan shows strengths in transformational leadership, effective in building institutional competitiveness through the integration of religious values and innovative managerial strategies. The school principal's capacity to manage change contextually further reinforces institutional performance and public acceptance. However, these achievements remain constrained by the limited institutionalization of evaluation systems based on measurable indicators and the potential dependence on individual leadership figures. In its implications, the sustainability of school competitiveness requires strengthening organizational governance and institutionalized strategic leadership to replicate value-based advantages systematically.

3. Evaluation of the School Principal's Strategic Management in Enhancing Academic Competitiveness

The evaluation of strategic management at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan shows a strong reflective and participatory orientation in ensuring the sustainability of academic and religious quality. The school principal positions evaluation as an integral component of the strategic management process rather than only an administrative instrument. The evaluation is conducted through collaborative involvement of teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents to assess program effectiveness, identify constraints, and formulate data-based improvement measures [45]. This approach reflects reflective and transformational leadership practices. School principals who adopt participatory leadership styles grounded in empirical evaluation have been shown to be capable of improving teacher performance and the quality of student learning outcomes [46].

The evaluation process at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro is cyclical and systematic, encompassing reviews of the effectiveness of the *Diniyah* curriculum, the implementation of the *tahfidz* program, and character-based extracurricular activities. The evaluation results are utilized to strengthen strategic policies, such as increasing memorization hours, improving learning methods, and enhancing teacher professionalism. School leadership policies grounded in continuous evaluation serve as an essential foundation for improving institutional management quality and strengthening competitiveness amid the landscape of modern Islamic education [47]. Thus, evaluation functions not only as a tool for measuring success but also as an adaptive mechanism for institutional learning.

In addition to focusing on internal aspects, the implementation of evaluation at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro is also directed toward assessing the effectiveness of external strategies, particularly in strengthening public image and school promotion. In the context of modern Islamic education, integrative school marketing management needs to combine religious, innovative, and adaptive dimensions in response to the dynamics of the educational market in order to create a sustainable competitive advantage [48]. In line with this framework, the school principal routinely conducts reviews of the institution's social media performance, such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, to measure the level of community engagement and public perceptions of the school's core programs. This practice reflects a strategic orientation toward competitive branding, in which the institutional image is built through the integration of Islamic values and managerial professionalism [49].

Based on the interview results, the evaluation of the school principal's strategic management in enhancing academic competitiveness at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan demonstrates a tangible impact on improving students' academic and religious achievements, particularly in national-level *tahfidz* competitions and science olympiads. These achievements reflect the effectiveness of the school principal in systematically integrating the evaluation process with academic supervision, thereby fostering improvements in educational quality, especially within pesantren-based educational institutions that share similar characteristics [50]. Thus, strategic evaluation functions not only as a tool for measuring achievements but also as an instrument for guidance and the strengthening of sustainable academic quality control.

Conceptually, the evaluation model applied shows alignment with the strategic performance management framework, in which the success of educational strategy implementation depends on the integration of planning, implementation, and evaluation that is oriented toward outcomes and organizational learning [51]. The school principal of SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro interprets this principle within the context of Islamic education by positioning evaluation as a continuous process of institutional learning. Evaluation is framed as a cycle that does not conclude with performance assessment, but rather serves as the starting point for subsequent managerial innovation.

The school principal of SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro does not assess success solely from an academic perspective; they also ensure that every managerial decision remains grounded in Qur'anic values and professional ethics. From the perspective of leadership ethics, the principal's reflective practices demonstrate alignment with the principles of ethical digital leadership, in which moral integrity, social sensitivity, and ethical responsibility serve as the core pillars of educational leadership in the era of artificial intelligence [52]. Thus, evaluation

functions as both a moral instrument and a means of strengthening value-based governance.

Holistically, the pattern of strategic evaluation at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro reflects the maturity of a management system grounded in institutional learning that is adaptive to social and technological change. Evaluation is no longer understood as a post-program activity, but rather as a mechanism for the continuous enhancement of organizational capacity [53]. The success of strategic educational management depends greatly on leadership commitment to facilitating continuous learning, strengthening teacher motivation, and sustaining academic quality over time [54].

Thus, the evaluation of the school principal's strategic management at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan functions as an organizational learning system that integrates reflection, collaboration, technology, and spirituality. This model affirms that value-oriented strategic leadership not only strengthens academic performance but also builds institutional resilience and the competitiveness of Islamic education in the modern and highly competitive era.

CONCLUSION

The strategic management of the school principal at SD Al-Qur'an Ummul Quro Pamekasan has proven effective in enhancing academic competitiveness by integrating strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes grounded in Qur'anic values and modern managerial principles. The school principal serves as a strategic leader who can integrate environmental analysis, strengthen human resources, integrate curriculum innovation, and conduct a reflective, participatory, data-based, continuous evaluation. These strategies not only improve students' academic and religious achievements but also strengthen organizational governance, public trust, and the school's institutional resilience amid competition in modern Islamic education. Thus, this study affirms that value-oriented, adaptive, and institutionalized strategic leadership constitutes a key factor in building sustainable competitive advantage in Islamic elementary schools.

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