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The Excellent Performance Of Madrasah Principals In Developing The Competitive Advantage Of State Madrasah Aliyah In The Riau Islands

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and develop a conceptual model on the relationship between the Excellent performance of madrasah principals and the competitive advantage of madrasah institutions within the perspective of Islamic Education Management. The research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method, supported by NVivo software to generate in-depth thematic and conceptual mapping. The findings reveal that the Excellent performance of madrasah principals is constructed through four main dimensions: leadership vision and innovation, high-achievement mindset, governance and social responsibility, as well as leadership efficiency and effectiveness. These dimensions significantly contribute to building the competitive advantage of madrasah institutions, which is characterized by the ability to create added value, strategic and directed development, unique attractiveness, and customer-oriented collaboration. A key finding of this research lies in its novelty, namely the integration of Islamic leadership values and an integrated curriculum as strengthening variables. Islamic leadership values such as trustworthiness (amanah), intelligence (fathonah), integrity, and strong religious character serve as the fundamental basis for reinforcing leadership performance. Meanwhile, the integrated curriculum combining academic, Islamic, and global competencies functions as a strategic instrument in creating institutional differentiation and excellence. This study produces a conceptual model of madrasah leadership based on Islamic Value, emphasizing that the competitive advantage of Islamic educational institutions is not solely determined by managerial factors but also by the comprehensive integration of Islamic values and curriculum innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen as guaranteed by the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. It functions not only to develop intellectual capacity but also to shape moral character, spirituality, and national civilization. In the Islamic perspective, education holds a noble position as a means of cultivating knowledge, ethics, and human excellence. Therefore, education becomes a strategic foundation for producing competitive and virtuous generations.

Despite its importance, the quality of education in Indonesia still faces various challenges, including unequal access, limited resources, and low international performance indicators. Within the national education system, madrasahs have gained stronger recognition and continue to develop as institutions that integrate religious values with academic excellence. However, many madrasahs still encounter issues such as weak management, limited innovation, and public stigma as second-class institutions.

The competitiveness of a madrasah is strongly influenced by leadership quality. The principal of a madrasah plays a central role as strategic leader, change agent, and institutional manager. Effective leadership can create a clear vision, improve teacher professionalism, strengthen organizational culture, encourage innovation, and build public trust. In contrast, weak leadership often results in administrative stagnation, declining quality, and low competitiveness.

In the context of State Madrasah Aliyah (MAN), several institutions in Indonesia have demonstrated significant achievements and increasing public interest. However, such success has not been evenly distributed, especially in peripheral and island regions such as the Riau Islands Province. In this province, only a small number of Madrasah Aliyah are state institutions, facing geographical limitations, resource constraints, and competitive educational pressures.

This condition raises an important question regarding how principals of State Madrasah Aliyah in the Riau Islands achieve excellent performance in developing sustainable competitive advantage for their institutions. Empirical studies examining the relationship between principal excellence and institutional competitiveness in this regional context remain limited.

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Therefore, this study aims to analyze the construction, characteristics, and mechanisms of excellent principal performance in transforming normative, structural, and cultural potentials into sustainable competitive advantage in State Madrasah Aliyah institutions in the Riau Islands.

METHOD

The term excellent performance of madrasah principals needs to be understood through two main components: the subject, namely the madrasah principal, and the predicate, namely excellent performance. The madrasah principal refers to the leader of a madrasah institution who carries out managerial functions at the middle management level, serving as a bridge between higher-level policy and operational implementation within the educational unit. Therefore, the assessment of the principal is not merely directed at the individual personally, but at his or her capacity as a functional official who performs leadership duties effectively.

From the perspective of educational leadership, the madrasah principal plays a strategic role as both a leader and the executor of leadership, determining the direction of institutional development. Andries G. van Aarde, in Education Leadership: Scoping, Perspectives and Future Trajectory, citing Dempster, states that an effective school leader must possess four main elements: vision, communication, inspiration, and commitment.

First, vision, namely the ability to see the future of the institution optimistically, determine strategic direction, and lead the madrasah toward excellence. Second, communication, namely the ability to build dialogue, convey messages clearly, and foster motivation among teachers and educational staff. Third, inspiration, namely the ability to become a role model, empower others, and encourage the professional development of all members of the madrasah community. Fourth, commitment, namely consistency toward institutional goals, loyalty to the vision and mission, and perseverance in facing organizational challenges.

In line with this, Murni defines the madrasah principal as a functional educator who is given additional duties to lead a madrasah, where the learning process takes place between teachers and students. This definition indicates that the principal has the responsibility to direct, manage, and optimize all institutional resources in order to achieve educational goals effectively.

Normatively, Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 6 of 2018 emphasizes that a school/madrasah principal is a teacher assigned additional duties to lead an educational unit. In this context, the madrasah principal has a

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strategic role in institutional governance, improving the quality of learning, developing teacher professionalism, and building a productive organizational culture.

The organizational structure in madrasahs includes structural positions such as principal, vice principal, and head of administration, as well as functional teaching positions consisting of junior teacher, associate teacher, senior teacher, and master teacher. Promotion in functional teaching ranks is determined through credit score assessments, performance evaluations, and professional competency tests.

Based on the explanation above, the madrasah principal in this study is positioned not merely as an administrative office holder, but as a strategic actor who influences the quality, reputation, and competitiveness of the institution. Therefore, when associated with the concept of excellent performance, it refers to the highest level of leadership effectiveness of the madrasah principal in mobilizing all institutional potentials toward sustainable excellence.

DISCUSSION

At the research findings stage through observation, interviews, and the examination of various documents, the researcher presents the following regarding the Excellence Performance of Madrasah Principals in Developing the Competitive Advantage of State Madrasah Aliyah Institutions in the Riau Islands Province. The indicators of Peak Performance of Madrasah Principals determined in this study are **Leadership Vision and Innovation, High Achievement Mindset, Governance and Social Responsibility, as well as Leadership Effectiveness and Efficiency.

Based on the researcher's interview with the principal of MAN 1 Batam City, the leadership vision and innovation of a madrasah principal are reflected in the maturity of an innovative, measurable leadership vision that has a real impact on institutional progress. At the initial stage, as conveyed by the principal of MAN 1, he stated that a madrasah principal does not merely perform administrative functions, but must demonstrate strategic leadership grounded in a clear vision and mission during the open bidding process, which must then be effectively communicated to all members of the madrasah community. As he expressed:

"Previously, of course, prospective madrasah principals, like I once was, had to present their vision and mission when applying to become principal. At minimum, they must already hold an educator certificate, be a civil servant, and at least rank III/C. They must also attend principal candidate training. There are also principals appointed first while the training follows later, but initially everyone must pass through the open bidding process. After that, it depends on the

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policymakers, namely the Ministry of Religious Affairs delegated through each regional office head."

In policy-making, the principal demonstrated professional capacity through data-based decision making, ensuring that every program and policy implemented had a strong analytical foundation and relevance to the needs of the madrasah. Sensitivity to current developments was also evident in his ability to follow educational trends without losing the identity of the madrasah as an Islamic educational institution. As stated by one of the informants during the interview:

"Yes, the principal is democratic and data-driven when making decisions. Whenever he has a program, we are all gathered and asked for our opinions according to our expertise and respective fields. After many considerations, only then does he decide."

This peak performance was further strengthened by the principal's ability to maintain team focus. He was able to mobilize teachers and educational staff toward one common goal, building a collaborative and productive work culture. This was reinforced through a humanistic approach, such as creating family-oriented moments that strengthened brotherhood and increased team loyalty.

"He always stays focused in maintaining the team so that we remain consistent. Usually, we may design great and extraordinary programs, but during implementation they still need to be controlled. They should not just be abandoned. So everything continues to be monitored and evaluated."

In addition, a culture of deliberation became a hallmark of his leadership. Every strategic decision was reached through dialogue and collective consideration, thereby creating a sense of belonging among all members of the madrasah. The principal also actively presented the vision and mission regularly, ensuring that the direction of institutional development was understood and internalized by all stakeholders.

The value of spirituality as the soul of the madrasah was also strengthened through religious programs such as the Friday Qur'an Recitation Program, which functioned not only as a routine activity but also as a medium for character development and strengthening the religious culture within the madrasah environment.

"Alhamdulillah, for example, we have a Friday recitation program for teachers. Sometimes it may seem trivial, but it is part of his routine. So besides academics, spiritual values are also instilled. Every Friday, the students perform Dhuha prayer, while we teachers recite the Qur'an guided directly by him."

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On another occasion, the researcher also interviewed the Public Relations Vice Principal of MAN 1 Batam regarding the principal's leadership vision and innovation. He mentioned that one form of the principal's leadership was prioritizing deliberation whenever facing various institutional problems. He was also willing to be a good listener and not hasty in making decisions:

"He does not avoid clashes. If problems can be solved through deliberation, why not? From what I have seen, the principal first asks the vice principals, including me as vice principal of public relations. He is the type of person who is always there for us. We are gathered first, then after agreement is reached, we convey the information to the teachers. That is his character—he is not selfish."

In implementing leadership vision and innovation, another interesting aspect of the principal of MAN 1 Batam was his activeness in following current trends. One form of innovation was recognizing what other institutions had developed and then applying the concept of Observe, Imitate, Modify (ATM). This is where benchmarking or comparative studies with other madrasahs became important. One clear observation made by the researcher at MAN 1 Batam was the wide range of digitalization that could no longer be compromised. An institution that is literate in digitalization reflects an innovative institution, and this was clearly visible at MAN 1 Batam, not only in learning activities but also in the services provided.

The researcher's documentation while accessing the official website of MAN 1 Batam showed a comprehensive range of services for both internal and external users, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, teachers and educational staff, students, and the community. These services included One-Stop Integrated Service (PTSP), Madrasah E-Learning, Digital Madrasah Report Cards (RDM), Digital Library, Student Admission System (PPDB), Community Satisfaction Survey (SukaSam), Customer Care, Attendance System, Graduation Portal, PPID MAN Batam, and many others.

The field findings obtained by the researcher were also in line with information from one of the informants in this study, who stated that one of the principal's many strengths was his ability to follow various current trends. As expressed verbatim:

"He always follows today's digital trends, so according to him the key is to keep up with developments. For example, at MAN Batam we already have Cambridge classes. There is also MAN PK focusing on Tahsin, Tahfidz Qur'an, and classical Islamic texts. Everything is digitalized now—there is no longer paper use. Even exams are fully Computer Based Tests (CBT)."

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CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions presented in the previous chapters, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that the peak performance of madrasah principals in developing the competitive advantage of State Madrasah Aliyah institutions in the Riau Islands has shown significant achievements, although it has not yet been fully optimal in all aspects of its implementation. This can be seen from the variation in the level of achievement across each peak performance indicator, namely leadership vision and innovation, high-achievement mindset, governance and social responsibility, as well as leadership efficiency and effectiveness. In certain aspects, madrasah principals have demonstrated visionary and innovative leadership through the development of flagship programs, curriculum integration, and the utilization of technology in learning. However, several limitations were still identified in practice, particularly regarding the consistency of program implementation and the equal distribution of quality across all educational units. Furthermore, in the context of developing competitive advantage, madrasahs have been able to create added value through academic and non-academic achievements, strengthening religious programs, and innovating educational services. Nevertheless, this development still faces several challenges, including limited resources, uneven optimization of the integrated curriculum, and collaboration with stakeholders that has not yet been fully strategic and sustainable. Moreover, this study found that Islamic leadership values and an integrated curriculum are key factors that strongly determine the relationship between the peak performance of madrasah principals and institutional competitive advantage. However, the implementation of these two aspects still requires strengthening, both in the consistent internalization of values and in the development of a more adaptive and comprehensively integrated curriculum. Therefore, it can be emphasized that the peak performance of madrasah principals plays a strategic role in building institutional competitive advantage. However, in the context of State Madrasah Aliyah institutions in the Riau Islands, more systematic, focused, and sustainable strengthening efforts are still required so that such achievements can provide an optimal impact on institutional competitiveness.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on the results of this study, the novelty identified by the researcher under the title Peak Performance of Madrasah Principals in Developing the Competitive Advantage of State Madrasah Aliyah Institutions in the Riau Islands lies in two new findings. First, peak performance,

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particularly within State Madrasah Aliyah institutions, is also influenced by Islamic leadership values and an integrated curriculum as strengthening factors (core drivers) in building the relationship between the peak performance of madrasah principals and the competitive advantage of the institution.

Conceptually, this study demonstrates that the peak performance achievements of madrasah principals which include leadership vision and innovation, high-achievement mindset, governance and social responsibility, as well as leadership efficiency and effectiveness will not produce optimal impact on competitive advantage unless they are reinforced by a distinctive foundation of values and curriculum systems. This is where the novelty of this research lies.

First, Islamic leadership values in this study are not merely positioned as normative ethics, but as an operational strategic variable with direct impact on institutional performance. Values such as trustworthiness (amanah) in financial management, anti-corruption principles, clean bureaucracy, wisdom (fathonah) in decision-making, patience in leadership, and strong religious character have proven to be internal energy that sustains consistency, trust, and the institution's social legitimacy. Therefore, this study offers a new perspective that Islamic values are not simply complementary, but function as a driving force in generating sustainable competitive advantage.

Second, the integrated curriculum represents a novel element that connects academic, spiritual, and 21st-century skill dimensions within one holistic system. The integration of the national curriculum, Cambridge curriculum, classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), Qur'anic memorization (tahfidzul Qur'an), as well as deep learning approaches and digital classes demonstrates a synthesis that not only produces academically accomplished students, but also individuals with strong character and Islamic identity. In this context, curriculum is no longer understood merely as a learning instrument, but as a strategic tool for building differentiation and the unique attractiveness of madrasahs.

Thus, the novelty of this research lies in affirming that the competitive advantage of madrasahs is built not only through modern managerial practices, but through the deep integration of Islamic leadership values and an integrated curriculum as the main foundation. These two aspects function as strengthening variables that bridge the transformation from the peak performance of madrasah principals toward institutional competitive advantage in a holistic, sustainable, and value-based manner.

The implication is that the model produced in this study offers a new approach to Islamic educational leadership, namely that institutional success cannot rely solely on innovation and

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strategy, but must also be supported by a living value system and a comprehensively integrated curriculum. This constitutes the original contribution of this research to the development of both theory and practice of madrasah leadership in the contemporary era.

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