

Strategic Leadership of Madrasah Principals in Enhancing Student Quality: A SWOT-Based Assessment at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

Increasing public trust in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru, reflected in rising student enrollment, sustained academic and non-academic achievements, and expanding flagship programs, highlights the importance of strategic leadership in improving student quality. However, previous studies have predominantly examined educational leadership in relation to school effectiveness, teacher performance, or organizational management, while limited attention has been given to how strategic leadership is formulated, implemented, and evaluated through a SWOT-based approach to improve student quality in public madrasahs. This study therefore aims to analyze the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the principal's strategies for improving student quality based on SWOT analysis at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed using interviews, observations, and document analysis, with data analyzed through the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that strategic formulation was conducted systematically through institutional evaluation and SWOT analysis, while implementation was supported by collaborative leadership, teacher professional development, and differentiated academic and non-academic programs. Continuous evaluation focused on student achievement, graduate transition to higher education, and character development as indicators of educational quality improvement. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating how SWOT-based strategic leadership integrates evidence-based planning, participatory management, and continuous evaluation to strengthen student quality within the context of Islamic secondary education. These findings provide practical implications for madrasah leaders by emphasizing the importance of data-driven decision-making, collaborative governance, and sustainable quality assurance in improving student outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a strategic investment in human capital development and a fundamental instrument for enhancing national competitiveness. The quality of educational outcomes significantly influences the capacity of a nation to respond to social, economic, and technological challenges in an increasingly globalized world. Consequently, educational institutions are expected not only to provide academic knowledge but also to develop students' character, leadership, creativity, and life skills necessary for sustainable development (Bush, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). In this regard, educational quality has become a central concern for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to improve institutional effectiveness and student achievement. The implementation of educational decentralization in Indonesia has provided schools and madrasahs with greater autonomy in managing educational resources and designing quality improvement programs. This policy requires educational institutions to strengthen their management capacity and strategic planning to achieve educational goals effectively. Educational quality is closely associated with the ability of institutions to optimize available resources, improve learning processes, and produce graduates who demonstrate academic excellence, character integrity, and social

responsibility (Cholid et al., 2026; Mukhlisin et al., 2024; Mulyasa, 2017; Usman et al., 2025). Therefore, strategic leadership has become an essential component in ensuring continuous educational improvement. Among various factors influencing educational quality, leadership has consistently been identified as one of the most significant determinants of institutional success. School leaders play a critical role in establishing organizational vision, coordinating educational programs, mobilizing human resources, and creating a culture of continuous improvement. Effective leadership contributes to school effectiveness by aligning institutional objectives with operational practices and fostering collaboration among stakeholders (Bush & Glover, 2021; Hallinger & Wang, 2020). Similarly, Bush and Glover argue that strategic leadership enables educational institutions to adapt to changing environments while maintaining organizational sustainability and performance.

In Islamic educational institutions, student quality represents a multidimensional concept encompassing academic competence, character formation, leadership capacity, social responsibility, and the internalization of Islamic values. Consequently, improving student quality requires strategic leadership capable of integrating educational management with institutional quality improvement. Previous studies consistently report that principal leadership positively influences school effectiveness, teacher performance, and organizational quality (Arif et al., 2024; Rahman & Saudin, 2022), while strategic planning contributes to more effective resource allocation and institutional performance (David et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these studies predominantly examine organizational outcomes rather than student quality itself. As a result, limited attention has been given to how leadership strategies are systematically formulated and implemented to improve student quality as the primary educational outcome, particularly within the distinctive governance context of public Islamic secondary schools (madrasahs).

Despite the growing body of literature on educational leadership, several important gaps remain. Existing studies have largely concentrated on organizational effectiveness, teacher performance, school culture, or institutional management, whereas empirical evidence explaining how strategic leadership directly enhances student quality remains limited. Furthermore, most leadership studies have been conducted in general schools or private Islamic educational institutions, leaving public madrasahs relatively underexplored. Research employing SWOT as a strategic management framework has also primarily focused on institutional planning and organizational analysis rather than examining how the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of SWOT-based leadership strategies contribute to student quality improvement. This limitation indicates that the strategic role of SWOT in guiding leadership decisions within high-performing public madrasahs has not yet been sufficiently investigated (Gurel & Tat, 2017; Supriani et al., 2022). Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru provides an important context for addressing these gaps. As one of the leading public madrasahs under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the institution has experienced an increase in student enrollment from 1,008 students in the 2021/2022 academic year to 1,076 students in 2024/2025, reflecting growing public confidence in its educational services. Alongside this positive trend, the madrasah faces increasingly complex challenges, including higher expectations regarding graduate competitiveness, stronger competition among public and private educational institutions, rapid digital transformation, and the need to maintain excellence in both academic and character development.

The expansion of flagship programs, increasing student diversity, and broader stakeholder expectations require school leaders to formulate strategic decisions based on institutional evidence rather than routine administrative practices. These conditions demonstrate that sustaining student quality has become a strategic leadership challenge rather than merely an operational educational issue. SWOT analysis offers a comprehensive strategic framework for assessing internal and external organizational conditions. Through SWOT analysis, educational leaders can identify institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that influence educational performance and student

development. The results of such analysis provide a foundation for developing strategic actions that support sustainable quality improvement and institutional competitiveness (Chandratreya, 2024; Gurel & Tat, 2017).

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of principal strategies for improving student quality through a SWOT-based strategic management perspective within a high-performing public madrasah. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine organizational effectiveness, teacher performance, or institutional management, this study investigates how SWOT-based strategic leadership is formulated, implemented, and evaluated to improve student quality in a high-performing public madrasah, thereby extending the application of strategic management within Islamic secondary education. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the principal's strategies for improving student quality based on SWOT analysis at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of educational leadership and strategic management literature and provide practical recommendations for improving student quality in Islamic educational institutions

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Qualitative research is intended to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of participants and to generate in-depth descriptions of events, experiences, and meanings within their natural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The descriptive approach was selected to explore the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the principal's strategies for improving student quality based on SWOT analysis at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru. The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia, from July 2025 to May 2026. The site was selected purposively because it is recognized as one of the leading public madrasahs in Pekanbaru, as evidenced by increasing student enrollment, various academic and non-academic achievements, and strong public trust. Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources.

Primary data were collected through interviews with the principal, vice principals, teachers, and other stakeholders directly involved in educational management and student development programs. Secondary data consisted of institutional documents, strategic planning documents, educational reports, student achievement records, photographs, and other supporting documents relevant to the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby informants were chosen based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the implementation of strategies related to student quality improvement (Moleong, 2019; Nazir, 2011; Sugiyono, 2017). The participants included the principal as the key informant, vice principals, teachers, dormitory supervisors, and coordinators of flagship programs. Their involvement provided comprehensive information regarding strategic planning, implementation processes, supporting factors, and challenges encountered in improving student quality.

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant	Number	Selection Criteria	Main Information Obtained
Principal	1	Responsible for strategic planning and institutional management	Formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategic leadership
Vice Principals	4	Responsible for curriculum, student affairs, facilities, and public relations	Implementation of strategic programs and quality improvement
Teachers	6	Minimum five years of teaching experience and involvement in flagship programs	Teaching practices, student development, and implementation of school strategies
Dormitory Supervisors	2	Responsible for students' character development and dormitory management	Character building and student discipline
Coordinators of Flagship Programs	3	Directly involved in planning and implementing excellence programs	Program implementation and student achievement

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was carried out using passive participant observation, allowing the researcher to observe educational activities, school culture, facilities, and student development programs without direct involvement (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain in-depth information regarding strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes. Documentation techniques were used to collect supporting evidence, including organizational structures, strategic plans, educational performance reports, student achievement records, and other institutional documents. Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the condensation stage, all interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were repeatedly reviewed to identify meaningful units of information. Initial open coding was conducted by assigning descriptive codes to statements related to strategic planning, leadership practices, SWOT implementation, student quality, supporting factors, and implementation challenges. Similar codes were then grouped through axial coding into broader categories, which were subsequently synthesized into major themes, namely: (1) strategy formulation, (2) strategy implementation, (3) strategy evaluation, (4) supporting factors, and (5) challenges in improving student quality. The themes were continuously compared across data sources to ensure conceptual consistency before being interpreted in relation to strategic leadership and SWOT theory (Miles et al., 2014). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several triangulation procedures were implemented throughout the study. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the principal, vice principals, teachers, dormitory supervisors, and program coordinators regarding the same strategic issues. Method triangulation involved comparing findings derived from interviews, classroom and school observations, and institutional documents, including strategic plans, Educational Quality Report Cards, EDM, PKKM reports, AMBK results, and student achievement records. Time triangulation was undertaken by collecting data at different stages of the academic year to verify the consistency of participants' responses and institutional practices. Any discrepancies identified during the triangulation process were re-examined through follow-up interviews and document verification until consistent interpretations were achieved.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented based on the three main objectives of the research, namely the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the principal's strategies for improving student quality at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru. The analysis revealed that the principal

employed a systematic and data-driven strategic management approach, supported by stakeholder participation, institutional quality assurance mechanisms, and continuous evaluation processes. These strategies were designed to enhance academic achievement, non-academic performance, graduate competitiveness, and student character development. Furthermore, the findings indicate that student quality improvement was supported by the integration of SWOT analysis into strategic planning and decision-making processes. The principal utilized institutional strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and external challenges through various academic and non-academic programs. The following sections present the research findings concerning strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, followed by a discussion of their implications for educational leadership and quality improvement in Islamic secondary education.

3.1 Strategy Formulation for Improving Student Quality

The findings indicate that the formulation of strategies for improving student quality at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru follows a systematic strategic management process consisting of institutional evaluation, environmental analysis, target setting, budget alignment, and program development. These activities are integrated into the annual planning cycle and are supported by quality assurance instruments such as the Madrasah Self-Evaluation (EDM), Principal Performance Assessment (PKKM), Computer-Based Madrasah Assessment (AMBK), Academic Competency Tests (TKA), and the Education Report Card. The overall strategic formulation process is summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

Tabel 2. SWOT Analysis of Student Quality Improvement at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1

<i>Internal Factors</i>	<i>Description</i>
Strengths	103 teachers, 10 flagship programs, international-oriented curriculum, Cambridge Program, Tahfiz Program, strong institutional reputation, increasing public trust, adequate facilities
Weaknesses	Monitoring and evaluation systems are not yet optimal, program management depends on coordinators, supervision remains inconsistent across programs
External Factors	Description
Opportunities	Increasing demand for quality Islamic education, opportunities for overseas university admission, technological advancement, collaboration with external institution
Threats	Competition among leading schools, increasing expectations regarding graduate quality, rapid educational transformation, global competitiveness demands

Tabel 3. Strategic Formulation Process for Student Quality Improvement

Stage	Activities	Output
Evaluation	EDM, PKKM, AMBK, TKA, Education Report Card analysis	Institutional performance profile
Environmental Analysis	Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats	SWOT-based priorities
Strategic Planning	Formulation of annual targets and quality indicators	Annual Work Plan (RKT)
Budget Alignment	Integration into RKAM	Resource allocation
Program Development	Design of academic and non-academic initiatives	Student quality improvement programs

The analysis identified three interrelated themes: evidence-based planning, participatory decision-making, and student-oriented program development. Institutional evaluation served as the basis for determining strategic priorities, while discussions involving the principal, vice principals, teachers, and the quality assurance team ensured that decisions reflected organizational needs and stakeholder perspectives. Student interests and achievement outcomes were also considered in determining the continuation and development of flagship programs. This evidence is reflected in the following statement from the Head of P2MM: “*Hasil dari dokumen EDM dan PKKM, serta asesmen seperti AMBK, TKA, dan rapor madrasah menjadi titik tolak awal untuk strategi*

berikutnya.” These findings demonstrate that strategy formulation was not merely an administrative activity but an evidence-based and collaborative process that integrated institutional evaluation with student needs to support continuous quality improvement.

3.2 Strategy Implementation for Improving Student Quality

The findings indicate that the implementation of strategies to improve student quality was carried out through integrated academic and non-academic programs supported by collaborative leadership. Rather than functioning as separate initiatives, the flagship programs were coordinated to develop students' academic achievement, character, leadership, digital competence, and global competitiveness. The implementation process involved the principal, vice principals, teachers, the Madrasah Quality Assurance Center (P2MM), and external instructors, each assuming complementary responsibilities in Tables 4 and 5.

Tabel 4. Flagship Programs and Student Development Orientation

Program	Main Objective
Middle East Program	Preparation for overseas Islamic universities
Tahfiz Program	Qur’anic memorization and character development
Cambridge Program	International academic competence
Olympiad Program	Academic excellence
Research Program	Scientific literacy and research competence
Entrepreneurship Program	Entrepreneurial mindset
Robotics Program	Innovation and technological competence
Information Technology Program	Digital literacy
Multimedia Program	Digital communication competence
Accelerated Credit System (SKS)	Academic acceleration

Tabel 5. Roles of Stakeholders in Strategy Implementation

Stakeholder	Primary Role
Principal	Strategic leadership and policy direction
P2MM	Planning, monitoring, and evaluation
Vice Principals	Operational coordination
Curriculum Division	Academic management and scheduling
Teachers	Instructional implementation
External Instructors	Specialized coaching and mentoring

The analysis identified three interconnected implementation themes: collaborative leadership, student-centred program implementation, and professional support. Responsibilities were distributed across organizational units, while learning activities were adapted to students' interests, talents, and future aspirations. The involvement of external coaches in selected programs further strengthened students' preparation for academic competitions and international education. These findings indicate that strategy implementation relied not only on program availability but also on effective coordination among stakeholders. This collaborative approach is reflected in the following statement: *“Implementasi strategi dilakukan bersama oleh P2MM, bidang kurikulum, bidang kesiswaan, dan guru sesuai tugas masing-masing sehingga program dapat berjalan secara terarah.”* Despite these achievements, the findings also revealed that monitoring remained a challenge because the increasing number of flagship programs required stronger supervision and coordination. Consequently, the effectiveness of implementation depended not only on strategic planning but also on continuous collaboration and quality control across all educational programs.

3.3 Strategy Evaluation of Strategies for Improving Student Quality

The findings indicate that strategy evaluation was conducted continuously through monitoring student achievement, graduate outcomes, character development, and the performance of flagship programs. Evaluation results were used to identify program strengths, address implementation

constraints, and determine priorities for subsequent planning. The main evaluation indicators are presented in Table 6.

Tabel 6. Indicators of Student Quality Improvement

Dimension	Indicators
Academic Quality	Olympiad achievements, academic competitions, AMBK and TKA results
Graduate Quality	Admission to prestigious national and international universities
Character Development	Tahfiz, Tahsin, Muhadharah, discipline, Islamic values
Non-Academic Quality	Leadership, extracurricular participation, social competence
Global Competence	Cambridge certification, IELTS preparation, overseas university admission

As explained by the Head of P2MM: *“Ketika program selesai dilaksanakan, madrasah melakukan evaluasi diri kembali. Hasil evaluasi tersebut menjadi dasar dalam menyusun strategi pada periode berikutnya.”* The findings also revealed that, although the evaluation system had supported continuous improvement, monitoring remained challenging because of the large number of academic and non-academic programs implemented simultaneously. This indicates that sustainable student quality improvement depends not only on periodic evaluation but also on strengthening monitoring and follow-up mechanisms across all programs.

DISCUSSION

Strategic Leadership through Evidence-Based Decision-Making

This study demonstrates that strategic leadership at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru is characterized by the systematic use of institutional evidence to formulate educational strategies. The integration of EDM, PKKM, AMBK, TKA, and the Education Report Card into strategic planning indicates that leadership decisions are grounded in institutional performance rather than personal judgment. This explains why the madrasah has been able to maintain educational quality while responding to changing internal and external demands. This finding extends previous studies that identify data-driven leadership as an important determinant of school effectiveness (Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Sheninger, 2023). Earlier research primarily emphasizes the managerial value of educational data for planning and accountability. In contrast, this study demonstrates that institutional evaluation also functions as a mechanism for organizational learning, enabling leaders to continuously refine strategic priorities based on measurable evidence. Consequently, strategic leadership becomes an adaptive process rather than a series of administrative decisions. Within the context of Islamic education, the use of institutional evaluation reflects the value of *muhāsabah*, which encourages continuous reflection and self-improvement. Rather than being viewed solely as a managerial activity, evaluation becomes part of an ethical responsibility to ensure that educational policies remain aligned with the mission of developing knowledgeable, responsible, and morally grounded students (David et al., 2019; Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Sheninger, 2023).

Participatory Leadership as the Foundation of Organizational Commitment

Another important finding is that strategic decisions were developed through participatory leadership involving vice principals, teachers, quality assurance teams, and program coordinators. The collaborative planning process strengthened institutional commitment because stakeholders were actively engaged in identifying priorities and implementing improvement strategies. This participatory approach explains why strategic initiatives were consistently translated into educational practices despite increasing organizational complexity. These findings are consistent with distributed leadership theory, which argues that organizational effectiveness is strengthened when leadership responsibilities are shared among institutional members. However, this study offers a different perspective by demonstrating that participation in a madrasah extends beyond managerial

collaboration. Decision-making is embedded within the Islamic principle of *shūrā*, where consultation serves not only to improve the quality of decisions but also to reinforce mutual trust, collective responsibility, and institutional solidarity. This finding suggests that strategic leadership in Islamic educational institutions should not be interpreted solely through organizational management theories. Instead, leadership effectiveness is shaped by the interaction between professional governance and Islamic values, enabling institutional development while preserving the distinctive culture of the madrasah (Bush, 2021; Mahfudh, 2022). Participatory leadership allows organizations to utilize diverse expertise and experiences, thereby improving the quality of strategic decisions. The collaborative process identified in this study contributes to stronger organizational commitment because stakeholders perceive themselves as active contributors rather than passive implementers of institutional policies (Leithwood et al., 2020).

SWOT-Based Strategic Management for Sustainable Student Quality

The findings further indicate that SWOT analysis functioned as a strategic learning framework rather than merely a planning instrument. The identification of institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats enabled the madrasah to formulate adaptive strategies while maintaining its educational vision. This explains why institutional development remained responsive to increasing competition, technological advancement, and stakeholder expectations without compromising educational quality. Previous studies generally position SWOT as a tool for environmental analysis and strategic planning (Gurel & Tat, 2017). The present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that SWOT becomes more effective when integrated with continuous evaluation, collaborative leadership, and quality assurance systems. Rather than producing static planning documents, SWOT supports an ongoing cycle of institutional learning and strategic adjustment. The findings also emphasize that strategic management in a madrasah differs from that of general educational institutions. Student quality is interpreted not only through academic performance but also through character formation, discipline, religious commitment, and leadership development. Consequently, strategic planning must accommodate both educational competitiveness and the broader mission of Islamic education (David et al., 2019; Saharudin et al., 2023).

Implications for Islamic Educational Leadership

This study contributes to the development of Islamic educational leadership by proposing that strategic leadership should be understood as the integration of evidence-based management, participatory governance, and Islamic educational values. The findings demonstrate that improving student quality cannot rely exclusively on organizational effectiveness or strategic planning. Sustainable improvement requires leadership capable of transforming institutional evaluation into strategic action while maintaining the cultural and spiritual identity of the madrasah. The findings provide guidance for leaders of Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen student quality in increasingly competitive educational environments. Strategic planning should be supported by systematic evaluation, collaborative decision-making, and continuous professional development while remaining grounded in the values of *amanah* (trustworthiness), *shūrā* (consultation), and *muhāsabah* (continuous self-evaluation). These values ensure that institutional competitiveness develops alongside the broader educational mission of producing graduates who are academically capable, ethically responsible, and spiritually mature (Bush & Glover, 2021; Hadi et al., 2021; Mukhlisin et al., 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal's strategy for improving student quality at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Pekanbaru has been formulated systematically, data-driven, and participatively

through the utilization of Madrasah Self-Evaluation (EDM), Principal Performance Assessment (PKKM), Computer-Based Madrasah Assessment (AMBK), Academic Competency Tests (TKA), and educational report data. The formulation process is strengthened by the identification of institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which serve as the foundation for determining quality targets and developing strategic programs. The implementation of these strategies is carried out through various academic and non-academic programs, including the Cambridge Program, Tahfiz Program, Middle East Class, Olympiad Class, Research Class, Entrepreneurship Class, Robotics Class, Information Technology Class, Multimedia Class, and Accelerated Learning Program. The implementation process is further supported by teacher professional development, collaborative leadership, and adequate educational facilities.

The findings also indicate that the implemented strategies have contributed positively to student achievement, graduate quality, and character development, as reflected in students' academic and non-academic accomplishments as well as their admission to prestigious national and international higher education institutions. Continuous evaluation through monitoring student outcomes, program implementation, and institutional performance has enabled the madrasah to maintain and improve educational quality. Nevertheless, challenges remain in strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, optimizing human resource management, and ensuring the sustainability of program implementation. Therefore, enhancing quality assurance mechanisms, strengthening stakeholder involvement, and improving continuous supervision are necessary to support sustainable student quality improvement and institutional excellence in Islamic secondary education.

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