

Value-Embedded Strategic Management in Pesantren: A Case Study of Sustainable Qur'anic Achievement in Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an Competitions

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ABSTRACT

Strategic management theory explains how organizations formulate, implement, and evaluate long-term direction, yet its application to value-based, non-bureaucratic religious institutions remains underdeveloped. This gap is acute in Indonesian pesantren, where sustained excellence in the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) is studied mainly as coaching outcome rather than deliberate institutional strategy. This study examines strategic management at Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng, Jombang, which has sustained national and international MTQ achievement. Using a qualitative single-case design, data came from twelve in-depth interviews, eighteen participant-observation sessions, and documents, analyzed through the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) interactive model with source, method, and theory triangulation. Findings show environmental analysis relies on implicit, kiai-centered situational awareness rather than formal SWOT; strategy formulation combines rational planning with non-negotiable normative commitments; implementation is sustained by a layered competitive structure embedded in the lafdzan ma'nan 'amalan educational architecture; and evaluation combines a multilayered, technology-supported system with the kiai's normative oversight. The study proposes value-embedded strategic management (VESM), explaining how strategic effectiveness can be achieved through cultural and moral infrastructure rather than formal bureaucratic mechanisms. It extends Mintzberg's emergent-strategy thesis and complements Wheelen-Hunger's rational planning model, with implications for pesantren leaders, MTQ policymakers, and faith-based institutional management research.

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1. Introduction.

The rapid transformation of global educational systems has intensified demands on religious educational institutions to demonstrate not only doctrinal soundness but also measurable institutional performance (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 2010), with the increasing demand for formal education and the expansion of education systems across various countries, there has emerged a need to manage educational institutions more efficiently and effectively (Brutu, Annur, & Ibrahim, 2024). In Indonesian Islamic education, one of the most visible performance indicators is student achievement in the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ), a national and international Qur'anic recitation competition administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the National Qur'an Coaching Institute (LPTQ). MTQ spans branches including tilawah, tahfidz, tafsir, fahmil Qur'an, and syarhil Qur'an, and functions simultaneously as a religious competition and a public benchmark of Qur'anic education quality (LPTQ Nasional, 2024; Abshor & Rahmah, 2024).

Education should be able to foster students into individuals with good character and a strong sense of identity, while equipping them with competencies that are relevant to the demands and developments of the times (Zainuri et al., 2023). Pesantren occupy a distinctive position in this landscape. With more than 36,000 institutions nationally (Kementerian Agama RI, 2023), pesantren constitute the largest network of Islamic education in the world, yet only a small number consistently produce nationally competitive MTQ participants. This disparity suggests that sustained achievement is a function of strategic management capacity rather than institutional size or reputation alone (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2015; David, 2017).

Strategic management is conventionally defined as the systematic process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions to achieve long-term organizational objectives (Chandler, 1962; Ansoff, 1965; David, 2017). Wheelen and Hunger (2012) frame it as a set of managerial decisions and actions linking internal capability to external environmental dynamics, while Hitt et al. (2015) emphasize sustained competitive advantage through optimal resource deployment. In educational contexts, strategic management aligns institutional policy with environmental demands (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Bush, 2011), reframing schools as purposive organizations that require long-term governance rather than reactive administration (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013; Leithwood & Louis, 2011).

Needs planning is a detailed aspect of the planning function that takes into consideration the factors of needs that must be fulfilled. Its purpose is to prevent undesirable errors and failures and to improve effectiveness and efficiency in its implementation (Annur, Witahanriani, & Ibrahim, 2024). Mintzberg (1994), however, cautions against over-formalized planning, arguing that emergent strategies developed through practice and organizational learning rather than rational-comprehensive design are often more adaptive. (Mustajib, 2024) This tension between rational-comprehensive and emergent conceptions of strategy is central to the present study, since it is empirically unresolved for value-based religious organizations.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) offers a complementary lens. Barney (1991) argues that sustained competitive advantage derives from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Applied to educational organizations, RBV suggests that intangible assets leadership authority, institutional reputation, and organizational culture can constitute strategic resources even in the absence of formal planning systems (Hitt et al., 2015). Yet RBV was developed for market-competitive firms, and its applicability to institutions whose "competitive advantage" is inseparable from religious and moral authority has rarely been tested empirically, which is one of the theoretical gaps this study addresses.

In Islamic educational settings, strategic management is further contextualized by normative dimensions. Mujib and Mudzakir (2006) argue that Islamic educational management must integrate rational decision-making with the values of tauhid (monotheism), amanah (trust), and maslahah (public welfare); Nata (2010) similarly holds that Islamic educational management addresses instrumental and transcendental goals simultaneously, a requirement absent from conventional strategic management theory. Dhofier (2011) identifies five defining elements of pesantren the kiai, the santri, classical texts (kitab kuning), the mosque, and the residential compound and argues that pesantren operate under a logic of normative authority rather than bureaucratic rationality (see also Mastuhu, 1994; Selznick, 1957). Selznick's (1957) concept of institutionalization, whereby organizations become infused with values

beyond technical requirement, is particularly apposite: in pesantren, values such as keikhlasan (sincerity), kesederhanaan (simplicity), and ukhuwah (brotherhood) function as governance mechanisms rather than cultural ornamentation (Mastuhu, 1994; Schein, 2010), and the kiai acts as a “cultural broker” mediating tradition and social change (Wahid, 2001).

Recent scholarship has begun to apply strategic management concepts directly to pesantren governance, confirming that this is an emerging but still fragmented research area. Harjawati, Aisjah, and Ratnawati (2026) document integrated business strategies in pesantren-based enterprises but confine their analysis to economic units rather than educational achievement. Huda, Supratno, and Hariyati (2025) examine strategic institutional reform in pesantren-based universities, and Wafa, Maskuri, and Said (2026) analyze strategic management for organizational resilience in a religiously plural pesantren, but neither study addresses Qur'anic-competition achievement as a strategic output. This recent cluster of studies indicates that strategic management is increasingly recognized as analytically relevant to pesantren, yet its specific application to MTQ achievement arguably the most visible and contested performance indicator in Qur'anic education remains unexamined.

MTQ functions as both an arena of Qur'anic excellence and a public legitimacy mechanism for institutional quality (Abshor & Rahmah, 2024; LPTQ Nasional, 2024); for pesantren, sustained achievement signals coaching effectiveness and enhances reputation at local, national, and international levels (Yakup, 2023; Salma et al., 2024). Tafsir (2012) positions Qur'anic education not as a discrete technical skill but as the integrative core of Islamic tarbiyah, the holistic formation of Muslim personhood; consistent MTQ performance, on this view, reflects institutional strategy rather than individual coaching success. Empirical studies support this relationship at the coaching level: Abshor and Rahmah (2024) found systematic MTQ preparation correlated with broader gains in Qur'anic achievement; Irhamdani (2024) linked tahfidz-based coaching to competitive readiness; and Salma et al. (2024) showed that structured tasmi' programs improved MTQ outcomes.

These studies share a common limitation: they examine coaching mechanisms in isolation from the strategic architecture environmental analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation-control that enables such mechanisms to operate consistently over time. Prior strategic management research on Islamic education, meanwhile, has addressed madrasah quality management (Mistiani, 2018; Laeli, 2021) and Islamic education strategy in general terms (Rahman, 2020; Riyanto, Wardini, & Daroini, 2023), but not pesantren-specific contexts in which MTQ constitutes the focal strategic output. No study to date has integrated these two literatures strategic management theory and MTQ achievement research through a single, theoretically grounded case.

Three gaps follow from this review. First, strategic management frameworks have been applied to Islamic education broadly but rarely to pesantren-specific contexts with MTQ as the focal output (Rahman, 2020; Riyanto et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2025). Second, MTQ research emphasizes technical coaching rather than the institutional strategic architecture that sustains performance (Irhamdani, 2024; Salma et al., 2024). Third, the organizational distinctiveness of pesantren kiai authority, value-based governance, non-bureaucratic management has not been adequately theorized in relation to strategic management frameworks derived from secular organizational theory (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012; Mintzberg, 1994; Wafa et al., 2026).

This study addresses these gaps through a case study of Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng Jombang, one of Indonesia's most prestigious Qur'anic boarding schools, founded in 1971 under the umbrella of Pesantren Tebuireng. The institution structures Qur'anic education around three dimensions lafdzan (recitation and memorization), ma'nan (textual understanding), and 'amalan (spiritual practice) and its students achieved first place at the National MTQ in 2023 and have represented Indonesia internationally, making it an information-rich, purposively selected case for theory-building (Patton, 2015).

The study offers theoretical novelty in four respects: (1) it operationalizes strategic management theory within a value-based Islamic educational organization rather than a market-competitive firm; (2) it demonstrates empirically how implicit, culturally embedded strategic processes can achieve outcomes comparable to formal strategic planning; (3) it develops “value-embedded strategic management” (VESM) as an alternative theoretical construct extending Mintzberg's (1994) emergent-strategy thesis;

and (4) it contributes an empirically grounded, transferable institutional model of Qur'anic achievement management. Correspondingly, the study pursues four objectives: (1) to analyze the environmental analysis practices underpinning MTQ achievement strategy; (2) to examine the strategy formulation process; (3) to describe strategy implementation mechanisms; and (4) to evaluate the strategy evaluation-control system employed at Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014); (Annur, 2018; Ibrahim, Nabila, Rahmaliya, & Setyaningsi, 2023), selected for its capacity to generate contextually rich understanding of strategic management phenomena within a bounded institutional setting. The interpretive paradigm underpinned the research, treating strategy as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by leadership, values, and organizational culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Moleong, 2018).

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng, Jombang Regency, East Java, a region widely recognized as a center of Indonesian Islamic educational tradition. The institution was selected through purposive criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2015) based on three criteria: (1) documented national-level MTQ achievement sustained over multiple years; (2) the presence of structured Qur'anic coaching programs; and (3) a distinct institutional identity offering rich data on strategic management processes. Data collection was conducted between July 2024 and February 2025.

Participants were selected using purposive, information-rich case sampling (Patton, 2015): the kiai/mudir as strategic decision-maker, one educational coordinator (ustadz) responsible for MTQ programs, the head of the Tahfidz Unit, three MTQ coaches with documented competitive experience, and five santri with MTQ competition records twelve participants in total. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and institutional and personal anonymity were maintained in accordance with research ethics protocols.

Three data collection methods were triangulated (Moleong, 2018; Creswell, 2018); (Annur, Ibrahim, & Febrianto, 2024; Ibrahim, Annur, & Rahma, 2024): (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews (12 sessions, 45–90 minutes each), guided by a protocol aligned with the four strategic management stages; (2) participant observation (18 sessions) of MTQ training, institutional coordination meetings (rapat), internal competitions (musabaqah), and daily Qur'anic activities; and (3) documentary review of program work plans, achievement records, training schedules, and institutional reports.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display (matrices and narrative maps organized around the four strategic management stages), and conclusion drawing/verification. Coding was conducted in NVivo; initial codes were derived deductively from the Wheelen-Hunger (2012) framework and refined inductively from field data, allowing emergent categories such as normative control that fell outside the original coding frame to be captured.

Trustworthiness followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria. Credibility was established through source triangulation (kiai, administrators, coaches, santri), method triangulation (interviews, observation, documents), and member-checking with key informants. Transferability was supported by thick institutional description. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting methodological decisions. Confirmability was ensured through peer debriefing with two external experts in Islamic educational management. As a single-site case study, analytic rather than statistical generalization is claimed; this limitation is revisited in the Conclusion.

3. Results

3.1 Environmental Analysis: Value-Embedded Scanning

Environmental analysis at Madrasatul Qur'an does not follow a formal SWOT protocol. Instead, it occurs through an institutionalized process of implicit, value-centered situational awareness exercised by the kiai and senior administrators. Three internal strength domains were consistently identified across data sources.

First, the kiai's leadership functions as a non-substitutable strategic resource. The institution's mudir stated: "Madrasatul Qur'an is built on the vision of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari and K.H. Wahid Hasyim the desire to produce hafidz who not only memorize but understand and practice the Qur'an. Everything we do is a continuation of that vision." This narrative situates MTQ achievement within a

multigenerational institutional mission that functions as a strategic compass transcending periodic planning cycles.

Second, the institution operates a selective admission system screening incoming santri for Qur'anic aptitude, voice quality, tajwid accuracy, and spiritual readiness. As one coordinator explained: "The admission process is the first stage of coaching. From intake testing to classroom grouping in Qur'anic instruction this is how we identify who will become champions." This practice exemplifies proactive capability management aligned with long-term MTQ strategy.

Third, a pervasive Qur'anic culture constitutes a structural competitive advantage. Observation confirmed that tilawah, tahfidz, and muraja'ah are not supplementary activities but the dominant rhythm of santri daily life, reducing coordination costs and organically integrating MTQ preparation into institutional routine.

External factors are consciously monitored but interpreted through institutional identity rather than competitive response. As one administrator explained: "We align our coaching with the MTQ categories set by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and LPTQ, so santri are prepared when they compete." Community expectations and inter-pesantren competition are recognized as legitimizing pressures that reinforce internal quality standards without destabilizing institutional values.

3.2 Strategy Formulation: Rational-Normative Integration

Strategy formulation exhibits a rational-normative hybrid character. The process begins with an annual program-planning rapat involving the kiai, mudir, administrators, and coaching units, reviewing prior-year achievement data and articulating program priorities. As the educational coordinator described: "At the start of the academic year, we hold a full-division rapat before each division meets separately. The kiai or his representative attends to approve the programs already formulated."

The formulation process produces a structured MTQ coaching document specifying: (1) priority MTQ branches for intensive development; (2) santri grouping by ability level and specialization; (3) coach-branch assignments based on competence; (4) an integrated training schedule aligned with academic and dormitory calendars; and (5) performance indicators and evaluation mechanisms an unusual degree of formal planning rigor for a pesantren context, yet one deeply anchored in institutional values.

MTQ is formally framed not as a strategic goal in itself but as a consequence of Qur'anic education quality. The kiai stated: "MTQ is not the sole purpose of Qur'anic instruction at Madrasatul Qur'an. It is a motivation and a means of maintaining memorization." This framing is strategically significant: it prevents instrumentalization of the coaching process while sustaining high standards, so that MTQ success becomes a by-product of rigorous Qur'anic formation rather than a pressure-driven target.

Coach recruitment and assignment is based on demonstrated competence, including competitive experience at national and international MTQ levels. One participant noted: "Coaches and MTQ trainers here include international champions, and many serve as coaches and judges at district, provincial, and national levels," ensuring alignment between formulation (assigning coaches to priority branches) and implementation (delivering technically proficient coaching).

3.3 Strategy Implementation: Systemic Cultural Embeddedness

Implementation proceeds through a layered competitive development structure that functions simultaneously as a talent-identification pipeline and a mass Qur'anic development program, operating at four sequential levels. At the foundational level, all santri participate in weekly branch-specific talent-development sessions covering tilawah, calligraphy, religious speech, academic paper, and quiz. An administrator confirmed: "The talent development program is held every Monday. Branches include tilawah, calligraphy, speech, academic paper, and quiz."

The competitive structure escalates from intra-room musabaqah, to inter-room competition, to institution-level musabaqah held weekly, with mandatory attendance that creates a community of practice around competitive excellence. The institutional-level winner cohort forms the pool from which MTQ candidates are drawn for external competitions.

Implementation is distinguished by systemic integration across three educational dimensions. The lafdzan dimension is operationalized through daily recitation, memorization submission sessions (setoran), and intensive coaching for identified talent. The ma'nan dimension integrates formal instruction in tafsir, asbabun nuzul, and Qur'anic sciences. The 'amalan dimension is addressed through the Majelis Tarbiyah Wat Ta'lim, organizing spiritual vigils, communal prayer, and reflective study, building the spiritual resilience necessary for competitive performance.

Coach engagement is intensive and competence-differentiated, with experienced coaches working directly with priority candidates while supporting the broader pipeline through cascaded supervision. Evaluation data from musabaqah are recorded using spreadsheet-based online scoring, enabling real-time tracking and data-driven coaching adjustments a technologically mediated innovation within an otherwise culturally rather than bureaucratically managed institution.

3.4 Strategy Evaluation and Control: Multilayered Continuous Assessment

Evaluation and control operate through a multilayered system spanning daily, weekly, monthly, and annual cycles, functioning as an organizational learning mechanism (Senge, 2006; Miles et al., 2014) rather than a terminal accountability process. Daily evaluation tracks attendance and commitment; weekly evaluation assesses tajwid quality, melodic proficiency, and memorization strength; monthly evaluation takes the form of internal musabaqah simulating authentic MTQ conditions; and annual strategic evaluation conducted by the kiai, mudir, and coaching leadership reviews aggregate achievement data, program effectiveness, and resource adequacy.

The coordinator described the evaluation philosophy: "Evaluation is continuous, not only at competitions. From daily practice to competition simulations, everything informs the next coaching step." The online system enables objective quantification: "Musabaqah scores across pondok units are recorded online in a spreadsheet. Scoring and evaluation can be done and aggregated in real time. These results serve as our reference for the next program and coaching cycle."

Strategic control is exercised primarily through the kiai's normative oversight. The kiai does not engage in technical coaching but enforces the integration of achievement ambition with akhlaq (character) and adab (comportment); any perceived imbalance between performance pursuit and spiritual-behavioral formation triggers corrective intervention. This constitutes what Selznick (1957) terms institutionalized value protection and what Paine (1994) describes as a values-based control system.

3.5 Summary of Findings

Table 1 synthesizes strategic management findings across the four stages.

Stage	Key Characteristics	Strategic Mechanism
Environmental Analysis	Implicit, value-centered, kiai-guided; selective admission; strong Qur'anic culture	Resource-Based View; institutional tradition as competitive advantage
Strategy Formulation	Annual rapat; structured planning document; kiai normative authority; MTQ as consequence of Qur'anic formation	Rational-normative hybrid; integrated lafdzan-ma'nan-'amalan vision
Strategy Implementation	Layered competitive structure; systemic integration across lafdzan, ma'nan, 'amalan; weekly and monthly musabaqah	Quality-culture embedding; habitual coaching; competence-based coach deployment
Evaluation & Control	Daily, weekly, monthly, annual multilayered assessment; online digital scoring; normative kiai control	Continuous organizational learning; values-based control; feedback-loop strategy adjustment

4. Discussion.

4.1 Value-Embedded Environmental Analysis

The finding that environmental analysis occurs implicitly through kiai-centered leadership rather than formal SWOT instruments challenges conventional strategic management assumptions (Wheelen &

Hunger, 2012; David, 2017). It resonates with Barney's (1991) Resource-Based View in identifying pesantren-specific intangible resources *kiai* authority, Qur'anic cultural tradition, alumni networks as primary strategic assets, whose competitive advantage arises from reproduction and deepening of a distinctive value system rather than environmental scanning.

At the same time, this finding should not be read as evidence that formal environmental analysis is unnecessary in value-based organizations; rather, it suggests that RBV's VRIN criteria manifest differently when the resource in question is religious authority rather than a market-based capability. The selective admission system exemplifies a proactive capability-building strategy operationalizing this resource-based logic: by prioritizing talent-input quality, the institution creates a structural advantage sustaining performance across competitive cycles. This extends prior work on Islamic educational management (Rahman, 2020; Laeli, 2021) by showing that strategic environmental reading in pesantren is cognitively structured by institutional values rather than rationalized through analytical frameworks a pattern also observed, though less explicitly theorized, in Wafa et al.'s (2026) study of pesantren organizational resilience.

4.2 Rational-Normative Strategy Formulation

The annual *rapat* process and structured MTQ coaching document represent a level of formal strategic planning that distinguishes Madrasatul Qur'an from the informal governance often stereotypically attributed to pesantren. This finding partially confirms Wheelen and Hunger's (2012) rational-comprehensive planning model while simultaneously subverting it: the rational planning process is constrained and oriented by normative commitments that prevent purely instrumental strategy formulation.

The *kiai*'s framing of MTQ as a consequence of Qur'anic formation quality, rather than a primary strategic goal, constitutes what Selznick (1957) terms institutional character protection preserving organizational distinctiveness against the pressures of performative competition. David's (2017) framework positions vision-mission clarity as foundational to effective formulation; at Madrasatul Qur'an, this clarity is enacted through cultural transmission rather than formal documentation, yet produces comparable strategic coherence. This finding challenges Mistiani's (2018) conclusion that planning formality is a prerequisite for quality improvement, and instead resonates with Mintzberg's (1994) observation that effective strategy may be "crafted" rather than planned. An alternative reading, however, cannot be ruled out from a single case: the coexistence of rational planning artifacts and normative framing may reflect institutional isomorphism adoption of formal planning documents to satisfy external legitimacy expectations from LPTQ and the Ministry of Religious Affairs rather than a genuinely distinct strategic logic. Distinguishing these explanations is a task for future comparative research.

4.3 Systemic Cultural Strategy Implementation

The finding that implementation is structurally embedded through institutional culture, competitive programming, and the *lafdzan-ma'nan-'amalan* framework extends the implementation literature in two directions. First, it demonstrates that implementation can be rendered self-sustaining when strategy is institutionalized as cultural practice rather than dependent on managerial enforcement (Schein, 2010; Paine, 1994), contrasting with formal educational settings where implementation fidelity depends heavily on administrative monitoring (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Second, the layered competitive structure progressing from weekly talent development through intra-room to institutional-level musabaqah operationalizes talent management theory (Collings & Mellahi, 2009) in an educational context, ensuring that strategic human-capital development is conducted across the entire student body rather than reserved for an elite minority. This is consistent with Wheelen and Hunger's (2012) emphasis on structure-strategy fit but demonstrates that the relevant structural mechanism in pesantren is cultural habitualization rather than bureaucratic hierarchy, complementing Harjawati et al.'s (2026) finding that pesantren-based organizations achieve operational coherence through integrated, values-anchored rather than purely procedural systems.

4.4 Continuous Evaluation as Organizational Learning

The multilayered evaluation system integrating daily observation, weekly technical assessment, monthly simulation, and annual strategic review constitutes a robust organizational learning mechanism (Senge, 2006; Miles et al., 2014) that transcends the episodic evaluation typical of many Islamic educational institutions (Abshor & Rahmah, 2024; Irhamdani, 2024). The integration of digital scoring with the *kiai*'s normative oversight creates a dual-control system balancing technical performance tracking with value alignment a configuration not previously documented in the *pesantren* literature.

This finding extends David's (2017) three-stage evaluation model (review, measure, corrective action) by showing that corrective action in *pesantren* is governed not solely by performance criteria but by character and spiritual-integrity norms, representing a substantive theoretical contribution: the normative-control dimension of strategic evaluation in value-based organizations constitutes a functionally distinctive control mechanism not captured by conventional performance-management frameworks (Hitt et al., 2015; Wheelen & Hunger, 2012).

4.5 The Value-Embedded Strategic Management Model

Integrating findings across all four stages, this study proposes value-embedded strategic management (VESM) as a theoretical construct applicable to *pesantren* and analogous value-based educational organizations. VESM is characterized by four properties: (1) environmental analysis conducted through value-anchored institutional awareness rather than formal analytical tools; (2) strategy formulation integrating rational planning with normative commitments as non-negotiable constraints; (3) implementation sustained through cultural habituation and institutional identity rather than bureaucratic control; and (4) evaluation integrating technical performance measurement with normative integrity assessment.

VESM extends Mintzberg's (1994) emergent-strategy concept by specifying the institutional value infrastructure that enables strategy to emerge sustainably, and complements Wheelen and Hunger's (2012) rational model by identifying its functional equivalent in non-bureaucratic organizations. It also advances Islamic educational management literature (Mujib & Mudzakir, 2006; Nata, 2010; Rahman, 2020; Huda et al., 2025) by grounding normative claims in systematic empirical analysis rather than doctrinal assertion.

4.6 Boundary Conditions and Alternative Explanations

Three qualifications bound the VESM construct's claims. First, *Madrasatul Qur'an* is an atypical *pesantren* large, historically prestigious, and resource-endowed so the observed coexistence of rational planning artifacts and normative constraint may not generalize to smaller or less-established institutions where either formal planning capacity or normative cohesion is weaker. Second, because the *kiai*'s authority is both the mechanism enabling VESM and the primary data source describing it, the account is vulnerable to self-legitimizing narration; triangulation with coaches and *santri* partially mitigates but does not eliminate this risk. Third, the apparent effectiveness of implicit environmental analysis may be a function of the institution's stable, low-turbulence environment (a well-established religious market position); in more volatile or contested institutional environments, formal environmental scanning may prove indispensable even for value-based organizations. These qualifications do not undermine the central finding but delimit the conditions under which VESM is likely to operate as described.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the strategic management of Pondok Pesantren *Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng* in developing sustainable MTQ achievement. Environmental analysis is conducted implicitly through *kiai*-centered institutional awareness, leveraging intangible resources *kiai* authority, *Qur'anic* culture, selective admission as structural competitive advantages consistent with the Resource-Based View. Strategy formulation employs a rational-normative hybrid process combining annual planning rigor with value-based constraints, positioning MTQ as a consequence rather than a goal of *Qur'anic* formation. Strategy implementation is structurally embedded through a layered competitive development architecture and the *lafdzan-ma'nan-'amalan* framework, rendering implementation self-sustaining through cultural habituation. Evaluation and control operate through a multilayered continuous-assessment system integrating digital performance tracking with *kiai*-centered normative oversight.

Collectively, these findings ground the construct of value-embedded strategic management (VESM), demonstrating that strategic effectiveness in value-based organizations is achievable through cultural infrastructure rather than formal bureaucratic mechanisms. The construct contributes to strategic management theory, Islamic educational management literature, and institutional theory, while the boundary conditions discussed in Section 4.6 indicate where its explanatory scope may be limited.

This study carries practical implications for three audiences. For pesantren leaders (kiai and mudir), it confirms that deliberate cultivation of institutional values, selective human-capital management, and layered competitive development structures constitute a functional equivalent of formal strategic planning. For policy makers and LPTQ, it suggests that national MTQ development policy should support the preservation of pesantren's distinctive value infrastructure rather than imposing standardized bureaucratic planning models. For coaches and program administrators, it demonstrates that integrating technical MTQ preparation with spiritual formation produces more sustainable achievement than technical preparation alone.

Several limitations bound these conclusions. As a single-case qualitative study, findings are analytically rather than statistically generalizable, and the institution's exceptional resources may limit representativeness of the broader pesantren population. Future research should test VESM's applicability across diverse pesantren using comparative or mixed-methods designs, examine the longitudinal sustainability of value-embedded strategy as institutional generations change, and investigate VESM in analogous value-based educational organizations in other religious traditions.

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