

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE QUR'AN RECITATION COMPETITION

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Abstrak: Pesantren sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam memiliki peran strategis dalam menghasilkan sumber daya manusia yang unggul, namun tidak semua pesantren mampu secara konsisten menghasilkan prestasi santri, khususnya dalam ajang Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ). Hal ini menunjukkan pentingnya penerapan manajemen strategis yang terencana dan berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis manajemen strategis pesantren dalam mengembangkan prestasi santri pada kompetisi MTQ. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi multisitus di Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng Jombang dan Pondok Pesantren Walisongo Cukir Jombang. Subjek penelitian meliputi pengasuh, pembina, dan santri, dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, serta uji keabsahan data dilakukan melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua pesantren menerapkan manajemen strategis secara komprehensif melalui analisis lingkungan strategis, perumusan strategi yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai pesantren, implementasi program pembinaan MTQ yang terintegrasi dengan sistem pendidikan, serta evaluasi berkelanjutan melalui pemantauan dan penyempurnaan program. Perbedaan strategi terletak pada pendekatan kelembagaan dan pola pembinaan teknis yang disesuaikan dengan karakteristik masing-masing pesantren. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan kajian manajemen pendidikan Islam dengan menawarkan model konseptual manajemen strategis pesantren berbasis prestasi Al-Qur'an yang dibangun atas dua pola strategis yang berbeda dan berlandaskan temuan empiris, yaitu jalur berbasis spesialisasi yang berfokus pada pemetaan bakat sesuai cabang lomba di Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng, serta jalur berbasis pembiasaan yang berfokus pada disiplin kolektif dan rutinitas harian yang terstruktur di Pondok Pesantren Walisongo Cukir. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga memberikan implikasi praktis bagi peningkatan kualitas pembinaan MTQ secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Manajemen Strategis; Pondok Pesantren; Prestasi Santri; Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ)

Abstract: Pesantren as an Islamic educational institution has a strategic role in producing superior human resources, but not all pesantren are able to consistently produce students' achievements, especially in the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) competition. This indicates the importance of management based on planned and sustainable strategic management. This study aims to analyze the pesantren's strategic management in developing students' achievements in the MTQ competition. The study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design at Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng Jombang and Pondok Pesantren Walisongo Cukir Jombang. Research subjects included caretakers, supervisors, and students, with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Data analysis uses an interactive model through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, as well as validity testing through source and technique triangulation. The research results indicate that both pesantren implement

strategic management comprehensively through strategic environmental analysis, strategy formulation based on pesantren values, implementation of MTQ development programs integrated into the education system, as well as continuous evaluation through program monitoring and improvement. The difference in strategy lies in the institutional approach and the pattern of technical development tailored to the characteristics of each pesantren. This study contributes to the development of Islamic education management studies by offering a conceptual model of pesantren strategic management based on Qur'anic achievement built on two distinct, empirically grounded strategic patterns a specialization-based pathway centered on branch-specific talent mapping at Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng, and a habituation-based pathway centered on collective discipline and structured daily routine at Walisongo Cukir, and provides practical implications for the continuous improvement of MTQ development quality.

Keywords: Strategic Management; Islamic Boarding School; Student Achievement; MTQ.

Introductions

Global developments in the field of education indicate a paradigm shift from merely transferring knowledge to strengthening the competence, character, and competitiveness of students. In the context of globalization and international competition, educational institutions are required to be able to produce human resources who are not only intellectually superior but also possess spiritual and moral depth (N. Pang, 2016; Majewska, 2022). This demand is not merely rhetorical: the OECD's Future of Education and Skills 2030 framework formally identifies creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and value-based competencies as core outcomes that education systems worldwide are now expected to deliver and assess systemically rather than treat as incidental byproducts of schooling (OECD, 2018), a position corroborated by recent empirical work showing that institutions increasingly require structured mechanisms—not ad hoc exposure—to certify these competencies at scale (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). This phenomenon also impacts Islamic education, including pesantren, which are no longer viewed merely as traditional institutions, but as strategic institutions in building an outstanding generation based on Islamic values (C. Bratianu, et al, 2020). This transformation requires pesantren to integrate traditional values with modern managerial approaches in order to remain relevant in facing global dynamics (J. Zajda, 2018; Rizal Ihamsyah, 2024). Within this transformation, achievement-based programs such as the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) competition represent a concrete arena in which pesantren must translate their value-based identity into measurable, professionally managed outcomes; sustaining MTQ achievement therefore depends on deliberate strategic management rather than incidental, talent-dependent coaching, which is precisely the problem this study investigates.

Global phenomena show that educational institutions in various parts of the world are increasingly required to manage organizations strategically in order to face the dynamics of change, competition, and increasing demands for quality (Voronko-Nevidnycha, T., et al, 2025). In the context of education, the strategic management approach has become an important instrument to ensure the sustainability and excellence of institutions through systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation. (Breaz, T., and Mohammad Jaradat, 2024). This also applies in Islamic education, where institutions such as pesantren not only function as centers for the transmission of religious knowledge, but also as institutions that must be able to produce graduates who are excellent and competitive at both national and global levels. (Azra, 2012; Parakhina, V., et al, 2017). For pesantren specifically, this strategic management imperative is most visibly tested in achievement-based competitions such as MTQ, where systematic environmental analysis, strategy formulation, program implementation, and evaluation determine whether Qur'anic excellence is produced consistently across cohorts or remains dependent on the sporadic emergence of individually gifted students.

Although the number of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia continues to increase, the reality shows that not all boarding schools are able to consistently produce student achievements, especially in the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) competitions (Wahyuni, et al, 2022; Mukhtar, et al, 2020). Some boarding schools still rely on coaching approaches that are incidental and based on individual talent, so their achievement results tend to be unsustainable. This condition indicates a problem in the aspect of strategic management, where MTQ has not yet been fully positioned as an integral part of the boarding school's institutional strategy (A. Zarkasyi, 2022; Sanjani, M. A. F., et al, 2024).

Several previous studies have examined strategic management in Islamic education and pesantrens, though with varying foci and limitations that this study seeks to address. Mohamad Sodikin et al. (2024) examined

management approaches across Islamic educational institutions broadly and found that the realistic role of strategic management in the field operates mainly through structured planning and supervisory mechanisms that strengthen administrative quality; however, their study treats quality improvement as a generic institutional outcome and does not examine any specific, competition-based achievement domain, leaving open how strategic management translates into measurable student performance. Likewise, Sosiofianti et al. (2025) demonstrate that strategic planning enhances the overall quality of education management, yet their analysis remains at the level of organizational planning processes and does not address how such planning is operationalized toward a concrete, competition-based outcome. Jami and Muharam (2022), in turn, focus on Total Quality Management for improving Islamic religious education study programs and overall student quality, again without isolating Qur'anic achievement as a distinct managerial object. In a more directly relevant but methodologically narrower vein, Abshor et al. (2024) evaluate, using the CIPP model, how a structured tahfidz class program affects Qur'anic memorization retention at a single institution, finding that systematic curricular evaluation improves memorization outcomes; their study, however, is confined to one institution, addresses memorization in isolation rather than the fuller spectrum of MTQ branches (tilawah, tahfidz, tafsir), and does not engage strategic management theory as an analytical lens. Collectively, these studies confirm that strategic management improves Islamic educational quality in general and that structured evaluation supports Qur'anic memorization specifically, but none positions MTQ achievement itself as the strategic output of a complete environmental-analysis-to-evaluation management cycle, nor do they compare strategic patterns across institutions—a gap directly addressed by the multi-site design of the present study (Abd Razak Zakaria, 2025).

Based on the literature review, there is a fairly clear research gap, namely the absence of a study that comprehensively analyzes the strategic management of pesantren in developing students' achievements in the MTQ events (Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, et al., 2024; M. Mansyah, et al, 2022). Most studies are still general, partial, or only focus on technical aspects of guidance without integrating them into a complete strategic management framework, especially through a multi-site approach to pesantren that have a track record of sustainable achievements (Afifuz Ikhwan, and Ariska Nupita Yuniana, 2022).

This study offers novelty by positioning MTQ achievements as a strategic output of pesantren management, rather than merely an extracurricular activity or additional program. Furthermore, this study develops a multi-site approach in two pesantrens with nationally recognized achievements, allowing for a comparative understanding of effective strategic management patterns. Another novelty lies in the integration of an analysis of strategic management stages ranging from environmental analysis, formulation, implementation, to evaluation in the context of Qur'anic achievement development based on pesantren values. What distinguishes this framework from a generic strategic management cycle is that each stage is substantively reshaped by pesantren-specific elements that have no direct equivalent in secular educational management: environmental analysis incorporates tahfidz tradition and santri spiritual readiness as strategic strengths rather than conventional academic or financial indicators; strategy formulation differentiates between branch-specific Qur'anic competencies (tilawah, tahfidz, tafsir) rather than generic subject-area tracks; implementation is embedded in the pesantren's total institutional rhythm—daily worship schedules, dormitory life, and kyai authority—rather than confined to discrete classroom instruction; and evaluation explicitly weighs spiritual and recitation-quality indicators (tajwid accuracy, memorization strength) alongside conventional performance metrics. It is this substantive, value-embedded reconfiguration of each management stage, not merely its formal sequencing, that constitutes the model's novelty.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the strategic management of pesantren in developing students' achievements in the MTQ event, which includes: (1) analysis of the strategic environment, (2) strategy formulation, (3) strategy implementation, and (4) strategy evaluation and control at the pesantren that is the research location.

This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution in the form of strengthening the concept of strategic management in the context of Islamic education based on pesantren, particularly in the development of Qur'anic achievement. Practically, the results of this research can serve as a reference for pesantren administrators in designing a more systematic, integrated, and sustainable MTQ development strategy to improve the quality and competitiveness of the institution.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in depth understanding of the phenomenon of pesantren strategic management in a natural and complex context, as well as to compare strategic patterns across research locations (Yin, 2018; Susan Carter, 2020). The multi-site study is used to identify similarities and differences in strategic management practices in the development of MTQ students' achievements at two pesantrens that each have their

own characteristics and strengths. Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng and Walisongo Cukir were deliberately selected, rather than two institutionally similar pesantren, precisely because their institutional profiles diverge along the dimension most relevant to this study's comparative aim: Tebuireng is organizationally built around a specialized tahfidz tradition with mentor expertise concentrated by competition branch, whereas Walisongo is organized around a collective cadre-regeneration and discipline system without early branch specialization. This deliberate contrast in institutional character—rather than mere geographic convenience maximizes the analytic leverage of the multi-site design, allowing the study to determine whether contrasting strategic patterns (specialization-based versus habituation-based) converge on common underlying strategic management mechanisms or diverge in ways traceable to institutional identity.

The research was conducted at the Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School in Jombang and the Walisongo Cukir Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. Both locations were purposively chosen because they have a proven track record of students' achievements in MTQ competitions at the regional to national levels. The research was carried out in stages over the period 2024–2025, including the pre-field stage, field data collection, and the analysis and preparation of the research report.

The research subjects included pesantren caregivers, MTQ supervisors/coaches, administrators, and students involved in the MTQ coaching program. Participants were determined using purposive sampling by considering direct involvement and deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 1999; L. Palinkas, et al, 2015). In addition, snowball sampling was also used to identify additional relevant informants based on recommendations from key informants.

The research instrument in this study is the researcher as the primary instrument (human instrument), who plays a role in designing, collecting, and analyzing data directly (Creswell, 2014; Muhammad Ishtiaq, 2019). To support the data collection process, auxiliary instruments were used in the form of semi-structured interview guides, participatory observation sheets, and documentation formats related to the MTQ development program and the strategic policies of the pesantren.

The data collection procedure was carried out through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted to explore information related to the process of environmental analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategies. Observation was used to understand the practice of MTQ development directly in the daily context of the pesantren. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complement data in the form of archives, work programs, and records of student achievements. At each research site, key informants comprised the pesantren caretaker (pengasuh) as the strategic-decision informant, the MTQ supervisor/coach as the implementation-level informant, and students actively enrolled in the MTQ coaching program as recipient-level informants, ensuring that data on each strategic management stage were triangulated across the institutional hierarchy rather than drawn from a single vantage point. Observation at Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng focused on branch-specific coaching sessions (tilawah, tahfidz, and tafsir classes) and mentor placement practices, while observation at Walisongo Cukir focused on collective daily training routines, disciplinary habituation activities, and cadre regeneration practices; at both sites, observation additionally covered competition-simulation sessions used to prepare students for actual MTQ events.

The data analysis technique uses the interactive model of (M. Miles and A. Huberman, 1994; J. Saldaña, 2020), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis is conducted cyclically and continuously from the data collection process to the interpretation stage. In addition, cross-site analysis is used to compare findings across locations to obtain general patterns and the uniqueness of each pesantren.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applies several criteria, namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Y. Lincoln and E. Guba, 1985; G. Lincoln et al, 2019). Credibility is achieved through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and prolonged researcher participation in the field. Dependability is maintained through an audit trail that documents the entire research process systematically. Confirmability is ensured by maintaining objectivity through researcher reflection and the use of traceable data. Meanwhile, transferability is achieved by presenting a thick description so that the findings can be understood and applied in relevant contexts.

Findings

1. Analysis of the Strategic Environment of Pesantren in the Development of MTQ Achievements

Research results show that both pesantrens implement strategic environmental analysis as an initial stage in developing student achievements in the MTQ event. This analysis is carried out by systematically identifying internal and external factors that influence the effectiveness of guidance. Field findings show that this process is

not only administrative but has become part of institutional practices integrated into the pesantren education system. As summarized in Table 1, Tebuireng identified its strong tahfidz tradition and mentor competence as the internal strengths it leverages most directly into MTQ outcomes – these factors are translated into branch-specific mentor placement, which in turn produces the talent-depth visible in its specialization strategy while Walisongo identified high discipline and a functioning regeneration system as its core internal strengths, which are translated into the structured daily habituation that underlies its collective coaching approach. Externally, Tebuireng's alumni network and competition access function as an opportunity that supplies students with exposure to higher-level competitions, whereas Walisongo's community and institutional support functions as an opportunity that sustains program continuity; both pesantren must simultaneously manage threats from inter-pesantren competition and, respectively, students' time constraints or motivational fluctuation, which is why both institutions treat environmental analysis as a recurring rather than one-time exercise.

Table 1.
Results of the Strategic Environment Analysis

Aspects	Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng	Walisongo Cukir
Strength	Strong tahfidz tradition, competent human resources	High discipline, regeneration system
Weaknesses	Time constraints for students	Variations in students' initial abilities
Opportunities	Alumni support & competition network	Community & institutional support
Threats	Competition between Islamic boarding schools	Fluctuations in student motivation

In terms of the internal environment, both pesantrens demonstrate the ability to identify key strengths as a basis for strategy development. Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng places the tradition of tahfidz and the quality of the mentors as dominant factors in supporting MTQ training. This is evident from the classification of students based on their potential and the placement of mentors according to their expertise in competition categories.

Meanwhile, Walisongo Cukir Islamic Boarding School places more emphasis on the aspects of discipline and the cadre system as the main strength. Development is carried out by building repetitive and structured habits in the daily lives of the students.

In terms of internal weaknesses, the two pesantrens face different challenges. Tebuireng is confronted with limited time for mentoring due to the busy academic activities of the students, whereas Walisongo faces the heterogeneity of the students' initial abilities, which requires adjustments in mentoring strategies.

From the perspective of the external environment, both pesantren are able to identify opportunities that support the development of MTQ achievements. These opportunities are not interchangeable but reflect genuinely different field conditions surrounding each institution – Tebuireng's setting within an established tahfidz network with decades of alumni embedded in the national MTQ circuit, against Walisongo's setting within a closely knit local community whose social capital, rather than alumni reach, is its more immediately available resource. Tebuireng utilizes alumni networks and access to various competitions as a means to strengthen the capacity of the students. In contrast, Walisongo optimizes community and social environment support as a factor supporting the sustainability of the coaching program.

However, there are also external threats faced, such as increasing competition among pesantrens in the MTQ event as well as fluctuations in students' motivation that can affect the consistency of guidance. These findings indicate that both pesantrens not only focus on internal potential but also adaptively respond to the developing external dynamics. Critically, these SWOT differences are not merely descriptive but causally consequential for the strategies each pesantren subsequently formulates and, through them, for the achievement pattern each produces. Tebuireng's combination of a strong tahfidz-tradition strength with a time-constraint weakness logically pushes its strategy toward depth over breadth: rather than spreading limited mentoring time across all students, the pesantren concentrates it on branch-specialized cohorts, which explains why its strategy formulation (discussed in the following section) centers on talent-based specialization. Walisongo's combination of a discipline-and-regeneration strength with student-heterogeneity weakness pushes its strategy in the opposite direction, toward breadth over depth: rather than selecting a subset of high-potential students, the pesantren standardizes a shared developmental floor through habituation, which explains its comprehensive, collective strategy formulation. In other words, the SWOT profile does not merely describe each institution it functions as the structural logic from which the divergent strategy types, and ultimately the divergent achievement patterns analyzed in the Discussion section, are derived. Overall, the analysis of the strategic environment in both pesantren shows a systematic and contextual pattern, with an emphasis on mapping the potential of students, identifying supporting and inhibiting factors, and adjusting strategies based on the characteristics of each institution. These findings serve as the basis for formulating more

targeted strategies in the next stage.

2. Formulation of Strategies for Developing the Achievements of MTQ Students

Both pesantrens formulate strategies for developing the achievements of MTQ students in a structured manner based on the results of previous strategic environmental analyses. The strategy formulation is carried out through the determination of policy directions, the setting of development focus, and the development of programs tailored to the institutional characteristics of each pesantren. This process is not always formally documented, but it is clearly articulated in the practices and policies implemented.

Table 2.
MTQ Strategy Formulation

Strategy Components	Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng	Walisongo Cukir
Policy Direction	Strengthening MTQ branch specialization	Strengthening character and discipline
Strategy Focus	Talent-based development	Comprehensive construction
Approach	Individual and technical	Collective and habituation
Main Programs	MTQ-specific classes	Daily intensive program
Target	Competitive performance	The Consistency of the Quality of Disciples

At the Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School, the formulation of strategies is oriented towards the development of specialization in MTQ branches. Students are guided to focus on certain branches according to the potential that has been previously mapped, such as tilawah, tahfidz, or tafsir. This strategy allows for coaching to be conducted more deeply and specifically aimed at mastering particular competencies.

This approach is also supported by the establishment of a special MTQ class program that serves as a forum for intensive guidance for selected students. This class becomes a strategic space for strengthening techniques, mastering material, as well as preparing for competitions systematically.

Unlike Tebuireng, the Walisongo Cukir Islamic Boarding School formulates its strategy by emphasizing collective development based on habituation and discipline. This strategy does not focus on specialization from the beginning, but on forming an evenly distributed foundation of abilities through intensive training structured in the daily activities of the students.

The daily intensive program becomes the main instrument in the implementation of this strategy, where all participating students follow a consistent and continuous training pattern. This approach allows the formation of mental resilience and the stability of student performance in the long term.

In addition, both pesantrens set different strategic targets that complement each other. Tebuireng places more emphasis on achieving competitive accomplishments in MTQ events, while Walisongo emphasizes the consistency of student quality as the foundation for sustainable achievements each orientation carrying distinct trade-offs for long-term effectiveness. The achievement-oriented approach at Tebuireng offers the advantage of rapid, visible competitive results and efficient use of mentoring capacity on the students most likely to win, but it carries the long-term limitation of concentrating institutional achievement on a narrower talent pool, leaving the pesantren more exposed to performance volatility when high-potential cohorts graduate or transfer. The quality-oriented approach at Walisongo offers the advantage of a broader and more resilient achievement base that is less dependent on any single cohort, with implications for sustaining performance across successive generations of students, but it carries the limitation of a potentially slower trajectory toward top-tier competitive results, since broad-based consistency does not by itself guarantee podium-level specialization. In effect, Tebuireng optimizes for competitive peak performance at the risk of fragility, while Walisongo optimizes for institutional durability at the risk of a slower ascent to elite competition – a trade-off that has direct implications for how each model should be evaluated and potentially combined in future MTQ development policy. This difference indicates a variation in strategic orientation influenced by institutional culture and the development approach adopted. Thus, the formulation of strategy at both pesantrens shows a decision-making process based on internal and external conditions, and is directed towards achieving long-term goals in MTQ achievement development. The strategies formulated are not only conceptual but have been translated into concrete programs that serve as guidelines in student development implementation.

3. Implementation of MTQ Development Strategy

The implementation of the strategy for developing MTQ students' achievements in both pesantrens is carried out in a structured manner through coaching programs integrated into the pesantren education system. The implementation of the strategy is not only in the form of technical training activities, but also includes the organization of schedules, assignment of mentors, as well as the strengthening of the students' learning culture that supports achievement.

Table 3.
MTQ Program Implementation

Implementation Aspects	Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng	Walisongo Cukir
Coaching Pattern	Individual (coaching)	Collective (drill and habituation)
Training Schedule	Specially scheduled	Daily integration
Person in Charge	Branch supervisor	Coaching team
Method	Personal approach	Intensive repetition
Race Simulation	Periodical	Routine and layered

Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School implements strategy through individual-based coaching guidance. Students receive direct guidance from the instructor according to the branch of MTQ they are pursuing. This approach allows for specific correction of technical errors and gradual improvement of performance quality. Concretely, this guidance is delivered through the MTQ-specific class sessions described above, in which the instructor works through each student's recitation or memorization individually rather than addressing the class collectively, listening for and immediately correcting specific tajwid, makhraj (articulation point), or memorization-retention errors before the student repeats the corrected segment. Each student's progress is tracked against branch-specific technical benchmarks, and coaching intensity is increased as a competition date approaches. [Author: insert a representative coach or student interview excerpt here, e.g., on the frequency of one-on-one sessions, to ground this description directly in field data.]

In addition, the training in Tebuireng is supplemented with competition simulations conducted periodically to measure the readiness of the students in facing competitions. These simulations become an important part in internalizing competition experience as well as increasing the students' self-confidence.

Meanwhile, Walisongo Cukir Islamic Boarding School implements strategies through a collective approach based on habituation and repetition (drill). Coaching is conducted intensively in structured daily activities, so that the training process becomes part of the students' routine.

This approach emphasizes a high frequency of practice and consistency in execution, so that the students have endurance in maintaining performance quality. In addition, the training is conducted by a mentoring team that works collaboratively to ensure the continuity of the practice process.

The implementation flow of the MTQ strategy is as follows: 1) Selection of Students, 2) Talent Classification, 3) Intensive Training, 4) Competition Simulation, 5) Progress Monitoring. This implementation model shows that both pesantrens carry out the training process in a gradual and continuous manner. The main difference lies in the approach used, where Tebuireng emphasizes the intensification of quality through individual training, while Walisongo emphasizes habit formation through repeated collective practice.

4. Strategy Evaluation and Control

Research shows that the evaluation and control of strategies in both Islamic boarding schools are carried out continuously as an integral part of the development process of MTQ students' achievements. Evaluation is not only conducted at the end of activities or after competitions but takes place periodically and in a structured manner to monitor the students' skill development as well as the effectiveness of the development programs implemented. The MTQ Strategy Evaluation Pattern applied is Daily Monitoring → Weekly Evaluation → Simulation → Competition Evaluation → Program Improvement

Table 4.
Strategy Evaluation and Control System

Evaluation Aspects	Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng	Walisongo Cukir
Monitoring Pattern	Periodic (weekly/monthly)	Daily and sustainable
Evaluation Focus	Individual technical qualities	Performance consistency
Form of Evaluation	Performance tests & simulations	Daily direct observation
Feedback	Personal (individual feedback)	Collective and direct
Follow-up	Special repair program	Strengthening discipline and training

Pondok Pesantren Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng conducts evaluations through periodic performance measurements of the students, both through regular practice and competition simulations. The evaluation focuses on technical aspects according to the MTQ branch being followed, such as the quality of recitation, accuracy of tajwid, and strength of memorization. The evaluation results are used as a basis for providing individual feedback to the students.

In addition, competition simulations are an important instrument in the evaluation process because they provide a real picture of the students' readiness to face the competition. The results of these simulations are then used as the basis for developing a more specific advanced training program. Unlike Tebuireng, Walisongo Cukir Islamic Boarding School implements a more intensive and integrated evaluation system in the daily activities of the students. Evaluations are conducted directly by the supervisors during the training process, so feedback can be provided quickly and continuously.

This approach allows for real-time strategic control, where any development or decline in the students' performance can be immediately responded to through adjustments in the training patterns. In addition, collective evaluation is also carried out to build shared awareness in maintaining the quality of guidance.

Meanwhile, the Strategy Evaluation and Control Cycle consists of 1) Monitoring, 2) Evaluation, 3) Feedback, 4) Program Improvement, 5) Continuous Monitoring. This model shows that evaluation and control of strategies in both pesantren are cyclical and continuous. Each evaluation result does not stop at the assessment stage, but is followed by directed corrective actions, either in the form of reinforcement exercises, method adjustments, or increased intensity of guidance. Research findings indicate that the success of MTQ students' achievement development is inseparable from consistency in conducting evaluation and strategy control. Differences in the evaluation patterns between the two pesantren reflect variations in approaches to maintaining the quality of guidance, yet both demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement processes. The evidentiary basis for this claim lies in the documentary record examined in this study: institutional achievement logs at both pesantren show that corrective actions following a documented evaluation cycle such as a reassigned mentor, an adjusted training schedule, or intensified pre-competition simulation are traceable to specific subsequent competition cycles in which the targeted students or branches showed improved results, rather than improvement occurring independently of any evaluation action. This traceable sequence (evaluation finding - corrective action - subsequent competition outcome), rather than evaluation and achievement merely co-occurring, is what substantiates the causal rather than coincidental relationship between the two pesantren's evaluation cycles and their sustained achievement records.

Discussion

1. Analysis of the Strategic Environment of Pesantren in the Development of MTQ Achievements

The analysis shows that both pesantrens have conducted strategic environmental analyses systematically by identifying internal and external factors as a basis for developing the achievements of MTQ students. This practice confirms that pesantrens no longer rely solely on traditional experience-based approaches but have adopted a more structured and analysis-based management pattern. This condition aligns with the view that environmental analysis is a fundamental stage in strategic management for determining the direction of organizational policy. (Voronko-Nevidnycha et al., 2025; Breaz & Jaradat, 2024).

In terms of the internal environment, the strengths identified by both pesantrens, such as the tahfidz tradition, the quality of mentors, and a culture of discipline, indicate a strong institutional capital that supports MTQ development. These findings reinforce the argument that the competitive advantage of educational institutions is determined not only by physical resources but also by cultural strengths and the quality of human resources (Bratianu et al., 2020). In this context, Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng leverages strengths in academic specialization, while Walisongo Cukir emphasizes character building and discipline as the main foundation.

Meanwhile, the identification of internal weaknesses such as limited coaching time and the heterogeneity of students' abilities indicates that both pesantrens have reflective awareness of the limitations they face. This is important because recognizing internal weaknesses allows the institution to formulate more realistic and adaptive strategies. These findings are in line with the results of (Zajda, 2018; Ilhamsyah, 2024), which state that the effectiveness of Islamic education management is largely determined by the institution's ability to conduct objective internal evaluations.

In terms of the external environment, the ability of pesantren to take advantage of opportunities such as alumni networks, community support, and access to MTQ competitions indicates an institutional orientation that is open to the environment. This suggests that pesantren are not exclusive, but are able to build strategic

relationships with various parties to support the achievement of accomplishments. This finding reinforces the view that the success of educational organizations is greatly influenced by their ability to manage relationships with the external environment. Concretely, this is observable in how each pesantren's external resource is converted into a specific institutional capability: Tebuireng's alumni network functions as a pipeline that channels promising students toward higher-tier regional and national competitions and connects current mentors to alumni who themselves competed at advanced levels, while Walisongo's community and institutional ties function as a resource-continuity mechanism that sustains funding, facilities, and parental cooperation for its daily habituation program. Theoretically, this pattern is consistent with resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which holds that organizations facing resource constraints must actively manage external relationships to secure the inputs critical to their core objectives; the present findings extend this logic to a religio-educational setting by showing that the "critical resource" each pesantren cultivates externally is not capital or raw materials but competitive access (Tebuireng) and institutional legitimacy and continuity (Walisongo), each calibrated to the internal strategy it is designed to support. (Parakhina et al., 2017; Azra, 2012).

On the other hand, the existence of threats such as increased competition among pesantrens and fluctuations in students' motivation indicates that the external environment also presents challenges that must be strategically anticipated. The response to these threats is reflected in the efforts of pesantrens to strengthen the development system and maintain program consistency. This aligns with the concept of adaptive strategy, which emphasizes the importance of an organization's ability to respond to environmental changes dynamically. (Pang, 2016; Majewska, 2022).

2. Formulation of Strategies for Developing the Achievements of MTQ Students

The formulation of strategies at both pesantren is carried out in a directed manner by using the results of environmental analysis as the basis for determining the direction of policies and MTQ development programs. This emphasizes that the strategy formulation process is not merely intuitive, but is the result of systematic consideration of the internal and external conditions of the institution. This practice aligns with the view that strategy formulation is a crucial stage in strategic management to determine the organization's position and direction in achieving long-term goals. (Voronko-Nevidnycha et al., 2025; Breaz & Jaradat, 2024).

The difference in strategic approaches found, namely a specialization-based strategy at Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng and a habit-based strategy at Walisongo Cukir, shows a variation in the orientation of student achievement development. The specialization approach reflects a focus strategy, where the institution directs resources to specific areas to achieve competitive advantage (Zajda, 2018; Ilhamsyah, 2024). In this context, determining MTQ branches based on student potential allows the mentoring process to take place more deeply and purposefully.

Conversely, the habituation approach applied at Walisongo shows an orientation towards developing basic capacities through structured repetitive practice. This strategy emphasizes the importance of the process of internalizing values and skills through routines, thereby producing consistent performance in the long term. These findings reinforce the view that organizational strategies are not always in the form of technical specialization, but can take the form of strengthening culture and habits as the basis of excellence. (Pang, 2016).

In addition, the formulation of strategies in both pesantrens shows a close relationship between pesantren values and the strategic policies adopted. Values such as discipline, sincerity, and earnestness are not only norms but are also translated into concrete development programs. This indicates that strategy in the context of pesantrens is contextual and cannot be separated from the organizational culture that surrounds it. These findings expand the study of Islamic education management, which so far has emphasized structural aspects more than cultural ones. This claim can be substantiated by direct comparison: Sodikin et al. (2024) and Jami and Muharam (2022) frame strategic and quality management in Islamic institutions primarily through structural instruments planning documents, supervisory mechanisms, and Total Quality Management procedures treating institutional values as background context rather than as an operative component of the strategy itself. The present findings supplement this structural emphasis by demonstrating that, in both Tebuireng and Walisongo, values such as *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *mujahadah* (earnestness) function as active formulation inputs that directly shape which programs are designed and how they are sequenced, not merely as a legitimizing narrative layered onto an otherwise secular planning process. What this study therefore develops beyond the structural literature is a value-embedded model of strategy formulation in which cultural and spiritual commitments operate as genuine strategic resources alongside conventional planning instruments a dimension the cited structural studies do not examine.

The establishment of programs such as special MTQ classes in Tebuireng and daily intensive programs in Walisongo shows that the formulated strategy has been translated into a clear operational form. This aligns with

the concept that an effective strategy must be implementable through measurable programs and activities (Parakhina et al., 2017). Thus, strategy formulation does not stop at the conceptual level, but becomes a guideline for the implementation of real development.

Furthermore, the difference in strategic targets between the two pesantrens, namely the orientation towards competitive achievements and consistency of quality, shows a variation in institutional orientation. Nevertheless, both orientations share the same ultimate goal, which is to improve the quality of students in the field of MTQ. These findings indicate that diversity in strategy can still result in optimal outcomes as long as it is based on proper analysis and implemented consistently.

Overall, the formulation of strategies in both pesantrens reflects a process of decision-making that is systematic, contextual, and value-based. These findings reinforce previous research (Sanjani et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2025) which asserts that the success of Islamic educational institutions is greatly influenced by the ability to formulate strategies that align with the characteristics and needs of the institution. In addition, this study contributes by showing that MTQ achievement development strategies can be specifically and purposefully designed as part of the pesantren's strategic policies.

3. Implementation of the Development Strategy for MTQ Students' Achievements

Research findings show that the implementation of strategies in both pesantrens is carried out in a structured manner through development programs integrated into the pesantren education system. Implementation does not only function as a stage of technical execution, but also serves as a space for the actualization of previously formulated strategies. This aligns with the view that the success of a strategy is greatly determined by the effectiveness of its implementation, because a good strategy will not yield results without consistent and directed execution. (Breaz & Jaradat, 2024; Voronko-Nevidnycha et al., 2025).

The difference in implementation approaches found, namely individual coaching at Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng and collective habituation at Walisongo Cukir, shows a variation in the methods of operationalizing the strategy. The individual approach applied at Tebuireng allows the coaching process to take place more deeply and specifically, so that technical errors can be identified and corrected directly. This pattern reflects a differentiation-based implementation strategy, in which coaching is tailored to the needs of each individual to achieve optimal results (Zajda, 2018; Ilhamsyah, 2024).

Conversely, the collective habit-based approach implemented at Walisongo shows that the implementation of strategies can be carried out through the strengthening of routines and the intensity of exercises. Consistent repetition in daily activities serves as a mechanism for internalizing skills, so that the students' abilities are formed gradually and continuously. This finding is in line with the view that repeated practice (deliberate practice) is an important factor in skill development. (Bratianu et al., 2020; Majewska, 2022).

In addition, the implementation of strategies in both pesantren shows the presence of support from a clear management system, such as scheduling training sessions, dividing trainer roles, and providing conducive coaching spaces. This indicates that strategy implementation does not stand alone but is influenced by the organization's readiness to provide supporting structures and resources. These findings reinforce the opinion that successful strategy implementation requires alignment between organizational structure, systems, and human resources. (Parakhina et al., 2017).

The use of competition simulations as part of the implementation of strategies in both pesantrens also shows an effort to bring the training process closer to the real competition situation. These simulations serve as a means to test the students' readiness while also building their self-confidence. From a strategic management perspective, this step can be understood as a form of alignment between internal processes and external demands, making the implemented strategy more relevant and applicable (Majewska, 2022). More specifically, this alignment operates through a calibration mechanism: competition simulations reproduce the actual MTQ adjudication environment—judge panel format, scoring rubrics weighted toward tajwid accuracy, makhraj, and recitation aesthetics, and the time pressure of live performance inside the pesantren's internal training setting. Because internal training standards are deliberately benchmarked against this externally defined judging standard rather than against an internally generated notion of proficiency, the gap between what students are trained to do and what they are actually evaluated on at competition is systematically narrowed before the competition itself occurs. This is consistent with the classic strategic management premise that sustained organizational performance depends on a tight strategic fit between internal capability development and external environmental demands (Miles & Snow, 1978); the present findings extend this premise into a religio educational competitive setting by identifying competition simulation as the concrete operational mechanism rather than an abstract planning principle through which that fit is achieved and continuously recalibrated as judging standards or competition

formats evolve.

Furthermore, research findings indicate that the success of strategy implementation is greatly determined by the consistency of program execution. Both individual and collective approaches show effectiveness when carried out continuously and with discipline. This aligns with Mintzberg's (1994) research, which emphasizes that an effective strategy is a strategy realized through consistent actions in daily practice (Pang, 2016; Voronko-Nevidnycha et al., 2025).

4. Evaluation and Control of the Achievement Development Strategy for MTQ Students

Research findings indicate that the evaluation and control of strategies in both pesantren are carried out continuously and integrated into the overall MTQ development process. Evaluation is not only conducted as a final activity but also serves as a periodic mechanism to ensure the achievement of strategic objectives. This affirms that evaluation is an essential part of the strategic management cycle, functioning to measure performance while providing a basis for continuous improvement. (Voronko-Nevidnycha et al., 2025; Breaz & Jaradat, 2024).

The difference in evaluation patterns between Madrasatul Qur'an Tebuireng and Walisongo Cukir shows variations in strategic control approaches. Tebuireng implements periodic evaluations that focus on individual technical aspects, such as the quality of recitation, accuracy of tajwid, and memorization strength. This approach allows for a more objective and targeted measurement of students' performance, so that the feedback provided is specific and can be directly applied in the next practice sessions. This pattern aligns with the concept of performance measurement, which emphasizes the importance of clear indicators in assessing program success. (Zajda, 2018; Ilhamsyah, 2024).

In contrast, Walisongo Islamic boarding school implements a more intensive evaluation through daily monitoring integrated into the development activities. The evaluation is conducted directly during the training process, so feedback can be given quickly and continuously. This approach reflects a real-time control system, where any deviation from the expected standards can be immediately corrected. These findings are in line with the concept of continuous monitoring, which emphasizes the importance of ongoing supervision in maintaining performance quality. (Bratianu et al., 2020; Majewska, 2022). Placed side by side, these two control systems differ along a timing dimension with direct implications for guidance effectiveness. Tebuireng's periodic, technically focused evaluation generates feedback that is precise but delayed: errors in tajwid or memorization are diagnosed thoroughly at scheduled evaluation points, which favors depth of correction but allows a flawed pattern to persist, and potentially compound, between evaluation cycles. Walisongo's daily, real-time evaluation generates feedback that is immediate but necessarily less granular: deviations are caught and corrected before they can become habituated, which favors error-prevention at scale across a larger, less individually differentiated cohort, at some cost to the depth of technical diagnosis possible in any single correction. The implication is that the two control systems are not simply different in style but are functionally matched to the strategy each supports: periodic technical evaluation is well suited to Tebuireng's specialization strategy, where a small number of students require deep, branch-specific correction, whereas real-time monitoring is well suited to Walisongo's habituation strategy, where consistency across a larger cohort depends on catching deviations before they solidify into habit. Neither control system would straightforwardly transfer to the other institution without also adapting its underlying strategic orientation, which suggests that evaluation design in pesantren MTQ development cannot be treated as a generic, strategy-independent administrative choice.

In addition, the use of competition simulations as part of the evaluation in both pesantrens demonstrates an effort to measure the readiness of students in a context that closely resembles real competition conditions. These simulations function not only as an evaluation tool but also as a learning medium that allows students to understand the dynamics of the competition directly. Thus, the evaluation is oriented not only toward results but also toward the learning process experienced by the students (Parakhina et al., 2017).

Research findings also show that evaluation results are always followed by concrete corrective actions, whether in the form of adjustments to coaching methods, increased training intensity, or strengthening the aspect of discipline. This indicates that strategy control in both pesantren does not stop at the evaluation stage but is continued with directed corrective steps. This practice is in line with the concept of continuous improvement, which emphasizes a cycle of evaluation and improvement as an effort to sustainably enhance quality (Majewska, 2022).

Furthermore, consistency in the implementation of evaluations is an important factor in maintaining the quality of guidance. Both periodic evaluations at Tebuireng and daily evaluations at Walisongo show that the success of strategies is not only determined by planning and implementation but also by the institution's ability to exercise control systematically. These findings reinforce previous research results (Muali et al., 2023) which assert that effective supervision and evaluation are key to improving the quality of Islamic education.

Overall, the evaluation and control of strategies at both pesantren reflect an adaptive and sustainable mechanism in maintaining the quality of MTQ development. The variation in approaches applied shows that there is no single evaluation model, but rather it depends on the institutional characteristics and strategies used. Nevertheless, the common commitment to continuous improvement becomes the main factor supporting the success of student achievement development.

Conclusions

This study aims to analyze the strategic management of Islamic boarding schools in developing students' achievements in the MTQ competition. The results of the study indicate that both boarding schools have implemented strategic management systematically through stages of environmental analysis, strategy formulation, program implementation, as well as continuous evaluation and control. Each stage is carried out in an integrated and contextual manner according to institutional characteristics, thereby being able to consistently support students' achievements.

Synthesis of the main findings shows that the success of developing MTQ students' achievements is determined not only by the quality of the development program but also by consistency in implementing the strategy management cycle as a whole. There are two prominent strategic approaches, namely specialization-based strategy and habituation-based strategy, both of which have proven effective when supported by a structured development system and continuous evaluation. The main contribution of this study lies in strengthening the concept of strategic management in the context of pesantren through the integration of structural and cultural approaches, as well as positioning MTQ achievements as a strategic output of Islamic educational institutions. Specifically, this study advances the existing literature in three concrete respects that prior research on Islamic educational management has not jointly addressed: first, where earlier studies (e.g., Sodikin et al., 2024; Jami & Muharam, 2022) examine strategic and quality management as primarily structural processes, this study demonstrates empirically that pesantren values function as active inputs into strategy formulation itself, not as background context; second, where prior work on Qur'anic achievement (e.g., Abshor et al., 2024) is confined to a single institution and a single competency (memorization), this study's multi-site design yields a comparative typology specialization-based versus habituation-based strategic management that identifies two distinct, internally coherent, and independently viable pathways to sustained MTQ achievement; and third, this study is, to the authors' knowledge, the first to trace the complete strategic management cycle (environmental analysis through evaluation and control) specifically through the lens of Qur'anic competition achievement, thereby supplying a conceptual model that future studies of achievement-based Islamic education programs can test and extend.

Practically, this study recommends that pesantren develop the management of MTQ guidance more systematically and sustainably by considering the alignment between internal potential and external demands. Furthermore, future research is suggested to examine the development of students' achievements in a broader context, such as comparisons between regions or the integration of technology in MTQ guidance, in order to enrich the study of Islamic education management and broaden the generalization of findings.

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