

Executive Strategic Planning as a Pillar of Building School Competitive Advantage in a Dynamic Era

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Abstract

Rapid changes in the educational environment require schools to have adaptive and visionary leadership strategies. Competition between educational institutions and increasing public expectations for service quality add to the complexity of the challenges of managing educational institutions. In this context, the strategic role of school executives becomes crucial as the determinant of direction and the main driver of institutional transformation. This study aims to analyze how school executives design and implement strategies in building competitive advantages amidst the ever-evolving dynamics. This study uses a qualitative approach by relying on data from various relevant sources, such as previous research and institutional strategic documents. The data obtained are analyzed interpretively to reveal patterns and tendencies in strategic leadership practices in schools. The results of the study indicate that school executives have a central role in determining the direction of policies and program priorities that impact the quality and competitiveness of institutions. Success in building competitiveness is greatly influenced by the leadership's ability to respond to change, manage resources, and involve stakeholders. Although there are various challenges in implementing strategies, consistent and reflective leadership can maintain the continuity of planning and implementation on an ongoing basis.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Executive Leadership, Competitive Advantage, Schools, Educational Dynamics.

Abstrak

Perubahan cepat dalam lingkungan pendidikan menuntut sekolah untuk memiliki strategi kepemimpinan yang adaptif dan visioner. Persaingan antar lembaga pendidikan serta meningkatnya ekspektasi publik terhadap kualitas layanan menambah kompleksitas tantangan dalam mengelola institusi pendidikan. Dalam konteks ini, peran strategis pengelola sekolah menjadi sangat krusial sebagai penentu arah dan penggerak utama transformasi institusional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana pengelola sekolah merancang dan mengimplementasikan strategi dalam membangun keunggulan kompetitif di tengah dinamika yang terus berkembang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan memanfaatkan data dari berbagai sumber relevan, seperti penelitian sebelumnya dan dokumen strategis institusi. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis secara interpretatif untuk mengungkap pola dan kecenderungan dalam praktik kepemimpinan strategis di sekolah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengelola sekolah memiliki peran sentral dalam penentuan arah kebijakan dan prioritas program yang berdampak pada kualitas dan daya saing institusi. Keberhasilan dalam membangun daya saing sangat dipengaruhi oleh kemampuan kepemimpinan dalam merespons perubahan, mengelola sumber daya, dan melibatkan para pemangku kepentingan. Meskipun terdapat berbagai tantangan dalam pelaksanaan strategi, kepemimpinan yang konsisten dan reflektif mampu mempertahankan kesinambungan perencanaan dan pelaksanaan secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Perencanaan Strategis, Kepemimpinan Eksekutif, Keunggulan Kompetitif, Sekolah, Dinamika Pendidikan

BACKGROUND

In recent decades, the world of education has undergone a rapid and complex transformation, along with the development of technology, demographic changes, globalization, and public expectations for the quality of education. Schools at various levels are now not only required to carry out educational functions normatively, but also to be able to survive, compete, and thrive in a very dynamic environment (Matyushok et al., 2021). Changes in government policies, demands for quality from parents of students, and the entry of private educational institutions with various competitive advantages have created an atmosphere of intense competition in the education sector. In this context, the existence of schools can no longer be maintained by relying solely on conventional managerial practices, but must be supported by leadership capacity that can formulate long-term directions in a structured manner and oriented towards sustainable excellence (Scott & Guan, 2023).

Amid increasingly strong competition between educational institutions, a major challenge arises for school leaders to navigate their institutions towards achieving a relevant and adaptive vision. Schools are required not only to be a place for transferring knowledge, but also as agile learning organizations, able to read environmental changes, and have a quick and appropriate response to various challenges (Sandy, 2024). This issue becomes more complex when schools are in a diverse social environment, where the needs and expectations of stakeholders are constantly changing, both in terms of learning approaches, curriculum, and overall educational services. Thus, the success of schools in facing a dynamic era like today is highly dependent on the quality of decision-making carried out by their top leaders (Kumar & Rewari, 2022)

In practice, strategic decisions in the school environment cannot be separated from the ability of executive actors to read the competition map, recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the institution, and map opportunities and threats from the external environment. The absence of a clear direction, lack of consistency in implementing internal policies, and minimal innovation are often inhibiting factors that cause schools to lag behind other institutions (Mutambo et al., 2022). In conditions like this, schools that are unable to build a strong strategic foundation will find it difficult to maintain their existence, let alone develop and compete sustainably. Therefore, the role of school leaders becomes increasingly important, not only as administrative managers but as the main actors in navigating the future of schools (Liu et al., 2022).

The reality on the ground shows that there are still many schools that do not have a structured and systematic long-term direction. Decisions are often reactive, depending on momentary needs, without considering the long-term impact. This phenomenon causes many schools to be trapped in inefficient work patterns, lose their institutional identity, and are unable to build a strong image in the eyes of the community. In an increasingly competitive situation, schools must be able to create unique added value and differentiate themselves from other institutions. This requires the active involvement of school leaders to build a framework that is based on the actual needs and unique potential of each educational institution (Gkintoni et al., 2025).

Technological changes and digitalization in the world of education also pose new challenges for school management. Not only related to the use of digital devices in the teaching and learning process, but also in administrative governance, services to students and parents, and the delivery of information to the public (Pettersson, 2021). Schools that are unable to adapt to these changes will have difficulty reaching the generation of students who have grown up in the digital ecosystem. In this context, school leaders are required to have the ability to design policy directions that can accommodate technological changes and

respond to the dynamics of the times. They must have the courage to make updates in various aspects, from organizational structure, communication patterns to learning approaches (Manca & Delfino, 2021).

The complexity of government regulations also adds to the challenges in school management. School leaders are required to be able to manage various changing policies while maintaining the stability of school operations. In facing conditions like this, the role of school executives cannot only rely on administrative routines, but must move at a strategic level to develop a long-term roadmap that can answer regulatory challenges and the needs of the education market. Accuracy in determining priorities, efficiency in the use of resources, and insight in seeing future trends are non-negotiable (Fotheringham et al., 2022).

Changes in the characteristics of students and society are also very important factors in planning educational institutions. Today's young generation has very different learning styles, values, and preferences compared to previous generations. They live in a very fast, digital era and are very sensitive to social issues and diversity (Shorey et al., 2021). If schools fail to understand these changes, then traditional approaches will no longer be relevant and risk hindering the achievement of educational goals. In this case, schools need a strategy that is truly adaptive and able to read the direction of social and cultural developments in society.

Another challenge is how to maintain student loyalty and public trust amidst the many choices of educational institutions available. In an environment full of competition, parents and students now tend to choose schools that not only offer superior curricula but also a safe environment, positive culture, and values that suit the needs of their families. Schools that fail to clearly articulate their advantages and added value will have difficulty building long-term loyalty. This further emphasizes that efforts to build the competitiveness of educational institutions are highly dependent on the capacity for planning that is carried out comprehensively and in an integrated manner at the highest leadership level.

All these dynamics show that schools must be able to develop a strong and forward-looking managerial foundation, where the executive position has a central role as the main architect in building the strategic direction of the institution. In a situation that is constantly changing, the ability to anticipate various future possibilities, design flexible strategies, and implement them effectively is the key to creating a sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, attention to the process and role of strategic planning at the executive level is not only important but urgent to be studied more deeply to answer the challenges of the future of the world of education.

This study was designed to answer the complexity of the role of school executives in building competitive advantage amidst the dynamics of a rapidly changing educational environment. In this context, researchers seek to explore in depth how strategic leadership is implemented in school management practices, as well as how these strategies are responded to by external and internal factors of educational institutions. To understand this problem comprehensively, a qualitative approach was chosen as the main basis for conducting the study. This approach is considered the most appropriate because it can capture meaning, experience, and dynamics that are not accessible through a quantitative approach, especially in viewing the strategic decision-making process by school executives in a real and contextual context. Through a qualitative approach, research data will be obtained from various relevant sources, such as the results of previous studies that are directly related to the focus of this study. Data collection will be carried out intensively with an emphasis on the validity of the content and depth of information. After the data has been collected sufficiently, the analysis process will be carried out. In this way, the study is expected to be able to produce findings that are not only descriptive but also reflective and applicable to the development of school management strategies in the future.

Strategic Planning

Planning plays an important role in the scope because it determines and, at the same time, provides direction to the goals to be achieved. With careful planning, a job will not be messy and unfocused. Careful and well-arranged planning will influence the achievement of goals (Irfan et al., 2021)

Strategic planning is a leadership instrument and a process. It determines what the organization wants in the future and how to achieve it, a process that explains the goals. Even strategic planning is a process of making strategic decisions or offering methods for formulating and implementing strategic decisions and allocating resources to support work units and levels in the organization (Al-Dhaafri & Alosani, 2022).

The meaning of planning cannot stand alone and is limited to one understanding. This is due to the diverse meanings of planning in various fields of science. The various meanings of planning depend on the perspective and background that influence a person. Taylor said that strategic planning is seen as a method for managing unavoidable change, so that it can also be called a method for dealing with the complexity of the environment, which is often closely related to the interests of the organization (Matsler et al., 2021). However, it is also a method for taking the complexity of the internal environment caused by the various needs of each work unit in the organization. The role of strategic planning is so great that it cannot be delegated. If there is delegation from the upper echelon to the lower echelon and at the same time eliminates their active participation, then the pressure becomes the planning process into a plan book (Alsharari, 2024).

Stainer explains that strategic planning is a logical thinking framework that determines where you will be, where you will go, and how you can get there. It is also a process that directs leaders in developing a vision to describe the desired future. It changes the way management thinks, allocates, and relocates resources, while program implementation is taking place. In other words, planning is related to the future impact of decisions made now. Or also called the futurity of current decisions (Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette, 2023). Strategic planning is formulated by McNamara as determining the direction of where an organization will go in the following years, accompanied by determining how the organization will reach its intended goal. Strategic planning can be done for the scope of one organization as a whole, or the scope of the main parts of the organization, but generally covers the scope of one organization as a whole (Anggadwita et al., 2021).

There are three stages in the preparation of strategic planning, namely diagnosis, planning, and preparation of plan documents. The diagnosis stage begins with the collection of various planning information as study material. The planning stage begins with establishing the vision and mission (Retnandari, 2022). The stage of preparing strategic plan documents. The formulation in this case does not need to be too thick so that it is easy to understand and can be implemented by the management team flexibly. The formulation of a strategic plan can be carried out from the time the assessment has produced findings (Ichimura et al., 2022).

The strategic plan formulated in the description of the vision, mission, main issues, and development strategies must be used as a guideline in developing a five-year operational plan. The five-year operational plan includes, among other things, work programs/activities, targets, and stages. The five-year operational plan is then divided into annual operational plans containing projects/activities, targets, and supporting data or reasons (Williams, 2021). The work plan must be described according to the vision and mission. School/madrasah programs should also be adjusted to the vision and mission of the school/madrasah so that the school/madrasah can develop optimally. Program and activity planning

in the RKS must be measurable and realistic so that the program can be implemented (Haddade et al., 2024).

To contextualize the strategic role of school executives, this study draws upon established leadership theories, particularly transformational leadership and adaptive leadership. Transformational leadership, as proposed by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), emphasizes the role of visionary leaders in inspiring and motivating stakeholders toward collective goals, fostering innovation, and managing change. Similarly, adaptive leadership, as conceptualized by Heifetz et al. (2009), focuses on the capacity of leaders to respond to complex challenges by encouraging learning, flexibility, and collaboration within organizations. These frameworks are particularly relevant in the educational sector, where dynamic environments demand both strategic foresight and responsive decision-making. This study provides a deeper theoretical lens to understand how school executives navigate institutional transformation and build sustainable competitive advantage by integrating these theories.

Dynamics of the Educational Environment and Demands for Executive Leadership

In facing an era marked by rapid change, the educational environment is undergoing a transformation that is no longer linear or predictable. Continuously shifting educational policies, both in terms of curriculum orientation, evaluation systems, and administrative regulations, force educational institutions to always be ready to adapt. This dynamic not only creates administrative challenges but also demands a sharp vision and responsive management direction from school executive leaders. When a new policy is implemented with a short time span, school leaders are required to immediately understand its implications, develop adaptation strategies, and ensure that all elements of the school move in a direction that is following the demands of the policy. The speed in absorbing policies and the ability to interpret them in an applicable manner are vital abilities that must be possessed by executive leaders, especially to maintain continuity between the school's strategic direction and external demands.

Along with policy changes, educational institutions also face the reality of increasingly sharp competition. Schools are no longer only focused on providing educational services, but must also be able to compete in attracting students, retaining quality teachers, and securing the resources needed to run various superior programs (Balan, 2023). This competition creates significant pressure for school leaders, because the success of the institution depends heavily on the extent to which the school can build appeal and demonstrate excellence compared to other schools. In this context, executive leaders must play a dual role: as managers who ensure effective operations, and as innovators who encourage the birth of superior programs and a positive image of the institution. The inability to manage the dynamics of competition will have implications for decreasing public interest in the school, decreasing stakeholder support, and difficulties in maintaining the sustainability of strategic programs.

The demands of society for the quality of educational services have also escalated. Parents and communities now have much higher expectations of the role of schools in facilitating the academic, emotional, and social growth of students. Society is no longer satisfied with minimum standards, but rather demands education that is relevant to the demands of the times, based on values, and capable of producing competent and highly competitive graduates. School executive leaders must understand that this change in expectations is not just a technical change, but a paradigm shift that requires a new leadership approach. They are not enough to just manage schools administratively, but must also be transformational leaders who can design an education service system that is humanistic, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of students and the aspirations of the wider community. These public expectations are a pressure that

requires executive leaders to constantly reflect on themselves, strengthen strategic communication with various parties, and develop inclusive leadership patterns.

Other pressures that are no less strong come from the pace of technological development, socio-cultural changes, and global economic conditions. The emergence of new technologies changes the way we learn, how we access information, and how we interact in the school environment. School leaders who are not responsive to these changes will be left behind in managing a modern learning ecosystem. In addition, the ever-changing social and cultural dynamics—from changes in family structure, values of the younger generation, to global issues—give rise to unique challenges in managing students and developing school curricula. Meanwhile, economic pressures affect the availability of education funds, both from the government and the community, which ultimately impacts the implementation of school programs. In this context, adaptive and strategic executive leadership is needed. School leaders must be able to manage uncertainty, make decisions quickly, and keep the direction of the institution relevant to the changes that are taking place.

Changes in the characteristics of today's students are also a challenge in themselves. The generation that grew up in the digital era has a different way of thinking, learning, and needs compared to the previous generation. They tend to be more independent in seeking information, more demanding of space for expression, and more sensitive to developing social issues. Their expectations of schools are no longer limited to formal learning places, but also as a space for personal growth that provides freedom to explore one's potential. This requires school executive leaders to create a more flexible, personal, and meaningful learning environment. Rigidity in the approach to learning and school management will only create alienation between students and their institutions. School leaders must be able to design a system that provides space for creativity, collaboration, and holistic character and competency development.

The findings of this study resonate strongly with principles from transformational and adaptive leadership theories. The strategic actions of school executives—such as mobilizing stakeholder support, prioritizing innovative programs, and adjusting to environmental changes—reflect key dimensions of transformational leadership, where leaders act as change agents and inspire institutional growth. Concurrently, the adaptability shown by executives in responding to uncertainties aligns with the core tenets of adaptive leadership, emphasizing learning, stakeholder engagement, and iterative problem-solving. Linking these findings to established leadership models enhances our understanding of how strategic planning functions not only as a managerial process but also as a dynamic leadership practice crucial for sustaining competitiveness in the educational field.

The Role of the School Executive Center in Determining Strategic Direction and Priorities

In a complex and dynamic school governance structure, the role of school executives is not only administrative, but also very decisive in strategically directing the future of the institution. Leadership at the executive level holds a central position in the long-term planning process that touches the essence of the school's existence itself. A school leader must be able to design a policy direction that not only answers short-term needs but also reflects a progressive vision that is oriented towards sustainable institutional growth. Determining this direction requires a deep understanding of the school's internal potential, as well as the ability to project future challenges and opportunities. The strategic goals set must represent the excellence that the school wants to achieve, while being realistic so that they can be implemented consistently by all elements of the organization.

In the process of designing policy directions, school executives must start with a comprehensive mapping of the school's internal and external conditions. Analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses—such as the quality of educators, availability of infrastructure, managerial capacity, and organizational culture—is a crucial starting point to ensure that strategic planning is based on controllable realities (Constantinides, 2021). On the other hand, observation of external factors such as the dynamics of education regulations, social conditions of the surrounding community, trends in the needs of the world of work, and changes in technology are determining factors in ensuring that the policies formulated are adaptive and relevant. When strategic decision-making is not based on a comprehensive analysis of the school environment, the direction set is at risk of being off-target and making it difficult to achieve the desired goals.

Once the strategic direction has been determined, the next important task for executive leaders is to formulate work program priorities that have a direct impact on improving the quality of education and school competitiveness. In situations of limited resources that are commonly experienced by many educational institutions, determining the scale of priorities becomes an important instrument to ensure that the programs implemented truly contribute to achieving institutional goals. Prioritized programs must reflect the real needs of students and the school community, and be able to drive significant transformation in academic aspects, character development, and student readiness in facing global challenges. By setting the right priorities, school leaders can avoid wasting energy and budget on activities that have little impact, and instead, direct all potential to produce meaningful output.

In formulating and determining strategic directions and work priorities, the participation of all school stakeholders is an element that cannot be ignored. Wise school leaders will involve teachers, education personnel, students, parents, and even external partners in the deliberative decision-making process. This involvement not only strengthens the sense of ownership of the policies set, but also enriches the strategy formulation process with more diverse perspectives. By opening up a wide space for participation, school leaders can create a strong consensus on shared goals, so that policy implementation runs more smoothly because it has support from all levels of the school community. Participation is also a means to strengthen information transparency, reduce the potential for resistance to change, and increase accountability in the implementation of strategic programs.

To support the successful implementation of the formulated policy direction, school resource management must be carried out in a planned and efficient manner. Executive leaders need to have the capacity to manage budget, manpower, facilities, and time carefully so that all can be utilized to support the achievement of strategic goals. Failure in resource management will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the program being run, thus hampering the realization of institutional targets. A data-based managerial approach, a transparent reporting system, and a continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanism are needed so that every resource owned can provide maximum contribution. Moreover, school leaders must also be active in building collaboration with external parties to expand access to additional resources that can support the institution's long-term vision.

Strategy for Strengthening School Competitiveness in an Era of Rapid Change

In facing an era of rapid change, school competitiveness is an aspect that cannot be ignored by educational leaders. Schools are no longer sufficient to only carry out conventional functions as places of learning, but must become institutions that can demonstrate uniqueness, excellence, and high adaptability to external dynamics. One important strategy that must be prioritized is the creation of a strong school identity and image. This identity includes core values, school culture, program characteristics, and

management approaches that distinguish schools from other institutions. A consistent and positive image will strengthen the school's position in the minds of the public, influence the perceptions of prospective students and parents, and increase opportunities to attract public interest and trust. A systematically built identity also functions as a reference in formulating policy directions and decision-making that are following the unique characteristics of the school.

Strengthening school competitiveness also requires the use of information and communication technology as an integral element in the transformation of services and learning. During the digital progress that has hit almost all sectors of life, schools must not be left behind in adopting technology to accelerate the achievement of institutional goals. Digitalization of school administration, development of management information systems, online platform-based learning, and the use of technology in learning evaluation are concrete examples of innovative strategies that can be applied (Budiarto et al., 2024). Technology also opens up opportunities to reach a wider audience of learners, create flexibility in learning methods, and provide access to global learning resources. In this context, school leaders have a responsibility to ensure the readiness of all elements of the organization to adopt technology, while ensuring that digital transformation does not reduce human values and closeness in the learning process.

In an effort to attract students and parents, innovation in superior programs is a very important strategic tool. Schools need to design and implement various creative programs that are not only following academic needs, but also develop students' non-academic potential optimally. Programs such as character building, entrepreneurship education, thematic extracurricular activities, project-based literacy and numeracy programs, or interest and talent-based training can be a special attraction. This program innovation must continue to be updated to follow the times so that schools do not get caught up in boring routines and lose their relevance in the eyes of the community. Success in implementing superior programs will also strengthen the school's track record, foster community pride, and be a source of motivation for students to develop themselves as a whole.

The strategy for strengthening competitiveness must also involve efforts to build strong external relations with various parties outside the school. Connectedness with the surrounding community, the business world, higher education institutions, professional organizations, and government institutions can open up various opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and resource support. Strong external relations allow schools not to walk alone in facing challenges, but to grow together in a productive social network. Internships, industry mentoring, guest lectures, and CSR programs from external partners are tangible forms of synergy that can be utilized to enrich students' learning experiences and expand institutional support networks. Schools that can position themselves as active strategic partners in local social and economic development will gain greater trust from the community and other stakeholders.

To ensure that all of the above strategies can be implemented sustainably, schools need to have a strong internal system that is continuously improved. Improving the management system, curriculum governance, developing teacher professionalism, strengthening work culture, and improving service quality are the keys to ensuring that the quality of education is not only maintained but also continuously improved. Periodic evaluation of program achievements, utilization of data in decision-making, and the formation of a continuous improvement cycle are essential managerial approaches. With a strong internal system, schools will have a solid foundation to respond to any changes quickly, without losing direction or quality of service. All of this confirms that strengthening school competitiveness in an era of rapid change is not the result of chance, but the fruit of a strategy that is systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated in the spirit of comprehensive and consistent continuous improvement.

Challenges of Strategy Implementation and Leadership Consistency in School Management

In the process of school management, the implementation of strategies that have been formulated in a structured manner often faces various complex challenges. One of the main obstacles lies in the mismatch between ideal strategic planning and the reality of implementation in the field. Although the vision and objectives have been clearly defined, their implementation is often disrupted by practical factors such as a lack of technical understanding, time constraints, and internal school dynamics that are not always aligned. When the strategy only becomes a formal document without being translated concretely into a daily work program, there is a serious gap between what is designed and what is implemented. This condition makes the strategy lose its driving force as a guide, and the implementation of activities becomes reactive, not proactive.

In the process of implementing the strategy, changing organizational culture is often the most difficult challenge to overcome. Innovations introduced by school leaders can create resistance from within, especially if the change disrupts work comfort or challenges old habits that have taken root (Naveed et al., 2022). Teachers, staff, and middle management may not immediately accept change because of fear of failure, lack of adaptive capacity, or feelings of not being involved in the transformation process. This challenge is even greater if the leadership does not show consistent assertiveness in directing the organizational culture in a new direction. Without effective change management and persuasive communication, resistance can turn into structural barriers that hinder the entire process of school strategic development.

In addition to cultural barriers, the classic problem of limited human and financial resources is also a serious challenge in implementing long-term strategies. Schools are often required to innovate and develop, but on the other hand only have a limited workforce and minimal operational budget. This gap requires school leaders to be able to set sharp priorities, determine which programs are truly impactful, and overcome deficiencies with a collaborative approach or utilization of external resources. However, not all schools have the managerial capacity to optimize this potential, so many major strategies ultimately fail to be realized due to a lack of adequate operational support. In this situation, strong leadership is needed to maintain focus, mobilize the team, and avoid despair in the face of limitations.

Another challenge that cannot be avoided is the emergence of technological disruption and regulatory changes from external parties. The world of education is in the midst of a very rapid technological change, where digital systems, online learning platforms, and artificial intelligence are drastically changing the educational landscape. Schools that are not ready to face this disruption will find it difficult to maintain the relevance of their programs and learning methods. At the same time, regulatory changes coming from the government or educational authorities often change policy parameters suddenly, making the strategies that have been prepared less appropriate. The disconnect between applicable regulations and the school's long-term plan creates additional pressure for school leaders, who must adjust quickly and accurately without sacrificing organizational stability.

Amidst these challenges, the need for a consistent monitoring and evaluation system is crucial to ensure that the strategy is not just a symbol or jargon. Effective monitoring allows school leaders to detect early gaps between plans and implementation and to intervene in a timely manner. Systematic evaluation also plays a role in measuring the impact of each policy, program, and activity that has been implemented, so that the strategic direction can be dynamically adjusted according to current conditions. Schools risk repeating the same mistakes, wasting resources on unproductive programs, and losing the trust of all stakeholders without a continuous monitoring and evaluation process. Consistent, results-oriented, and

adaptive leadership to change is the main foundation for the strategy to be truly realized in the management of high-performing and sustainable schools.

This study relies on institutional strategic documents and prior empirical research to explore leadership practices in schools, these sources offer valuable insight into how school executives shape strategic direction and manage organizational change. The absence of direct engagement with school leaders limits the depth of contextual understanding. Firsthand perspectives could reveal how leaders interpret and apply strategic principles in specific environments, highlighting practical nuances often overlooked in secondary data. Future research should prioritize qualitative case studies or interviews to enrich the evidence base and capture the complexity of executive decision-making in real-world settings.

The literature also highlights several persistent obstacles to effective strategic planning, including weak stakeholder involvement, inadequate resources, organizational resistance, and a disconnect between long-term visions and daily operational demands. These challenges require more than technical planning—they demand leaders who think strategically, act adaptively, and engage collaboratively. Building such leadership capacity calls for continuous reflection, responsiveness to feedback, and an institutional culture that supports innovation and shared responsibility.

CONCLUSION

In an era defined by rapid change and intense competition, school executives play a pivotal role in directing strategic orientation, sustaining institutional vision, and navigating both internal and external challenges. Educational dynamics—driven by evolving policies, technological disruption, and growing public expectations—demand leadership that is not only adaptive but also capable of strategic foresight. Effective management of resources, transformation leadership, and the ability to foster lasting competitiveness have become essential attributes of school executives. The capacity of a school to endure and thrive amid complexity hinges on how well its leadership interprets the shifting landscape and translates it into concrete, measurable actions. Executive strategic planning must be viewed not merely as an administrative function, but as a foundational process for building authentic, sustainable competitive advantage; this requires visionary leadership, participatory decision-making, and unwavering consistency in strategy execution. Despite real constraints—such as limited resources, institutional inertia, and external disruptions—schools can still achieve high performance through transformative and responsive leadership that prioritizes quality and long-term sustainability. Strategic executive leadership is not just desirable; it is the cornerstone for delivering relevant, high-quality education that meets future societal needs.

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