

Strategic Management of Schools for Excellence: Integrating Quality Culture and Character Development in Leading Educational Institutions

Ismatul Izzah¹, Mulyadi², Muhammad Walid³, Moh. Padil⁴, Aji Wahyudin⁵

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia; ismaizza83@gmail.com

² Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia; mulyadi@psi.uin-malang.ac.id

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia; walidpgmi@pgmi.uin-malang.ac.id

⁴ Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia; padil@pai.uin-malang.ac.id

⁵ Institut Agama Islam Faqih Asy'ari, Kediri, Indonesia; ajiwahyudin39@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates strategic management practices in two high-achieving Indonesian schools, focusing on how they integrate quality culture and character development. With increasing emphasis on holistic education, this research explores how different management strategies can balance academic excellence with character formation. A qualitative descriptive approach using a case study design was employed to provide a deep understanding of these schools' management practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, involving principals, teachers, management staff, students, and parents to gain multiple perspectives on school policies, teaching methods, and learning experiences. The findings reveal that both schools implement strategic management effectively, though with distinct approaches. SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong prioritizes spiritual and moral development through structured programs grounded in religious values, shaping students' character. Conversely, SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo emphasizes educational technology to enhance learning quality, incorporating digital tools that also support character development. These results highlight the role of visionary and adaptive leadership in aligning strategic management with educational goals, demonstrating that both religious and technological approaches can effectively balance academic and character growth. This study contributes to educational management by offering a model for integrating quality culture and character development, adaptable to various school contexts. By combining spiritual, moral, and technological strategies, schools can enhance both academic success and character formation, providing a comprehensive educational approach.

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Corresponding Author:

Ismatul Izzah

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang; ismaizza83@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic management has become a key tool in guiding educational institutions to achieve excellence, especially in high-achieving schools that emphasize a balance between academic achievement and character development. With the right approach, strategic management allows schools to design strategies that are aligned with their vision, to effectively integrate academic achievement and character formation. The concept of strategic management has become the key to directing educational institutions to achieve excellence (Amaludin, 2020; Taufik, 2020; Wibowo & Subhan, 2020; Zien, Bakar, & Saad, 2024). However, there is a gap between ideal strategic management theory and the social reality faced by leading schools

One of the main challenges faced by schools is the gap between the implementation of quality culture and character development in strategic management. Although strategic management theory offers an approach to integrate these two aspects, in practice many schools have difficulty balancing the focus on academic improvement with student character development. This gap often manifests itself in limited resources, lack of adequate staff training, and misalignment between school policies and program implementation in the field. This challenge is significant because the effective integration of quality culture and character development is essential to forming students who are not only academically superior, but also have strong moral and social values (Ananto Wibowo, Wulandari Iman Utama, & Bagas Arwansyah, 2022; Haryati & Suciptaningsih, 2020; Imawan & Ismail, 2023; Intania & Sutarna, 2020). Strategic management theory often focuses on operational aspects and academic achievement alone but does not pay sufficient attention to the integration of character development as an integral part of quality culture.

The importance of this research lies in the need to understand how strategic management can be implemented effectively in high-achieving schools to integrate quality culture and character development. Quality culture here refers to a continuous commitment to improving quality in all aspects of education, from the learning process, and resource management, to achieving high academic standards. This study aims to identify management strategies that allow schools to combine this quality culture with character development programs, thus producing students who are not only excellent in academic achievement but also have strong morality and ethics. Excellent schools are often faced with the challenge of not only maintaining high academic achievement but also forming strong and integrity-based student characters. Therefore, effective strategic management must be able to bridge this gap and create an environment that supports both aspects in a balanced manner.

The importance of this integration can be found in various previous studies showing that schools that successfully develop a strong culture of quality often also show improvements in the quality of student character. For example, research by Nasir, and Walsh, (Nasir, 2022; Walsh & Lannon, 2023) shows that schools that implement management strategies that focus on developing student character tend to produce graduates who are not only academically superior but also have strong social and ethical skills. This shows that there is a close relationship between a culture of quality and character development, and both must be strategically integrated into school management.

Previous research has shown that the implementation of strategic management in leading schools often focuses only on improving academic achievement, while character development aspects receive less attention. A study by Qin Hu (Qin, Hu, Loyalka, Dill, & Rozelle, 2022) provides a concrete example of how some leading schools fail to adequately integrate character development into their curriculum. For example, findings from Qin Hu et al. show that schools that focus heavily on academic achievement often neglect aspects of character development, resulting in low levels of empathy, ethics, and social skills in students. For example, in one leading school in China, despite high academic achievement, a survey revealed that many students had difficulty interacting socially and showing concern for moral issues, due to the lack of programs that support the formation of these values.

In contrast, Ambaye's research (Ambaye, 2024) shows the real benefits of effectively integrating quality culture and character development. In a school in Ethiopia that strategically combined these two aspects, it was found that in addition to achieving superior academic performance, students also showed

improvements in ethical behavior and leadership skills. This provides strong evidence that a balance between the two components is important and can also be achieved with the right strategic management.

There is an urgent need to develop a strategic management approach that not only emphasizes quality culture but also effectively integrates character development as part of the overall strategy. This study shows that superior schools that are successful in the long term are those that can create a balance between academic achievement and character development of students. Thus, this study aims to explore management strategies that can be used to achieve this goal, as well as identify key factors that support the integration of quality culture and character development in superior educational institutions. Strategic management in the context of education can be defined as the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating policies that aim to achieve the long-term goals of the school, both in terms of academic achievement and character development of students. Although this concept has been widely applied, there is a significant gap between theory and practice, especially in integrating quality culture and character development simultaneously.

Top schools often focus on academic achievement as the primary indicator of success, while character development, such as empathy, ethics, and social skills, is often neglected. The concept of a culture of quality, which includes a commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of education, when combined with character development, can create a more holistic learning environment. Therefore, this background provides a strong foundation for further research on how strategic management can be effectively implemented in top schools, as well as providing practical insights for educational leaders who want to create a balance between academic excellence and character building.

2. METHODS

This research method uses a qualitative design with a case study approach (Alinsky, Silva, Adger, & McGinty, 2022; Grenier, 2023; Khoa, Hung, & Hejsalem-Brahmi, 2023; Rohman & Fauziah, 2023), which was chosen to gain an in-depth and contextual understanding of how strategic management is implemented in leading schools in integrating quality culture and student character development. This approach allows for a thorough exploration of specific phenomena in each school, including the challenges and success factors faced. The research locations are SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong and SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo, which were selected based on their academic reputation and focus on student character formation. Research participants include principals, vice principals, teachers, and school management staff who are directly involved in the planning and implementation of management strategies. Students and parents will also be interviewed as additional sources of information. The selection of participants is based on the criteria of relevance of their role in the strategic management process, and as many as 10-15 people from each category (e.g., principals, teachers, students) will be invited to participate.

The data collection process will be conducted sequentially. First, documents such as strategic plans, curricula, character development programs, and school performance reports will be analyzed to build a basic understanding of the management strategies implemented in each school. Next, in-depth interviews will be conducted with principals, management staff, and teachers to explore further the strategic management planning and implementation process. Participatory observation of the learning process and character development activities in schools will also be conducted. After that, focus group discussions (FGDs) with groups of teachers and students will be held to explore their collective perceptions of quality culture and character development in schools. (Jailani, 2023; John W. Creswell, 2019; Muhammad Rijal Fadli, 2021; Zaman, Nisak, & Zuhriyah, 2023).

Data from the documents will be analyzed using a thematic approach (Annisa & Mailani, 2023; Asipi, Rosalina, & Nopiyadi, 2022; A. M. Huda & Rokhman, n.d.; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024), by identifying key themes such as indicators of management success, values developed, and academic outcomes and student character. These themes will be linked to the management strategies implemented in schools to identify patterns and relationships between the implementation of strategic management and educational outcomes.

Thematic analysis will be conducted through several stages. The first step is a transcription and coding of interviews and observations based on relevant themes. After that, the main themes that emerge will be identified, and patterns or relationships between themes will be analyzed to understand the dynamics that occur. Triangulation of data from various sources (interviews, observations, and documents) will be conducted to increase the validity of the research results. (Azhari, Afif, Kustati, & Sepriyanti, 2023; Fadilla & Wulandari, 2023; Tharaba, Purwono, & Baladina, 2024; Vivek, 2023).

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Abuzaid & Elshami, 2024; Prayogi & Kurniawan, 2024; Romlah, 2021) is used to gain deeper insights and diverse perspectives from teachers and students. This FGD will be held in small groups of 6-8 participants, with a moderator guiding the discussion about their experiences and perceptions related to the implementation of quality culture and character development in schools. The results of the FGD will be analyzed thematically to understand collective perceptions that may not be revealed in individual interviews.

This study is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how strategic management in leading schools contributes to the integration of quality culture and character development and to identify key factors that support the success of the strategy. The results of the analysis will be presented in the form of a narrative that describes the implementation of strategic management and its impact on academic quality and student character.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Research result*

This study examines the implementation of strategic management in two leading educational institutions, namely SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong and SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo, with a focus on the integration of quality culture and student character development. Data collected in this study include interviews with principals, teachers, and management staff at the two leading schools, as well as document analysis related to strategic management and character development programs. In addition, data from direct observation and focus group discussions (FGD) with students and parents were also used to provide a more comprehensive picture of how strategic management is implemented to integrate quality culture and character development providing a comprehensive picture of the strategies used by these two schools to achieve academic and character excellence. The following are the results of the study.

3.1.1 SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong

The study found that the school successfully created an educational environment that supported and promoted the values of integrity, discipline, and responsibility. Spiritual and moral development programs, such as daily religious activities, leadership training, and social activities, played an important role in strengthening students' character. These programs were not just additional activities but were integrated into the daily life of the school, creating a culture that values ethics and morality.

For example, leadership training is conducted through routine activities such as the Student Leadership Basic Training (LDKS), which involves students in leadership and responsibility simulations. A student, Ahmad, stated, "Through LDKS, I learned to lead with integrity, and this helps me in managing the organization at school." A teacher also added, "This program shapes the character of our students so that they not only excel but also have strong morals."

The results of this study suggest that the implementation of strategic management focused on character development can support a culture of quality in schools. SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong is committed not only to achieving high academic performance but also to building solid character in its students. This approach results in graduates who are ready to face future academic and social challenges and is a powerful example of how focused strategic management can create an educational environment that balances academic achievement and character values.

3.1.2 SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo

SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo has a slightly different approach to other flagship schools, with a strong focus on the use of educational technology as the core of its management strategy. The school has thoroughly integrated technology into the curriculum, which not only enhances learning effectiveness but also equips students with digital skills that are highly relevant in today's world. This technology integration includes the use of educational software, online learning platforms, and interactive applications that enable students to learn both independently and collaboratively, deepen their understanding of the subject matter, and improve their problem-solving skills.

One of the key findings of this research is the ability of SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo to effectively combine technological innovation with character development. Although technology is the main focus, the school does not undermine the importance of students' character development. Instead, technology is used as a tool to enhance existing character development programs. For example, in a structured mentoring program, technology allows mentors to monitor students' progress in real-time. Through digital platforms such as Google Classroom, teachers can monitor academic progress while guiding the development of values such as responsibility, cooperation, and ethics.

One student, Wahyu, explained that 'using the online platform makes it easier for me to manage my assignments and to interact with my mentor about my character development. We also often discuss the challenges we face in our daily lives, and our mentors give us very useful advice. Meanwhile, a teacher, Mrs. Rina, said: *'The technology has helped us not only in teaching but also in guiding the students towards good character. We can track their progress more accurately and give faster feedback.*

These findings suggest that technology can be a very powerful tool in supporting management strategies that focus on quality and character development. Technology serves not only as a means to improve learning efficiency but also as a medium to enrich student's learning experience, integrating academic and moral aspects into a harmonious whole. SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo has shown that when technology is used wisely and integrated with a structured management strategy, the result is an educational environment that produces students who are both high achievers and of strong character, ready to face future challenges with solid skills and values.

This approach serves as an example for other schools wishing to use technology to strengthen both academic quality and student character development. By combining technological innovation with character development programs, SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo has successfully created a holistic and sustainable educational model that prepares students to become intellectually competent and highly moral individuals.

Overall, the study found that excellent schools can achieve a balance between academic achievement and character development through focused and innovative management strategies. SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong succeeds in creating an environment that supports the development of integrity, discipline, and responsibility through spiritual and moral development programs integrated into daily activities. On the other hand, SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo stands out with an approach that incorporates technological innovation in learning as well as the development of student's character. Both schools demonstrate that the proper implementation of strategic management can produce graduates who not only excel academically but also have a strong character, ready to face the challenges of the future.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Leadership in strategic management

This research explores the role of leadership in supporting strategic management that integrates character development in SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong and SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo. The two schools show different approaches but remain in line with the main objective of the research, which is to examine how leadership in each school supports character development strategies.

At SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty, leadership focuses on moral and spiritual values, which are reflected in the character development program based on daily religious activities and basic student leadership training (LDKS). The leadership model used in this school is in line with the concept of transformational leadership. Bass and Avolio (Bass, B. M & Avolio, 2013; Furqon, Prabowo, & Zawawi, 2024; Yufita, 2020) define transformational leadership as a process in which a leader can motivate and inspire members to achieve higher results, as well as foster a sense of morality and ethics. Previous research, as found by Basman and Widodo (Basman, Tentama, & Situmorang, 2022; Widodo, Zuhri, & Djani, 2020) in their study, revealed that transformational leadership is highly effective in instilling moral and spiritual values among high school students in Indonesia, reflecting the active role of principals in directing the institution's vision towards ethical and character goals.

SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo, on the other hand, demonstrates a more innovative and adaptive leadership approach to technology development. The leadership in this school embraces technology as an important tool to facilitate learning and character building, using digital platforms to monitor student progress in real-time. This approach is akin to a distributed leadership model, where responsibility and decision making is shared between different leaders or staff in the organization. Andrew and Hira (Andrews, 2023; Hira, Li, Chughtai, Mushtaq, & Zeng, 2023) emphasize that distributed leadership can enhance collaboration between leaders and staff and maximize the effectiveness of managing educational organizations.

Research by Rozalina and Suherni (Rozalina, Fitria, & Rohana, 2020; Suherni, Wahyudin, & Gunawan, 2023) showed that technology-oriented leadership in Indonesian secondary schools can improve efficiency not only in learning management but also in character development through more in-depth supervision and more effective communication between students and teachers. In addition, research by Dexter and Kaya-Kasikci (Dexter & Richardson, 2020; Kaya-Kasikci, Zayim-Kurtay, & Kondakci, 2023) confirmed that technology integration in a distributed leadership model can create a more adaptive and responsive learning environment that supports character development in the digital age.

These two models of leadership, both transformational and distributed, demonstrate that different approaches to school leadership can effectively support students' character development, depending on the prevailing cultural and technological context. These findings corroborate the existing literature on the crucial role of leadership in creating an educational environment that supports the formation of moral and ethical character, as well as adaptation to technological change in education.

3.2.2 Character Development Strategy

Character development is organized differently in both schools according to their respective strategic management focus. At SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty, character development focuses on the promotion of spiritual and moral values, which are integrated into various structured programs. Daily religious activities and leadership training, such as Latihan Dasar Kepemimpinan Siswa (LDKS), are designed to strengthen students' integrity and discipline. This approach is consistent with Lickona's research in Maimudin and Arif (Arif, Abdurakhmonovich, & Dorloh, 2023; Mainuddin, Tobroni, & Nurhakim, 2023) which found that spiritually based programs can strengthen students' morals and create an environment that supports the development of moral character. In addition, Abdi and Nugraha's research (Abdi, 2021; Nugraha & Hasanah, 2021) concluded that religious values-based character development programs in Indonesian schools can create students with strong and responsible ethics, supporting the findings at Hafshawaty Unggulan High School.

This moral values-based approach is also consistent with the findings of Brooks and Suhifatullah (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022; Suhifatullah, Sutarman, & Thoyib, 2021), who emphasized that spiritual activities conducted regularly in schools not only strengthen individual morality but also build a positive school culture. This research also shows that the integration of spiritual activities and learning can provide a solid foundation for students' character development in the long run.

On the other hand, SMA Tunas Luhur uses technology as the main tool in its mentoring program to support character development. The program integrates values such as cooperation, responsibility, and ethics into a more independent and collaborative learning process. This use of technology in character development challenges previous research that suggests technology only supports academic aspects. Research by Mahabuddin (Mahbuddin, 2020) suggests that when used in the context of mentoring, technology can be an effective tool for teaching character values. This is also supported by Novayanto's research (Novayanto & Pribadi, 2023), which found that digital platforms such as Google Classroom not only improve students' academic skills but also strengthen the values of responsibility and discipline through more intensive monitoring and communication between teachers and students.

Furthermore, research by Al-Abdullatif and Talan (Al-Abdullatif & Gameil, n.d.; Talan, 2021) showed that the integration of technology in collaborative learning not only supports academic achievement but also strengthens soft skills such as work ethic and teamwork. This finding supports SMA Tunas Luhur's findings that technology can be adapted for broader purposes, including character development, especially when combined with structured mentoring strategies.

Overall, the character development strategies of these two schools reflect different but complementary approaches. SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty relies on a deep spiritual and moral approach, while SMA Tunas Luhur uses technological innovation to integrate character values into students' learning lives. This research confirms that both traditional approaches and modern technology can be used effectively to support character development in schools, according to the context and needs of each educational institution.

3.2.3 Technology Integration

The role of technology in these two schools is very different. At SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty, technology is not a major focus of the management strategy. Instead, spiritual and social tradition-based character development programs are favored, suggesting a more conservative approach to character education. This approach is supported by literature such as that of Syarif (Syarif, 2020) who asserts that spiritually-based education methods tend to be more traditional, emphasizing core moral values. Research by Hafidz et al. (Hafidz, Cahyani, Azani, & Inayati, 2021) also found that spiritually-based approaches in Indonesian secondary schools can instill values of integrity and responsibility through activities that focus on students' moral development.

Another study by Maulana and Rivauzi (Maulana, 2020; Rivauzi, 2020) confirms that a spiritual approach to character education is more effective in instilling deep ethical principles and creating students with strong morals. This reflects what is happening at Hafshawaty Senior High School, where the focus on spiritual values overrides the role of technology in character development.

In contrast, at SMA Tunas Luhur, technology is fully integrated into every aspect of learning and character development. The integration of technology in this school includes the use of digital platforms such as Google Classroom, which allows students to learn independently and collaboratively while facilitating communication between mentors and students. The use of technology to promote character development is in line with Bai and Bunyamin's research (Bai & Brown, 2022; Bunyamin, Samsudi, & Rohman, 2022), which states that technology can improve learning efficiency and help instill soft skills such as ethics, responsibility, and cooperation.

Similar research by Huda and Sinaga (N. Huda, Pratiwi, Sugito, Imran, & Fakhri, 2023; Sinaga, 2023) shows that the use of technology in education, especially through digital platforms, not only improves academic outcomes but also assists in the development of students' character, especially in the development of soft skills. This finding is consistent with the findings at SMA Tunas Luhur, where technology is used not only as an academic tool but also as a medium for character development, especially through technology-enabled mentoring programs.

In addition, research by de Aldama (de Aldama, 2020) supports the idea that technology integration in education does not only focus on cognitive enhancement but also plays a role in building social and emotional skills. They found that digital platforms can be used to promote collaboration,

self-reflection, and ethical learning in a broader context, which is in line with the approach at SMA Tunas Luhur.

Through the use of technology, SMA Tunas Luhur not only supports students' academic achievement but also contributes to the development of a balanced character through a technology-based mentoring program. Research by Suharsiwi et.al. (Suharsiwi, Usmiyatun, & Siddique, 2023) also confirmed that technology plays an important role in supporting character-based learning, especially in promoting communication and collaboration between students and teachers.

Overall, the role of technology in these two schools is quite different. SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty relies more on traditional, spiritually based approaches to character development, while SMA Tunas Luhur integrates technology in every aspect to support learning and character development. This approach highlights the flexibility of each school's management strategies in achieving the students' character development goals, whether through traditional methods or modern technology.

The role of visionary and innovative leadership is crucial in integrating strategic management focused on character development in schools. At SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty, leadership based on moral and spiritual values has succeeded in creating a supportive environment for students' character development, in line with the transformational leadership model that emphasizes the importance of moral development. In contrast, at SMA Tunas Luhur, innovative and adaptive leadership in the use of technology shows that technology can be an effective tool in shaping students' character, in line with distributed leadership that encourages collaboration in educational development.

These two schools demonstrate that a good management strategy lies not only in academic achievement but also in the school's ability to instill strong character in students. The findings make an important contribution to the educational literature by showing that different approaches, both spiritual values-based and technology-based, can produce positive outcomes in students' character development. The findings also challenge the conventional view of the limitations of technology in character development and provide a model for other schools seeking to balance academic quality and character development in the modern era.

3.2.4 Implications and Contributions

The findings of this study have significant implications for flagship schools and educational institutions, in general, that wish to improve the quality of their education through a holistic strategic management approach. SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong and SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo demonstrate that integrating quality culture and character development is not just an additional component but the foundation of a successful educational strategy (Fios, Marzuki, Ibadurrahman, Renyaan, & Telaumbanua, 2024; T Kilag et al., 2024). Other schools can learn from the way these two institutions have designed and implemented programs that not only promote academic achievement but also strengthen moral character values.

School leaders who wish to emulate the success of these two schools should emphasize the balance between academic achievement and character development. At SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty, leadership that focuses on spiritual and moral values strongly supports students' character development. School leaders can replicate this model by integrating religious activities, leadership training, or spiritual programs into their curriculum. Research by Brooks and Herminingsih (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022; Herminingsih, Arijanto, & Yamin, 2020) supports the importance of this approach, highlighting that values-based leadership can significantly improve student discipline and integrity.

Meanwhile, SMA Tunas Luhur demonstrates how technology can be integrated into learning to reinforce the values of cooperation, ethics, and responsibility. School leaders who wish to follow this model should prioritize the use of educational technology to support mentoring and character development programs. They should also train teachers to maximize the use of digital platforms, such as Google Classroom, not only for academic learning but also for monitoring students' character development. Research by Hartati and Widiyanto (Hartati, Fernadi, & Utama, 2022; Widiyanto, 2021)

supports the use of technology in developing soft skills, which could be an important reference for other schools.

To support successes such as those achieved in these two schools, education policymakers need to consider policies that support the integration of technology with character development. The government or relevant parties can provide technological assistance to schools, especially in underserved areas, to integrate digital platforms into the learning process. In addition, policymakers must ensure that training for educators includes aspects of technology as well as character development methodologies so that teachers have the skills needed to manage both aspects effectively. (Durairaj et al., 2024).

Policies should also be directed at funding that supports character development programs in schools, both through technology-based activities and spiritual and social activities. For example, Isra Adawiyah Siregar (Isra Adawiyah Siregar, 2020) in her research emphasized the importance of strong financial and policy support in ensuring the implementation of effective character development programs in Indonesian schools. Thus, policymakers must realize that the success of schools in forming students with character requires ongoing policy support.

The success of these two schools in integrating quality culture and character development provides a model that can be replicated or adapted by other educational institutions, according to their respective needs and contexts. These findings add to the strong empirical evidence of the importance of balancing academic achievement and character development. This study supports the argument that effective strategic management must include efforts to instill moral and ethical values, in line with previous research findings. (Cai, Fan, & Wang, 2023; Syarnubi, Mansir, Purnomo, Harto, & Hawi, 2021).

The model produced from this study can be an important reference for other schools that want to develop a more holistic and sustainable education strategy. Research by Ananto and Fanny (Ananto Wibowo et al., 2022; Fanny Iffah Zunnurain, 2021) also supports the importance of this balance, by emphasizing that successful schools focus not only on academic improvement but also on the formation of strong character as social capital.

This study also encourages further reflection among educators and school leaders on the importance of visionary leadership in driving positive change in educational institutions (Durairaj et al., 2024; Erna Kusumawati, 2023). Future-oriented leadership, which can integrate academic and character aspects in its management strategy, is the key to creating schools that not only produce outstanding students but also individuals who are ready to contribute positively to society.

Thus, the implications of this study are relevant not only for leading schools but also for all educational institutions that seek to improve the quality of education while forming the next generation with character. Policies and programs that strengthen spiritual, social, and technological aspects can create a dynamic and balanced educational environment, preparing students for real-world challenges with high integrity and competence.

Effective strategic management, supported by visionary leadership, is key to achieving a balance between academic achievement and character development in leading schools. These findings reinforce the importance of a holistic approach to educational management, where quality culture and character development complement each other as two essential aspects for long-term success. This study provides practical contributions for other schools, as well as offers concrete recommendations for school leaders and policymakers to support the implementation of similar strategies in a broader context. More details will be presented in the table below.

Table 1. Summary of research results and discussion

Aspects	SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty Zainul Hasan BPPT Genggong	SMA Tunas Luhur Paiton Probolinggo	Discussion
Leadership	Leadership based on moral and spiritual values, plays an active role in formulating the vision and mission.	Innovative and adaptive leadership, utilizing technology in educational management.	Visionary leadership, both through traditional and technological approaches, is key to the successful implementation of management strategies at both schools.
Character Development	Focus on integrity, discipline, and responsibility through spiritual programs and leadership training.	Technology-based character development, with a focus on responsibility, cooperation, and ethics through digital-based mentoring.	Character development is seen as an integral part of quality management, with approaches tailored to the context of each school.
Quality Culture Integration	Integration of academic programs with character development through spiritual guidance and social activities.	Full integration of technology into the educational process to enhance 21st-century skills and student character.	Both schools integrate quality culture with character development but with different approaches: spiritual and traditional in Hafshawaty, and technological in Tunas Luhur.
Use of Technology	Technology is used minimally, focusing on traditional approaches to character building.	Technology is integrated into every aspect of learning, enhancing academic skills and character.	Technology at Tunas Luhur High School is used to support learning and character development, while Hafshawaty High School prioritizes a traditional, values-based approach.
Implications	The balance between academic achievement and character development through intensive coaching.	Improving students' digital skills and character, supported by the integration of educational technology.	Other schools can emulate this approach to effectively integrate academic quality and character development.
Contribution to the Literature	Providing a model for integrating quality culture and character development based on spiritual traditions.	Providing examples of technology integration with character development in leading schools.	This study enriches the educational management literature by showing two different approaches to achieving a balance between academic quality and character development.

4. CONCLUSION

This research provides valuable insights into strategic management practices at two high-performing schools, each integrating quality culture and character development through distinct but effective methods. SMA Unggulan Hafshawaty emphasizes intensive spiritual and moral development, embedding religious and leadership programs to instill values like integrity, discipline, and responsibility in students. In contrast, SMA Tunas Luhur uses educational technology as a vehicle for both learning and character formation, with digital mentoring supporting students' growth. The findings imply that successful strategic management is less about the specific approach—whether spiritual or technological—and more about how well the approach aligns with the school's unique context and needs. The study offers a practical model adaptable for other schools, showing that Hafshawaty's approach suits religiously oriented institutions, while Tunas Luhur's model benefits schools aiming to leverage technology for holistic development. Theoretically, this research contributes

to educational management literature by showing how context-specific, transformational, and distributed leadership models can foster academic and character growth effectively.

However, the study's limitations include its focus on two well-resourced schools, which may limit the broader applicability of its findings. Additionally, the qualitative design did not quantify the impact of management strategies, and external factors like policy and socio-economic influences were not fully explored. Future research could use a mixed-methods approach to quantitatively assess the impact of these strategies, with longitudinal studies to evaluate long-term effects. Exploring the influence of education policies and government support could also offer a more comprehensive understanding of strategy effectiveness across diverse educational contexts. School leaders can adapt this model by aligning management strategies with their context, incorporating spiritual or technological programs, optimizing educational technology for both academic and character growth, and fostering visionary and adaptive leadership to balance academic excellence with character development.

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