

Optimizing Decision Making through a Strategic Approach in Educational Institutions

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Abstrak

Pengambilan keputusan merupakan salah satu fungsi manajerial yang menentukan arah dan keberhasilan lembaga pendidikan dalam mencapai visi dan misinya. Namun, dalam praktiknya, masih banyak lembaga yang mengambil keputusan secara reaktif, tidak berbasis data, dan minim partisipasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana pendekatan strategis diterapkan dalam proses pengambilan keputusan di lingkungan pendidikan serta dampaknya terhadap kinerja institusi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi pada salah satu lembaga pendidikan yang menerapkan prinsip manajemen strategis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengambilan keputusan yang berbasis visi-misi, didukung oleh data akademik dan non-akademik, serta melibatkan berbagai pemangku kepentingan, berkontribusi signifikan terhadap peningkatan mutu layanan, efektivitas program, dan kepuasan warga sekolah. Namun demikian, implementasi pendekatan ini masih menghadapi hambatan, seperti keterbatasan data, tekanan waktu, dan intervensi eksternal. Kepemimpinan transformatif menjadi faktor kunci dalam mendorong pola pengambilan keputusan yang lebih terarah, kolaboratif, dan berkelanjutan. Temuan ini memperkuat pentingnya optimalisasi pengambilan keputusan strategis dalam memperkuat efektivitas manajerial dan daya saing lembaga pendidikan di tengah tantangan era VUCA.

Kata Kunci: *pengambilan keputusan; pendekatan strategis; lembaga pendidikan*

Abstract

Decision making is one of the managerial functions that determines the direction and success of educational institutions in achieving their vision and mission. However, in practice, there are still many institutions that make decisions reactively, not based on data, and with minimal participation. This research aims to examine how strategic approaches are applied in the decision-making process in the educational environment and its impact on institutional performance. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies at one of the educational institutions that applied strategic management principles. The results show that vision-mission-based decision-making, supported by academic and non-academic data, and involving various stakeholders, contributes significantly to improving service quality, program effectiveness, and school community satisfaction. However, the implementation of this approach still faces obstacles, such as data limitations, time pressures, and external interventions. Transformative leadership is a key factor in driving more directed, collaborative, and sustainable decision-making patterns. These findings reinforce the importance of optimizing strategic decision-making in strengthening the managerial effectiveness and competitiveness of educational institutions amid the challenges of the VUCA era.

Keywords: *Decision; strategic approach; Institution*

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Pendahuluan

Educational institutions, as institutions responsible for producing superior human resources, are currently facing increasingly complex challenges in the decision-making process (Goel et al., 2022). These challenges arise in line with the dynamics of rapid environmental changes, both in terms of government policies, technological developments, increasingly diverse needs of students, and public demands for the quality of educational services. In facing this condition, the decision-making process is a crucial element that determines the direction and success of the implementation of education (Kaggwa et al., 2024). However, in reality, many educational institutions still make decisions reactively, not based on data and empirical evidence, and do not optimally involve various stakeholders (Effendi, 2022; Hallpike et al., 2024). Intuitive or unilateral decision-making practices often ignore the principles of good governance, such as transparency, accountability and participation (Sari, 2023). This leads to weak program planning, unsynchronized internal policies with field needs, and low effectiveness of policy implementation. Decisions that are not based on a strategic approach tend to be short-term and do not consider the long-term impact on the quality of education (Tilak & Kumar, 2022). As a result, educational institutions have difficulty in maintaining organizational stability, improving service quality, and responding adaptively to change (Mukaram et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to examine and develop more systematic, participatory and strategy-based decision-making approaches in the context of managing modern educational institutions.

The main problem often encountered in decision-making in educational institutions is the lack of application of a comprehensive and long-term oriented strategic approach (Makki et al., 2023). Many key decisions are still made on an ad hoc basis, without in-depth analysis of data and trends, and without considering the systemic implications for the sustainability of the institution (Omazic & Zunk, 2021). In addition, the centralistic and authoritarian leadership style is still quite dominant, where decision-making is centered on individual leaders without involving educators, administrative staff, parents, or even students as part of the educational ecosystem (Cheng & Zhu, 2023; Maqbool et al., 2024; Or & Berkovich, 2023). This weakens the collaborative and innovative process that should be the cornerstone of modern education management. As a result, there are irregularities in strategic planning, such as in human resource management, curriculum development, as well as financial planning and infrastructure facilities, which ultimately hinder the improvement of the quality and competitiveness of the educational institution itself.

In the midst of a world reality characterized by VUCA conditions (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity), educational institutions are faced with the challenge of continuing to adapt and respond to changes quickly and appropriately (Villarama et al., 2024). The educational environment is no longer stable and linear, but dynamic and full of uncertainties, thus demanding the ability of institutions to be strategic in every decision making (Gilead & Dishon, 2022). In this context, the ability to optimize the decision-making process is crucial so that the resulting policies are not only reactive, but also proactive and future-oriented (Robinson et al., 2021). Strategic, data-driven decision-making involving various stakeholders will improve the effectiveness of institutional policies and strengthen the achievement of overall educational goals (Chigbu & Makapela, 2025; Wande Kasope Elugbaju et al., 2024). Therefore, this research is important to examine how a strategic approach can be integrated into the decision-making process in educational institutions, in order to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of institutions in facing various global and local challenges.

This research is based on several theoretical frameworks that complement each other in explaining the importance of strategic decision-making in educational institutions. First, decision-making theory emphasizes the systematic process of choosing the best alternative course of action based on analysis of information, context, and goals (Sahoo & Goswami, 2023). This theory provides an understanding of how decisions should be made in a rational and structured manner to minimize risks and improve outcomes. Second, strategic management provides a framework for educational institutions to formulate, implement, and evaluate long-term decisions that are directly related to achieving the institution's vision and mission (Candra Susanto et al., 2023; Ferrer-Estévez & Chalmeta, 2021). Third, transformative leadership is important because it emphasizes positive change through inspiration, motivation, and collective participation, which encourages an inclusive and visionary decision-making culture (Sharma & Adeoye, 2024). In this context, a data-driven, collaborative and future-oriented approach is key in building a decision-making process that is not only responsive to challenges, but also able to take educational institutions in a more strategic and sustainable direction.

Although the issue of decision-making and strategic management in educational institutions has been widely discussed in the literature, there are still limited studies that specifically examine the application of strategic approaches in the context of decision-making practices in educational institutions in Indonesia. Most previous studies tend to focus on theoretical aspects or discuss decision-making in general, without linking it in depth with contextual and applicable institutional strategies. In fact, the social, cultural and bureaucratic characteristics of education in Indonesia have their own complexities that influence the way decisions are made and implemented (Badruzaman & Adiyono, 2023; Hidayat, 2023). As such, there is an urgent need to fill this void through research that examines in a more focused manner how a strategic approach that includes data utilization, stakeholder engagement, and long-term vision can be optimized in the decision-making process of educational institutions in Indonesia. This research is expected to provide empirical and practical contributions relevant to the development of more effective and sustainable education governance.

Based on the background description that has been presented, this research implicitly aims to explain the urgency of applying a strategic approach in the decision-making process in educational institutions. This research wants to highlight that decision-making that is carried out in a planned, data-based, participatory and visionary manner is the key to improving managerial effectiveness and the overall quality of education services. In addition, this research is also directed to describe the practices of optimizing decision-making that have been implemented in educational institutions, both in terms of strategies, leadership patterns, and stakeholder involvement mechanisms. Thus, the results of this research are expected to provide applicable and replicable insights, as part of efforts to build a more adaptive, responsive and sustainable decision-making system in the national education ecosystem.

Methodologi

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study type to gain an in-depth understanding of the application of the strategic approach in the decision-making process in educational institutions. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for studying complex and contextual phenomena, especially in understanding the dynamics of decision-making involving various actors and strategic considerations within educational institutions. The research subjects included principals, vice principals, senior teachers and other parties directly involved in the decision-making process. Data collection techniques were conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation of decision-making forums (such as school management meetings), and analysis of institutional documents such as strategic plans, meeting minutes and operational guidelines. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, through a process of data reduction, categorization, pattern discovery, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and techniques, confirmation of results to informants (member checking), and systematic recording of audit trails were used. With this design, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive picture of the practice of optimizing strategy-based decision-making in educational institutions.

Results and Discussion

Strategy-based Decision Making Patterns

The results revealed that the decision-making process in the educational institutions studied has shown a strong tendency towards a strategic approach. Institutional leaders actively refer to the institution's vision and mission as the basic framework in formulating policies, both at the managerial and operational levels. Every decision is not made spontaneously, but through long-term considerations that take into account the direction of school development, the carrying capacity of resources, and the needs of students and the surrounding community. One striking indicator is the use of data as a basis in the decision-making process. Academic data such as learning assessment results, achievement of quality indicators, and graduation data are analyzed regularly and become the basis for determining learning strategies, teacher development, and budget allocation. On the other hand, non-academic data such as discipline levels, student and parent satisfaction, and community participation levels are also used to design more responsive support programs.

This finding shows the internalization of strategic management values in the governance of educational institutions, where decisions are no longer reactive or administrative in nature, but have been directed to achieve institutional excellence in a sustainable manner. This is in line with strategic management theory, which emphasizes the importance of goal alignment, namely the alignment between

decisions, policies and the strategic direction of the institution. This approach also reflects the organization's awareness of the importance of sustainability and accountability in carrying out educational functions. Thus, strategy-based decision-making patterns not only increase the effectiveness of institutional management, but also strengthen the competitiveness and legitimacy of educational institutions in the midst of dynamic changes in the evolving external environment.

Stakeholder Engagement in the Decision Process

This study found that the strategic decision-making process in educational institutions is not done unilaterally by the leadership, but through a participatory approach that actively involves various stakeholders. Important decisions, such as determining the annual program, curriculum development, and strategies for improving service quality, are generally discussed through a joint deliberation forum involving the school management team, teachers, and in some cases also involving representatives of parents. This practice shows the organization's awareness of the importance of collaboration in determining policy direction, especially in the complex and multidimensional context of education.

Teacher participation in the decision-making process is one of the key elements that school leaders pay attention to. Teachers are not only considered as policy implementers but also as strategic partners who have direct experience in the learning process and an understanding of students' needs. Their involvement in curriculum development and professional development programs has been proven to increase the relevance of the policies and strengthen commitment to their implementation. This finding is consistent with the principles of participatory and collaborative leadership, which places all elements of the organization as part of the change and innovation process. Such intensive involvement also contributes to the creation of a sense of ownership among stakeholders, which in turn strengthens an organizational culture that is inclusive, open to input, and responsive to challenges.

Barriers to Implementing the Strategic Approach

Although the educational institutions studied have shown a strong tendency to apply a strategic approach to decision-making, this study also found a number of barriers that hinder the consistent application of this approach. In practice, not all decisions can be strategically designed and implemented. Some decisions are urgent and must be made in a short period of time, neglecting the planning process and adequate data analysis. In addition, the limited availability of accurate and up-to-date data is also a significant obstacle, especially in terms of collecting and utilizing non-academic data. Other obstacles come from outside the institution, such as policy interventions from the education office or foundation that are sometimes not aligned with the context of the institution's needs, thus limiting the space for leaders to formulate autonomous and strategy-based decisions.

The findings show that in the context of Indonesian education, which is still influenced by bureaucratic dynamics, fluctuating regulations and VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) conditions, efforts to implement a comprehensive strategic approach still face structural and cultural challenges. Some decisions remain top-down and reactive, especially when faced with administrative pressures or emergency needs. Therefore, there is a need for a support system that can strengthen the capacity of institutions to apply the strategic approach consistently. Such systems include the provision of efficient data analysis tools, managerial training for leaders and staff, and the creation of spaces for dialogue and reflection that enable collective and informed decision-making. With such support, educational institutions will be better equipped to carry out decision-making processes that are structured, adaptive and oriented towards institutional sustainability.

Leadership's role in driving strategic decisions

This research confirms that school principals or institutional leaders play a central role in shaping and directing strategic decision-making patterns in educational institutions. In the cases studied, institutional leaders act as prime movers who not only initiate policy directions, but also create an organizational culture that supports participatory and planned decision-making processes. This role is reflected in the principal's ability to convey a clear vision, inspire the work team and encourage collaboration between parties in the decision-making process. In addition to being a strategic direction setter, the leader also acts as a facilitator who opens discussion spaces, gives trust to staff, and encourages the participation of teachers and other stakeholders in determining institutional policies.

This finding is in line with transformative leadership theory, which places leaders as agents of change through the power of vision, inspiration and empowerment. Principals who apply this leadership style are able to create a working atmosphere conducive to strategic, adaptive and inclusive decision-making. This kind of leadership also enables the internalization of strategic values in daily managerial

practices, as leaders not only provide direction but also foster collective awareness of the importance of sustainability, efficiency and future orientation in every policy taken. Thus, the quality of leadership is a key factor in determining the extent to which institutional strategies can be integrated into decision-making processes consistently and effectively within educational institutions.

Impact of Decision Optimization on Institution Performance

The results show that the implementation of strategic decision-making has a real positive impact on improving the performance of educational institutions. In the study schools, decisions made using a data-driven, participatory approach and aligned with a long-term vision proved to be able to improve the overall quality of education services. This is reflected in the increased effectiveness of school programs, such as curriculum development, teacher training, and guidance and counseling services that are more responsive to learners' needs. In addition, this approach has also resulted in increased satisfaction of the school community, including students, teachers and parents, with the direction of policies and the quality of services provided by the institution.

This finding is in line with the theory of organizational effectiveness, which states that the success of the institution depends on the managerial ability to manage resources, make the right decisions, and respond to environmental changes in an adaptive and planned manner. Optimizing the decision-making process contributes significantly to the achievement of institutional targets, both in terms of improving academic achievement, operational efficiency, and the institution's reputation in the eyes of the public. With strategic decision-making, educational institutions are able to move in a more measured, directed and sustainable manner, so that they can face external challenges with higher readiness and resilience.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the application of a strategic approach in the decision-making process in educational institutions contributes significantly to improving managerial effectiveness and the quality of educational services. Decision-making that refers to the institution's vision and mission, is data-based, and actively involves stakeholders reflects directed and long-term oriented management practices. Although there are still obstacles in its implementation, such as time pressure, limited data and external interventions, the role of transformative leadership has proven to be a key driver in shaping a strategic, inclusive and adaptive organizational culture. Optimizing decision-making not only improves the quality of policies and programs implemented, but also has a direct impact on the satisfaction of school members and the achievement of institutional targets in a more measurable manner. Therefore, the strategic approach to decision-making needs to be strengthened through increased leadership capacity, data-based support systems and participatory spaces that encourage collaboration among stakeholders in the education environment.

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