

# Initiating Islamic Education Innovation to Enhance Institutional Competitiveness: A Multisite Study at MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kediri

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the initiation stage of Islamic education innovation in enhancing institutional competitiveness through a multisite study at MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kediri, Indonesia. The initiation phase is a strategic starting point that includes problem identification, awareness building, attitude formation, and decision-making toward innovation implementation. This research employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña with triangulation to ensure trustworthiness. The findings indicate that the initiation of innovation in both madrasahs is driven by benchmarking activities, internal discussions, and the awareness of improving educational quality in response to contemporary challenges. The innovation is initiated through the development of talent- and interest-based curricula aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, supported by psychometric assessments to map students' potential. In addition, teacher capacity is strengthened through continuous training and the adoption of differentiated learning approaches. MAN 2 Tulungagung initiates innovation through the establishment of specialized classes and digital administrative systems, while MAN 2 Kediri emphasizes a holistic approach integrating intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular programs under the "red carpet" philosophy. These initiatives contribute to improving student achievement, institutional branding, and overall competitiveness. In conclusion, the initiation stage plays a crucial role in shaping sustainable innovation by integrating intellectual, spiritual, and character development, thereby strengthening the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions.

**Keywords:** Islamic Education Innovation, Initiation Stage, Institutional Competitiveness, Madrasah

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, educational institutions are required to continuously innovate in order to remain competitive and relevant to the demands of the 21st century. The discourse on sustainable education, particularly within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizes the importance of quality education that is adaptive, inclusive, and future-oriented [1], [2]. In this context, innovation in education is not merely an option but a necessity to enhance institutional competitiveness and ensure long-term sustainability [3]. Islamic educational institutions, including madrasahs, face unique challenges in balancing religious values with modern educational demands, making innovation a critical strategic approach [4].

Recent studies have highlighted that educational innovation significantly contributes to institutional competitiveness through curriculum transformation, teacher development, and student-centered learning approaches [5]–[7]. In Islamic education, innovation is often linked to the integration of intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions, aiming to produce holistic graduates who are not only academically competent but also possess strong character and ethical values [8], [9]. However, most existing research tends to focus on the implementation stage of innovation, while limited attention has been given to the initiation phase, which serves as the foundation for successful innovation processes [10].

The initiation stage of innovation plays a crucial role in determining whether an innovation will be adopted or rejected within an organization. This stage involves the processes of awareness building, knowledge acquisition, attitude formation, and decision-making toward innovation adoption [11], [12]. Without a strong initiation phase, subsequent stages of implementation and institutionalization are unlikely to succeed. Therefore, understanding how innovation is initiated within educational institutions becomes essential, particularly in the context of Islamic education, where values, culture, and leadership significantly influence decision-making processes [13].

In the Indonesian context, madrasahs have begun to transform through various innovative practices, especially following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides flexibility for institutions to develop context-based and student-centered learning models [14]. Some madrasahs have adopted talent- and interest-based approaches, differentiated learning strategies, and integrated programs that combine intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities to enhance student competencies [15], [16]. Despite these developments, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies that explore how such innovations are initiated, particularly through a multisite perspective that allows for comparative and in-depth analysis [17].

This study addresses this gap by examining the initiation of Islamic education innovation in two leading madrasahs, namely MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kediri. These institutions have demonstrated significant progress in developing innovative educational practices aimed at enhancing institutional competitiveness. By employing a qualitative multisite design, this research seeks to explore how innovation is initiated, the factors influencing the process, and how the initiation stage contributes to strengthening institutional competitiveness.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the initiation stage of innovation within Islamic educational institutions, integrating perspectives of innovation management, Islamic education, and institutional competitiveness. This research offers a multidisciplinary contribution to the discourse on sustainable education by providing insights into how early-stage innovation processes can shape the development of competitive and adaptive Islamic educational institutions in the global era.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design to explore the initiation of Islamic education innovation in enhancing institutional competitiveness. The phenomenological approach is used to understand the lived experiences and meanings constructed by educational actors in initiating innovation within their institutional context [18], [19].

The research design adopts a multisite study involving two Islamic senior high schools (madrasahs), namely MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kediri, Indonesia. This design enables cross-site comparison and provides a comprehensive understanding of similarities and differences in the innovation initiation process [20]. The focus of this study is the initiation stage of innovation, which includes awareness building, attitude formation, and decision-making processes within educational institutions [21].

The data used in this study are primary data obtained directly from the field. Data sources include school principals, vice principals, teachers, and educational staff who are directly involved in the innovation process. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives and their active role in institutional innovation [22].

Data collection techniques consist of in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and strategies in initiating innovation. Participatory observation was carried out to understand the real context of institutional practices and culture. Documentation analysis was used to examine curriculum documents, institutional reports, and records of student achievements to support data triangulation [23], [24].

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification [25]. The analysis process was carried out continuously throughout the research to ensure a comprehensive and in-depth interpretation of the data. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applies four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [26]. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources and methods. Transferability was ensured by providing detailed descriptions of the research context. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic documentation and audit trails of the research process.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Initiation of Islamic Education Innovation at MAN 2 Tulungagung**

The initiation of Islamic education innovation at MAN 2 Tulungagung begins with awareness building through benchmarking activities and internal reflection on institutional quality. The school leadership actively conducted comparative studies to leading madrasahs, which stimulated new ideas and strengthened the urgency of innovation. This finding aligns with previous studies that emphasize benchmarking as a strategic trigger for organizational innovation and quality improvement [27], [28].

At the knowledge and awareness stage, innovation ideas emerged through internal discussions, training, and evaluation of institutional performance. One of the key innovations initiated is the development of talent- and interest-based classes supported by psychometric assessments. This approach enables the institution to map students' potential and design differentiated learning strategies accordingly. Such practices are consistent with contemporary educational innovation emphasizing personalized learning and student-centered approaches [29], [30].

In the attitude formation stage, teachers and staff gradually developed positive perceptions toward innovation through continuous engagement in training and collaborative forums. Initially, some resistance was observed; however, structured discussions and leadership support contributed to building a shared commitment to change. This process reflects the importance of organizational culture and leadership in fostering innovation acceptance [31].

The decision-making stage resulted in the formal adoption of innovative programs, including specialized classes (research, multimedia, arts, and sports) and the implementation of a digital administrative system (SATELIT). These innovations significantly improved institutional efficiency, student achievements, and public trust. The findings indicate that a well-structured initiation stage contributes directly to strengthening institutional competitiveness, particularly through differentiation strategies and performance enhancement [32].

### 3.2 Initiation of Islamic Education Innovation at MAN 2 Kediri

At MAN 2 Kediri, the initiation of innovation is driven by a strong institutional vision emphasizing holistic student development. The concept of "red carpet" philosophy reflects the institution's commitment to facilitating diverse student potentials through integrated programs. This aligns with the concept of inclusive and holistic education, which is increasingly recognized as a key factor in sustainable educational development [33].

The initiation process begins with identifying the need for curriculum transformation in response to global educational demands. The institution integrates innovation across intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities, ensuring that learning experiences are comprehensive and relevant. This approach is supported by prior studies highlighting the importance of integrated learning models in enhancing student competencies and institutional competitiveness [34], [35].

In terms of attitude formation, teachers are actively involved in training programs and collaborative discussions to strengthen their understanding of differentiated learning and innovation practices. The establishment of a teacher innovation team further supports this process by facilitating continuous professional development and knowledge sharing. This finding supports the argument that teacher capacity building is a critical factor in successful educational innovation [36].

At the decision-making stage, the institution formally adopts innovation strategies through structured programs such as talent-based extracurricular clubs, leadership development activities, and character-building initiatives. These programs not only enhance students' academic and non-academic achievements but also strengthen the institutional image as a competitive and adaptive madrasah. The results confirm that innovation initiation contributes to both internal quality improvement and external institutional branding [37].

### 3.3 Cross-Site Analysis: Patterns of Innovation Initiation and Institutional Competitiveness

The cross-site analysis reveals several common patterns in the initiation of Islamic education innovation at both institutions. First, innovation is initiated through awareness of the need for quality improvement, driven by both internal reflection and external benchmarking. Second, the development of talent- and interest-based education becomes a central strategy in enhancing institutional differentiation and competitiveness.

Third, the role of leadership is crucial in shaping positive attitudes toward innovation and facilitating decision-making processes. Both institutions demonstrate participatory leadership, where teachers and staff are actively involved in discussions and implementation planning. This finding is consistent with innovation management theories that highlight leadership and collaboration as key drivers of successful innovation [38].

Fourth, the integration of innovation across curriculum, student management, and teacher development creates a systemic impact on institutional performance. The alignment between these components ensures that

innovation is not fragmented but embedded within the organizational culture. This supports the concept of sustainable innovation, where continuous improvement becomes part of institutional practice [39].

Overall, the findings indicate that the initiation stage plays a strategic role in building institutional competitiveness. Through structured processes of awareness, attitude formation, and decision-making, both madrasahs are able to develop innovative practices that enhance student outcomes, institutional reputation, and adaptability to global educational challenges.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the initiation stage of Islamic education innovation plays a critical and strategic role in enhancing institutional competitiveness. The findings demonstrate that innovation begins with awareness of the need for quality improvement, followed by the development of positive attitudes toward change and collective decision-making processes within the institution. Without a strong initiation phase, innovation is unlikely to be effectively implemented or sustained.

Both MAN 2 Tulungagung and MAN 2 Kediri show that innovation initiation is driven by benchmarking activities, internal discussions, and the alignment of institutional vision with contemporary educational demands. The development of talent- and interest-based education, supported by differentiated learning approaches and teacher capacity building, becomes a key strategy in strengthening institutional differentiation and competitiveness.

Furthermore, leadership and collaborative culture emerge as essential factors in fostering innovation. The involvement of teachers and stakeholders in the initiation process ensures that innovation is not only accepted but also sustainably implemented. The integration of curriculum innovation, student development, and teacher professional growth creates a systemic impact that enhances both academic outcomes and institutional reputation.

In conclusion, the initiation of innovation in Islamic educational institutions contributes not only to improving internal quality but also to building competitive advantage in the global education landscape. Future research is recommended to explore the implementation and sustainability stages of innovation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of innovation management in Islamic education.

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