



Organizational Values and Culture as Drivers of Sustainable Competitive Advantage in Private Senior High Schools

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Abstract

Background: Private senior high schools in Indonesia face intensifying competition driven by digital transformation, educational globalization, and rising stakeholder expectations. In this context, sustainable competitive advantage can no longer be built solely on physical resources but must be grounded in intangible strategic assets that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable.

Objective: This study analyzes the role of organizational values and culture in building sustainable competitive advantage in private senior high schools.

Methods: The research employs a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design involving two leading private high schools in Jakarta. Data were collected through in-depth interviews (six informants from each school), field observation, and document analysis, and validated using triangulation techniques.

Results: The findings reveal that both private high schools develop strong organizational values as the foundation of their strategic management practices, which are subsequently implemented through structured student development programs. Despite differences in cultural orientation—one emphasizing discipline and academic excellence and the other focusing on holistic education and character development—both schools successfully translate their values into distinctive programs that enhance student outcomes and institutional reputation. Furthermore, continuous evaluation mechanisms and experiential learning activities play a significant role in sustaining program effectiveness.

Conclusion: This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence that organizational culture and value-based strategies function as critical intangible resources that drive sustainable competitive advantage in educational institutions. The findings also offer practical implications for school leaders in designing culturally grounded strategies to enhance school competitiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly dynamic competitive era, the education sector, including private senior high schools, is required not only to survive but also to proactively build sustainable competitive advantage. The rapidly changing external environment, including digital technology developments, educational globalization, increasing public demands for the quality of educational services, as well as higher expectations from parents and students, has made schools school organizations that must be adaptive, innovative, and responsive to change (Hitt et al., 2009). In this context, schools can no longer rely solely on competitive advantages based on physical resources but need to develop strategic resources that are intangible and difficult for competitors to imitate (Fuentes Salazar et al., 2025; Souza, 2024).

According to UNESCO, the number of private schools globally has increased by 17% over the past decade, intensifying competition for student enrollment and institutional reputation. In Indonesia specifically, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology recorded 14,617 private senior high schools nationally in 2023, representing 72.8% of all senior high schools, yet with highly unequal distribution in student enrollment, where the top quartile of private schools captures disproportionately larger enrollment shares. The OECD's Education at a Glance 2022 report notes that in countries with expanding private school sectors, parental choice is increasingly driven by institutional reputation, values alignment, and program distinctiveness, factors beyond academic performance alone.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of strategic management, originally developed by Jay B. Barney (1991) and subsequently extended by Barney and Mackey (2016), provides the primary theoretical lens for this study. RBV posits that sustainable competitive advantage derives from an organization's possession and effective deployment of resources that are: Valuable, contributing to organizational efficiency and effectiveness; Rare possessed by few or no current competitors; Inimitable difficult for competitors to duplicate or replicate; and Non-substitutable without equivalent strategic alternatives.

Applied to the educational context, RBV shifts the analysis from external market positioning to internal resource management. In private schools, intangible resources specifically organizational values, culture, leadership philosophy, and institutional identity satisfy all four VRIN characteristics: they are valuable (influencing educational quality and reputation), rare (each school's culture is contextually unique), inimitable (embedded in years of institutional history and human relationships), and non-substitutable (culture cannot be replaced by technology, facilities, or financial investment alone). Introducing RBV explicitly at this juncture establishes the theoretical foundation for the entire study, ensuring readers understand why organizational values and culture are the analytical focus.

In line with these developments, the concept of sustainable competitive advantage from a strategic management perspective emphasizes the importance of possessing and managing resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. The Resource-Based View perspective developed by Barney (2016) asserts that an organization's competitive advantage is largely determined by its internal ability to manage these strategic resources effectively and consistently. In the context of education, these resources are not always physical but often lie in non-material aspects such as values, organizational culture, leadership, and distinctive learning practices that are internalized within school life (J. B. Barney & Mackey, 2016).

In the Indonesian private school context, organizational values and culture frequently constitute the primary differentiating factor from both public schools and competing private institutions. This differentiation stems from the flexibility of private schools to develop value systems aligned with their institutional vision. Research consistently shows that a school's competitive positioning and public trust are strongly influenced by the alignment between core organizational values and their concrete operational implementation. However, despite growing recognition of this dynamic, empirical qualitative research exploring how this alignment functions in practice at the Indonesian senior high school level remains limited, constituting the research gap this study addresses.

Furthermore, organizational culture in educational institutions plays a strategic role in creating meaningful and sustainable differentiation. Schools with a strong organizational culture

tend to demonstrate consistency in service quality, have a clear identity, and are able to build a positive reputation in the eyes of the public. Research shows that organizational culture oriented toward learning, collaboration, and innovation contributes significantly to improving the performance of educational organizations and the sustainability of competitive advantage (Fullan, 2007; Zhang et al., 2025). In practice, the values embraced by a school do not only remain at a normative or symbolic level but are realized concretely in school leadership, student development systems, teacher professional development, and various flagship programs that become the institution's hallmark.

In the context of private schools in Indonesia, organizational values and culture often serve as the primary distinguishing factor from other schools, including public schools. Flexibility in organizational management allows private schools to develop more specific and directed value systems according to the institution's vision. Leading private schools generally show consistency between communicated values and implemented practices, thus building public trust and a strong reputation. This aligns with research findings showing that a school's success in building a positive image and competitiveness is greatly influenced by the alignment between core organizational values and their concrete implementation in operational activities (Sopian & Suharto, 2025). Thus, organizational values and culture not only function as internal elements but also as strategic instruments in building school positioning and branding amidst increasingly fierce competition.

Burhanuddin (2019) examined organizational culture in Indonesian schools primarily through quantitative structural equation modelling, providing correlational data but not explaining the process and mechanism of cultural internalization. Ulkhaq (2026) Studied learning-oriented culture in Indonesian educational institutions, finding significant effects on organizational performance, but their study focused on university-level institutions rather than senior high schools. Susilo (2018) Provided foundational work on school culture in the United States, but their framework has not been empirically applied to Indonesian private school contexts with distinct religious, traditional, and postmodern cultural orientations. Fullan (2007) emphasizes the systemic nature of educational change but does not specifically link cultural internalization processes to competitive advantage creation in a multiple-case comparative format.

Nevertheless, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how organizational values and culture concretely play a role in building sustainable competitive advantage in the education sector, particularly at the senior high school level in Indonesia. Most previous research has focused more on aspects of academic performance, management effectiveness, or quantitative variable relationships, while in-depth qualitative studies examining the dynamics of organizational values and culture remain relatively limited (Abbas & Kumari, 2023). In fact, a qualitative approach is very important to understand the process of value internalization, daily cultural practices, and the meanings constructed by organizational members, which cannot be fully explained through quantitative approaches.

Based on this background, this study aims to deeply analyze the role of organizational values and culture in building sustainable competitive advantage in private senior high schools. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design on two schools, namely a Catholic School and a National School, which are known to have strong organizational culture characteristics and clear differentiation in educational practices. The selection of these two schools was based on the consideration that both represent best practices in managing organizational values and culture in the secondary education environment.

Through this research, it is expected to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational values and culture are internalized, implemented, and contribute to the creation of sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, this study also seeks to formulate a conceptual model proposition based on field findings that describes the relationship between values, organizational culture, and competitive advantage in the context of private schools. The resulting model is contextual and exploratory, thus requiring further testing in subsequent research. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of strategic management in the education sector, while practically providing implications for school administrators in designing

and implementing strategies based on organizational values and culture.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with the aim of deeply understanding the role of organizational values and culture in building sustainable competitive advantage in private senior high schools. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore meanings, perspectives, and complex social dynamics in an organizational context holistically, which cannot be fully explained through quantitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Liang, 2019). Additionally, this approach allows researchers to understand phenomena in their natural context, making it relevant to the research focus emphasizing organizational values and culture. The research design used was a case study with a multiple-case study approach. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of each case as well as comparative analysis between cases to identify general patterns and contextual differences. The multiple-case approach also strengthened the validity of findings through analytic replication logic, so that research results had a higher level of reliability.

The multiple-case study design (as opposed to a single-case study) was selected for the following theoretical reasons, drawing on Yin's (2018) methodological framework: (1) analytic replication logic: Yin (2018) distinguishes between literal replication (cases expected to produce similar results) and theoretical replication (cases expected to produce contrasting results for predictable reasons). This study employed theoretical replication; Kolese Gonzaga and Labschool Cirendeu were selected precisely because they represented different cultural orientations (Jesuit vs. traditional academic), enabling prediction and explanation of how different value systems produce different but equally effective competitive differentiation strategies. This replication logic strengthens the analytical validity of findings beyond what a single-case study could provide. (2) pattern matching across cases: the multiple-case study design enables cross-case pattern matching, identifying what is common (e.g., both schools internalize values through structured programs) and what differs (e.g., the specific programs and cultural mechanisms differ by orientation), providing richer theoretical understanding of the values-competitive advantage relationship. (3) transferability of findings: multiple cases with contextually different characteristics increase the analytical generalizability (transferability) of findings to other Indonesian private school contexts, compared to a single case which could only speak to its own specific institutional environment.

The unit of analysis in this study was two private senior high schools selected purposively based on the characteristics of strong organizational culture and clear strategic differentiation. Purposive selection aimed to obtain information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). By using two cases, this study not only produced an in-depth understanding but also allowed for comparisons that enriched the interpretation of findings. Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, field observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to provide flexibility in exploring relevant and in-depth information according to the dynamics developing in the field (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In each school, six (6) informants were selected purposively, consisting of the principal or vice principal, representatives of the foundation leadership, senior teachers, parents of students, alumni, and active students. This composition was designed to obtain comprehensive perspectives from various stakeholders in the school ecosystem.

Field observations were conducted to understand organizational cultural practices directly in the real context, including interactions among school members, program implementation, and dynamics of the school environment. This technique allowed researchers to capture phenomena not always revealed in interviews (Liang, 2019). Additionally, document analysis was conducted on various official documents such as the school's vision and mission, work programs, and publication materials to complement and verify the data obtained (Bowen, 2009; Nowell et al., 2017). Interview data were recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Huberman, 2014). This process began with identifying key information, followed by coding to group data into relevant categories and themes. Through this process,

researchers identified patterns, relationships, and main findings that answered the research questions.

The data analysis process in this study followed a systematic six-stage procedure based on Miles (2014) framework. Stage 1 was data preparation: all audio-recorded interview data were transcribed verbatim using NVivo 12 software. Transcriptions were verified for accuracy by cross-checking against audio recordings. Field observation notes were written up in full detail within 24 hours of each observation session. Document data were digitized and organized by school and document type. Stage 2 was data condensation (first-cycle coding): interview transcripts were read holistically to develop initial first-cycle codes using Saldaña's (2021) in vivo and descriptive coding approaches. An initial codebook of 47 first-cycle codes was developed across both cases. Stage 3 was thematic coding (second-cycle coding): first-cycle codes were grouped into pattern codes and then into thematic categories aligned with the research questions. Stage 4 was data display: coded themes were visualized through thematic maps and within-case and cross-case matrices to identify convergence and divergence across schools (Yin, 2018). Stage 5 was conclusion drawing: analytical conclusions were drawn through pattern matching (comparing case findings against initial theoretical propositions derived from RBV) and explanation building. Stage 6 was verification (triangulation): all findings were triangulated against observational data and documentary sources. Member checking was conducted with two informants per school to verify the accuracy of interpretations.

To ensure data validity and credibility, this study used source triangulation and method triangulation techniques (Denzin, 2017). Source triangulation was done by comparing information from various informants, while method triangulation was done by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Additionally, this study also applied trustworthiness principles, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability in the data analysis process (Nowell et al., 2017). Besides verbal data, this study also utilized visual data, such as documentation of school activities and physical environmental conditions, to enrich the interpretation of the implementation of organizational values and culture. This visual data served as a complement in understanding the context and strengthening the research findings more comprehensively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Organizational Values and Culture as a Foundation for School Excellence

The results showed that both schools have a strong value system that serves as the foundation for organizational management and student character formation. These values are not only formally formulated in the vision and mission but are also internalized in the daily practices of school members.

In the first school, values such as integrity, devotion, perseverance, noble character, self-governance, and high intellectual potential are developed as the main foundation in the educational process. These values are reinforced through the concept of lifelong guidance and manifested in various concrete practices, such as the 3S culture (smile, greet, salute), discipline, and fostering independence and competitiveness. The internalization of these values is also reflected in teachers' understanding of the school's strategic direction, as expressed:

"The main point, as I understand it, is to be the leading learning provider for Indonesia and the world." (Teacher)

This statement shows that organizational values and vision are not merely symbolic but have been understood and internalized by organizational members as part of their daily work orientation.

Meanwhile, the second school develops core values based on the Jesuit tradition through the 4C concept: competence, conscience, compassion, and commitment. These values become the central orientation in formulating strategies and educational practices. This was affirmed by the school principal:

"The core of this vision and mission is the center of excellence... related to the 4Cs: competence (intellectual), conscience (heart), compassion (caring), and commitment

(character)." (Principal)

These values are then implemented in various educational activities designed systematically. One teacher stated:

"To ground the 4Cs, there are activities, for example, the Jamboree." (Teacher)

These findings indicate that, in both schools, organizational values do not stop at the normative level but are manifested in real practices that shape student learning experiences. Thus, organizational values and culture serve as the main foundation in building the school's identity and strategic direction.

Development Programs as a Manifestation of Value Implementation

The values embraced by both schools are subsequently implemented through various structured and sustainable student development programs. These programs act as the main medium for transforming values into real practice.

The first school develops multi-resource-based learning programs, field observation activities, and the MANTRA program as a strategy for preparing students for university entry. Additionally, there are distinctive programs such as Japanese language learning and pencak silat as part of strengthening the school's identity. The implementation of these programs is supported by a planned management system based on continuous evaluation, as expressed:

"We have leadership meetings every month... to report and evaluate ongoing programs." (Principal)

This shows that the implementation of values is not merely spontaneous but managed through systematic organizational mechanisms oriented toward continuous improvement.

On the other hand, the second school develops programs such as leadership training, Jamboree, live-in experiences, and various extracurricular activities focused on developing leadership and social concern. These programs are designed as concrete means to internalize the 4C values in students' learning experiences.

Thus, the findings show that development programs act as a bridge between organizational values and educational practice, so that values are not only understood conceptually but also experienced directly by students.

Value and Culture-Based Strategic Differentiation

Differences in the value system and its implementation impact the differentiation strategies developed by each school. This differentiation is one form of observable competitive advantage.

The first school shows differentiation through strengthening academic aspects and student readiness to continue to university. This is reflected in a student's perception:

"Even without tutoring, my sibling was accepted into a state university by participating in the programs at this school." (Student)

This statement indicates that school programs are perceived as effective in supporting students' academic success, thus becoming an added value that differentiates the school from competitors.

Conversely, the second school develops differentiation through a more balanced approach between academic and non-academic achievements. This was expressed by a student:

"Academic and non-academic achievements are both good... but I focus more on academics." (Student)

These findings show that the school not only emphasizes academic achievement but also provides ample space for developing students' non-academic potential, especially in leadership and social concern. Thus, differentiation in both schools is built upon organizational values and culture that serve as the basis for formulating educational strategies.

Perception of Competitive Advantage by Stakeholders

Based on the perceptions of various stakeholders, both schools are perceived as having a strong competitive advantage, albeit with different characteristics. The first school is perceived as superior in academic aspects, discipline, and program effectiveness in supporting student success

in entering university. Meanwhile, the second school is perceived as superior in character building, balanced student development, and achievement in both academic and non-academic areas.

Interestingly, the advantages perceived by stakeholders are not only based on final outcomes but also on the learning process experienced by students while at school. This shows that a school's competitive advantage is multidimensional and not solely determined by academic indicators.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that a school's competitive advantage is built through the integration of values, organizational culture, and consistent implementation strategies. Although the two schools have different approaches, both show that organizational values and culture act as key factors in creating differentiation and sustainable advantage.

Discussion

The results show that organizational values and culture play a fundamental role in building sustainable competitive advantage in private senior high schools. These findings reinforce the Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective, which states that sustainable competitive advantage comes from internal resources that are intangible, unique, and difficult to imitate (J. Barney, 1991; J. B. Barney & Mackey, 2016). In this context, organizational values and culture not only function as a normative identity but also as a strategic mechanism that directs the collective behavior of all school members.

Empirically, this study found that the internalization of values in both schools did not stop at the symbolic level but manifested in real practices such as leadership patterns, teacher-student interactions, and the design of student development programs. This aligns with the view of Schein (2010) that a strong organizational culture is reflected in artifacts, espoused values, and underlying basic assumptions, which collectively shape organizational behavior. Thus, the strength of organizational culture lies in the consistency between stated values and implemented practices.

Furthermore, the results showed differences in the characteristics of organizational culture between the two schools, which actually became a source of strategic differentiation. Schools with a more structured culture based on traditional values tend to produce stability, consistency, and a strong identity. Meanwhile, schools with a more adaptive and innovative culture show higher flexibility in responding to environmental changes. These findings indicate that there is no universally superior form of culture; rather, the fit between organizational culture and institutional strategy is a key factor in creating competitive advantage (Hitt et al., 2009).

From the perspective of educational management, a learning-oriented organizational culture contributes to the continuous improvement of school quality. This is evident from the commitment to teacher professional development, internal collaboration, and continuous reflection on learning practices. These findings support previous research stating that learning organizations have a higher ability to create innovation and maintain long-term performance (Fullan, 2007).

Additionally, organizational values and culture are also proven to act as strategic instruments in building public trust and school reputation. In the context of competition among private schools, public perception of school quality is not only determined by academic output but also by the values upheld and experienced by stakeholders. Consistency between communicated values and the real experiences of students and parents is an important factor in building loyalty and a positive school image (Kurniasari et al., 2025).

However, this study also found that the process of internalizing organizational values and culture is not without challenges. Differences in individual backgrounds, generational dynamics, and external pressures can affect the consistency of value implementation in daily practice. This shows that organizational culture is not static but dynamic and requires a continuous strengthening process through effective leadership and supportive organizational systems (Alateeg & Alhammedi, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes by enriching the study of sustainable competitive advantage in the education sector through an in-depth qualitative

approach. Whereas most previous research emphasized structural aspects and performance, this study highlights the role of organizational values and culture as a deep structure that underpins school excellence. Thus, this research expands the application of the Resource-Based View in the educational context, particularly at the senior high school level.

Practically, the findings of this study imply that school administrators need to consciously design, internalize, and manage organizational values and culture as part of a long-term strategy. Such efforts are not sufficient by merely formulating a vision and mission but must be integrated into the school management system, including teacher recruitment, professional development, and performance evaluation. Thus, organizational values and culture can become a source of sustainable advantage that is difficult for competitors to imitate.

From a strategic management perspective, organizational values and culture can be viewed as intangible internal resources. This aligns with the Resource-Based View concept proposed by Jay B. Barney (2016), which emphasizes that sustainable competitive advantage comes from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. This perspective is further reinforced in Barney's (2016) work integrating RBV with stakeholder theory, where organizational values become an important element in creating long-term value. In the context of this research, values such as integrity, discipline, and the 4C concept represent unique identities that are difficult for other schools to replicate.

Furthermore, this study shows that values and culture do not only remain at the conceptual level but are translated into concrete and structured student development programs. Programs such as leadership training, live-in experiences, observation trips, and university preparation programs serve as mechanisms for implementing values in real practice. These findings align with research by Wu (2019), which shows that a strong organizational culture can drive innovation and program effectiveness through the internalization of values in operational activities.

Additionally, periodic evaluation mechanisms, such as leadership meetings and workshops, indicate the practice of continuous improvement in school management. This aligns with modern strategic management principles that emphasize the importance of strategy evaluation and control as part of the management cycle (David et al., 2017). In the educational context, Hallinger (2021) also asserts that effective school leadership is characterized by the ability to conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation of school programs.

Cultural differences between the two schools also produced different differentiation strategies. The first school emphasizes academic excellence, discipline, and university readiness, while the second school prioritizes a holistic educational approach encompassing academic, social, and character development. These findings align with research by Leithwood (2017), which states that school success is not only determined by academic achievement but also by the holistic development of student character and leadership.

Thus, this research provides an understanding that a school's competitive advantage is not solely determined by academic factors but also by how organizational values and culture are internalized, implemented, and managed strategically. The combination of strong values, relevant programs, and a continuous evaluation system are key factors in creating sustainable competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that organizational values and culture have a central and strategic role in shaping sustainable competitive advantage in private senior high schools. Core organizational values not only function as a normative identity but also serve as the main foundation for directing organizational behavior, shaping work culture, and determining the direction and consistency of institutional strategy. The research findings indicate that a school's competitive advantage does not emerge instantly but is the result of a continuous internalization process integrated into all organizational practices. The two schools studied show that organizational values and culture are internalized through various structured student development programs, supportive management systems, and continuous evaluation mechanisms. Despite having different cultural characteristics, both are able to create competitive

advantage through alignment between embraced values and implemented strategies.

This confirms that there is no universal cultural approach; rather, the effectiveness of organizational culture is largely determined by its suitability with the school's context and strategy. Furthermore, this study identifies that a school's competitive advantage is multidimensional, encompassing academic aspects, character formation, and positive perceptions from stakeholders. This advantage is built through consistent integration of core organizational values, lived culture, relevant development programs, and an effective strategic management system.

This study has limitations in the number of cases, which is limited to two private schools; therefore, the generalization of findings needs to be approached cautiously. Additionally, the qualitative approach used emphasizes the depth of analysis in a specific context, thus it does not yet provide a general picture of a larger population. Therefore, future research is advised to involve more cases, including public schools, to allow for broader comparative analysis. Further research can also develop the conceptual model produced in this study through quantitative or mixed-methods approaches so as to test the validity and generalizability of the model in more diverse contexts. Additionally, future studies could explore the role of external factors, such as educational policies and education market dynamics, in moderating the relationship between organizational culture and competitive advantage.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Paulus Sunarjo contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design, data collection, manuscript drafting, and corresponding author responsibilities. Ahmad Mulyana contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, data analysis, and interpretation of research findings. Dudi Permana contributed to the research methodology, validation of data, and critical review of the manuscript. Erna Sofriana Imaningsih contributed to manuscript editing, supervision of the research process, final evaluation of the study, and approval of the final manuscript for publication. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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