

Integration of Local Wisdom in Strategic Management of Higher Education: Findings of a Multi-Site Study

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Abstract

This study examines strategic management of higher education institutions based on local wisdom through a qualitative multisite approach. The research was conducted at Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai, two private higher education institutions that explicitly integrate local values into their institutional governance. Using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, this study explores how local wisdom is embedded in strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The findings reveal that local wisdom functions as strategic capital that shapes institutional identity, leadership orientation, organizational culture, and quality assurance mechanisms. IJM Langkat grounds its strategy in historical-ideological legitimacy rooted in Islamic-Malay traditions, while STKIP Budidaya Binjai adopts a sociological-pragmatic approach emphasizing social relevance and graduate character. Despite these differences, both institutions successfully translate local wisdom into teaching, research, community service, and student development practices. Strategy evaluation further demonstrates that culturally grounded quality assurance enhances both managerial accountability and moral legitimacy. This study contributes to the discourse on higher education management by positioning local wisdom as a dynamic, context-sensitive resource for sustainable institutional competitiveness.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji manajemen strategik perguruan tinggi berbasis kearifan lokal melalui pendekatan kualitatif multisitus. Penelitian dilakukan di Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat dan STKIP Budidaya Binjai sebagai dua perguruan tinggi swasta yang secara sadar mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai lokal dalam tata kelola kelembagaan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumen, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik lintas situs. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kearifan lokal berfungsi sebagai modal strategik yang memengaruhi perumusan, implementasi, dan evaluasi strategi institusi. IJM Langkat mengembangkan strategi berbasis legitimasi historis-ideologis yang berakar pada tradisi Islam-Melayu, sementara STKIP Budidaya Binjai mengembangkan strategi berbasis legitimasi sosiologis-pragmatis yang berorientasi pada relevansi sosial dan karakter lulusan. Meskipun berbeda orientasi, kedua institusi berhasil mengoperasionalkan kearifan lokal dalam tridarma perguruan tinggi dan budaya organisasi. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kearifan lokal merupakan sumber daya strategis yang kontekstual dan adaptif dalam meningkatkan daya saing perguruan tinggi secara berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci:

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions play a strategic role in shaping national development by producing qualified human resources, fostering innovation, and contributing to social, economic, political, and cultural advancement. Countries with strong higher education systems tend to demonstrate higher levels of competitiveness and societal well-being, while weaknesses in higher education quality often correlate with limited national progress (Gunawan et al., 2024). In Indonesia, however, the overall performance of higher education institutions remains relatively low compared to global standards, resulting in constrained human capital competitiveness and socio-economic outcomes (Sari, 2022). Through the implementation of the *Tri Dharma of Higher Education*—education, research, and community service—universities are expected not only to disseminate knowledge but also to actively participate in nation-building and problem-solving in collaboration with government and society.

Conceptually, higher education institutions operate as complex organizations that resemble corporate entities, as they possess defined missions, strategic objectives, policies, programs, budgets, and operational procedures while simultaneously facing external pressures and internal resource limitations (Marginson, 2022). In the contemporary era, universities are no longer solely academic service providers but also function within competitive environments that demand institutional sustainability, public trust, and student recruitment. Consequently, universities must pursue excellence and competitiveness through effective strategic management to ensure organizational survival and long-term relevance. This condition has intensified as the rapid quantitative growth of higher education institutions in Indonesia has created fierce competition among public and private, secular and religious institutions (Ghafur, 2024; Siswanto & Hidayati, 2021).

Strategic management has therefore become a critical requirement for higher education institutions to respond adaptively to dynamic environmental changes. Effective institutional management encompasses strategic planning, decision-making, program implementation, and continuous evaluation to support sustainable quality improvement (Siahaan et al., 2023). Central to this process is the formulation of a forward-looking vision that guides institutional direction and is coherently translated into strategies and operational actions (Eidgahi et al., 2025; Spanjol et al., 2024). Visionary leadership plays a crucial role in transforming abstract institutional aspirations into concrete strategic initiatives, mobilizing organizational commitment, and fostering long-term competitiveness (Chaerudin et al., 2020; Napisah et al., 2024).

Beyond competitiveness and efficiency, Indonesian higher education institutions carry a moral and cultural mandate as stipulated in Law No. 12 of 2012, which emphasizes character development, ethical cultivation, and cultural preservation alongside academic excellence. In the context of globalization, higher education faces serious challenges related to moral degradation, erosion of cultural values, and weakening national identity, particularly among students. Empirical evidence highlights rising social problems such as substance abuse and bullying among youth, underscoring the urgency of character education rooted in local cultural values (Nanggala & Risda, 2023). Local wisdom (*local wisdom*)—defined as a system of values, norms, traditions, and collective knowledge embedded within local communities—offers a humanistic and contextual foundation for education that strengthens identity, moral character, and social responsibility (Alfiyanto et al., 2023; Suarningsih, 2019; Turyani et al., 2024).

Despite its potential, local wisdom remains underutilized in the strategic management of higher education institutions, as existing studies largely focus on character education at the primary or secondary level or treat local wisdom as a supplementary element within specific subjects (Rummar, 2022; Yuliatin et al., 2021). Limited research has examined how local wisdom can be systematically integrated into higher education governance, policy formulation, academic culture, and curriculum development. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the integration of local wisdom into strategic management practices through a multisite qualitative study at STKIP Budidaya Binjai and Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah Langkat. By exploring the rationale, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of locally grounded strategic management, this study aims to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of culturally rooted and competitively sustainable higher education institutions in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach grounded in a phenomenological paradigm to obtain an in-depth and holistic understanding of how local wisdom is integrated into the strategic management of higher education institutions. A multisite qualitative design was adopted to explore a single phenomenon across two institutional contexts, namely Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai. These sites were purposively selected due to their shared characteristics as private higher education institutions with strong socio-cultural roots and explicit commitments to local wisdom in institutional development. The multisite approach enabled the researcher to capture contextual variations while identifying convergent patterns of strategic practices, thereby enhancing the transferability and analytical richness of the findings. Data collection was conducted between July 2025 and January 2026, with flexibility maintained until data saturation was achieved.

Data in this study consisted of qualitative information related to the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategic management grounded in local wisdom. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observation involving key stakeholders, including institutional leaders, foundation representatives, quality assurance units, lecturers, administrative staff, students, community figures, and alumni users. Secondary data were gathered through document analysis of institutional policies, strategic and operational plans, curriculum documents, internal evaluation reports, and official archives. These diverse data sources allowed for triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings. Data were collected in natural settings, emphasizing participants' lived experiences, institutional practices, and contextual meanings rather than numerical generalization.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis was conducted in two stages: within-site analysis to examine each institution independently, followed by cross-site analysis to identify thematic patterns, similarities, and contextual distinctions between the two sites. Throughout the analytical process, inductive reasoning was applied to develop themes and propositions grounded in empirical data. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of sources and techniques, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of an audit trail. These strategies were employed to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the strategic realities of higher education institutions implementing local wisdom-based management.

RESEARCH RESULTS DAN DISCUSSION

Results

Rationale for Implementing Local Wisdom–Based Higher Education Institutional and Socio-Cultural Foundations

The rationale for embedding local wisdom into institutional strategy emerged from distinct historical, cultural, and socio-educational foundations at each site. Qualitative data triangulated from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis reveal that local wisdom was not adopted as a symbolic gesture, but as a structural imperative for institutional legitimacy and strategic differentiation.

At Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat, strategic orientation is deeply anchored in historical–ideological legitimacy. The Rector explicitly articulated this foundation during an interview at the Rector's Office: *“Local wisdom for IJM is the historical legacy of Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah, born from the Langkat Sultanate. Thus, Islamic values, Malay customs, and the leadership of the ulama serve as the moral foundation for every strategic policy of the campus.”* (Rector IJM, Interview, 12 August 2025, Rector's Office)

This historical continuity is structurally embedded in institutional documents and spatial culture. Official records, including the Institutional Statute and the 2025–2035 Strategic Plan (Renstra), explicitly codify “Islamic–Malay identity” as a core institutional character. Field observations and photographic documentation confirm this rationale: traditional Malay architectural motifs on campus buildings, historical archives of Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah displayed in leadership offices, and formal meeting protocols that prioritize deliberation (*musyawarah*) collectively manifest the institutionalization of historical legitimacy. The Vice Rector for Academic Affairs further clarified the operationalization of this rationale: *“Local wisdom serves as the primary reference in formulating our vision, mission, and curriculum, ensuring that students develop not only academic competence but also a distinct Malay–Islamic character.”* (Vice Rector I, Interview, 13 August 2025, Vice Rector's Office).

Conversely, at STKIP Budidaya Binjai, the rationale is rooted in sociological–pragmatic legitimacy, where local wisdom is operationalized as a response to contemporary community needs and graduate character formation. The Chairperson emphasized during an interview: *“Local wisdom for us is not merely Malay culture, but encompasses values of solidarity, religiosity, and the social character of the Binjai community, which must be reflected in campus governance.”* (Chairperson STKIP, Interview, 10 September 2025, STKIP Leadership Office).

This socio-contextual orientation is evident in institutional policies that prioritize community-engaged education and professional ethics. The Vice Chair I for Academic Affairs noted: *“In curriculum development, we consistently consider the social and cultural context of the surrounding community, particularly in character education and strengthening the professional ethics of prospective teachers.”* (Vice Chair I, Interview, 12 September 2025, Vice Chair's Office).

Documentary analysis corroborates this rationale: official MoUs with local schools, community service reports, and curriculum syllabi that integrate contextual case studies demonstrate how STKIP translates local socio-cultural values into actionable academic and outreach programs. Field documentation further confirms this through records of

student community service, religious-cultural activities, and collaborative forums with regional educational partners.

Cross-site analysis reveals that while both institutions institutionalize local wisdom as a strategic imperative, their underlying rationales diverge in source and expression. IJM draws legitimacy from historical continuity and religious-cultural heritage, positioning local wisdom as a non-negotiable moral compass. STKIP, in contrast, derives legitimacy from contemporary social relevance, framing local wisdom as a dynamic tool for character development and community responsiveness. Despite these differences, both institutions converge on the principle that strategic management must remain culturally grounded to maintain institutional identity and public trust. Table 1 systematically maps these rationales across dimensions of legitimacy, dominant values, internal/external drivers, and strategic outcomes, reinforcing the proposition that local wisdom functions as contextualized strategic capital rather than decorative tradition.

Table 1.

Institutional Rationales for Adopting Local Wisdom-Based Higher Education

No.	Site I (IJM Langkat)	Site II (STKIP Budidaya Binjai)	Cross-Site Analysis	Proposition
1	Historical-Ideological Basis: Local wisdom is understood as the historical legacy of Jam'iyah Mahmudiya h, rooted in the Langkat Sultanate and the Malay-Islamic scholarly tradition. The principle "adat bersendikan syarak, syarak bersendikan Kitabullah" serves as the moral foundation for strategic decision-making.	Sociological-Pragmatic Basis: Local wisdom is understood as socio-cultural values embedded in the Binjai community and its surroundings (togetherness, religiosity, and social ethics), which are directed to shape institutional character and graduate differentiation.	Both institutions position local wisdom as a strategic identity; however, the sources of legitimacy differ. IJM relies on historical-ideological legitimacy, while STKIP emphasizes sociological-pragmatic legitimacy.	The foundation of local wisdom-based higher education is determined by the dominant source of legitimacy (historical-ideological or sociological-pragmatic), which shapes the direction of institutional strategy.

2	Dominant Institutional Values: Scholarly authority (<i>keulamaan</i>), Malay-Islamic etiquette, respect for tradition, and deliberation (<i>musyawarah</i>) shape the campus work culture and academic ethics.	Dominant Institutional Values: Values of being ethical and socially useful (<i>berbudi dan berdaya guna</i>), togetherness, discipline, service, and religiosity guide organizational culture and student development.	Shared core values include religiosity, ethics, and togetherness/deliberation; differences lie in symbolic-historical emphasis (IJM) versus social-professional character formation (STKIP).	Core values of local wisdom function as institutional identity and cultural guidelines that strengthen governance and character development within the academic community.
3	Internal Driving Factors: Collective awareness of institutional history, moral legitimacy of religious scholars, and commitment to preserving IJM's identity as a Malay-Islamic institution.	Internal Driving Factors: Commitment of leadership and the foundation to develop graduates with strong character, maintain institutional identity amid competition, and enhance social relevance of graduates.	Internal drivers are strong in both institutions, but differ in sources: IJM is driven by historical memory and tradition, while STKIP is driven by graduate quality orientation and social needs.	The strength of internal driving factors determines institutional consistency in positioning local wisdom as the foundation of strategic management.
4	External Driving Factors: Strong expectations of the Tanjung Pura community to preserve Malay-Islamic traditions and IJM's position as a	External Driving Factors: Regional demand for professional and character-based educators, support from partners (government/institutions/organizations), and demands for program relevance to community needs.	External support exists in both contexts; IJM is influenced by expectations to preserve tradition and identity, while STKIP is influenced by human resource development needs and partnerships.	External factors reinforce local wisdom-based policies through two pathways: cultural identity preservation and fulfillment of social development needs.

	symbol of historically rooted local education.			
5	Integration into Vision–Mission and Documents: Islamic and Malay cultural values define institutional character; statutes, strategic plans, and curricula explicitly reflect local identity and scholarly ethics.	Integration into Vision–Mission and Documents: Vision emphasizes excellence and ethical usefulness; missions focus on education, research, community service, and human resource investment; documents emphasize learning quality, publication, and research-based service.	Both institutions integrate local wisdom into formal documents, but in different forms: IJM emphasizes explicit Islamic–Malay identity symbols, while STKIP emphasizes character values and Tridharma quality.	Documented integration of local wisdom (statutes–strategic plans–curricula) provides a formal foundation guiding strategic management policies and practices.
6	Implementation in Managerial Practices: Decision-making prioritizes deliberation and moral legitimacy; work culture emphasizes etiquette, role modeling, and ethical compliance.	Implementation in Managerial Practices: Decision-making emphasizes familial deliberation and service orientation; student development is fostered through social, religious, and organizational activities.	Managerial practices are similar in deliberation, but differ in rationale: IJM emphasizes traditional legitimacy, while STKIP emphasizes effectiveness of development and service delivery.	Internalized local wisdom within work culture strengthens decision-making effectiveness, organizational cohesion, and academic services.
7	Strategic Advantage: Institutional differentiation based on historical legitimacy and scholarly tradition,	Strategic Advantage: Institutional differentiation through graduate character and social engagement, building public trust through relevance and Tridharma impact.	Strategic advantages in both cases manifest as trust and identity, but with different sources: IJM derives trust from history and tradition; STKIP from service quality,	Local wisdom functions as strategic capital that enhances public trust and institutional competitiveness through identity

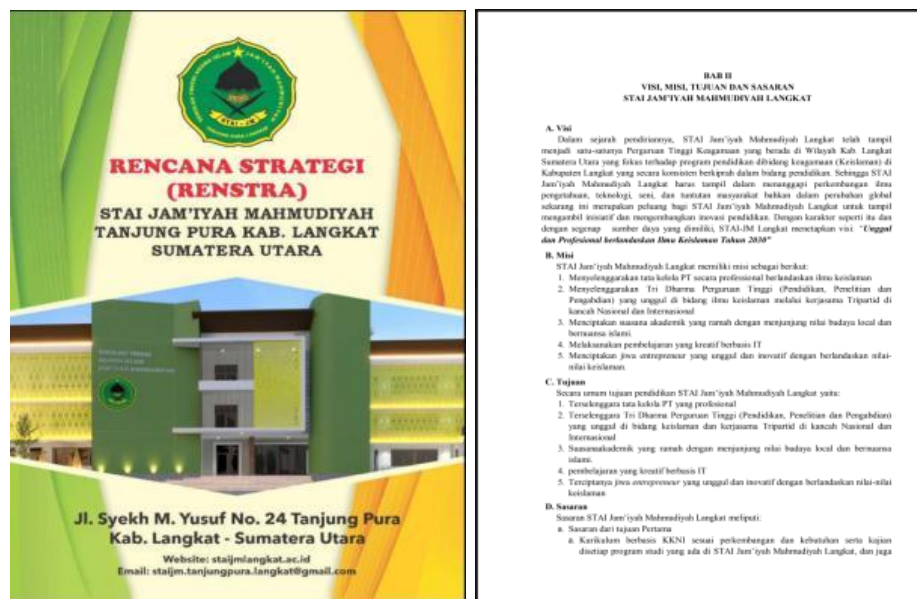
building public trust as a campus with a strong identity.	graduate character, and social and social benefits. relevance.
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The table summarizes that while Institut Jam’iyah Mahmudiyah Langkat emphasized historical-ideological foundations, STKIP Budidaya Binjai highlighted socio-cultural and contextual considerations. Despite these differences, both institutions shared the view that local wisdom strengthened institutional legitimacy and strategic clarity. This convergence underscores the strategic role of local wisdom as a foundation for sustainable higher education management.

Local Wisdom as Institutional Identity

Beyond historical and socio-cultural foundations, local wisdom is formally institutionalized as the core identity of both institutions. Interview data and document analysis reveal that cultural values are not merely rhetorical; they are systematically embedded in statutory documents, strategic plans, and academic frameworks. At IJM Langkat, the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs emphasized that local wisdom serves as the primary reference in formulating institutional direction: *“Local wisdom serves as the primary reference in formulating our vision, mission, and curriculum, ensuring that students develop not only academic competence but also a distinct Malay–Islamic character.”* (Vice Rector I, Interview, 13 August 2025, Vice Rector’s Office)

This orientation is explicitly codified in IJM’s 2025–2035 Strategic Plan and Institutional Statute, which mandate the integration of “Islamic–Malay identity” into all academic and administrative policies. Documentary analysis confirms that curriculum syllabi, course outlines (RPS), and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) documents consistently reference local history, ethical norms (adab), and scholarly traditions as formal learning outcomes. Field documentation further illustrates this institutionalization: historical archives of Jam’iyah Mahmudiyah displayed in leadership offices, formal statutes highlighting cultural mandates, and academic building facades incorporating traditional Malay motifs collectively reinforce identity as a strategic asset.



Source: Researchers' field documentation, August 2025

Figure 1. Evidence of formal institutionalization of cultural identity

Conversely, at STKIP Budidaya Binjai, institutional identity is framed around pragmatic character formation and social responsiveness. The Chairperson articulated the rationale for embedding local values amid educational globalization: *"We do not want to become a campus that loses its identity to globalization; therefore, local values must serve as both our identity and our point of differentiation."* (Chairperson STKIP, Interview, 10 September 2025, STKIP Leadership Office)

This strategic positioning is operationalized through the institutional vision: *"To become an outstanding institution producing educators and educational professionals who are ethical and socially useful (berbudi dan berdaya guna)."* Unlike IJM's explicit historical symbolism, STKIP translates local wisdom into competency-based frameworks. Document analysis of the STKIP Strategic Plan, OBE curriculum matrices, and lecturer workload distributions (BKD) demonstrates that "ethical professionalism," "social empathy," and "community responsiveness" are embedded as measurable graduate attributes (CPL/CPMK). Photographic records of academic planning meetings, curriculum development workshops, and community partnership agreements (MoU/MoA) with local schools further evidence how identity is constructed through pedagogical relevance and stakeholder engagement.



Source: Researchers' field documentation, September 2025

Figure 2. Evidence of translation of local values into a competency-based

Cross-site analysis indicates that both institutions treat local wisdom as a deliberate identity marker, yet their documentation strategies reflect distinct institutional logics. IJM employs symbolic-historical institutionalization, where identity is preserved through explicit cultural mandates, archival continuity, and normative ethical frameworks. STKIP utilizes pragmatic-competency institutionalization, embedding local values into performance indicators, graduate attributes, and community-aligned programs. Despite these methodological differences, both institutions converge on a critical finding: local wisdom gains strategic legitimacy only when formally documented and aligned with academic standards. This aligns with institutional theory positing that organizations achieve legitimacy when internal practices are codified into formal structures that resonate with external socio-cultural expectations (Scott, 2014). Consequently, local wisdom in both campuses functions not as cultural ornamentation, but as a codified strategic identity that guides curriculum design, leadership accountability, and institutional positioning.

Strategy Formulation of Local Wisdom-Based Higher Education Management

The formulation of local wisdom-based strategic management at Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai represents a critical phase in translating cultural values into formal institutional direction. This stage reflects how each institution interprets local wisdom as a strategic resource and embeds it into vision, mission, and planning documents. Strategy formulation does not occur in a value-neutral space; rather, it is shaped by historical memory, leadership perspectives, and perceived institutional challenges. Consequently, the formulation process becomes a forum for negotiating identity, relevance, and long-term sustainability.

At IJM Langkat, strategy formulation is explicitly value-led, beginning with a reading of historical identity before addressing technical or administrative metrics. The Rector articulated this normative starting point during an interview at the Rector's Office: *"Our campus strategy does not begin with numbers alone, but with the identity of Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah as a legacy of Malay-Islamic education in Langkat. Therefore, strategic*

formulation is always bound by the values of adab, deliberation, and societal benefit." (Rector IJM, Interview, 12 August 2025, Rector's Office).

This orientation is operationalized through a multi-layered, deliberative process. The Vice Rector for Academic Affairs explained that mapping academic conditions and Tridharma needs is systematically filtered through institutional character: *"Strategy formulation usually begins with mapping academic conditions, learning quality, and Tridharma strengthening needs, but all of it is directed to align with the campus character: Islamic, Malay, and scholarly tradition."* (Vice Rector I, Interview, 13 August 2025, Vice Rector's Office).

Documentary analysis confirms that these value-driven deliberations are codified into formal planning instruments. The Institutional Statute, 2025–2035 Strategic Plan (Renstra), and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) matrices explicitly mandate Islamic–Malay ethical standards as baseline criteria for program development. Photographic records of academic planning forums, statutory documents highlighting cultural mandates, and curriculum matrices integrating local ethical competencies collectively evidence how historical–ideological values are structurally embedded into strategic planning.

Conversely, STKIP Budidaya Binjai employs a systematic–participatory formulation model that blends managerial analysis with contextual value integration. The Chairperson described the structured yet value-anchored process: *"The strategy drafting process begins with evaluating previous achievements, reading community needs, and then formulated in leadership meetings with units. We use local values as a foundation so the campus direction remains ethical and socially useful."* (Chairperson STKIP, Interview, 10 September 2025, STKIP Leadership Office).

Unlike IJM's normative-historical approach, STKIP explicitly employs environmental scanning tools to align local values with market and social demands. The Chairperson further clarified: *"We conduct SWOT analysis to map human resources, facility limitations, partnership opportunities, and competitive pressures. Local potential, such as the demand for educators and the religious culture of the community, is treated as a strategic opportunity."* (Chairperson STKIP, Interview, 10 September 2025, STKIP Leadership Office). This pragmatic orientation is institutionalized through performance-aligned planning documents. The Vice Chair I for Academic Affairs emphasized: *"In drafting the strategic plan, we place ethical values and character as the main orientation. Quality indicators are not only academic, but also include the formation of professional ethics for prospective teachers."* (Vice Chair I, Interview, 12 September 2025, Vice Chair's Office)

Documentary records substantiate this approach: Renstra documents feature measurable indicators for graduate character formation, OBE matrices (CPL/CPMK) explicitly embed socio-professional ethics, and partnership agreements (MoU/MoA) with regional schools demonstrate how contextual needs are translated into strategic academic programs.

The comparative data reveal that while both institutions integrate local wisdom into strategic formulation, they differ in emphasis and rationale. IJM prioritizes historical–ideological legitimacy, treating values as normative filters for policy appropriateness. STKIP prioritizes sociological relevance and pragmatic outcomes, treating local wisdom as a functional asset for graduate competitiveness and social responsiveness. Nevertheless, both models demonstrate that local wisdom can serve as

a coherent strategic framework rather than an ornamental discourse. Table 2 systematically maps these formulation dynamics across eight strategic dimensions, reinforcing the proposition that local wisdom-based strategy formulation is determined by the institution's primary source of legitimacy.

Table 2.

Strategy Formulation of Local Wisdom-Based Management at IJM Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai

No.	Site I (IJM Langkat)	Site II (STKIP Budidaya Binjai)	Cross-Site Analysis	Proposition
1	Strategic Formulation Basis: Strategy is formulated based on the historical legitimacy of Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah and Islamic-Malay values. Etiquette (<i>adab</i>), deliberation (<i>musyawarah</i>), and social benefit serve as primary criteria prior to policy enactment.	Strategic Formulation Basis: Strategy is formulated based on societal needs and an orientation toward developing graduates with ethical and professional character.	Both institutions initiate strategy formulation from local identity; however, IJM is grounded in historical-ideological legitimacy, whereas STKIP is grounded in sociological-pragmatic needs.	Local wisdom-based strategy formulation is determined by the institution's primary source of legitimacy (historical or sociological), which shapes strategic policy orientation.
2	Formulation Process: Conducted through leadership meetings and academic forums using deliberation as a cultural tradition.	Formulation Process: Conducted through leadership meetings, unit coordination, and structured managerial mechanisms employing a modern participatory approach.	Both processes are participatory, yet IJM emphasizes cultural-deliberative mechanisms, while STKIP emphasizes systematic-coordinative processes.	Participatory models of strategy formulation strengthen legitimacy and organizational cohesion, with distinctive characteristics shaped by institutional culture.
3	Environmental Analysis (Internal-External): Focuses on historical strength, moral reputation, and community social capital as strategic assets.	Environmental Analysis (Internal-External): Employs SWOT analysis to map human resources, partnerships, demand for educators, and competitive dynamics.	IJM emphasizes symbolic capital and social trust, whereas STKIP emphasizes managerial analysis and education market relevance.	Integrating managerial analysis with contextual understanding of local values enhances the strategic accuracy of local wisdom-based management.

4	Integration into Strategic Documents: Islamic values and Malay culture are explicitly articulated in the vision, mission, statutes, and strategic plans.	Integration into Strategic Documents: The value of “ethical and socially useful” (<i>berbudi dan berdaya guna</i>) graduates is embedded in the vision, goals, and quality indicators of the Tridharma.	Both institutions integrate local values into formal documents, though symbolic expressions differ (explicit cultural identity vs. explicit character orientation).	Formal documentation of local values in strategic plans and policies functions as a control mechanism for strategy implementation.
5	Implementation in the Tridharma: Integration of Islamic–Malay history and identity into curricula, lesson plans, and community service rooted in local traditions.	Implementation in the Tridharma: Integration of local social contexts into learning processes, regional education research, and community service based on societal needs.	Both operationalize local values within the Tridharma, with IJM emphasizing historical identity and STKIP emphasizing social relevance.	Local wisdom–based strategies become effective when translated concretely into curriculum, research, and community service policies.
6	Role of Units and Study Programs: Study programs cascade institutional strategy while maintaining consistency in <i>adab</i> values and Islamic–Malay identity.	Role of Units and Study Programs: Study programs cascade strategy through performance indicators, Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and professional character development of prospective teachers.	Strategy cascading occurs in both sites, but the basis of value interpretation differs (identity-oriented vs. performance-oriented).	Cascading strategy to the study program level ensures alignment between local values and academic implementation.
7	Adaptation to Global Dynamics: Modernization is filtered through local values to prevent the erosion of historical identity.	Adaptation to Global Dynamics: National and global standards are adopted while maintaining character orientation and social relevance.	Both institutions demonstrate selective adaptability; IJM emphasizes identity preservation, whereas STKIP emphasizes	Local wisdom–based strategies remain adaptive when local values function as ethical filters in responding to global educational dynamics.

				quality and professionalism.	
8	Degree of Operationalization: Local values are operationalized through organizational culture, academic ethics, and historical symbols.	Degree of Operationalization: Local values are operationalized through quality indicators, student activities, and character development programs.	Implementation at IJM tends to be symbolic-cultural and academic, while at STKIP it is more programmatic and indicator-based.	Operationalizing local wisdom-based strategies requires a combination of organizational culture and measurable management systems.	

Table 2 presents empirical findings on how both institutions conceptualize and formalize their strategies. The table outlines differences in strategic orientation, planning priorities, and the role of local wisdom within official documents such as statutes, strategic plans, and operational programs. At IJM Langkat, strategy formulation is explicitly grounded in Islamic-Malay values and the historical legacy of Jam’iyah Mahmudiyah. In contrast, STKIP Budidaya Binjai emphasizes pragmatic alignment between local values and graduate competencies.

Strategy Implementation in Local Wisdom-Based Institutional Practices

The implementation phase represents the operational translation of formulated strategies into daily academic practices, organizational routines, and community engagement. At both Institut Jam’iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai, local wisdom is not confined to policy documents but is actively internalized across the Tridharma of higher education, leadership behavior, and institutional culture. Implementation serves as the critical test of whether culturally grounded strategies achieve substantive impact beyond symbolic rhetoric.

At IJM Langkat, implementation is deeply anchored in value preservation and ethical consistency. The Rector explicitly emphasized that strategic implementation must transcend administrative compliance: *“Local wisdom-based strategies must not remain confined to strategic plans or visions; they must live within learning, research, and community service. If they do not manifest in the Tridharma, they become mere symbols.”* (Rector IJM, Interview, 12 August 2025, Rector’s Office)

This orientation is operationalized through contextual curriculum integration and character-centered pedagogy. The Vice Rector for Academic Affairs clarified the evaluation criteria for implementation: *“In the academic domain, we do not merely assess cognitive achievements, but also student attitudes and ethics. Values of adab and moral character are embedded as formal learning evaluation indicators.”* (Vice Rector I, Interview, 13 August 2025, Vice Rector’s Office)

Documentary analysis of course syllabi (RPS) and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) matrices confirms that Islamic-Malay history, ethical norms, and contextual case studies are systematically integrated into learning outcomes. Field observations further reveal that classroom interactions emphasize respectful communication, scholarly etiquette, and the use of local historical narratives to contextualize theoretical concepts. Organizational culture reinforces this through deliberative decision-making

(musyawarah) and lecturers' role modeling, where ethical conduct is treated as both a managerial standard and a pedagogical tool.

Conversely, STKIP Budidaya Binjai implements local wisdom through contextual responsiveness and professional socialization. The Chairperson articulated the implementation mandate: "The strategies we have formulated must be visible in our Tridharma activities; not merely as slogans, but evident in teaching, research, and community service that directly engage society." (Chairperson STKIP, Interview, 10 September 2025, STKIP Leadership Office). This pragmatic orientation is realized through problem-based learning and community-embedded academic practices. The Vice Chair I for Academic Affairs explained the pedagogical approach: *"We encourage lecturers to connect course materials with the educational conditions in Binjai and its surroundings, so that prospective teachers understand the social context where they will eventually serve."* (Vice Chair I, Interview, 12 September 2025, Vice Chair's Office)

Official documents, including curriculum frameworks and CPL/CPMK matrices, explicitly integrate ethical professionalism, social empathy, and contextual relevance as graduate attributes. Field observations show that students actively participate in school observations, literacy programs, and teaching practicums in partner schools around Binjai and Langkat, making local values part of experiential learning practices. Organizational culture at STKIP is characterized by collegiality, open communication, and service-oriented leadership that reinforce the principle of *"berbudi dan berdaya guna."* Cross-site analysis indicates that both institutions successfully implement local wisdom across teaching, research, community service, and organizational culture, although with different approaches. IJM applies a value-preservation model emphasizing ethical identity and historical continuity, whereas STKIP adopts a value-integration model focused on contextual problem-solving and community-responsive activities. Despite these differences, both institutions demonstrate that culturally grounded implementation strengthens institutional cohesion, increases student engagement, and connects academic theory with local socio-cultural realities.

Strategy Evaluation in Local Wisdom-Based Higher Education Management

Strategy evaluation constitutes a critical phase in ensuring that local wisdom-based strategies remain relevant, accountable, and sustainable. At both Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai, evaluation is not perceived merely as a technical audit mechanism but as a reflective process aligned with institutional values. It assesses consistency between formulated strategies, implemented practices, and expected outcomes, serving as a bridge between managerial accountability and moral responsibility.

At IJM Langkat, evaluation is deeply embedded in the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and routine academic forums. The Rector explicitly stated: *"Our evaluation is not a separate agenda for local wisdom; it is integrated into academic and institutional performance reviews. We assess whether values of adab, character, and Islamic-Malay identity are genuinely reflected in Tridharma practices."* (Rector IJM, Interview, 12 August 2025, Rector's Office).

This indicates a normative-reflective evaluation model where cultural consistency functions as a primary quality indicator. The Vice Rector for Academic Affairs further

clarified the assessment criteria: *"Success is measured not only by administrative completeness, but by student attitudes, communication ethics, value integration in RPS, and active engagement in community service."* (Vice Rector I, Interview, 13 August 2025, Vice Rector's Office)

Documentary analysis of semester evaluation reports, SPMI audit trails, and curriculum review minutes confirms that evaluation results directly inform policy adjustments, syllabus revisions, and character-building initiatives. Participatory feedback mechanisms, including student forums and lecturer reflection meetings, ensure that evaluation outcomes translate into continuous institutional improvement.

Conversely, STKIP Budidaya Binjai adopts a procedural-analytical evaluation model integrated with institutional performance management. The Chairperson emphasized: *"We evaluate the implementation of 'berbudi dan berdaya guna' values alongside Tridharma performance reports. We look at whether these values are actually demonstrated in teaching, research, and community service."* (Chairperson STKIP, Interview, 10 September 2025, STKIP Leadership Office). The Vice Chair I for Academic Affairs added: *"Indicators include student discipline, character integration in syllabi, participation in social programs, and academic achievements. We do not just measure GPA; we measure attitude transformation and professional ethics."* (Vice Chair I, Interview, 12 September 2025, Vice Chair's Office)

Official documents, including annual performance reports, tracer study summaries, and OBE curriculum evaluation matrices, demonstrate how quantitative and qualitative metrics are combined to assess strategy effectiveness. Evaluation outcomes are systematically translated into strategic plan adjustments, curriculum refinements, and capacity-building programs.

Cross-site analysis reveals that while both institutions embed local wisdom evaluation within their quality assurance systems, their operational logics differ. IJM prioritizes ethical alignment, cultural consistency, and moral reflection, functioning as a value-based reflective evaluation. STKIP emphasizes measurable outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, and performance indicators, reflecting a performance-based evaluative model. Despite these differences, both recognize the complexity of assessing intangible cultural values and utilize participatory feedback mechanisms involving lecturers, students, and quality assurance units. Table 3 systematically maps these evaluation dynamics across institutional dimensions.

Table 3.

Evaluation Mechanisms of Local Wisdom-Based Strategic Management

No.	Site I (IJM Langkat)	Site II (STKIP Budidaya Binjai)	Cross-Site Analysis	Proposition
1	Implementation in Teaching and Learning: Integration of Islamic-Malay values, the history of Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah, and adab into the curriculum, course	Implementation in Teaching and Learning: Integration of character values and regional educational social contexts into the curriculum, course syllabi, and contextual, local	Both institutions integrate local values into teaching and learning; however, IJM is oriented toward historical-religious identity, while STKIP	Local wisdom-based strategy implementation is effective when local values are consistently and contextually embedded in curricula and learning practices.

	syllabi, and student attitude assessment.	case-based learning approaches.	emphasizes contextual-professional orientation.	
2	Implementation in Research: Faculty and student research is directed toward preserving Islamic educational values and the Malay cultural heritage of Langkat.	Implementation in Research: Research focuses on addressing regional educational problems and improving the quality of teaching professionals.	IJM emphasizes cultural and religious value preservation, whereas STKIP emphasizes social relevance and educational problem-solving.	Local wisdom-based research strategies can function both as instruments of value preservation and as solutions to social challenges, depending on institutional character.
3	Implementation in Community Service: Religious development programs, value-based training, and collaboration with Islamic boarding schools and traditional institutions.	Implementation in Community Service: School assistance programs, literacy initiatives, and character development activities within surrounding communities.	Both institutions actively engage in local community service, with IJM adopting a religious-historical orientation and STKIP a professional-social orientation.	Community service becomes an effective medium for implementing local wisdom when aligned with institutional identity and community needs.
4	Organizational Culture and Governance: Work culture is grounded in adab, deliberation (musyawarah), and respect for religious scholarly traditions; local values guide ethical decision-making.	Organizational Culture and Governance: Work culture is based on collegiality, open communication, and professional academic services.	Both institutions reflect local values in organizational culture, with symbolic-historical expressions at IJM and managerial-familial expressions at STKIP.	Organizational culture rooted in local values strengthens internal cohesion and leadership legitimacy in strategy implementation.
5	Students as Value Agents: Students are guided to act as guardians of tradition and adab through religious and organizational activities.	Students as Value Agents: Students are encouraged to become social and professional agents through character-based student activities and community engagement.	Students play active roles at both sites; however, IJM emphasizes religious-identity orientation, while STKIP emphasizes social-professional orientation.	Students function as key actors in sustaining local wisdom-based strategies through value internalization in academic and organizational activities.

6	Faculty Socialization and Development: Value internalization occurs through leadership guidance, academic meetings, and cultural role modeling.	Faculty Socialization and Development: Value internalization occurs through workshops, program coordination, and reinforcement of character-based quality indicators.	Neither institution has formal local wisdom-specific training; values are internalized through leadership and academic forums.	Sustaining local value internalization requires strong leadership support and academic forums as continuous development mechanisms.
7	Monitoring and Evaluation of Implementation: Evaluation is conducted through routine meetings, study program reports, and supervision of alignment with institutional values.	Monitoring and Evaluation of Implementation: Evaluation is conducted through unit performance reports, quality assurance systems, and Tridharma achievement indicators.	IJM emphasizes value and cultural alignment, while STKIP emphasizes performance indicators and program effectiveness.	Monitoring local wisdom-based strategy implementation requires a combination of value-oriented evaluation and measurable quality management systems.

Table 3 summarizes the evaluation models applied in both institutions. The table outlines internal quality assurance processes, external evaluation mechanisms, and follow-up actions as part of a continuous improvement cycle. At IJM Langkat, evaluation emphasizes moral legitimacy, ethical compliance, and consistency with Islamic-Malay values. Meanwhile, STKIP Budidaya Binjai places stronger emphasis on measurable performance indicators, accreditation standards, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Strategic Outcomes and Institutional Advantages of Local Wisdom-Based Management

The strategic outcomes of local wisdom-based management extend beyond conventional performance metrics to encompass public trust, institutional legitimacy, and competitive differentiation. At both Institut Jam’iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai, local wisdom functions as a strategic asset that differentiates each institution within an increasingly competitive higher education landscape. Consequently, strategic success is measured not only by administrative efficiency or accreditation scores, but by societal recognition, cultural relevance, and sustained stakeholder confidence.

At IJM Langkat, strategic outcomes are strongly associated with historical legitimacy and moral authority. The Rector explicitly noted that community confidence is rooted in the institution’s unwavering commitment to cultural and religious continuity: *“The community perceives IJM as an institution that consistently preserves tradition and Islamic-Malay values; this strengthens public trust and ensures long-term social support.”* (Rector IJM, Interview, 12 August 2025, Rector’s Office)

This historical-cultural legitimacy translates into symbolic capital that buffers the institution against competitive pressures. Documentary analysis of accreditation reports, alumni tracer studies, and community partnership records confirms that IJM’s identity

coherence attracts stable enrollment, consistent donor support, and strong collaboration with local religious and cultural institutions. Observational records of campus branding, historical exhibitions, and formal ceremonies further demonstrate how institutional memory is actively maintained as a strategic resource. The Vice Rector for Academic Affairs reinforced this outcome by noting: *"A culture grounded in adab and deliberative governance creates a harmonious academic environment, which indirectly improves student retention and faculty commitment."* (Vice Rector I, Interview, 13 August 2025, Vice Rector's Office)

Conversely, STKIP Budidaya Binjai achieves strategic advantage through graduate relevance, social impact, and performance-driven community engagement. Institutional leaders emphasize that public trust is earned through tangible contributions to local educational development. The Chairperson articulated this outcome clearly: *"Public confidence is built not merely through academic competence, but through the moral character and social responsiveness of our graduates."* (Chairperson STKIP, Interview, 10 September 2025, STKIP Leadership Office)

The institution's competitive positioning is further reinforced by its pragmatic alignment with regional labor market needs and community development goals. The Vice Chair III for Student Affairs added: *"Our strategic advantage lies in our closeness to society and the continuous formation of student character through socially engaged programs."* (Vice Chair III, Interview, 14 September 2025, Vice Chair's Office)

Documentary analysis of tracer study summaries, partner school feedback reports, and MoU implementation records substantiates these outcomes. STKIP demonstrates high graduate employability in regional schools, consistent community service impact, and strong institutional reputation among local education authorities. Photographic records of graduate placement activities, school mentoring programs, and community literacy initiatives evidence how local wisdom is operationalized into measurable social returns.

The cross-site analysis demonstrates that while both institutions achieve trust and legitimacy, the sources of strategic advantage differ significantly. IJM derives its strength from historical continuity, symbolic-cultural resonance, and moral authority, positioning local wisdom as an identity anchor that ensures institutional resilience. STKIP derives its strength from performance relevance, graduate character, and social contribution, positioning local wisdom as a functional asset that enhances competitiveness through community responsiveness. These findings confirm that local wisdom operates as strategic capital when aligned with institutional context and stakeholder expectations. Ultimately, local wisdom-based management enhances institutional sustainability by embedding identity, ethical consistency, and social usefulness into the core of higher education strategy.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that local wisdom plays a strategic and structural role in higher education management rather than functioning merely as a symbolic cultural attribute. Both Institut Jam'iyah Mahmudiyah (IJM) Langkat and STKIP Budidaya Binjai position local wisdom as the foundation of strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation, albeit through different institutional logics. This

finding is consistent with recent studies emphasizing that culturally embedded management enhances institutional legitimacy and sustainability in higher education (Bauer et al., 2020; Niedlich et al., 2020; Roos et al., 2023; Roos & Guenther, 2020; Trudel, 2020; Wright et al., 2022). Moreover, the present study extends prior research by demonstrating that local wisdom operates as *strategic capital* that shapes institutional identity, governance orientation, and long-term competitiveness.

In the strategy formulation phase, the distinction between historical-ideological legitimacy and sociological-pragmatic legitimacy highlights the contextual nature of strategic planning in higher education. Recent research suggests that strategic planning is most effective when it aligns with institutional history, stakeholder expectations, and socio-cultural environments (Aldhobaib, 2025; Campos-Moreira et al., 2020; Sarfo et al., 2024). The findings of this study reinforce this perspective by showing that local wisdom provides a coherent reference framework for defining vision, mission, and strategic priorities. Unlike technocratic planning models, local wisdom-based formulation allows institutions to maintain strategic coherence while responding to changing educational demands. This contributes to contemporary debates on culturally responsive strategic management in higher education.

With respect to strategy implementation, the study demonstrates that local wisdom is translated into leadership practices, organizational culture, Tridharma activities, and student development programs. These results align with recent empirical studies highlighting the importance of value-based and culturally responsive leadership in strengthening institutional commitment and academic culture (Ansori et al., 2024; Purnomo et al., 2024; Surbakti, 2024). The comparative findings indicate that while IJM emphasizes moral authority and symbolic-cultural continuity, STKIP emphasizes service orientation and professional socialization. This supports the argument that local wisdom is adaptable and can be operationalized through diverse managerial practices without losing its normative core (Eko & Putranto, 2021; Husen et al., 2025).

In terms of strategy evaluation, the findings indicate that quality assurance mechanisms grounded in local wisdom go beyond procedural accountability and incorporate ethical and cultural reflection. Recent studies on higher education quality assurance emphasize the need to balance performance indicators with contextual relevance and institutional values (Beerkens, 2020; Serrano et al., 2025). This study adds to the literature by showing that evaluation systems informed by local wisdom enhance both managerial effectiveness and moral legitimacy. At IJM, evaluation prioritizes ethical alignment and cultural consistency, while at STKIP it emphasizes measurable outcomes and stakeholder satisfaction. This dual model enriches contemporary understandings of culturally sensitive quality assurance.

Finally, the strategic outcomes identified—public trust, institutional legitimacy, and competitive differentiation—are consistent with recent research indicating that culturally grounded institutions are more resilient and socially trusted (Aliari, 2025; Kayran & Kolbe, 2022; Poland et al., 2021). However, this study demonstrates that trust and competitiveness emerge from context-specific sources. Historical continuity and moral authority underpin IJM's strategic advantage, while graduate relevance and social impact underpin STKIP's advantage. These findings underscore that local wisdom-based management does not produce uniform outcomes but rather contextually meaningful institutional strengths. Overall, this study contributes to recent scholarship by positioning local wisdom as a dynamic, context-sensitive resource for strategic management in higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that local wisdom operates not merely as a symbolic cultural attribute but as a foundational strategic capital that systematically shapes higher education governance across formulation, implementation, and evaluation phases. An important and somewhat unexpected finding is that culturally grounded strategy evaluation simultaneously enhances managerial accountability and moral legitimacy, effectively bridging technocratic performance metrics with normative ethical reflection. The cross-site analysis further identified two distinct institutional models: a historical-ideological approach rooted in Islamic-Malay legacy at IJM Langkat, and a sociological-pragmatic approach oriented toward social responsiveness and graduate character at STKIP Budidaya Binjai. Academically, these findings confirm prior research asserting that culturally embedded practices strengthen institutional sustainability, but they challenge the prevailing technocratic bias in higher education management by demonstrating that local values can be systematically operationalized and evaluated. The study offers a new conceptual perspective by introducing a contextual typology of local wisdom-based strategic management and positioning cultural heritage as a dynamic, context-sensitive strategic capital that aligns institutional identity with contemporary governance demands.

Despite these contributions, the study is constrained by its qualitative multisite design, which limits statistical generalizability and relies exclusively on institutional contexts within North Sumatra. The findings are deeply contextual and may not capture variations in regions with different cultural, religious, or historical backgrounds. Additionally, the cross-sectional data collection restricts the ability to assess long-term institutional performance and the measurable impact of local wisdom-based strategies on graduate outcomes, accreditation trajectories, or financial sustainability. Future research should therefore employ mixed-methods designs and longitudinal approaches to quantify the relationship between culturally grounded management and institutional performance across diverse higher education settings. Expanding the sample to include public, private, and religious universities across multiple cultural and geographic contexts will further validate the proposed typology, refine evaluation instruments for intangible cultural values, and generate evidence-based policy recommendations for scaling local wisdom integration in national higher education frameworks.

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