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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Knowledge Management as a Strategy for Enhancing Competitiveness in Islamic Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze knowledge management as a strategy for enhancing competitiveness in Islamic higher education. The study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation involving institutional leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data credibility was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that knowledge management is implemented through five interconnected processes: knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge storage, knowledge utilization, and the transformation of knowledge into institutional capabilities. Knowledge creation is supported by research, academic discussions, and professional development, while knowledge sharing occurs through meetings, collaborative activities, and digital communication. Knowledge storage is increasingly supported by digital documentation, although institutional repositories remain partly fragmented. Knowledge utilization contributes to academic decision-making, curriculum development, service improvement, and institutional innovation. Overall, knowledge management contributes to institutional competitiveness through improvements in academic quality, research productivity, innovation, human resource development, and institutional adaptability. The study highlights that knowledge management should be positioned as a strategic institutional capability rather than merely an administrative or technological practice.

Keywords: Knowledge Management; Institutional Competitiveness; Islamic Higher Education; Knowledge Sharing; Organizational Learning.



ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis knowledge management sebagai strategi dalam meningkatkan daya saing perguruan tinggi Islam. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan pimpinan institusi, dosen, dan tenaga kependidikan. Data dianalisis melalui tahap kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sedangkan keabsahan data diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa knowledge management diimplementasikan melalui lima proses yang saling berkaitan, yaitu penciptaan pengetahuan, berbagi pengetahuan, penyimpanan pengetahuan, pemanfaatan pengetahuan, dan transformasi pengetahuan menjadi kapabilitas institusi. Penciptaan pengetahuan didukung oleh kegiatan penelitian, diskusi akademik, dan pengembangan profesional, sedangkan berbagi pengetahuan berlangsung melalui rapat, kegiatan kolaboratif, dan komunikasi digital. Penyimpanan pengetahuan semakin didukung oleh dokumentasi digital, meskipun repositori pengetahuan institusi masih belum sepenuhnya terintegrasi. Pemanfaatan pengetahuan berkontribusi terhadap pengambilan keputusan akademik, pengembangan kurikulum, peningkatan layanan, dan inovasi institusi. Secara keseluruhan, knowledge management berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan daya saing melalui peningkatan kualitas akademik, produktivitas penelitian, inovasi, pengembangan sumber daya manusia, dan kemampuan adaptasi institusi. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa knowledge management perlu ditempatkan sebagai kapabilitas strategis institusi, bukan sekadar praktik administratif atau teknologi

Kata Kunci: Manajemen Pengetahuan; Daya Saing Institusional; Perguruan Tinggi Islam; Berbagi Pengetahuan; Pembelajaran Organisasional.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions is increasingly determined not only by the availability of physical resources, but also by their ability to manage, develop, and utilize knowledge effectively. In the context of rapid technological change, globalization, and increasingly complex demands on higher education, Islamic universities are required to continuously improve the quality of academic services, research, human resources, and institutional governance (Haningsih et al., 2026; Kuswadi et al., 2026). Knowledge management (KM) provides a strategic framework for managing knowledge as an institutional asset through the processes of knowledge creation, acquisition, sharing, storage, and utilization. For Islamic higher education, the implementation of knowledge management is particularly important because institutional knowledge is not limited to academic knowledge, but also encompasses Islamic values, organizational experience, best practices, and the intellectual capacity of lecturers and educational staff. Effective knowledge management can therefore become a strategic instrument for strengthening institutional adaptability and competitiveness (Dinata Feri Riski et al., 2025; Kuswadi et al., 2026).

However, the implementation of knowledge management in Islamic higher education remains challenging. Knowledge is often distributed among individual lecturers, study programs, administrative units, and institutional leaders without being optimally integrated into an institutional knowledge system (Suparman, 2024). This condition may result in the repetition of

practices, limited knowledge sharing, dependence on individual expertise, and slow institutional responses to environmental changes. Moreover, previous studies have generally examined knowledge management in relation to organizational performance, innovation, or knowledge sharing, while research that specifically positions knowledge management as a strategic mechanism for enhancing competitiveness in Islamic higher education remains relatively limited. The specific relationship between knowledge management processes and the formation of institutional competitive advantage within the distinctive context of Islamic higher education also requires further empirical investigation.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze how knowledge management functions as a strategy for enhancing competitiveness in Islamic higher education. The study focuses on how institutions create, share, preserve, and utilize knowledge to support academic quality, innovation, institutional decision-making, and organizational adaptability. The novelty of this research lies in positioning knowledge management not merely as an administrative or technological practice, but as a strategic institutional capability that integrates human knowledge, organizational experience, digital resources, and Islamic values to build sustainable competitiveness. Thus, this study is expected to contribute a more contextual understanding of how Islamic higher education institutions can transform knowledge into a strategic resource for achieving institutional excellence and responding to the changing higher education environment.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to examine knowledge management as a strategy for enhancing competitiveness in Islamic higher education. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand in depth how knowledge is created, shared, managed, and utilized within the institutional context, as well as how these processes contribute to institutional competitiveness (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at an Islamic higher education institution that had developed various academic, administrative, and digital initiatives related to knowledge management. The research setting was selected purposively based on its relevance to the research focus and its efforts to strengthen institutional quality and competitiveness through knowledge-based practices.

Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with institutional leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff who were directly involved in academic management, institutional development, research, and knowledge-sharing activities. Interviews explored the processes of knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge storage, and knowledge utilization, as well as their contribution to institutional innovation and competitiveness. In addition, observations were conducted to examine knowledge management practices in academic and administrative activities. Documentation was used to complement interview and observation data, including institutional policies, strategic plans, academic programs, research and publication records, digital platforms, and other relevant institutional documents.

The data were analyzed interactively through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview and observation data were organized according to the main dimensions of

knowledge management and institutional competitiveness, while relevant documentary evidence was used to strengthen the interpretation of field findings. The analysis focused on identifying patterns concerning how institutional knowledge is generated, transferred, documented, and transformed into organizational capabilities. Particular attention was given to the relationship between knowledge management practices and indicators of competitiveness, such as academic quality, innovation, research productivity, human resource development, digital adaptability, and institutional reputation (Creswell, 2023).

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study employed source and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff and by comparing interview findings with observations and documentary evidence. Member checking was also conducted by confirming important interpretations with selected informants. Through these procedures, the study sought to produce a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of knowledge management as a strategic mechanism for strengthening competitiveness in Islamic higher education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that knowledge management has become an increasingly important component in strengthening the competitiveness of Islamic higher education. The results were obtained through interviews with institutional leaders, lecturers, and administrative staff, supported by observations of academic and administrative activities and an examination of relevant institutional documents. The findings are presented descriptively according to the main practices of knowledge management and their contribution to institutional competitiveness, without entering into theoretical discussion.

The first finding concerns the process of knowledge creation through research, academic discussions, training, and institutional development activities. The institution provides opportunities for lecturers and academic staff to develop new knowledge through research projects, seminars, workshops, curriculum development, and collaborative academic activities. Knowledge creation is not limited to individual academic activities but is gradually directed toward supporting institutional programs.

An institutional leader explained:

“We encourage lecturers not only to conduct research for publication, but also to make the results useful for developing study programs and improving academic services.”

A lecturer similarly stated:

“After conducting research, we usually discuss the findings with colleagues, especially when the research is related to learning or curriculum development. Sometimes the results become input for improving our teaching.”

Observation note: During the observation, academic discussions and informal exchanges among lecturers were found to take place before and after teaching activities. Several lecturers were also observed discussing research findings, teaching strategies, and academic program development with colleagues.

Documentation note: Institutional documents showed the existence of research programs, lecturer development activities, academic meetings, and research-related outputs. Research and academic activity records indicated that knowledge creation was supported through formal institutional programs.

Finding: These data indicate that knowledge creation occurs through a combination of formal academic programs and informal interactions among academic personnel. Research and professional development activities serve as important sources for generating new institutional knowledge.

The second finding relates to knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing takes place through meetings, academic discussions, workshops, research collaboration, and digital communication platforms. The institution has encouraged lecturers and staff to share experiences, teaching materials, research information, and administrative practices.

One lecturer stated:

“Knowledge sharing usually happens through meetings and WhatsApp groups. If there is new information about research, accreditation, or teaching, we share it with other lecturers.”

An administrator added:

“When there is a new administrative procedure, we usually explain it to the staff first. This makes it easier for everyone to follow the same procedure.”

Observation note: The observation identified several forms of knowledge exchange, including meetings between lecturers, communication through institutional digital groups, and coordination between academic and administrative units. Information was frequently exchanged when institutional programs or academic activities were being prepared.

Documentation note: Institutional meeting minutes, internal announcements, training materials, and digital communication records demonstrated that knowledge and institutional information were distributed among relevant personnel.

Finding: Knowledge sharing has developed through both formal and informal mechanisms. However, the process is still strongly dependent on communication among individuals and work units, particularly through meetings and digital communication channels.

The third finding concerns the storage and documentation of institutional knowledge. The institution has begun to document academic, administrative, research, and organizational information in digital and physical formats. Important documents include curriculum documents, research reports, meeting minutes, academic guidelines, institutional policies, and administrative records.

An administrative staff member explained:

“We try to keep important documents in digital folders so that they can be accessed again when needed. Previously, some documents were only stored by individuals, but now we are trying to organize them institutionally.”

A lecturer also noted:

“For teaching and research documents, we have our own files. Some are already shared digitally, although not everything is in one institutional database.”

Observation note: Digital folders and institutional document repositories were observed to be used for storing academic and administrative documents. At the same time, several documents were still found to be stored separately by individual units or personnel.

Documentation note: The documents examined included strategic planning documents, academic guidelines, research reports, meeting records, curriculum documents, and administrative files. The documentation showed that institutional knowledge was increasingly being recorded, although the storage system was not yet completely integrated.

Finding: Knowledge storage has moved toward digital documentation, but institutional knowledge repositories remain partially fragmented. Some knowledge is already institutionalized through formal documents, while other knowledge remains attached to individuals or specific work units.

The fourth finding shows that institutional knowledge is utilized to support decision-making, academic improvement, curriculum development, research activities, and administrative services. Knowledge obtained from research, meetings, training, and institutional experience is used as consideration in planning and implementing various programs.

An institutional leader stated:

“Before making a program, we usually look at previous experiences, research results, and input from lecturers. These become references for deciding what needs to be improved.”

Another lecturer explained:

“The results of discussions and training are often applied in teaching. We try to adapt what we learn to the needs of our students.”

Observation note: The application of institutional knowledge was observed in academic planning, teaching practices, administrative coordination, and the preparation of institutional programs. Several activities showed that previous experiences and information were considered when making decisions.

Documentation note: Strategic plans, program reports, curriculum documents, and activity evaluations contained evidence of the use of previous institutional experiences and academic information in planning and evaluating programs.

Finding: Knowledge is not only collected and shared but is also used as an input for institutional decision-making and academic improvement. The utilization process is visible in program planning, teaching practices, curriculum development, and administrative improvement.

The fifth finding concerns the relationship between knowledge management practices and institutional competitiveness. The data indicate that knowledge management contributes to institutional competitiveness through improvements in academic quality, research productivity, innovation, human resource development, and institutional responsiveness to changes in higher education.

A senior institutional manager stated:

“Our competitiveness depends on how quickly we can learn and improve. If lecturers and staff continue to develop their knowledge, the institution will also be able to improve its programs.”

A lecturer similarly stated:

“Competition between universities is getting stronger. We have to improve our teaching, research, publications, and services. Sharing knowledge among lecturers helps us do that.”

Observation note: Institutional efforts to improve competitiveness were visible through academic development activities, research and publication initiatives, lecturer training, curriculum improvement, and the use of digital platforms to support academic and administrative services.

Documentation note: Institutional documents showed various indicators related to competitiveness, including academic programs, lecturer development activities, research and publication outputs, curriculum development, digital service initiatives, and institutional quality improvement programs.

Finding: The findings show that knowledge management functions as an institutional process that supports competitiveness. The contribution is particularly visible through the development of human resources, improvement of academic services, strengthening of research activities, adoption of new practices, and increased institutional capacity to respond to environmental changes.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that knowledge management in Islamic higher education operates through five interconnected processes: knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge storage, knowledge utilization, and the transformation of knowledge into institutional capabilities. These processes demonstrate that knowledge is not merely an individual academic asset but has become an organizational resource that can support institutional development and competitiveness. This finding is consistent with the knowledge management perspective of Nonaka and Takeuchi, particularly the SECI model, which emphasizes that organizational knowledge develops through continuous interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. Research activities, academic discussions, training, and professional experiences represent important spaces for converting individual knowledge into shared institutional knowledge.

The finding regarding knowledge creation is also relevant to the concept of knowledge-based view, which places knowledge as a strategic resource for creating organizational advantage. In the context of Islamic higher education, lecturers' research experiences, pedagogical knowledge, and institutional experiences constitute valuable resources that can be transformed into academic innovation. This is in line with previous studies showing that knowledge management contributes to organizational innovation and performance because institutions that are capable of generating and developing knowledge tend to be more adaptive to environmental changes. Thus, the research findings strengthen the argument that continuous knowledge creation is an important foundation for institutional competitiveness.

Knowledge sharing emerged as another important finding. The study shows that meetings, academic discussions, collaborative research, and digital communication facilitate the transfer of

knowledge among lecturers and staff. This can be explained through organizational learning theory, which emphasizes that institutional learning occurs when individual knowledge is shared, interpreted, and incorporated into collective practices. Previous research on knowledge management in higher education similarly demonstrates that knowledge-sharing practices can strengthen collaboration, innovation, and organizational performance. However, the present findings also reveal that knowledge sharing remains partly dependent on informal communication and individual initiatives. This indicates that Islamic higher education institutions need to move from interpersonal knowledge sharing toward more systematic institutional mechanisms.

The findings concerning knowledge storage and utilization further demonstrate the importance of institutionalizing knowledge. Digital documentation, research repositories, academic guidelines, and institutional records enable knowledge to remain accessible beyond the individuals who initially produced it. This corresponds with knowledge management theory, which views organizational memory as an important mechanism for preserving knowledge and facilitating its reuse. Previous studies have also found that effective knowledge storage and retrieval can improve organizational decision-making and reduce the loss of knowledge when personnel change. In this study, however, fragmented repositories indicate that institutional knowledge has not yet been fully integrated, which may limit the effectiveness of knowledge utilization.

Most importantly, the findings show that knowledge management contributes to competitiveness through academic quality improvement, research productivity, innovation, human resource development, and institutional adaptability. This finding supports the knowledge-based view of the firm, which argues that sustainable advantage is derived from valuable and difficult-to-imitate knowledge resources and capabilities. Although this perspective was initially developed in the organizational and business context, its principles are relevant to higher education because universities depend heavily on intellectual capital, expertise, innovation, and organizational learning. Previous higher education studies have similarly reported positive relationships between knowledge management, innovation, organizational performance, and competitive advantage. The present study extends these findings by placing the discussion specifically within Islamic higher education, where knowledge management also interacts with institutional values, academic traditions, and the mission of Islamic education.

Overall, the study suggests that knowledge management should not be understood merely as the use of digital systems or the documentation of institutional information. Rather, it represents a strategic organizational capability through which individual expertise is transformed into collective institutional knowledge and subsequently utilized to improve quality and competitiveness. The distinctive contribution of this study lies in highlighting the importance of integrating human knowledge, collaborative learning, digital documentation, and institutional experience within the context of Islamic higher education. Nevertheless, the finding that several knowledge management practices remain fragmented indicates the need for stronger institutional governance and an integrated knowledge management system to ensure that knowledge can continuously generate institutional value.

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