



Creating A Sustained Competitive Advantage at Nusaputera 1 Vocational High School Using a Phenomenology Theory Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategies implemented by SMK Nusaputera 1 to create and sustain a competitive advantage, with a particular focus on the Resource-Based Theory (RBT) approach. RBT emphasizes the importance of leveraging unique internal resources—such as high-quality teaching staff, relevant curriculum, adequate facilities, and strong industry relationships—that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these resources can be effectively managed and developed to enhance the school's competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic educational environment. Furthermore, the study identifies key areas for strategic improvement, including curriculum innovation aligned with industry standards, continuous professional development for teachers, and robust collaboration with external stakeholders such as universities and industry partners. By focusing on these areas, SMK Nusaputera 1 can strengthen its position as a leading vocational institution, offering students the skills and competencies required in the modern workforce. The findings of this research are intended not only to guide SMK Nusaputera 1 but also to serve as a valuable reference for other vocational schools in Indonesia, highlighting the critical role of dynamic capabilities and resource management in achieving long-term, sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords : Sustained Competitive Advantage, Resource-Based Theory, Strategic Management, Internal Resources, VRIN Criteria.

Introduction

Vocational High School (SMK) Nusaputera 1 is one of the vocational schools that focuses on developing technical and vocational skills for its students. In recent years, this school has faced a significant challenge in the form of rising school fees. Despite this, the intake of new students has remained high, indicating that the school has managed to maintain its appeal to prospective students and their parents. In this context, this research aims to explore the strategies implemented by SMK Nusaputera 1 to create and sustain a competitive advantage.

The Resource-Based Theory (RBT) approach is used as the main theoretical framework in this research. RBT, introduced by Barney (1991), focuses on the utilization of an organization's internal resources to create a competitive advantage. According to this theory, organizations that possess valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources can achieve and maintain a competitive advantage. In the context of SMK Nusaputera 1, these resources could include the quality of teachers, a curriculum relevant to industry needs, adequate facilities, and a good reputation in the community. Therefore, the school's strategic plan is crucial in winning competition among schools and improving the quality and professionalism of school management (Wijaya, 2008). Thus, a strategic school plan is important to guide better change and reduce future uncertainty.

A dynamic school must continuously adapt to changes in the environment and increasing challenges (Putra, 2012). To achieve a productive, enjoyable, and competitive school life, innovation in strategic planning is required (Porter, 2007; Rangkuti, 2013; Putra, 2012). Strategic planning is a framework created by schools to direct choices and actions in achieving high goals and performance that are in line with the existing resources and challenges faced by the school (Barney, 2007; Akdon, 2006).

The school principal is responsible for formulating the right strategy to achieve the school's competitive advantage. This strategy determines the future success or failure of the school (Akdon, 2006). School strategic planning can be done by analyzing the school's internal resources and identifying the school's strengths and weaknesses (Wandrial, 2011). The concept of competitive advantage based on a resource-based view sees the organization as unique because it is surrounded by various resources and capabilities (Barney, 2007). The resources owned by the company are far more important than the industry structure in achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage. This approach views the organization as an asset or resource and capability that must be developed to create an advantage that is difficult for competitors to replicate (Kuncoro, 2006).

Resource-based management is an alternative solution for an organization, including a school organization. This can help organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage through unique resources (Anatan & Ellitan, 2009). Resource-Based Theory (RBT) directs management to identify, master, and develop strategic resources to achieve optimal performance (Barney & Hesterly, 2008).

Research by Priem and Butler (2001) emphasizes the importance of understanding how internal resources can be transformed into capabilities that generate competitive advantage. In this regard, SMK Nusaputera 1 must be able to identify and develop its resources to remain relevant and competitive in the increasingly dynamic education market. One strategy that can be applied is the development of an industry-based curriculum, which allows students to acquire skills that meet market demands.

Grant's (2016) study highlights that success in creating a sustainable competitive advantage also depends on the organization's ability to manage and utilize resources efficiently, including good financial management, the use of technology in the learning process, and improving the quality of educational services. SMK Nusaputera 1 needs to ensure that every resource it has is optimally used to support the teaching and learning process and meet the expectations of students and parents.

Finally, research by Barney and Hesterly (2019) suggests that success in creating a competitive advantage also depends on the organization's ability to build a culture that supports continuous innovation and learning. SMK Nusaputera 1 must create an environment that encourages collaboration, creativity, and continuous quality improvement among teachers and students.

The challenge of determining the right strategy to maintain the school's existence is strongly felt by SMK Nusaputera 1. In addressing this challenge, this research will identify strategies that can be applied based on the RBT and dynamic capabilities approaches. By combining these theoretical perspectives, this study aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the strategies that can be implemented by SMK Nusaputera 1 to create and sustain a competitive advantage. The findings from this research are expected to serve as a guide for other schools facing similar challenges and to improve the quality of vocational education in Indonesia.

In the context of the challenges in attracting new students each year, the previous efforts mentioned are still not sufficient to create a competitive advantage for the school, where the number of new students remains high, fluctuates, and even declines. The data on new student intake at SMK Nusaputera 1 is shown in the following table:

Table 1 - Admission And Graduation Data.

Academic Year	Number of TKJ Students	Number of Multimedia Students	Graduates	Number of Students in Grades 10 & 11	Total Students	Percentage of Students Enrolled (%)
2016/2017	28	-	30	93	121	23.1
2017/2018	28	-	30	91	119	23.5
2018/2019	28	-	30	89	119	23.9
2019/2020	30	20	28	89	140	35.7
2020/2021	41	55	28	112	208	46.1
2021/2022	32	42	50	158	232	31.8
2022/2023	29	40	91	141	210	32.8

According to Table 1, there has been an increase in student numbers due to the introduction of a new program, Multimedia, as the Computer Network Engineering program has reached saturation. During the first two years of the new program, tuition fees were still at a promotional rate of IDR 300,000. In the third year, price adjustments were made. Additionally, SMK Nusaputera 1 implemented flagship programs that gave the school a competitive edge over others.

SMK Nusaputera 1 faces issues with fluctuating student intake, in line with David's (2010) thinking that a strategic plan is essential in encouraging organizations to commit to products, resources, and technology over a long period, and in determining long-term competitive advantage. A principal must be able to formulate a strategic plan that includes developing a vision, mission, identifying external opportunities and threats, being aware of internal strengths and weaknesses, setting long-term goals, searching for alternative strategies, and selecting specific strategies to achieve the school's goals. To address these issues, research titled "Resource-Based Theory (RBT) Strategy at SMK Nusaputera 1" was conducted.

The school needs a sound strategy with a well-conceived and structured school strategic plan to address the issues that arise each year. Currently, SMK Nusaputera 1's strategy is still limited to the principal's thinking. An organization can function well if there is good coordination among its members, working together to resolve issues, especially in this era of rapid change, which requires accurate and swift strategies. SMK Nusaputera 1 is currently inconsistent in implementing its strategies year after year, with poor coordination within the institution. The school is now beginning to restructure its strategic plan, starting with an internal analysis to address the issues where the realization deviated from the jointly planned strategy, with the hope that this research can assist before proceeding to an external analysis. Despite the intense competition among schools, SMK Nusaputera 1 has managed to maintain its student numbers by optimizing its resources through the Resource-Based Theory concept, which is expected to enhance its competitiveness and become a strength for SMK Nusaputera 1.

Literature Review

The provided research leverages Resource Based Theory (RBT) to examine the strategic management of resources as a means to establish a competitive position for SMK Nusaputera 1. RBT posits that a firm's unique bundle of resources and capabilities forms the basis of its competitive advantage. Unlike the earlier market-based view, which focused on external industry analysis, RBT emphasizes the internal resources and capabilities of a firm. This shift in perspective is grounded in the recognition that a firm's unique assets, such as human capital, knowledge, and technology, can serve as a sustainable source of competitive advantage when they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable.

The study delves into the various types of resources, including tangible and intangible assets, and their role in creating value. Tangible assets such as physical facilities and equipment, while essential, are often easier for competitors to imitate. Intangible assets, such as brand reputation, organizational culture, and intellectual property, are more difficult to replicate and can provide a more sustainable competitive advantage. The research also explores the concept of resource heterogeneity, suggesting that firms differ in their resource endowments, and that these differences can lead to variations in performance. By effectively managing and leveraging its unique resources, a firm can establish a distinctive position in the market and outperform its competitors.

Analysis And Discussion Results

This thesis research employs a qualitative approach, a strategy and technique used to understand societal phenomena, issues, or phenomena by gathering in-depth factual data, which is presented verbally rather than numerically. This approach was chosen because the subject of this thesis is the role of the Principal of SMK Nusaputera 1 in strategic decision-making for enhancing the school's excellence in Semarang. The qualitative approach is fitting as it allows for a narrative description of the role, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

The research is categorized as a single case study, focusing on one complex case, such as an individual, group, organization, or event, with the aim of gaining a deep and holistic understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. This approach emphasizes a thorough understanding of the case, including its context, influencing factors, and interactions among its various elements. The research employs qualitative methods, including observation, interviews, and document analysis, to collect descriptive data and identify emerging patterns and themes.

In conducting the research, the researcher uses triangulation to enhance data validity. This triangulation involves using multiple data sources, methods, and time points to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon and ensure data accuracy. The qualitative data analysis involves data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing to systematically organize and evaluate the collected data.

The study also incorporates a phenomenological approach, focusing on exploring the structure of consciousness and subjective experiences of individuals. Phenomenology emphasizes the interpretation and understanding of personal experiences, aligning with the research's goal of understanding the meanings from the participants' perspectives. Through in-depth interviews and observations, the researcher explores participants' perceptions and interpretations related to the Principal's role in strategic decision-making.

Data sources for this research include primary data obtained directly from the field through interviews and observations, and secondary data from documents and relevant literature. Primary data encompasses information from key informants such as the Principal, Curriculum Vice Principal, and Head of the Competency Program, while secondary data consists of administrative documents and reports. The use of both data types aims to enrich the analysis and support the research findings.

Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the Principal's role in the competitive strategy of SMK Nusaputera 1 in Semarang. By applying qualitative methods and triangulation, the researcher provides comprehensive insights into how strategic policies and decisions are implemented to enhance educational quality and attract student interest.

Conclusion

The application of Resource-Based Theory (RBT) at SMK Nusaputera 1 revolves around leveraging internal resources to gain a competitive advantage in education. This theory emphasizes that a school's success hinges on its ability to effectively manage and combine its internal resources—human, physical, and organizational—to enhance productivity, create cohesiveness, and build a strong reputation for long-term profitability. At SMK Nusaputera 1, this involves enhancing teacher skills, optimizing resources, and refining learning processes to improve competitiveness and add value for students. The internal resources include skilled human resources, well-maintained physical assets, and effective organizational structures, all of which contribute to a well-rounded educational experience.

The school's approach to resource management includes several strategic actions. For human resources, SMK Nusaputera 1 focuses on recruiting qualified educators, providing continuous training, and fostering a collaborative work environment to maximize teaching effectiveness. Physical resources, such as classrooms and laboratories, are meticulously maintained and updated to support educational activities. Additionally, the organization employs strategic planning for student recruitment and curriculum development to ensure alignment with industry standards and emerging educational needs. This includes cooperation with universities and industry partners to enhance the relevance of the curriculum and improve the school's overall performance.

Incorporating RBT principles, SMK Nusaputera 1 not only improves its educational offerings but also enhances its competitive positioning in the vocational education sector. By adopting innovative teaching methods, engaging in industry collaborations, and continuously refining its resources and strategies, the school builds a distinctive competitive edge. This approach ensures that the institution remains adaptable to technological advancements and industry requirements, thereby producing graduates who are well-prepared for the global job market and maintaining a robust reputation in the education sector.

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