INNOVATIVE CHANGE STRATEGIES FOR EXCELLENCE IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM INDONESIA AND THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the pivotal role of institutional management in facilitating changes crucial for the advancement of Islamic educational institutions amidst escalating global competition. The purpose of the study is to examine how Indonesian Islamic High School IIHS in Indonesia and Bamrung Muslimin High School (BMHS) in Thailand transformed into internationally renowned centers of excellence. Employing a multi-site qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, the study utilizes Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's interactive analytical method. The research underscores three pivotal stages of change management—selection, trajectory, and implementation—that significantly enhance the schools' competitiveness in terms of student performance, faculty, curriculum, and overall quality. The study highlights the imperative of adeptly managing change as a linchpin for these institutions' innovative adaptation, thereby bolstering their capacity to navigate the evolving landscape of national and global educational competition. Ultimately, this study underscores the critical importance of strategic change management in fostering innovation and competitiveness within Islamic education, offering insights into navigating contemporary challenges.

Keywords**:** Change Management, Global Competitiveness, Institutional Innovation, Islamic High School

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, educational institutions encounter unprecedented challenges and opportunities driven by technological advancements, shifting societal needs, and increasing competition (Haddade, et al., 2024). Digital revolution has transformed how knowledge is accessed, disseminated, and consumed, necessitating that schools integrate advanced technologies into their curricula to stay relevant (Tiwari, et al., 2023). At the same time, societal changes, such as increased emphasis on inclusivity and personalized learning, require educational institutions to adapt their teaching methods and administrative practices. Furthermore, the globalization of education has intensified competition, with institutions worldwide vying to attract the best students and faculty, often leading to a race for innovation and excellence.

Education stands as the cornerstone of progressive civilizations, profoundly shaped by the currents of global transformation. Efe (2018) underscores that it is a fundamental necessity for humanity's journey towards continuous advancement. Education fosters a dynamic mindset, prompting individuals to engage in perpetual self-improvement and contribute to the evolution of their surroundings. In tandem with the ever-evolving landscape of technology and societal dynamics, education exhibits remarkable flexibility in adapting to diverse societal demands and aspirations (Ekpenyong et al., 2020). This adaptability ensures that education remains relevant and effective in addressing the needs of society.

As emphasized by Amos et al. (2021), education must pivot towards a future-oriented trajectory to remain competitive in the global arena. This imperative underscore the necessity for educational institutions to not only anticipate but also adeptly respond to forthcoming shifts in societal paradigms. Consequently, educational strategies must be forward-thinking, envisaging future trends and devising proactive measures to harness sustainable changes while mitigating adverse impacts (Boakye & Ampiah, 2017). Thus, education emerges as both a catalyst and a compass, guiding societies towards resilience, innovation, and prosperity in an era characterized by relentless change.

Education, as it evolves, inherently undergoes a series of transformations—a natural progression that manifests both consciously and unconsciously, directly or indirectly, and in planned or unplanned manners (Bustari, 2020). As succinctly put by Bairizki (2021), nothing remains static in our world; change is its only constant. Amidst this dynamic backdrop, a notable trend emerges: an increasing emphasis on educational internationalization, propelled by the demands and imperatives of implementing standardized curricula on a global scale (Beare et al., 2018; Sutrisno, 2020). This evolution reflects a strategic orientation aimed at expanding the educational market share and fostering a broader global reach.

Despite extensive research on educational transformation, a notable gap remains in understanding the role of change management in educational settings. Most studies have focused on principal leadership, quality assurance systems, and character education (Ahmad, 2014; Amanchukwu & Ololube, 2015; Bafadal et al., 2020; Bustari, 2020; Hifza et al., 2020; Lubis et al., 2022; Manan, 2014; Muslim & Kawakip, 2022; Rahayu et al., 2021; Schwartz, 2020; Thoyib, 2022; Umasugi & Djibat, 2020). However, the exploration of how change management strategies can be effectively implemented to navigate the complexities of educational change is limited. This study has investigated the specific change management practices employed in educational institutions to foster resilience and adaptability amidst dynamic global transformations. This study is expected to provide insights into how educational institutions can implement strategic change management practices to enhance their responsiveness and competitiveness in an ever-changing global landscape.

METHOD

This research utilized a descriptive qualitative approach with a multi-site study design to explore specific phenomena or cases, gathering detailed and in-depth information. This approach is well-suited for examining realistic conditions within educational institutions (Manab, 2016). The study was conducted at SMA IIHS (International Islamic High School) in Bekasi, Indonesia, and BMHS (Bamrung Muslimin High School) in Pattani, Thailand. Data collection involved three primary methods: in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Ten informants were selected from key stakeholders at both schools, including school administrators, teachers, and students, to provide a diverse range of perspectives on the research topics.

The data analysis followed the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). This model consists of four stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. These stages ensure a systematic and thorough examination of the collected data. In the first stage, data collection, comprehensive information was gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The second stage, data condensation, involved organizing and summarizing the data to identify key themes and patterns. In the third stage, data display, the condensed data was presented in an organized manner, facilitating easier analysis and interpretation. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, insights were synthesized to form comprehensive conclusions about the role of change management in fostering excellence within the studied Islamic educational settings. By employing this rigorous analytical

framework, the study aimed to generate comprehensive insights into how change management practices are implemented and their impact on educational excellence in the context of Islamic schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the importance of designing and implementing changes at IIHS, Bekasi, Indonesia, and BMHS, Pattani, Thailand, to achieve excellence as Islamic schools with an international perspective. Based on the data collected, the study confirms four key findings: the choice process, the trajectory process, the change process, and the implications of change management for institutional excellence at these schools. These findings will be discussed alongside relevant literature to assess their contributions to the scientific understanding and potential benefits for Islamic educational institutions nationally and globally.

Managing Choice for Process of Change at IIHS and BMHS

IIHS and BMHS have undergone change both challenges and opportunities with potential positive and negative impacts in their organizational development. The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, drastically affected the education sector, shifting traditional face-to-face learning to online and blended formats. In that context, what has been conducted by IIHS in Indonesia and BMHS in Thailand through various activities and measurable targets is a comprehensive and strategic effort. In facing the potentials of change and global education competition that is so fast, the two excellent Islamic schools are also trying to improve the ability of their institutions to adapt to environmental changes.

The existence of conditions of sudden environmental changes and without preparation, causes the importance of caution in making decisions and determining policies (Nursaid, 2020; Hashim, 2015). Thus, an appropriate approach is needed and in accordance with the conditions faced by the two international standard Islamic schools addressing these changes requires effective change management to find organized and appropriate solutions (Levy, 2017). Managing the impact of these changes helps to understand them fully and determine the best responses (Hidayat & Ibrahim, 2021; Johansson et al., 2009). In the current reality, change is a transformation from the present state to a different future state (Ekpenyong & Enoh Bassey, 2020). This process can be conscious or unconscious, direct or indirect, and planned or unplanned. While change can bring improvements, it can also pose significant challenges for educational institutions (Pounder & Peter Stoffell, 2019).

Based on the research results, both IIHS and BMHS have adopted an approach that involves understanding their institutions' strengths and weaknesses to analyze the conditions of change. Their approach includes identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) they will face in the future. The analysis reveals that both schools effectively use SWOT analysis as their primary method, considering it the most effective and efficient approach. This aligns with the first element in the choice process of change, which is the organizational context (Ravitch & Stoehr, 2018).

In its implementation, the SWOT analysis enables SMA IIHS in Indonesia and Bamrung Muslimin High School in Thailand to comprehend their strengths and weaknesses in navigating various changes and accompanying threats. This understanding helps them identify opportunities to maintain their image as leading international standard Islamic schools. According to Boakye & Ampiah (2017), addressing these challenges involves recognizing available opportunities and focusing on specific problem areas as primary targets. The suggestion that educational activities should be blended highlights the need for all school members to understand and master technology. Thus, the focus of change for both IIHS and BMHS is on adapting to Information Technology (IT). This focus aligns with the second element of change management, which asserts that an organization is successful if it

concentrates on a narrow range of short, medium, and long-term issues (Bairizki, 2021; Fryer et al., 2014).

The IT adaptations carried out by IIHS and BMHS encompass several key initiatives. Firstly, both schools utilize Learning Management Systems (LMS) as a fundamental component of their online learning activities. These LMS platforms include applications such as WhatsApp, E-Learning, Google Classroom, Zoom, and Google Meet, which are considered highly effective tools. Notably, IIHS has used these applications to maintain continuity in its international programs with countries like Canada, New Zealand, France, and Australia during the Covid-19 pandemic (Budi Utomo, personal communication, September 2022). Secondly, both schools provide guidance for teachers on using IT effectively. This support includes continuous and simultaneous consultation and coaching from the curriculum and IT teams. IIHS primarily relies on internal experts for IT counseling, whereas BMHS partners with an external IT expert consultant with national credibility in the field of educational IT development and utilization (Satopa Puteh, personal communication, July 2022).

In responding to current changes, IIHS and BMHS have made several strategic adjustments tailored to their specific needs and conditions. Research data indicates that every policy and decision taken by these international standard Islamic schools in dealing with change is made through a process of deliberation. This deliberation involves all school members, including school leaders, both the principal and vice principal, teacher representatives, and administrative employees. Additionally, BMHS involves external parties, such as national education and IT expert consultants, as institutional partners (Satopa Puteh, personal communication, July 2022). This approach aligns with the third element of the choice process, known as organizational trajectory. The schematic representation of the change selection process undertaken by IIHS and BMHS is illustrated in Figure 1.
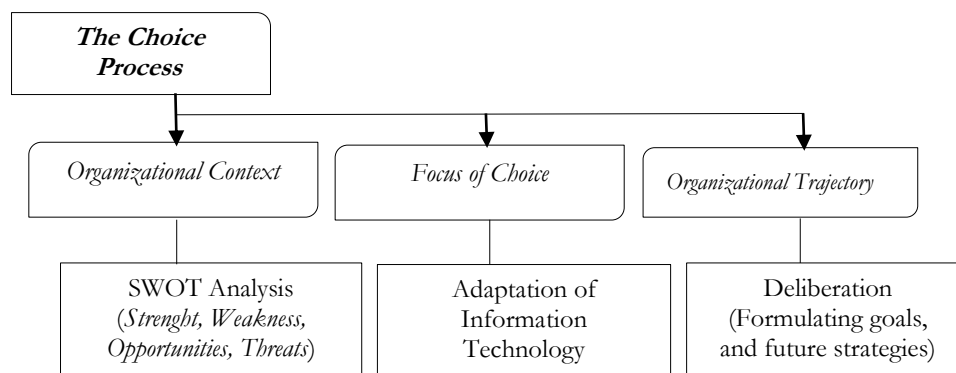

Figure 1. The Choice Process of Change in IIHS and BMHS

Managing Trajectory Process of Change at IIHS and BMHS

Research at IIHS and BMHS shows that their visions drive decision-making and activities. At IIHS, the vision is "M-PIIIASR: Building International Islamic Education based on the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah Rasulullah SAW to uphold human existence as Khalifatullah Fil Ardh." BMHS's vision is "RIEC: Religious, Integrity, Excellent, Competitive." According to Burnes' change management model, the second stage, the trajectory process, describes how an organization's past informs its future direction. This is evident in the schools' visions, aims, and objectives (Bairizki, 2021).

The clear vision of the two excellent Islamic schools is intended to be easily memorized and implemented by all school members. The visions of M-PIIIASR and RIEC are translated into the missions and objectives that guide these schools forward. This strong directional foundation has enabled IIHS and BMHS to withstand intense global competition and the

challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. This aligns with the concept of vision as an idealization of future organizational goals, which is crucial for driving change in excellent educational institutions (Lubis et al., 2022; Gayef, 2014).

The existence of a strategy is the second element of change in the trajectory process. Both IIHS and BMHS have implemented four stages of the management process, known as POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling), within a dynamic controlled system. Planning involves stakeholders at IIHS and BMHS adjusting policies according to existing regulations and technical guidelines. The key difference in current planning is the flexibility to conduct activities offline, online via Zoom, or through blended learning approaches. Organizing entails optimizing roles according to respective fields. The principals of these schools use media applications like WhatsApp, Zoom, and their LMS pages to arrange and direct activities. Actuating focuses on directing and motivating teachers based on the M-PIIIASR and RIEC visions to increase commitment and maintain their status as international standard Islamic schools. Controlling involves monthly supervision by the principals and supervision teams to assess teacher and institutional performance. This will support their professional development (Ekawati et al., 2022.) This integrated oversight ensures continuous improvement in line with the schools' visions (Sani & Anwar, 2020). Effective change, as highlighted by Schwartz (2020) and Tan & Dimmock (2014), requires a quality school management strategy that is built and developed to maintain and enhance the achievements of these excellent schools.

The key distinction between educational and managerial activities during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods lies in the optimal use of technology in various activities. To adapt to limited offline social interaction, both IIHS and BMHS have implemented a blended learning interaction system. This approach adjusts the implementation of educational activities to policies and field conditions in a controlled manner. In essence, the trajectory process of change at these two excellent Islamic schools involves leveraging technology to maintain and enhance their educational standards. This process is illustrated in Figure 2.
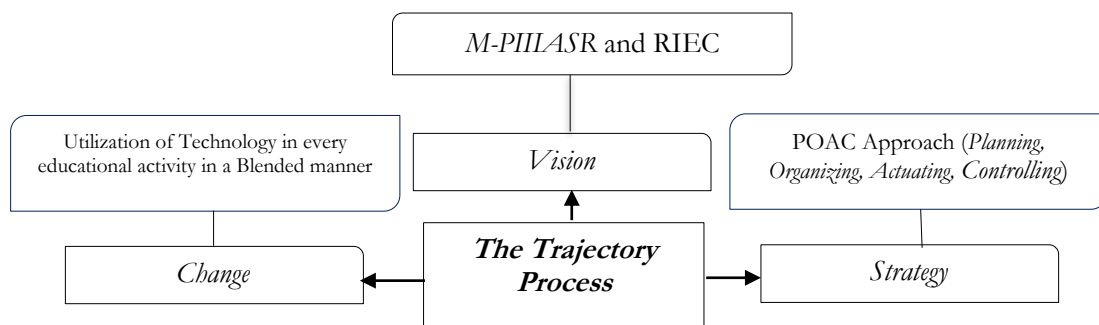
Figure 2. *The Trajectory Process* of Change in IIHS and BMHS

Managing Change Process at IIHS and BMHS

Both IIHS and BMHS have made various changes and adjustments to maintain their status as international standard Islamic schools. These changes encompass approaches to achieve transformation through inputs, processes, and outputs. The change process represents the third stage of change management, which these schools have undertaken to sustain their existence and achievements amidst increasing global competition. Currently, the focus is on the approaches or mechanisms used to implement change (Bairizki, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2021). These efforts largely involve leveraging technology to adapt and enhance IT quality (Muslim & Kawakip, 2022; H. E Mihrez & Thoyib, 2014).

First, the input approach involves several key changes implemented by the two Islamic schools. (1) Socialization, a mandatory agenda before the start of the new school year, is conducted both online and offline. The use of social media platforms such as Instagram, the

school's website, and E-PTSP has increased for reporting school activities to the community and enhancing school branding. (2) The student team contributes significantly by organizing activities like the School Ball Invitation (SBI) and the National Language and Writing Competition (NLWC). Participants in these events have the opportunity to be admitted directly as students at IIHS and BMHS without needing to take an entrance test. (3) New student admissions are conducted both online and offline, ensuring optimal service for prospective students enrolling in these excellent Islamic schools (Azhar Amin, personal communication, September 2022; Satopa Puteh, personal communication, July 2022).

Second, the process approach aims to provide the best educational services at these two excellent Islamic schools through various initiatives. (1) Innovation in learning activities includes the use of e-learning platforms, Zoom, Google Meet, LMS, and blended learning techniques. (2) Collaboration with the Ministry of Communication helps provide free data packages to students, addressing the issue of limited internet access. (3) Focus on achievement development is maintained through online guidance in fields such as research. (4) Network enhancements involve upgrading intranets in regular classes and adding servers to expand connectivity. (5) Teacher coaching with HAFECS includes webinars and structured training to accelerate educational transformation. (6) The maintenance of the moving class innovation allows students to join specialization classes based on their interests and talents. These elective classes include options like olympic class, research, multimedia, fashion design, robotics, tahfidz, reading books, sports, and calligraphy (Budi Utomo, personal communication, September 2022; Hakim Pijee, personal communication, July 2022).

Third, the output approach ensures that graduates from IIHS and BMHS are well-prepared in both academic and non-academic fields. Data shows that students from these leading Islamic schools possess three types of intelligence, indicating the schools' success in nurturing well-rounded individuals. These intelligences are Spiritual Quotient (SQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ), and Intellectual Quotient (IQ). SQ is demonstrated by students' commitment to daily prayers and the integration of prayer into their learning routines. Additionally, prospective students are required to master reading, writing, and memorizing the Al-Qur'an. This balanced development of SQ, EQ, and IQ signifies the schools' effectiveness in fostering holistic growth.

In terms of Spiritual Quotient (SQ) and Emotional Quotient (EQ), both IIHS and BMHS strive to develop their students' emotional intelligence by instilling values such as integrity, honesty, commitment, vision, creativity, mental resilience, wisdom, fairness, and self-confidence. Regarding Intellectual Quotient (IQ), students at SMA IIHS and Bamrung Muslimin High School demonstrate strong cognitive and academic abilities, evidenced by their numerous national and international achievements. Additionally, graduates from these schools gain admission to prestigious universities worldwide, including institutions in Singapore, Australia, Egypt, Morocco, Canada, France, and the United States. In summary, the final stage of the change management process at these excellent Islamic schools involves the comprehensive development of SQ, EQ, and IQ, ensuring their students are well-equipped for future success. Prasetyo (2018) and Mintrom (2014) affirm these qualities as critical success factors in human life. Especially in today's competitive global landscape, students need to be resilient and adaptable to excel and achieve with high motivation (Prasetyo, 2018; Mintrom, 2014). Their school progression can be observed in Figure 3.
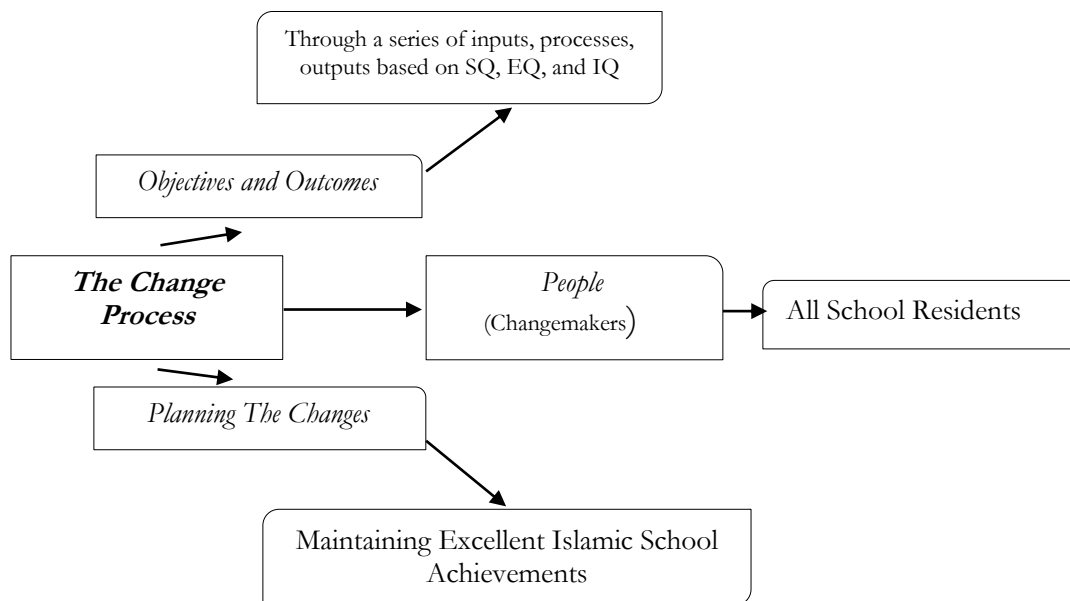
Figure 3. *The Change Process* in IIHS and BMHS

The Implication of Change Management at IIHS and BMHS

One indication of a school's excellence is its ability to achieve both national and international recognition (Bonsu, 2016; Manan, 2014). In this context, IIHS and BMHS both international standard Islamic schools, have consistently garnered accolades for their academic and non-academic achievements. These accomplishments are a result of effectively managing potential global changes. Anho (2018) notes that their strategic adaptation to various issues has enabled them to position themselves as leading Islamic schools, distinguished by their educational innovations.

Substantively and operationally, there are at least three aspects that highlight the implications of the change management strategy implemented by the two excellent Islamic schools. First, the implications for input include innovations in student and educator recruitment. During the pandemic, blended outreach efforts expanded the reach and information available to prospective students about SMA IIHS in Indonesia and Bamrung Muslimin High School in Thailand. Both schools offer various entry points and excellent class services to capture students' potential and interests, such as the School Football Competition (SFC) and the National Language and Writing Competition (NLWC). For teacher and education staff recruitment, both schools conduct rigorous selection processes focusing on scientific competence and mastery of international languages, particularly English and Arabic.

Second, the implications for the educational process aspect include educational facilities, the learning environment, curriculum, and learning processes. Both IIHS and BMHS excel in these areas. Achievements include high-quality digital-based learning facilities and infrastructure, the establishment of integrated digital libraries, and the implementation of E-PTSP (Electronic One-Stop Integrated Service), accessible online via their websites. The conducive learning environment at both schools supports the development of students' potential (Matthews, 2009). Thei higher order thinking can be developed (Sugilar,et al, 2024) Their curricula are enhanced and adapted to meet national and international standards, integrating the national curriculum with Cambridge University's curriculum. Additionally, IIHS offers specialized classes with extended study hours outside the national curriculum, maintaining this program even during the pandemic through a blended learning system.

In other aspects of the educational process, the quality of learning provided by the two excellent Islamic schools is evident through their various student achievements, both academic

and non-academic. At IIHS, notable accomplishments include winning 2nd place in the 2020 World Invention Competition and Exhibition in Singapore, 1st place in the National Host Presenter Competition, and securing two silver medals at the International AISEEF (Asean Innovative Science Environmental and Entrepreneur Fair) in 2022 (Edi Rahmatullah, personal communication, September 2022). Similarly, BMHS has earned prestigious awards, such as 1st place in national English and Arabic debate competitions in 2019, recognition as a national model Islamic school in 2021, and 2nd place in the National Young Researcher competition in 2022 (Sahid Ngo, personal communication, August 5, 2022).

However, there are differences in the learning process between IIHS and BMHS. At IIHS, the learning period is longer. Before the pandemic, learning activities at the school ran from 07:00 to 15:30 WIB, with the addition of six subjects. During the pandemic, activities were conducted in a blended format, and an emergency curriculum reduced the number of subjects from 57 to 45. Despite these adjustments, both schools have maintained a high-quality learning process, as reflected in their various academic and non-academic student achievements. This aligns with the perspectives of Amanchukwu and Ololube (2015) and Hifza et al. (2020), who emphasize that a qualified learning process demonstrates accountability to all stakeholders.

Third, the implications for the aspect of educational output encompass both academic and non-academic achievements. Both IIHS and BMHS have successfully enabled their students to pass selection processes and secure scholarships at prestigious universities, both domestically and internationally, including in the USA, Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, Singapore, Australia, Japan, and Canada. This underscores the exceptional educational output of these schools, which is bolstered by high-quality and measurable education management (Bafadal et al., 2020; Ahmad, 2014). Consequently, both schools have established themselves as top-choice Islamic institutions, recognized nationally and internationally for their numerous achievements.

The findings of this research highlight the significant efforts made by IIHS and BMHS to adapt to global changes and maintain their status as excellent Islamic schools. Both institutions have successfully implemented strategic change management processes, including the use of SWOT analysis for planning, optimizing roles through effective organization, motivating staff through visionary leadership, and maintaining high standards through rigorous supervision. These efforts have resulted in outstanding educational outputs, with students achieving notable academic and non-academic successes and gaining admission to prestigious universities worldwide. The study underscores the importance of adaptive strategies, such as leveraging technology and enhancing the curriculum to meet international standards. These findings demonstrate that with effective change management, educational institutions can thrive in a competitive global landscape, continually improving and sustaining high levels of excellence.

This study has certain limitations, primarily its focus on only two Islamic schools, which may not fully represent the diversity of educational strategies and outcomes in other Islamic educational institutions globally. Additionally, the qualitative approach, while providing in-depth insights, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider including a larger and more diverse sample of schools to enhance the breadth of the findings. Furthermore, incorporating quantitative methods could provide a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of change management strategies. Investigating long-term outcomes of these strategies and exploring their applicability in different cultural and educational contexts would also offer valuable insights for the broader field of educational change management.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the efforts to design and implement changes at IIHS in Indonesia and BMHS in Thailand to achieve excellence as international Islamic schools. The findings underscore several key points. First, in the choice process, strategic decision-making at both

schools incorporates organizational context analysis using the SWOT method, a focus on IT adaptation, and deliberative decision-making. Second, the trajectory process is driven by each school's vision, strategy, and goals, guided by the M-PIIIASR and RIEC visions. Third, in the change process, both schools sustain their achievements through comprehensive mechanisms encompassing student recruitment, innovative learning activities, achievement development, teacher training programs, and specialized classes. These change management strategies have positioned IIHS and BMHS as competitive and innovative institutions on national and international levels. This is evident through their conducive learning environments, excellent teaching staff with high technological adaptability, and integrated curricula.

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