

Organizational Resilience And Sustained Competitive Advantage: The Mediating Role of Organizational Learning In Higher Education Institutions

Ketangguhan Organisasi dan Keunggulan Bersaing Berkelanjutan: Peran Mediasi Pembelajaran Organisasi pada Lembaga Pendidikan Tinggi

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Abstract :

In an era of disruption marked by rapid digital technological advancement and increasing demands for educational quality, private universities in Indonesia face significant challenges in sustaining their competitive advantage. This study aims to examine the effect of organizational resilience on sustained competitive advantage, with organizational learning serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was employed, involving 191 respondents consisting of lecturers and structural leaders at private higher education institutions. Data were collected using a questionnaire and analyzed through Jamovi. The results reveal that organizational resilience has a positive effect on sustained competitive advantage ($\beta = 0.154$, $p = 0.044$), as well as on organizational learning ($\beta = 0.492$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, organizational learning significantly influences sustained competitive advantage ($\beta = 0.298$, $p = 0.004$) and partially mediates the relationship between organizational resilience and sustained competitive advantage (Indirect Effect = 0.147, $p = 0.005$). These findings underscore the strategic importance of organizational learning as a bridge that transforms resilience into long-term competitive advantage in the private higher education sector.

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1. Introduction

In an era of disruption characterized by the acceleration of digital technology, changing preferences of the younger generation, and increasing demands for educational quality, higher education institutions are challenged not only to survive but also to create a sustained competitive advantage. In this context, organizational resilience has become an increasingly central concept. Organizational resilience is understood as the ability of an institution to anticipate, respond to, and recover from disruptions in an adaptive and transformative manner (Duchek, 2020). Numerous studies indicate that resilient organizations not only withstand crises but also thrive through learning and innovation (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Burnard & Bhamra, 2011).

However, in the higher education sector in Indonesia, particularly among private universities, the challenges of survival and competition are growing. One of the primary causes is the non-competitive nature of the competition, exacerbated by government policies regarding the autonomy of State Universities (PTN) in conducting independent student admissions. Since the enactment of Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education and reinforced by the legal entity status of PTN (PTN-BH),

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many PTNs have gained broad authority to conduct independent admissions. This selection process is often carried out without strict quota limitations, allowing PTNs to absorb prospective students en masse, even in popular study programs, and at very competitive fees compared to private universities.

As a result, private universities are losing their primary market segment, which initially targeted students from non-SBMPTN pathways. Data from PDDikti indicates that the decline in new student enrollment at various small and medium private universities has reached over 30% in the last three years (LLDIKTI, 2023). This decline directly impacts funding, operations, and the sustainability of private institutions, which heavily rely on student tuition fees as their primary financial source.

In this context, organizational resilience becomes a strategic necessity; however, its presence does not automatically guarantee the creation of a sustained competitive advantage. Organizations need to internalize experiences and transform them into systemic learning processes. Herein lies the importance of organizational learning as a mediator in the relationship between organizational resilience and competitive advantage (Bui & Baruch, 2010). Organizations that can learn from challenges, overhaul learning approaches, and innovate in their curricula or industry partnerships will have a greater opportunity to remain relevant and competitive.

Unfortunately, studies examining the interrelationship between organizational resilience, organizational learning, and sustained competitive advantage in the context of private universities in Indonesia are still very limited. Most previous research has been conducted on business, manufacturing, or public sector organizations in developed countries (Akgün & Keskin, 2014; Pillai, 2022). However, the context of higher education in developing countries possesses its own complexities and dynamics, particularly in facing regulatory interventions, resource gaps, and demographic pressures.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining the influence of organizational resilience on sustained competitive advantage, as well as the mediating role of organizational learning in the context of private universities in Indonesia. The findings of this research are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the understanding of the dynamics of organizational resilience in education, as well as providing strategic recommendations for policymakers and leaders of private higher education institutions in facing the increasingly competitive and uneven higher education ecosystem.

Organizational Resilience

Organizational resilience refers to the capacity of an organization to face, respond to, and adapt to unexpected environmental changes or disruptions, as well as the ability to recover and even grow from those experiences (Duchek, 2020). Resilience is not merely about passive endurance; it also encompasses the organization's capacity for active transformation in response to external pressures. Organizational resilience has been shown to contribute to enhanced innovation (Akgün & Keskin, 2014), long-term performance (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011), and the creation of strategic value amidst environmental volatility (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011).

Sustained Competitive Advantage

Sustained competitive advantage refers to a condition in which an organization is able to create unique value that is not easily replicated by competitors (Barney, 1991). Sustained competitive advantage (SCA) denotes a competitive edge that is not merely temporary but can be maintained over the long term. In the education sector, SCA can manifest in the form of academic reputation, graduate quality, industry relationships, innovation in teaching, and institutional governance efficiency (Porter, 1996; Hidayat & Pangestuti, 2019). The challenge lies in how universities can sustain these factors amid strong external pressures, such as independent admissions by state universities and a decline in the number of prospective students.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is the process through which organizations systematically acquire, interpret, and disseminate knowledge to enhance their capabilities in responding to changes and developing innovations (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Bui & Baruch, 2010). This process includes the acquisition of information, distribution of knowledge, interpretation of information, and storage in organizational

memory. Organizational learning serves as the foundation for the development of dynamic capabilities, which are the abilities to continuously reshape organizational resources (Teece, 2007). In the context of higher education organizations, the ability to learn enables adaptation to student needs, advancements in learning technologies, and government regulations.

2. Methods

This research is a quantitative study aimed at examining the direct and indirect effects between the independent variable (organizational resilience), the mediating variable (organizational learning), and the dependent variable (sustained competitive advantage). The study also seeks to test causal relationships among the variables using a statistical modeling approach. The population for this research comprises permanent faculty members or structural leaders of private universities in Indonesia who have an understanding of institutional strategies, organizational learning, and institutional policies.

The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling with the criteria: originating from private universities with a minimum accreditation of B and serving as active permanent faculty members, program heads, deputy deans, or heads of LPM/LPPM. The sample size for this study is 191 respondents.

Data collection is conducted using a closed questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire is developed based on theoretical constructs and indicators that have been validated in previous research. The measurement tools used are adaptations from Organizational Resilience (Duchek, 2011), Sustained Competitive Advantage (Barney, 1991), and Organizational Learning (Teece, 2007). The testing model utilizes Jamovi. The hypotheses of this research are: 1) Organizational Resilience positively influences Sustained Competitive Advantage, 2) Organizational Resilience positively influences Organizational Learning, 3) Organizational Learning positively influences Sustained Competitive Advantage, and 4) Organizational Learning mediates the relationship between Organizational Resilience and Sustained Competitive Advantage.

3. Result

Based on the results of the data management output, the following results were obtained:

Table 1. Hipotesis Test Result “Path Estimates”

			Estimate	SE	Z	p
OR	→	OL	0.492	0.0393	12.54	<.001
OL	→	SCA	0.298	0.1043	2.85	0.004
OR	→	SCA	0.154	0.0765	2.02	0.044

Organizational Resilience (OR) has a positive effect on Sustained Competitive Advantage (SCA). The results indicate that the direct effect of OR on SCA has a coefficient value of 0.154, with $Z = 2.02$ and $p = 0.044$. Since $p < 0.05$, Hypothesis 1 (H1) is accepted. This finding suggests that the higher an organization's resilience in responding and adapting to challenges, the greater its ability to maintain a competitive advantage. This effect is considered moderate and statistically significant.

Organizational Resilience (OR) also positively influences Organizational Learning (OL). The estimated path coefficient from OR to OL is 0.492, with $Z = 12.54$ and $p < 0.001$, indicating a highly significant effect. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is supported. This implies that resilient organizations tend to adopt work patterns that promote institutional learning, such as systematic reflection, knowledge acquisition from experience, and learning-based adaptation.

Organizational Learning (OL) has a positive effect on Sustained Competitive Advantage (SCA). The path analysis from OL to SCA yields a coefficient of 0.298, $Z = 2.85$, and $p = 0.004$,

which indicates a statistically significant effect. Thus, Hypothesis 3 (H3) is accepted. This supports the notion that institutions with effective learning systems are better equipped to respond to stakeholder needs, drive innovation, and build sustainable reputations.

Table 2. Hipotesis Test Result “Mediation Estimates”

Effect	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Indirect	0.147	0.0527	2.78	0.005
Direct	0.154	0.0765	2.02	0.044
Total	0.301	0.0578	5.20	<.001

Organizational Learning mediates the effect of Organizational Resilience on Sustained Competitive Advantage. The mediation analysis results are as follows: Indirect Effect = 0.147 ($Z = 2.78$, $p = 0.005$), Direct Effect = 0.154 ($Z = 2.02$, $p = 0.044$), and Total Effect = 0.301 ($Z = 5.20$, $p < 0.001$). Since both the direct and indirect effects are statistically significant, the mediation is classified as partial. This indicates that Organizational Resilience influences Sustained Competitive Advantage both directly and indirectly through Organizational Learning. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 (H4) is accepted.

4. Discussion

This study aims to examine the effect of Organizational Resilience (OR) on Sustained Competitive Advantage (SCA), with Organizational Learning (OL) as a mediating variable. Based on the analysis results, all hypotheses proposed in this study were found to be statistically significant, both in direct and indirect relationships.

First, the direct effect of Organizational Resilience on Sustained Competitive Advantage ($\beta = 0.154$, $p = 0.044$) indicates that organizations that are resilient in facing uncertainty and external pressures have a greater chance of maintaining their competitiveness. This aligns with the concept of organizational resilience as an institution's ability to anticipate, confront, and adapt to change, as described by Duchek (2020). Previous studies also support the strategic role of organizational resilience in building competitive advantage (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

Second, the findings reveal that Organizational Resilience has a positive effect on Organizational Learning ($\beta = 0.492$, $p < 0.001$). This means that resilient organizations tend to possess more active, reflective, and structured learning systems. Organizational learning refers to the process by which institutions acquire, disseminate, and apply knowledge to support change and innovation (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Jerez-Gómez et al., 2005). In the context of higher education, institutions that are adaptive to past experiences and capable of managing internal knowledge are more likely to be prepared for long-term competitiveness and survival (Serrat, 2017).

Third, Organizational Learning also has a significant effect on Sustained Competitive Advantage ($\beta = 0.298$, $p = 0.004$). This suggests that effective internal learning processes play a crucial role in creating sustained competitive advantage. According to Teece (2007), organizational learning is part of an institution's dynamic capabilities, which enable the reconfiguration of resources in response to strategic changes. These findings are also in line with Bui and Baruch (2010), who stated that educational organizations that adopt systemic learning principles tend to exhibit stronger institutional competitiveness.

Finally, the mediating effect of Organizational Learning in the relationship between Organizational Resilience and Sustained Competitive Advantage was found to be significant (Indirect Effect = 0.147, $p = 0.005$). This means that part of the effect of resilience on competitive advantage is mediated by organizational learning, which bridges experience and adaptation into sustainable strategic action. This finding is consistent with structural mediation theory, which emphasizes the importance of internal processes in linking resources to performance outcomes (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Overall, these findings contribute significantly to the literature on strategic management and higher education. Amid global disruptions, the challenges of university autonomy policies, and declining student enrollment, organizational resilience and systemic learning emerge as critical factors for private universities to survive and compete sustainably.

5. Conclusions

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that organizational resilience is a key factor in building sustained competitive advantage among private higher education institutions in Indonesia. Organizational resilience enables institutions to adapt to external pressures such as policy changes, competition with public universities, and fluctuations in student enrollment. However, to transform resilience into long-term competitive advantage, a strong foundation of organizational learning is essential.

The results indicate that organizational learning is not only influenced by organizational resilience but also plays a significant role in driving sustained competitive advantage. Organizational learning processes such as knowledge acquisition, dissemination, and utilization serve as critical mechanisms for translating resilience into innovation, efficiency, and institutional excellence.

6. Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Didik Widianoro (First Author): Responsible for formulating the research idea, developing the theoretical framework, designing the instrument, collecting and analyzing data, and writing the final manuscript.

Md Azman Shahadan (Second Author): Contributed to strengthening the theoretical foundation, supervising the quantitative methodology, providing critical analysis of the findings, and conducting scientific editing of the manuscript for international publication.

Sigit Nugroho (Third Author): Played a key role in managing the technical aspects of field data collection, validating the research instrument, processing the data, and drafting the results section of the study.

Meyrhita Trifina Sari (Forth Author): Assisted in drafting the research report and finalizing the discussion section of the study.

7. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest whether financial, institutional, or personal that could affect the objectivity and integrity of the research design, analysis, or reporting presented in this article.

8. Declaration of Generative AI and Assistive Technologies in the Writing Process

In the process of writing this article, the authors utilized generative AI technology specifically ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with improving the structure, editing the language, rephrasing sentences for academic clarity, and enhancing the coherence of the argumentation. However, all scientific content, including the ideas, data, analysis, and interpretation of results, remains the sole responsibility of the authors. The authors have thoroughly reviewed the entire manuscript to ensure its accuracy, originality, and adherence to ethical standards in scholarly publication.

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10. Ethical Approval

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including ethical approval where necessary, with additional consent sought from relevant institutional authorities.

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