



The Impact of Strategic Planning Practices on Quality Improvement in Christian Higher Education Institutions

Junihot M. Simanjuntak^{1✉}, Perus A. Usmanij²

¹Christian Education Departement, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang, Indonesia

²Management Information System Departement, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Quality development particularly through strategic planning is essential to meet market demands. However, its role as a strategic resource in Christian Religious Higher Education Institutions remains unexplored in determining program implementation. This study examines the quality improvement of Christian Religious Higher Education in Indonesia through strategic planning. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from interviews and literature studies, including journals and related documents. Data are then analyzed using Creswell's method. The findings indicate that these institutions require: 1) effective leadership training programs to develop and regularly review strategic plans, which include identifying core values, defining missions based on surrounding needs, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and formulating action plans through earnest prayer to achieve desired goals; and 2) expertise and skills in implementing higher education management strategies to diagnose, plan, design, and systematically compile documents, establish policies, motivate faculty and staff, allocate human resources, and develop a strategic culture that supports institutional and program quality improvement. Challenges in strategic planning include improper formulation and a lack of strong organizational leadership support. The study concludes that strategic planning encompassing quality training, process improvement, benchmarking, open culture, employee empowerment, and executive commitment can enable.

ABSTRAK

Pengembangan mutu harus dilakukan untuk memenuhi kebutuhan pasar, yaitu pengembangan yang berorientasi pada perencanaan strategis, namun perannya sebagai sumber daya strategis di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Kristen masih belum teruji dalam menentukan program-program yang akan dilaksanakan. Penelitian ini menganalisis peningkatan kualitas Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Kristen di Indonesia berdasarkan strategi perencanaan. Menggunakan pendekatan wawancara dan studi literatur dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, dimana data utama berupa jurnal dan dokumen terkait dikumpulkan, kemudian dianalisis dengan metode analisis Creswell. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Kristen membutuhkan: 1) program pelatihan kepemimpinan yang baik untuk mengembangkan dan secara teratur meninjau kembali rencana strategis yang mencakup penemuan nilai-nilai yang dianutnya, mendefinisikan misinya berdasarkan kebutuhan di sekitarnya, menilai kekuatan dan kelemahan diri sendiri, dan kemudian berdoa dengan sungguh-sungguh untuk menyusun rencana aksi untuk mencapai tujuan yang diinginkan. 2) keahlian dan keterampilan dalam mengimplementasikan strategi manajemen perguruan tinggi untuk mendiagnosis, merencanakan, merancang dan menyusun dokumen secara sistematis, menetapkan kebijakan, memotivasi dosen dan tenaga kependidikan,

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Corresponding E-mail: ✉ junihot.simanjuntak@sttmoriah.ac.id

mengalokasikan sumber daya manusia, dan mengembangkan budaya strategis yang mendukung peningkatan mutu institusi dan program studinya. Kendala yang dihadapi dalam perencanaan strategis adalah masalah perumusan yang kurang tepat, dan tidak adanya dukungan kepemimpinan organisasi yang kuat. Penulis menyimpulkan bahwa perencanaan strategis ini – seperti pelatihan kualitas, perbaikan proses, dan benchmarking, budaya terbuka, pemberdayaan karyawan, dan komitmen eksekutif dapat mengungguli kompetitor dengan ideologi perencanaan strategis yang menyertainya.

Introduction

The results of a survey on the satisfaction of lecturers and education staff regarding the services provided by Christian Religious Higher Education focusing on competency development, career development, welfare provision, leadership; and interpersonal relationships that contribute to improving the quality of institutions, shows that the average level of satisfaction of 1.61 on the Linkert scale. Institutions do not yet fully comprehend the role of strategic planning in improving the quality of lecturers and education staff, who are pivotal in improving the quality of institutions and study programs. The strategic planning document prepared does not serve as a guide for institutional operations to achieve desired outputs and outcomes, nor does it play a crucial role in determining the programs to be implemented with appropriate amount of resources (Simanjuntak et al., 2019).

Strategic planning is the process of determining what programs an organization will carry out, by identifying what must be done and what can be done. It provides guidelines for organizations, from the current conditions to future scenarios in order to achieve the desired goals (Fattah, 2004; Lubis, 2018; Kerzner, 2017). Strategic planning includes assessing the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges; formulating a mission and policy philosophy; establishing strategic objectives; and implementing controls. The steps in preparing strategic planning require analyzing current and future conditions, identifying institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks, considering norms, and determining the scope of needs and supporting factors. This process involves formulating objectives, success criteria, and determining the distribution and arrangement of resources. If executed correctly, the strategic planning designed by the institution will achieve the desired results (Mintzberg, 1994).

Higher Education plays an important role in progress, increasing competitiveness, and building national excellence; through the development of science, scientific discovery, and technological innovation (Ristekdikti, 2015). An advanced nation is characterized by a population with higher levels of education (Azhari & Bustamin, 2020). In Indonesia, the average length of schooling is only 8.17 years, indicating a relatively low duration of education (BPS, 2018).

Christian Religious Higher Education aims to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective ministry (Magezi & Madimutsa, 2023). This process involves acquiring thorough biblical knowledge, understanding theological insights and applying these truths practically in the real world. It also includes conscious character and spiritual development, enabling students to exemplify these truths in their lives.

Previous studies have identified issues in Christian Religious Higher Education, such as inadequate staff and imperfect faculty members (Simanjuntak et al., 2023). Additionally, a study on strategic planning research at Bakrie University revealed that existing plans do not fully align with the vision, mission and business processes. The results indicated that the Bakrie University IS/IT strategic planning model could serve as a reference for IS/IT development (Rizanti & Saragih, 2017). In line with this, a case study on information system strategic planning at Diponegoro University, Semarang, showed that the academic information system and the university website have strategic value, as these systems provide direct strategic value to the institution. Without an academic information system and a profile representation on the university website, the institution cannot compete with other universities (Rochim, 2017).

This present study differs from previous studies by focusing on strategic planning in Christian theological higher education, approached from Biblical and Christian values for continuous quality improvement.

The present study is expected to make an academic contribution to improving the quality of Christian Religious Higher Education in Indonesia based on planning strategies. This aligns with the requirements of the Law no. 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education, Article 5 (b), which mandates producing graduates who master branches of Science and/or Technology to fulfil national interests and enhance the nation's competitiveness. Practically, the results of this study can guide Christian Religious Higher Education in Indonesia in implementing accreditation policies following the issuance of Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Regulation number 53 of 2023.

Methods

This study involved twenty Christian Religious Higher Education institutions in Indonesia and was conducted from April 2022 to August 2022. The study employed survey methods with a Likert scale, interviews and literature reviews using a qualitative descriptive approach. Prior to the interviews, the researchers collected participants' sociodemographic characteristics, including age, gender, education and professional information. Preliminary interviews were used to screen participants who did not fit the study's scope, such as those born before 1970. Secondary data, including journals and related documents, were collected and analyzed using Creswell's analysis procedure (Creswell, 2015).

The validity of the data was ensured using triangulation techniques (Sugiyono, 2016), particularly the source and technique triangulation. The data analysis technique followed four stages as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1992):

- Data Collection: Data were collected through observation, interviews, and literature review. The collected data were then presented.
- Data Reduction: Interview data were grouped based on the interview questions. Conclusions from the interviews were then combined with the results of observations and documentation studies, summarized based on the research questions.
- Data Presentation: Data were presented in a descriptive-narrative format. Researchers compared their findings with existing theories.
- Drawing Conclusions: The final stage involved drawing conclusions for strategic planning for Christian Religious Higher Education.

Findings and Discussion

Current State of Strategic Planning in Christian Higher Education

Based on participant information, it can be explained that strategic planning at Christian Religious Higher Education institutions has not been implemented in accordance with the institution's vision and mission. Annual work programs have not been developed or executed, external and internal audits supported by valid instruments have not been conducted, and long-term goals have not been formulated. Additionally, there has been a lack of periodic evaluation, strategic selection, and ongoing implementation. Strategic planning should not attempt to address every possible need indiscriminately. As Hanchin & Hearlson (2020) note, no Christian Religious Higher Education institution can be all things to all people. A good strategic plan defines the questions of constituency and reflects how that specific constituency will be well served.

The research findings indicate that the implementation of strategic planning to improve the quality of education in Christian Religious Higher Education has not fully adhered to the strategic planning stages. Higher education policies have not been based on the institution's vision, mission, and goals, nor have they motivated educators and staff.

Human resources have not been allocated based on the needs and competencies of study programs, and a strategic supporting culture has not been developed. The implementation of strategic planning has merely continued the legacy of previous years without regular review. Strategic planning should not simply perfect what was inherited from the past. Although the program may have been developed during colonial times by foreigners using Western models of education, what exists now is often seen as sacred, requiring only preservation and polishing (Sumanti et al., 2021). Any change is perceived as a betrayal of the founders' efforts. Consequently, the driving energy of strategic planning comes from perpetuating and perfecting the original intentions (Lambrou & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022). Interestingly, if the founders could set up the program today, they would likely use newer, creative models of learning, just as they did initially. Strategic planning cannot be built on polishing relics from the past (Ali et al., 2023). While affirming the past is important, strategic planning must consider present realities. As students and the world in which they minister change, so too must training institutions and programs (Banks, 1999). Strategic planning needs to balance an affirmation of the past with the challenges of the present (Namazi & Rezaei, 2023).

Based on the strategic evaluation of planning activities carried out by Christian Religious Higher Education, researchers found improvements in several parts of the activity program. However, these improvements did not consider the supporting factors for the success of the institution's strategic planning in improving the quality of education, nor did they address the inhibiting factors. There is not yet good support from all stakeholders, including students, lecturers, education staff, and the community. Strategic planning is not merely about fixing what is broken (Ritchie, 2020). While it is useful to maintain a list of issues and develop plans to address them, focusing solely on maintenance can overlook larger issues. Some course offerings or study programs may need to be dropped rather than fixed, and some buildings may need to be replaced rather than patched. A strategic plan encompasses much more than just fixing things; it includes maintenance issues as part of the overall program (Mintzberg, 1994).

Interview data revealed that Christian Religious Higher Education institutions are more focused on creating new programs adapted to existing conditions at other institutions. Although the organization has internal and external strengths, these have not been optimized for the benefit of higher education. As a result, the organization faces instability when implementing new programs, making it difficult for the institution to progress.

This is evident from the statement of participant PTKK-KH-01, who gave the following response:

"Many Theological Colleges are influenced by what is currently trending in the western world, meaning that Theological Colleges are more inclined towards adapting it through the creation of new study programs rather than trying to advance existing study programs to gain recognition from the community about their quality. So, what I mean is, we leave quality more in order to teach what is trending today in the western world. We create new programs that are not necessarily appropriate and needed in our church or society" (interview with PTKK-KH-01)

This sentiment was echoed by participant PTKK-BP-04, who stated

... this may seem important, but it is very ineffective in encouraging quality theological colleges... we have ignored what is called short-term, medium-term and future planning..." (interview with PTKK-BP-04)

Both participants suggested that while creating new programs may seem important, it is ineffective in encouraging quality theological education. Strategic planning is not

about creating new programs (Pelissari et al., 2022). Some schools mistakenly believe that a strategic plan involves launching various new upper-level programs (Johnsen, 2023). A strategic plan should assess current program strengths and successes in light of the real needs of students and the world in which they will minister. Christian Religious Higher Education institutions must realistically consider how many programs they can afford to offer. Introducing new programs should not compromise the quality of existing programs that have built the institution's reputation. A good strategic plan builds on proven strengths and responds to the real needs of the environment within the available resources (Salendab & Cruspero Dapitan, 2021).

Observations of 10 leaders of Christian Religious Higher Education institutions reveal that their understanding of strategic planning is limited to documents compiled in book form, neatly arranged on a shelf as blueprints for success during accreditation. Strategic planning, however, is not merely about preparing blueprints for buildings (Kohl, 2012). For many leadership training programs, health is often measured solely in terms of numerical growth. Consequently, the strategic plan becomes a public relations document featuring colorful graphs projecting five-to-ten-year growth in programs, students, books, faculty, and especially buildings (Sutrisno et al., 2023). Most of these plans focus on sketches and cost estimates for new buildings or campuses needed to accommodate projected growth. While campus development is a valid part of a strategic plan (Budiarto & Salsabila, 2022), a comprehensive strategic plan must also consider other factors accompanying growth, such as library development, qualified national faculty, staff support, student recruitment, and administrative costs. A good strategic plan is not only comprehensive but also grounded in reality (Bakri, 2023).

Interviews with 5 heads, 10 deputy heads, and 15 heads of study programs provide insights into the procedural conditions for preparing strategic planning at the university and faculty levels. The information obtained suggests that involving fewer people in the preparation of strategic planning is seen as advantageous in terms of saving energy, time, and costs. Consequently, the strategic planning team often consists solely of university or faculty leadership. However, test results indicate that 80% of those involved in preparing strategic planning do not meet the competency requirements. Leadership positions at the university and faculty levels are often assigned based on proximity to the highest leadership rather than competence. Effective strategic planning is not a document written by a small committee. To be effective, strategic planning must be a group process (Hinton, 2012). Preparing a five-year or ten-year plan is not akin to submitting a research paper to the administration or board, nor is it the private plan of the principal, administrative team, or board. A strategic plan should reflect the collective dreams of everyone involved (Mintzberg, 1987; Grenni et al., 2020). While appointing a working committee to coordinate the strategic planning process and having responsive individuals with communication skills to gather results is beneficial, good strategic planning is owned and developed by everyone in the organization (Banks, 1999; Ginter et al., 2018).

Challenges in Implementing Strategic Planning in Christian Higher Education

Interviews with study program leaders, lecturers, and educational staff revealed three primary weaknesses in the strategic planning process. First, the environmental analysis failed to provide comprehensive information about the organization's position, including its strengths, weaknesses, and real conditions. Second, universities struggled to diversify their tactical strategies. Third, there was a lack of survival strategies and the ability to control internal performance, preventing further decline. Effective strategic planning must consider various possibilities, advantages, and disadvantages, and account for the institution's real conditions and strengths (Falqueto et al., 2020). Strategic planning involves determining the programs to be implemented and allocating

appropriate resources to each program over several years (Priyambodo & Hasanah, 2021; (Rahayu et al., 2024).

Our actions ultimately reflect our core values, whether consciously or not (Rahayu et al., 2024). Therefore, before developing specific plans for the future of a leadership training program, it is essential to revisit and reaffirm what is important to all stakeholders, including staff, faculty, the governing board, and students. Values are not necessarily Bible verses or spiritual traits but often reflect cultural priorities (Porter et al., 2021; Prasetiawati, 2022).

Value clashes are common in cross-cultural contexts. For North Americans, for instance, the value of efficiency is paramount, as time equates to money. In contrast, Latin Americans prioritize relationships over time. For instance, a Brazilian student might choose to stay up all night with a hurting relative rather than finish a term paper due the next day. How do we plan our programs to accommodate the values of our students and teachers? (Kretzschmar, 2020).

In the African world, on the other hand, community welfare and respect for elders are significant values (Kretzschmar, 2020). Scripture supports giving respect and maintaining unity as biblical values (Widjaja et al., 2020). However, for Americans and many Europeans, individual rights and defending one's position are more important, regardless of age, gender, race, or religion (Setiyonugroho et al., 2022; (Alfarisi & Darmiyanti, 2023). Western Christianity and culture emphasize developing individual gifts, as each person is made in the image of God. The Bible highlights the importance of truth and the gifts given to each believer, which help individuals understand their life's purpose (Simanjuntak & Simanjuntak, 2022). The priesthood of all believers supports democratic (DeVries, 2016). These values can clash, even in educational settings (Tonner, 2022).

What teacher believe and and value inevitably influences what students learn, whether intentionally or not (Syahid, 2017; Matusov, 2022). Teacher views on community, cleanliness, punctuality, the role of the Holy Spirit in learning, purity, piety, reconciliation, and forgiveness all affect student learning (Tandana et al., 2022). Teachers must identify their core values to ensure that their planning for programs and educational communities consciously builds on what is important (Muhibah, 2020). This process should include evaluating inherited cultural values, some of which may not align with biblical principles. To be intentional in their training efforts, teachers should begin the strategic planning process by identifying and evaluating their core values (Evans et al., 2014).

Almost every school has a purpose or mission statement. Before revising, fixing, or creating a new one, it is prudent to organize small groups to systematically review all aspects of the program in light of the current mission statement. Does the statement encompass everything the school aims to achieve? Does it reflect the institution's values and priorities? (Gupta, 2021).

Taking education mission statement seriously involves asking critical questions: Are there activities currently being undertaken that extend beyond the mission statement? If so, the strategic plan should include eliminating such activities as they do not contribute to the institution's core objectives. Does the mission statement suggest activities or areas of ministry that have not yet been addressed? If so, the strategic plan should outline how to initiate these important activities. A good mission statement should be inclusive, covering all current and future activities, while also being limiting, defining what the institution does not or will not do (Kristyana et al., 2021).

For denominational programs, it is hoped that the denomination views its own school as the primary institution for training its students. However, many schools founded by

denominations no longer receive students from their own denomination for various reasons. Understanding why this is the case is crucial (Ferris, 1990).

A crucial aspect of developing and refining a mission statement is involving the broader community. The advantage of group development, discussion, and revision is that broader consensus on the mission statement leads to greater unity in its implementation. Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the existing program in light of the mission statement not only clarifies strategic planning tasks but also drives necessary changes (Banks, 1999). Changes in community needs, program realities and the capacity to respond will affect the mission statement. Organizations grow and evolve, and a strategic planning process helps to make this change intentional (Fuadi et al., 2021). Organizational expansion may necessitate revising the mission statement. It is important to continually revisit the mission statement to determine what should be added, changed, or retained (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). For denominational programs, it is hoped that the denomination views its own school as the primary institution for training its students. However, many schools founded by denominations no longer receive students from their own denomination for various reasons. Understanding why this is the case is crucial (Ferris, 1990).

The question remains: who is being served? And for what purpose? their expectations from the training program? Do they seek Bible school teachers, pastors, church planters, Sunday school workers, or Christian laity prepared for the marketplace? Do they want a two-week program offered in multiple locations, or do they prefer multiple degree programs? Knowing the answers to these questions helps focus the program's objectives. Different ministry tasks require different levels of training, and it is essential to understand the target audience and the purpose of the training (Ferris, 1990).

A number of Bible schools were established by missionaries as independent programs, operating on the philosophy of "Build it, teach the Bible, and they will come" (Piang, L. L. K. (2022). However, such programs could be improved by realistically assessing their target audience and identifying those who do not see them as their training program. It is important to determine which denominations, para-church organizations, non-governmental organizations, ethnic or linguistic groups view the program as their own. Additionally, the geographic reach and focus of the training—whether on future leaders, new leaders, or current leaders—should be carefully considered (Ferris, 1996).

The easier part of needs assessment involves examining current students. From which churches or organizations do they come? Why did they choose your school? What do they and their leaders expect from the institution? It is essential to engage in dialogue with students and their leaders to understand their training needs. This ongoing dialogue helps assess the effectiveness of the training efforts and informs necessary improvements (Hardy, 2016; Purwanto et al., 2019).

The more challenging aspect of needs assessment involves anticipating future needs. How do social, political, or economic factors affect the program? What issues do students currently face, and what issues will they need to be prepared for? (Du Plessis, 2020). Understanding these needs helps evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. Curricular design should start with a careful profile of the students and a detailed description of the ministries they will enter as part of their response to the needs of the church and society (Ferris, 1990). A thorough needs analysis is essential to understand what has been done well, poorly, or not at all.

Before compiling or revisiting the strategic plan, it is important to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the overall training program (Nurjanah, 2019). The entire academic community should affirm what is done well and identify specific areas of success (Peters & Rodabaugh, 1988). Achieving consensus within the wider community, both inside and outside the institution, is crucial for understanding the bigger picture.

Formal and informal feedback can reveal common perceptions of strengths and weaknesses (Shriberg, 2002). By asking stakeholders about what is done well and what needs improvement, the institution can prepare for necessary changes (Suprpto, 2019).

A strategic planning process requires a systematic analysis of each component of the training program. Organizing smaller study groups to examine details and provide written reports with suggestions for change is an effective approach (Al Kadri & Widiawati, 2020). One of the best tools for doing a systematic and detailed evaluation of program is to work through the self-study guides that are normally a part of an accreditation process (Widjaja et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study concludes that: One, Christian Religious Higher Education institutions in Indonesia have not aligned their annual work plans with the vision, mission, and objectives of the institution as formulated in the tridharma program at the study program level. Additionally, a high-quality development team has not been established at both the college and faculty levels, and appropriate planning times, educational procedures, and assessments of development and training outcomes have not been determined.

Two, In general, the ability to implement higher education management strategy planning is still inadequate. Institutions struggle to diagnose, plan, develop, and compile documents systematically and structurally, determine policies, motivate educators and staff, provide human resources, and foster a supportive strategic culture. Strategic planning is a mutualistic design, intended to improve higher education performance and increase trust within the higher education community on an ongoing basis. At the management strategy evaluation level, Christian Religious Higher Education institutions have not analyzed the alignment between strategy design and planning. Evaluation results have not been used to determine whether a program should be continued, improved, or discontinued.

Three, theological tertiary institutions should commit to and consistently maintain strategic planning documents that guide organizational operations, ensuring that outputs and outcomes are achieved efficiently and effectively. These institutions need robust leadership training programs to develop and regularly review strategic plans. This process should include discovering institutional values, defining missions based on surrounding needs, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and developing action plans through earnest prayer to guide the institution towards its goals.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of this research due to its reliance on limited number of participants and minimal research funding. Future research could empirically (quantitative research approach) test the significant influence of strategic planning on improving the quality of Christian Religious Higher Education institutions.

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