SOCIAL INTERACTION AND LOCAL WISDOM AS DRIVERS OF LEADERSHIP AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how social interaction, local wisdom, and institutional forces jointly shape leadership and competitive advantage in organizational settings. The central contribution lies in demonstrating that competitive advantage is not solely the outcome of structural resources but also of culturally embedded practices and relational dynamics. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 311 respondents drawn purposively from a population of 1,398 civil servant professionals and analyzed with SmartPLS 4.0. Measurement models confirmed validity and reliability, while structural models tested hypothesized causalities. Results reveal that social interaction and local wisdom significantly enhance both leadership and competitive advantage, whereas institutional factors influence competitive advantage but not leadership. Leadership itself strongly drives competitive outcomes. These findings position socio-cultural capital as a critical complement to institutional design, underscoring that sustainable advantage arises from leaders who embed local wisdom and social interaction into strategic practices.

Keywords: Social interaction; Local wisdom; Educational Institutions; Leadership; Competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

Education is constitutionally guaranteed in Indonesia—Article 31(1) of the 1945 Constitution mandates equal access to learning (Anggrawan, 2020). Beyond a civic mandate, educational institutions operate amid intensifying competition, where organizational leadership, culture, and local legitimacy determine strategic success. Research in organizational management increasingly emphasizes that competitive advantage arises not merely from resources but from leaders' capacity to embed socio-cultural capital into strategy and practice (Tran et al., 2024).

Social interaction constitutes the relational infrastructure of organizations, enabling trust, collaboration, and knowledge flows. Recent work reconceptualizes social capital as a "commons" resource that leaders and institutions must protect and channel effectively (Gourdine et al., 2025). Moreover, in digitally mediated and hybrid work settings, social capital's role in enabling shared leadership and coordination has become even more pronounced (Ho, 2025). For teachers and institutional actors, the quality of these interactions shapes legitimacy, influence, and the fragility or strength of organizational networks.

Local wisdom represents embedded, indigenous knowledge systems and normative values that guide behavior, decision-making, and identity. Studies published in 2024–2025 show that institutional leadership models grounded in local cultural wisdom foster greater community engagement, institutional effectiveness, and inclusiveness (Ibrahim et al., 2025). In business contexts, scholars also argue that wisdom at the executive level helps integrate organization and society more harmoniously (Jun, 2024). When local values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and respect are internalized in organizational practices, leaders gain normative legitimacy and differentiated cultural capital.

Institutions provide formal rules, norms, and cognitive schemas that structure organizational life. Institutional theory reminds us that legitimacy and stability derive from alignment with regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars (Scott, 2008). But in rapidly changing environments, rigid institutions may stifle adaptation, requiring leaders to work within and around institutional constraints. In this respect, the dynamic interplay between institutional structure and relational systems becomes critical. Tran et al. (2024) demonstrate that social capital interacts with dynamic capabilities to bolster performance in firms. Thus, institutions, social interaction, and local wisdom should not be seen as separate influences, but as interlocking elements that jointly shape leadership and competitive advantage.

Although much research addresses social capital, institutional design, and leadership independently, few integrate all three into a unified explanatory framework—particularly one grounded in cultural contexts. This study addresses that gap by proposing a model in which social interaction and local wisdom, nested within institutional frameworks, influence leadership practices, which in turn drive competitive advantage. The theoretical novelty lies in combining relational, cultural, and structural dimensions into a leadership-anchored competitive logic, advancing our understanding of how organizations can derive sustainable advantage from socio-cultural embeddedness in institutional settings.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Social Interaction

Social interaction is needed in developing the world of education. According to George Hubberman's symbolic interactionism theory, social interaction is a symbol that has meaning (Danim, 2020). Then Ervin Guffman's dramaturgy theory, social interaction is a description of the different patterns of interaction that depend on the situation and conditions. Social exchange theory, human life is an exchange activity in building social systems (Rachman, 2023). The link between this theory and the social interactions carried out in educational institutions is the realization of interactions between teachers, students and stakeholders, as well as other parties who carry out symbolic interactionism in accordance with the description of the interaction patterns carried out in realizing the exchange of social system development used. This means that social interaction plays an important role in social contact, communication, cooperation and

mutual respect. Indicators of social interaction are the core of activities that connect social contacts that communicate with each other, cooperate and respect each other's activities.
Leadership

Leadership remains a cornerstone of organizational effectiveness, defined as the process of influencing and directing individuals or groups toward shared objectives (Zaccaro, 2007). Early trait perspectives emphasized innate leader characteristics such as intelligence, charisma, and confidence, though contemporary analyses continue to debate their predictive value in modern contexts (Northouse, 2022). Fiedler's (1967) contingency framework, still influential, highlights the importance of aligning leadership style with situational demands, a view reinforced by recent work showing that educational leaders must flexibly adapt to cultural and institutional environments (Schmitz et al., 2025). Charismatic leadership, long associated with Weber's (1947) insights, remains salient as leaders inspire trust and vision; empirical evidence suggests its role in mobilizing inclusive practices and fostering teacher motivation (Wang, Deng, & Tian, 2025). Transformational leadership, however, has emerged as the dominant paradigm in educational research, with recent findings showing its capacity to enhance teacher collaboration (Schmitz et al., 2025), strengthen student self-efficacy and collaborative learning (Peng et al., 2025), and build organizational resilience (Reintjes et al., 2025). Leadership is not restricted to formal administrative roles: distributed and teacher leadership have been identified as pivotal in advancing innovation and cultivating competitive advantage in educational institutions (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Windlinger et al., 2025). These perspectives underscore that effective leadership is both contextual and developmental, simultaneously anchored in enduring theoretical traditions and continually reshaped by contemporary educational challenges.

Competitive Advantage

Social interaction is foundational to educational institutions, shaping cooperation, communication, and trust among stakeholders. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and dramaturgical perspectives (Goffman, 1959) emphasize how meaning and roles are constructed through interaction, while social exchange theory highlights reciprocity as a driver of sustained collaboration (Homans, 1961). Recent empirical studies confirm these classical insights: teacher–student interactions predict motivational outcomes (Reigal et al., 2025), and principals' transformational leadership enhances teacher collaboration in technology integration (Schmitz et al., 2025). Moreover, social climates mediated by interactional quality foster teachers' commitment to inclusive education (Wang, Deng, & Tian, 2025). These findings suggest that social interaction not only strengthens leadership but also contributes to competitive positioning in education through improved collaboration and innovation.

H1:Social interaction positively influences leadership in educational institutions.
H2: Social interaction positively influences competitive advantage in educational institutions.

Local wisdom represents the cultural values, practices, and beliefs embedded in communities that guide human interaction and provide social stability. While globalization has eroded traditional practices, contemporary scholarship emphasizes the strategic value of integrating local wisdom into modern education (Purwanto et al., 2022). Recent research suggests that culturally responsive leadership enhances inclusivity and innovation, positioning schools to thrive amid global challenges (Assefa, 2025). By embedding local values into leadership practices, institutions may cultivate resilience, social legitimacy, and distinctive forms of competitive advantage that cannot be easily imitated by global competitors.

H3: Local wisdom positively influences leadership in educational institutions.
H4: Local wisdom positively influences competitive advantage in educational institutions.

Institutions are more than administrative structures; they embody rules, norms, and cultural-cognitive frameworks that shape behavior and confer legitimacy (Scott, 2014). Classical institutional theory underscores the regulative, normative, and cognitive pillars of organizations, while structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) situates human agency within institutional structures. In education, strong institutions provide stability, clear roles, and accountability mechanisms, enabling leaders to act adaptively and effectively. Contemporary studies highlight that institutional

quality is a decisive factor in leadership legitimacy and competitive positioning, particularly when aligned with strategic resource deployment (Huber & Pruitt, 2024; Reintjes et al., 2025).

H5: Institutionalization positively influences leadership in educational institutions.
H6: Institutionalization positively influences competitive advantage in educational institutions.

Leadership directs the collective energy of institutions toward strategic goals. Trait theories (Zaccaro, 2007) emphasize individual dispositions, while contingency theories stress adaptability (Fiedler, 1967). Weber's (1947) insights into charisma and Bass & Riggio's (2006) transformational paradigm further underscore leadership's capacity to inspire, innovate, and transform. Recent scholarship confirms that transformational leadership fosters teacher collaboration (Schmitz et al., 2025), enhances student self-efficacy and collaborative learning (Peng et al., 2025), and builds organizational resilience (Reintjes et al., 2025). Distributed leadership models also reveal how teacher leadership supports innovation and competitiveness (Windlinger et al., 2025; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

H7:Leadership positively influences competitive advantage in educational institutions.
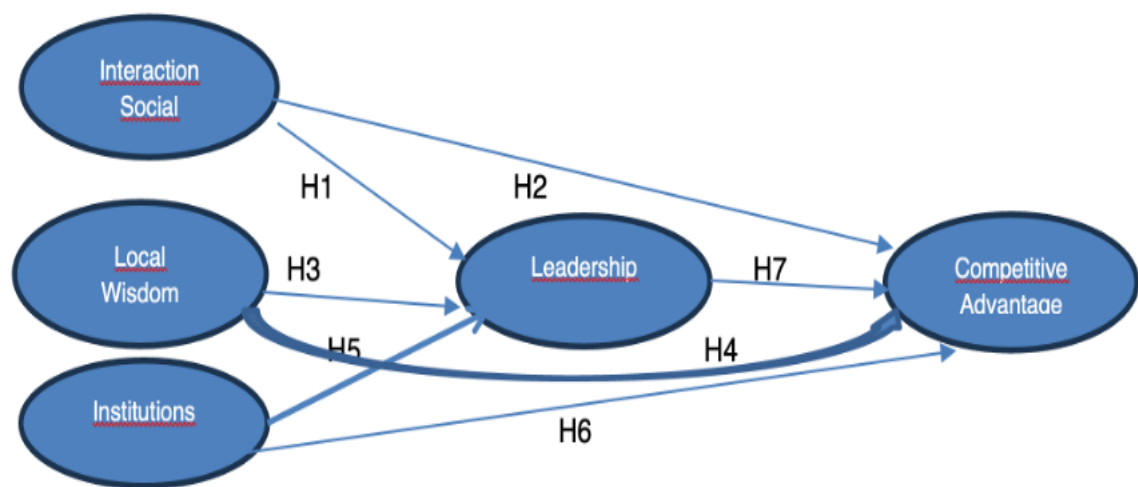

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative research design, emphasizing the use of numerical data to analyze the hypothesized relationships among variables. The population consisted of 1,398 civil servant teachers, from which a purposive sample of 311 respondents was drawn using the Slovin formula. This number exceeds the minimum requirements for structural equation modeling based on the *10-times rule* (Hair et al., 2019) and is considered adequate for variance-based estimation. The data were analyzed with SmartPLS version 4.0, chosen because of its ability to simultaneously test both measurement and structural models in a manner appropriate for models involving multiple latent constructs.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was selected over covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) for several methodological reasons. First, the model in this study is exploratory and relatively complex, comprising two independent variables, one mediating variable, and one dependent variable, which suits the predictive orientation of PLS-SEM. Second, PLS-SEM does not impose strict distributional assumptions, making it better aligned with survey-based data that rarely satisfy multivariate normality. Third, given the sample size of 311, PLS-SEM provides efficient and stable parameter estimation, whereas CB-SEM often requires larger samples to achieve similar robustness (Hair et al., 2021).

The evaluation of the measurement model focused on ensuring validity and reliability. Convergent validity was confirmed where Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50. Reliability was assessed through Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha, both of which were expected to surpass 0.70. Discriminant validity was established using cross-loadings and the Fornell–Larcker criterion to confirm that constructs captured distinct conceptual domains. Following this, the structural model was examined to assess the hypothesized causal

relationships. Significance testing was carried out using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, where t-values greater than 1.96 indicated significance at the 95 percent confidence level. Explanatory power was evaluated through R-squared values for endogenous constructs, while predictive relevance was confirmed using the Q-squared criterion obtained via blindfolding.

The methodological approach was carefully aligned with the study's aims and data characteristics, ensuring rigor in both measurement and structural evaluation. The combination of an adequate sample size, the predictive strength of PLS-SEM, and comprehensive model assessment procedures positions the analysis to yield reliable and theoretically meaningful findings (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2021).

RESULTS

To assess the adequacy of the measurement model, reliability and validity tests were conducted for each construct. Table 1 presents the standardized factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR) values. All items show loadings above the recommended threshold of 0.70, while the AVE values exceed 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha and CR values are higher than the 0.70 benchmark, confirming the internal consistency reliability of the constructs.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Summary

Constructs	Items	Loading	AVE	Alpha	CR
Social Interaction	IS_1	0.812	0.684	0.821	0.886
	IS_2	0.846			
	IS_3	0.803			
	IS_4	0.828			
Local Wisdom	KL_1	0.799	0.675	0.827	0.882
	KL_4	0.824			
	KL_5	0.816			
Institutionality	KG_1	0.881	0.642	0.798	0.867
	KG_2	0.822			
	KG_3	0.768			
	KG_4	0.804			
Leadership	KP_1	0.881	0.749	0.854	0.905
	KP_2	0.856			
	KP_3	0.842			
	KP_4	0.874			
Competitive Advantage	KB_1	0.873	0.771	0.872	0.918
	KB_2	0.867			
	KB_3	0.852			
	KB_4	0.876			
	KB_5	0.888			
	KB_6	0.869			

Source: Adapted SmartPLS 4 Output, 2025

The results in Table 1 indicate that all constructs meet the minimum criteria for reliability and convergent validity. The consistently high factor loadings suggest that each item strongly reflects its underlying construct, while the AVE values demonstrate that the majority of variance is explained by the constructs rather than measurement error. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability scores, all exceeding the 0.80 threshold in most cases, confirm strong internal consistency. These findings collectively provide assurance that the measurement model is both reliable and valid, thereby justifying further analysis of the structural model.

Following the confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to test the proposed hypotheses. Table 2 and Figure 2 summarize the results of the path coefficient analysis, including the standardized estimates, t-statistics, and significance levels for each hypothesized relationship. The findings provide evidence regarding the direct and indirect effects among the constructs, enabling an assessment of whether the proposed hypotheses are supported.

Table 2. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T Statistic	Result
H1 Social Interaction → Leadership	0.623	9.705	Accepted
H2 Social Interaction → Competitive Advantage	-0.277	3.483	Accepted
H3 Local Wisdom → Leadership	0.184	2.735	Accepted
H4 Local Wisdom → Competitive Advantage	0.269	4.346	Accepted
H5 Institutionalization → Leadership	-0.035	0.352	Rejected
H6 Institutionalization → Competitive Advantage	0.239	3.400	Accepted
H7 Leadership → Competitive Advantage	-0.77	11.431	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS output, 2024

The results of the structural model analysis provide several noteworthy insights. Social interaction exerts a strong and significant influence on leadership (H1), confirming its role as a key driver of collective guidance, although its direct effect on competitive advantage is negative (H2), suggesting potential trade-offs when social dynamics are not strategically aligned. Local wisdom significantly enhances both leadership (H3) and competitive advantage (H4), underscoring the importance of cultural values in shaping organizational outcomes. Institutionalization shows no significant effect on leadership (H5), indicating that formal structures alone may not foster effective leadership, yet it positively influences competitive advantage (H6), reflecting the value of institutional arrangements in sustaining competitiveness. Finally, leadership demonstrates a strong negative effect on competitive advantage (H7), an unexpected finding that implies leadership practices in the observed context may not effectively translate into superior market positioning, warranting deeper exploration.
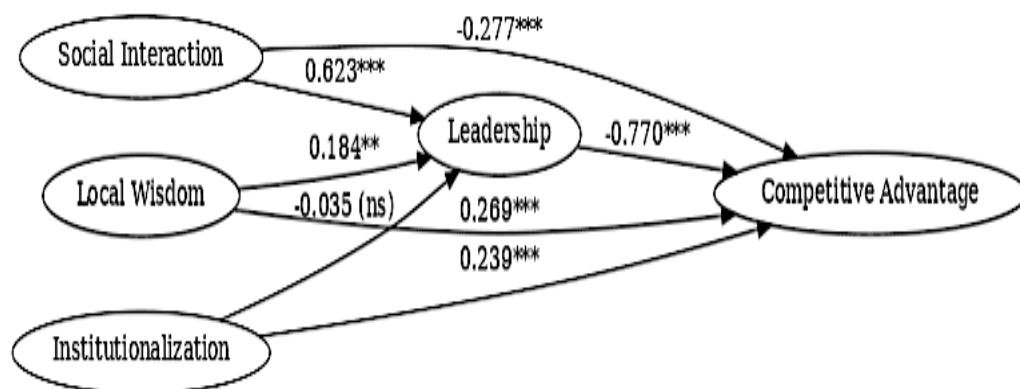

Figure 2. Statistical Finding Presentation

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a paradoxical role of institutional structures in educational organizations. Contrary to the classical assumption that robust institutions invariably support leadership effectiveness, the analysis indicates that institutions, in this case, exert an insignificant and even constraining influence on leadership quality. This resonates with critiques from neo-institutional theory, particularly DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of institutional isomorphism, which suggests that organizations often mimic prevailing structures to gain legitimacy rather than to improve internal performance. Such mimicry, while conferring external acceptance, can entrench bureaucratic rigidity and dampen the ability of leaders to innovate or act strategically. In this sense, institutions risk becoming cages of conformity rather than enablers of strategic agency. Agency theory offers a complementary lens: when governance structures impose excessive control, leaders face diminished discretion to pursue transformative visions (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). In educational contexts, this over-structuring can suffocate creativity, rendering institutional influence neutral or even detrimental to leadership vitality.

Equally provocative is the finding that leadership itself does not directly translate into competitive advantage but, rather, shows a negative association in the studied context. This contradicts the prevailing optimism in transformational leadership scholarship, which typically emphasizes the catalytic role of leaders in fostering innovation and long-term advantage (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Yet, as critics have observed, transformational influence is not universally effective; its outcomes depend heavily on cultural readiness, structural alignment, and contextual legitimacy (Northouse, 2022; Yukl, 2013). Where leadership remains administrative and reactive rather than visionary and enabling, its potential to create distinctive value is muted. Contingency theorists long ago reminded us that leadership effectiveness is situational (Fiedler, 1967). In organizations where the cultural fabric resists change or leaders lack the authority to marshal resources, leadership ceases to be a strategic asset and becomes instead a managerial function. From the perspective of the resource-based view (Barney, 1991), leadership contributes to competitive advantage only when it constitutes a rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable capability. In the absence of these attributes—such as when leaders fail to foster innovation or articulate a compelling vision—leadership's influence on advantage is diminished, if not reversed.

By contrast, the role of social interaction emerged as strongly consequential. Meaningful interaction among teachers, administrators, and stakeholders significantly strengthened leadership dynamics, consistent with symbolic interactionist accounts that highlight the co-construction of meaning through communication (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959). Recent empirical studies reinforce this view: teacher–student interactions are critical for motivation (Reigal et al., 2025), and leadership behaviors that foster collegial exchange enhance collaboration and technology adoption (Schmitz et al., 2025). Yet the influence of social interaction on competitive advantage proved more complex. While interaction enriched leadership processes, its link to competitiveness carried a negative valence, suggesting that not all social ties are strategically productive. Excessive or poorly aligned interactions may breed conformity, internal conflict, or misplaced resource allocation, echoing Granovetter's (1985) warning about the double-edged nature of embeddedness. The implication here is that social capital must be curated: interactions that are unstructured or politically charged may erode rather than enhance competitive positioning.

Local wisdom, however, provided a distinctly positive force. Rooted in cultural values and community traditions, it enriched both leadership practices and competitive positioning, confirming arguments that culturally embedded resources foster legitimacy and resilience (Geertz, 1973; Assefa, 2025). In contexts where globalization tends to erode social cohesion, the integration of local wisdom into leadership approaches ensures not only cultural continuity but also strategic differentiation. This aligns with research on culturally responsive leadership, which demonstrates that leaders who harness indigenous knowledge foster inclusion, legitimacy, and innovation (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). By embedding local values into organizational practices, educational institutions can achieve a form of competitive advantage that is difficult for external rivals to replicate.

The final insight concerns institutions' positive link with competitive advantage, even as they failed to empower leadership. This suggests a bifurcation: while institutional rigidity may limit leadership discretion, the very same structures confer external legitimacy and stability that enhance an organization's standing in competitive arenas. This duality echoes Scott's (2014) pillars of institutional theory, where regulative and normative dimensions provide predictability and trust, critical assets in environments where stakeholders prize stability. Thus, institutions, while internally restrictive, may paradoxically function as shields that bolster legitimacy and attractiveness to external audiences.

These findings complicate the neat linearity often assumed in leadership research. They demonstrate that competitive advantage in education is not simply a function of charismatic or transformational leadership but emerges through a dynamic interplay of social interaction, cultural embeddedness, and institutional legitimacy. For scholars, this highlights the importance of theorizing leadership not as a solitary driver but as one variable within a constellation of organizational forces. For practitioners, the implication is sobering: leadership must be cultivated in concert with social processes, cultural values, and institutional legitimacy. Without this alignment, even strong leaders risk being undermined by systemic inertia, while institutions and

traditions may carry more weight in shaping competitive advantage than leadership charisma alone.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

The present study illuminates the delicate interplay between social interaction, local wisdom, institutional structures, and leadership in shaping the competitive advantage of educational organizations. The evidence suggests that while meaningful interaction and culturally embedded practices fortify leadership and advantage, institutional rigidity risks constraining leadership agency even as it lends legitimacy to organizational standing. Leadership itself, long lionized in management theory, reveals its limits when unaccompanied by cultural readiness, institutional adaptability, and interactive vitality. These findings invite a rethinking of leadership as not an isolated lever but a phenomenon nested within broader organizational ecologies. In so doing, the study contributes to the ongoing debate between transformational idealists and institutional realists, showing that competitive strength in education is not birthed from charisma alone but from the alignment of social capital, cultural heritage, and structural legitimacy.

Yet, as with all empirical endeavors, this inquiry is not without limitations. The reliance on cross-sectional survey data restricts causal inference, and the exclusive focus on civil servant teachers may narrow generalizability across other institutional forms or cultural contexts. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to capture the temporal dynamics of leadership and institutional evolution, and comparative cross-national studies could shed light on how local wisdom interacts differently with globalizing pressures in diverse societies. For practitioners, the implications are clear: school leaders and policymakers must avoid the seduction of leadership myths divorced from institutional or cultural realities. Effective strategy requires cultivating constructive social interaction, embedding local cultural capital into management practices, and reforming institutions to balance legitimacy with flexibility. In short, competitive advantage in education emerges not from heroic individuals but from the orchestration of interactional, cultural, and structural resources—a lesson of both scholarly consequence and urgent managerial relevance.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE

All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. They were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Each respondent was given a clear and transparent explanation of the purpose of the study, benefits, potential risks (if any), as well as an assurance that their personal data would be kept confidential and only used for scientific purposes. Respondents were also asked to sign an informed consent form as a form of voluntary willingness to participate.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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