

Strengthening Distinctiveness of Law Study Programs: A SWOT-Based Analysis in South Sulawesi

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History: Received 21/8/2025 | Revised 10/11/2025 | Accepted 25/12/2025 | Published 30/12/2025

Abstract. The urgency of this research arises from intensifying competition among law faculties and study programs in South Sulawesi, which demands a clear strategic positioning and distinctive profile for each program. This study aims to analyze the distinctiveness of law study programs in several universities in South Sulawesi by employing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) approach to identify internal and external factors influencing their competitiveness and differentiation. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, and an extensive review of institutional and policy documents. The findings indicate that program differentiation can be systematically developed through market needs analysis and benchmarking, the formulation of visions and missions grounded in institutional core values, and curriculum development aligned with each university's core business and regional characteristics. The strengths of the examined law programs include lecturer competence, relatively adaptive curricula, and networking with local legal and governmental stakeholders, while weaknesses are evident in limited facilities, constrained research resources, and insufficiently structured internship schemes. Opportunities are created by the high demand for qualified legal professionals and the dynamic evolution of national regulations, whereas major threats stem from intense inter-program competition and shifting higher education policies. The novelty of this study lies in its SWOT-based comparative mapping of multiple law study programs within a single geographic region, simultaneously identifying their substantive differentiation. The research contributes strategic recommendations for enhancing program competitiveness by strengthening flagship academic offerings, expanding collaboration with legal institutions, and optimizing internal resources to improve academic quality and competitive positioning at regional and national levels.

Keywords: *Law Study Programs; Strategic Distinctiveness; SWOT Analysis; Higher Education Competitiveness; South Sulawesi Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of national education in Indonesia is constitutionally framed as the development of citizens who are knowledgeable, dignified, and capable of contributing to a just and civilized society, as affirmed in the National Education System Law and subsequent regulatory frameworks (Indonesia, 2003; Kementrian Hukum dan HAM, 2012; Pendidikan et al., 2020). Higher education institutions are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate character, critical thinking, and social responsibility in line with national ideology and global transformations in science and technology (Andika & Zham-zham, 2022; Hui & Yan, 2023; Jayadiputra, 2023). Within this mandate, universities are increasingly required to align their curricula with rapidly changing societal needs and labour markets, while preserving humanistic values and the broader mission of education for the common good (Godonoga & Sporn, 2023;

Hassan et al., 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). Legal education, in particular, holds a strategic position in supporting the rule of law, social justice, and human rights, and thus demands continuous recalibration of its academic orientation and program design (Judijanto et al., 2024; As et al., 2023).

The development and implementation of curriculum constitute a central mechanism through which these national objectives are operationalised at the program level (Mara Samin Lubis, 2016; Matshe & Mahlangu, 2014; Mendoza et al., 2022). Contemporary higher education research underscores that curriculum should be conceptualised as a dynamic system that integrates goals, content, pedagogy, assessment, and learning environments, while remaining responsive to external changes in technology, economy, and culture (Adnan et al., 2020; Karakuş, 2021; Susanti et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, policies on national higher education standards and the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka agenda have intensified pressures on universities to innovate, differentiate their study programs, and strengthen graduate employability (Andika & Zham-zham, 2022; Gumilar et al., 2023; Pendidikan et al., 2020). This requires law study programs to move beyond generic curricula and to articulate distinctive academic profiles that reflect institutional missions, regional characteristics, and global legal developments (Akhtar et al., 2024; Niță & Guțu, 2023; Wit, 2020).

Despite these policy directions, competition among study programs at both public and private universities has become increasingly intense due to the expansion of higher education providers and changing expectations of stakeholders (Gunawan, 2020; Phiri et al., 2024; Prasetianto, 2024). The proliferation of law study programs across Indonesia—including in South Sulawesi—has posed challenges in maintaining curriculum relevance, assuring quality, and differentiating graduate profiles in a crowded academic marketplace (Chusniyah et al., 2023; Dolipas et al., 2022; Kurniawan, 2020). National databases and quality assurance mechanisms have been developed to support governance and accreditation, yet their effectiveness depends on how far study programs are able to internalise strategic planning and evidence-based decision-making at the program level (Prasetianto, 2024; Dolipas et al., 2022; Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024). Common responses adopted by universities include periodic curriculum review, strengthening internal quality assurance, and pursuing accreditation upgrades, but these measures often remain generic and do not automatically lead to clear program distinctiveness (Matshe & Mahlangu, 2014; Mendoza et al., 2022; Niță & Guțu, 2023).

In the specific field of legal education, the need for differentiation is particularly urgent in view of complex socio-legal problems and diversifying demands for legal services (As et al., 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024; Phiri et al., 2024). South Sulawesi constitutes a region with distinctive

socio-cultural and economic features, including strong maritime orientation, rich customary law traditions, and dynamic regional governance, all of which require law graduates with contextual understanding and specialised competencies (Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Rijal Idrus et al., 2023; Rizal et al., 2024). The increasing number of law study programs in this region—spanning state, Islamic, and private universities—has generated both competition and opportunities for collaboration, but has also exposed the risks of homogeneous curricula and indistinct graduate profiles (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Kurniawan, 2020; Mardiyana et al., 2022). Existing management practices and curriculum reforms, while important, tend to address quality in a general way and seldom provide a strategic framework for positioning each law study program vis-à-vis regional legal needs and institutional core values (Akhtar et al., 2024; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; Hassan et al., 2024).

Previous studies in higher education management and strategic planning have proposed various tools to support program development, among which SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis is one of the most widely used frameworks (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Aziz, 2021; Mardiyana et al., 2022). SWOT analysis has been employed to guide organisational diagnosis, identify internal and external environmental forces, and design competitive strategies in diverse institutional settings, including universities and faculties (Chusniyah et al., 2023; Phiri et al., 2024; Azhari, 2024). In the Indonesian context, the use of SWOT has been documented in studies on program planning, institutional benchmarking, and business development, providing structured insights into how programs can leverage strengths and opportunities while mitigating weaknesses and threats (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Aziz, 2021; Kurniawan, 2020). However, most of these applications focus on general management or non-legal disciplines, and pay limited attention to the specificities of law study programs and their socio-legal environments (As'ad & Firmansyah, 2022; Gunawan, 2020; Phiri et al., 2024).

In parallel, research on curriculum development and institutional strategy underscores the importance of aligning program design with learning outcomes, graduate employability, and broader societal needs (Akhtar et al., 2024; Mendoza et al., 2022; Susanti et al., 2024). Studies highlight that program distinctiveness can be constructed through the articulation of unique competencies, integration of local wisdom, and incorporation of interdisciplinary perspectives that respond to complex real-world challenges (Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Rizal et al., 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). Vision–mission alignment, leadership, and shared institutional values are emphasised as key drivers for building cohesive and innovative academic communities (Dolipas et al., 2022; Niță & Guțu, 2023; Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024). Yet, empirical investigations that concretely link such strategic elements to the differentiation of law study programs—particularly

in a specific regional cluster—remain scarce, leaving questions about how these principles operate in practice within Indonesian legal education (As et al., 2023; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; Hassan et al., 2024).

A closer reading of the literature indicates that existing studies relevant to this topic can be grouped into three main strands: strategic management and SWOT-based planning in higher education, curriculum alignment and employability, and socio-legal contextualisation of legal education (Akhtar et al., 2024; Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Chusniyah et al., 2023; Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024; Mardiyana et al., 2022; Phiri et al., 2024). The first strand demonstrates the utility of SWOT and related tools for institutional diagnosis but rarely moves beyond single-case analyses or non-legal contexts (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Aziz, 2021; Kurniawan, 2020; Mardiyana et al., 2022). The second strand elaborates how curricula can be redesigned to enhance learning outcomes, critical thinking, and employability, often in response to national reforms and digital transformation (Adnan et al., 2020; Akhtar et al., 2024; Gumilar et al., 2023; Karakuş, 2021; Niță & Guțu, 2023). The third strand highlights the significance of integrating local wisdom, cultural literacy, and social justice concerns into legal education, yet typically does so at the conceptual or normative level rather than through comparative program-level analysis (As et al., 2023; Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024; Rizal et al., 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). Collectively, these strands point to the need for a more integrated and context-sensitive approach to understanding how law study programs can construct distinctive profiles within a shared regional environment.

From this synthesis, several research gaps become apparent. First, there is a paucity of empirical studies that directly compare multiple law study programs within a single geographical region, such as South Sulawesi, using a common analytical framework (Chusniyah et al., 2023; Phiri et al., 2024; Prasentianto, 2024). Second, the potential of SWOT analysis as a strategic tool for legal curriculum development, particularly in linking internal capacities with external legal labour market demands, has not been fully explored (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Aziz, 2021; Mardiyana et al., 2022; Phiri et al., 2024). Third, there is limited research that systematically connects program differentiation with regional socio-legal contexts, including maritime characteristics, customary law, and local governance dynamics (Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024; Rijal Idrus et al., 2023). Finally, methodological discussions on how to rigorously validate qualitative findings in strategic higher education studies—through techniques such as triangulation, systematic instrument development, and trustworthiness criteria—are still emerging and have seldom been applied to the case of law study programs (Anthony et al., 2023; Edd & Hart, 2023; Khoshnevisan, 2022; Zia UI Haq Kakar, 2023).

The present study addresses these gaps by proposing a SWOT-based comparative analysis of law study programs in South Sulawesi that explicitly incorporates regional characteristics and institutional core values into the assessment of program distinctiveness. Methodologically, the research adopts a generic qualitative design with triangulated data sources—interviews, observations, and document analysis—informed by established guidelines for qualitative rigor and instrument validation (Anthony et al., 2023; Edd & Hart, 2023; Khoshnevisan, 2022; Zia UI Haq Kakar, 2023). Substantively, it focuses on how strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are configured across different institutions, and how these configurations relate to curriculum design, human resources, partnerships, and digital transformation (Adnan et al., 2020; Gunawan, 2020; Niță & Guțu, 2023). The novelty of this research lies in its integrated perspective that combines higher education management, curriculum studies, and socio-legal analysis to construct a conceptual model of context-based and strength-based differentiation for law study programs in a maritime and culturally rich region (As et al., 2023; Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Rijal Idrus et al., 2023).

Accordingly, the study pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it seeks to identify and compare the strengths and weaknesses of law study programs in several universities in South Sulawesi, with particular attention to curriculum, human resources, facilities, and stakeholder engagement (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Dolipas et al., 2022; Mardiyana et al., 2022). Second, it aims to map the opportunities and threats arising from regional legal needs, national regulatory developments, digitalisation, and competitive dynamics in higher education (Adnan et al., 2020; Chusniyah et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2024; Phiri et al., 2024). Third, based on this comparative SWOT mapping, the study intends to formulate strategic recommendations for enhancing the distinctiveness and competitiveness of law study programs through contextually grounded differentiation strategies (Akhtar et al., 2024; Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Niță & Guțu, 2023). These objectives are operationalised through the following research questions: (1) How are internal strengths and weaknesses of law study programs in South Sulawesi configured in relation to their institutional missions and resources? (2) What external opportunities and threats shape the strategic environment of these programs within regional and national legal contexts? and (3) How can the resulting SWOT profiles inform the design of distinctive, context-responsive strategies for law study program development in South Sulawesi?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an empirical qualitative design with a descriptive orientation to address the research problem of how law study programs construct distinctiveness and competitiveness within a shared regional context. An empirical orientation was selected because

the phenomenon under investigation—strategic positioning of law study programs—is deeply embedded in the lived experiences, interpretations, and everyday practices of academic leaders and lecturers, which are best accessed through naturalistic inquiry rather than experimental control or large-scale surveys (Adnan et al., 2020; Azhari, 2024; Gumilar et al., 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024; Mardiyana et al., 2022). The design followed principles of generic qualitative research that emphasise flexible sampling, iterative data collection and analysis, and attention to meaning-making, thereby allowing the research questions to be refined as patterns emerged from the field (Prasetianto, 2024; Zia UI Haq Kakar, 2023). Within this framework, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was adopted as the main analytical lens to diagnose internal and external conditions of study programs in a structured manner and to generate context-sensitive strategic insights rather than purely normative prescriptions (Azhari, 2024; Gumilar et al., 2023; Mardiyana et al., 2022).

The research was conducted in five universities offering law study programs in South Sulawesi, representing a spectrum of institutional types (state, Islamic, and private) and accreditation levels. These sites were selected because they combine relatively established law programs with explicit aspirations for differentiation and regional relevance, making them analytically rich cases for comparative SWOT analysis (Akhtar et al., 2024; Gunawan, 2020). The delimitation of the setting considered prior studies on strategic planning, curriculum implementation, and benchmarking in higher education, which underline the importance of examining institutional strategies within specific organisational and regional contexts rather than in isolation (Aziz, 2021; Karakuş, 2021; Matshe & Mahlangu, 2014). In addition, the inclusion of universities that contribute to the development of the maritime vision for Eastern Indonesia and to the articulation of regional academic priorities ensured alignment with broader strategic documents on the maritime character and development agenda of South Sulawesi (Rijal Idrus et al., 2023).

The primary research subjects consisted of key stakeholders in each law study program, including deans or vice deans, heads of study programs, quality assurance coordinators, and senior lecturers who are directly involved in curriculum development, accreditation, and external partnerships. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to select informants who possessed substantive knowledge of program history, strategic planning processes, and interactions with regulatory and professional environments, in line with recommendations for information-rich qualitative sampling in education and institutional research (Andika & Zham-zham, 2022; Chusniyah et al., 2023; Hamzah & Zubair, 2023). Additional informants, such as student representatives and alumni actively engaged in legal practice, were included in several sites to

provide complementary perspectives on graduate profiles and perceived distinctiveness of the programs (Kartikawati, 2022; Mendoza et al., 2022; Rizal et al., 2024). This combination of managerial and user perspectives enabled a more holistic understanding of how differentiation strategies are formulated, implemented, and experienced.

Data were collected through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow researchers to work with a guiding protocol while still enabling informants to elaborate their experiences and interpretations in depth, which is crucial in generic qualitative designs (Anthony et al., 2023; Edd & Hart, 2023). Interview protocols covered themes such as institutional mission and vision, curriculum structure, human resources, collaboration with external stakeholders, and perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Interviews were conducted face to face or via online platforms depending on logistical conditions and digital readiness of each campus, paying attention to issues of access and equity in digital interaction (cut Afrina et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2024; Ning et al., 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). Document analysis was conducted on institutional strategic plans, curriculum documents, accreditation reports, organisational structures, and internal quality assurance documents, complemented by national regulations on higher education such as Law No. 12 of 2012 and related implementing regulations (Kementrian Hukum dan HAM, 2012). These documents were treated as both contextual information and substantive data for triangulation.

The interview guides and observation sheets were developed deductively from the theoretical framework on curriculum and program development, and inductively from initial readings of policy documents and prior studies on SWOT-based institutional planning. The construction of instruments followed principles of clarity, relevance, and coverage of core constructs in strategic management and curriculum analysis (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Dolipas et al., 2022; Hui, 2023; Niță & Guțu, 2023). Draft instruments were reviewed and refined through expert judgement involving scholars in education management and legal education, and through limited pilot interviews in institutions outside the main sample to check comprehensibility and the capacity of questions to elicit rich data (Khoshnevisan, 2022; Susanti et al., 2024). Revisions from these stages were incorporated to enhance content validity and to ensure that the instruments captured both formal structures (e.g., documented curricula) and informal practices (e.g., unwritten norms in teaching and collaboration).

The overall research procedure comprised several sequential and iterative stages. First, a preliminary literature and policy review was undertaken to map concepts of distinction, curriculum differentiation, and strategic planning in higher education, as well as to identify key

regulatory frameworks governing Indonesian legal education (Indonesia, 2003; Kurniawan, 2020; Pendidikan et al., 2020). Second, contact was established with the selected universities for access negotiation and alignment of research focus with institutional priorities, a step consistent with participatory approaches to institutional research (As'ad & Firmansyah, 2022; Edd & Hart, 2023). Third, fieldwork was conducted through scheduled interviews and observations, with ongoing reflective memos documenting emerging themes, researcher assumptions, and contextual factors that might influence interpretation (Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024). Fourth, documents were systematically collected and catalogued from institutional websites, internal archives, and regulatory repositories, ensuring that each piece of evidence could be traced back to its source.

Data analysis followed a multi-stage, primarily inductive procedure integrated with the SWOT framework. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and, together with observation notes and documents, were subjected to open coding to identify significant statements, events, and descriptions related to program strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and differentiation strategies (Adnan et al., 2020; Azhari, 2024; Mardiyana et al., 2022). Coded segments were then grouped into higher-order categories representing internal dimensions (e.g., human resources, curriculum design, facilities, governance) and external dimensions (e.g., regulatory context, labour market dynamics, regional socio-legal issues) in line with established applications of SWOT in institutional and program-level analysis (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Aziz, 2021; Chusniyah et al., 2023; Phiri et al., 2024). Within-case SWOT matrices were first constructed for each law study program and then compared across cases to identify convergent and divergent patterns, as well as unique strategic configurations (Gunawan, 2020; Matshe & Mahlangu, 2014; Mendoza et al., 2022). Throughout this process, iterative movement between data, codes, and conceptual categories was used to refine interpretations and to link empirical patterns to the broader theoretical and policy frameworks.

Trustworthiness and validity of the qualitative data were addressed through multiple strategies consistent with contemporary standards in institutional and educational research. Triangulation was conducted across data sources (interviews, observations, documents), participant groups (managers, lecturers, students, alumni), and institutions to check the consistency of emerging interpretations and to avoid overreliance on single perspectives (As, 2023; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; Phiri et al., 2024). Member checking was implemented by sharing preliminary summaries of SWOT profiles with selected informants for feedback on accuracy and plausibility, while peer debriefing sessions with colleagues helped to interrogate assumptions and alternative explanations (Jayadiputra, 2023; Wit, 2020). An audit trail documenting decisions in sampling, instrument revision, coding, and categorisation was

maintained to support transparency and potential replication (Mara Samin Lubis, 2016; Zia UI Haq Kakar, 2023). Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality of institutional and individual identities, and reflecting critically on the researcher's positionality as a scholar engaging with law schools that function as fields for cultivating legal, civic, and moral values in society (As, 2023; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023).

RESULT

Formulation of Study Program Distinctiveness

The term *distinction*, following Bourdieu, refers to processes of domination, prestige, and sharp differentiation within society, and in the present context denotes curricular differentiation or specialisation in higher education designed to provide in-depth expertise in a particular field (Kartikawati, 2022). Program distinctiveness is thus understood as a deliberate effort to enhance graduate quality through the development of special competences aligned with industry and societal needs, while simultaneously fostering innovation and scientific advancement. Juridically, differentiation at the university and study program levels is grounded in Article 35 of Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education, which mandates that curricula be designed to meet societal needs and the development of science, technology, arts, and culture (Kementrian Hukum dan HAM, 2012; Pendidikan et al., 2020). Against this legal and conceptual backdrop, the present study examined five law faculties in South Sulawesi: the Faculty of Sharia and Law, UIN Alauddin Makassar (superior institutional accreditation); the Faculty of Law, Hasanuddin University (superior faculty and institutional accreditation); the Faculty of Law, Indonesian Muslim University Makassar (superior faculty and institutional accreditation); and, within the Luwu Raya area, the Faculties of Law at Andi Djemma University and Mega Buana University.

Across these institutions, the formulation of program distinctiveness follows three main stages: (a) needs analysis, (b) formulation of vision and mission derived from institutional core values, and (c) curriculum development that operationalises those values through courses and learning experiences. Needs analysis is conducted as a systematic process to identify and evaluate gaps between current and desired conditions, with the aim of understanding what is required to achieve agreed goals in a particular organisation, project, or program. It constitutes the first step in formulating study program distinctiveness. In practice, two key activities are undertaken. First, *market studies* are used to map labour market demands and to understand trends in the legal industry, thereby informing decisions on the focus and specialisation of the study program. Methods include surveys of law firms, government agencies, companies, and non-governmental organisations to identify desired skills and knowledge in law graduates, as well as trend analysis drawing on industry reports, legal publications, and employment data to identify emerging areas

such as cyber law, intellectual property rights, and environmental law (Susanti et al., 2024). Second, *benchmarking* is carried out as inter-institutional collaboration through direct observation and visits, during which institutions exchange information on learning processes and management practices. Benchmarking is used to compare existing curricula with leading programs, identify good practices and weaknesses, and explore opportunities for improvement, in line with views that benchmarking is an appropriate long-term strategy for continuous performance enhancement (Kurniawan, 2020; Ning et al., 2024).

The second step concerns the formulation of vision and mission at the study program level. Vision is defined as a long-term ideal description of what the study program seeks to achieve, providing an ultimate goal and inspiration for all stakeholders; mission explains the primary goals and approaches to achieving that vision through education, research, and community service. Together, vision and mission provide strategic direction, shape academic culture, and establish long-term and short-term goals for the study program (Dolipas et al., 2022). In formulating vision and mission, several characteristics are emphasised. The vision should be inspirational and ambitious, capable of motivating the entire academic community, yet realistic and measurable. The mission should be specific and clear in describing what the study program does and how it does it, and should be oriented towards stakeholder and market needs by reflecting a commitment to students, society, and the legal profession (Mendoza et al., 2022). The process involves, *inter alia*, identifying core values through discussions, workshops, and focus group discussions with lecturers, staff, students, and alumni to reach agreement on institutional values, and conducting surveys or consultations with internal and external stakeholders regarding the core values that will underpin the program vision (Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024).

In the law study programs examined, the formulation of distinctiveness at the program level is consistently derived from the institutional vision. As explained by the Vice Dean I of the Faculty of Sharia and Law, UIN Alauddin Makassar, the distinctive profile of the law program originates from the institutional core value of “civilization”, which prioritises moral and ethical dimensions; consequently, the faculty and study program must translate this value into their own visions and missions (interview, 1 July 2024). The program vision is thus based on the institution’s core business—civilization—understood as prioritising moral and ethical strengthening in all activities (interview, Abdul Rais Asmar, Head of Law Study Program, 1 July 2024). The visions of the five law study programs can be summarised as follows:

1. Faculty of Sharia and Law, UIN Alauddin Makassar: “Becoming a superior centre for study, development, and transformation of progressive and innovative law globally,” derived from the university’s civilizational core.

2. Faculty of Law, Hasanuddin University: “Centre of excellence for human development and Indonesian maritime continent-based law,” derived from the university’s maritime core.
3. Faculty of Law, Indonesian Muslim University: “Becoming a study program that produces reliable and leading law scholars in solving legal problems on the basis of *akhlaq al-karimah* and capable of competing at national and international levels by 2025,” derived from the institutional core of moral character.
4. Faculty of Law, Andi Djemma University: “Becoming a study program that produces legal professionals with character through education, research, and service based on justice and morality grounded in local wisdom by 2029.”
5. Faculty of Law, Mega Buana University, Palopo: “Becoming a law study program that produces innovative, superior, and professional graduates in the provision of legal protection for vulnerable groups,” derived from the institutional emphasis on local wisdom.

Interviews with the Head of the Law Study Program and senior academics at Hasanuddin University confirm that program distinctiveness is derived from the institutional vision, with locality being reflected primarily in courses and supported by the establishment of a specialised maritime law study centre (interviews, 2 July 2024). Similarly, the Dean of the Faculty of Law, Mega Buana University, notes that the institutional vision centred on local wisdom provides the reference point for program-level distinctiveness focused on vulnerable groups (interview, 5 July 2024). Collectively, these findings indicate that the primary mechanism for articulating program distinctiveness is the derivation of study program vision and mission from the institution’s core business.

Curriculum development constitutes the third major step in realising program distinctiveness. The curriculum is understood as a set of plans and arrangements concerning objectives, content, teaching materials, and methods used as guidelines for implementing learning to achieve higher education goals (Pendidikan et al., 2020). It encompasses the full range of experiences provided by universities to enable students to achieve desired learning outcomes. Curriculum development is a systematic and dynamic process involving design, implementation, evaluation, and revision to maintain relevance and effectiveness. Key concepts include: (1) needs analysis based on environmental, job-market, and societal demands, drawing on data from multiple stakeholders; (2) formulation of clear and measurable educational objectives across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains; (3) curriculum design involving the structuring of subjects, time allocation, and learning sequences, and the selection and organisation of content and teaching materials; (4) curriculum implementation through active involvement of lecturers, students, and other educational resources, supported by training and capacity building; and (5)

ongoing evaluation and revision based on various assessment methods to ensure continued relevance (Adnan et al., 2020; Gumilar et al., 2023). Principles that guide curriculum development include relevance to student needs and socio-cultural-economic demands, integration across subjects, flexibility in responding to changes in science and technology, stakeholder involvement, and learning outcome orientation (Matshe & Mahlangu, 2014; Karakuş, 2021).

In the law study programs examined, distinctiveness is made visible in the curriculum through the design of learning materials and course offerings. At Hasanuddin University, institutional maritime vision is translated into compulsory institutional courses on the law of the sea (PIP), a faculty-level compulsory course in maritime law, and the development of a maritime studies centre and maritime specialisation (interview, 2 July 2024). At UIN Alauddin, the civilizational core is operationalised through compulsory courses on the History of Islamic Civilization, strengthened courses on Legal Ethics and the Legal Profession, and the requirement for students to memorise Juz 30 (interview, Abdul Rais Asmar, 1 July 2024). In Palopo, the Dean of the Faculty of Law at Unanda emphasises that core business is reflected in course offerings, while at Mega Buana University, local wisdom and protection of vulnerable communities are translated into a vision focused on vulnerable groups and the development of practical courses on handling such groups (interviews, Dr. Khaidar Djidar and Nursyamsi Ichsan, 5 July 2024). These examples show that one of the primary ways to articulate institutional core business is through the formulation of courses that directly support it in each university.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) was used as an effective tool to evaluate the strategic position of the law study programs by systematically identifying internal and external factors affecting their development (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Mardiyana et al., 2022). Four generic strategy types are considered: (a) strength–opportunity (SO) strategies that use internal strengths to exploit external opportunities; (b) strength–threat (ST) strategies that deploy internal strengths to mitigate external threats; (c) weakness–opportunity (WO) strategies that employ external opportunities to reduce internal weaknesses; and (d) weakness–threat (WT) strategies that seek to minimise weaknesses while avoiding external threats. The generic matrix used in the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis Matrix

	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Opportunities (O)	SO strategies: Using internal strengths to take advantage of external opportunities	WO strategies: Overcoming weaknesses by taking advantage of external opportunities
Threats (T)	ST strategies: Using strengths to avoid or mitigate external threats	WT strategies: Minimising weaknesses and avoiding external threats

The SWOT framework guided the analysis of law study program distinctiveness in South Sulawesi by structuring the identification of internal and external factors that influence program success and development. The findings for each dimension are summarised below.

Strengths

The study identified several key strengths across the five law faculties. At the Faculty of Sharia and Law, UIN Alauddin Makassar, strengths include: (1) superior institutional accreditation; (2) a strategic geographical position in Eastern Indonesia and in the provincial capital; (3) a curriculum that integrates Islamic values, including the obligation to memorise 30 Juz before the final examination; and (4) special training programs for alumni preparing for civil servant recruitment (interview, 1 July 2023). These elements highlight the integration of positive law and Islamic law as a core strength (As'ad & Firmansyah, 2022; Hamzah et al., 2023).

At the Faculty of Law, Hasanuddin University, strengths include: (1) superior institutional and program accreditation, with the law program also internationally accredited; (2) a strategic geographical location in Eastern Indonesia and the provincial capital; (3) a curriculum that integrates maritime studies, including specialisation in maritime law and a Maritime Studies Centre, with 12 areas of specialisation and 12 corresponding departments, where students select a specialisation in the fifth semester; (4) two study programs at faculty level (Law and State Administrative Law) mandated by the Ministry of Law and Administrative Reform; (5) full implementation of the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum, whereby all students in the sixth semester must undertake off-campus MBKM activities worth 20 credits; and (6) substantial human resources, with 98 academic staff including 37 professors (interview, 2 July 2023). These features underscore the strength of superior accreditation and robust human resources (Gunawan, 2020; Niță & Guțu, 2023).

The Faculty of Law at the Indonesian Muslim University (UMI) also exhibits significant strengths: (1) superior institutional and program accreditation; (2) a strategic location in Eastern Indonesia and the provincial capital; (3) flexible class or lecture programs in the form of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which convert work experience into course credits to

shorten study duration for those with more than five years of work experience; (4) a curriculum grounded in moral values, implemented through one month of Islamic boarding-school activities at Darul Muhlisin Padang Lampe; and (5) human resources that include 14 professors (interview, 3 July 2023). These characteristics reflect strong reinforcement of moral and religious values through a boarding-school model (Dolipas et al., 2022; Safrilsyah et al., 2024).

The Faculty of Law at Andi Djemma University (Unanda) shares similar strengths, including RPL-based flexible classes, a strategic position in Luwu Raya as a district/city capital, and an evolving curriculum that has moved from a strong customary law focus to material law (criminal, civil, constitutional) and is planned to expand towards procedural law (criminal, civil, and constitutional), reflecting alumni practice patterns in advocacy (interview, Sulastry, 5 July 2024). The integration of local wisdom, coupled with the presence of 2–3 professors, constitutes an additional strength. At the Faculty of Law, Mega Buana University, strengths include RPL-based flexible classes, a strategic position in Luwu Raya, and a curriculum grounded in local wisdom. The program's vision emphasises the protection of vulnerable groups, operationalised through local values in *Tana Luwu* such as *Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbe*, and through specific courses on handling vulnerable groups (interview, Nursyamsi Ichsan, 5 July 2024). These elements highlight the strength of combining RPL implementation with local wisdom and a focus on vulnerable communities (Hamzah et al., 2023; Rizal et al., 2024).

Weaknesses

The analysis identified four main weaknesses affecting governance and educational quality: (1) limited educational infrastructure; (2) suboptimal integration of learning technology; (3) budget constraints; and (4) limited internationalisation activities. With respect to infrastructure, interviews at five universities indicate that two campuses (40%) acknowledge significant limitations in learning support facilities such as moot courts, digital reading rooms, and access to international law journals. Legal laboratory facilities, including moot courts, were reported as limited and not yet responsive to contemporary needs, and access to international journals was constrained by limited licences, preventing all students from using them (interview, Sulastry, 5 July 2025). This finding aligns with studies noting disparities in infrastructure quality between campuses in provincial capitals and those in districts or cities, and highlighting inadequate average infrastructure as a systemic challenge in the education sector (Hassan et al., 2024).

Regarding learning technology, two out of five campuses (40%) reported the absence of comprehensive integration of learning technology systems. Learning-related units still operate separate systems, for example, learning management systems (LMS), digital attendance,

assessment, and repositories for student assignments. As noted by the Dean of Law at Mega Buana University, the LMS exists but remains stand-alone, without integration into attendance, scheduling, and academic service systems (interview, 5 July 2025). This is consistent with findings that digital literacy in ASEAN is still relatively low, with an index of only 3.54 (out of 5) across dimensions of digital skills, security, culture, and ethics, which poses obstacles for universities seeking to integrate academic systems (cut Afrina et al., 2024; Adnan et al., 2020).

Budget constraints were frequently cited as a major barrier to developing institutional capacity, especially for research, curriculum enhancement, and lecturer competence. Informants emphasised that budgets are still insufficient and need to be increased, particularly for research and internal scholarships for high-achieving and underprivileged students. As noted by a deputy dean, internal scholarships are only available when specific allocations exist, and otherwise institutions depend on government scholarships (interview, Sulastry, 5 July 2025). Although the constitution mandates that 20% of the state budget be allocated to education, distribution mechanisms and prioritisation often pose challenges, especially for regional universities (Hassan et al., 2024). The World Bank has similarly reported that Indonesia's higher education investment remains relatively low at approximately 0.3% of GDP, below the OECD average of 1.1%.

Finally, most campuses have not yet consistently implemented internationalisation programs such as student exchanges, joint research, or visiting professorships. Informants reported interest in developing student-exchange programs but noted the absence of active cooperation with foreign universities and low levels of international publication, partly due to language barriers and high publication costs in reputable journals (interview, Sulastry, 5 July 2025). These constraints are in line with research showing that publication productivity is significantly influenced by demographic factors; lecturers graduating from foreign universities tend to publish four to five times more than those who graduate domestically (Gunawan, 2020). Limited foreign-language competence and minimal funding for internationalisation thus emerge as significant weaknesses (Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; Wit, 2020).

Opportunities

Field findings show that all universities (5/5 campuses) have considerable potential to develop specialisations or special tracks tailored to institutional character, geographical context, scientific traditions, and social needs. Empirically, these opportunities are reflected as follows. UIN Alauddin Makassar has strong potential to cultivate a specialisation in the integration of sharia and positive law grounded in Islamic civilizational and moral values. Integrative approaches between religious and modern knowledge are considered crucial for producing graduates who are both morally grounded and professionally competent (As'ad & Firmansyah,

2022; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). The core business of the law program at UIN Alauddin can therefore be understood as the integration of sharia and positive law.

The Faculty of Law at Hasanuddin University has promising opportunities to further develop specialisations in maritime and fisheries law, consistent with South Sulawesi's coastal characteristics and the existence of a maritime and marine studies centre. Hasanuddin University plays a strategic role in national development, especially in the Eastern Indonesia Region (Kawasan Timur Indonesia, KTI), an area with rich marine resources and communities with strong maritime cultural traditions, positioning it as a potential centre for maritime culture development (Rijal Idrus, 2023). The Faculty of Law at UMI Makassar has equally strong potential to deepen specialisations based on moral values, with a vision of producing law graduates with high moral integrity. Moral values are important in shaping strong character, ethics, and integrity, which positively influence students' relationships with society and the natural environment (Safrilsyah et al., 2024).

The Faculty of Law at Mega Buana University has opportunities to develop specialisations in customary law, access to justice, and legal aid for vulnerable groups, rooted in local values such as *Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbi*. Prior research confirms that these values are highly relevant in Bugis–Makassar culture-based dispute resolution (Hamzah et al., 2023). The law program at Unanda can similarly develop specialisations rooted in local wisdom, particularly in mining law, given the presence of numerous mining companies in Luwu Raya. These differences among study programs constitute opportunities to create distinctive law programs that differ substantively from one another. Additional opportunities arise from government and industry support, which are important for the sustainability and development of study programs and universities, as well as from partnerships with industry that can foster applied research and internship programs. Through such collaborations, study programs can design appropriate courses and better support labour-market needs (Aziz, 2021; Phiri et al., 2024).

Threats

The main threats identified include competition, regulatory change, and socio-economic conditions. Competition is particularly acute with law faculties in other universities, especially in provincial capitals with strategic locations and superior facilities and international networks. Competition is also reflected in accreditation profiles, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Accreditation of five law faculties in South Sulawesi

Institution	Institutional accreditation	Faculty of Law / Sharia accreditation	Law Study Program accreditation	Status
UIN Alauddin Makassar	Superior	Good	Good	Public
Hasanuddin University of Makassar	Superior	Superior	Excellent / internationally accredited	Public
Indonesian Muslim University	Superior	Superior	Superior	Private
Andi Djemma University, Palopo	B	Very Good	Very Good	Private
Mega Buana University, Palopo	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Private

Table 2 shows that two law study programs with superior accreditation—Unhas and UMI—are both located in the provincial capital, while the two programs in Luwu Raya hold very good accreditation status. The emergence of new law study programs at other institutions, such as the Business Law Study Program at Makassar State University, constitutes an additional competitive threat that may attract prospective students. Changes in education regulations also represent a significant threat, given their dynamic nature and the demands they place on institutional adaptation. The recent revisions to the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum, which aim to encourage students to master a wide range of fields in addition to their core expertise so as to compete globally, require substantial pedagogical and managerial adjustments (Andika & Zham-zham, 2022; Gumilar et al., 2023). Likewise, the shift to nine-criteria accreditation frameworks and increasingly stringent standards can pose funding and capacity challenges for law faculties.

Socio-economic conditions constitute a further threat. Regional economic instability can negatively affect student enrolment and institutional funding, while social issues such as unequal access to education and security concerns may disrupt academic activities. These dynamics are consistent with broader analyses of the vulnerability of higher education systems in emerging economies to macroeconomic fluctuations and persistent inequalities (Hassan et al., 2024; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023).

Overall, the SWOT analysis shows that law study programs in South Sulawesi not only obtain a descriptive picture of their internal and external conditions but can also relate these findings to theories of strategic university management, which emphasise that institutional excellence depends on strategic fit between internal capabilities and environmental dynamics (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Mardiyana et al., 2022; Phiri et al., 2024). The success of law study programs is therefore highly dependent on the quality of human resources, the relevance of the

curriculum, and the strength of external partnerships (Wit, 2020; Akhtar et al., 2024). This study provides more specific evidence for the context of Eastern Indonesia—particularly South Sulawesi—which has so far received relatively limited attention in legal education development literature (As et al., 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024).

The findings suggest that key strengths of law study programs in South Sulawesi—such as lecturer competence in criminal and customary law, strong local networks with law enforcement and government, and regional demand for legal professionals who understand Sulawesi’s socio-cultural configuration—constitute strategic foundations that remain underutilised. The integration of these strengths with external opportunities, including growing needs for regional development advocacy and digital transformation of legal services, is crucial for creating competitive advantage for regional study programs (Adnan et al., 2020; Hamzah et al., 2023; Ning et al., 2024). The main contribution of this research lies in: (1) its focus on specific regional contexts that have been overlooked in prior research on law study program development; (2) its identification of linkages between local legal particularities and modern curricular needs, thereby generating a more grounded strategic perspective; and (3) its integration of SWOT analysis with national higher education policies and global trends in legal education, providing a comprehensive decision-making framework (Gumilar et al., 2023; Niță & Guțu, 2023; Rizal et al., 2024).

Based on these findings, several practical and contextual strategic steps are recommended. First, strengthening curricula based on local wisdom and digital transformation by adding specialised courses or modules on South Sulawesi customary law, community-based dispute resolution, and digital legal practice, and by integrating clinical legal education in collaboration with courts, prosecutors’ offices, legal aid institutes, and local governments (Hamzah et al., 2023; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). Second, focused human resource development by encouraging competency certification, legal-technology training, international publication, and research collaboration aligned with regional development needs, and by forming excellent research clusters in fields such as criminal law, coastal agrarian law, and local government law (Gunawan, 2020; Phiri et al., 2024). Third, development of targeted, value-added partnerships with the legal industry, local government, customary institutions, and professional organisations for internships, joint research, and curriculum co-design, including opportunities for joint degrees or academic exchanges with national and international law schools (Aziz, 2021; Dolipas et al., 2022; Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024). Fourth, *threat mitigation through adaptive policy* by differentiating graduate competencies based on regional needs—such as specialisations in maritime law, customary law, or regional development law—and strengthening internal quality assurance systems to adapt to evolving accreditation, technological change, and labour-market demands (Andika & Zham-

zham, 2022; Pendidikan et al., 2020; Wit, 2020). Through this strategic approach, SWOT analysis functions not merely as a descriptive mapping tool but as a foundation for transformative program development oriented towards sustainable excellence and substantive relevance to local, national, and global needs.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that the distinctiveness of law study programs in South Sulawesi is constructed at the intersection of national policy mandates, institutional core values, and regional socio-legal realities. At the normative level, the emphasis on differentiation is compatible with the national education system and higher education laws, which require curricula to respond to societal needs and developments in science, technology, arts, and culture (Indonesia, 2003; Kementrian Hukum dan HAM, 2012; Pendidikan et al., 2020). This is consistent with broader humanistic conceptions of education that underline the dual mission of cultivating character and advancing science and technology for the common good (Hui & Yan, 2023; Jayadiputra, 2023). In legal education, the orientation toward social justice and human rights—particularly in rural and peripheral contexts—further reinforces the need for law programs that are contextually grounded and socially responsive rather than generically structured (Judijanto et al., 2024). The empirical pattern in South Sulawesi, in which institutional core businesses (civilization, maritime, moral character, local wisdom, vulnerable groups) are translated into program visions, missions, and curricula, thus aligns with contemporary expectations of “socially responsible universities” that integrate academic excellence with public responsibility (Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; As et al., 2023).

The formulation of distinctiveness through needs analysis and benchmarking also echoes theoretical and empirical work on curriculum development and institutional strategy. Literature on curriculum change stresses that program design should be preceded by systematic needs analysis, stakeholder consultation, and labour-market scanning to ensure relevance and responsiveness (Adnan et al., 2020; Matshe & Mahlangu, 2014; Susanti et al., 2024). The use of market studies and stakeholder feedback in the investigated law programs demonstrates a movement in this direction, even if not yet fully formalised. At the same time, the practice of benchmarking leading law schools—both nationally and internationally—corresponds with recommendations that institutions adopt comparative perspectives to identify gaps and best practices in curriculum and governance (Kurniawan, 2020; Aziz, 2021; Prasetyanto, 2024). From a theoretical standpoint, this supports the view that distinction is not merely symbolic but also organisational, emerging from structured processes of comparison, imitation, and innovation that generate different forms of capital and prestige (Kartikawati, 2022).

The centrality of vision–mission alignment in the structuring of law programs corroborates previous findings that institutional coherence is a cornerstone of effective quality assurance and strategic management. Studies on the assessment of institutional vision, mission, and program objectives indicate that clarity, internal consistency, and stakeholder ownership of these statements are critical for guiding decision-making and ensuring that academic units move in convergent directions (Dolipas et al., 2022; Toikka & Tarnanen, 2024). In the present study, all five law faculties derive their program visions explicitly from institutional cores—civilization at UIN Alauddin, maritime at Unhas, moral integrity at UMI, justice and local wisdom at Unanda, and the protection of vulnerable groups at Mega Buana. This practice is congruent with views that universities should articulate distinct social and cultural missions while simultaneously aligning with national standards and global trends (Gumilar et al., 2023; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023). It also resonates with socio-legal perspectives describing law schools as “generative social fields” for cultivating liberty, prosperity, and civic virtues, where institutional values are transmitted through both formal curricula and informal academic cultures (As et al., 2023; As’ad & Firmansyah, 2022).

The way in which distinctiveness is embedded into curricula through specialisations, compulsory courses, and co-curricular programs is broadly consistent with contemporary curriculum theory and research on learning outcomes. Scholars argue that curriculum should be conceptualised as a coherent system of objectives, content, pedagogy, and assessment oriented toward explicit learning outcomes and graduate competencies (Mara Samin Lubis, 2016; Mendoza et al., 2022; Matshe & Mahlangu, 2014). The examples identified in this study—maritime law tracks at Unhas, integration of sharia and positive law at UIN Alauddin, moral-character formation at UMI, local wisdom and mining law at Unanda, and vulnerable-group protection at Mega Buana—illustrate efforts to move from generic legal curricula toward more differentiated, outcome-based designs. These patterns are compatible with international discourse on interdisciplinary curriculum alignment aimed at enhancing graduates’ employability and institutional sustainability (Akhtar et al., 2024), as well as with calls for integrating cultural literacy, local wisdom, and prosocial behaviour development into higher education (Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Rizal et al., 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). At the same time, the challenges observed in curriculum implementation—such as infrastructural gaps, uneven digital integration, and resource constraints—reflect problems documented more generally in curriculum reform literature (Karakuş, 2021; Adnan et al., 2020).

The SWOT-based diagnosis of internal and external conditions situates these findings within the broader literature on strategic management in higher education. Previous studies have

shown that SWOT analysis can function as a pragmatic tool for strategic planning, program development, and institutional benchmarking, provided that it is grounded in robust data and linked to actionable strategies (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Azhari, 2024; Aziz, 2021; Chusniyah et al., 2023; Mardiyana et al., 2022). The present research extends this work by applying SWOT comparatively across multiple law programs within a single region, thereby exposing both shared vulnerabilities and distinctive configurations. The identification of strengths such as superior accreditation, strong local networks, and value-based curricula confirms that internal capacities can serve as levers for competitive advantage when strategically aligned with external opportunities (Gunawan, 2020; Niță & Guțu, 2023; Phiri et al., 2024). Conversely, the recognition of weaknesses—including limited infrastructure, fragmented digital systems, budget constraints, and limited internationalisation—mirrors concerns in the literature about uneven resource distribution, low digital literacy, and modest public investment in higher education in Indonesia (cut Afrina et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2024; Prasetyanto, 2024).

The pattern of opportunities and threats identified in this study is also consistent with national and global trends. Opportunities arise from policy reforms such as Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka, expansion of higher education participation, and the growing need for specialised legal expertise in maritime, environmental, mining, and social-justice-related fields (Andika & Zham-zham, 2022; Gumilar et al., 2023; Phiri et al., 2024; Rijal Idrus et al., 2023). Threats, by contrast, emerge from intensified competition between institutions, increasingly stringent accreditation standards, regulatory volatility, and socio-economic instability (Wit, 2020; Hassan et al., 2024; Ary & Sanjaya, 2020). In this regard, the case of South Sulawesi exemplifies a broader tension in the internationalisation of higher education: regional institutions must navigate pressures to conform to global benchmarks while simultaneously leveraging local strengths and responding to local challenges (Wit, 2020; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023). The discussion of internationalisation deficits in the findings—low mobility, limited joint research, and weak foreign-language competence—closely mirrors empirical evidence on the unequal distribution of international research productivity and collaboration in Indonesian universities (Gunawan, 2020; Akhtar et al., 2024).

Methodologically, the study's use of a generic qualitative design, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis with triangulation and member checking adheres to contemporary principles of rigour in qualitative research (Edd & Hart, 2023; Khoshnevisan, 2022; Zia Ul Haq Kakar, 2023). The stepwise development and validation of research instruments—through expert judgement and pilot interviews—reflects good practice in mixed-methods instrument validation and reinforces the trustworthiness of the data (Anthony et al., 2023).

Moreover, the integration of policy documents, institutional reports, and national regulations as secondary data strengthens contextual interpretation and aligns with recommendations that strategic analyses of higher education take into account both institutional and systemic levels (Kementrian Hukum dan HAM, 2012; Prasetyanto, 2024). The resulting SWOT matrices therefore function not only as descriptive devices but also as analytic tools for linking micro-level program conditions to macro-level policy and economic dynamics.

On the basis of these convergences and tensions, the author's position is that the distinctiveness of law study programs in South Sulawesi should be understood as a process of *contextual differentiation*, in which institutional cores (civilization, maritime, morality, local wisdom, vulnerable groups) are strategically connected to regional socio-legal needs and national reform agendas. This position affirms that the strengths identified—such as expertise in criminal and customary law, strong local networks with law-enforcement and government agencies, and the integration of religious and cultural values—are not merely symbolic assets but strategic resources that can underpin durable competitive advantage when combined with targeted capacity-building in digitalisation, internationalisation, and research (Adnan et al., 2020; Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Niță & Guțu, 2023). At the same time, the discussion recognises that without deliberate efforts to address weaknesses in infrastructure, technology, budgeting, and global engagement, regional law faculties risk being left behind in increasingly competitive and internationalised academic environments (cut Afrina et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2024; Wit, 2020).

In light of the above, several recommendations and solutions can be proposed. First, law faculties should deepen *curriculum differentiation* by systematically linking program learning outcomes to regional legal issues—such as maritime governance, mining regulation, customary law, and access to justice for vulnerable groups—while maintaining core competencies in national and international law (Mara Samin Lubis, 2016; Mendoza et al., 2022; Rizal et al., 2024). This may involve expanding clinical legal education, community-based dispute resolution modules, and interdisciplinary collaborations with social sciences and technology programs (Akhtar et al., 2024; Hamzah & Zubair, 2023; Judijanto et al., 2024). Second, faculties should pursue *strategic digital transformation* by integrating learning management systems, academic services, and assessment tools in ways that are aligned with staff digital competencies and supported by continuous professional development (Adnan et al., 2020; Niță & Guțu, 2023). Third, institutions should strengthen *human resource and partnership strategies* through targeted support for lecturer research, international publication, and networking, as well as through structured collaborations with courts, prosecutors' offices, law firms, NGOs, and local governments for

internships, joint research, and curriculum co-design (Ary & Sanjaya, 2020; Aziz, 2021; Dolipas et al., 2022; Phiri et al., 2024).

Finally, from a policy perspective, there is a need for *adaptive governance* that recognises regional diversity and supports law faculties outside metropolitan centres through more equitable resource allocation, capacity-building programs, and flexible quality assurance mechanisms attuned to local conditions (Hassan et al., 2024; Gumilar et al., 2023; Pendidikan et al., 2020). Such governance should acknowledge universities as key actors in promoting social justice, civic education, and moral development, particularly in areas facing complex socio-legal challenges (As et al., 2023; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). In this way, the SWOT-based differentiation strategies proposed by this study can serve not only to strengthen the competitiveness of individual law study programs but also to enhance the collective contribution of legal education to liberty, prosperity, and the protection of human dignity in South Sulawesi and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the distinctiveness and competitiveness of law study programs in South Sulawesi are shaped not only by curriculum design, but by the capacity of institutions to interpret their strategic environment and translate institutional core values into program visions, missions, and learning trajectories. The comparative SWOT analysis shows that differentiation is rooted in the alignment between program strengths—such as human resource quality, integration of religious and local wisdom, and strategic regional positioning—and external opportunities related to regional legal needs, national reforms, and digital transformation, while simultaneously addressing weaknesses in infrastructure, technology integration, budgeting, and internationalisation.

The key findings imply that context-based differentiation, anchored in clear institutional cores (civilization, maritime, morality, local wisdom, vulnerable groups), can provide a sustainable basis for competitive advantage when linked to responsive academic governance, targeted human resource development, and value-added partnerships with legal institutions and local governments. Conceptually, the research contributes to the literature by offering a SWOT-based comparative mapping of multiple law programs within a single region and by proposing a model of contextual and strength-based differentiation in legal education. Future studies should develop quantitative instruments to measure program distinctiveness, conduct longitudinal analyses of graduate outcomes, and examine in greater depth how professional stakeholders and evolving national policies influence the sustainability and competitiveness of law study programs across different regions.

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