



Adaptive Decision-Making in School Leadership for Enhancing Teacher Performance in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: School leadership in early childhood education requires principals to respond to diverse organisational demands while maintaining teacher performance and educational quality. However, existing studies have largely examined leadership through specific styles, providing limited explanation of how principals adapt decision-making processes to changing organisational conditions. This study aims to examine how principals enact adaptive decision-making and its implications for teacher performance in an early childhood education setting. A qualitative case study was conducted at TK Bina Bangsa, Situbondo, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis involving the principal and teachers. Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, with source and methodological triangulation and member checking used to strengthen trustworthiness. The findings show that adaptive decision-making was enacted through collaborative deliberation for strategic matters and situationally direct decisions when immediate responses were required. Decisions were subsequently implemented through teacher autonomy and delegated responsibilities, followed by systematic monitoring and periodic evaluation. These interconnected practices were accompanied by positive changes in selected aspects of teacher performance, including attendance and punctuality, instructional preparedness, professional responsibility, and participation in school activities. Adaptive decision-making is better understood as an interconnected leadership process than as the application of a single leadership style. The study extends style-based approaches to school leadership by providing a process-level account of how principals combine participatory and situationally direct decision-making with teacher autonomy, monitoring, and evaluation. The study offers an empirically grounded framework for understanding adaptive decision-making in early childhood education and provides practical guidance for principals seeking more responsive and context-sensitive leadership practices. The framework remains contextually grounded and requires further examination across diverse educational settings.

Keywords: adaptive decision-making; school leadership; teacher performance; decision-making process.

INTRODUCTION

School leadership is widely recognized as a key determinant of educational quality because it plays a strategic role in directing organisations, managing change, and making decisions that influence instructional effectiveness and teacher performance. Amid the growing complexity of educational governance in the twenty-first century, principals are expected to demonstrate not only administrative competence but also adaptive leadership capable of responding effectively to the evolving internal and external demands facing schools. Previous studies have shown that the quality of principals' decision-making influences organisational climate, teacher motivation, professional development, and the achievement of educational goals. Moreover, leadership that adapts decision-making strategies to organisational needs has been found to be more effective in enhancing teacher performance than relying on a single or rigid leadership approach (Firmansyah et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2024). Consequently, research on school leadership should move beyond the traditional classification of leadership styles and instead examine how adaptive decision-making processes are enacted to improve teacher performance and promote organisational effectiveness.

The importance of school leadership becomes particularly evident in the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE), where organisational conditions require close coordination among principals, teachers, educational staff, and parents to support children's development. Unlike many other educational settings, ECE involves educational processes that are closely connected to children's daily routines, classroom interactions, and developmental needs, requiring teachers to

respond to changing situations while maintaining continuity in learning and care. These conditions place particular demands on principals to make decisions that are responsive to both immediate operational needs and longer-term educational objectives. Previous studies have shown that leadership practices promoting open communication, collaboration, teacher empowerment, and teacher involvement in decision-making contribute positively to teacher motivation, organisational commitment, professionalism, and teacher performance in ECE settings (Jaelani & Sugito, 2024; Safrida et al., 2023). Accordingly, ECE provides an important context for examining adaptive decision-making because principals must balance participation and responsiveness when addressing organisational challenges and supporting teachers' professional responsibilities.

Recent research has increasingly positioned school leadership as a strategic factor in improving educational effectiveness. Studies have shown that transformational, participative, instructional, and distributed leadership can contribute to teacher motivation, organisational commitment, professionalism, and teacher performance by fostering collaborative school cultures and effective communication (Hariyono et al., 2025; Parveen et al., 2022; Rahayuningsih et al., 2026). Research has also highlighted the value of involving teachers in organisational decision-making, particularly in strengthening their sense of ownership and professional responsibility (Abdul Kadir Jaelani & Sugito, 2024). More recent reviews further suggest a shift from reliance on a single leadership model towards the integration of multiple leadership approaches in response to organisational characteristics and changing educational conditions (Özdemir et al., 2024; Suhaimi et al., 2025). These developments indicate that the effectiveness of school leadership may depend not only on the leadership style adopted but also on how principals adjust their leadership practices to the demands of particular situations.

Despite these developments, limited attention has been given to explaining adaptive decision-making as the process through which principals translate different leadership approaches into concrete organisational decisions, particularly in ECE settings. Existing studies provide substantial evidence concerning the relationship between particular leadership styles and teacher performance, but they offer less insight into how principals determine when to deliberate, when to make direct decisions, how decisions are subsequently implemented through teacher autonomy, and how monitoring and evaluation inform subsequent action. Empirically, studies that examine these interconnected processes as part of an adaptive decision-making cycle remain scarce, particularly in the context of ECE. This gap is important because the effectiveness of leadership in ECE may depend not simply on the adoption of a particular leadership style, but on the principal's capacity to adjust decision-making practices to the urgency, complexity, and developmental demands of the educational setting. Accordingly, this study addresses this gap by examining adaptive decision-making practices based on empirical evidence from TK Bina Bangsa.

Building on this gap, the present study advances a different perspective by conceptualizing school leadership not merely as the expression of a particular leadership style, but as an adaptive decision-making process that evolves in response to the nature of organisational challenges and the needs of the school. Drawing on the empirical findings, this process is enacted through the integration of collaborative deliberation in strategic decision-making, situational decisiveness when rapid responses are required, teacher autonomy in carrying out professional responsibilities, systematic monitoring of decision implementation, and periodic evaluation as a means of ongoing professional support. This perspective extends the school leadership literature beyond evaluating the effectiveness of individual leadership styles toward a deeper understanding of how leadership



is enacted through adaptive decision-making processes that produce effective organisational decisions. Accordingly, this study contributes not only to the conceptual development of school leadership research but also to educational practice by providing an adaptive decision-making framework that may inform principals particularly those working in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in fostering sustained improvements in teacher performance (Hariyono et al., 2025; Özdemir et al., 2024; Suhaimi et al., 2025).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to examine principals' adaptive decision-making and its implications for teacher performance at TK Bina Bangsa. Specifically, it investigates how principals enact adaptive decision-making through collaborative deliberation, situational decisiveness, teacher autonomy, systematic monitoring, and periodic evaluation to support improvements in teacher performance. By doing so, the study seeks to enrich the school leadership literature by advancing a more comprehensive understanding of leadership as an adaptive decision-making process while providing empirical evidence to inform the further development of leadership theory in the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE). The findings are also expected to offer practical insights for principals, educational leaders, and policymakers in designing decision-making processes that are more effective, participatory, and conducive to sustained improvements in teacher performance and educational quality.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of principals' adaptive decision-making practices and their implications for teacher performance within the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE). A case study design was selected because it enables an intensive exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context by drawing on multiple sources of evidence, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). The study was conducted at TK Bina Bangsa, located in Bantal Village, Asembagus District, Situbondo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The research site was selected purposively because it exhibits leadership practices that align with the focus of this study, particularly principals' adaptive decision-making and its implications for teacher performance.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby individuals were chosen based on their direct experience, relevant knowledge, and active involvement in the school's decision-making processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants consisted of the principal, who served as the primary decision-maker, and teachers who were directly involved in implementing school policies. Participant recruitment continued until the information collected was considered sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research focus, consistent with the principle of information sufficiency.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument (human instrument) and was responsible for designing the study, collecting and analyzing the data, and interpreting the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To support these activities, three complementary data collection instruments were employed: a semi-structured interview guide, an observation protocol, and a document review template. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The interviews explored principals' adaptive decision-making practices, while observations were conducted to examine how leadership was enacted in everyday



school activities. Document analysis provided supplementary evidence through the examination of school records, administrative documents, and other materials relevant to the research focus. The use of multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility, depth, and completeness of the findings (Yin, 2018).

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al., (2020) which comprises three interconnected processes: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, allowing emerging patterns, relationships among categories, and overarching themes to be identified throughout the research process. This iterative approach facilitated the development of themes that explain how principals enact adaptive decision-making to enhance teacher performance. The thematic analysis was refined continuously to ensure that the interpretations remained closely grounded in the empirical data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Source triangulation was achieved by comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, observations, and documentary evidence, whereas methodological triangulation involved cross-checking findings derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis. In addition, member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review and confirm the researchers' interpretations to ensure that they accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. The study also adhered to established ethical principles by informing participants of the study's purpose, obtaining their voluntary informed consent prior to participation, protecting the confidentiality of participant identities, and ensuring that all data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study are derived from an analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis concerning principals' adaptive decision-making practices at TK Bina Bangsa. Data analysis was conducted iteratively to identify recurring patterns across multiple sources of evidence, leading to the development of themes that capture how adaptive decision-making was enacted to enhance teacher performance. The findings are organized into four interrelated themes: (1) principals' adaptive decision-making practices, (2) the enactment of decisions through teacher autonomy, (3) monitoring and evaluation as integral components of the decision-making process, and (4) the implications of adaptive decision-making for teacher performance. These themes represent a synthesis of evidence from interviews, observations, and documentary sources, providing a comprehensive account of principals' adaptive decision-making within the context of the study.

Table 1. Summary of the Main Empirical Themes

Theme	Empirical Findings	Supporting Evidence
Decision-making practices	Strategic issues were resolved through deliberation, while urgent issues required direct decisions	Interview, Observation, Documentation
Decision implementation	Decisions were implemented through task allocation, teacher autonomy, and continuous coordination	Interview, Observation



Monitoring and evaluation	Classroom observation, administrative review, feedback, and periodic evaluation	Interview, Observation
Teacher performance	Increased discipline, responsibility, teaching readiness, and participation	Interview, Observation, Documentation

Table 1 summarises the four empirical themes identified from interviews, observations, and documentation. These themes illustrate the adaptive decision-making process implemented by the principal, beginning with decision-making practices and culminating in improved teacher performance.

Principals' Adaptive Decision-Making Practices

The findings indicate that the principal at TK Bina Bangsa enacted adaptive decision-making by adjusting the decision-making approach to the nature of the issues encountered within the school. Evidence from interviews, observations, and document analysis showed that the principal did not rely on a single, fixed decision-making pattern. Instead, decision-making practices were adapted to the evolving circumstances of the school. For issues related to programme planning, school activities, and policies affecting teachers, decisions were generally reached through collaborative deliberation, allowing teachers to contribute their views and considerations before a final decision was made. In contrast, situations requiring immediate action were addressed through direct decision-making while remaining attentive to organisational needs and the continuity of teaching and learning activities.

This pattern was also reflected in the principal's account of her decision-making practice: "I usually discuss matters with the teachers first, particularly those concerning school programmes and task allocation. However, in certain situations, I need to be firm and make decisions directly, especially when the issue concerns discipline or requires immediate resolution." (*Principal, interview, 19 June 2026; translated from Indonesian*).

Interview data from teachers similarly revealed that collaborative deliberation was frequently used for decisions concerning school programmes and instructional activities. One teacher explained that teachers were invited to express their views and suggestions before decisions were finalised, making the resulting decisions easier to accept and implement. Observational evidence likewise showed that deliberative meetings functioned as an important forum for coordinating school activities and discussing issues arising during programme implementation. Documentary evidence, including records of school meetings, further confirmed that regular meetings formed part of the school's policy formulation and decision-making processes.

Following the collaborative decision-making process, the findings also revealed that, in certain situations, the principal made decisions independently without engaging in extended deliberation. Such decisions were typically taken when immediate action was required to prevent disruptions to school operations or the continuity of teaching and learning activities. Although these decisions were made directly, the principal consistently communicated the rationale and intended objectives to teachers, enabling them to understand and accept the decisions before implementation. Observational evidence further indicated that this approach did not create difficulties in carrying out school responsibilities, as teachers implemented the decisions in accordance with the guidance provided. Taken together, the interview, observational, and documentary evidence demonstrates that the combination of collaborative deliberation and



situationally direct decision-making, selected according to the demands of each situation, constituted a central feature of adaptive decision-making at TK Bina Bangsa.

Enacting Decisions Through Teacher Autonomy

Following the decision-making process, the findings showed that the principal entrusted teachers with implementing decisions according to their agreed roles and responsibilities. Interview data indicated that the principal not only communicated the decisions that had been made but also provided teachers with autonomy to manage programme implementation in accordance with their respective responsibilities and professional expertise.

The principal described this approach as follows: “I give teachers the freedom to carry out their responsibilities according to their respective abilities, but this does not mean that I leave them on their own. I continue to monitor their work and provide guidance when difficulties arise.” (*Principal, interview, 19 June 2026; translated from Indonesian*).

This statement illustrates that teacher autonomy was accompanied by continued supervisory support rather than complete withdrawal from the implementation process. Observational evidence further showed that teachers carried out school programmes independently while maintaining communication with the principal whenever challenges arose. Documentary evidence likewise demonstrated that clearly defined roles and responsibilities served as operational guidelines for implementing various school programmes.

The implementation of decisions was further strengthened through ongoing coordination between the principal and teachers throughout programme implementation. Interview findings revealed that the principal maintained communication regarding the progress of assigned responsibilities and provided guidance whenever implementation challenges emerged. Observational evidence also showed that coordination occurred during both routine activities and specific programmes, while documentary evidence confirmed collaborative implementation among teachers in accordance with the previously established allocation of responsibilities.

Monitoring and Evaluation as Integral Components of Adaptive Decision-Making

The findings indicate that, following the implementation of decisions, the principal consistently monitored teachers' professional responsibilities through classroom observations, reviews of instructional administration, and regular communication regarding the progress of school programmes. Within the context of this study, monitoring functioned not merely as a supervisory activity but as an ongoing process for obtaining information about the implementation of decisions and identifying areas requiring attention.

The principal explained the monitoring and evaluation process as follows: “I conduct monitoring by directly observing teachers' classroom activities, checking instructional administration, and paying attention to their discipline in carrying out their responsibilities. Evaluation of teacher performance is usually conducted after monitoring, particularly at the end of the semester. We discuss the results together so that teachers know what has been done well and what needs to be improved.” (*Principal, interview, 19 June 2026; translated from Indonesian*).

Observational evidence further showed that the principal regularly followed the progress of school programmes and provided guidance when challenges emerged during implementation. Evaluation subsequently followed the monitoring process and focused on teachers' attendance and punctuality, instructional preparedness, and responsibility in carrying out their duties. A teacher also explained that evaluation was communicated constructively, enabling teachers to identify areas requiring improvement without feeling pressured.



Implications of Adaptive Decision-Making for Teacher Performance

The findings further indicate that adaptive decision-making was associated with changes in several aspects of teachers' professional practice. Interview data suggested that teachers perceived opportunities for participation, professional development, and discussion as supportive of their instructional preparedness and confidence. One teacher explained: "The school gives teachers opportunities to participate in training and workshops. We also often discuss our experiences in PAUD teacher meetings. These activities have had a positive influence: we understand better how to teach, feel more confident, and are better prepared to work with the children." (*Teacher, interview, 22 June 2026; translated from Indonesian*).

Observational evidence further indicated that teachers demonstrated punctuality, preparedness for teaching, and responsibility in carrying out their duties. Documentary evidence also confirmed that school programmes were implemented according to the agreed allocation of responsibilities. Taken together, the interview, observational, and documentary evidence suggests that adaptive decision-making was associated with positive changes in selected aspects of teacher performance within the study context.

Figure 1. Empirical Model of Adaptive Decision-Making in School Leadership

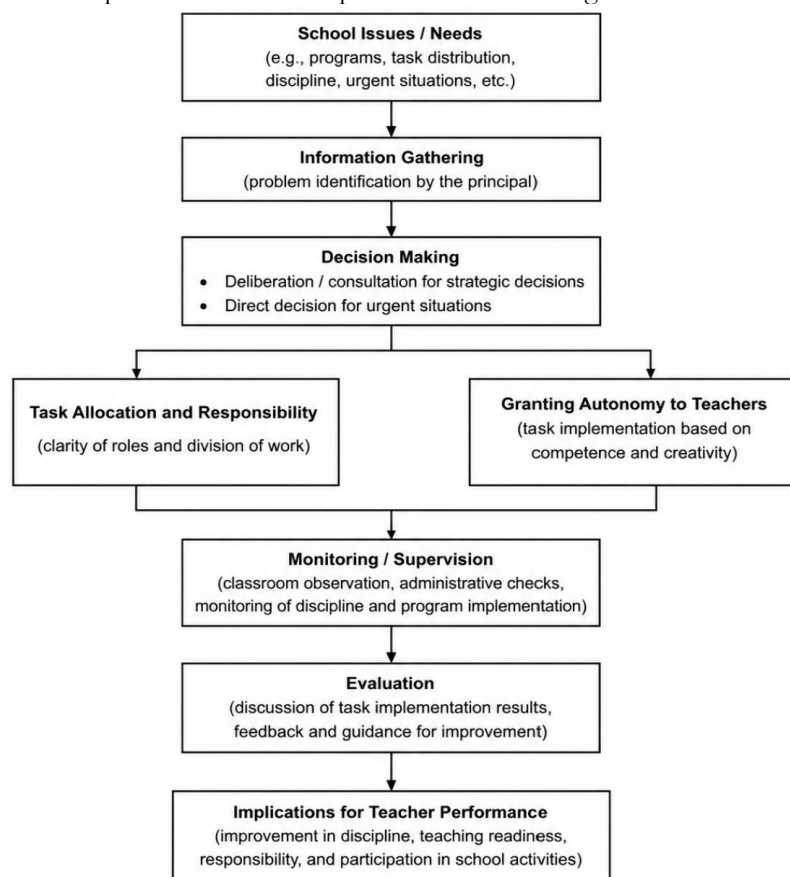


Figure 1 presents the empirical model of the principal's adaptive decision-making process identified in this study. The model illustrates that decision-making begins with identifying school issues, followed by deliberation or direct decisions according to situational needs. The resulting decisions are implemented through task allocation and teacher autonomy, monitored continuously, evaluated periodically, and ultimately contribute to improved teacher performance.

Discussion



The principal finding of this study is that school leadership at TK Bina Bangsa is more appropriately understood as an adaptive decision-making process than as the expression of a single leadership style. The findings show that the principal adjusted decision-making practices to the nature of organisational challenges by combining collaborative deliberation for strategic decisions, situationally direct decision-making when immediate responses were required, teacher autonomy during implementation, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. This finding is consistent with Sumiati et al. (2024), who demonstrated a positive relationship between principals' adaptive leadership and teacher performance, with collaborative school culture playing a mediating role. However, whereas Sumiati et al. examined adaptive leadership primarily as a leadership construct and tested its relationship with teacher performance, the present study provides a process-level account of how adaptivity is enacted through concrete decision-making practices. Similarly, Parveen et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of adjusting leadership practices to organisational needs and contextual demands, but their focus was on leadership behaviours and styles rather than on the sequence through which principals formulate, implement, monitor, and evaluate decisions. The present findings therefore extend these studies by showing that adaptive leadership can be understood not only in terms of what leaders do or which leadership approach they adopt, but also in terms of how they shift between decision-making approaches in response to situational demands. In this sense, adaptive decision-making represents a process through which different leadership practices are translated into context-responsive organisational action.

The findings demonstrate that collaborative deliberation was the principal approach used by the principal in strategic decision-making concerning school programme planning, school activities, and policies affecting teachers. By involving teachers in these deliberative processes, the principal provided opportunities for them to express their perspectives and professional judgments before decisions were finalized. This practice was associated with greater understanding and acceptance of organisational decisions among teachers, as reflected in the interview and observational findings. The finding is consistent with Parveen et al. (2022), who reported that teacher participation through open communication and shared decision-making is positively associated with teacher performance. Similarly, Noviadari et al. (2022) found that principals' involvement of teachers in organisational processes can strengthen work motivation and support more effective professional performance. However, the present study extends these findings by showing that collaborative deliberation was not limited to increasing teacher participation or motivation; it functioned as an initial stage in an adaptive decision-making process through which the principal gathered professional input before determining subsequent action. In this context, deliberation served both a participatory and a managerial function: it strengthened teachers' involvement in organisational decisions while providing the principal with contextual information for formulating decisions that were appropriate to school needs. Thus, the contribution of the present study lies in positioning collaborative deliberation as part of a broader adaptive decision-making process rather than as an isolated participatory leadership practice.

The findings also show that the principal used situationally direct decision-making when school circumstances required immediate action to prevent disruption to teaching and learning or other school activities. This practice indicates that adaptive leadership cannot be reduced to consistently participatory decision-making; rather, it involves the capacity to adjust the degree of participation according to the urgency and complexity of the situation. From a situational leadership perspective, the appropriateness of a leadership response depends on the conditions



confronting the organisation. In the present case, direct decisions were not used as a dominant leadership pattern but as a context-specific response to situations requiring timely resolution. This finding is broadly consistent with Parveen et al. (2022), who emphasised the importance of adapting leadership practices to organisational needs and contextual demands, and with Sarwar et al., (2022), who highlighted the importance of adjusting leadership behaviour to situational conditions rather than relying exclusively on a single leadership style. However, the present study adds a process-level dimension to these perspectives by showing how situational directness operates alongside collaborative deliberation within the same decision-making process. The principal therefore did not simply alternate between participatory and directive leadership styles; instead, the decision-making approach was selected according to the demands of the situation. This finding suggests that the adaptive quality of school leadership lies not in avoiding direct decisions, but in using them selectively while maintaining communication and accountability with teachers.

The findings further demonstrate that adaptive decision-making extends beyond the formulation of decisions to how those decisions are enacted through teacher autonomy. In the present study, the principal provided teachers with room to carry out their professional responsibilities according to their roles and expertise, while maintaining coordination and providing guidance when difficulties arose. This pattern suggests that teacher autonomy functioned not as unrestricted independence but as a form of delegated responsibility embedded within the broader organisational framework established by the principal. The finding is consistent with Hallinger et al. (2022), who highlighted the contribution of teacher empowerment through distributed leadership to professional capacity and school effectiveness, and with Jaelani and Sugito, (2024), who found that trust and teacher involvement in school programmes were associated with stronger motivation, collaboration, and professional responsibility. However, these studies primarily emphasise the benefits of teacher empowerment and involvement, whereas the present study highlights how autonomy operates as a subsequent stage of the adaptive decision-making process. Once a decision has been formulated, responsibility is transferred to teachers while the principal remains involved through coordination and professional support. This combination of delegated responsibility and continued leadership involvement provides a more nuanced understanding of teacher autonomy in adaptive school leadership: autonomy is neither the withdrawal of principal oversight nor unilateral teacher discretion, but a coordinated form of professional agency that allows teachers to implement decisions while remaining aligned with organisational goals.

The findings further show that monitoring functioned as an important stage between decision implementation and subsequent evaluation. Following the implementation of decisions, the principal monitored teachers' professional responsibilities through classroom observation, reviews of instructional administration, and regular communication concerning the progress of school programmes. Rather than functioning solely as a form of supervisory control, monitoring enabled the principal to obtain ongoing information about how decisions were being enacted, identify implementation difficulties, and provide timely guidance when necessary. This finding is consistent with Hallinger et al., (2022), who emphasised the importance of principals' involvement in monitoring teaching and learning as part of effective instructional leadership. It also resonates with Wiyono et al. (2023), who highlighted systematic monitoring as a means of strengthening teacher accountability and organisational coordination. However, the present study extends these perspectives by locating monitoring within the broader adaptive decision-making process rather



than treating it solely as a supervisory practice. In the case examined, monitoring generated information about the implementation of decisions that could be used to determine whether further guidance or adjustment was required. Monitoring therefore served as an information-generating stage that connected decision implementation with subsequent evaluation, allowing the principal to remain responsive to conditions emerging during implementation.

The findings also indicate that evaluation served as a follow-up stage through which information obtained from monitoring was reviewed and translated into feedback for subsequent practice. In the study context, evaluation was generally conducted at the end of the semester through discussions between the principal and teachers concerning the implementation of their responsibilities, with attention to attendance and punctuality, instructional preparedness, and professional responsibility. Rather than functioning primarily as an assessment of teachers' performance, the evaluation process was used to identify aspects that had been implemented effectively and those requiring further improvement. This finding is consistent with Wiyono et al. (2023), who emphasised the role of continuous evaluation in strengthening teacher accountability and supporting improvements in school practice. The present study extends this perspective by showing how evaluation operates as the reflective stage of an adaptive decision-making process: information gathered through monitoring is discussed with teachers, areas requiring improvement are identified, and feedback is used to inform subsequent practice. Evaluation therefore completes the monitoring cycle by transforming implementation information into reflective feedback, while also preserving the participatory character of the leadership process through direct communication with teachers.

The findings further indicate that the adaptive decision-making process was associated with positive changes in selected aspects of teacher performance, particularly attendance and punctuality, instructional preparedness, professional responsibility, and participation in school activities. These changes should be interpreted within the context of the case rather than as evidence of a direct causal effect of adaptive decision-making on teacher performance. Interview and observational evidence suggests that teachers experienced greater clarity regarding their responsibilities and opportunities to exercise professional judgement, while monitoring and evaluation provided continuing feedback on their implementation of assigned tasks. This finding is broadly consistent with Sumiati et al., (2024), who reported a positive relationship between adaptive leadership and teacher performance through a collaborative school culture, and with Jaelani and Sugito (2024), who associated principal leadership practices with teacher motivation, collaboration, and professional responsibility in early childhood education. However, the present study adds a process-oriented explanation to these relationships by showing how teacher performance is situated within a sequence of leadership practices rather than treated solely as an outcome of a particular leadership style. In the case examined, performance-related changes were observed alongside teacher participation in decision-making, delegated responsibility, ongoing monitoring, and evaluative feedback. This suggests that the contribution of adaptive decision-making lies not in a single leadership action, but in the interconnected process through which teachers are involved in decisions, entrusted with responsibilities, supported during implementation, and provided with opportunities for reflection and improvement.

Taken together, the findings indicate that adaptive decision-making in school leadership is best understood as an interconnected process rather than as the application of a single leadership style. As illustrated in Figure 1, the process begins with identifying organisational challenges and



gathering relevant information, followed by collaborative deliberation or situationally direct decision-making according to the demands of the situation. Decisions are then enacted through delegated responsibilities and teacher autonomy, while monitoring provides information about implementation and evaluation generates feedback for subsequent practice. Changes observed in selected aspects of teacher performance should therefore be understood within this interconnected process rather than attributed to any single leadership practice. In contrast to studies that primarily examine particular leadership styles or the relationship between leadership and teacher performance, this study contributes a process-level perspective by showing how different leadership practices are connected through adaptive decision-making in an early childhood education setting. The framework presented in Figure 1 should be interpreted as an empirically grounded representation of leadership practice at TK Bina Bangsa rather than as a universally validated causal model. Its contribution lies in showing how principals can combine participatory decision-making, situational decisiveness, teacher autonomy, monitoring, and evaluation in responding to organisational demands while maintaining attention to teacher performance.

COCLUSION

This study concludes that principal leadership in Early Childhood Education is more appropriately understood as an adaptive decision-making process than as the application of a single leadership style. At TK Bina Bangsa, adaptive decision-making was enacted through collaborative deliberation for strategic matters, situationally direct decision-making when immediate responses were required, teacher autonomy in implementing decisions, and subsequent monitoring and evaluation. The findings indicate that these interconnected practices were associated with positive changes in selected aspects of teacher performance, including attendance and punctuality, instructional preparedness, professional responsibility, and participation in school activities.

Theoretically, this study contributes a process-level perspective to school leadership research by showing how different leadership practices are connected through adaptive decision-making in an early childhood education setting. Rather than treating participative, directive, or instructional practices as separate leadership styles, the findings suggest that their relevance depends on how principals combine and adjust them in response to organisational demands. The empirical framework presented in Figure 1 therefore provides a contextually grounded representation of adaptive decision-making that extends existing discussions of school leadership beyond style-based classifications.

Practically, the findings suggest that principals in ECE settings may benefit from balancing teacher participation with situational decisiveness and combining delegated responsibility with systematic monitoring and periodic evaluation. This approach can provide a practical reference for developing more responsive and context-sensitive decision-making practices while maintaining teacher involvement and professional responsibility. However, the study is limited by its single-case design, small and context-specific participant group, and focus on one ECE institution. The proposed framework should therefore not be interpreted as a universally validated model or as evidence of a direct causal relationship between adaptive decision-making and teacher performance. Future research should examine the framework across different ECE institutions and educational contexts, preferably through comparative case studies, longitudinal designs, or mixed-methods research, to assess its transferability and further refine its explanatory value.



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