



Strategic decision-making and leadership practices in early childhood education: evidence from an islamic preschool in indonesia

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Article Information	Abstract
Submitted: Jan 17, 2026 Revised: March 23, 2026 Accepted: May 05, 2026 Keywords Strategic Decision Making; Educational Leadership; Early Childhood Education; Islamic Preschool; Qualitative Case Study.	Purpose: This study aims to examine strategic decision-making and leadership practices in early childhood education management within the context of an Islamic preschool institution in Indonesia. Method: This study employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving the school principal, teachers, and parents at an Islamic preschool institution in Indonesia. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis through data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification to ensure data credibility and validity. Findings: The findings indicate that strategic decision-making in early childhood education management consists of four main stages: problem identification, development of alternative solutions, implementation of selected decisions, and evaluation of decision outcomes. The study further reveals that leadership practices were influenced by collaborative communication, organizational culture, leadership experience, and limitations in human resources. In addition, participatory leadership involving teachers and parents contributed positively to institutional adaptability, problem-solving effectiveness, and the improvement of educational service quality within the preschool institution. Significance: This study contributes to the literature on educational leadership and strategic decision-making by providing empirical evidence from Islamic early childhood education institutions in Indonesia. The findings offer practical implications for school leaders, policymakers, and educational practitioners in improving leadership effectiveness and decision-making strategies in early childhood education management, particularly in developing country contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is widely recognized as one of the most critical stages in human development because it contributes significantly to children's cognitive, emotional, social, and moral growth. Educational experiences during early childhood strongly influence children's future learning readiness, behavioral development, and social adaptability (Harrington et al., 2020; Kaveri et al., 2024; Meng et al., 2025; Offer-Boljahn et al., 2022). As a result, educational institutions providing early childhood services are required to maintain effective organizational management and high-quality educational practices (Asiyai, 2022; Díez et al., 2020). The quality of educational management in early childhood institutions is closely associated with leadership effectiveness and institutional decision-making processes (Díez et al., 2020; Gibbs, 2022; Polishchuk & Horbatiuk, 2023). School leaders play an important role in determining educational directions, solving institutional problems, and maintaining organizational sustainability (Filho et al., 2020; Karakose et al., 2024; Nadeem, 2024). Effective decision-making is therefore considered an essential component of educational leadership within early childhood institutions (Brauckmann et al., 2023; McLeod & Dulskey, 2021; Wang, 2021). Strategic decisions made

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by school leaders may influence teacher performance, educational service quality, stakeholder trust, and institutional adaptability. In many educational organizations, leadership effectiveness is strongly determined by the ability of leaders to make responsive and context-sensitive decisions. Previous studies have emphasized that strategic leadership and decision-making practices are important factors in improving organizational performance and institutional effectiveness. Consequently, strategic decision-making has become an increasingly important issue in educational leadership and management studies.

Decision-making processes in educational institutions involve complex organizational considerations because school leaders are often required to address various managerial, pedagogical, and institutional challenges simultaneously. In early childhood education institutions, these challenges may include limited human resources, inadequate managerial capacity, financial constraints, curriculum implementation difficulties, and increasing demands for educational service quality (Diale & Sewagegn, 2021; Díez et al., 2020; Zickafoose et al., 2024). School leaders are expected to identify institutional problems, formulate alternative solutions, implement strategic decisions, and evaluate decision outcomes effectively. Several studies have discussed distributed leadership, leadership development, pedagogical decision-making, and data-informed leadership practices within educational settings (Gibbs, 2022; Waltzer et al., 2025; Wang, 2021). Other studies have also explored educator wellbeing, workforce sustainability, and organizational management issues in early childhood institutions (Farewell et al., 2022; Logan et al., 2020). Although these studies provide important insights into educational leadership and management, most of them primarily focus on leadership models, organizational wellbeing, or pedagogical practices rather than comprehensively examining strategic decision-making processes in institutional management. In addition, existing studies have predominantly concentrated on developed-country educational settings. As a result, the dynamics of strategic decision-making within early childhood education institutions in developing countries remain insufficiently explored. This condition indicates the need for further investigation into leadership and decision-making practices within diverse educational and institutional contexts.

Islamic preschool institutions in Indonesia possess unique organizational characteristics because they integrate educational management, religious values, and community-based educational practices simultaneously. Raudhatul Athfal institutions not only function as educational organizations but also serve as religious and social institutions within local communities. Leadership practices in Islamic preschool institutions therefore require adaptive communication, participatory decision-making, and collaborative relationships among principals, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders (Aithal & Maiya, 2023). Strategic decisions made by school leaders may directly affect institutional development, stakeholder trust, and educational service sustainability. Previous studies on Islamic educational leadership have generally focused on leadership styles, organizational culture, and religious educational values rather than strategic decision-making processes in institutional management. Furthermore, studies investigating how school leaders identify problems, formulate alternative strategies, implement decisions, and evaluate outcomes within Islamic early childhood education

institutions remain limited. Existing research has also rarely examined participatory leadership involving teachers and parents in strategic decision-making processes within preschool management. This limitation demonstrates a significant gap in the literature regarding strategic decision-making practices in Islamic early childhood education institutions. Understanding how school leaders manage decision-making processes in Islamic preschool institutions is important for improving educational leadership effectiveness and organizational sustainability. Therefore, investigating strategic decision-making and leadership practices within Islamic preschool institutions may provide valuable contributions to educational leadership and early childhood management literature.

Previous studies have extensively examined decision-making, leadership, and management practices across educational and organizational contexts, including ethical decision-making, shared decision-making, distributed leadership, strategic leadership, and technology-supported decision-making in educational leadership settings (Akdeniz et al., 2021; Nadeem, 2024; Wang, 2021). In the context of early childhood education, prior research has primarily focused on pedagogical decision-making, leadership development, teacher leadership, organizational improvement, educator wellbeing, and workforce sustainability within preschool institutions (Gibbs, 2022; Halpern et al., 2021; Logan et al., 2020; Waltzer et al., 2025). Other studies have also emphasized management-related issues in early childhood contexts, particularly healthcare management such as asthma management and childhood caries management (Rehman et al., 2024; Zou et al., 2022). Although these studies provide important contributions to leadership and management literature, most of them concentrate on leadership models, pedagogical approaches, organizational wellbeing, or healthcare intervention rather than comprehensively examining strategic decision-making processes in early childhood education management. Furthermore, previous studies predominantly focused on developed-country educational settings, while limited attention has been given to Islamic preschool institutions in developing countries such as Indonesia. Existing research also rarely investigates how school leaders identify institutional problems, formulate alternative solutions, implement strategic decisions, and evaluate decision outcomes within Islamic early childhood education institutions. In addition, empirical discussions regarding participatory leadership involving teachers, parents, and stakeholders in strategic decision-making processes remain underexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating strategic decision-making and leadership practices in the management of Islamic preschool institutions in Indonesia.

This study aims to examine strategic decision-making and leadership practices in the management of Islamic early childhood education institutions in Indonesia. Specifically, this study investigates how school leaders identify institutional problems, formulate alternative solutions, implement strategic decisions, and evaluate educational service outcomes within preschool management practices. The study also explores the role of participatory leadership involving teachers, parents, and stakeholders in institutional decision-making processes. In addition, this research seeks to understand how organizational conditions, leadership experiences, and resource limitations influence strategic decision-making within Islamic preschool institutions. By focusing on the context

of Islamic early childhood education, this study intends to provide empirical evidence regarding leadership and decision-making dynamics in developing-country educational settings. This study further aims to contribute to the growing literature on educational leadership and strategic management within early childhood education institutions. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for school leaders in improving institutional management and educational service quality. Moreover, this research seeks to strengthen understanding regarding collaborative leadership practices in early childhood education management. The study is also expected to support policymakers and educational practitioners in developing effective leadership strategies for preschool institutions. Ultimately, this research aims to enrich educational leadership literature by highlighting strategic decision-making practices within Islamic preschool institutions in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic decision-making is considered one of the most important components of organizational leadership because it determines how institutions respond to challenges, allocate resources, and achieve organizational objectives. In educational institutions, decision-making processes influence managerial effectiveness, institutional sustainability, and educational quality outcomes (Mattos et al., 2022; Polishchuk & Horbatiuk, 2023). Decision-making generally involves identifying organizational problems, analyzing available alternatives, selecting appropriate strategies, implementing decisions, and evaluating outcomes systematically (Acciarini et al., 2020; Sinnaiah et al., 2023). Educational leaders are expected to possess the ability to make rational, adaptive, and context-sensitive decisions in dynamic institutional environments. Simon's decision-making theory explains that organizational decision-making is influenced not only by rational considerations but also by limitations in information, organizational structures, and individual experiences. In practice, educational leaders frequently encounter complex situations that require collaborative and participatory approaches in solving institutional problems. Strategic decision-making therefore becomes an essential aspect of educational leadership because institutional decisions often produce long-term consequences for organizational performance (Masnawati & Darmawan, 2022; Rajagopal et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that effective strategic leadership contributes positively to organizational adaptability, institutional development, and stakeholder satisfaction. In addition, participatory decision-making practices have been associated with stronger organizational commitment and improved communication among institutional members. Consequently, strategic decision-making is widely recognized as a central element in contemporary educational management and leadership practices.

Educational leadership plays a critical role in maintaining institutional effectiveness and improving the quality of educational services within schools and preschool institutions. Leadership in educational settings involves not only administrative responsibilities but also the ability to guide organizational members toward achieving shared educational goals. Effective school leadership requires communication skills, organizational management capacity, emotional intelligence, and strategic problem-solving abilities (Çayak & Eskici, 2021;). Educational leaders are also expected to establish

positive organizational cultures that encourage collaboration, innovation, and institutional improvement. Within early childhood education institutions, leadership practices become increasingly important because preschool management involves educational, social, emotional, and developmental dimensions simultaneously (Mahoney et al., 2021; Movahedazarhouligh et al., 2022; Myran & Masterson, 2021). School principals in early childhood education institutions are often responsible for coordinating teachers, interacting with parents, managing institutional resources, and ensuring educational quality standards. Leadership effectiveness in preschool settings may directly influence teacher performance, student learning environments, and stakeholder trust. Previous research has demonstrated that collaborative leadership and shared decision-making positively affect organizational climate and educational service quality. Leadership practices emphasizing participation and stakeholder involvement may also improve institutional responsiveness to organizational challenges. Therefore, educational leadership is considered an essential determinant of organizational sustainability and educational effectiveness in early childhood education institutions.

Early childhood education management refers to the process of organizing, implementing, and evaluating educational services designed to support children's developmental needs during early learning stages. Effective management in preschool institutions requires systematic planning, organizational coordination, resource allocation, curriculum implementation, and continuous evaluation (Liu, 2024; Masnawati & Darmawan, 2022). Preschool institutions often face various managerial challenges, including limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and increasing expectations regarding educational service quality. Consequently, school leaders in early childhood education settings must develop adaptive and strategic management practices to maintain institutional sustainability. The management of early childhood education institutions also requires strong collaboration among principals, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders. Collaborative management practices may strengthen institutional accountability, communication quality, and stakeholder participation within preschool environments (Maqhubela, 2025). In addition, effective preschool management contributes significantly to the creation of safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments for children. Several studies have highlighted that institutional management quality strongly influences educational outcomes and organizational effectiveness in preschool institutions. However, many preschool institutions in developing countries continue to experience managerial limitations due to resource constraints and organizational challenges. Therefore, strengthening strategic management and leadership practices in early childhood education institutions remains an important issue in educational administration research.

Islamic preschool institutions possess distinctive organizational characteristics because they combine educational management with religious values and community-oriented educational practices. Raudhatul Athfal institutions in Indonesia function not only as formal educational organizations but also as institutions responsible for promoting moral and religious development among young children. Leadership practices in Islamic preschool institutions therefore involve educational responsibilities, religious guidance, and community engagement simultaneously. School leaders in Islamic preschool

institutions are expected to integrate educational objectives with Islamic values in organizational decision-making processes. This condition creates unique leadership dynamics that may differ from leadership practices in secular educational institutions. Participatory communication and stakeholder collaboration are often emphasized within Islamic educational institutions because organizational decisions may affect institutional reputation and community trust. In addition, principals in Islamic preschool institutions frequently rely on collective discussions and shared considerations when making institutional decisions. Previous studies on Islamic educational leadership have generally focused on leadership styles, religious values, and organizational culture rather than strategic decision-making processes. Research examining how Islamic preschool leaders identify organizational challenges, formulate solutions, and evaluate institutional decisions remains relatively limited. Consequently, investigating strategic decision-making practices within Islamic preschool institutions may provide important contributions to educational leadership and organizational management literature.

The relationship between strategic decision-making and leadership practices has become increasingly important in educational management research because organizational sustainability depends heavily on leadership effectiveness and institutional adaptability. Educational leaders who possess strong decision-making abilities are generally more capable of addressing institutional challenges, managing organizational change, and improving educational service quality. Strategic decision-making practices may also strengthen institutional resilience by enabling organizations to respond effectively to environmental, managerial, and operational challenges. In preschool institutions, leadership decisions frequently influence curriculum implementation, teacher management, stakeholder participation, and institutional development strategies. Participatory leadership practices involving teachers and parents may further improve institutional communication, collaborative problem-solving, and educational accountability. Organizational decision-making in educational settings is also influenced by internal factors such as leadership experience, organizational culture, and institutional resources. External factors including government regulations, stakeholder expectations, and educational policy changes may additionally shape leadership decision-making processes. Previous studies have indicated that adaptive and collaborative leadership practices contribute positively to institutional effectiveness and organizational sustainability. Nevertheless, empirical studies specifically examining strategic decision-making practices within Islamic early childhood education institutions in developing countries remain insufficient. Therefore, further investigation into strategic decision-making and leadership practices within Islamic preschool management contexts is necessary to strengthen educational leadership literature and improve institutional management practices.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore strategic decision-making and leadership practices within an Islamic early childhood education institution in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because this study aimed to obtain an in-

depth understanding of leadership experiences, institutional decision-making processes, and organizational dynamics within preschool management contexts. The case study design enabled the researcher to investigate naturally occurring decision-making practices within a specific institutional setting. This approach was considered appropriate because strategic decision-making in educational institutions involves contextual, social, and organizational interactions that cannot be fully explained through quantitative methods. The study focused on examining how school leaders identify institutional challenges, formulate alternative solutions, implement strategic decisions, and evaluate decision outcomes in managing educational services. In addition, the qualitative case study approach allowed the researcher to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations regarding institutional leadership practices. The selected research site was an Islamic preschool institution located in Indonesia that actively provides early childhood education services within a community-based educational environment. The institution was selected purposively because it represented an Islamic preschool setting that continuously manages organizational and educational challenges through leadership-based decision-making practices. The study emphasized understanding institutional realities and leadership dynamics within their natural educational context. Therefore, the qualitative case study design was considered suitable for addressing the objectives of this research.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of individuals directly involved in the management and implementation of educational services within the Islamic preschool institution. Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques to ensure that the selected individuals possessed relevant knowledge and experiences regarding institutional leadership and decision-making processes. The participants included the school principal, teachers, and parents involved in preschool educational activities and institutional communication processes. The school principal was selected as the primary participant because the principal holds the main responsibility for institutional leadership and strategic decision-making within the preschool organization. Teachers were involved because they actively participate in implementing educational policies, managing classroom activities, and supporting institutional programs. Parents were also included as participants because they contribute to participatory communication and stakeholder involvement within preschool management practices. The inclusion of multiple participant groups enabled the researcher to obtain diverse perspectives regarding leadership practices and decision-making processes within the institution. Participants were selected based on their active involvement in institutional activities and willingness to participate voluntarily in the research process. Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the study by ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent procedures. The participation of principals, teachers, and parents provided comprehensive information regarding strategic decision-making and leadership practices within the Islamic preschool institution.

Instruments

The primary research instrument in this study was the researcher, who was directly involved in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing research data. Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation techniques to obtain comprehensive information regarding leadership and decision-making practices within the preschool institution. Semi-structured interview guidelines were developed to facilitate systematic exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and institutional practices. The interview questions focused on institutional problem identification, alternative solution development, decision implementation, stakeholder involvement, and evaluation practices within preschool management. In-depth interviews were conducted individually with the school principal, teachers, and parents to encourage participants to express their experiences openly and comprehensively. Observations were conducted to examine leadership interactions, institutional communication patterns, and educational management activities within the preschool environment. The observation process enabled the researcher to understand naturally occurring organizational practices and leadership dynamics. In addition, documentation analysis was conducted using institutional records, organizational documents, meeting reports, and educational activity archives relevant to strategic decision-making processes. Data collection activities were conducted over a specific research period to ensure sufficient data depth and contextual understanding. The use of multiple data collection techniques supported data triangulation and strengthened the credibility and validity of the research findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using thematic analysis techniques to identify, categorize, and interpret patterns emerging from the collected data. The analysis process began with data organization and transcription of interview recordings into written documents to facilitate systematic examination. The researcher repeatedly reviewed interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and institutional practices. Data reduction was conducted by selecting and focusing on information relevant to strategic decision-making and leadership practices within preschool management. After data reduction, the researcher categorized data into several thematic areas, including problem identification, alternative solution development, decision implementation, participatory leadership, and evaluation practices. Data display techniques were subsequently used to organize findings systematically and facilitate interpretation of relationships among identified themes. The researcher then interpreted the findings by connecting thematic patterns with relevant educational leadership and decision-making theories. To ensure research credibility, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing interview findings, observation results, and institutional documentation. Member checking procedures were also conducted to confirm the accuracy and consistency of participants' statements and interpretations. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to generate comprehensive explanations regarding strategic decision-making and leadership practices within the Islamic preschool institution.

Procedure

The research procedure was conducted through several systematic stages to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The first stage involved preliminary observation and identification of research problems related to leadership and decision-making practices within the Islamic preschool institution. After identifying the research focus, the researcher conducted a literature review to establish theoretical foundations and conceptual understanding regarding strategic decision-making and educational leadership. The researcher subsequently prepared research instruments, including interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation frameworks relevant to the study objectives. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained institutional permission and informed consent from all participants involved in the research process. The data collection stage involved conducting interviews, observations, and documentation analysis within the preschool institution over a predetermined research period. During the data collection process, the researcher continuously recorded field notes and organized collected information systematically. After completing data collection, the researcher transcribed interview recordings, organized observational findings, and conducted thematic data analysis. The interpretation stage involved identifying major themes, comparing participant perspectives, and connecting findings with existing educational leadership theories. Finally, the researcher formulated conclusions and research implications based on the analyzed findings regarding strategic decision-making and leadership practices within Islamic preschool management.

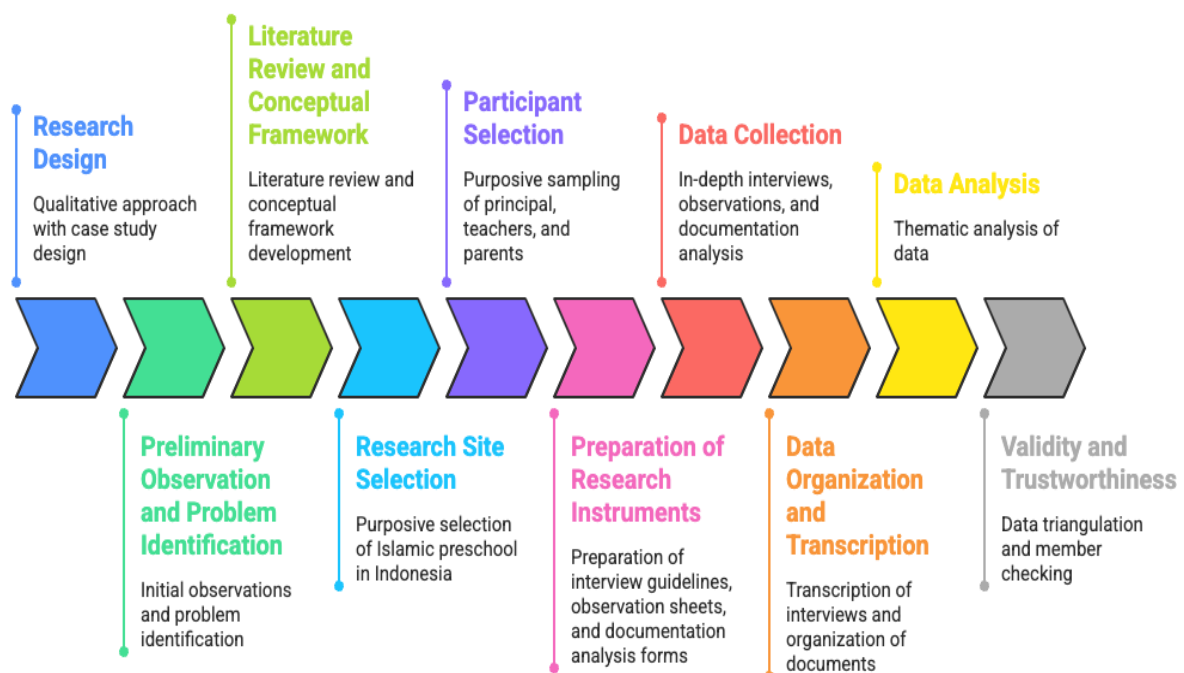


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Institutional Overview of the Islamic Preschool

The findings revealed that the Islamic preschool institution operated as a community-based early childhood education organization integrating educational management, religious values, and stakeholder collaboration. The institution provided educational services for early childhood learners while simultaneously emphasizing Islamic character development and community engagement. Organizational management within the institution was coordinated by the school principal together with teachers and supported by parents through participatory communication and institutional activities. The preschool institution continuously faced several managerial and organizational challenges related to human resources, educational service quality, institutional coordination, and operational management. Despite these challenges, the institution demonstrated adaptive leadership practices and collaborative decision-making processes in managing educational services. The school principal played a central role in coordinating institutional activities, solving organizational problems, and maintaining educational quality within the preschool environment. Teachers were actively involved in implementing educational programs and supporting organizational decisions within the institution. Parents also participated in institutional communication and contributed to educational support activities organized by the preschool institution. These collaborative interactions created a participatory organizational environment that supported institutional sustainability and educational service improvement. The institutional context therefore provided an appropriate setting for examining strategic decision-making and leadership practices within Islamic early childhood education management.

Table 1. Overview of Institutional Characteristics

Aspect	Findings
Institution Type	Islamic preschool institution
Educational Level	Early childhood education
Leadership Structure	Principal-led management
Stakeholders Involved	Principal, teachers, parents
Organizational Orientation	Educational and religious values
Main Challenges	Human resources, service quality, institutional coordination
Leadership Approach	Participatory and collaborative
Decision-Making Style	Adaptive and context-based

Problem Identification in Strategic Decision Making

The findings indicated that the first stage of strategic decision-making involved identifying institutional problems and organizational challenges affecting educational service management. The school principal continuously monitored institutional conditions through direct observation, communication with teachers, and discussions with parents. Several major challenges identified within the institution included limited human resources, overlapping administrative responsibilities, communication barriers, and constraints related to educational program implementation. The findings also showed that institutional problems were often identified collectively through participatory discussions involving teachers and stakeholders. Teachers frequently communicated classroom-related issues, educational implementation challenges, and student learning concerns to the principal during organizational meetings and informal interactions. Parents also

contributed information regarding children's learning experiences and institutional service quality. The school principal demonstrated adaptive leadership by encouraging open communication and collaborative problem identification processes within the institution. The identification process enabled institutional leaders to recognize organizational priorities and determine appropriate managerial responses. The findings further revealed that effective communication played an important role in identifying educational challenges and improving institutional coordination. Therefore, problem identification became the foundation for subsequent strategic decision-making processes within the preschool institution.

Table 2. Major Institutional Problems Identified

Institutional Issue	Description
Human Resource Limitation	Limited number of teachers and staff
Administrative Overlap	Multiple responsibilities handled simultaneously
Communication Challenges	Coordination difficulties among stakeholders
Educational Service Constraints	Challenges in implementing educational activities
Resource Limitation	Limited institutional facilities and operational support

Development of Alternative Solution

The findings demonstrated that alternative solution development was conducted collaboratively through discussions involving the principal, teachers, and parents. After identifying institutional challenges, the principal initiated meetings and communication sessions to explore possible strategies for addressing organizational problems. The decision-making process emphasized participatory leadership practices, where teachers were encouraged to provide suggestions and practical recommendations regarding institutional management and educational implementation. Parents also contributed perspectives concerning educational service quality and children's learning needs within the preschool environment. The findings revealed that leadership practices within the institution emphasized collective discussion rather than authoritarian decision-making approaches. Several alternative solutions discussed within the institution included improving communication patterns, redistributing organizational responsibilities, strengthening collaboration among teachers, and increasing stakeholder involvement in educational activities. The school principal considered institutional conditions, available resources, and stakeholder perspectives before selecting appropriate strategies. The findings also indicated that practical experiences and organizational adaptability influenced leadership decisions within the preschool institution. Collaborative discussions enabled organizational members to understand institutional challenges more comprehensively and encouraged stronger stakeholder participation in educational management. Consequently, the development of alternative solutions became an important process supporting effective strategic decision-making within the preschool institution.

Table 3. Alternative Solutions Developed by the Institution

Strategic Area	Alternative Solution
Human Resource Management	Redistribution of responsibilities
Communication Improvement	Regular coordination meetings
Educational Activities	Collaborative teaching support
Stakeholder Participation	Increased parent involvement
Organizational Coordination	Shared problem-solving discussions

Decision Implementation and Leadership Practices

The findings revealed that the implementation of strategic decisions within the preschool institution was conducted through collaborative leadership practices emphasizing communication, coordination, and stakeholder involvement. The school principal played an important role in directing institutional activities, monitoring organizational implementation, and ensuring that selected decisions were applied effectively. Teachers were actively involved in implementing educational programs, supporting institutional coordination, and adapting classroom activities according to organizational decisions. The findings also indicated that leadership practices within the institution were adaptive and experience-based rather than strictly formalized through written organizational systems. Decision implementation frequently involved continuous discussions and adjustments depending on institutional conditions and educational needs. Parents participated by supporting educational activities, attending institutional meetings, and contributing to communication processes between the school and families. The implementation process demonstrated that collaborative leadership strengthened institutional adaptability and improved stakeholder trust within the preschool environment. The findings further showed that participatory leadership practices encouraged stronger teamwork and institutional commitment among teachers and parents. In addition, the implementation stage revealed that leadership effectiveness depended heavily on communication quality and stakeholder cooperation. Therefore, collaborative and participatory leadership practices became important factors supporting the successful implementation of strategic decisions within the Islamic preschool institution.

Table 4. Leadership Practices During Decision Implementation

Leadership Practice	Institutional Impact
Collaborative Communication	Improved organizational coordination
Participatory Leadership	Increased stakeholder involvement
Adaptive Leadership	Better response to institutional challenges
Shared Responsibility	Improved teamwork among teachers
Parent Engagement	Strengthened institutional support

Evaluation of Decision Outcomes

The findings showed that evaluation activities were conducted continuously to assess the effectiveness of institutional decisions and educational management practices. The school principal regularly evaluated organizational activities through observations, teacher discussions, and feedback from parents regarding educational services and institutional performance. Evaluation processes focused on identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas requiring improvement within preschool management practices. Teachers provided reflections regarding classroom implementation, institutional coordination, and educational program effectiveness during evaluation meetings. Parents also communicated their perspectives regarding children's learning experiences and educational service quality within the institution. The findings revealed that evaluation activities supported organizational learning and encouraged continuous institutional improvement. Leadership practices within the preschool institution emphasized reflective communication and collaborative evaluation rather than formal performance assessment systems alone. The evaluation process enabled the institution to adjust educational strategies, improve coordination, and strengthen stakeholder relationships within the

preschool environment. The findings further indicated that continuous evaluation contributed positively to institutional adaptability and educational service sustainability. Therefore, evaluation became an essential stage supporting effective strategic decision-making and leadership practices within the Islamic preschool institution.

Table 5. Evaluation Findings and Institutional Improvements

Evaluation Aspect	Institutional Improvement
Communication Quality	Improved stakeholder coordination
Educational Services	Better implementation of learning activities
Organizational Collaboration	Stronger teamwork among institutional members
Parent Involvement	Increased participation in school activities
Institutional Adaptability	Improved response to organizational challenges

Overall, the findings demonstrated that strategic decision-making within the Islamic preschool institution involved four interconnected stages, namely problem identification, development of alternative solutions, decision implementation, and evaluation of decision outcomes. Leadership practices within the institution emphasized participatory communication, collaborative problem-solving, and adaptive organizational management. The school principal played a central role in coordinating institutional activities and facilitating stakeholder involvement throughout the decision-making process. Teachers and parents contributed actively to organizational discussions and educational management practices within the preschool environment. The findings further indicated that institutional decision-making was strongly influenced by organizational conditions, leadership experiences, communication quality, and stakeholder participation. In addition, collaborative leadership practices strengthened institutional adaptability and supported continuous improvement within educational services. The institution relied heavily on participatory approaches to maintain organizational sustainability and improve educational quality despite existing managerial limitations. The findings therefore highlighted the importance of adaptive leadership and collaborative decision-making within Islamic early childhood education institutions. Strategic decision-making practices within the institution reflected context-sensitive leadership approaches emphasizing organizational flexibility and stakeholder cooperation. Consequently, participatory leadership and collaborative decision-making became important elements supporting effective preschool management and institutional sustainability.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that strategic decision-making within Islamic preschool institutions is closely associated with adaptive leadership, collaborative communication, and stakeholder participation in educational management processes. The results indicate that institutional leaders continuously identify organizational challenges through direct observation, participatory discussions, and communication with teachers and parents. Strategic decision-making processes were influenced not only by managerial considerations but also by institutional culture, interpersonal relationships, and organizational conditions within the preschool environment (Roponen et al., 2023). The findings further reveal that school leaders relied heavily on contextual understanding and practical experiences when determining institutional strategies and educational management decisions. Leadership practices within the institution emphasized flexibility,

responsiveness, and collaborative communication rather than rigid organizational control (Alat & Suar, 2020; Flori et al., 2025). This condition enabled institutional leaders to respond more effectively to emerging educational and organizational challenges. The findings also indicate that collaborative leadership practices strengthened organizational coordination and improved stakeholder trust within the preschool institution. Teachers and parents actively contributed to institutional discussions and educational management processes, creating a more participatory organizational environment. The results suggest that effective strategic decision-making within preschool institutions depends strongly on communication quality and stakeholder involvement. Therefore, participatory leadership practices became important factors supporting institutional sustainability and educational service quality within the Islamic preschool institution.

The study further revealed that problem identification became the foundational stage in the institutional decision-making process because organizational challenges influenced subsequent leadership actions and management strategies. School leaders actively gathered information from teachers, parents, and institutional observations before determining strategic responses to organizational problems (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Masnawati & Darmawan, 2022; Meyer et al., 2023). This process enabled the institution to recognize educational priorities and organizational needs more effectively. The findings indicate that communication among institutional members played an essential role in identifying educational challenges and operational difficulties within the preschool environment (Aitymova et al., 2023; Roponen et al., 2023). Teachers frequently communicated classroom implementation issues, while parents provided feedback regarding educational services and children's learning experiences. The principal demonstrated openness toward institutional feedback and encouraged participatory communication during organizational discussions. The findings also reveal that problem identification within the preschool institution tended to occur informally through continuous interaction and social communication among stakeholders. This condition created a more flexible and adaptive organizational environment within the institution. In addition, informal communication strengthened interpersonal relationships and improved organizational awareness among institutional members. Consequently, effective problem identification within Islamic preschool management relied heavily on leadership sensitivity, communication effectiveness, and collaborative organizational culture.

Another important finding of this study concerns the collaborative development of alternative solutions within institutional decision-making processes [need citation]. The principal involved teachers and parents in discussing organizational challenges and determining appropriate strategies for improving educational services. This participatory approach encouraged organizational members to contribute actively to institutional problem-solving and management activities. Collaborative discussions enabled teachers and parents to express opinions, share experiences, and propose educational improvements relevant to institutional conditions (Giampietro & Romiti, 2025; Maqhubela, 2025; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022). The findings indicate that shared decision-making strengthened organizational commitment and improved stakeholder participation within the preschool environment. Leadership practices within the institution emphasized collective discussion and cooperation rather than centralized and authoritarian leadership

approaches. The institution also demonstrated flexibility in adjusting organizational strategies according to educational needs and stakeholder recommendations. This collaborative organizational culture created stronger communication and teamwork among institutional members. In addition, participatory leadership practices increased institutional trust and strengthened relationships between the school and parents. Therefore, collaborative decision-making practices contributed positively to organizational effectiveness and educational service improvement within the Islamic preschool institution.

The implementation stage of strategic decision-making revealed that adaptive leadership and continuous communication played important roles in supporting institutional coordination and educational service management. The principal continuously monitored organizational implementation while maintaining communication with teachers and parents during educational activities and institutional programs. Leadership implementation within the preschool institution relied heavily on interpersonal interaction, practical coordination, and organizational flexibility. Teachers actively participated in implementing educational programs and supporting institutional management decisions within classroom and organizational activities. Parents also contributed to institutional implementation processes by supporting educational activities and maintaining communication with the school. The findings indicate that adaptive leadership practices strengthened organizational responsiveness and improved institutional coordination within the preschool environment. Leadership flexibility enabled the institution to adjust strategies according to changing organizational conditions and educational challenges. The implementation process further demonstrated that collaborative communication supported stronger teamwork and improved stakeholder participation within educational management activities. In addition, participatory implementation practices increased organizational commitment among institutional members. Consequently, adaptive leadership and collaborative communication became essential elements supporting effective strategic decision-making implementation within the Islamic preschool institution.

The evaluation findings indicate that reflective communication and continuous organizational learning contributed significantly to institutional improvement and strategic management effectiveness. The principal regularly evaluated educational activities and organizational performance through discussions with teachers and parents regarding institutional conditions and service quality. Evaluation activities focused on identifying organizational strengths, recognizing weaknesses, and improving educational management practices within the preschool institution. Teachers provided reflections regarding classroom implementation and institutional coordination, while parents contributed feedback concerning educational services and children's learning experiences. The findings reveal that participatory evaluation strengthened communication and encouraged collaborative organizational improvement within the institution. Leadership practices emphasized reflective discussion and continuous adaptation rather than formalized performance evaluation systems alone. This approach enabled the institution to respond more effectively to educational challenges and organizational limitations. Continuous evaluation also supported institutional adaptability and strengthened

stakeholder trust within the preschool environment. Furthermore, reflective organizational practices encouraged continuous improvement in educational service quality and institutional coordination. Overall, the findings demonstrate that strategic decision-making within Islamic preschool institutions is strongly influenced by adaptive leadership, collaborative communication, stakeholder participation, and continuous organizational evaluation practices.

Implication

The findings of this study provide important theoretical and practical implications for educational leadership and early childhood education management, particularly within Islamic preschool institutions in developing countries. The study demonstrates that strategic decision-making in preschool management is strongly influenced by adaptive leadership, participatory communication, and collaborative stakeholder involvement. These findings imply that effective preschool leadership should not rely solely on formal managerial authority but also on interpersonal communication, organizational flexibility, and collective problem-solving practices. The results further indicate that participatory leadership involving teachers and parents may strengthen institutional coordination, organizational trust, and educational service quality within preschool environments. From a practical perspective, school leaders may utilize collaborative decision-making approaches to improve institutional responsiveness toward educational and organizational challenges. The findings also suggest that continuous communication and reflective evaluation practices are important for maintaining institutional sustainability and improving management effectiveness in early childhood education institutions. In addition, this study highlights the importance of strengthening leadership capacity and organizational adaptability within preschool institutions experiencing resource limitations and managerial challenges. From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the development of educational leadership literature by providing contextual evidence regarding strategic decision-making practices within Islamic preschool institutions. The study also expands current understanding of how organizational culture, stakeholder participation, and community-based educational values influence leadership practices in early childhood education settings. Furthermore, the findings suggest that Islamic preschool institutions may require context-sensitive leadership models emphasizing collaboration, communication, and organizational flexibility rather than centralized administrative control. Policymakers and educational practitioners may therefore consider developing leadership training programs focusing on participatory decision-making and adaptive organizational management for preschool leaders. Overall, this study contributes to strengthening educational leadership practices and improving institutional sustainability within Islamic early childhood education management contexts.

Limitation and Suggestion for Further Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings and developing future research. First, the study was conducted within a single Islamic preschool institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts and organizational settings. The organizational culture, leadership characteristics, and stakeholder interactions observed in this study may differ from those

found in other preschool institutions or educational environments. Second, the study employed a qualitative case study approach that focused primarily on participants' experiences and perceptions regarding strategic decision-making and leadership practices. Although this approach provided rich and contextual insights, the findings were based on subjective interpretations and institutional conditions within a specific educational setting. Third, the participants involved in the study consisted only of principals, teachers, and parents, while other stakeholders such as school foundations, policymakers, or local educational authorities were not included in the research process. In addition, the study mainly explored strategic decision-making from a leadership and organizational perspective without examining its direct impact on measurable educational outcomes or student development indicators. The research also focused specifically on Islamic preschool institutions, which may not fully represent leadership practices within secular or non-religious early childhood education settings. Furthermore, the study did not investigate the influence of technological systems, digital management tools, or formal policy frameworks on institutional decision-making processes. Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger participant groups and multiple preschool institutions to obtain broader comparative findings regarding strategic decision-making practices in early childhood education management. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also be conducted to examine the relationship between leadership practices, decision-making effectiveness, and educational performance indicators more comprehensively. Future studies are additionally encouraged to investigate the role of organizational culture, digital leadership, and educational policy implementation in shaping strategic decision-making within preschool institutions. Finally, comparative studies involving Islamic and non-Islamic preschool institutions across different regional or national contexts may provide deeper understanding regarding leadership dynamics and institutional management practices in early childhood education settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that strategic decision-making within Islamic preschool institutions is strongly influenced by adaptive leadership, participatory communication, and collaborative stakeholder involvement in educational management processes. The findings demonstrate that strategic decision-making in preschool management involves four interconnected stages, namely problem identification, development of alternative solutions, decision implementation, and evaluation of organizational outcomes. School leaders played a central role in coordinating institutional activities, facilitating communication, and maintaining organizational sustainability within the preschool environment. The study also revealed that teachers and parents actively contributed to institutional discussions and educational management through participatory communication and collaborative problem-solving practices. Leadership practices within the institution emphasized flexibility, interpersonal relationships, and organizational adaptability rather than centralized managerial control. The findings further indicate that effective communication among stakeholders contributed significantly to institutional coordination, educational service quality, and organizational trust within the preschool institution. In addition, the implementation of collaborative leadership practices

strengthened organizational responsiveness toward educational and managerial challenges. Continuous evaluation and reflective communication also supported institutional improvement and organizational learning within preschool management practices. The study highlights that strategic decision-making within Islamic preschool institutions is shaped by contextual organizational conditions, stakeholder relationships, and community-based educational values. From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the development of educational leadership literature by providing empirical evidence regarding strategic decision-making practices within Islamic early childhood education institutions in developing-country contexts. Practically, the study suggests that preschool leaders should strengthen participatory leadership, collaborative communication, and adaptive organizational management to improve institutional sustainability and educational service effectiveness. Overall, this research demonstrates that strategic decision-making and collaborative leadership practices are essential components supporting effective management and long-term sustainability within Islamic preschool institutions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

AMS : Conceptualization, research design, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, and drafting the original manuscript.

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