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Decision-making as a mediator: how principals' growth mindset and emotional intelligence shape school climate

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of school principals' growth mindset and emotional intelligence on decision-making and their implications for elementary school climate. A quantitative survey involved 297 civil-service teachers, comprising 208 Government Employees with Work Agreements (PPPK) and 89 Civil Servants (PNS), from public elementary schools in Region I of Sumedang Regency, Indonesia. Respondents were selected through non-probability quota sampling. Data were collected using five-point Likert-scale questionnaires measuring growth mindset, emotional intelligence, decision-making, and school climate and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.753–0.862, AVE of 0.591–0.759, and composite reliability of 0.831–0.907. Growth mindset significantly and positively affected decision-making ($\beta = 0.189$, $t = 3.247$, $p = 0.001$), as did emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.761$, $t = 13.245$, $p < 0.001$). Decision-making strongly and significantly influenced school climate ($\beta = 0.917$, $t = 60.677$, $p < 0.001$) and mediated the effects of growth mindset and emotional intelligence on school climate. The model explained 87.3% of decision-making and 84.1% of school climate variance. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening principals' psychological capacities to support effective leadership and a positive school climate.



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Introduction

Education plays a strategic role in responding to increasingly complex social, economic, and technological changes in the era of globalization and digital transformation (Putra et al., 2025). These changes require educational institutions not only to improve students' academic achievement but also to develop school organizations that are adaptive, innovative, and sustainable. In this context, school principals occupy a strategic position as leaders responsible for determining policy directions, managing resources, developing organizational culture, and creating conditions that support the learning process (Karimah et al, 2024; Ocsis et al., 2024; Rezeki et al., 2026). The complexity of educational change requires school principals to possess adaptive leadership capacities, including the ability to respond to change, manage uncertainty, and make appropriate decisions based on various organizational considerations. Recent studies have shown that school leadership plays an important role in shaping school management practices, decision-making processes, teachers' professional development, and the creation of a positive school climate (Azeem & Bochner, 2026; Wood, 2026).

One psychological factor that may influence the quality of school leadership and principals' decision-making is a growth mindset. A growth mindset refers to the belief that abilities and competencies can be developed through effort, learning, appropriate strategies, and experience. In contrast, individuals with a fixed mindset tend to perceive abilities as relatively stable and are therefore more likely to avoid challenges and regard failure as a threat to their competence. Within educational organizations, a growth mindset may encourage leaders to become more open to change, criticism, feedback, and continuous learning. Recent research on school principals has demonstrated that a growth mindset is associated with openness to change and readiness to respond to educational transformation (Kılınç et al., 2025). Furthermore, research on growth mindset-based leadership suggests that school principals with a strong learning orientation tend to be more receptive to criticism, regard mistakes as part of the learning process, and promote innovation and continuous change within school organizations (Wulandari et al., 2026).

In the decision-making process, a growth mindset is particularly important because school principals are continuously confronted with problems that cannot always be addressed through routine administrative procedures. Decision-making often involves uncertainty, conflicting interests, policy changes, and the need to consider the diverse perspectives of school stakeholders. Principals with a growth mindset are theoretically more likely to perceive problems as opportunities for learning and improvement rather than as threats to be avoided. Therefore, a growth mindset has the potential to promote decision-making that is more reflective, adaptive, innovative, and oriented toward the sustainable development of the school.

In addition to a growth mindset, emotional intelligence is another important internal factor in educational leadership. Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, use, and regulate one's own emotions while also understanding the emotional responses of others in social interactions. Within the school environment, principals encounter diverse interpersonal relationships and emotionally demanding situations, including conflicts among teachers, parental expectations, administrative pressures, resistance to change, and differences in stakeholders' interests. Therefore, the ability to manage emotions constitutes an important component of leadership capacity and decision-making. Al Shehhi and Alzouebi (2021) found a relationship between school principals' emotional intelligence and school climate, emphasizing the importance of developing emotional competencies in educational leadership. Recent systematic reviews have also demonstrated that emotional intelligence is increasingly recognized as an essential competency in educational leadership because of its association with interpersonal relationships, conflict management, decision-making, and leadership effectiveness (Daly et al., 2026; Nwosu et al., 2026).

Emotional intelligence is particularly relevant to the decision-making process because principals' decisions are not based solely on rational and administrative considerations but also occur within social contexts involving perceptions, emotions, and the interests of various stakeholders. Principals who are able to manage emotional pressure, understand others' perspectives, and address conflicts constructively are more likely to make decisions that are objective and acceptable to members of the school community. Conversely, limited emotional regulation may result in reactive or defensive decisions that insufficiently consider the social consequences for the organization. Recent studies have also shown that emotional intelligence is strongly associated with the effectiveness of principals' administrative performance, particularly in relation to interpersonal competence, stress management, adaptability, and relationship management (Franco, 2026).

The quality of principals' decision-making ultimately has important implications for school climate. School climate reflects the quality of the school's social and psychological environment, characterized by interpersonal relationships among school members, a sense of safety, trust, support, fairness, comfort, and opportunities to participate in organizational life. Decisions that are transparent, fair, participatory, and responsive to the needs of school members have the potential to strengthen their sense of ownership and trust in the organization. Conversely, decision-making processes that are closed, centralized, and insufficiently inclusive may weaken communication, reduce psychological safety, and diminish commitment to school programs. Adams (2023) demonstrated that principals' support for teachers' psychological needs is associated with a more supportive instructional climate, while psychological safety constitutes an important mechanism linking leadership and organizational conditions in schools. Recent evidence has further indicated that school leadership contributes to the development of school climate through management practices, decision-making, teachers' professional development, and support for school members (Azeem & Bocharver, 2026).

The urgency of this study becomes increasingly evident in the context of primary education in Sumedang Regency. The 2025 Education Report Card data for primary schools in Sumedang Regency indicate a discrepancy between improvements in several student learning outcomes and declines in indicators related to teachers' psychological safety and support for teacher reflection. This condition suggests that improvements in academic achievement do not necessarily occur alongside improvements in the

organizational and psychological quality of the school environment. From the perspective of educational leadership, this issue is important because principals' decision-making should not be oriented solely toward achieving program targets and performance indicators but should also consider its consequences for social relationships, psychological safety, and the sustainability of the organizational climate.

The preliminary study conducted by the researchers in several public primary schools in Region I of Sumedang Regency further supports these indications. Based on initial observations, limited interviews with principals and teachers, and an examination of school policy documents, the findings indicated that decision-making processes in several schools remained predominantly centralized, administrative, and top-down, with relatively limited teacher involvement. Such conditions may reduce teachers' participation and sense of ownership in school programs. In addition, there were indications that some principals continued to perceive change as a risk that should be minimized, resulting in responses to criticism and innovation that were not fully oriented toward organizational learning. Differences were also observed in principals' ability to manage emotions when dealing with work-related pressures and conflicts among school members. These conditions may indirectly affect the quality of communication, perceptions of fairness, psychological safety, and workplace comfort within the school environment.

Previous studies have examined, separately, the relationships among leadership characteristics, emotional intelligence, growth mindset, and school climate. Al Shehhi and Alzouebi (2021) specifically demonstrated the importance of school principals' emotional intelligence in relation to school climate. Kılınç et al. (2025) identified principals' growth mindset as an important factor associated with openness to change and readiness for technological transformation. Meanwhile, Wulandari et al. (2026) demonstrated that growth mindset-based leadership has the potential to foster leadership practices that are more adaptive and learning-oriented. Other studies have also indicated that school leadership and principals' interactions with teachers are associated with psychological safety and organizational climate (Adams, 2023).

Nevertheless, a review of previous studies reveals several research gaps. First, most existing studies have examined growth mindset and emotional intelligence separately; thus, relatively few studies have integrated these two internal factors into a single empirical model to explain school principals' decision-making. Second, research on school principals' growth mindset has primarily focused on openness to change, readiness for innovation, or leadership practices, whereas its direct relationship with decision-making remains relatively underexplored. Third, although the relationship between emotional intelligence and school climate has received considerable attention, the role of principals' decision-making as a mechanism linking leaders' personal capacities with school climate has rarely been examined simultaneously. Fourth, empirical evidence regarding the relationships among growth mindset, emotional intelligence, decision-making, and school climate remains limited, particularly within the context of primary schools in Indonesia.

Based on these research gaps, the present study proposes an integrated model that examines school principals' growth mindset and emotional intelligence as internal factors that are expected to influence the quality of decision-making and investigates the implications of decision-making for school climate. Conceptually, this study is based on the assumption that principals who demonstrate a strong orientation toward learning and self-development, as well as the ability to understand and manage emotions, are more likely to make decisions that are adaptive, reflective, and responsive to the diverse interests of school stakeholders. The quality of these decisions is subsequently expected to contribute to the development of a school climate that is safer, more supportive, participatory, and conducive to effective educational processes.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study aims to: (1) examine the effect of school principals' growth mindset on decision-making; (2) examine the effect of school principals' emotional intelligence on decision-making; (3) examine the simultaneous effects of school principals' growth mindset and emotional intelligence on decision-making; and (4) examine the effect of school principals' decision-making on school climate.

In line with these objectives, four hypotheses are proposed: H1, school principals' growth mindset has a positive and significant effect on decision-making; H2, school principals' emotional intelligence has a positive and significant effect on decision-making; H3, school principals' growth mindset and emotional intelligence simultaneously have a significant effect on decision-making; and H4, school principals' decision-making has a positive and significant effect on school climate.

Method

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between variables using Structural Equation Modeling – Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The proposed model involved four latent variables: growth mindset (X1) and emotional intelligence (X2) as exogenous variables, decision-making (Y) as a mediating variable, and school climate (Z) as the endogenous variable. The details of the problem are illustrated in the figure below:

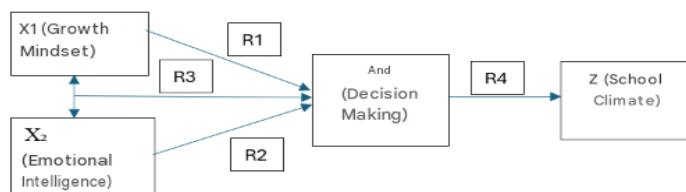


Figure 1. Research Scheme

The population for this study consists of public elementary school teachers in Sumedang Regency. Teachers were selected as respondents because they interact directly with school principals regarding leadership implementation within the educational unit; consequently, they possess the relevant experience and information to observe the principal's growth mindset, emotional intelligence, and decision-making processes. Furthermore, as teachers directly experience the school climate, their perceptions serve as a relevant data source for measuring the research variables.

However, to achieve the research objectives—which focus on the impact of the principal's growth mindset, emotional intelligence, and decision-making processes on the school climate—the researcher established specific criteria for defining the target population. The target population is limited to teachers with State Civil Apparatus (ASN) status, comprising both Civil Servants (PNS) and Government Employees with Work Agreements (PPPK). This criterion selection is based on the following methodological considerations: 1) Homogeneity and Standardization, ASN teachers possess relatively homogeneous qualification and competency standards due to having undergone a national selection process, thereby reducing data variability stemming from diverse recruitment backgrounds, 2) Stability and Depth of Experience, ASN teachers have more stable and continuous tenures within the educational unit. This enables respondents to provide more objective and in-depth assessments regarding school climate dynamics and the consistency of the principal's decision-making over a representative period, 3) Structural Involvement, ASN teachers tend to hold strategic positions within the school's organizational structure (such as vice-principal or program coordinator), making them the individuals most directly affected by the managerial decisions made by the principal.

The sampling technique used for questionnaire distribution is non-probability sampling a method that does not afford every member of the population an equal chance of being selected as a sample. The sampling method employed is quota sampling, which involves selecting a sample based on specific quotas derived from the existing population according to predetermined characteristics. The study population consists of ASN (State Civil Apparatus) teachers comprising both Permanen Civil Servants (PNS) and Government Employees with Work Agreements (PPPK) in Region I of Sumedang Regency. This region encompasses five districts: Jatinangor, Cimanggung, Tanjungsari, Sukasari, and Pamulihan, with a total of 297 teachers serving as respondents. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula to ensure a representative sample (Alfatih, n.d.).

$$n = N / (1 + N \cdot e^2)$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (1%, 2%, 3%, 4%, 5%, or 10%)

The margin of error used for educational research is 5% = 0.05); thus, the value of n is:

$$n = 1151 / (1 + 1151 \cdot (5\%)^2)$$

$$n = 1151 / (1 + 1151 \cdot (0.0025))$$

$$n = 1151 / (1 + 2.8775)$$

$$n = 1151 / 3.8775$$

$$n = 296.84$$

n = 297

Data were collected using a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The growth mindset instrument was adapted from the mindset measurement developed by Sembiring (2017), which was based on Dweck's theoretical framework and includes responses to challenges, obstacles, effort, criticism, and the success of others (Sembiring, 2017). The emotional intelligence instrument was adapted from Goleman's framework, covering self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills (Goleman, 1998). The decision-making instrument was developed based on three ethical decision-making approaches: ends-based thinking, rule-based thinking, and care-based thinking. Meanwhile, the school climate instrument was adapted from the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory developed by the National School Climate Center and included aspects related to interpersonal relationships, fairness in school policies, safety and comfort, and the physical environment. Prior to the main data collection, the instruments were pilot-tested on 52 respondents outside the main research sample to establish their validity and reliability.

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 3.0 through two main stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The outer model assessment included convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), whereas discriminant validity was assessed using cross-loadings, the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability.

Based on the results of the first-stage convergent validity test, all indicators across the research variables demonstrated outer loading values above the minimum threshold of 0.50, indicating that they met the criteria for convergent validity. For the Growth Mindset (X1) variable, the indicator Belief that Ability Can Be Developed obtained an outer loading value of 0.600, followed by Attitude Toward Challenges (0.549), Attitude Toward Mistakes and Failure (Productive Failure) (0.565), Orientation Toward Process and Effort (0.577), Optimism and the “Power of Yet” Principle (0.562), and Commitment to Building a Growth Culture (0.507). These findings indicate that all indicators were capable of reflecting the Growth Mindset construct, although several indicators contributed at a moderate level.

For the Principal's Emotional Intelligence (X2) variable, the outer loading values were 0.559 for Self-Awareness, 0.525 for Self-Regulation, 0.514 for Social Awareness, and 0.581 for Social Skills. Among these indicators, Social Skills exhibited the highest loading value, suggesting that it was the strongest indicator in representing the construct of principal emotional intelligence. Conversely, Social Awareness recorded the lowest loading value, although it remained above the acceptable threshold.

Regarding the Decision Making (Y) variable, the indicator Ends-Based Thinking achieved an outer loading value of 0.646, while Rule-Based Thinking and Care-Based Thinking obtained values of 0.584 and 0.624, respectively. These results suggest that all three indicators adequately represented the Decision Making construct, with Ends-Based Thinking serving as the most dominant indicator.

For the School Climate (Z) variable, the indicators Interpersonal Relationships, Fairness in School Policies, Safety and Comfort, and Physical Environment obtained outer loading values of 0.529, 0.531, 0.512, and 0.579, respectively. The Physical Environment indicator contributed the most strongly to the School Climate construct, whereas Safety and Comfort showed the lowest loading value while still meeting the required criterion for convergent validity.

Overall, the results of the first-stage measurement model assessment indicate that all indicators achieved outer loading values above 0.50 and can therefore be considered valid for further analysis. Nevertheless, indicators with relatively lower loading values may warrant further evaluation in subsequent stages of model refinement to enhance the overall quality of the measurement model.

The trial results, out of the 17 existing indicators, the following indicators demonstrated valid status: Attitude Toward Challenges, Optimism and the Power of Yet Principle, Commitment to Building a Growth Culture, Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Social Awareness, Social Skills, Ends-Based Thinking, Care-Based Thinking, Safety and Comfort, Physical Environment, and Belief. The variables include Developable Ability, Attitudes Toward Mistakes and Failure (Productive Failure), Process and Effort Orientation, Rule-Based Thinking, and Interpersonal Relationships/Fairness in School Policy; consequently, no items were found to be invalid, making the instrument suitable for testing or data collection.

The inner model assessment included the coefficient of determination (R^2) to evaluate the model's predictive explanatory power and hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping procedure. This procedure generated path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values to determine the significance of the relationships among variables. A hypothesized relationship was considered statistically significant when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below .05 at the 5% significance level (Hair et al., 2011).

Each construct in this model recorded an AVE value exceeding 0.50. These results confirm that the requirement for convergent validity has been successfully met by all variables. The lowest AVE value was 0.591 (for the emotional intelligence variable), while the highest reached 0.759 (for the Growth Mindset variable). Thus, in accordance with Hair et al. (2021), all these values satisfy the minimum AVE criterion of 0.50. All HTMT scores fell below the 0.90 threshold. This confirms that each construct in the model possesses a unique identity and captures a specific concept without the risk of inter-variable redundancy. These findings align with the criteria established by Henseler et al. (2015), who emphasized that discriminant validity is considered adequate if the HTMT values between constructs do not exceed the 0.90 limit.

The criteria applied are based on Ghazali et al. (2015), where good reliability is indicated by a CR value above 0.70 and a Cronbach's Alpha exceeding 0.60. With these conditions met, the validity and reliability of the measurements in this study are strongly confirmed.

The Cronbach's Alpha values for each construct exceeded 0.60, while the overall Composite Reliability scores surpassed the 0.70 threshold. These findings confirm that all latent variables met the reliability prerequisites required for PLS-SEM analysis. Based on these results, it can be concluded that each construct demonstrates a satisfactory level of internal consistency in accordance with established minimum standards.

Results and Discussions

Respondent Characteristics and Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Before the questionnaire was distributed to the research respondents, validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure that the instrument accurately and consistently measured the intended constructs or variables. A pilot test was administered to 52 respondents, consisting of teachers who were not included in the actual research sample. The validity of each questionnaire item was assessed by comparing the calculated *t*-value with the *t*-table value at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and degrees of freedom ($df = n - 2$). An item was considered valid if the calculated *t*-value exceeded the *t*-table value, while reliability was assessed to ensure the consistency of the instrument. After the instrument was confirmed to be valid and reliable and the data distribution met the normality assumption, the questionnaire was considered appropriate for data collection.

Subsequently, the Outer Model (Measurement Model) was tested using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method with the assistance of SmartPLS 3.0 to examine the relationships between the indicators and their respective latent variables. One of the tests performed in the outer model was Convergent Validity, which was used to assess indicator validity based on the *factor loading* values, representing the correlation between an individual questionnaire item and the construct being measured. In this study, the minimum acceptable *factor loading* value was 0.50. The resulting *loading factor* values were then used to determine the adequacy of each indicator in representing the respective research constructs. The processing of the loading factor data yielded the following results.

Table 1. Loading Factor

Variables	Indicator Question	Outer Loading
Mindset Growth Mindset (X1)	Belief Ability Can Be Developed	0.600
	Attitude To Challenge	0.549
	Attitude To Mistakes and Failures (<i>Productive Failure</i>)	0.565
	Process and Effort Orientation	0.577
	Optimism and Principles <i>Power Of Yet</i>	0.562
	Commitment Build Culture Grow	0.507
Principal's Emotional Intelligence (X2)	Self - Awareness	0.559
	Self - Regulation	0.525
	Awareness Social	0.514
	Skills Social (<i>Social Skills</i>)	0.581
Decision Making (Y)	Think Ends - Based <i>Thinking</i>	0.646

Variables	Indicator Question	Outer Loading
School Climate Variable (Z)	Think Based Regulation (<i>Rule-Based Thinking</i>)	0.584
	Think Based on Caring (<i>Care-Based Thinking</i>)	0.624
	Interpersonal Relationships	0.529
	Justice In Policy School	0.531
	Safety and Comfort	0.512
	Environment Physique (<i>Physical Environment</i>)	0.579

The test results in the table above indicate that, out of the 17 indicators, the following were found to be valid: Attitude Toward Challenges; Optimism and the "Power of Yet" Principle; Commitment to Building a Growth Culture; Self-Awareness; Self-Regulation; Social Awareness; Social Skills; Ends-Based Thinking; Care-Based Thinking; Safety and Comfort; Physical Environment; Belief in the Developability of Abilities; Attitude Toward Mistakes and Failure (Productive Failure); Process and Effort Orientation; Rule-Based Thinking; and Interpersonal Relationships/Fairness in School Policies. Consequently, no indicators were found to be invalid, making the instrument suitable for data collection.

This study involved 297 teachers employed as civil servants in public elementary schools across Region I of Sumedang Regency. Of the total respondents, 227 teachers (76%) were female, while 70 teachers (24%) were male. In terms of employment status, 208 respondents (70%) were Government Employees with Work Agreements (*Pegawai Pemerintah dengan Perjanjian Kerja [PPPK]*), whereas 89 respondents (30%) were Civil Servants (*Pegawai Negeri Sipil [PNS]*). This respondent profile provides an overview of the demographic and employment characteristics of the participants who contributed to the assessment of principals' growth mindset, emotional intelligence, decision-making, and school climate.

The measurement model was first evaluated by examining convergent validity. The results showed that all indicators across the four constructs had outer loading values exceeding 0.70, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability and strong associations between the observed indicators and their respective latent constructs. The highest loading within the growth mindset construct was observed for the optimism and *power of yet* indicator (0.838). For emotional intelligence, the social skills indicator demonstrated the highest loading (0.820). Within the decision-making construct, ends-based thinking produced the highest loading (0.825), whereas safety and comfort represented the strongest indicator of school climate (0.815). In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the four constructs ranged from 0.591 to 0.759, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. These findings indicate that each construct explained more than 50% of the variance in its respective indicators, thereby confirming adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 2. AVE

Variables	AVE
Growth Mindset	0,759
Principal's Emotional Intelligence	0,591
Decision-Making	0,626
School Climate	0,626

Discriminant validity was subsequently assessed using cross-loadings, the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The results demonstrated that each indicator exhibited a stronger relationship with its intended construct than with the other constructs, supporting the distinctiveness of the four latent variables. Furthermore, all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90, providing additional evidence of satisfactory discriminant validity (Cheung et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2026).

Table 3. Correlation values between constructs and the square root of AVE (Fornell-Larcker)

X1	Z	X2	Y	
Growth Mindset (X1)	0.684			
School Climate (Z)	0.850	0.791		
Principal's Emotional Intelligence (X2)	0.899	0.908	0.768	
Decision Making (Y)	0.872	0.917	0.930	0.789

Table 4. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha Values

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Growth Mindset	0.862	0.881
Principal's Emotional Intelligence	0.860	0.907
Decision-Making	0.753	0.831
School Climate	0.837	0.896

The reliability assessment further demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency across all constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.753 to 0.862, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.831 to 0.907. All values exceeded the recommended minimum thresholds, indicating that the indicators consistently measured their respective constructs. Overall, the results confirm that the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. Therefore, the four constructs were considered sufficiently valid and reliable to proceed to the evaluation of the structural model and hypothesis testing.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model) and Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination (R^2) analysis showed that the decision-making construct obtained an R^2 value of 0.873. This result indicates that 87.3% of the variance in principals' decision-making could be jointly explained by growth mindset and emotional intelligence, while the remaining 12.7% was attributable to other factors not included in the proposed model. Similarly, school climate obtained an R^2 value of 0.841, indicating that 84.1% of its variance could be explained by principals' decision-making. According to commonly accepted PLS-SEM guidelines, the coefficient of determination provides an important indication of the explanatory power of endogenous constructs within a structural model. Accordingly, the R^2 values obtained in this study indicate substantial explanatory power for both decision-making and school climate (Hair et al., 2021).

The high R^2 value for decision-making further suggests that growth mindset and emotional intelligence represent important and complementary psychological resources in explaining how school principals formulate and implement decisions. Growth mindset may provide a cognitive orientation that encourages openness to learning, feedback, challenges, and continuous improvement, whereas emotional intelligence enables leaders to recognize, understand, and regulate emotional information when responding to complex organizational and interpersonal situations. The combination of these cognitive and emotional capacities may therefore provide a strong foundation for effective leadership decision-making. Previous research has similarly emphasized that leadership effectiveness and decision quality are shaped by the interaction between cognitive processes and emotional competencies rather than by purely rational analysis alone (Awais et al., 2025).

Likewise, the R^2 value of 0.841 for school climate indicates that principals' decision-making is a highly important explanatory factor in shaping the organizational environment of the school. This finding suggests that the ways principals evaluate alternatives, involve stakeholders, communicate decisions, and implement policies may substantially influence teachers' perceptions of relationships, fairness, trust, safety, and collaboration within the school. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that school leadership practices play an important role in shaping organizational conditions and the overall quality of the school environment (Veletić et al., 2023).

More specifically, the strong explanatory relationship between decision-making and school climate suggests that decision-making should not be understood merely as an administrative or technical function. Decisions made by school principals communicate organizational priorities and influence how school members perceive the legitimacy, fairness, and responsiveness of leadership. When decision-making processes are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of school stakeholders, they are more likely to strengthen trust and cooperation. Conversely, inconsistent or insufficiently participatory decisions may weaken interpersonal relationships and negatively affect perceptions of the school environment. Research on participatory and distributed leadership has similarly demonstrated the importance of shared decision-making processes in strengthening collaboration and improving organizational functioning in schools (Nadeem, 2024).

Taken together, the results provide empirical support for the proposed structural mechanism in which principals' psychological capacities are translated into broader organizational outcomes through the quality of their decision-making. The substantial R^2 value for decision-making indicates that growth mindset and emotional intelligence provide a strong explanatory basis for understanding variation in principals' decision-making, while the substantial R^2 value for school climate demonstrates the central role of decision-making in explaining organizational conditions within schools.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of these R^2 values should be made carefully. In PLS-SEM, R^2 primarily reflects the proportion of variance explained by the predictors within the analyzed sample and should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of out-of-sample predictive performance. A model with substantial explanatory power may still require additional predictive assessment to determine its ability to predict observations beyond the original sample. Therefore, future studies may complement R^2 evaluation with out-of-sample prediction procedures, such as PLSpredict, to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the model's predictive capability (Shmueli et al., 2019).

Overall, the findings indicate that the proposed structural model has substantial explanatory power and provides strong empirical support for the hypothesized relationships among growth mindset, emotional intelligence, principals' decision-making, and school climate. The results further imply that efforts to strengthen school leadership should extend beyond administrative and technical competencies by developing principals' adaptive cognitive orientations and emotional competencies. Strengthening these psychological capacities may improve the quality of decision-making and, consequently, contribute to the development of a more positive, collaborative, and supportive school climate.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. The results of the path coefficient analysis, including the original sample estimates, t-statistics, and p-values, are presented in Table 1.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results (Path Coefficients)

Variable Relationship	Original Sample (O)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Description
Growth Mindset (X1) → Decision-Making (Y)	0.189	3.247	0.001	Significant
Emotional Intelligence (X2) → Decision-Making (Y)	0.761	13.245	0.000	Significant
X1 and X2 (simultaneously) → Decision-Making (Y)	0.899	72.475	0.000	Significant
Decision-Making (Y) → School Climate (Z)	0.917	60.677	0.000	Significant

Source: Primary data analysis, 2026.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination (R-Square) Values

Endogenous Variable	R-Square	Category
Principals' Decision-Making (Y)	0.873	Strong
School Climate (Z)	0.841	Strong

Source: Primary data analysis, 2026.

The Effect of Growth Mindset on Principals' Decision-Making

The results of the first hypothesis test demonstrated that growth mindset had a positive and significant effect on elementary school principals' decision-making (Original Sample = 0.189; T-statistic = 3.247; $p = 0.001$). Therefore, H1 was supported. This finding indicates that principals who more strongly believe that abilities and competencies can be developed through effort, learning, and continuous improvement tend to demonstrate better decision-making.

A growth mindset encourages individuals to view challenges and setbacks as opportunities for learning rather than as evidence of fixed limitations. In leadership contexts, such an orientation may promote openness to feedback, willingness to reconsider existing practices, and persistence when facing organizational difficulties. Consequently, principals with a stronger growth mindset are more likely to approach complex problems through reflection, learning, and adaptation rather than relying exclusively on established routines.

This interpretation is consistent with contemporary research on implicit theories and growth-oriented beliefs, which suggests that beliefs about the malleability of personal capacities can influence individuals' responses to challenges, effort, and learning processes. In educational leadership, these characteristics are particularly relevant because principals are required to make decisions under changing organizational, instructional, and interpersonal conditions. Thus, the positive relationship identified in this study suggests that a growth-oriented cognitive framework contributes to the development of more adaptive decision-making among school leaders.

Principals with a growth mindset are also likely to interpret organizational obstacles constructively. Program failures or unexpected outcomes can become sources of evaluation and improvement rather than situations to be avoided. Openness to feedback may further encourage principals to involve teachers and other stakeholders in deliberative processes before important decisions are made. Such participation can improve the quality and acceptance of decisions because it allows leaders to consider multiple perspectives and contextual information.

Nevertheless, the effect of growth mindset in the present model was substantially weaker than the effect of emotional intelligence. This finding suggests that, within the context of elementary school leadership in Sumedang Regency, a cognitive orientation toward learning and self-development alone may not be sufficient to determine the quality of principals' decisions. The ability to understand, regulate, and respond appropriately to emotions appears to play a more dominant role in decision-making processes that involve complex interpersonal relationships.

The Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Principals' Decision-Making

The results of the second hypothesis test showed that emotional intelligence had a positive and highly significant effect on principals' decision-making (Original Sample = 0.761; T-statistic = 13.245; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H2 was supported. The substantially larger path coefficient compared with growth mindset indicates that emotional intelligence was the most dominant predictor of decision-making in the proposed model.

This finding is consistent with the emotional intelligence framework, which emphasizes the capacity to perceive, understand, use, and regulate emotions in ways that facilitate effective thinking and action (Busu, 2020). Emotional processes are closely connected to judgment and reasoning, particularly when leaders must respond to uncertainty, interpersonal conflict, competing interests, and organizational pressure. Therefore, the ability to manage emotional information constructively can support more balanced and context-sensitive decision-making.

Self-regulation is particularly important in this context because it enables principals to avoid impulsive emotional reactions and to consider alternative solutions before making a decision. Principals who can regulate their emotions are more likely to evaluate situations objectively, listen to different perspectives, and assess the potential consequences of alternative actions. Emotional maturity may also enable leaders to consider the psychological consequences of school policies, making decisions not only administratively effective but also fair, humane, and supportive of sustainable organizational relationships.

The strong effect identified in this study suggests that decision-making in elementary school leadership is fundamentally an interpersonal as well as a cognitive process. School principals regularly interact with teachers, students, administrative staff, parents, and other stakeholders whose interests and expectations may differ. Consequently, decisions require not only analytical competence but also empathy, emotional regulation, social awareness, and the ability to manage interpersonal relationships. These findings reinforce the theoretical proposition that emotional intelligence represents an important resource for leadership effectiveness and organizational decision-making.

The Simultaneous Effect of Growth Mindset and Emotional Intelligence on Principals' Decision-Making

The results of the third hypothesis test demonstrated that growth mindset and emotional intelligence simultaneously had a positive and significant effect on principals' decision-making (Original Sample = 0.899; T-statistic = 72.475; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H3 was supported. The R^2 value of 0.873 further indicates that growth mindset and emotional intelligence jointly explained 87.3% of the variance in principals' decision-making. This substantial proportion of explained variance suggests that principals' decision-making is strongly associated with the integration of adaptive cognitive beliefs and emotional competencies. In other words, effective decision-making in school leadership cannot be understood solely as a technical or rational activity; it also involves how leaders interpret challenges, learn from experience, regulate emotional responses, and manage relationships with organizational stakeholders.

These findings demonstrate that growth mindset and emotional intelligence should not be viewed as isolated psychological resources operating independently within the leadership process. Instead, the two constructs appear to complement one another in shaping principals' capacity to respond to organizational challenges and make appropriate decisions. Growth mindset provides a cognitive orientation characterized by openness to learning, persistence, adaptability, and a willingness to improve one's abilities through experience. Research has also demonstrated a positive relationship between growth mindset and leadership behavior, suggesting that leaders who perceive their abilities as developable are more likely to demonstrate adaptive leadership practices and openness to organizational learning (Mahidhika & Fathiyah, 2022).

Within the context of school leadership, a growth-oriented perspective may encourage principals to interpret challenges and setbacks as opportunities for reflection and improvement rather than as evidence of personal or organizational failure. Such an orientation can support a more flexible decision-making process because principals may become more willing to reconsider existing strategies, seek feedback from teachers and other stakeholders, and revise decisions when previous approaches prove ineffective. Consequently, growth mindset may reduce the tendency to rely excessively on established routines and instead encourage leaders to view decision-making as a competence that can be continuously refined through experience, evaluation, and organizational learning.

Emotional intelligence complements this cognitive orientation by addressing the affective and interpersonal dimensions of leadership. Decision-making in schools frequently takes place in situations characterized by uncertainty, conflicting interests, interpersonal tensions, and diverse stakeholder expectations. Contemporary systematic evidence indicates that emotional intelligence is closely associated with effective school leadership, particularly through competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, empathy, and the capacity to establish trusting relationships with teachers and other school members (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). These emotional competencies enable school leaders to respond to challenging situations more constructively and to consider not only the technical consequences of their decisions but also their interpersonal and psychological implications.

The simultaneous influence of growth mindset and emotional intelligence therefore suggests the operation of complementary mechanisms in principals' decision-making. Growth mindset primarily supports the cognitive and developmental dimension of leadership by encouraging principals to believe that their knowledge, competence, and decision-making capacity can be improved through effort, reflection, and learning. Emotional intelligence, in contrast, supports the affective and relational dimension by enabling leaders to regulate emotional responses, recognize the perspectives of others, and maintain constructive interpersonal relationships. A recent review of the literature further indicates that emotionally intelligent leadership is consistently associated with beneficial leadership outcomes, including leadership effectiveness, relational leadership behaviors, and improved performance-related outcomes (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

The integration of these two capacities is particularly important because decision-making in educational organizations rarely depends exclusively on objective or quantitative information. School principals must often make decisions involving professional values, institutional regulations, human relationships, organizational priorities, and competing stakeholder needs. A decision may be technically appropriate but generate resistance if it is implemented without sufficient sensitivity to teachers' concerns or organizational conditions. Conversely, a decision that prioritizes interpersonal harmony but lacks analytical flexibility may fail to address underlying organizational problems. The present findings therefore suggest that high-quality decision-making requires principals to combine openness to learning and change with the emotional capacity to understand, regulate, and respond appropriately to complex interpersonal dynamics.

The strong simultaneous effect observed in this study also suggests that growth mindset and emotional intelligence may reinforce one another throughout the leadership process. A principal with a growth-oriented perspective may be more willing to acknowledge limitations and learn from feedback; however, receiving criticism and recognizing weaknesses may involve emotional challenges. Emotional intelligence can support this process by helping principals regulate defensive reactions and remain receptive to constructive feedback. Similarly, emotional intelligence may increase principals' capacity to understand the perspectives of teachers and other stakeholders, while growth mindset may encourage them to treat those perspectives as opportunities for learning rather than as challenges to their authority. Thus, growth mindset may create the willingness to develop, whereas emotional intelligence provides the emotional and relational capacity necessary to sustain that developmental process.

This interpretation is supported by broader evidence indicating that emotional intelligence contributes to multiple dimensions of leadership effectiveness. A comprehensive review of empirical studies found that leader emotional intelligence is positively associated with beneficial outcomes, including leadership behaviors, leader effectiveness, and performance-related outcomes (Gerhardt et al., 2026). These findings are relevant to the present study because principals' decision-making is not an isolated cognitive activity but a central leadership behavior that influences organizational processes and stakeholder responses. Therefore, the strong contribution of emotional intelligence in combination with growth mindset may reflect the psychological resources required to make decisions under conditions of complexity, uncertainty, and interpersonal interdependence.

The findings further imply that decision-making competence should be regarded as a dynamic leadership capability rather than a fixed personal characteristic. School principals continuously encounter policy changes, instructional demands, organizational problems, and interpersonal conflicts that require them to revise their understanding and adapt their actions. Growth mindset supports this adaptive process by encouraging persistence and continuous learning, whereas emotional intelligence enables principals to maintain emotional stability and constructive relationships during periods of organizational change. The combination of these capacities may therefore strengthen principals' ability to make decisions that address immediate problems while remaining responsive to the longer-term needs of the school organization.

The high explanatory power of the model also provides an important implication for principal leadership development. Leadership preparation and professional development programs often emphasize administrative competence, policy implementation, strategic planning, and managerial procedures. Although these competencies remain essential, the present findings indicate that technical knowledge alone may not adequately explain the quality of principals' decision-making. Psychological capacities, particularly adaptive beliefs about learning and emotional competencies, should also receive systematic attention. Evidence from research on school leadership during periods of organizational disruption further demonstrates that principals' emotional capacities and leadership responses are particularly important when schools face uncertainty and rapid change (Dare & Saleem, 2022).

The findings also suggest that an imbalance between growth mindset and emotional intelligence may weaken leadership effectiveness. Principals with strong emotional intelligence but limited openness to learning and adaptation may maintain positive interpersonal relationships and emotional stability while becoming less responsive to innovation and organizational change. Conversely, principals with a strong growth orientation but limited emotional regulation may actively pursue innovation but encounter difficulties in managing resistance, conflict, and the psychological consequences of organizational decisions. This potential imbalance highlights that leadership effectiveness may depend not merely on the presence of individual psychological strengths but on the capacity to integrate those strengths appropriately within complex organizational situations.

Therefore, the strongest form of leadership decision-making may emerge from the integration rather than the isolated development of these two psychological capacities. Growth mindset enables principals to question existing assumptions, learn from challenges, and continuously improve their approaches. Emotional intelligence enables them to regulate emotional reactions, recognize the needs and perspectives of others, and maintain constructive relationships while implementing decisions. Together, these capacities can support a more reflective, adaptive, participatory, and context-sensitive decision-making process.

From a practical perspective, these findings have important implications for principal recruitment, preparation, and professional development. Programs designed to strengthen leadership decision-making should not focus exclusively on technical decision-making models or administrative procedures. They should also incorporate structured activities aimed at developing reflective learning, openness to feedback, resilience in responding to challenges, emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal relationship management. Leadership development may therefore include reflective case analysis, feedback-based learning, simulations of complex organizational decisions, conflict-management exercises, and structured opportunities for principals to evaluate their responses to failure, uncertainty, and organizational change.

Overall, the findings provide strong empirical support for the proposition that principals' decision-making is shaped by the integration of cognitive adaptability and emotional competence. Growth mindset encourages principals to remain open to learning, reflection, and continuous improvement, whereas emotional intelligence enables them to manage the affective and interpersonal demands associated with leadership decisions. The substantial simultaneous effect of these two variables demonstrates that high-quality decision-making in school leadership is most likely to emerge when principals possess both the willingness to learn and adapt and the emotional capacity to manage themselves and respond constructively to others. Consequently, strengthening growth mindset and emotional intelligence should be considered an important strategic component of efforts to improve principals' decision-making capacity and, ultimately, the effectiveness of school leadership.

The Effect of Principals' Decision-Making on School Climate

The results of the fourth hypothesis test showed that principals' decision-making had a positive and highly significant effect on school climate (Original Sample = 0.917; T-statistic = 60.677; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H4

was supported. With an R^2 value of 0.841, principals' decision-making emerged as a major explanatory factor in the development of school climate in public elementary schools in Region I of Sumedang Regency.

This finding indicates that the way principals formulate and implement decisions has important implications for teachers' and other stakeholders' perceptions of the school environment. Decisions that are transparent, fair, participatory, and responsive to stakeholder needs can strengthen trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. Conversely, decisions perceived as inconsistent, unfair, or insufficiently inclusive may undermine interpersonal relationships and weaken the overall organizational climate.

The finding is consistent with research demonstrating the close relationship between school leadership and organizational quality, including shared perceptions of trust, rules, relationships, and support for new initiatives (Keravnos et al., 2025). In particular, participatory leadership and inclusive decision-making can encourage teachers and other school members to perceive organizational processes as more legitimate and equitable.

Ethical considerations and consistency in decision-making may also influence stakeholders' perceptions of fairness. When principals consider both organizational objectives and the needs of school members, decisions are more likely to be perceived as balanced and legitimate. In the context of elementary schools in Sumedang Regency, the present findings indicate that participatory, ethical, effective, and context-sensitive decision-making contributes to the development of a more conducive and harmonious school climate that supports teacher performance and student development.

The Mediating Role of Principals' Decision-Making

Overall, the findings indicate that principals' decision-making serves as an important mediating mechanism through which growth mindset and emotional intelligence contribute to school climate. The psychological capacities of school leaders are not merely individual attributes but are translated into organizational outcomes through how principals interpret problems, evaluate alternatives, consider stakeholder perspectives, and implement decisions.

Growth mindset encourages principals to approach challenges with openness, persistence, adaptability, and a willingness to learn from feedback and experience. Emotional intelligence complements this capacity by enabling principals to regulate emotions, understand others' perspectives, and manage complex interpersonal relationships. These emotional competencies are closely associated with effective school leadership and constructive relationships within educational organizations (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Sasere & Matashu, 2025).

The integration of these capacities can promote more thoughtful, balanced, and contextually appropriate decision-making. Growth mindset supports openness to alternative solutions and continuous improvement, whereas emotional intelligence helps principals manage disagreement, criticism, and interpersonal tensions constructively. Consequently, decision-making becomes an important mechanism through which principals' cognitive and emotional capacities are translated into leadership practices.

High-quality decision-making can subsequently strengthen important dimensions of school climate, including trust, fairness, safety, collaboration, and positive interpersonal relationships. The findings therefore support a sequential leadership mechanism in which growth mindset and emotional intelligence enhance principals' decision-making, which subsequently contributes to the development of a positive school climate.

These results highlight that effective school leadership depends not only on administrative and managerial competence but also on principals' ability to learn, adapt, regulate emotions, understand stakeholders, and translate these psychological capacities into thoughtful and responsive decisions. Therefore, strengthening growth mindset, emotional intelligence, and decision-making competence should be considered an important strategy for promoting a positive, supportive, and collaborative school climate (Mugabekazi et al., 2026).

Conclusions

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that principals' psychological capacities play an important role in shaping decision-making and, ultimately, the school climate. First, principals' growth mindset has a positive and significant effect on decision-making among elementary school principals in Sumedang Regency ($\beta = 0.189$; $t = 3.247$; $p = 0.001$). Second, emotional intelligence has a positive and highly significant effect on principals' decision-making ($\beta = 0.761$; $t = 13.245$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that emotional intelligence provides a substantially stronger contribution to decision-making than growth

mindset. Third, growth mindset and emotional intelligence jointly demonstrate a strong and significant contribution to principals' decision-making, confirming that adaptive thinking and emotional competence are complementary psychological resources in the leadership process. Fourth, principals' decision-making has a positive and highly significant effect on school climate ($\beta = 0.917$; $t = 60.677$; $p < 0.001$). Decision-making also functions as an important mediating mechanism through which growth mindset and emotional intelligence contribute to the development of a more positive school climate. These findings highlight that effective school leadership should not be viewed solely from administrative and managerial competencies. The capacity to respond constructively to challenges, learn from feedback, regulate emotions, understand others, and make appropriate decisions constitutes an essential psychological foundation for educational leadership. The findings also suggest that strengthening principals' growth mindset and emotional intelligence may indirectly contribute to the improvement of school climate by enhancing the quality of their decision-making processes. Practically, the findings provide important implications for education authorities and school leadership development programs. The recruitment, preparation, professional development, and performance evaluation of school principals should consider psychological and interpersonal competencies, including adaptive thinking, emotional regulation, social awareness, and participatory decision-making, alongside conventional administrative and managerial performance indicators. For school principals, the findings emphasize the importance of continuously developing openness to feedback, persistence in addressing challenges, emotional self-regulation, and sensitivity to the perspectives and needs of school stakeholders.

This study is limited to public elementary school teachers with civil servant status in Region I of Sumedang Regency; therefore, the generalizability of the findings should be interpreted within this context. Future studies are encouraged to examine additional factors that may influence principals' decision-making and school climate, such as transformational leadership, organizational culture, principals' self-efficacy, and the quality of school facilities and infrastructure. Further research may also involve broader geographical areas, different educational levels, and more diverse categories of respondents to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which principals' individual capacities influence decision-making and the development of a positive school climate. Future studies are encouraged to extend the findings of this research by examining additional variables that may affect decision-making and school climate, applying alternative research methodologies, and broadening the geographical coverage to obtain more comprehensive and generalizable findings. Further investigation may also focus on the potential roles of mediating and moderating variables, including school organizational culture, transformational leadership, organizational commitment, and principal self-efficacy. Exploring these factors may contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying educational leadership and provide further theoretical and practical insights for improving school management and organizational climate.

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