



Adaptive Leadership Behaviors in Secondary schools: A Systematic Review of Practices, Challenges, Outcomes, and Implications

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Abstract

This systematic review examined adaptive leadership practices in secondary schools worldwide, focusing on their implementation, challenges, and outcomes. A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2025 was conducted across major databases and institutional repositories, yielding 15 eligible articles from diverse contexts including Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Palestine, and New Zealand. Thematic synthesis indicated that principals utilized adaptive practices such as contextual problem-solving, collaboration, digital transformation, and stakeholder engagement to address complex educational challenges. Despite persistent constraints including bureaucratic rigidity, resource limitations, and cultural resistance, findings revealed positive links between adaptive leadership practices and teachers' engagement, motivation, performance, curriculum innovation, and equity outcomes. The review concludes that adaptive leadership provides a flexible and globally relevant framework for boosting resilient, inclusive, and future-ready secondary schools, while stressing the significance of contextual adaptation to local traditions and systemic constraints.

Keywords: Adaptive leadership; secondary schools; school principals

1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations, particularly the education sector, require effective leadership more than ever to navigate the complexities of an increasingly dynamic and volatile global environment (Vincent, 2021). The present era is marked by heightened uncertainty and risks [Mazurkiewicz \(2021\)](#), with successive crises fundamentally altering established norms and exposing the inadequacy of traditional operational approaches. In this context, the exploration of innovative concepts and methodologies has become indispensable to ensure agile and appropriate responses to evolving challenges

For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed critical limitations in existing school leadership theory underscoring the imperative for robust crisis management capabilities and specialized leadership skills among school principals ([Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023](#)). These findings emphasize the inadequacy of traditional leadership models in effectively addressing the disruptive nature of crises within educational settings and necessitate the development of new theoretical frameworks that explicitly account for these realities ([Ramos-Pla et al., 2021](#)). Recent scholarly literatures emphasize the imperative for a paradigm shift in educational leadership towards more innovative, collaborative, and adaptive practices to effectively confront global challenges ([Mazurkiewicz, 2021](#); [Striepe & Cunningham, 2021](#)).

A notable challenge, however, lies in the limited adaptive capacity exhibited by many contemporary school principals. Sudden and significant shifts in the global environment often destabilize institutions and negatively affect school performance ([Bhengu & Myende, 2016](#); [Khan, 2017](#)). This underscores the necessity of adopting innovative practices that cultivate resilience and enhance the capacity of principals to withstand future disruptions arising from environmental volatility ([Bagwell, 2020](#)). Effective crisis management requires school principals to adopt responsive, adaptive, and future-oriented strategies, with a central focus on community well-being and clear, consistent communication ([Striepe, Cunningham, & Branson, 2023](#)).

The ability of teachers and students to adapt during crises depends largely on principals who remain learning-focused, foster creative thinking, and launch innovative solutions ([Northouse, 2018](#)). In a knowledge-based society, leaders play a decisive role in promoting knowledge acquisition, sharing, and the implementation of innovative solutions to adapt to rapidly changing environments ([Zubek, 2020](#)). If schools are to deliver world-class education, effective educational leadership is indispensable ([Atkinson, 2013](#)). Indeed, research demonstrates that the quality of leadership substantially influences school performance and student outcomes ([Robinson & Gray, 2019](#)). School Principals, as the forefront of institutional continuity, mobilize and inspire others,

thereby shaping both organizational life and future outlook ([Shuaib, Ahmad, & Hashim, 2022](#); [Sari, 2019](#)).

The demand for exceptional educational leaders has intensified in the 21st century due to globalization and competitive pressures ([Zhou & Alias, 2024](#)). Achieving significant improvements in school performance requires not only trained and committed teachers but also strong and diligent leadership from principals ([Atkinson, 2013](#)). Leadership practices that resolve complex, dynamic, and ill-defined organizational problems are increasingly critical ([Yukl & Mahsud, 2010](#)). The nature of contemporary challenges necessitates leadership approaches that are flexible and adaptive to shifting sociological and political environments ([Heifetz, 1994](#)). Adaptive leadership, therefore, emerges as essential for driving organizational change and fostering school transformation ([Rajiah, Tan, & Lim, 2019](#); [Arthur-Mensah, 2017](#)).

The challenges facing schools today are increasingly complex and adaptive in nature, requiring different leadership behaviors from those we have practiced so far. They require leaders to spend more time running experiments than solving problems, adapting than executing, and inventing new practices than searching for best practices ([Linsky & Lawrence, 2011](#)).

Early leadership theories, including trait, behavioral, and contingency approaches, along with transactional and transformational leadership, have significantly influenced our understanding of leadership in educational settings. However, these earlier frameworks often fall short in addressing the inherent complexities of modern educational environments ([Liu, 2025](#); [Northouse, 2018](#)). In response to these limitations, adaptive leadership approach, developed by [Heifetz and Linsky \(2002\)](#), emerges as a more fitting contemporary alternative approach which emphasizes guiding individuals through continuous change by mobilizing them to confront difficult realities, experiment, and learn.

While adaptive leadership is extensively studied in business and healthcare sectors, its application in education, particularly in the complex arena of secondary schools, is less synthesized. This systematic review therefore seeks to identify and synthesize empirical evidence on adaptive leadership practices in secondary schools and their outcomes across diverse contexts. Specifically, it is guided by the following research questions:

- What adaptive leadership practices are exercised in secondary schools?
- What challenges do secondary school leaders face when applying adaptive leadership in diverse educational contexts?
- What observed outcomes emerge from the implementation of adaptive leadership practices in secondary schools?

- What implications do adaptive leadership practices and their associated outcomes hold for educational leadership, policy and system reform, and in secondary schools?

2. Methodology

A systematic review was conducted to examine the practices, challenges, and outcomes of adaptive leadership in secondary schools. Searches were conducted in Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley software search to identify peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025 that addressed adaptive leadership in secondary education worldwide. To ensure comprehensive coverage and methodological rigor, indexing verification was performed using Scopus, Web of Science, and Taylor & Francis Online. In addition, institutional repositories and selected regional journals were reviewed to capture relevant studies not indexed in major databases. Only studies that met predefined inclusion criteria and were published in peer-reviewed journals were included. This approach ensured a methodologically sound and globally relevant evidence base, providing a nuanced understanding of the current state of knowledge on the practices, challenges, and outcomes of adaptive leadership in secondary schools.

Additionally, review protocol, finding/searching strategies, data selection process, data extraction, included/excluded, data synthesis, were included to the study as the following section.

2.1. Developing Review Protocol

The researcher used the data from the electronic Google website by downloading the previous articles which were related to the procedure, methodology, and similar prescription ideas used to evaluate.

2.2. Study Methods

The systematic review of the previous article based on adaptive leadership in different countries on the basis of to the Practices, Challenges, and Outcomes of Adaptive Leadership in Secondary Schools. The review employed qualitative methods to synthesize and integrate findings, thereby generating a coherent account of the literature and advancing understanding of the field.

2.3. Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion Criteria served as the study's foundation. All duplications were carefully examined to maintain the review's caliber as per the criteria. After examining each publication against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study chose 15 articles. Inclusion Criteria: peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025 in the English language.

The researchers selected this time frame because studies examining the practices, challenges, and outcomes of adaptive leadership in secondary schools have not been done before in this way. Exclusion Criteria: Non peer reviewed sources (blogs, opinion pieces), duplicates, articles outside

secondary education, and journals lacking recognized indexing or accreditation. For comprehensive clarification, refer to [Table A](#) (page 17) appended subsequent to the references.

2.4. Employed Databases

Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley software search, databases were used for primary searches. Additionally, Elsevier's regional journals and institutional repositories were examined, along with Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science DOAJ, and Scopus to ensure comprehensive coverage.

2.5. Search Strategy

Keywords used as search strategies comprised "Adaptive Leadership" AND "Secondary Education", ("Adaptive Leadership") AND ("Secondary Education" OR "High School" OR "Secondary School"). Search logs and a PRISMA flow diagram were maintained to document the process.

2.6. Data Extraction

Data extraction forms were created and performed through an Excel spreadsheet, which was a crucial dedication to gathering information on study characteristics and on the practices, challenges, and outcomes of adaptive leadership in secondary schools. Metadata were extracted for each study, including author(s), year of publication, study design, and major findings.

2.7. Quality Assessment

To ensure quality assessment, the review strictly followed the Eligibility Criteria, retaining only peer-reviewed and accredited studies relevant to adaptive leadership in secondary schools and thereby guaranteeing methodological transparency.

2.8. Data Synthesis

The systematic review was synthesized thematically through narrative approach. Accordingly, it was categorized into Practices, Challenges, and Outcomes of Adaptive Leadership in Secondary Schools.

2.9. Ethical Considerations

Only publicly available, peer-reviewed literature is used in this review.

3. Results

Prior to crafting review questions, literature that is pertinent to adaptive leadership in secondary school was carefully chosen. Refined research questions about the purpose of the study area were used to determine the title of the review pertaining to adaptive leadership. Protocol criteria were then incorporated into the inclusion or exclusion process using the following mechanism.

3.1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

The PRISMA diagram documented the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, ensuring transparency and reproducibility as indicated in figure 1 below. It details the procedures used to retrieve, screen, and choose articles for the final review.

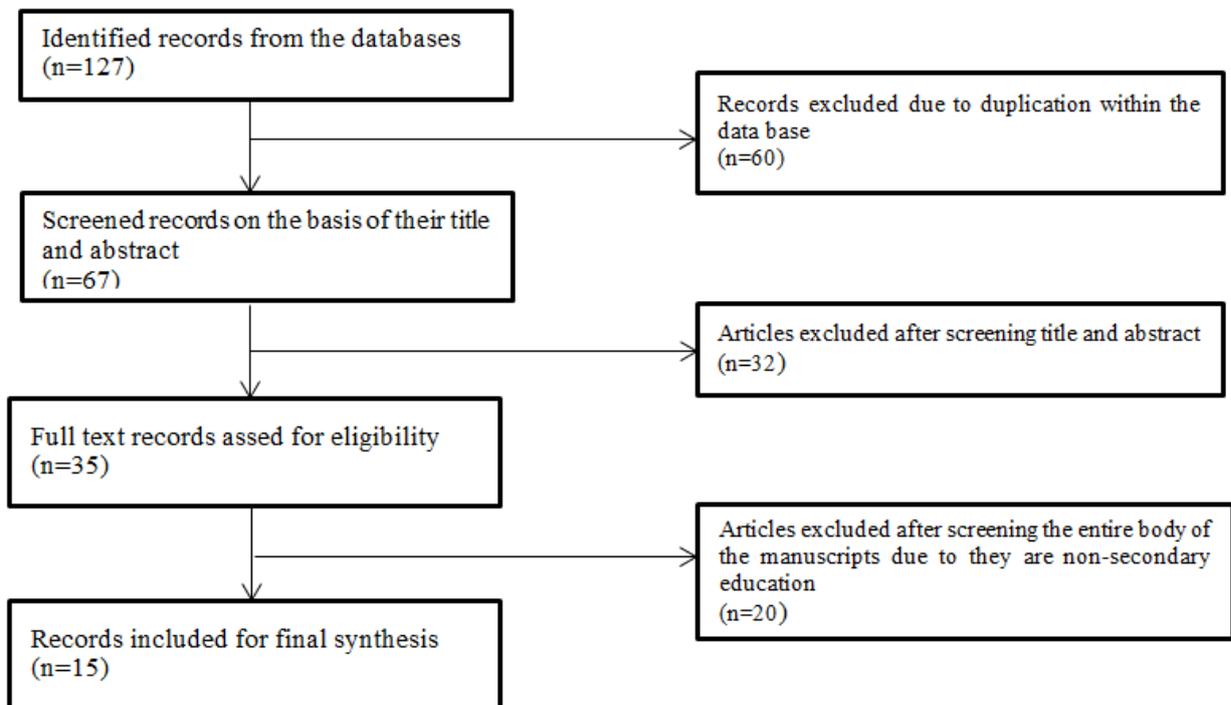


Figure 1. Figure illustrating procedural steps undertaken by the researchers to identify, screen, and select articles for inclusion in the final review

3.2. Characters of Included Studies

This study critically examines the literature on adaptive leadership in secondary education from 2000 to 2025, focusing on practices, challenges, and outcomes. Relevant studies were identified through targeted searches, covering different countries. The review includes 15 studies: 10 qualitative, 2 quantitative, and 3 mixed-methods, with geographic representation from Indonesia (6), Ethiopia (3), Philippines (3), and one each from Malaysia, Palestine, and New Zealand. Participants comprised various educational stakeholders including principals, supervisors, parents, teachers, and students. The limited number of studies, totaling only 15, is mainly due to the fact that research conducted on adaptive leadership in education represents just 1.5% of the total, as noted by [Pujianto et al. \(2023\)](#) and especially rare in secondary schools. As evidenced in Pujianto’s systematic review, scholarly inquiry has largely centered on health and business, which explains the scarcity of studies conducted in secondary school context. For supplementary information, please refer to [Table B](#) (page 18), which is appended after the reference list for detailed clarification.

3.3. Setting

This systematic review focused solely on studies carried out at the secondary education level worldwide. A total of fifteen reviewed studies were conducted in various countries, all focusing on adaptive leadership.

4. Discussion

The reviewed literatures show a varied range of findings, each providing fundamental contributions to the development of adaptive leadership practices. Based on these understandings, the reviewer has fused the evidence into three thematic areas: (i) Adaptive leadership practices, (ii) Challenges limiting adaptive leadership implementation, and (iii) the resultant outcomes observed within secondary education due to the enactment of adaptive leadership practices. This thematic structuring increases analytical clarity while stressing the multifaceted nature of adaptive leadership in educational contexts. Please refer to [Table C](#) (page 20), which follows the references, for a detailed description.

4.1. Adaptive leadership practices

Across diverse contexts, school principals have consistently employed adaptive leadership practices rooted in Heifetz's framework to navigate crises and sustain organizational effectiveness. In Ethiopia, [Alene et al. 2025a](#)) demonstrated how secondary school principals engaged in “getting on the balcony,” stepping back from immediate crises to contextualize problems, while simultaneously giving work back to teachers and maintaining disciplined attention. These practices facilitated contextual problem-solving and sharpened teacher focus despite systemic rigidity. In a related study by [Alene et al.\(2025b\)](#) found that behaviors such as recognizing adaptive challenges, managing distress, and protecting leadership voices from below predicted workplace engagement and explained nearly half of the variation in teacher engagement. Similarly, [Gebeyehu \(2025\)](#) reported moderate levels of adaptive leadership in the Amhara region, noting that while principals identified challenges and managed distress, their efforts were constrained by teacher resistance and lack of trust.

In the Philippines, [Balagtas \(2024\)](#) expanded the adaptive leadership toolkit by incorporating visioning, communication, inquiry, co-creation, and resilience alongside conventional behaviors. These strategies strongly correlated with teacher motivation, underscoring how adaptive leadership fosters autonomy, collaboration, and empowerment. [Famero \(2024\)](#) further extended the scope by identifying nine emergent adaptive leadership practices during the COVID-19 crisis in Philippines, including curriculum review, resource management, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder involvement, and teacher support. These practices highlighted the strategic dimension of adaptive leadership in sustaining educational continuity under extreme uncertainty.

Beyond the Philippines and Ethiopia, international studies have reinforced the versatility of adaptive leadership. In Indonesia, [Tanio and Wibawanta \(2024\)](#) emphasized cooperation and delegation, showing how curriculum change was enabled through feedback loops and empowerment. [Takdir et al.\(2025\)](#) linked adaptive practices such as empathy, appreciation, and digital transformation to organizational effectiveness, while [Rakhmadi et al.\(2025\)](#) introduced agile leadership practices flexible decision-making, sprint planning, and iterative cycles that enhanced responsiveness and innovation. [Don \(2020\)](#) illustrated how Malaysian school leaders strengthened stakeholder networks, autonomy, and teamwork during COVID-19 lockdowns, while [Pettalongi et al. \(2025\)](#) advanced digital leadership strategies to optimize online platforms and build teacher capacity. In Palestine, [Emran and Abo-Thabet \(2024\)](#) confirmed strong links between adaptive leadership and teacher performance, emphasizing professional development, teamwork, and open communication. [Le Fevre and Sinnema \(2024\)](#) highlighted contextual responsiveness, middle leader empowerment, and policy–practice bridging, while [Huda \(2025\)](#) offered a culturally grounded Indonesian example of “Gotong Royong Sekolah”—mutual cooperation integrating inclusive practices, religious values, and community involvement to promote equity and innovation.

Taken together, these studies reveal adaptive leadership as a multidimensional framework that empowers teachers, sustains motivation, and enhances organizational resilience across both stable and crisis contexts. Yet, they also underscore persistent challenges: systemic rigidity, resistance to change, limited trust, and resource constraints often hinder full enactment. Despite these barriers, the evidence affirms adaptive leadership as a critical lever for educational transformation, capable of bridging policy and practice, fostering collaboration, and ensuring continuity in times of uncertainty.

While these studies demonstrate the variety of adaptive leadership practices, they also stress challenges that impede its implementation.

4.2. **Challenges to Adaptive Leadership in secondary School**

Despite the growing recognition of adaptive leadership as a transformative framework in education, its implementation across global contexts continues to face persistent and multifaceted challenges. These challenges can be synthesized into six core categories that highlight the systemic, cultural, infrastructural, and psychological barriers confronting school leaders worldwide.

One of the most significant obstacles is systemic rigidity and bureaucratic constraints. Across Ethiopia, Palestine, Malaysia, and New Zealand, studies consistently reveal that centralized decision-making, hierarchical leadership cultures and rigid accountability structures such as exam-driven performance metrics limit principals’ autonomy to initiate context-specific reforms. This

bureaucratic rigidity undermines their ability to respond flexibly to emerging challenges ([Alene et al., 2025a](#); [Emran & Abo-Thabet, 2024](#); [Don, 2020](#); [Le Fevre & Sinnema, 2024](#)).

Resistance to change and cultural inertia further complicate adaptive leadership efforts. Teacher resistance, stakeholder skepticism, and entrenched traditional norms often obstruct reform initiatives. In Ethiopia and Indonesia, principals reported difficulty in shifting attitudes, values, and professional identities among staff, particularly when adaptive challenges required cultural transformation. This inertia slows innovation and undermines collaborative problem-solving ([Gebeyehu, 2025](#); [Tanio & Wibawanta, 2024](#); [Huda, 2025](#)).

Resource constraints and infrastructure gaps also pose recurring challenges. Studies from Ethiopia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Palestine underscore chronic shortages in financial, technological, and human resources. Limited access to digital tools, unstable internet connectivity, and uneven infrastructure hinder the enactment of adaptive strategies, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic ([Famero, 2024](#); [Takdir et al., 2025](#); [Petalangi et al., 2025](#)).

Another critical barrier lies in limited professional development and leadership capacity. Inadequate training opportunities mean that many principals lack exposure to adaptive leadership models and tools, resulting in inconsistent implementation and low confidence in navigating complex challenges. This issue is especially evident in Ethiopia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, where professional learning opportunities remain scarce or misaligned with adaptive demands ([Balagtas, 2024](#); [Gebeyehu, 2025](#); [Elmasniar et al., 2024](#)).

The rapid shift to digital learning environments has also exposed digital competency gaps and technological disruption. In Romblon, Indonesia, and Norway, principals struggled to manage remote learning, data systems, and ICT integration, revealing a critical need for digital capacity-building among educators and leaders ([Famero, 2024](#); [Rakhmadi et al., 2025](#)).

Finally, the psychological burden and emotional stress of leading through crises have been widely reported. Principals in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia described the emotional toll of supporting teachers and students while managing uncertainty and health risks. Anxiety, burnout, and fear often compromised decision-making and reduced leadership effectiveness ([Don, 2020](#); [Balagtas, 2024](#); [Petalangi et al., 2025](#)).

Adaptive leadership offers a robust framework for handling complexity and fostering resilience, but systemic, cultural, infrastructural, and psychological barriers still prevent it from reaching its full potential. To address these concerns, deliberate investments in digital infrastructure and emotional support systems, continuous professional development, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and targeted policy reform are all required. Only by taking such actions can adaptive leadership become a practical driver for educational reform.

4.3. Outcomes of Adaptive leadership practices

Adaptive leadership in secondary education has demonstrated consistent and transformative outcomes across diverse contexts, particularly in response to systemic crises, digital disruption, and pedagogical reform. Synthesizing findings from Ethiopia, Southeast Asia, Palestine, and New Zealand, several recurring outcome themes emerge that affirm the strategic value of adaptive leadership behaviors and practices. One of the most prominent outcomes is enhanced teacher engagement and motivation. Multiple studies confirm that adaptive leadership significantly predicts teacher focus, task ownership, and performance. In Ethiopia, [Alene et al. \(2025a\)](#) and [Gebeyehu \(2025\)](#) found that behaviors such as “getting on the balcony,” “giving work back,” and “regulating distress” improved teacher engagement. Similarly, [Balagtas \(2024\)](#) reported strong correlations between adaptive leadership and teacher motivation ($r = .66-.77$), while [Emran and Abo-Thabet \(2024\)](#) identified statistically significant links to teacher performance in Palestine ($r = .63, p \leq .01$).

Adaptive leadership also strengthens organizational effectiveness and school performance. [Takdir et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Rachmadi et al. \(2025\)](#) linked adaptive and agile leadership to enhanced responsiveness, innovation, and collaboration. In Indonesia, adaptive strategies supported curriculum innovation and project-based learning, while in Malaysia; [Don \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that adaptive leadership enabled schools to thrive under pandemic conditions by fostering autonomy and stakeholder networks.

Improved instructional quality and curriculum responsiveness represent another key outcome. Studies by [Famero \(2024\)](#) and [Tanio & Wibawanta \(2024\)](#) emphasized the role of adaptive leadership in enabling curriculum change through teacher empowerment and strategic delegation. Principals contextualized curricula, sustained quality teaching, and aligned instruction with evolving student needs, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.

Inclusive and digitally responsive learning environments have also emerged as critical adaptive outcomes. [Petalangi et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Huda \(2025\)](#) demonstrated how adaptive managerial practices improved teacher competence, enhanced student engagement, and cultivated inclusive digital ecosystems. These practices supported disadvantaged learners and prepared schools for transitions toward Industry and Society.

Strengthened stakeholder relationships and community engagement further highlight the impact of adaptive leadership. [Famero \(2024\)](#) and [Huda \(2025\)](#) underscored the importance of stakeholder involvement, health protocols, and community-based collaboration in sustaining school operations and promoting equity. [Le Fevre and Sinnema \(2025\)](#) emphasized middle leader empowerment and policy–practice bridging as essential outcomes during crisis leadership.

Finally, sustained resilience and crisis continuity are consistently associated with adaptive leadership. Across studies, principals regulated distress, maintained disciplined attention, and supported teacher well-being, enabling schools to manage environmental shocks and maintain instructional quality ([Don, 2020](#); [Famero, 2024](#); [Petalangi et al., 2025](#)).

The collective evidence affirms that adaptive leadership produces measurable outcomes in teacher engagement, instructional quality, organizational resilience, and digital innovation. These outcomes are consistently linked to core behaviors—such as getting on the balcony, regulating distress, and protecting voices—and operational practices including visioning, stakeholder engagement, curriculum adaptation, and teacher empowerment. Together, they form a unified framework that enables school leaders to respond strategically to uncertainty, foster inclusive learning environments, and sustain educational excellence across diverse systems and cultures.

5. Conclusion

Over all, the findings from different countries viz. from Ethiopia and Palestine to Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and New Zealand—reveals adaptive leadership’s global relevance. Yet, the cultural adaptations observed (e.g., integration of religious values and community engagement in Indonesia) underscore the importance of contextualizing adaptive leadership to local traditions and needs. Adaptive leadership is lasting importance in fostering resilient, inclusive, and future-ready schools globally. This implies global applicability of adaptive leadership with local adaptability which indicates adaptive leadership as a universal yet flexible and transformative framework for educational leadership in the 21st century.

6. Implications

The synthesized studies on adaptive leadership in secondary education reveal several important implications for practice, policy, and research.

6.1. Educational Leadership Practice

The indication that adaptive leadership practices fosters teacher engagement, motivation, and performance ([Alene et al., 2025a, 2025b](#); [Balagtas, 2024](#); [Emran & Abo-Thabet, 2024](#)) stresses the need for school principals to include adaptive behaviors into their daily leadership routines.

6.2. Policy and System Reform

The challenges observed are bureaucratic rigidity, exam-driven accountability in school, resource scarcities, and equity blind spots ([Gebeyehu, 2025](#); [Le Fevre & Sinnema, 2024](#); [Huda, 2025](#)) stress the urgent need for systemic reforms. Policymakers should lessen bureaucratic constraints and offer greater autonomy to school principals, empower them to respond adaptively to local challenges. Investment in infrastructure, ICT capacity, and Continuous professional development is needed to overcome digital gaps and resource shortages ([Famero, 2024](#); [Pettalongi et al., 2025](#)).

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Moreover, equity focused policies must be given priority to make certain that adaptive leadership practices translate into inclusive learning environments, especially for underprivileged students ([Huda, 2025](#)). By embedding adaptive leadership practices into national education frameworks, the concerned bodies can enhance resilience and responsiveness across secondary school systems.

6.3. Research

The findings also have important implications for future research. While quantitative studies confirmed strong correlations between adaptive leadership and teacher outcomes ([Alene et al., 2025b](#); [Emran & Abo-Thabet, 2024](#)), qualitative and mixed-method studies revealed nuanced insights into contextual practices and challenges ([Balagtas, 2024](#); [Tanio & Wibawanta, 2024](#)). Future research should therefore adopt cross-cultural designs to examine how adaptive leadership evolves over time and across varied educational systems. Comparative studies between high-resource and low-resource contexts could brighten how adaptive leadership works under diversified constraints. Furthermore, conceptual contributions ([Le Fevre & Sinnema, 2024](#); [Don, 2020](#)) should be expanded into empirical testing, confirming that theoretical models are validated in practice.

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Data Availability

The data utilized in this study were included into the review. Accordingly, readers and reviewers may readily access the data through the cited sources and author.

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Appendices

Table A

Review Protocol

This table summarizes the systematic review protocol, including objectives, research questions, eligibility criteria, methods, sources, search strategies, data extraction, study focus, and synthesis methods.

Review Objectives	Refined Research Question/s	Eligibility Criteria	Methods and processes used	Sources for Search	Search strategy	Data extraction method	Study focus	Data synthesis Method
To identify adaptive leadership practices in secondary schools	What adaptive leadership practices are exercised in secondary schools?	Inclusion Criteria: Date Range: 2000–2025 Study Design: Qualitative, mixed-methods, empirical Publication Type: Peer-reviewed articles, reports, dissertations Language: English Exclusion Criteria: Non-peer-reviewed sources journals lacking recognized indexing or accreditation.	Define questions Formulate objectives Prepare protocol Select studies Extract data Report findings	Primary searches Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley. Supplementary sources: Elsevier Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science, DOAJ, and Scopus	Adaptive Leadership" AND "Secondary Education", ("Adaptive Leadership") AND ("Secondary Education" OR "High School" OR "Secondary School").	Data Extraction : Structured format developed in Microsoft Excel.	adaptive leadership practices	Qualitatively (narrative/thematic synthesis)
To examine challenges faced by school leaders when applying adaptive leadership	What challenges do secondary school principals face when applying adaptive leadership in diverse educational contexts?	Inclusion Criteria: Date Range: 2000–2025 Study Design: Qualitative, mixed-methods, empirical Publication Type: Peer-reviewed articles, reports, dissertations Language: English Exclusion Criteria: Non-peer-reviewed sources journals lacking recognized indexing or accreditation.	Define questions Formulate objectives Prepare protocol Select studies Extract data Report findings	Primary searches: Primary searches Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley. Supplementary sources: Elsevier Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science, DOAJ, and Scopus	Leadership" AND "Secondary Education", ("Adaptive Leadership") AND ("Secondary Education" OR "High School" OR "Secondary School"). Leadership" AND "Secondary Education", ("Adaptive Leadership") AND ("Secondary Education" OR "High School" OR "Secondary School").	Data Extraction : Structured format developed in Microsoft Excel	Implementation Challenges of Adaptive Leadership	Qualitatively (narrative/thematic synthesis)
To assess outcomes of adaptive leadership	What are the observed outcomes of adaptive leadership practices in secondary schools?	Inclusion Criteria: Date Range: 2000–2025 Study Design: Qualitative, mixed-methods, empirical Publication Type: Peer-reviewed articles, reports, dissertations Language: English	Define questions Formulate objectives Prepare protocol Select studies Extract data Report findings	Primary searches Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley. Supplementary sources: Elsevier Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science, DOAJ, and Scopus	Leadership" AND "Secondary Education", ("Adaptive Leadership") AND ("Secondary Education" OR "High School" OR "Secondary School").		Adaptive leadership outcomes	Qualitatively (narrative/thematic synthesis)

		Exclusion Criteria: Non-peer-reviewed sources journals lacking recognized indexing or accreditation.			"Secondary School").			
To explore implications for policy and practice	What implications do adaptive leadership practices and their associated outcomes hold for educational leadership, policy and system reform, and in secondary schools?	Inclusion Criteria: Date Range: 2000–2025 Study Design: Qualitative, mixed-methods, empirical Publication Type: Peer-reviewed articles, reports, dissertations Language: English Exclusion Criteria: Non-peer-reviewed sources journals lacking recognized indexing or accreditation.	Define questions Formulate objectives Prepare protocol Select studies Extract data Report findings	Primary searches Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley. Supplementary sources: Elsevier Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science, DOAJ, and Scopus	Leadership" AND "Secondary Education", ("Adaptive Leadership") AND ("Secondary Education" OR "High School" OR "Secondary School").	Data Extraction : Structured format developed in Microsoft Excel	Adaptive leadership implication	Qualitatively (narrative/ thematic synthesis)

Table B
Characteristics of Included Studies

This table summarizes the aims, designs, participants, tools, assessment levels, and countries, of 15 studies investigating adaptive leadership in secondary education

Study Title	Author(s)	Year	Aim	Study Design	Participants & Sampling	Tools/Instruments	Assessment Level	Country
Secondary School Principals’ Adaptive Leadership Practices Amid the Quality Education Crisis in Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia	Alene, A. A., Tsegaye, M. A., & Wolle, G. S.	2025	To examine how principals employ adaptive leadership practices to address the crisis of secondary school quality education.	Qualitative: phenomenological design	5 principals, 12 teachers; purposive sampling	Semi-structured interviews; focus group discussions	Secondary	Ethiopia
The Predictive Effect of Principals’ Adaptive Leadership Behaviour on Teachers’ Workplace Engagement in Public Secondary Schools of Amhara	Alene, A. A., Tsegaye, M. A., & Wolle, G. S.	2025	To investigate the extent to which principals’ adaptive leadership behaviours predict teachers’ workplace engagement.	Quantitative: correlational design	967 teachers; stratified random sampling	Structured questionnaires	Secondary	Ethiopia
The Effect of Principals’ Adaptive Leadership Practice on Teachers’ Work Engagement in Secondary Schools of Central Gondar Zone	Gebeyehu, E.	2025	To examine the effect of principals’ adaptive leadership practices on teachers’ work engagement.	Explanatory sequential mixed-methods design	283 teachers, 4 principals, 2 supervisors; mixed sampling	Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews	Secondary	Ethiopia

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Adaptive Leadership Behavior and Practices of School Heads: Input to Task Motivation of Teachers	Balagtas, L. U.	2024	To explore the relationship between adaptive leadership practices of school heads and teachers' task motivation.	Descriptive and correlational survey	138 teachers; purposive sampling	Researcher-made questionnaire	Secondary	Philippines
Emergence of an Adaptive Leadership Model from the Collective Practices of Public Secondary School Principals during the COVID-19 Education Crisis	Famero, A. M.	2024	To generate an adaptive leadership model based on principals' lived experiences during the COVID-19 education crisis.	Qualitative: phenomenology and ethnography	9 principals; purposive sampling	Semi-structured interviews; focus group discussions	Secondary	Philippines
Adaptive Leadership as a Strategy for Curriculum Change: A Case Study in XYZ School	Tanio, E. A., & Wibawanta, B.	2024	To examine how adaptive leadership supports curriculum change implementation	Qualitative: case study	1 principal, multiple teachers; purposive sampling	Semi-structured interviews; passive observation; document analysis	Secondary	Indonesia
Adaptive Leadership in Educational Practice in the Era of Society 5.0	Takdir, M., Karsivan, W., Badar, D. S., & Fajartriani, T.	2025	To determine how school leaders implement adaptive leadership in the context of digital transformation and Society 5.0.	Qualitative survey	283 principals; purposive sampling	Structured questionnaires (open and closed items)	Secondary	Indonesia
The Role of Agile Leadership: Enhancing School Innovation and Adaptability	Rakhmadi, E., Norliani, Muhaimim, M., Aslamiah, & Cinantya, C.	2025	To explore how agile/adaptive leadership fosters innovation and adaptability in secondary schools.	Qualitative descriptive case study	25 teachers, 10 informants; purposive case selection	Interviews; observations; document analysis	Secondary	Indonesia
Malaysia School Leadership Crisis during COVID-19: From Conventional to Adaptive Leadership	Don, Y.	2020	To examine how Malaysian school leaders shifted from conventional/transformational leadership to adaptive leadership during COVID-19.	Conceptual analysis	Conceptual paper	Literature review; policy and practice reflection	Secondary	Malaysia
Implementation of Adaptive Leadership by School Principals for Success in the Disruption Era	Elmanisar, V., Utami, B. Y., Gistituati, N., & Anisah	2024	To explore how school principals implement adaptive leadership principles to ensure success in the disruption era.	Qualitative literature study	Literature sources	Literature review (books, journals, dissertations, online sources)	Secondary	Indonesia
Adaptive Leadership Practices and Their Relationship to Teacher Performance in the West Bank – Palestine	Emran, M., & Abo-Thabet, W.	2024	To examine the relationship between adaptive leadership practices and teacher performance in Palestinian secondary schools.	Mixed-methods	245 teachers, 15 principals, 15 teachers	Adaptive leadership and performance questionnaires; semi-structured interviews	Secondary	Palestine

Leadership through Times of Crisis: Possibilities and Practices for Adaptive Leadership	Le Fevre, D., & Sinnema, C. (Eds.)	2024	To examine how adaptive leadership can be mobilized during crises to support school improvement and equity.	Edited conceptual/ practice-based volume	Literature, policy, practitioner insights	Thematic synthesis of literature, policy, and practitioner insights	Secondary	New Zealand
Emergence of an Adaptive Leadership Model from the Collective Practices of Public Secondary School Principals during COVID-19	Famero, A. M.	2024	To generate an adaptive leadership model based on emerging practices of principals during COVID-19.	Qualitative: phenomenological & ethnographic	9 principals; purposive sampling	Semi-structured interviews; focus group discussions; Colaizzi's thematic analysis	Secondary	Philippines
Adaptive Managerial Strategies in Schools During the Digital Disruption Era to Foster Innovative Learning Environments (Palu City)	Pettalongi, S. S., Lopulalan, P. M., & Gunawan, A.	2025	To analyze adaptive managerial strategies applied by high schools in Palu City.	Qualitative case study	12 informants; purposive sampling	Semi-structured interviews; participatory observation; document analysis	Secondary	Indonesia
The Role of Adaptive Leadership in Improving the Quality of Education: Case Study of NU Al Islami Junior High School	Huda, M.	2025	To analyze how adaptive leadership strategies improve education quality in a resource-limited, religious-based junior high school.	Qualitative case study	Principal, teachers, staff, students, parents; purposive sampling	In-depth interviews; direct observation; document analysis	Secondary	Indonesia

Table C

Key Findings Pertaining to Adaptive Leadership Practices, Outcomes, Challenges, and Implications in Secondary Schools

Study Title	Objective	Country	Sampling Technique	Participants	Study Design	Adaptive leadership Practices	Challenges Impending Adaptive leadership implementation	Outcomes of Adaptive leadership	Implications of Adaptive Leadership
Secondary school principals' adaptive leadership practices amid the quality education crisis in Amhara	Examine principals' adaptive leadership practices during a quality education crisis	Ethiopia	Purposive	5 principals; 12 teachers	Mixed methods (phenomenology emphasis)	Balcony view; giving work back; contextual problem-solving	Bureaucratic rigidity; weak distress regulation	Improved teacher focus and engagement; partial empowerment	Train principals in distress regulation and voice protection to strengthen adaptive capacity
Predictive effect of principals' adaptive leadership behaviour on teachers' workplace engagement	Test whether adaptive leadership predicts teacher engagement	Ethiopia	Stratified random (multistage)	967 teachers	Quantitative correlational	Balcony view; regulating distress; protecting voices	Bureaucratic rigidity; exam-driven accountability	Explained teacher engagement by 46.1%.	Embed Adaptive leadership in professional development; increase autonomy to sustain engagement
Effect of principals' adaptive leadership on teachers' work engagement	Assess AL's influence on teacher engagement	Ethiopia	Random (teachers); purposive (leaders)	283 teachers; 4 principals; 2 supervisors	Explanatory sequential mixed (QUAN → qual)	Disciplined attention; balcony view;	Resistance to change; resource gaps; trust issues	predicted teacher engagement	Targeted leadership training; address trust and resource barriers

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(Central Gondar Zone)						protect voices		ent by 39.4 %	
Adaptive leadership behavior and practices of school heads: Input to task motivation of teachers	Explore links between AL and teacher motivation	Philippines	Purposive	138 teachers	Descriptive correlational survey	Visioning; communication; co-creation; resilience	Traditional resistance; inadequate training	Improved teachers' motivation.	Standardize AL in DepEd policy; invest in leadership development
Emergence of an adaptive leadership model during the COVID-19 education crisis	Generate an AL model from principals' lived experiences	Philippines	Purposive (Tablas Island)	9 principals	Qualitative (phenomenology + ethnography)	Stakeholder involvement; monitoring; teacher support; curriculum review	Digital gaps; resource constraints; emotional stress	Continuity of learning and management	Institutionalize AL for crisis resilience; strengthen ICT and networks
Adaptive leadership as strategy for curriculum change: Case study in XYZ School	Examine AL in curriculum change	Indonesia	Purposive	1 principal; multiple teachers	Qualitative case study	Empowerment; collaboration; strategic delegation	Teacher resistance; feedback gaps; centralized decisions	Curriculum change implemented; teacher ownership	Strengthen feedback systems; inclusive leadership during reform
Adaptive leadership in educational practice in the era of Society 5.0	Determine AL use amid digital transformation	Indonesia	Purposive	283 principals	Qualitative survey	Problem identification; empathy; ICT integration; transparency	Post-pandemic uncertainty; digital gaps; hierarchy	88–98% report practicing AL indicators	Embed adaptive leadership in policy; build digital capacity and collaborative governance
The role of agile leadership: Enhancing school innovation and adaptability	Explore agile/adaptive leadership for innovation	Indonesia	Purposive case selection	25 teachers; 10 informants	Qualitative descriptive case	Sprint planning; stakeholder collaboration; iterative cycles; digital integration	Limited ICT; infrastructure; top-down culture	Improved responsiveness; innovation; engagement	Institutionalize agile practices; empower teachers; expand ICT training
Malaysia school leadership crisis during COVID-19: Conventional to adaptive leadership	Analyze shift from conventional to AL during crisis	Malaysia	Conceptual (conference proceeding)	Conceptual review	Conceptual analysis	Empathy; reflection; distributed decisions	Lockdowns; anxiety; hierarchical culture	More collaboration; teacher autonomy	Adaptive leadership is more suitable than conventional leadership in crises
Implementasi kepemimpinan adaptif kepala sekolah untuk keberhasilan di era disrupsi	Explore AL principles for success in disruption	Indonesia	Literature selection	conceptual/literature study)	Qualitative literature study	Visionary thinking; empowerment; team collaboration	resistance to innovation	Enhanced competencies and readiness	Adaptive leadership builds resilience and competitiveness in schools
Adaptive leadership practices and their relationship to the	Examine AL—performance	Palestine	Random (survey); purposive (interviews)	245 teachers; 15 principals; 15 teachers	Mixed methods	Professional development support; teamwork;	Political instability; limited resources; low adaptive	r = 0.63; improved motivation and	Institutionalize adaptive leadership in professional development;

performance of school teachers (West Bank – Palestine)	relationships					empathy; flexible decisions	leadership scores	collaboration	decentralize decisions; build collaborative culture
Leadership through times of crisis: Possibilities and practices for adaptive leadership	Examine how AL is mobilized to support improvement and equity	New Zealand	Conceptual/practice selection	conceptual/literature study)	Edited volume (thematic synthesis)	Bridge policy and practice; empower middle leaders	Systemic rigidity; equity blind spots; resource constraints	Resilience strengthened; equity gains with support	Invest in middle leaders; align policy and practice; reduce structural barriers
Emergence of an adaptive leadership model from collective practices during COVID-19	Model Adaptive Leadership from emerging practices in crisis	Philippines	Purposive (≥3 years' service)	9 principals	Qualitative phenomenology & ethnography	Teacher support; health protocols; data/resource management	Resource limits; health risks; rapid adaptation	Sustained teaching quality; managed operations	Integrate Adaptive leadership into the workplace; build crisis readiness and ICT skills
Adaptive managerial strategies in schools during the digital disruption era	Analyze adaptive managerial strategies for innovation	Indonesia	Purposive	12 informants (3 schools)	Qualitative case study	Digital leadership; capacity development; platform optimization; collaborative culture	Infrastructure gaps; uneven literacy; resistance; burden	Better competence; collaboration; engagement	Form innovation teams; standardize LMS; data-driven decisions; expand infrastructure
The role of adaptive leadership in improving the quality of education: NU Al Islami JHS	Analyze AL strategies in a resource-limited, religious school	Indonesia	Purposive	Principal; teachers; staff; students; parents	Qualitative case study	Teacher training; PBL with values; community engagement; inclusive strategies	Limited resources; diverse student backgrounds; change resistance	Improved competence; inclusion; stronger community ties	Adaptive leadership fosters flexible, inclusive, collaborative solutions in constrained contexts