

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON CRISIS MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTED IN SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19

Baykan AKGÜR

Northern Cyprus Ministry of National Education, Akdoğan Dr. Fazıl Küçük Primary School, Classroom Teacher

baykanakgur@hotmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9611-0445>

ABSTRACT

The global perspective of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world, causing numerous changes that could be described as utopian. COVID-19 has necessitated the re-evaluation of education along with all work areas, prompting the emergence of different perspectives. This study aims to determine the opinions of school administrators regarding crisis management implemented in schools during the COVID-19 process. In this context, the study group of the research consists of six school administrators serving in primary schools in Northern Cyprus. The interview questions prepared by the researcher were directed to the participants who volunteered to participate in the research. As a result of the research, it was found that schools were not prepared for crisis management related to the pandemic, and the most significant problem was infrastructure inadequacy.

Keywords: crisis management, pandemic, COVID-19, school administrators

Introduction

Due to the characteristics of the organization, it may encounter special situations from time to time. These situations can lead to problems for the organization, but they generally trigger crises. Can et al. (2005) define a crisis as a "complex stage or event, a difficult situation to escape, sudden deterioration and development in dangerous moments." In order for the organization to overcome the crisis with minimal damage, and even turn it into an opportunity, a detailed analysis of the causes, effects, and directions of the crisis is necessary. This analysis should be based on reliable data, and timely and easily implementable measures should be taken (Aksu and Deveci, 2009).

A school is a dynamic and organic institution. The manager of this dynamic and organic structure should observe the current situation with an open and innovative perspective and dynamically transform projects that affect the school (Yahşi, 2018). The expected crisis management skills and leadership style of the school principal are considered crucial as they play a key role in establishing a qualified educational institution. Consequently, this research examines the relationship between crisis management skills and the leadership styles of school principals.

The key to successful crisis management is to perceive the symptoms of a crisis and eliminate factors that could cause it (Kırdar and Demir, 2007). In this process, initiatives and information should be taken into account for monitoring the situation, predicting potential outcomes, determining activities, establishing communication, and strengthening collaboration. Considering all these functions, the experience of decision-makers becomes crucial (Tena-Chollet, Tixie, Dandrieux, and Slangen, 2017). Systematic decision-making should also form an implementation team and enable making new decisions based on the results (Aksu, 2009).

Crisis Management at Schools

The task of taking the organization out of the crisis primarily falls on the managers. Although crisis intervention requires teamwork, school administrators are the first authorities and can understand problems that may lead to a crisis from the perspective of the person managing the school. Therefore, managers need to have skills in managing changes, resolving conflicts, perceiving and managing crisis situations, and, of course, crisis management. They should acquire these skills through on-the-job training and should be able to effectively manage the organization within their responsibilities. Managers, along with the crisis management team they establish in the school based on these skills and abilities, manage the crisis. In a smooth environment, individuals with average intelligence and skills can successfully implement multiple rules and regulations (Özdemir, 2002). A crisis environment managed with good management skills can be overcome with fewer losses. Having the most effective management method to increase or decrease the degree of crisis is important (Akdağ and Taşdemir, 2006).

In the chaotic environment the school experiences during a crisis, everyone will be involved in dealing with the crisis. The success of the planning and collaboration of the organization's team depends on the leadership quality of the manager (Ulutaş, 2010). Crisis involves change, and it is the subject of management. It may require significant decisions and changes. Poorly managed change can lead to feelings of alienation, stress, conflict, crisis, resistance, and other such problems in organizations (Tunçer, 2013). Therefore, the ability to manage change is essential in a crisis environment.

Crisis caused by internal and external factors can harm the educational process, the functioning of the school, the individuals in the school, the school atmosphere, and the dignity of the school. Without necessary precautions, schools will be negatively affected, and these negative effects will always be a risk factor triggering crises. Schools, like all organizations, should consider crisis management research aimed at minimizing or preventing crises (Saym, 2008).

While the goals of school organizations may be the same, management approaches vary based on environmental conditions, school climate, type of school, school level, and administrative leadership characteristics. Therefore, each school should develop its own crisis definition and crisis management plan. However, the content of crisis planning, and crisis management research should include similar steps, despite variations according to school level, location, school size, and environment. To identify the shortcomings of the organization, both internal and external factors of the organization should be carefully examined, and plans should be prioritized (Ocak, 2006).

Covid 19 and School Management

Chaos theory predicts that an event occurring in one part of the world will trigger another event. Therefore, as the triggering event will cause confusion, it will affect all elements of the system. As stated in chaos theory, the flapping of the wings of Asian butterflies will cause global storms (Lorenz, 1972). There are so many instances, such as the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic that emerged at the end of 2019, which turned into a global storm. In addition to the consequences of the existing chaos and storms, the outcomes of this situation in terms of social, cultural, economic, political, and many other aspects are unpredictable in many ways. Undoubtedly, education was affected by this storm, and the Covid-19 pandemic has changed perspectives and understanding of education (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020). Due to the global impact of the pandemic, it can be fundamentally considered a disaster. This is interpreted as the end of something and a sign of a new beginning (El Maarouf et al., 2020). With these perspectives as a pivot, it can be said that everything that happened in the world after Covid-19 creates a new world order and establishes a normal new paradigm.

With the development of this pandemic, the pace and flow of life in the world have changed (Zhao, 2020). Practices such as flexibility, remote work, and alternating work schedules were implemented to reduce the impact of pandemics and slow down the spread of diseases due to high pollution levels. Additionally, partial, or complete lockdowns, personal isolation, quarantine procedures, and social isolation measures were adopted in every country worldwide (Gupta & Goplani, 2020). As part of these measures, places where interpersonal contact could occur were decided to be closed, and all educational institutions were included in this scope (Doghonadze et al., 2020; Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020). With the closure of schools and the interruption of face-to-face education, the education of 1.6 billion students was disrupted, constituting approximately half of the total number of students at all levels of education (Bozkurt et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2020).

According to the principle that education is a fundamental human right (United Nations, 1984), many educational institutions worldwide have rapidly implemented emergency remote learning to compensate for the disruptions caused by the pandemic. The continuity of the current education system worldwide is not yet prepared for a pandemic to ensure students' learning under all conditions; schools, teachers, and others with whom they learn have been observed to be physically separated (Bozkurt and Sharma, 2020). Moreover, during the crisis, misinformation about emergency remote learning spreads at the same speed as the virus. It is evident that crisis management is being attempted through decisions made based on the presentation of these concepts.

In this roadmap, to prevent the disruption of students' learning processes during the education interruption caused by coronavirus measures, an effective framework for remote learning activities is provided, and research has been conducted in five main areas: infrastructure, content, legislation, human resources, and implementation.

The aim of the research is to determine the opinions of school administrators regarding crisis management policies implemented in schools during the Covid-19 process. In this context, the following questions have been explored:

1. How do you evaluate the level of preparedness of schools for crisis management?
2. What is the level of education of school administrators in crisis management? Have you received any training in this area before?
3. What opportunities and challenges have been encountered during the Covid-19 process? What practices have been implemented during this period?

Method

The participants of the study were determined using the purposive sampling method, specifically the typical sampling technique. Accordingly, six school administrators from primary schools in Northern Cyprus, selected

based on the principle of voluntarism, were included in the study group. Within the scope of the research, a descriptive case study model was applied, focusing on the views of school administrators on crisis management policies in primary schools in Northern Cyprus. Qualitative research techniques were employed.

An interview form developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. Participants are referred to by codes such as OY1, OY2, etc., instead of their real names, in accordance with the principle of identity confidentiality.

Findings

Levels of Preparedness for Crisis Management in Schools

The question "How do you assess the levels of preparedness for crisis management in schools?" was posed to the participants, and their responses are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' opinions on the levels of preparedness for crisis management in schools

Theme	n
Not prepared	5
Limited resources	3
Unpredictable	3
No planning	2
Varies by type of crisis	1
Total	14

When the participants' opinions regarding the preparedness levels of schools for crisis management are queried, 14 expressions stand out. The statements put forth by the school administrators participating in the research are as follows: not ready (n5), limited resources are available (n3), unpredictable (n3), no planning (n2), depends on the type of crisis (n1). The participants' expressions in this regard are as follows:

"Unfortunately, it cannot be said that our schools are fully prepared for the crises we experience. Moreover, in potential crises, they are unpredictable." OY2

"The readiness of schools for a crisis depends on the type of crisis; for example, although some preparation has been made for crises such as natural disasters, fires, or administrative crises, we were unprepared for the pandemic we are currently experiencing, and our most important infrastructure is very weak." OY5

"They are not ready. Possible crises are not foreseen, and there is no plan, preparation, or training in this regard." OY3

Education Levels of School Administrators for Crisis Management

Participants asked, "What are the education levels of school administrators regarding crisis management?" Have you received training on this subject before?"

Table 2. Crisis management training levels of school administrators

Education Attainment Status		Education Attainment Levels	
Theme	n	Theme	n
Received Education	4	Insufficient	6
Did not Received Education	2		
Total	6		6

The opinions of participant school administrators regarding their training status are as follows: Some participants stated that they received training (n4), while others mentioned that they did not receive training (n2). However, all participants expressed that the level of training was inadequate. The statements of the participants are as follows:

"I had participated in in-service training where we had discussed crisis management, but the current crisis situation we are facing today is very different. Therefore, the training was not quite sufficient." OY1

"I received limited training in this regard. Unfortunately, we were caught unprepared for what should be done during the pandemic. Unfortunately, our school lacks a crisis team, and our infrastructure is not sufficient. As a result, both we administrators and our teachers struggled to determine the appropriate course of action." OY4

"I don't have crisis management training, but I know that even those who have received training don't have much knowledge. In fact, all of us were inadequate in terms of what needed to be done during the pandemic." OY6

Opportunities-Problems and Practices Encountered During Covid 19 Process

The school administrators who participated in the research were asked, "What are the opportunities and problems encountered during the Covid 19 process?" "What kind of practices were put forward in this process?" The answers of the participants who were asked the question were collected in two separate tables.

Table 3. Opportunities and problems encountered during the Covid 19

Opportunities		Challenges	
Theme	n	Theme	n
Online education	5	Infrastructure deficiency	6
Collaboration with parents	2	Insufficient technological knowledge	4
Self-improvement opportunities	2	Inability to have equal opportunities	2
Total	9		12

Participants' opinions on the opportunities encountered during the Covid-19 process have been categorized under three themes: online education (n5), collaboration with parents (n2), self-development opportunities (n2). Participants' views on the problems are related to infrastructure deficiencies (n6), lack of technological knowledge (n4), and inability to have equal opportunities (n2). The responses provided are as follows:

"Unfortunately, we once again realized the inadequacy of our technological knowledge and infrastructure. However, online in-service training prepared with the support of the ministry has been beneficial for teachers and us in this regard." OY3

"During this process, we once again understood that all our students do not have equal opportunities. Due to the inadequacy of our infrastructure, we could not provide any support to these students. However, I can positively say that families taking responsibility during this period and following the development of their children by communicating with us is a good aspect." OY4

"Despite being forced, school administrators and teachers have made progress in terms of development and technology. Our teachers have improved themselves in this direction with the training provided, even though their technological knowledge was weak before Covid." OY6

In the continuation of the question, the participants were asked what kind of practices were put forward in this process and the answers given are shown in table 4.

Table 4. Educational practices introduced during the Covid 19

Theme	n
Whatsapp groups	5
Parents' participation was ensured	3
Videos added to the lessons	2
Total	11

Participants in the educational practices implemented during the Covid-19 process have indicated that they formed WhatsApp groups (n5), ensured parental participation (n3), and added videos to lessons (n2). Participant statements include:

"We continuously communicated with parents by creating WhatsApp groups." OY1

"Our teachers created WhatsApp groups for communication with parents. They sent video explanations on topics to attract students' attention and make the lessons more effective." OY2

"During this process, our parents supported us, and together with them, we were able to reach our students and strive to make this period as productive as possible, even if not perfect." OY5

Discussion and Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a challenging period affecting societies worldwide and all age groups. In managing this crisis, it is observed that schools in our country, in particular, have been inadequate. In this context, the study aims to determine the opinions of school administrators regarding crisis management policies implemented in schools during the Covid-19 process.

According to the findings obtained, it has been identified that schools are not adequately prepared for the management of this crisis and the implementation of necessary measures. Participants expressed that preparations for the crisis in schools vary in different aspects. Additionally, it was concluded that school administrators lack

training in this regard. Even school administrators with training in crisis management were found to be lacking in managing the pandemic.

Participants were asked about the opportunities, problems, and practices encountered during the Covid-19 process. Among the opportunities, it is observed that communication with parents has been more effective during this period. Borup, Jensen, Archambault, Short, & Graham (2020) mentioned in their research that during the pandemic, students need support, and families are the most important community to provide that support. When examining the problems, all participants pointed out infrastructure inadequacy. Another issue is the unequal conditions of students. In this regard, studies highlight that the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated various issues, most notably inequality (Williamson, Eynon, & Potter, 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Regarding the practices implemented, the use of technological applications integrated into lessons is evident.

Based on the findings of the research, it is recommended to establish crisis teams in schools and minimize infrastructure inadequacies as much as possible. The study suggests that future research could focus on obtaining the opinions of parents regarding this process.

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