

Leadership and School Management during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Empirical Findings from Crisis Management

► Michaela Kovalčíková » Catholic University in Ružomberok, Faculty of Education, Hrabovská cesta 1, 034 01 Ružomberok, Slovak Republic; email: michaela.kovalcikova464@edu.ku.sk

1. Introduction

The term "crisis management" first appeared in literature in the 1970s. In the field of science and research, this term and subsequently its necessity began to appear after the occurrence of large-scale disasters across the world, such as a gas leak from a pesticide factory in India, the environmental disaster of the Exxon Valdez tanker, when an oil tanker spilled 10.8 million gallons of oil into the sea, and the Chernobyl tragedy. At that time, scientists identified several phases related to crisis management, and Cushnahan defined the phases of risk assessment, management plan development, and reporting on subsequent implementation. The crisis management process was identified as an effort to prepare for a crisis, intervene in a crisis, and reduce the impact of a crisis. It is essential to plan for the pre-crisis period, the crisis response period, and the post-crisis period. The pre-crisis period is when factors that are likely to cause a crisis emerge. During this period, it is extremely important for school management to identify the sources of the crisis and take the necessary measures to prevent the crisis in a controlled manner. If the crisis cannot be prevented, the manager is expected to take on the task of overcoming the crisis without causing undue damage to the organization, or to take the necessary measures to turn the crisis into an opportunity. Periods of crisis refer to periods when a crisis is evident in

the organization, which subsequently leads to events that can cause considerable stress among employees, students, and managers. At times like these, managers are expected to smoothly implement pre-prepared plans and take steps to resolve the crisis. Since crises are extraordinary and serious in nature, leadership requires leaders who can make agile decisions during new and unprecedented events. Empirical findings demonstrate that teachers particularly value leadership that is supportive, communicative, and actively involved during crises, with transformational leadership perceived as most effective for maintaining stability and ensuring staff engagement (Goh, 2023). The need for agile, responsive, and community-oriented leadership is supported by empirical research. According to Brown et al. (2023), during serious crises such as pandemics, school leaders who support and unite the school community building resilient and responsive leadership practices help institutions better manage uncertainty, coordinate responses, and maintain cohesion. During serious crises such as pandemics, school leaders who support and unite the school community, building resilient and responsive leadership practices, help institutions better manage uncertainty, coordinate responses, and maintain cohesion (Fernandes et al. 2023). During the post-crisis period, the causes of the crisis, its management, and its consequences should be discussed in detail. Furthermore, the

pandemic context has in some cases triggered leadership roles not only among school principals or formal managers, but also among teachers. In a study of teachers working with marginalized Roma students in Bulgaria, Lambrev (2024) documents how the health crisis served as an “adaptive challenge” that prompted emergence of teacher leadership committed to supporting vulnerable pupils via culturally responsive pedagogies, strong relationships, collaboration, and non-traditional educator roles demonstrating that crisis can catalyze distributed leadership across the school community. Currently, agile leaders who can make quick but appropriate decisions when managing crises are coming to the fore (Çobanoğlu and Selçuk, 2022). Most crises occur without early warning, so it is desirable to be aware of the importance and process of crisis management. It is also important to create an effective communication plan with stakeholders in the sense that managers and teachers should plan communication with communities, students, and parents about the crisis and work together to solve the problem to ensure the effectiveness of crisis management (Sinlapapiromsuk, 2023). Payot and Montero (2025) point out certain characteristics that managers should possess, emphasizing the need for leadership with elements of emotional intelligence in the sense that managers remain calm under pressure, encourage cooperation, and respond quickly and empathetically to ensure the safety of the entire school community.

2. Theoretical background

Crisis management theory provides a framework for analysing how leaders respond to unexpected and stressful situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic provides additional scope for analysing how school principals adapt their management styles to ensure continuity of education and decision-making in times of crisis (Paymalan and Budias, 2023). The unpredictable Covid-19 pandemic, which has affected the entire world and can be considered a global pandemic, has been perceived by the WHO (World Health

Organization) as an unprecedented test for organizations around the world, disrupting every aspect of normal daily life, threatening social and economic cohesion, and interrupting the smooth provision of education at all levels. The very process of education was disrupted as educational institutions unexpectedly found themselves in emergency mode amid the chaos. Many schools were forced to suspend face-to-face education, while others had to significantly reorganize their teaching practices. It is clear that the rapid transition from face-to-face to distance learning and the modified management of schools forced teachers to adapt their teaching methods to the new unexpected situation almost overnight. Given the unpredictable situations brought about by the pandemic, school leaders were required to provide leadership that was sensitive and focused, as well as flexible and adaptable. Leaders were called upon to act quickly and proactively, make rapid decisions on complex issues, communicate with empathy and humanity, and manage the anger and frustration of others throughout the crisis (Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou, 2023). The difficulty and, above all, the importance of crisis management knowledge during the Covid-19 pandemic is also highlighted by Tsagdi et al. (2022) also point out the difficulty and, above all, the importance of crisis management knowledge during the Covid-19 pandemic, as teaching in schools had to be moved online, teachers had to design and upload teaching materials to various internet portals, and they had to ensure that all pupils and students had access to these materials. Another specific issue was undoubtedly the unexpected increase in the number of teachers who were directly or indirectly affected and infected during the pandemic (Lukhele and Lebeloane, 2024). Crisis management measures were therefore focused on promoting holistic school safety, which included physical, social, psychological, and pedagogical safety (Peltola, Lindfors & Luukka, 2024).

In their research study, authors Iacuzzi et al. (2020) point out that the school environment should be able to guarantee a harmonious

environment and social inclusion, but this is often complicated by the different needs of students, tense relationships between students and teachers, but also between teachers themselves, or even between teachers and school management. There is often a lack of uniform guidelines for teaching or implementing the educational process. The research was conducted in three educational institutions in northeastern Italy, which were selected from among the participants in a workshop during which they were asked to write a report on how they were coping with the emergency measures. This was followed by semi-structured online interviews with school principals, staff, and parents. The results of the research showed that schools first had to stabilize the situation and then introduce new guidelines to protect the health of not only students but also their employees, with school principals playing a decisive and key role. These three schools took completely different paths in terms of digitization, organization, and management structure, and therefore did not have the same opportunities when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world. However, as mentioned above, it can be concluded that directors played a key role in all three educational institutions. The results also show, among other things, that leadership with empathy and a diverse set of competencies has proven successful, guiding the organization toward a common goal even during difficult situations that may arise unexpectedly. Management should also be supported by a team that responds immediately to crises, with regular meetings to discuss rapidly changing priorities and new knowledge about crisis management. This is known as the hub-and-spoke model.

Researchers Kaul et al. (2020) also point to approaches to crisis management during the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on school principals and their responses to the pandemic. Principals felt that their staff and students needed to feel good not only physically but also mentally during the global crisis. In addition to addressing such basic needs, they had to face enormous logistical obstacles in ensuring access to information and communication

technologies and creating clear and understandable communication. Kaul et al. (2022) point out that principals were tasked with leading organizational change in historically challenging conditions, while having to deal with often conflicting demands from district leadership or the ministry. As middle managers, principals are close to the front line and at the same time have an overview of the situation. Davis-Vaught (2022), who describes the situation when the governor closed public schools in Virginia by executive order on March 13, 2020, and its employees were overwhelmed by a range of deep emotions. When they switched from face-to-face to distance learning, they became more aware of the situation of their students, many of whom were experiencing traumatic home environments, food insecurity, and a serious lack of material resources for learning at home. The author also notes that principals faced enormous demands, especially those of educational institutions.

3. Methodology description

The objective of this paper is to analyze the issue of leadership and crisis management in the school environment during the COVID-19 pandemic based on available international research studies. The intention was to identify how school leaders in different countries responded to crisis situations, what management and leadership strategies proved effective during emergency measures, and which factors significantly influenced the continuity of education, communication, organizational culture, and the overall functioning of schools during the pandemic. Part of the objective was also to compare the findings of individual studies in order to highlight common patterns, differences, and specifics that contribute to understanding effective approaches to crisis management in the school context.

The methodology was based on a systematic analysis of available foreign empirical studies, professional articles, and research reports dealing with the impact of the COVID-19

pandemic on leadership and school management. The selection of publications was based on predefined criteria, including relevance to the issue under investigation, timeliness (2020-2024), availability of the full text, methodological quality, and empirical nature of the research. The analysis compared the responses of school leaders in different education systems, the main challenges they

faced, and the crisis management strategies they implemented. Emphasis was placed on categorizing topics, identifying key factors influencing school management, and synthesizing findings relevant to further research on leadership during crisis situations. When selecting studies, we took into account the following criteria for selecting foreign research (Table 1).

Table 1 » *Criteria for selecting foreign research studies*

Criteria	Description
Relevance to the issue of leadership and crisis management in the school environment during the COVID-19 pandemic	Only studies that explicitly addressed school management, senior staff responses, or the implementation of crisis measures in the context of the pandemic were included in the analysis.
Timeliness	Only research published during and immediately after the pandemic was included in order to provide up-to-date findings.
Empirical nature of research	Studies based on real data (questionnaires, interviews, case studies) that allowed for comparison with the Slovak context were given priority.
Diversity of educational contexts	The selection included studies from several countries to identify common and different approaches to crisis management.
Full-text availability and methodological quality	Studies had to be available in full and contain a clearly described methodology that allows for an assessment of their scientific credibility.

Source: Own processing, 2025

4. Results and discussion

The objective of this paper was to analyze the issue of leadership and crisis management in the school environment during the COVID-19 pandemic based on available international studies and case studies. The intention was to identify the responses of school leaders to crisis situations, proven management and leadership strategies, as well as factors influencing the continuity of education, communication, and organizational culture. The results of the analysis of international studies and case studies show that the objective was successfully achieved. It was possible to:

- Identify the responses of school leaders: Principals had to act quickly and proactively, make decisions on complex issues, communicate with empathy, and

manage psychological and organizational challenges.

- Identify proven management and leadership strategies: Leadership based on empathy, flexibility, and team coordination, including the introduction of a hub-and-spoke model for rapid crisis management, proved to be an effective approach.
- Identify key factors influencing school organization: Decisive factors included the ability to adapt to distance learning, providing psychological and social support, transparent communication, and equal access to educational materials for all students.

The results confirmed that schools with a clear organizational structure, regular coordination meetings, and an emphasis on psychosocial support for teachers and students were able to respond more effectively to the pandemic and ensure continuity of education.

The discussion revealed that effective leadership strategies included an empathetic approach, flexibility, participatory decision-making, and team coordination, with the hub-and-spoke model also proving effective for rapid and decentralized crisis management (Copland and Knapp, 2021). Key factors influencing schools' ability to ensure continuity of education included preparedness for distance learning, transparent communication, equal access to educational materials, and psychosocial support (Townsend et al., 2022; Lassri, 2023). In some contexts, the shift in leadership style during the pandemic moved toward more distributed and collaborative models, with shared responsibilities across staff - a structure that allowed faster, decentralized crisis management. One recent study of school leaders in Kuwait documented how principals took on roles as change agents by providing intensive online-teaching training, leading school networks, and offering support to teachers, students, and parents - demonstrating that a decentralized, network-oriented "hub-and-spoke" style can be effective in crisis (Alsaleh, 2024). Schools with a clear organizational structure, regular coordination meetings, and an emphasis on supporting the teaching team were able to manage crisis situations more effectively and maintain continuity of teaching. The results suggest that a combination of empathetic, flexible, and participatory leadership, together with a clearly defined organizational structure and community support, is the most effective approach to crisis management in schools (Harris and Jones, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Ramos-Pla et al., 2021). For example, case-study evidence from an Australian primary school indicates that during the COVID-19 lockdown, school staff experienced anxiety, guilt, and frustration, especially when communication was poor and decisions seemed inconsistent but when staff were able to adopt both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies (such as peer support, maintaining routines, physical activity, or collaborative problem solving), they reported better psychological wellbeing and resilience (Brooks et al., 2022). These findings provide

practical recommendations for preparing leaders, strengthening the resilience of school systems, and planning strategies for managing future crisis scenarios, emphasizing the importance of adaptive leadership, participatory coordination, and psychosocial support as key determinants of successful crisis response.

5. Recommendations for practice in Slovak education

Based on an analysis of international studies and their implications for the Slovak educational environment, the following recommendations can be formulated:

For principals of primary and secondary schools in Slovakia

- Strengthen the ability to provide strategic and situation-specific leadership that enables a response to sudden changes in the environment with an emphasis on speed, thoughtfulness, and emotional maturity. Principals should know how to work effectively with uncertainty, show empathy when communicating with school members, and foster an atmosphere of trust during extraordinary situations.
- Create functional internal processes that enable the school to function smoothly in crisis situations. This includes clearly formulated procedures, a transparent division of responsibilities, permanent crisis management teams, and regular meetings to update information and resolve any issues that arise.
- Introduce modern elements of distributed management that relieve the central management role and strengthen the competencies of individual members of the management or methodological bodies. Decentralized models enable more effective decision-making, faster problem-solving, and strengthen collective responsibility for the running of the school in times of crisis.

For teaching staff

- Actively engage in participatory decision-making processes and provide feedback on

the organization of distance, hybrid, or face-to-face learning, thereby increasing the school's adaptability to changing conditions.

- Develop digital and pedagogical competencies for the effective use of online platforms and digital teaching materials, with an emphasis on ensuring equal access for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Use available forms of psychosocial support and mentoring, including collaboration with psychologists and school counselors, to reduce stress, promote mental well-being, and increase the professional resilience of educators in times of crisis.

For school digital coordinators and administrative staff

- Implement and regularly monitor effective processes for distance and hybrid learning, including ensuring functional technical infrastructure, access to digital platforms, and systems for managing teaching materials so that all students have equal opportunities to participate.
- Optimize and standardize internal communication channels so that information and instructions from school management, the Ministry of Education, or the school's founder are transparent, consistent, and quickly accessible to all employees.
- Introduce feedback mechanisms from teachers, students, and parents to evaluate the effectiveness of digital solutions and communication processes, enabling continuous improvement of the organization of the educational process in crisis situations.

For education policymakers and school founders

- Introduce systematic training programs for school leaders that cover crisis management, adaptive leadership, and the effective use of digital technologies in education. These programs should be regularly updated in line with current challenges and experiences in schools.

- Invest in accessible, high-quality digital infrastructure, including equipment, software solutions, and platforms for distance learning, to ensure equal access to education for all students and support the pedagogical work of teachers.
- Develop specific methodological recommendations and national frameworks for school management in crisis situations, enabling schools to respond flexibly and participatively to unforeseen events. The frameworks should include recommendations for organizational structures, communication mechanisms, psychosocial support, and adaptation of teaching processes.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of international studies and case studies clearly showed that leadership and crisis management play a key role in ensuring the continuity of education and the stability of school organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. School leaders who demonstrated flexibility, empathy, quick decision-making, and team coordination were able to respond more effectively to unpredictable challenges and minimize the negative impact of the crisis on teachers, students, and the entire school community. Saiti and Manesis (2023) highlighted that teachers' trust in school leadership increased when principals practiced transformational and participatory leadership, which strengthened professional collaboration and morale during crises. The results highlighted the importance of a clear organizational structure, regular coordination meetings, participatory decision-making, and psychosocial support as critical factors for successful crisis management (Eisenschmidt et al., 2024; Borazon and Chuang, 2023). Sirk et al. (2024) emphasized that schools with established collaborative cultures, data-driven routines, and digital readiness were better equipped to maintain learning continuity and adapt to unexpected changes. Similarly, Al-Khalifa et al. (2024) demonstrated that distributed leadership structures, where

responsibilities were shared among school leaders, teachers, and coordinators, improved crisis response and staff engagement during remote learning transitions. At the same time, it became clear that the implementation of agile management models, such as hub-and-spoke, and investments in digital infrastructure are essential for maintaining continuity of education in times of crisis (Eblie Trudel & Sokal, 2023). Research by Harris and Jones (2022) underlined the importance of strong professional communities, consistent communication, and participatory decision-making in ensuring rapid recovery and minimizing disruptions. Additional evidence from international comparative studies

(Kafyulilo et al., 2021) confirmed that schools with proactive planning, flexible leadership, and clear technology strategies were more resilient and able to support both students and teachers effectively. These findings provide valuable recommendations for practice and policy-making in education. Preparing leaders for crisis situations, strengthening organizational resilience, and supporting the psychosocial health of teachers and students are crucial for coping with future crisis scenarios. In the long term, adaptive leadership and effective crisis management are essential tools for ensuring the quality and stability of the school system.

REFERENCES

- AL-KHALIFA, H., AL-MANSOUR, S., AL-RASHIDI, L.: 2024. Responding to change: How was school leadership distributed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 123, 10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102331
- ALSALEH, A. A.: 2024. Responding to change: How was school leadership distributed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? School leader perspectives in Kuwait. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 127, 102425. 10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102425
- BORAZON, E. Q., CHUANG, H.-H.: 2023. Resilience in educational system: A systematic review and directions for future research. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 99, 102761. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102761>
- BROOKS, M., CREELY, E., LALETAS, S.: 2022. Coping through the unknown: School staff wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 3, 100146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100146>
- BROWN, B., WANG, T., LEE, M., CHILDS, A.: 2023. Surviving, navigating and innovating through a pandemic: A review of research on school leadership during COVID-19, 2020-2021. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 100, 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102804
- ÇOBANOĞLU, N., SELÇUK, D.: 2020. Crisis management, agile leadership, and organizational culture in primary schools. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 10 (2), 92-101. 10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.10n.2p.92
- COPLAND, M. A., KNAPP, M. S.: 2021. Leading schools through the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons from crisis management research. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 59 (6), 705-722. 10.1108/JEA-06-2021-0135
- DAVIS-VAUGHT, P.: 2022. Preparing school leaders for crises. *Policy Updates*, 29 (4), 1-2. <https://www.nasbe.org/preparing-school-leaders-for-crises/>
- EBLIE TRUDEL, L., SOKAL, L.: 2023. Dynamic perspectives on education during the COVID-19 pandemic and implications for teacher well-being. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 4, 100241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2023.100241>
- EISENSCHMIDT, E., LEY, T., SEITLINGER, P., TAMMETS, K.: 2024. Exploring leaders' perceptions of school resilience during COVID-19: Constructing the framework for school development. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 7, 100375. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100375>
- FERNANDES, V., WONG, W., NOONAN, M.: 2023. Developing adaptability and agility in leadership amidst the COVID-19 crisis: Experiences of early-career school principals. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 37 (2), 483-506. 10.1108/IJEM-02-2022-0076
- GOH, L. H.: 2023. Teachers' perception of leadership styles and involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 122, 102253. 10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102253
- HARRIS, A., JONES, M.: 2022. COVID-19. School leadership in disruptive times. *School Leadership & Management*, 42 (2), 103-116.

- CHATZIPANAGIOTOU, P., KATSAROU, E.: 2023. Crisis management, school leadership in disruptive times and the recovery of schools in the post COVID-19 era: A systematic literature review. *Education Sciences*, 13 (2), 118-147. 10.3390/educsci13020118
- IACUZZI, A., FEDELE, P., GARLATTI, A. (2020). Beyond coronavirus: The role for knowledge management in schools' responses to crisis. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 19 (2), 1-6. 10.1080/14778238.2020.1838963
- KAFYULILO, A., FISSER, P., VOOGT, J.: 2021. The role of school leadership in supporting teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 69, 2341-2361. 10.1007/s11423-021-10003-4
- KAUL, M., COMSTOCK, M., SIMON, N. S.: 2022. Leading from the middle: How principals rely on district guidance and organizational conditions in times of crisis. *AERA Open*, 8 (1), 1-17. 10.1177/23328584221077303
- KAUL, M., VANGRONIGEN, B. A., SIMON, N. S.: 2020. Calm during crisis: School principal approaches to crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consortium for Policy Research in Education. https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_policybriefs/89
- LAMBREV, V. S.: 2024. Adaptive teacher leadership in a pandemic context: The case of Roma education in Bulgaria. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 140, 104483. 10.1016/j.tate.2024.104483
- LASSRI, D. 2023. Psychological distress among teaching staff during the COVID-19 pandemic: A transdiagnostic perspective on profiles of risk and resilience. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 128, 104143. 10.1016/j.tate.2023.104143
- LEITHWOOD, K., HARRIS, A., HOPKINS, D.: 2020. Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40 (1), 5-22. 10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077
- LUKHELE, S. P., LEBELOANE, L. D. M.: 2024. Revisiting management of high school teachers during Covid-19: Implication for leadership contingency. *International Journal of Educational Management and Development Studies*, 5 (3), 118-144. 10.53378/ijemds.353091
- PAYMALAN, I. B., BUDIAS, M. S.: 2023. Leading from the frontlines: School principals' perspectives on crisis management during the new normal. *Journal of Educational, Health and Community Psychology*, 12 (2), 448-461. 10.12928/jehcp.v1i2.23485
- PAYOT, A. Jr., MONTERO, J.: 2025. The influence of emotional intelligence and community support on school crisis management. *American Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation*, 4 (2), 62-71. 10.54536/ajiri.v4i2.4460
- PELTOLA, J. P., LINDFORS, E., LUUKKA, E.: 2024. Exploring crisis management measures taken by school leaders at the unpredictable crisis - case COVID-19. *Journal of Educational Change*, 25, 727-743. 10.1007/s10833-024-09516-x
- RAMOS-PLA, A., TINTORÉ, M., DEL ARCO, I.: 2021. Leadership in times of crisis: School principals facing COVID-19. *Heliyon*, 7 (11), 1-10. 10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08617
- SAITI, A., MANESIS, D.: 2023. Teachers' perceptions of school principals' role in tackling the pandemic crisis. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 37 (2), 350-364. 10.1108/IJEM-02-2022-0056
- SINLAPAPIROMSUK, P., SANITLOU, N., YAPADIT, S., NAMPRADIT, A.: 2023. Crisis management strategies for school leaders affecting academic administration in private schools under Nakhonratchasima Province Education Office. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 6 (3), 15-25. 10.31014/aior.1993.06.03.759
- SIRK, M., LEIJEN, Å., PEDASTE, M.: 2024. Exploring leaders' perceptions of school resilience during COVID-19: Constructing the framework for school development. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 7, 10.1016/j.ijedro.2023.100347
- TOWNSEND, T., LEAT, D., GUNTER, H.: 2022. School leadership and crisis management: Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 50 (2), 189-205. 10.1177/174114322111053792
- TSAGDI, S., TSIPOPOULOU, V., BALATSOU, M., THEOLOGOU, K.: 2022. Crisis management in education: A comparative case study of a special school and a standardized school in Greece. *International Journal of Technology and Inclusive Education*, 11 (1), 1732-1738. 10.20533/ijtie.2047.0533.2022.0214

Leadership and School Management during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Empirical Findings from Crisis Management

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the functioning of schools and has placed increased demands on leadership, organization, and effective crisis management. The aim of this paper is to analyse the issues of leadership and crisis management in the school environment during the COVID-19 pandemic based on available international studies and case studies. The paper focuses on identifying the responses of school leaders to unexpected crisis situations, proven management and leadership strategies, as well as factors that have influenced the continuity of education, communication, and organizational culture. The results show that school principals had to act quickly and proactively, make complex decisions, ensure effective and empathetic communication, and manage psychosocial and organizational challenges. Leadership based on empathy, flexibility, and team coordination, including the implementation of a hub-and-spoke model for rapid decision-making, proved to be an effective approach. Key factors influencing the functionality of school organizations included the ability to adapt to distance learning, providing psychological and social support, transparent communication, and equal access to educational materials for all students. The paper provides valuable insights for the future training of school leaders and increasing the resilience of school systems to crises.

KEYWORDS

Leadership; Crisis Management; School Management, COVID-19

JEL CLASSIFICATION

I28; H12; M12; D83