

Crises in Schools and Crisis Management Skills of Principals

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the crisis management skills that school principals need in diverse crisis contexts. This is qualitative research which seeks to synthesize contemporary knowledge and perspectives in related documents and the literature concerning the crisis management competencies of school principals. Adopting a document analysis and literature review approach, the study focuses on both national and international academic sources published between 2015 and 2025. The analysis identifies the major types of crises, natural disasters, technological disruptions, human-related incidents, social and political tensions, and health emergencies, and evaluates the competencies principals must demonstrate, including situational awareness, communication, rapid decision-making, resilience, and collaborative leadership. Findings emphasize that effective crisis management extends beyond technical preparedness and requires psychosocial awareness, ethical sensitivity, and empathic leadership. The study also underscores the importance of principals addressing teacher isolation and burnout during crises, while fostering organizational resilience and stakeholder trust. Ultimately, the research highlights the urgent need for policy-level support and practice-based training programs that will enhance principals' capacity to act as crisis leaders in increasingly complex educational environments.

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Introduction

EDUCATIONAL institutions are not only structures where knowledge production and transfer processes are carried out; they are also multi-factor, multi-variable organizations that contain micro-samples of social life. Therefore, they are directly affected by social change and transformations. Many factors, such as the effects of globalization, the acceleration of digitalization, increasing social vulnerabilities, climate change, epidemics, political uncertainty, economic fluctuations, and migration movements, create dynamic threats that affect educational institutions both directly and indirectly (Beabout, 2014: 119). While some of these threats are predictable, a significant portion emerges unexpectedly, disrupting the daily operations of the school, complicating administrative decision-making processes, and causing emotional, social, or pedagogical trauma.

In the context of educational organizations, a “crisis” can be defined as an extraordinary situation that often falls outside routine operations, poses a direct threat to the institution’s core values, physical structure, or human resources, and requires rapid decision-making and effective leadership (Coombs, 2014: 7). Such situations can arise from both internal school dynamics (e.g., violent incidents, student suicide, staff conflicts) and external systemic conditions (e.g., earthquakes, pandemics, political pressures). Therefore, a crisis involves both physical destruction and the disruption of the symbolic order, trust, organizational climate, and educational processes.

Crises are multidimensional phenomena, often characterized by simultaneous experiences of uncertainty, time pressure, information scarcity, and high levels of stress (Pearson & Clair, 1998: 60). This multidimensionality causes crises to generate administrative and socio-psychological impacts. For example, a violent incident can profoundly impact school safety as well as teachers’ psychological resilience, students’ motivation to learn, and parents’ trust in the institution. Therefore, crisis management must be approached with structural as well as cultural and human sensitivity.

Crisis management emerges as one of the most essential and multi-faceted leadership competencies required of school administrators in contemporary educational environments. It is no longer sufficient for principals to oversee daily operations merely; rather, they must be equipped to respond effectively to unforeseen events that can destabilize the organizational climate and threaten the well-being of both staff and students. The ability of principals to anticipate risks, mitigate the immediate and long-term effects of crises, coordinate institutional responses, and initiate post-crisis recovery processes constitutes a decisive factor in determining a school’s overall resilience and sustainability. Institutional resilience in this context refers not only to the preservation of physical and organizational structures but also to the

maintenance of trust, morale, and a positive school climate that enables learning continuity.

Particularly in sudden and unpredictable situations, such as natural disasters, pandemics, acts of violence, or technological breakdowns, the extent to which a school is impacted depends heavily on the principal's situational awareness, strategic thinking capacity, communication competence, and psychological resilience. Situational awareness allows school leaders to detect early warning signs, interpret rapidly changing circumstances, and act proactively rather than reactively (Smith & Riley, 2012). Strategic thinking enables them to balance short-term emergency responses with long-term recovery planning, ensuring that decisions are operationally sound and ethically grounded. Communication capacity plays a critical role in maintaining transparency with stakeholders, reducing uncertainty, and preserving trust during times of turbulence (Coombs, 2014). Psychological resilience, on the other hand, equips principals with the emotional stability to remain calm under pressure, inspire confidence among teachers and parents, and prevent organizational panic.

In this sense, crisis management is not a peripheral skill but a central dimension of educational leadership that directly influences a school's ability to withstand shocks and transform challenges into opportunities for institutional learning and growth (Kapucu, 2008; Mutch, 2015). However, modern crises are no longer limited to physical or natural disasters; they also encompass digital crises such as cyberbullying, information security breaches, and disruptions to online learning processes. This demands new-generation skills from school principals, such as technological literacy, digital security awareness, and multi-actor communication strategies (Schildkamp, Poortman & Ebbeler, 2020: 654).

The type of crises, frequency, and impact of crises in educational institutions are increasingly diverse and complex. This positions school principals as more than just administrative actors; they also serve as crisis leaders, emotional stabilizers, and strategic coordinators. Restructuring education policies and in-school professional development programs to support this new leadership role is a critical requirement for building more crisis-prepared and resilient school systems.

The Concept of Crisis Management

Crisis management is a systematic management process that aims to ensure that organizations are prepared for unexpected, uncertain, and often threatening events, respond effectively to these events, and reestablish institutional functioning as quickly as possible in the post-crisis period (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short & Coombs, 2017: 1661). In the context of educational institutions, crisis management requires managing physical threats, pedagogical, psychoso-

cial, and digital risks. In this context, school principals must eliminate crises with a multidimensional leadership approach, and transform these processes into opportunities for learning, solidarity, and transformation.

An effective crisis management process in schools is generally examined through four main phases (Wang, Hutchins & Garavan, 2009: 120):

- *Preparation Phase:* Scenario studies for anticipating crises, organizing drills, establishing in-school crisis teams, and clarifying the distribution of duties among stakeholders are the fundamental steps of this phase.
- *Response Phase:* Demonstrating rapid, effective, and versatile decision-making skills during a crisis; ensuring a transparent and reliable flow of information; and ensuring the safety of students, teachers, and other staff are at the forefront of this phase.
- *Recovery Phase:* Implementing support mechanisms to repair the psychological, social, and pedagogical damage that occurred after the crisis and restructuring the school climate are the goals.
- *Learning Phase:* Systematically evaluating the crisis experience, analyzing shortcomings and strengths, and transferring them to institutional memory ensure the sustainability of this process.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine, from a multidimensional perspective, the crisis management skills required of school principals in the face of increasingly complex and unpredictable challenges in educational environments. By systematically reviewing national and international literature published between 2015 and 2025, the research aims to identify the types of crises most commonly encountered in schools, evaluate the leadership competencies that principals must demonstrate during different phases of crisis, preparedness, intervention, and recovery and highlight the critical role of situational awareness, communication, resilience, and ethical responsibility in effective crisis leadership. Furthermore, the study seeks to provide insights into how principals can transform crises into opportunities for institutional learning and growth, while also offering recommendations for professional development programs and policy frameworks designed to enhance the crisis leadership capacity of school administrators.

Method

This research is a qualitative study that aims to systematically compile current information and approaches in the literature regarding the crisis management skills of school principals. The research employed document analysis and literature review methods, and the scope of the study was limited to domestic and international scientific sources published between 2015 and

2025. Data collected through this method, focusing on themes such as crisis management, leadership, organizational resilience, emotional intelligence, teacher loneliness, and administrative interventions in education, was analyzed using descriptive analysis.

Research Design

This study was conducted using document analysis, a qualitative research design. Document analysis is based on the systematic review and interpretation of previously produced written documents on a specific topic (Bowen, 2009). In this context, the roles played by school principals in crisis management, the skills they developed, and the challenges they faced were examined in depth.

Data Collection Process

Data were obtained from national and international databases such as ULAKBİM, DergiPark, ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Web of Science, and Scopus. Searches were conducted using the keywords “school principal,” “crisis management,” “leadership skills,” “crisis in education,” “organizational resilience,” and “emotional intelligence.” Throughout the search process, articles, theses, book chapters, and reports published in both Turkish and English were reviewed. A total of 53 sources directly related to the purpose of the study and containing high-quality academic production were examined in detail.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Studies published between 2015 and 2025, ensuring that the review reflects up-to-date perspectives on crisis management in educational contexts.
2. Peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, book chapters, and reports that specifically address crisis management, leadership skills, organizational resilience, emotional intelligence, teacher isolation, and administrative interventions in schools.
3. Sources available in Turkish and English.
4. Researches focusing on the role of school principals or educational administrators during crisis situations, including preparedness, response, and recovery processes.
5. Publications accessible through reputable academic databases such as ULAKBİM, DergiPark, ERIC, ProQuest, Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Studies published before 2015 or after 2025, as they fall outside the defined timeframe of the research.
2. Publications not subject to academic peer review, such as opinion pieces, newspaper articles, or non-academic reports.
3. Studies that focus on crisis management in non-educational contexts (e.g., health sector, military, business organizations) without direct relevance to school leadership.
4. Sources lacking full-text availability or those without sufficient methodological or conceptual detail.
5. Duplicated studies or those that did not directly address the role of school principals in crisis management processes.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. First, each source was classified according to the identified themes. The identified themes were:

1. Types of crises and examples of crises that school principals may encounter
2. Required crisis management skills for school principals

The findings were presented with qualitative narratives and references rather than a quantitative data set. It is supported by case studies, conceptual frameworks, and policy recommendations.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study is a literature review, and limited to the literature between the years 2015-2025, empirical testing of which mix of strategies produces the best short- and long-term outcomes in different contexts remains limited. Future research should pursue comparative case studies that measure outcomes (safety, learning continuity, psychosocial recovery) across crises where different leadership models were applied. Longitudinal work is also needed to evaluate how institutional learning from crises is captured and translated into durable policy change.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study is based solely on a review of open-source scientific literature. No data obtained from human or animal participants was used, and no experimental procedures were conducted. Therefore, ethics committee approval is

not required. The study fully complied with scientific research and publication ethics.

Types of Crises and Crises Faced by School Principals

The concept of crisis is generally defined in management literature as sudden, unexpected, high-risk situations that are difficult to manage with existing management strategies. According to Coombs (2014: 5), crises are phenomena that threaten the fundamental expectations of an organization's stakeholders and jeopardize the organization's reputation, reliability, or operation. This definition also provides a suitable framework for classifying crises that can occur in educational organizations. Crises in the school environment can manifest in a wide variety of ways, and this diversity requires school principals to possess versatile skills.

In management literature, crises are defined as extraordinary situations that threaten the structural, functional, or symbolic integrity of organizations, often developing suddenly and unpredictably, involving a high level of uncertainty, and requiring decisions under time pressure (Bundy et al., 2017: 1661). Crises disrupt the routine decision-making processes of organizations and create complex problem sets that decision-makers struggle to cope with with their existing knowledge, experience, and resources (Pearson & Clair, 1998: 60). In this respect, crises are not merely problems; they are also tests of uncertainty, stress, and credibility. Successfully passing this test will enable the organization to achieve more successful results in the future and increase the trust of stakeholders and employees in the organization.

Coombs (2014: 5) defined crises as critical events that threaten the expectations of an organization's key stakeholders and damage the organization's credibility, functionality, and public reputation. This definition is particularly relevant for public institutions, such as educational organizations, with multiple actors and high social responsibilities. Educational institutions like schools are not only places where teaching processes are conducted; they are also structures with deep social functions such as trust, norms, culture, belonging, and social development. Therefore, any crisis experienced here can mean structural disruption, in addition to psychosocial disruption. The occurrence of an incident that threatens student safety and the failure to take adequate precautions can undermine the trust of students, teachers, and parents in the school and increase their motivation to leave or transfer to another school.

Crises in the school environment can develop at physical, psychological, administrative, social, or digital levels. For example, a natural disaster can damage the school's physical capacity, while also causing long-term traumatic effects on teachers and students. Or, a defamatory video spread online can damage the school's public image, cause a crisis of trust among

students, and even directly impact teachers' motivation. These examples clearly demonstrate the multifaceted nature of crises and how their impacts are not limited to a single area.

The effective management of crises in educational institutions depends on the technical competence of school administrators, their psychological flexibility, ethical sensitivity, communication skills, and systemic thinking. This is because crises in educational institutions often involve multiple stakeholders simultaneously: students, teachers, parents, local governments, the press, unions, and even national education authorities. Managing crises within such a multilayered network of interactions requires administrators to simultaneously utilize numerous skills, including strategic communication, risk analysis, coordination, and leadership. Furthermore, the definition of education systems as “emotionally charged organizations” makes the pedagogical and emotional impacts of crises even more significant. In a crisis, the school climate can be disrupted, the sense of belonging can be damaged, and institutional commitment can be severely shaken (Chess & Johnson, 2006: 26). In this context, school principals are positioned as problem-managers, as well as actors who restore institutional trust, organize psychological support processes, and rebuild the learning environment.

The diversity of crisis types encountered in educational organizations necessitates both managerial skills and leadership capacities of individuals managing these institutions. In this sense, crisis management is central to the contemporary leadership skills of school principals. The pandemic, the pressure of digital transformation, refugee crises, and natural disasters experienced in recent years have clearly demonstrated the vital importance of school principals' ability to make rapid decisions, ensure strategic coordination, and establish trust among stakeholders during times of crisis. A crisis is not merely an organizational “disruption”; it is also a test of leadership, an ethical test, and a test of social integrity. School principals' preparedness for such situations will ensure the continuity of the school, the safety of students, the professional motivation of teachers, and the social value of education. The main types of crises that school principals may encounter in the school environment are as follows:

Natural Crises

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, fires, storms, extreme heat, or frost are among the most common types of crises that directly impact educational institutions. In countries located in earthquake zones like Turkey, the physical resilience of school buildings, the effectiveness of post-disaster evacuation plans, and principals' competence in disaster leadership are of vital importance (Tuti ve Mankan, 2025). In such crises, school principals

are expected to facilitate physical evacuations, manage panic, ensure student and teacher safety, and guide post-crisis trauma processes.

Natural disasters are among the types of crises that can cause serious damage to educational institutions at both physical and social levels, have low predictability, and can have long-lasting effects. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, forest fires, hail, storms, and extreme heat or cold weather conditions not only damage the physical structure of the school but can also disrupt the school's pedagogical processes, directly impacting students' academic development, teachers' professional motivation, and parents' perception of trust (UNESCO, 2023: 12). In countries like Turkey, which are located on active fault lines and are highly affected by the climate crisis, the impacts of natural disasters on educational institutions are more profound and widespread. The 1999 Marmara Earthquake and the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, in particular, caused the destruction of numerous schools, the deaths of students and teachers, and severe disruptions to the education system. In such crises, school principals are expected to demonstrate managerial leadership, in addition to strategic, emotional, and ethical leadership (Tuti ve Mankan, 2025).

In times of disaster, principals' primary responsibility is to ensure the safe evacuation of students and staff and to make swift decisions to prevent loss of life. However, crisis management is not limited to this phase. It is a holistic process consisting of three consecutive phases: pre-crisis preparation (e.g., evacuation drills, creating a disaster bag, determining emergency communication chains), crisis intervention (e.g., preventing panic, student counting, access to health services), and post-crisis recovery (e.g., providing psychological support, planning for return to teaching activities) (Alexander, 2013: 22).

Research shows that one of the biggest challenges school principals face during disasters is the irregular flow of information and lack of communication. Especially in rural areas, difficulties in reaching external stakeholders during a crisis can lead to isolation and pressure on principals to make decisions (Kapucu, 2008: 276). Furthermore, the fact that principals have not received formal training in disaster leadership often makes interventions intuitive and fragmented, which can jeopardize student safety. Another significant problem is the inadequate consideration of post-disaster trauma. Students who survive disasters such as earthquakes, fires, or floods often experience psychological symptoms such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), learning disabilities, loss of motivation, and social isolation (Shaw, 2003: 6). In these cases, school counselors need to activate post-crisis psychosocial support mechanisms. The principal's management of this process can be decisive for the school's ability to recover. These crises may require more consultation processes rather than continuing education.

In international literature, the concept of disaster leadership is used to describe the leadership style exhibited by school administrators during times of crisis. This leadership style encompasses fundamental qualities such as resilience, flexibility, empathic communication, collaboration, and resource mobilization (Smith & Riley, 2012: 61). Research on this topic in Türkiye has revealed that many school principals are ill-equipped to prepare for crises, increasing the need for professional development programs in this area (Yılmaz, 2022: 93). Natural disasters cause both physical destruction and leave deep marks on the organizational memory of the institution and the psychology of its stakeholders. Therefore, disaster management has become a multidimensional field of leadership that encompasses both the technical and the ethical, psychological, and communicative capacities of school principals. Education policies must focus on this area, accelerate post-disaster recovery processes, and strengthen principals' disaster leadership capacities.

Technological and Digital Crises

Today, educational institutions must contend not only with physical threats but also with complex and multifaceted crises originating in the digital world. The rapid expansion of digitalization in both public administration and education systems has radically transformed schools' perception of crisis and their response strategies. While technological advancements offer numerous opportunities in education, they have also brought with them risks such as information security breaches, online bullying, digital communication incidents, data loss, digital privacy violations, and the collapse of distance education systems (Livingstone & Smith, 2014: 84).

With the acceleration of digitalization in education, we may be facing a new generation of crises, such as information security breaches, online bullying, digital communication incidents, and systemic breakdowns in school environments. The collapse of online education systems, technological infrastructure problems, difficulties in student monitoring, and teachers' lack of digital competence, particularly during the pandemic, have demonstrated that school principals are unprepared for digital crises (Schildkamp, Poortman & Ebbeler, 2020: 658; Şahin, 2022). Skills principals must possess in this area include digital governance, cybersecurity awareness, and remote crisis communication.

The distance education practices experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, have revealed the criticality of digital crisis management. During this period, many schools were forced to transition to digital infrastructure in a short time; however, in parallel with the speed of this transition, security vulnerabilities, system failures, and a lack of digital competence among teachers and students caused serious problems. Şahin (2021) emphasized that the instability of digital systems and the lack of technologi-

cal infrastructure in schools during the pandemic pushed the limits of school principals' crisis management skills. For example, some schools experienced crises such as the crash of e-learning platforms due to high volume, the inability to communicate effectively with parents, and the inability of teachers to use digital tools effectively. Digital crises are not limited to technical glitches; they also have ethical, pedagogical, and social dimensions. Situations such as students being subjected to digital bullying, posts on social media platforms that could damage the school's reputation, and online lessons being recorded and shared without permission raise the question of how prepared school principals are for new types of crises (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012: 91). In this context, the digital crisis management skills that contemporary school principals should possess can be listed as follows:

- *Digital Governance Awareness*: Principals must be knowledgeable about the management of educational technologies, the integration of digitalization into institutional culture, and the creation of digital policies (Anderson & Dexter, 2005: 65).
- *Cybersecurity Awareness*: They must raise awareness of issues such as intrusion attempts into the school network, password security, and data leaks, train staff on these issues, and implement technical measures.
- *Remote Crisis Communication*: The ability to communicate effectively, quickly, and reliably with teachers, parents, and students online in times of crisis is crucial. This is not only a technical skill; it is also a managerial competence that includes emotional resilience.
- *Combating Digital Inequality*: Accessibility issues for students in rural areas or with low socioeconomic status should also be considered a crisis factor. Strategic planning skills to address these inequalities are crucial (van Dijk, 2005: 112).
- *Ethical and Legal Awareness*: Knowledge of ethical issues such as personal data protection, online privacy, and records and archive policies, and the ability to manage all digital processes within the school within a legal framework are essential.

Technological and digital crises require a hybrid skill set beyond the classical crisis management approach. In the face of these new types of crises, which require both technical proficiency and leadership vision, it has become imperative for school principals to prioritize digital leadership competencies in their professional development processes. Current literature in educational administration demonstrates that these skills are critical to sustained success in extraordinary circumstances and in daily school management (Donovan et al., 2011: 78; Şahin, 2022b).

Human-Related Crises

Crises arising from human interactions are among the most common and challenging types of crises school principals encounter and manage. These include harassment between teachers and students, student suicides, teacher resignations, physical or verbal violence, indiscipline, and personnel conflicts such crises, principals must possess managerial knowledge, as well as ethical, psychological, and legal knowledge (Kapucu, 2008). Because these events often carry a high emotional content, principals' competencies in empathy, crisis communication, and restorative approaches come to the fore.

One of the most challenging and complex types of crises encountered in educational institutions is one that directly stems from human factors. These crises arise from the relationships, interactions, and conflicts among individuals within the school community; they often emerge unexpectedly and carry intense emotional burdens. Therefore, they are among the situations that require intervention not only with managerial reflexes but also with psychological, ethical, and communication competencies (Kapucu, 2008). For example, a student's suicide disrupts the psychological climate of a school while testing the principal's multifaceted crisis management skills under intense pressure from the public, the press, and parents. Such events threaten the school's institutional image and can have long-term traumatic effects on teachers and students.

The skills required of school principals in human-related crises go beyond classical management competencies. First and foremost, they must be prudent and ethical decision-makers in times of crisis. In this context, principals must simultaneously shoulder the contradictory responsibilities of ensuring the safety of the victim and safeguarding the rights of the teacher involved when an allegation of harassment against a teacher emerges. Ethical leadership is one of the most needed competencies for principals in this process (Bogotch, 2024).

School principals are also expected to possess high skills in crisis communication. Crisis communication means not only regulating the flow of information but also providing emotional support, rebuilding the school community's sense of trust, and creating a guiding discourse in an environment of uncertainty. Especially in human-related crises, empathic communication styles and restorative (repair-based) approaches come to the fore. Restorative approaches encourage dialogue between the parties and aim to produce solutions on a conciliatory basis, rather than blaming (Hopkins, 2015: 27). It is not sufficient for school principals to focus solely on disciplinary practices in their post-crisis intervention plans.

They should adopt leadership styles that foster collaborative learning, prioritize the emotional well-being of teachers and students, and improve school climate in line with restorative principles. It is crucial, especially in traumatic crises such as student suicide, for principals to implement post-traumatic support mechanisms, conduct post-crisis risk analyses, and devel-

op long-term preventative strategies. It is crucial to remember that school principals should not work alone in managing humanitarian crises. Effective crisis management should be implemented through a coordinated, multi-actor approach involving social workers, psychological counselors, local governments, law enforcement, and civil society organizations. Principals' ability to communicate effectively with these external actors can be particularly decisive in post-crisis reconstruction processes.

Social and Political Crises

The school environment is a mirror of society. Therefore, situations such as social polarization, ethnolinguistic conflicts, refugee movements, poverty, and social exclusion can become crisis areas that school principals must manage. For example, the increasing number of Syrian refugee students in Turkey in recent years has forced school principals to develop integration policies, anti-discrimination discourses, and multicultural leadership practices (Arar & Öztürk, 2019: 79). The leadership demonstrated by principals in such situations is a key indicator of a school's inclusiveness, its contribution to social peace, and its institutional ethical stance.

Social and political crises are multidimensional problem areas directly involved in educational institutions, often stemming from external dynamics but also having internal impacts. Such crises generally emerge as the reflection of large-scale social transformation processes, economic fluctuations, cultural identity conflicts, political decisions, and migration movements in schools. Because educational institutions are a reflection of the cultural, ideological, and political structures of their societies, such crises can manifest themselves quite quickly in school environments. Social inequalities, forms of discrimination, ideological tensions, or factors such as curricula and regulations shaped by political decisions can create significant crisis areas for schools.

The impacts of social crises in schools include cultural conflicts, student groups experiencing feelings of exclusion, increased demands for minority rights, and the permeation of social prejudices into school culture. In this context, the leadership roles of educational administrators are not limited to institutional planning or pedagogical practices; they also play a strategic role in building a school culture based on social justice and equality (Shields, 2010: 563). The impact of social crises on schools also has a direct impact on students' academic performance, sense of belonging, and psychosocial development; this expands the scope of school principals' interventions, both administratively and emotionally.

Considering Turkey specifically, the political transformations, refugee flows, social polarization, and economic contractions experienced in the last decade have had a multilayered impact on educational institutions. As a

result of the massive refugee movement towards Türkiye, particularly since 2011, millions of Syrian children have had to be integrated into the Turkish education system. This process has required school principals to develop strategies for arranging physical spaces and adjusting quotas, while also addressing language barriers, promoting intercultural understanding, and reducing social prejudices (Arar & Öztürk, 2019: 79). The leadership approach principals demonstrate in this context requires management skills blended with multicultural education, cultural competence, inclusive discourse, and social sensitivity.

Another potential impact of political crises in schools is sudden changes in educational policies. Frequent changes in curriculum content, the imposition of ideologically oriented teaching materials, or uncertainties in centralized examination systems create uncertainty for both teachers and students. In such situations, school principals' managerial competencies, as well as their crisis communication, internal motivation management, and ability to communicate openly with teachers, are crucial (Schechter, Da'as & Qadach, 2022). When the principle of predictability in education policies is violated, schools can become passive bearers of crises rather than crisis management. Reducing this risk is only possible through a proactive, participatory, and ethically based leadership approach.

Another dimension of social crises is the inequitable educational opportunities created by economic inequalities. Problems such as low student attendance in schools located in disadvantaged neighborhoods, inadequate technological infrastructure, nutritional deficiencies, and increased dropout rates compel principals to implement both pedagogical leadership and social service-focused interventions. The leadership principles demonstrated in this context should not be limited to the effective management of organizational resources, but should also be based on an understanding of social responsibility that enhances school-family-community collaboration and addresses students' basic needs (Leithwood, 2007). The leadership that school principals should exhibit in the face of social and political crises should not only be at the level of responding to crises but also based on analyzing the root causes of these crises and developing sustainable, inclusive, and equitable policies at the institutional level. The management of such crises clearly demonstrates that educational leadership encompasses both administrative functions and ethical, cultural, and social responsibilities.

Health-Related Crises (e.g., Pandemics)

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a turning point, testing the crisis-coping capacity of school administrators in Türkiye, as it has throughout the world. Multifaceted challenges such as physical closures, online education arrangements, the emotional burdens of teachers and students, hygiene proto-

cols, and vaccine policies have forced school principals to become both health leaders and digital transformation agents (Sahlberg, 2020: 5; Şahin, 2022). This process has demonstrated that crises are not merely physical threats; they also encompass organizational resilience, a culture of solidarity, and sustainable decision-making processes.

Health-related crises experienced in school environments have created new testing grounds for educational leadership, particularly in the context of increasing global health threats in the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused radical transformations in schools in Türkiye, as in all education systems worldwide, demonstrating that health-related crises are no longer merely biological threats but have become holistic administrative crises. In this process, school principals have positioned themselves not only as logistical decision-makers but also as health leaders, psychosocial support providers, and digital transformation actors (Sahlberg, 2020: 5).

The pandemic has tested the flexibility, resilience, and innovation capacities of school principals in the context of crisis leadership, highlighting their ability to maintain the delicate balance between educational continuity and human health. Numerous responsibilities, such as implementing physical closures, planning online education processes, overseeing hygiene and distancing protocols, and monitoring the psychological well-being of teachers and students, have directly impacted principals' decision-making and crisis management performance (Zhao, 2020: 57; Şahin, 2022a). Furthermore, if a COVID-19 case is detected in a school, they have had to manage many complex processes such as implementing isolation protocols, operating parent notification systems, and collaborating with local health authorities.

Such health crises have demonstrated the need to move beyond traditional school leadership paradigms. Principals need to possess administrative skills and should be equipped in areas such as health literacy, infectious disease knowledge, post-traumatic stress management, remote crisis communication, and sustainable digital strategies. In this context, it is vital that school administrators develop decision-making skills aligned with public health principles and demonstrate proactive leadership in response to health crises. Furthermore, secondary crises such as the "learning losses" that emerged during the return to school after the pandemic, the psychosocial effects of social isolation on students, and teacher burnout levels have required principals to develop long-term post-crisis recovery plans. At this point, the process of rebuilding the educational environment must be guided by an inclusive, collaborative, and human-centered leadership approach.

Crisis Management Skills Required for School Principals

School principals' ability to demonstrate effective leadership during crisis periods is not limited to rapid response; it also depends on generating constructive, strategic, and sustainable solutions. Literature reveals that the skills required of school leaders during crisis periods are multidimensional and that these skills should be evaluated in a complementary and holistic manner (Eacott, 2013; Kapucu, 2008). School principals' capacity to exhibit effective leadership during crisis periods transcends mere rapid reaction; it hinges upon their ability to craft constructive, strategic, and sustainable solutions that not only address immediate challenges but also strengthen organizational resilience and future readiness. Recent scholarship underscores that the competencies required of school leaders in times of crisis are multidimensional, encompassing managerial, emotional, instructional, ethical, and relational domains, which need to be evaluated in a complementary and holistic fashion (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Da'as et al., 2025).

In particular, post-pandemic research has highlighted that school leaders must demonstrate a wide range of interconnected competencies. Leaders must accurately interpret rapidly changing contexts, gather relevant data, and co-construct collective meaning with stakeholders. After crises subside, school leaders must engage in critical reflection, assess what worked and what did not, and institutionalize lessons learned for future preparedness. Crises often exacerbate inequalities; thus, principals are responsible for addressing digital divides, ensuring equitable access to resources, and protecting vulnerable students. Leaders must recognize the psychological toll of crises, foster a supportive climate, and safeguard the mental health and well-being of staff and students. Leaders must prioritize instructional quality, provide teachers with pedagogical support, and foster ongoing professional development to mitigate learning losses (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023).

Effective principals manage resources efficiently and make both short- and long-term strategic choices under pressure. Maintaining clear, empathetic, and consistent communication with teachers, students, families, and community partners is essential to build trust and stability (Durrani et al., 2024). Effective crisis leadership requires adjusting structures, promoting innovative solutions, and leveraging technology to sustain teaching and learning (Peltola et al., 2024). Leadership should not remain concentrated at the top; instead, principals must delegate responsibilities, build internal teams, and foster external partnerships (Da'as et al., 2025).

Crises in schools vary in form, ranging from natural disasters, pandemics, technological breakdowns, human-related conflicts, to social and political tensions, and each requires a distinct constellation of leadership skills. Yet, across contexts, certain management competencies emerge as the most decisive for effective intervention and long-term recovery. These dimensions reveal that crisis leadership is not merely about damage control but

rather about organizational learning, adaptation, and future-oriented transformation. A principal's character, ethical stance, and vision underpin the effective use of these competencies and ultimately shape how schools recover and grow stronger in the aftermath of crisis. Some competencies that school principals must have are given in this section of the study.

Situational Awareness

Situational awareness encompasses the process of perceiving pre-crisis signals, identifying risks, and anticipating potential impacts. An effective school principal must understand that crises are not merely external events; internal school structures (organizational culture, communication channels, security policies) can also act as triggers. Therefore, principals must possess advanced skills in analyzing both the internal and external environments and accurately interpreting the current context. For example, micro-level data such as increased absenteeism, the volume of parent complaints, or tensions among teachers can be early signals of a larger crisis. Improving school principals' situational awareness is crucial for preventing potential crises in the educational environment or minimizing their impact (Endsley, 1995: 36; Smith & Riley, 2012: 67). Crises, particularly in educational institutions, often do not emerge suddenly; on the contrary, they provide advance signals through various micro-indicators. In this context, situational awareness should be considered not as a passive observation process, but as an active, analytical, and proactive leadership behavior (James et al., 2011: 14).

For school principals, situational awareness consists of three interrelated components: perception, interpretation, and foresight. Perception refers to the ongoing observation and monitoring of all dynamics within the school environment, including teacher behaviors, student attitudes, parental expectations, and social media discourse. Interpretation involves making sense of the information gathered through perception, identifying patterns, assessing their significance, and understanding how various factors interact to influence the school context. Foresight is the ability to anticipate potential future developments and to formulate proactive intervention strategies based on the interpreted information (Endsley, 1995, p. 37; Wang, Hutchins, & Garavan, 2009, p. 124).

Educational institutions are often multi-actor, complex, and emotionally charged systems. Therefore, it is important to understand that crises can arise not only as an external threat but also as a result of internal school dynamics. For example, disintegration in organizational culture, blockages in communication channels, or a lack of trust among stakeholders can lay the groundwork for a crisis (Kapucu, 2008). Therefore, situational awareness should not be limited to observing only the external manifestations of events;

it should also include the internal network of relationships, norms, attitudes, and habits.

Micro-level indicators, such as increased absenteeism in school settings, decreased cooperation among teachers, increased parental complaints, or behavioral changes observed among students, can be early indicators of an impending crisis. Systematic monitoring and analysis of such data can enable principals to take preventive measures before crises even arise. Furthermore, in the digital age, situational awareness for school administrators remains relevant in physical spaces and virtual environment. Indicators such as student complaints on social media platforms, cyberbullying incidents, or a lack of interaction in digital classrooms can carry the digital footprint of a potential crisis. In this context, it can be said that the digital literacy levels of school principals are directly related to their situational awareness levels.

For effective crisis management, it is essential for school principals to develop situational skills. This is not a process based solely on individual intuition; it encompasses multiple competencies such as systematic observation, data analysis, empathic listening, and open learning, all within a single administrative responsibility. To fulfill this responsibility, principals must be supported by professional development activities and equipped with institutional decision-support systems (Day et al., 2016: 52). In sudden-onset crises like earthquakes or fires, early detection and rapid interpretation of risks are indispensable. Principals who can perceive warning signals (e.g., structural risks, panic signs among students) and anticipate likely scenarios should act faster and with fewer errors (Smith & Riley, 2012: 67).

Communication Competence

Regardless of crisis type, clear, honest, and timely communication is the life-line of school stability (Coombs, 2014: 145). During health crises (e.g., pandemics), principals must provide transparent updates on hygiene protocols, online learning, and mental health supports. In human-related crises, communication must be not only informational but also empathic and restorative, rebuilding trust among teachers, students, and families. During times of crisis, effective communication is seen as both an information tool for educational institutions and a vital element in building trust, maintaining governance stability, and fostering psychological solidarity. The communication skills that school principals demonstrate during times of crisis are a strategic management element that directly impacts the course of the process. In this context, communication is not merely a technical communication process; it also encompasses qualitative dimensions such as emotional intelligence, empathy, clarity, and consistency.

As the need for information increases during times of crisis, principals must utilize both formal (meetings, written announcements, etc.) and

digital (e.g., email, the school website, WhatsApp groups, social media platforms) channels effectively and in a coordinated manner (Coombs, 2014: 145). Especially in sudden and uncertain crises (e.g., a student injury at school, a teacher suicide, an epidemic, or a terrorist threat), stakeholder anxiety levels rise, and inaccurate or incomplete information can have even more devastating consequences. Therefore, clarity, honesty, and timeliness in the principal's communication language become critical. Crisis communication that avoids distorting the truth, creating panic, and using ambiguous language reinforces the school community's sense of trust. Delays in communication, silence, or contradictory statements damage both internal morale and the school's reputation with external stakeholders (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2017: 44).

Principals are recommended to proactively implement corporate communication strategies during times of crisis, taking measures such as being prepared for potential questions, creating messages tailored to the target audience, and ensuring coordination with the press and local authorities. Furthermore, the principal's attitude toward teachers, parents, and students with whom they interact during a crisis, along with their body language, tone of voice, and choice of words, directly impacts the effectiveness of communication. Therefore, not only what is said but also how it is said should be considered as crucial parameters.

The role of communication skills in crisis management is closely related to the concept of pedagogical leadership. Principals assume administrative as well as educational, cultural, and emotional leadership roles. Especially during prolonged crises like the pandemic, preventing teacher burnout, maintaining student motivation, and ensuring parental active participation in the process largely depend on the principal's ability to establish sustainable, morale-boosting, and empathic communication (Sahlberg, 2020: 4). Well-structured communication not only manages the crisis but also ensures a more resilient school after the crisis. In this context, principals' crisis communication skills should be developed both as an individual competence and as an integral part of the school culture. Institutional measures such as establishing crisis communication protocols, assigning communication officers, developing message patterns, and conducting regular communication drills should be systematic structures that support the principal's communication skills. The communication skills demonstrated by school principals during crises are fundamental in building trust, commitment, and institutional resilience. These skills form the cornerstones of sustainable school leadership, not only during the crisis but also in the pre- and post-crisis periods.

Strategic Decision-Making and Rapid Response

The decision-making process in times of crisis is far more complex, multi-faceted, and under pressure than in ordinary management situations. School principals' effective decision-making under these circumstances depends on their managerial, ethical, and strategic leadership competencies. This process has been defined in the literature as "cognitive flexibility and value-based managerial reasoning under high pressure" (Smith & Riley, 2012: 59). In a crisis, principals may be forced to act with limited information; therefore, their ability to conduct data-based preliminary analysis, quickly mentally construct various scenarios, and anticipate outcomes becomes critical. In such contexts, effective decision-making requires technical, managerial skills, ethical sensitivity, strategic foresight, and the ability to balance short-term needs with long-term sustainability (Deborah, 2020; Schechter & Shaked, 2017).

Strategic decision-making should not be limited to problem-solving; it should also consider the school's reputation, stakeholder trust, and long-term organizational health. For example, in the event of a security breach in a school environment, the principal must accurately analyze the nature of the incident, promptly implement relevant security procedures, ensure effective coordination with law enforcement, and simultaneously provide transparent information to students, teachers, and parents. Such situations require the principal to demonstrate leadership not only in operational but also in communication, ethical, and psychological dimensions. It is also important for the leader not to be isolated in the decision-making process but to develop reflexive thinking in collaboration with stakeholders. Collective wisdom and consultation mechanisms reduce the risks assumed by the principal alone and increase the legitimacy and acceptance of decisions made (Crisis Leadership in Schools, 2020: 12). Therefore, crisis management is closely linked to organizational learning capacity and the effectiveness of collective wisdom processes, as well as individual competencies.

Scholars have described this process as a form of cognitive flexibility and value-based reasoning under high pressure, where leaders must navigate competing priorities while upholding the ethical mission of schooling (Smith & Riley, 2012). Recent studies confirm that during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, principals frequently operated with limited or contradictory data, which forced them to make data-informed yet anticipatory decisions in real time (Harris & Jones, 2020; Durrani et al., 2024). This underscores the importance of scenario planning, rapid risk assessment, and adaptive decision-making as critical leadership competencies in times of uncertainty.

Strategic decision-making in crises should extend beyond immediate problem-solving and address reputation management, stakeholder trust, and long-term institutional resilience. For instance, in the case of a school security breach, a principal must quickly evaluate the scope of the incident, enact

security protocols, coordinate effectively with external authorities, and communicate transparently with students, teachers, and families. Research demonstrates that principals who manage to balance operational efficiency with ethical communication and psychological reassurance foster greater confidence and organizational stability among stakeholders (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). Another vital element is the recognition that principals should not act in isolation. Collaborative and distributed decision-making mechanisms allow leaders to draw upon collective wisdom, which reduces personal cognitive overload and enhances legitimacy (Da'as et al., 2025).

Consultation with teachers, school boards, and community partners broadens the information base and fosters shared ownership of solutions. Moreover, such inclusivity supports organizational learning, ensuring that the institution can reflect on past actions and improve future responses (Schechter & Shaked, 2017). Therefore, crisis leadership in schools is a dynamic interplay of individual competencies, organizational learning capacity, and collective wisdom processes. Strategic decision-making is not a solitary act of authority but a multi-layered practice that integrates rapid operational response, ethical reflection, stakeholder engagement, and long-term vision for resilience.

Psychological Resilience

Times of crisis are extraordinary circumstances that directly affect the organizational structure, psychological and emotional balance of educational administrators. These processes require coping with complex situations characterized by pressure to make instant decisions, conflicting expectations from stakeholders, lack of information, deadlines, and intense human concerns. Under such stressors, the psychological resilience of school principals becomes a critical element determining the sustainability of effective leadership (Leithwood, 2007: 14). The concept of psychological resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt, demonstrate emotional flexibility, and recover in the face of challenges, traumas, threats, or significant stressors (Masten, 2001: 227). This competency is vital for educational administrators, both in terms of ensuring their own emotional regulation and responding sensitively to the needs of the school community. During times of crisis, a leader's ability to maintain calm and manage panic provides security and stability for themselves, teachers, students, and parents.

Leaders with a high level of psychological resilience can prioritize a solution-focused approach by establishing positive cognitive frameworks in environments of anxiety and uncertainty. By preventing the spread of hopelessness and burnout, this leadership style indirectly fosters teachers' job satisfaction and motivation. In prolonged crises such as pandemics or refugee

integration processes, the emotional stability and resilience of the principal directly influence the morale of the school community. Leaders with high resilience prevent panic, reduce burnout, and inspire confidence (Leithwood, 2007: 14)). This is particularly vital in trauma-laden crises (e.g., student suicide, post-earthquake recovery), where principals must sustain both their own well-being and that of others. (Gu & Day, 2007: 1316).

Furthermore, principals need to maintain self-care habits (e.g., physical health, sleep patterns, mental awareness practices) and, when necessary, to implement professional psychological support mechanisms for the institutional continuity of psychological resilience (McCallum & Price, 2016: 59). School principals are expected to function both as individuals in crisis environments and as emotional balance-enhancing agents within the school ecosystem. Emotional intelligence, empathy, active listening, and positive communication skills are fundamental tools for leaders in this regard. Furthermore, principals must be able to promptly recognize signs of teacher burnout, develop support structures, and implement holistic policies that address the emotional needs of staff (Boylund, 2011: 75). Therefore, psychological resilience is not merely an individual virtue; it is also the cornerstone of organizational resilience and the capacity to learn from crises.

Collaboration and Team Management

Crises are the times when leadership approaches are most clearly tested and transformed. In these periods, when traditional, hierarchical leadership models prove inadequate, the importance of collaborative and distributed leadership approaches becomes even more evident (Harris, 2008: 39). For school principals to be successful in crisis management, they must possess both individual decision-making capacity and the skills to effectively design and manage institutional collaboration processes.

Collaborative crisis management requires principals to mobilize collective capacity within the organization, encourage responsibility sharing among stakeholders, and create a pluralistic basis for decision-making processes (Spillane, 2006). In this context, school principals should establish crisis committees with clearly defined duties before and during a crisis; They need to empower the individuals who will participate in these committees (e.g., guidance counselors, security guards, IT officers, healthcare workers, psychological counselors, and administrative staff) according to their roles. Such structures increase the speed and effectiveness of decision-making in times of crisis while strengthening the participation of the school community in the process. Research shows that distributed leadership practices during crises positively impact employee engagement, communication quality, and stress management (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020: 113). Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, have shown that,

compared to centralized and authoritarian interventions, team-based and shared leadership styles create higher organizational cohesion and less burn-out (Netolicky, 2020; Azorin, 2020). In this context, a collaborative management approach should be considered not only a technical choice but also a pedagogical, ethical, and social imperative. Crisis management based on collaboration contributes to the development of professional learning communities. Collective processes led by the principal strengthen solidarity among teachers and reduce feelings of isolation and inadequacy during crises (Stoll et al., 2006). Thus, the school becomes resilient to crises while gaining the potential to restructure as an organism that learns and develops from these processes.

Effective team management should not be limited to internal stakeholders. It is also crucial for principals to establish sustainable collaboration networks with local governments, health authorities, law enforcement, and non-governmental organizations in crisis management. Principals who can communicate quickly and reliably with external stakeholders, especially in situations such as natural disasters, social events, or infectious diseases, are observed to be more successful in responding to crises and ensuring school continuity (Riley & Dockery, 2017). Collaboration should be essential in post-crisis recovery processes. The principal, together with team members, should analyze the impact of the crisis, assess the challenges experienced during the process, and develop preventative strategies for future crises. Such collective assessment processes strengthen organizational memory and enable the school to act proactively and strategically, rather than reactively, in the face of future crises.

Discussion

This study synthesized contemporary literature on school principals' crisis management skills and identified patterns in the kinds of crisis responses recommended for different crisis types. The discussion below integrates the document's key arguments and summarizes which crisis-management approaches are advocated, and evaluates where each approach is most effective. Several studies conducted since 2015 highlight the kinds of crisis management strategies that principals use or are recommended to use. Tokel, Özkan, and Dağlı (2017) developed a scale for crisis management skills for school administrators that includes pre-crisis (risk assessment, planning) as one of the key components. Ulusoy and Yavuz (2022) found that teacher perceptions of principals' crisis management in İzmir are significantly related to leadership styles; principals who adopt more proactive, participative styles are seen as better at responding during crisis periods. However, after the February 2023 earthquake in Türkiye, a study of teacher opinions showed that principals who act to support the psychological health of teachers, stu-

dents, and parents, and who take initiative beyond formal guidelines, are perceived as more effective in the post-crisis period (Nil, 2024).

Recommended Crisis-Management Approaches

The literature groups recommended approaches into four broad orientations: preventive/preparatory, rapid/interventional (response), recovery/remedial and organizational learning (learning/feedback). Preventive actions emphasize risk analysis, drills, crisis teams, and digital preparedness. Interventional actions emphasize rapid decision-making, clear crisis communication, and safety procedures. Recovery focuses on psychosocial supports, restorative practices, and learning-loss remediation, and learning converts crisis experience into institutional memory and policy change. These four phases, preparation, response, recovery, and learning, form the backbone of the field's recommendations.

Which crisis-management approach works best in which crisis contexts

Based on the studies, we can discuss which approaches are stronger under particular kinds of crises.

Effective school leadership during natural disasters requires preparation and coordination. Research emphasizes the importance of evacuation plans, building safety, and regular drills (Fulton County Schools, 2025). During the event, principals' immediate priorities include life safety, rapid evacuation, and information flow (Prince William County Public Schools, 2024). Post-disaster recovery should prioritize psychosocial support and continuity of learning. Failures in any of these stages, particularly in communication or drills, increase the risk of casualties and prolong institutional disruption (Navigate360, 2023). Thus, disaster leadership, combining technical readiness and empathic post-crisis care, is the most effective approach.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, principals were required to integrate hygiene and health literacy, remote learning leadership, and community coordination (Wharton-Beck et al., 2022). Studies show that schools with principals knowledgeable in digital governance and established remote communication channels preserved educational continuity more effectively (Brown et al., 2023). Where such capacity was lacking, learning loss and teacher burnout increased (McLeod & Duslsky, 2021). Therefore, during pandemics and prolonged public-health emergencies, effectiveness depends less on heroic individual decisions and more on systematic health protocols, digital readiness, and sustained psychosocial support.

Digital crises respond best to preventive governance and rapid remote communication. Recommendations emphasize cybersecurity protocols,

digital policies, teacher capacity building, and contingency plans for platform outages (Security Magazine, 2025). When crises are reputational (viral posts) or privacy-related, transparent, timely, and ethically informed public communication reduces reputational damage. For technical issues (platform crashes), technical backups and alternative delivery channels preserve instructional continuity (Mclaurin, 2025). Hence, digital governance and cybersecurity awareness are high-value skill sets for school leaders in such contexts.

Human crises require restorative, empathic, and ethically grounded interventions. The literature recommends trauma-informed responses, restorative practices prioritizing dialogue and healing over punitive reflexes, and multi-actor collaboration (counselors, social services, and law enforcement when necessary) (Crisis Prevention Institute, 2021). These situations are high in emotional stakes and public scrutiny; therefore, principals need strong crisis communication skills, ethical decision-making capabilities, and access to mental-health resources to be effective.

Social and political tensions call for transformative and inclusive leadership. When crises stem from broader societal changes (e.g., refugee inflows, ideological polarization), technical crisis plans are insufficient. Research argues that principals must adopt culturally responsive, equity-oriented leadership to prevent marginalization and maintain school cohesion, including structural supports for integration, curriculum sensitivity, and community engagement (Shields et al., 2020). Distributed leadership, which shares responsibility across staff and community, is frequently recommended to build legitimacy and reduce backlash.

The literature indicates there is no single “one-size-fits-all” crisis model for schools. Instead, effectiveness depends on matching strategy to crisis type: disaster leadership and rapid coordination for natural hazards; health-aligned, digitally competent leadership for pandemics; cybersecurity and remote communication for digital crises; restorative, trauma-informed practice for human crises; and inclusive, transformative leadership for social/political tensions. Across contexts, however, the same core leadership competencies, situational awareness, transparent communication, strategic decision-making, resilience, and collaborative team management consistently determine whether schools weather crises and learn from them. Policy and training systems that embed those competencies, while tailoring tactics to crisis type, will maximize school resilience and wellbeing.

Conclusion

Crisis management has become a central component of school leadership in the rapidly changing and uncertain educational environments of the 21st century. Today, educational institutions face a widening spectrum of crises,

from natural disasters to epidemics, from social conflicts to digital security threats. This requires school principals to transcend administrative functions and assume ethical, psychosocial, and strategic leadership roles (Mutch, 2015 & Hunt, 2014). Therefore, contemporary school principalship encompasses much more than managing routine processes; it requires complex skills such as anticipating uncertainties, enabling rapid adaptation, and creating a learning cycle from crises.

Four types of crisis management—preventive, preparatory, interventional, and remedial—are examined in the study, highlighting the multifaceted roles school principals play in crises. Principals who conduct risk analysis beforehand, identify vulnerabilities, and develop strategic preparedness plans can make their institutions more resilient to crises. This proactive approach also fosters trust and stability within the school community (Luino et al., 2017). During a crisis, principals' decision-making processes, grounded in ethics, should be assessed alongside their ability to communicate transparently and openly with stakeholders. What school stakeholders need most during a crisis is clarity, direction, and a sense of psychological safety (Day et al., 2016).

However, crises should be considered both as a structural threat and as a source of serious psychological and organizational trauma. In this regard, school principals' individual resilience directly shapes their own decision-making and leadership capacities, as well as the crisis responses of other stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents (Leithwood et al., 2020). Leaders with high levels of resilience can remain calm in chaotic and uncertain environments, maintain a sense of community hope, and be more successful in maintaining a positive school climate. However, the limitations of individual leadership should not be overlooked in crisis management processes. Particularly in comprehensive crises, the need for collaborative leadership models becomes even more evident. Among the factors that increase sustainability are school principals' efforts to establish crisis committees, clarify roles within teams, democratize decision-making processes, and develop institutional collective memory (Spillane, 2006). A distributed leadership approach shares the burden and enables multifaceted crisis management by ensuring the active participation of teachers, guidance counsellors, and other school personnel.

Effective crisis management requires school principals to possess managerial skills alongside ethical sensitivity, empathic communication, strategic thinking, and a high level of self-awareness. When principals view a crisis as both a challenge and an opportunity for learning and transformation, they can restructure the institution according to transformative leadership principles. In this context, crises should be addressed not with temporary management solutions, but with long-term strategic visions, collaborative mechanisms, and inclusive leadership practices. A leader who learns

Table. 1: Recommended Crisis Management Approaches.

Crisis Type	Approaches Recommended / Evidenced	Why More Effective in This Context
Natural Disasters/ Sudden Physical Events	Emphasis on preparedness (evacuation plans, safety drills), clear protocols, external coordination, and post-crisis psychosocial support. Evidenced in Türkiye's case after the 2023 earthquake: teachers perceived unpreparedness, but also that psychological support matters (Nil, 2024).	Because physical safety is an immediate priority, unexpected damage demands both anticipatory structures and emotional recovery afterward. Principals' ability to communicate and act swiftly makes a major difference.
Health Crises/ Pandemics	Distributed leadership, inclusive decision-making, digital infrastructure, clear communication, and supporting mental health. The review of COVID-19 studies shows these were successful strategies (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023)	These crises are prolonged and affect many dimensions (health, learning, psychological). Rigid hierarchical top-down leadership is less effective; it needs flexibility, collaboration, and adaptability.
School Violence / Conflict (Human-Related Crises)	Restorative justice, conflict resolution, social-emotional learning, principal attitudes, and perceptions matter. RJ practices have been shown to reduce violence, improve well-being (Katic, Alba, & Johnson, 2020).	Because these crises are relational, often cumulative rather than sudden, punitive discipline often exacerbates conflict; restorative processes help rebuild trust and community.
Leadership Style Mediated Crises	Studies like Izmir (2022) show that leadership style (participatory, transformational) influences perceptions of crisis management effectiveness (Ulusoy & Yavuz, 2022).	Because in many crises, the quality of relational work and leadership behavior (how decisions are made, how people are involved) influences whether the school community will respond well.

from crisis, rather than simply managing it, has become a vital necessity for today's educational institutions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be developed in line with this study:

1. *Crisis Management Training Should Be Made Mandatory:* In-service crisis management training for school principals should be restructured to be informative, supported by practical scenarios, and should be integrated into the Ministry of National Education legislation (**Table 1**).
2. *Psychological Resilience and Emotional Intelligence Training Should Be Increased:* Development programs focused on emotional intelligence and resilience should be implemented to enable principals to protect their own psychological health and manage the school climate in crisis environments.
3. *Crisis Committees Should Be Established in Schools:* A crisis committee should be established in every school to be activated in times of crisis; this committee should conduct regular drills with predetermined job descriptions.
4. *A Distributed Leadership Culture Should Be Encouraged:* Instead of centralizing decisions during crisis periods, shared leadership practices

with teachers and other staff should be encouraged, increasing the school's holistic reflexivity.

5. *Interventions to Address Teacher Loneliness Should Be Developed:* In light of findings that teachers become isolated during crisis periods, guidance systems should be established to enable school administrators to recognize this loneliness and establish support mechanisms.
6. *Crisis Leadership Modules Should Be Added to Education Faculties:* Mandatory or elective courses on “crisis leadership” should be added to the educational administration programs of education faculties to increase the preparedness of aspiring administrators for crises.
7. *A National Strategy Should Be Developed for Policymakers:* The Ministry of National Education should develop a comprehensive national-level guideline, protocol, and resource pool to support school administrators in crises.

As this study is a literature review focusing on research published between 2015 and 2025, evidence regarding which combination of leadership strategies yields the most effective short- and long-term outcomes across different crisis contexts remains limited. Future investigations should prioritize comparative case studies that systematically assess outcomes such as safety, continuity of learning, and psychosocial recovery in schools employing varying leadership approaches. Additionally, longitudinal research is necessary to examine how schools internalize lessons from crises and translate them into enduring policy reforms.

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