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## Abstract

The focus of this research was to investigate how school administrators in Turkey managed the crises caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, which was a deadly threat for humanity worldwide. The research questions guiding this study are: 1) Did schools have a crisis plan? 2) If yes, how was the plan implemented in a crisis situation?; 3) What kind of changes were made in the plans?; 4) What should administrators do in such crisis situations?; and 5) What was done in the COVID-19 outbreak? The research was conducted as a qualitative case study which involved 105 school administrators. Due to the pandemic conditions that hindered direct face-to-face interviews and interactions, data collection was carried out online via a Google drive form with open-ended questions. The findings demonstrated that there were two main headings as the basis for the research problems. The first was the existence of crisis planning by school administrators; the other was the status of implementation of these plans. Finally, how school administrators handled crisis management was pointed out.

## Keywords

crisis management, planning, implementation, support, communication

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# How Did School Administrators Manage the Crises During the COVID-19 Outbreak?

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## Abstract

The focus of this research was to investigate how school administrators in Turkey managed the crises caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, which was a deadly threat for humanity worldwide. The research questions guiding this study are: 1) Did schools have a crisis plan? 2) If yes, how was the plan implemented in a crisis situation?; 3) What kind of changes were made in the plans?; 4) What should administrators do in such crisis situations?; and 5) What was done in the COVID-19 outbreak? The research was conducted as a qualitative case study which involved 105 school administrators. Due to the pandemic conditions that hindered direct face-to-face interviews and interactions, data collection was carried out online via a Google drive form with open-ended questions. The findings demonstrated that there were two main headings as the basis for the research problems. The first was the existence of crisis planning by school administrators; the other was the status of implementation of these plans. Finally, how school administrators handled crisis management was pointed out.

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## Introduction

Pandemics have been with us throughout history. Özlü and Öztaş (2020) summarized the historical outbreaks in their compilation studies and made recommendations for the next periods. According to them, the first serious pandemic occurred in 430 BC during the Morea War. The chronological order of the next pandemics was as follows: Justinian Plague (541-750 AD); Black Death (1347-1351); Cholera (1817- 1823); Smallpox (15th - 17th Centuries); Spanish Flu or H1N1 (1918-1919); The Hong Kong Flu or H3N2 (1968-1970); HIV / AIDS (1981 - present); SARS (2002-2003); Swine Flu or H1N1 (2009-2010); and Ebola (2014-2016). In 2019, the world began experiencing COVID-19. Undoubtedly, this outbreak will not be the last one. Emerging in Wuhan, China in 2019, the virus reached the other parts of the world quickly. The pandemic severely affected all countries and various sectors, including education, and unfortunately caused the death of more than one million people all over the world. According to UNESCO's May 2020 findings, educational institutions in many countries were closed completely or partly. Of the registered students in the world, 59.9% were affected by this pandemic. Similarly, in Turkey, several students from diverse school levels were also affected. During this period, several crises became apparent

at every level of education, and as a result, everyday activities and procedures of educational organizations were also affected seriously, as there was a swift shift in educational and administrative procedures and habits.

## Literature Review

Doğan (1982) defines *crisis* as a challenging situation that needs to be coped with and sudden happenings which are heading for a dangerous period. Usually, unanticipated circumstances lead to crisis situations in the organizations and have the potential to give unfavorable consequences unless controlled well. Grant and Mack (2004) assert crises are inevitable for institutions; therefore, leaders of organizations have to react well and try hard to manage crises effectively. According to Elliott et al. (2005, p. 2), there are common features of organizational crises: “several stakeholders are involved; time pressures requiring an urgent response are felt; there is almost no warning to the organization; high degree of ambiguity and a significant threat to an organization’s aims”. Jimerson et al. (2005, p. 5) list “school crisis interventions during the different phases of crisis event”. These are:

- Crisis preparedness (Pre-Impact Period)
- Immediate prevention (Impact Period)
- Minimizing crisis exposure (Recoil Period)
- Ensuring treatment of pre-existing conditions (Post-Impact Period)
- Crisis preparedness (Recovery/Reconstruction Period)

It is crucial for educational organizations to avoid crises because as Sandoval and Brock (2002) argue, busy places tend to be more vulnerable to chaos and crises and schools are such settings. Also, schools are places where students and staff are concentrated. According to them, students are mostly at school during daytime and might feel more distressed than adults. Hence, educational organizations are among places that are affected seriously by such crises, and it is school principals’ responsibility to manage those that have emerged due to the pandemic and their practices, actions should not be the same during usual and unusual circumstances (Akbaba-Altun, 2011; 2016).

There are several approaches for managing crises at schools. According to Can (1992), these are: notifying all stakeholders through trainings, leading a more adjustable management strategy, checking administrators’ crisis preparations, taking psychological measures, making flexible plans, sharing these plans with the personnel, and auditing them at times. The roles of school administrators while helping to get rid of the crisis situation in school (Döş & Cömert, 2012) are efficient use of chances and resources, communicating effectively, task allocation, making right decisions, persuading others easily and unbiased manner. In their studies, Döş and Cömert (2012) determined that the crisis may be caused by in school and environmental factors, and they also discovered the roles of school administrators in getting out of the crisis situation, the methods of intervention to the crisis, the crisis plan and the positive aspects of the crisis. In the study that they conducted with school administrators, they mentioned the positive aspects of the crisis as gaining experience, being ready for possible new crises, developing skills to solve possible new crises, learning from them, gaining the ability to develop foresight about next crises and identifying the weaknesses of the school. Aksoy and Aksoy (2003) classified possible causes of crises in educational institutions as crises caused by individuals, crises caused by natural disasters and crises caused by economic reasons in their article. They suggested that a crisis intervention team should

be formed at the school level and explained the responsibilities of the crisis intervention team as follows:

1. Development and implementation of the crisis response plan
2. Coordination with environmental resources
3. Training and placement
4. Revision of the program

Aksöz et al. (2008) also examined the crisis management strategies implemented by school administrators after an earthquake that took place in Turkey. When these strategies are compared with crisis management strategies and approaches, it is seen that administrators applied basic crisis management strategies.

## Methods

This study aims to discover whether school administrators had a crisis plan and, if so, how they implemented this plan during the pandemic period. In addition to considering the experiences of school administrators in this process, the other purpose of this study is to discover how the crises in the school should be managed according to the perspectives of school administrators who managed the crisis during the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, this study attempts to give answers to the research questions below:

- Did schools have a crisis plan?
- How did the administrators implement this plan –if any- in a crisis?
- What kind of changes were made in the plans?
- What did administrators do during the pandemic?
- What did administrators suggest coping with situations like COVID-19?

## *Empirical Model*

This research is a qualitative case study. A case study is a design which clarifies the way situations work by gathering details about people, social settings, events and groups (Berg, 1998). Graham (2000) claims that these situations need to be human activities in their own contexts and Yin (1994) states that researchers should choose to make use of case studies when asking *how* and *why* questions, when having very limited control over events or situations and finally when there is a real circumstance from real life.

Cases are defined by Stake (1995) as systems with precise boundaries and Elger (2010) says that each of these systems could be regarded as a research unit. A research unit can be a person or an event in a situation, process or even in an organization. In this study, the case is the pandemic itself and the study concentrates on the detailed accounts of school administrators' activities and experiences.

## *Sample*

The study, to which only school administrators (105 in total out of 29,050) from different education levels attended, was done at several state schools in different districts of the country. Most of the participants (73.3%,  $n = 77$ ) were men and some of them were women (26.7%,  $n = 28$ ). Very few participants (4.7%,  $n = 5$ ) worked at the preschool level, and others were mostly from primary

level (36.2%,  $n = 38$ ), secondary (21%,  $n = 22$ ) and high school levels (38.1%,  $n = 40$ ). Almost half (48.6%,  $n = 51$ ) of the participants had worked as an administrator for 7-18 years. A few (16.2%,  $n = 17$ ) of them had been working for 19-30 years. It can be easily inferred the participants were quite experienced. Of the participants, 40% ( $n = 42$ ) held a bachelor's degree and 56.2% ( $n = 59$ ) had a master's degree.

### **Data Collection**

Due to the current pandemic period, traditional interviews were almost impossible. And therefore, the data collection was done in April 2020 with the help of an online form. The form contained open-ended questions. Due to strict social distancing practices and measures, it was very difficult to collect data (Dodds & Hess, 2020) from participants face-to-face and qualitative researchers had to look for other ways. Consequently, online research using several platforms became inevitable and practical (Moises, 2020; Sy et al., 2020). In such research, the participants answered the questions by means of links (Barnes et al., 2021). In this research, school administrators answered the open-ended questions via various social media tools.

### **Data Analysis**

During the data analysis process, inductive method was used. In this method, intensive and detailed readings are done on the material and codes and categories emerge out of the raw data itself (Thomas, 2006) in place of collecting and analyzing data previously (Patton, 1980) so that theories can be built by working out models and making sense of ideas (Bryman, 2012). In this study, the data were coded, categorized, visualized and were finally reported with several quotations. Open coding technique was applied to determine the general categories. Open coding is defined as keeping open, going through the data in detail and nominating codes (Glaser, 1978). To do open coding, the researcher reads the material several times. When reading, pieces of concepts begin to form in the researcher's mind. In a sense, open coding is being busy forming concepts of the invisible aspects of the material. By doing so, sentences in materials become concepts and ideas (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013).

### **Findings**

In the study, the findings were grouped under two headings as the basis for research questions. First, the existence of crisis planning of school administrators and the status of implementation of these plans were given in detail. Subsequently, the opinions of school administrators on how the crisis management was made were conveyed.

#### ***Findings Regarding the Existence and Implementation of School Administrators' Crisis Plans***

School administrators were primarily asked whether they had crisis management plans. It was stated that more than half of the school administrators (53.3%,  $n = 56$ ) participating in the study had plans for crisis management and 46.7% ( $n = 49$ ) did not have any crisis plans. More than half (55%,  $n = 58$ ) of the school administrators who participated in the study answered the following questions: *Did your school have a crisis plan?* If your answer is Yes, how did you implement this plan in a crisis situation? What kind of changes have you made in your plan? When the data of those who answered this question were analyzed, it was seen that there were three categories. Of

these, 22% ( $n = 23$ ) participants remarked that they updated their plans, 19% ( $n = 20$ ) participants applied the crisis plans and 45% ( $n = 47$ ) participants made a new plan.

### *School Administrators' Reasons for Updating Plans*

It was found that school administrators' plans were updated due to pandemic conditions that closed educational institutions an extended time. Additionally, crisis plans had to be adapted to the situation, as they were too technical and standard. As a result, school administrators said they updated their crisis plans according to the new pandemic circumstances caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. An administrative view on this issue is as follows: "We adapted our plan to the conditions of COVID-19, determined what we should do, and gave responsibility to more people" Another reason school administrators cited to update their plans was the need to make changes related to the long-term interruption of education. One school administrator expressed his view on this issue as follows: "We made regulations regarding the reason that education was interrupted for a long time." Also, one reason for updating the crisis plans was that the current crisis plans were too technical and standard, and they needed to be updated according to the crisis situation. One of the views was expressed as; "Our crisis plan was generally based on earthquakes and natural disasters. We will make additions to the crisis plan such as distance education and assistance to students who do not have the necessary technology".

### *Views of School Administrators Implementing Their Plans*

School administrators mostly talked about how they implemented their plans and the problems they experienced regarding the implementation of the crisis plans. One of the school administrators stated that the Ministry of National Education sent them a letter about the pandemic and that they made their plans accordingly and therefore they easily implemented their plans. Concerning this issue, the thought of one of the school administrators is this way: "We have a crisis team, and the COVID pandemic is also included. Because in July last year, the nationwide pandemic document was sent by the Ministry of Education." The document mentioned by the participant was published on April 13, 2019. A circular numbered 30744 was published in the Official Gazette with the subject of the Global Flu Pandemic. Then, this circular was sent to all institutions in Turkey in January 2020 to have them prepare an action plan on this issue, including the Ministry of National Education.

School administrators further explained that they implemented their plans with the support of parents. Advisors indicated that they performed gradual and simple assignments while implementing their plans; they stayed in contact with stakeholders frequently and provided information; and that they were in cooperation with the crisis intervention group and the guidance service:

We held motivational interviews with parent representative groups and let them convey these interviews to our other parents and students. We had video calls from time to time and we also told the seriousness of the incident. By staying in constant contact with our teachers, students and parents.

School administrators also talked about the problems they encountered while implementing their crisis plans, which included: the people selected for the crisis response team were not suitable and certain parts of the crisis plan did not work. Some ideas were expressed as follows: "We held urgent meetings with administrators, branch and department managers and made an action plan,

and we created the technical infrastructure because the system did not work. The necessity to choose more effective people has emerged.”

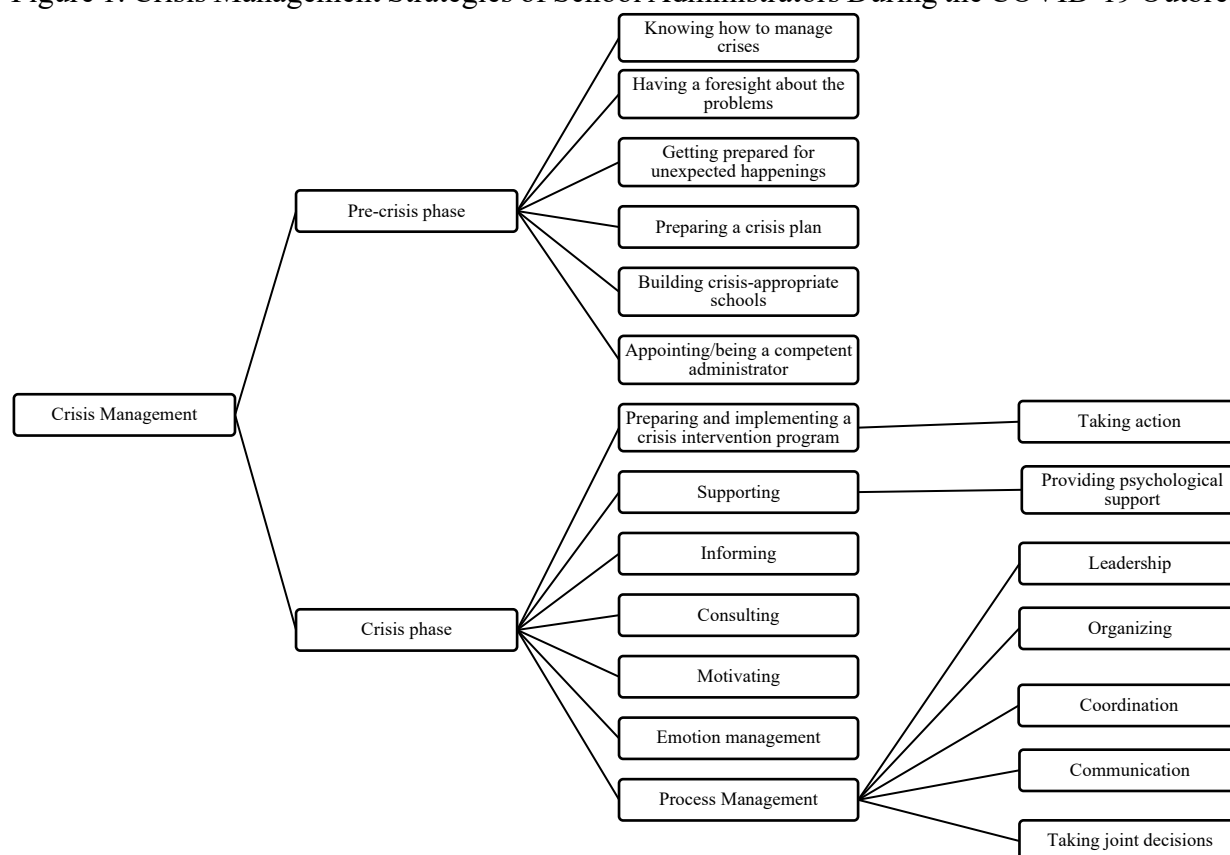
### *Views of the School Administrators Making New Plans*

Some school administrators stated that they directly created a crisis plan for the pandemic, and that they followed the instructions of the provincial/district national education directorates while creating this crisis plan. One opinion of the school administrators who participated in the study regarding the preparation and implementation of the crisis plan is expressed as: “Of course, there was no plan for the pandemic, but we learned about the latest news very quickly due to our experience in making and implementing fast decisions and our active use of social media.”

### *Findings Regarding What Administrators Should Do in Crisis Situations?*

What do you think administrators should do in such crisis situations? What did you do in this process? These questions were asked to the administrators and their views were gathered under two themes. The things to be done before the crisis and what to do during the crisis are presented in the Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Crisis Management Strategies of School Administrators During the COVID-19 Outbreak





### *The Things That Should Be Done Before the Crisis?*

The research indicated that school administrators need to know how to manage crises, prepare a crisis plan; have a foresight about the problems to be encountered in crisis situations; be prepared for unexpected events; appoint competent administrators; and have crisis-appropriate school buildings. These items all convey that school administrators have to be fully prepared for unexpected circumstances and know how to handle the situation.

***Knowing How to Manage Crises:*** Before a crisis hits educational organizations, being knowledgeable about the ways to cope with crises beforehand is utmost important. A school administrator stated that school administrators should be knowledgeable about crisis management and that it should be known who to contact in case of a crisis as follows: “He/She should be prepared in advance for the crisis, prepare the contact networks with its superiors and the environment. He should be in consultation with the parents and the relevant authorities at all times”. Another school administrator expressed that they should form a team and prepare an action plan for the crisis and implement the plan. “In order to be prepared for the crisis, they should establish a group of administrators and prepare an action plan without spending time in a crisis situation. All administrators should be in cooperation”.

***Having a Foresight Regarding the Crisis:*** School administrators should have a foresight about the crisis before the crisis, should be more open to communication, and anticipate some situations to be experienced: “The state should be able to receive information transfer from a system that considers these or similar possibilities, from the highest authority to the lowest one.”

***Getting Prepared for Unexpected Situations:*** School administrators expressed their views that they should be ready for unexpected events and also ready for possible problems they may encounter as “They should be ready for every kind of situation, analyze the course and effects of events well and it is necessary to be ready to solve all kinds of problems.”

***Preparing a Crisis Plan:*** The research indicated that development of a crisis plans prior to experiencing a crisis was important. Additionally, plans should contain multiple levels and attempt to cover all contingencies. Administrators stated in the sentences below that they should come together with stakeholders before the crisis, understand the basic principles in planning and make alternative plans for short, medium and long terms: “There must be plans A, B. In structures like us where everything is decided from the center, just do what the center says. A road map should be determined by taking the views of stakeholders.” School administrators also stated that there should be a framework plan that will form a framework for their own plans. An executive opinion on this issue is given below: “The crisis plan prepared by the Central Organization and the responsibilities outlined in this plan will increase the contribution of the administrator to the process in many ways.”

***Building Crisis-Appropriate Schools:*** It was also found that, besides preparing a crisis plan, school buildings and related infrastructure need to be suitable for unexpected circumstances. Therefore, school administrators primarily stated that schools should be built in accordance with crisis management criteria, have a technological infrastructure and that their existing structures should be changed. The idea of an administrator regarding this point is: “After a good R&D research, a pandemic action plan should be prepared and implemented throughout the country, the

structure of our schools should change, and seasonal outdoor courses should be spread throughout all months of the year.”

***Appointing / Being a Competent Administrator:*** The research also indicated that before a crisis arises, leaders and other people in charge should be capable of administrative tasks and efficient. School administrators stated their views on the appointment of competent administrators to manage the crisis and that such administrators should be “Appointing decent administrators - if you choose administrators who will work well, this question will not be necessary (if you assign competent persons to positions)”.

### *The Things That Should Be Done During the Crisis*

The other findings of the study showed that during the crisis; administrators need to prepare and implement a crisis intervention program, take the necessary actions, support and inform parents, students and teachers, consult others, when necessary, act as a motivator, manage emotions, do effective process management by forming teams, become a leader, organize, coordinate, communicate and take joint decisions. These findings are discussed in detail below.

***Preparing and Implementing a Crisis Intervention Program:*** Effective planning is indispensable during challenging times. School administrators stated that normally there should be a crisis plan, but that the plan should be reviewed in cases of a crisis, revised according to the situation and some planning should be made according to the current conditions. Some of the executive opinions on this issue are given as:

There should be correct action, direction and planning.

Creating a crisis response plan according to the situation of the region as soon as possible.

***Taking Action.*** Taking the necessary actions is one of the valuable findings of the study. In other words, being alert and do what is required is crucial during crises. School administrators expressed their views that as soon as the crisis is felt, action should be taken immediately, one of the participant comments, “They should take measures as soon as it is heard.”

***Supporting:*** The study also highlighted the importance of supporting the stakeholders. It was stated that they primarily tried to calmly support students and parents. A school administrator expressed his views on this issue as “We were calm and patient and made them feel that we were with the students and parents”.

***Psychological Support.*** It seems that during this severe pandemic period students and teachers felt depressed. As a result, school administrators remarked in the following statements that administrators should find ways to provide psychological support to teachers and students in times of crisis and help them.

They should provide psychological support by organizing weekly and live meetings with their teachers.

He should instill hope in the teachers and students under his responsibility, and constantly mention that this process will end soon.

**Informing:** In the following sentences, school administrators mentioned the importance of immediately informing students, teachers and parents about the situation. They said that in order to control the situation and to produce the solutions to the problems, the informing process should be accelerated. They also believe that quick information gave chance to analyze the situation and take the necessary actions:

They should fully control the situation, speed up the informing process.

Inform teachers and students about what to do in these situations, work on the division of tasks in the process and produce solutions with a common mind by going down to the root of the problems.

Quick information, analyzing the structure, determining what will be done and taking action.

**Consulting:** It was clear from the findings of the study that benefiting from other colleagues' experiences is useful. It was said that administrators should consult other educators in order to make the right decision in a crisis: "They should consult the educators who are sensitive, they should be able to make programs that meet the expectations of the students."

**Motivating:** Motivation became important according to the findings. They should try to maintain their educational activities by keeping their morale high and taking necessary precautions. Administrators should motivate teachers and students positively:

He should try to continue the education and training processes by taking the necessary precautions and should motivate teachers and students.

Teachers should motivate their students in a positive way.

He should keep morale and motivation high, and definitely make another plan.

**Emotion Management:** They said that administrators should manage their emotions in case of crisis. It has been stated that school administrators should be calm, pioneering, rational, patient, gathering, prudent, selfless, understanding, empathic, proactive and cool:

They must be calm, planners, pioneers, follow the instructions from the province and district.

They should deal with problems step by step without panic.

**Process Management:** They stated that in times of crisis, school administrators should plan the process well and manage it together with the team in cooperation:

They should understand the process and plan what will be done with the team.

They should manage the process calmly and rationally.

The process should be well planned and managed.

Also, it was stated that school administrators should manage the process without departing from reasoning, logic and science in the crisis management process, and do research for better quality process management:

The process should be managed without departing from reasoning, logic and science.

Research should be done on how to recover from this process at the highest quality.

*Leadership.* School administrators emphasized the importance of leadership in times of crisis. They stated that school administrators should be calm, visionary, solution-oriented, responsible and conscious in times of crisis. In addition, it was stated that administrators should know media literacy well and use social media effectively: “As a requirement of management, they should be responsible and conscious. They should know media literacy and should not participate in disinformation. They should also show confidence, precaution, understanding and practical solutions to its staff.”

*Organizing.* Organizing constitutes a large part of the crisis management and it is necessary to make the organization perfect. A school administrator said, “It is necessary to try to make the organization work perfect. Because organization business seems to be 80% of the issue to me and they should choose an understanding, loving and embracing behavior as their approach”.

*Coordination.* School administrators have stated that when there is a crisis, school administrators establish a good crisis team, coordinate the teams, and ensure coordinated work at all levels. In this regard, school administrators expressed their opinions as:

Coordinate all teams.

Coordination and effective communication should be provided.

There should be a coordinated work program from the highest to the lowest level jointly.

*Communication.* Communication has been the most emphasized by school administrators in crisis management. It was emphasized that in times of crisis, school administrators should be accessible to all stakeholders, enrich their communication channels and keep these channels open. In addition, it was emphasized that school administrators need to frequently inform parents, teachers and students about the process and establish and maintain an effective communication network. The ideas of some administrators are stated as:

They should be accessible and in communication with all stakeholders.

They should diversify and strengthen communication channels.

*Taking Joint Decisions.* The study indicated that involving other stakeholders during decision making process is one of the right things to do while managing the process. School administrators expressed that they make predictive, rational, practical and participatory decisions in times of crisis. The opinions of two administrators are given below:

Making and implementing decisions. To make and implement prudent, rational, practical and participatory decisions.

S/He should make fast, efficient, realistic and applicable decisions with the contribution of environmental samples. While implementing the decisions taken, the process should be followed up and evaluated and the plans should be revised.

## Conclusions

The social, political, economic and educational impacts of this pandemic have been widespread and are unprecedented in the modern era (Rumbley, 2020). As a result, governments, communities, and organizations all over the world are in crisis status and are searching for guidance from their leaders. “Leading an academic institution in a crisis is stressful, given that the role and the influence of the leader are magnified in times of change.” (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020, p. 3). As a result, this pandemic seems to be a test for leadership all over the world (Dirani et al., 2020).

This research paper covered how school administrators handled such crisis as well as their response practices during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, it was discovered that more than half of the school administrators who participated in the study already had plans for crisis management. And the majority of school administrators who had such crisis plans in their schools updated their plans in the pandemic. This mirrored research conducted by Yarnell et al. (2017) who claimed, leaders who are flexible and adaptive enough to learn and evolve will be able become much more ready for future challenges. Within this research it was discovered that school administrators updated their crisis plans according to the pandemic conditions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The reasons for school administrators to update their plans were stated as pandemic conditions, long-term closure of educational institutions and earlier crisis plans were too technical and standard.

“Crisis management involves multiple subjects, and they have to work together to prepare for, handle and recover from crisis” (Shangguan et al., 2020, p. 2). Therefore, school administrators in this research collaborated with stakeholders while implementing their plans. However, while implementing the crisis plans, school administrators experienced problems in with the selection of people for the crisis response team who were not suitable. Additionally, certain parts of the crisis plan did not work. Those who did not have a crisis plan, developed one directly suitable for pandemic conditions.

The research indicated that there are options related to the pre-crisis phase. School administrators primarily indicated that school administrators should know crisis management and have predictions about what crises their institution might face. In addition to these, they stated that school administrators should be ready for unexpected events. This mirrored Kezar et al. (2006) who found that to become an effective leader learning and evolving from facing significant crucibles is essential. School administrators also stated that the crisis plans of school administrators should be prepared in advance and that schools should be built with crisis management in mind. In addition, qualified school administrators should be appointed to these schools. These administrators need to be empathetic, compassionate, and flexible. This echoed the finding of Doraiswamy (2012), who indicated that showing proper leadership qualities that agree with managing crisis in educational settings is utmost important.

COVID-19 pandemic also necessitated entrepreneurial behavior (Leung et al., 2020). Similarly, school administrators said that immediately after the crisis started, they took the necessary actions. They prepared and implemented a crisis intervention program, and they supported the staff in this process, giving psychological support. “Leaders need to energize the entire university community by setting a clear direction and communicating it effectively” (Samoilovich, 2020, p. 3). As this quotation suggests, school administrators informed students, parents and teachers regarding the

process. They also consulted with other school administrators to make the right decision during the crisis. School administrators motivated teachers and students positively by keeping their morale high since “to ensure the physical and mental well-being of students and teachers, it is necessary to maintain a sense of community and common purpose” (Samoilovich, 2020, p. 3).

The findings of the study are also in tune with a prior study: Crisis conditions necessitate making quick and efficient decisions (Kuckertz et al., 2020). Therefore, new ways and approaches should be discovered which will help more creative ideas to be put into practice. Participants of the study stated that in times of crisis, school administrators should plan the process well and manage it together with the team in cooperation because when coping with a crisis, doing a kind of distributed leadership might become necessary so that an innovative impact can be applied during change periods (Holcombe & Kezar, 2017). In addition, they stated that school administrators should manage the process without leaving reason, logic and science in the crisis management process, and conduct research for better quality process management.

School administrators also stated that the administrators need to make predictive, rational, practical and participatory decisions and practices to manage the crisis well. School administrators emphasized the importance of leadership in times of crisis. They stated that school administrators should be calm, visionary, solution-oriented, responsible and conscious in times of crisis. In addition, it was stated that administrators should know media literacy well and should know how to use social media effectively as there are several tools for communication and in such crisis times, like the one during COVID-19, different kinds of communication channels need to be utilized due to the importance of information (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Participants stated that organizing constitutes a large part of the crisis management and it is necessary to make the organization perfect. In addition, it was stated by school administrators that school administrators must establish a good crisis team, coordinate the teams, and ensure coordinated work at all levels. Likewise, Samoilovich (2020) puts forward that it is appropriate to build a team to manage crises during such challenging times so as to help in all kinds of decision making.

Edmondson (2020) emphasizes leaders ought to have good communication skills and to have conversations regularly with all stakeholders during crises. Similarly, participants say that communication is the most important aspect regarding crisis management. It was emphasized that in times of crisis, school administrators should be accessible to all stakeholders, enrich their communication channels and keep these channels open. In addition, it was emphasized that school administrators frequently inform parents, teachers and students about the process and establish and maintain an effective communication network. Finally, school administrators put forward that administrators should manage their emotions in times of crisis. It has been stated that school administrators should be calm, pioneering, rational, patient, gathering, prudent, devoted, understanding, empathetic, proactive and cool.

Ratten (2020) claims that as COVID-19 pandemic is still a serious threat, it is uncertain what will happen next in global education sector. However, as our study suggests, using the most effective leadership approaches, school administrators will be able to survive this severe pandemic successfully. Therefore, we should take full advantage of the present pandemic for preparing our institutions to get ready for effectively managing potential crises in the future (Ahmed et al., 2020)

since such crises give opportunities for changing and learning rapidly (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001). In addition, if administrators would like to motivate all the staff well in the organization, they should help them plan for the future clearly and also, they should offer them an achievable point of view. What is more, they must encourage, and guide separated departments that are in charge of administration during their work routines in the organization. And most importantly, boosting the amount of communication and collaboration is one of the methods to achieve this (Samoilovich, 2020).

To sum up, the study indicated as a whole that planning, getting prepared, becoming competent, taking the necessary actions of all kinds, managing emotions and the process, coordination, communication and becoming leaders are very important both before and during the crisis period. What is more, in accordance with Kaul et al., (2020) study, administrators need to understand that before accomplishing the goals at school, pupils and school personnel must be secure both in physical and psychological terms. Therefore, supporting parents, students and other stakeholders and constructing suitable buildings and workplaces is crucial. Furthermore, we have to remember that “defeating the virus and the pandemic in general implies confronting facts” (Wodak, 2021, p. 18). And finally, there is need for more research that will deeply deal with the current problem.

## Implications

This current study has implications especially for policy makers. We hope, the findings of the study will encourage the authorities to redesign in-service training programs for school administrators, making use of the experiences portrayed in the findings. In-service training programs prepared accordingly are of great importance before and during such hard times. These programs will equip administrators with the skills that are necessary to cope with several difficulties. Furthermore, partnerships with other stakeholders and school administrators from different educational organizations should be strengthened through meetings and other occasions. Such networking will help them learn from each other and lead to a kind of unity in diversity. The study has implications also for school administrators. They will benefit from the experiences portrayed throughout the paper and design their own best practices.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study was based on a limited number of administrators from different levels of K-12 education; therefore, there are no findings about university administrators. In addition, the number of participants was limited to 105 in total. Moreover, the findings were from a Turkish context. Future studies could focus on designing a training program that will help school administrators become more experienced and knowledgeable. Such studies can try to determine the opinions of school administrators, who have experienced the COVID-19 epidemic, on the content, scope and training method of crisis management education, if it is planned.

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