

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL LEADERS

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Abstract

This systematic literature review offers valuable perspectives on the challenges faced by educational administrators amidst COVID-19, shedding light on key themes and concerns that arose during this unprecedented period. By focusing on emerging trends in school leaders' experiences, this study not only informs future research but also provides guidance for academic and educational practices. Drawing upon an analysis of 16 articles from peer-reviewed publications spanning the period from 2010 to 2021, this review provides a comprehensive overview of research themes, approaches, settings, and school management systems related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, most of the articles were published in the Journal of School Administration Research and Development, reflecting a significant scholarly interest in this topic. Additionally, almost half of the studies were conducted in the United States, indicating a geographical concentration of research efforts in this area. The analysis reveals that the primary focus of the literature centers around technological support and the professional development of teachers, highlighting the critical role of these factors in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Moreover, the predominant use of phenomenological design and structured interviews among principals and school administrators underscores the qualitative nature of much of the research in this field. While this review offers valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, including potential biases in the selection of articles and the evolving nature of the Covid-19 pandemic. Future research endeavors could consider longitudinal studies to track the long-term impacts of the pandemic on educational leadership and to identify strategies for resilience and adaptation in the face of ongoing challenges. This research contributes significantly to our understanding of the difficulties encountered by school leaders throughout the COVID-19 crisis and provides valuable insights that can inform future educational practices and policies.

Keywords, *School Leaders, School Management System, Systematic Literature Review*

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Introduction

Throughout history, humanity has grappled with various pandemics, each leaving its mark on societies. The emergence of the New Coronavirus, or COVID-19, represents one such global challenge. Designated as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020 due to its rapid spread across countries and continents (Townsend, 2020), COVID-19 has unleashed far-reaching consequences, not only in terms of public health but also in disrupting numerous aspects of daily life. Its impact on education has been particularly profound, necessitating swift and unprecedented responses from educational institutions and their leaders.

At the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, school leaders, educators, and stakeholders found themselves thrust into uncharted territory as governments mandated widespread closures of educational institutions. The abrupt halt to traditional teaching methods left many educators scrambling to adapt their practices to remote learning environments, with some struggling to meet established curriculum standards (Grissom & Condon, 2021). The shift towards virtual classrooms became the norm, facilitated by the widespread adoption of online platforms and social media for educational purposes.

In countries like the Philippines, where millions of learners and educators were affected by the crisis (Briones, 2020), the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced a range of alternative learning methods to mitigate the disruption. While options such as online learning and take-home activities were made available, many private institutions leaned heavily towards online modalities, prompting school leaders to revise their strategic plans and management systems to accommodate this transition (Obana, 2020).

The transition to distance education has prompted discussions about its efficacy and cost-effectiveness compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. While proponents argue that distance education can enhance educational access and equality, concerns linger regarding its ability to provide continuous and timely instruction, foster social interactions, and equip students with necessary technical resources (Kavrayci & Kesim, 2021). Effective distance education programs are deemed essential for the success of the education system, requiring careful consideration of individual learning needs and attitudes towards remote learning.

The COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the necessity for strong crisis management in the education sector, forcing leaders to adeptly handle unparalleled disruptions worldwide. Unlike localized crises that school leaders are accustomed to addressing, the pandemic has exposed systemic flaws in educational systems and administrative preparedness for crisis management (Townsend, 2020). As such, this systematic literature review aims to shed light on the experiences of school leaders amidst the pandemic, providing insights into the impact on school management systems and the delivery of education.

Ultimately, the COVID-19 crisis has challenged the strength and flexibility of educational systems globally, leading educators and leaders to reconsider conventional approaches to teaching and learning. While the transition to distance education has brought about its share of challenges, it has also opened doors to innovative approaches that have the potential to reshape the future of education. Examining the experiences of school leaders during this

unprecedented crisis, people gained valuable insights into the evolving landscape of education and the imperative for proactive crisis leadership in safeguarding the continuity of learning for future generations. Thus, this systematic literature review aimed to expose and analyze the experiences of school leaders concerning the effects of the pandemic on their school management systems and the delivery of education.

Statement of Objectives

The aim of this systematic literature review was to analyze and assess the research topics, methods, settings, and different challenges and opportunities experienced by school leaders, published from the year 2010 to 2021. Specifically, this review aimed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Determine the research methods that have been used on the peer-reviewed articles about school management during Covid-19, published from 2010-2021;
2. Determine research trends in terms of objectives, themes, respondents, and data collections; and
3. Present the analysis of the previous studies about the experiences of school leaders in school management during Covid-19, published from 2010-2021.

Previous studies

In recent years, numerous review studies have aimed to explore and share insights into the evolving understanding of how school leaders are addressing the impact of COVID-19 on educational systems. The COVID-19 pandemic is fundamentally reshaping the landscape of education and leadership. With the reopening of schools, administrators and educators are faced with the challenges of implementing distance learning and integrating technology into education (Aytaç, 2020). Given the rapid rate of change, school leaders must inspire their communities to adapt to the necessary adjustments (Northouse, 2019). Crisis management emerges as a core competency for school managers in these uncertain times. Effective managers and principals are not merely problem solvers; they are actively engaged in crisis management, emphasizing cooperation and support (Grissom & Condon, 2020).

Amidst widespread social isolation and uncertainty, school leaders are tasked with promoting social connectivity measures. Strengthening individual resilience during crises involves facilitating social connectivity through virtual platforms and engaging the community in making sense of current events. Enhanced resilience fosters resourcefulness, adaptability, and stability (Kuntz et al., 2017; Teo et al., 2017). School leaders are encouraging their communities to view these challenges as opportunities for growth, emphasizing adaptive resilience and deepening social connections through collaborative leadership and support. To navigate rapid change effectively, school administrators, educators, and students must maintain a focus on learning, foster creative thinking, and develop innovative solutions (Northouse, 2019; Hsieh et al., 2014).

To effectively manage uncertainty and steer educational institutions toward future-oriented goals, it is essential to embrace significant changes driven by technological resources and skilled personnel. Initiating transformative processes within schools requires the implementation of educational leadership. Unlike traditional educational approaches, leadership in today's information society demands a readiness to undertake new and

challenging responsibilities amidst shifting paradigms, all aimed at achieving long-term objectives. In essence, educational leadership entails the capacity to offer fresh perspectives that align with societal expectations amid evolving conditions (Mackay & Bertaini, 2016; Robinson & Aronica, 2015).

According to Thornton (2021), school authorities dedicated significant effort in the initial stages of the pandemic to transitioning from face-to-face instruction to technology-driven learning methods. Amidst the crisis, they swiftly and thoughtfully explored various options and anticipated outcomes (Netolicky, 2020). Towards the end of the pandemic-affected school year, principals prioritized ensuring that students had access to necessary devices and that teachers received adequate support for online instruction. Additionally, addressing staffing challenges arising from employees unable to work prior to lockdown was another pressing issue. Concerns regarding student safety, well-being, the uncertain duration of physical school closures, and financial matters were also highlighted.

Moreover, as highlighted by Epps et al. (2021), educators recognized the difficulties encountered by both parents and children amidst the crisis, although they did not anticipate that students would approach online learning in the same way as they did traditional classroom settings. Nevertheless, they demonstrated a willingness to depart from conventional classroom approaches to accommodate the transition to the new distance learning (DL) environment. Parents, in turn, expressed gratitude for the prompt and seamless shift to online learning facilitated by school administration and teaching personnel.

During the initial phases of the transition to distance learning (DL), parents underwent a shift in their perceptions of their roles and acknowledged instances of over-assisting their children. This trend of decreased student independence in DL was also observed during the pandemic (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Offering guidance to parents on how to support their children's education could prove beneficial (Doucet et al., 2020). Some parents expressed dissatisfaction with their perceived lack of qualifications as teachers, which led them to inadvertently provide excessive assistance to their children, potentially hindering their progress. Secondary educators perceived parents as less involved in supporting their children's learning, with older children generally displaying greater self-sufficiency and requiring less parental aid.

Epps, Brown, Nijjar, and Hyland (2021) found that stakeholders raised concerns about children's academic progress during distance learning (DL), a sentiment echoed by other studies. There was a discussion about the potential for academic decline and the likelihood that more students might need extra support, although this concern might not become evident until later. Niemi and Koussa (2020) suggest that evaluating the true extent of learning under the forced shift to DL is currently challenging, making it difficult to ascertain its academic impact.

Townsley (2021) also emphasized the urgent need to address a critical issue: how to manage student grading during the pandemic. Grades hold considerable importance for high school students, often influencing post-secondary admissions, scholarships, and financial aid decisions.

Given the unprecedented circumstances, secondary schools implemented "do no harm" grading systems, including actions such as freezing prior grades, adopting pass-fail grading in lieu of letter grades, and providing students with a choice between these alternatives (Doyme & Gonchar, 2020; Goldstein, 2020). With the prospect of remote and hybrid learning in future semesters (Hubler et al., 2020; Meckler, 2020), it becomes imperative for school leaders to establish a transparent grading policy.

In the context of hybrid or remote learning, it is advisable for letter grades to reflect the extent to which students have mastered a prioritized set of course objectives or standards (Iamarino, 2014; Knight & Cooper, 2019).

Secondary educators can offer students opportunities to demonstrate their progress towards learning objectives, such as by substantiating claims with textual evidence.

An ideal practice for schools involves distinguishing between non-cognitive behaviors, such as homework completion and engagement, and academic performance in their reporting. This method, supported by various scholars (Knight & Cooper, 2019; Reeves et al., 2017), offers the potential for a clearer understanding of student learning. However, accurately evaluating these behaviors within flexible delivery models presents challenges. Hence, it becomes increasingly critical in such contexts to separate or exclude non-cognitive activities to precisely reflect students' learning. Failure to differentiate between non-cognitive activities and academic learning could lead to "hodgepodge grading," where the significance of grades becomes uncertain (Brookhart, 1991).

School administrators should establish a grading system that prioritizes students' learning achievements over the timing of their learning, as advocated by Knight & Cooper (2019) and Reeves et al. (2017). In remote settings, disruptions to learning are inevitable, requiring instructors to be flexible in adjusting assignment deadlines. Additionally, schools may consider adopting adaptable assessment methods, as suggested by Wormeli (2011), particularly when students have not met learning objectives by the designated deadline.

Moreover, as highlighted by ZİNCİRLİ (2021), the primary concerns during the ongoing COVID-19 situation revolved around issues such as Internet connectivity, inadequate technological infrastructure, and a shortage of computers and tablets. Deficiencies in school internet infrastructure were particularly pronounced, as noted by Kavrayc & Kesim (2021). School officials and principals also underscored the impact of students' poverty, which limits their access to computers, the Internet, and even television, thereby negatively affecting the educational process (Kavrayc & Kesim, 2021).

As reported by National Center for Education Statistics, around 14% of K–12 students do not have internet access at home, leading to nearly 9 million children being unable to complete their school assignments (USA Facts, 2020). In response to this issue, several school districts have partnered with internet service providers to offer free or discounted internet access to students. Additionally, some districts are supplying students with devices and hotspots, while others are providing printed learning materials to reduce their reliance on internet access alone (Noonoo, 2020). Kearney and Levine (2015) propose that public television broadcasts could be a valuable resource for delivering instructional content to students who lack internet access.

Moreover, most school administrators have noted that teachers exhibited reluctance to conduct live sessions or utilize other online tools, citing various reasons. Consequently, their motivation progressively declined throughout the research period. During the pandemic, teachers may find themselves unfamiliar with available internet tools and resources, as well as effective instructional strategies, highlighting the need for ongoing guidance (Aytaç, 2020). School administrators stress that without this support, achieving proficient process management is unattainable (TEDMEM, 2020). According to Aytaç's (2020) findings, factors contributing to teachers' diminished motivation in the educational process include low digital learning-teaching competencies, inadequate information technology tools, and a lack of legal enforcement for conducting live lessons.

School administrators, a critical segment responsible for ensuring the proper delivery of education and training services in schools, have played a pivotal role in maintaining the continuity of distance education. As our educational system increasingly integrates distance learning as a fundamental component, it becomes more reliant on technological infrastructure. However, the effectiveness of remote education has been hindered by the

technological landscape of our educational system and the limited availability of internet connectivity, particularly in rural regions of our country (ZNCRL, 2021). The internet emerges as the cornerstone of distance education, emphasizing the need for improved access and infrastructure to realize its full potential.

The surge in individuals' internet usage, particularly during the pandemic, has also emboldened certain malicious actors, posing a significant cybersecurity concern. Addressing these threats has become imperative for remote education environments, underscoring the need for proactive security measures. School administrators must take decisive action to safeguard against these risks and ensure the integrity and security of online learning platforms.

School administrators and educators are encouraged to not only acquire the technical competencies essential for distance education but also to remain attentive to the unique requirements of their school community. According to Ehren and colleagues (2021), it is crucial for them to recognize local values and cultivate educational partnerships with parents and communities. This strategy ensures an inclusive and effective approach to addressing the learning impediments and socio-emotional hurdles encountered by children during the pandemic.

Moreover, fostering student rapport with instructors, safeguarding children's welfare, and alleviating stress among students and their parents were pivotal in resolving challenges associated with school closures faced by school administrators, as noted by Yoder et al. (2020). Thornton (2021) highlights that administrators who displayed empathy towards both students and staff during the New Zealand school lockdown and prioritized well-being over academics received commendations from the community. Every participant unanimously affirmed that frequent and transparent communication with stakeholders, including students, parents, staff, and colleagues from other schools, was indispensable for effective crisis management. While principals are obligated to uphold daily communication, the significance of schools as crucial hubs expanded significantly before and during the lockdown.

Given this, it is not surprising that principals, as noted by Stone-Johnson and Weiner (2020), are essential frontline figures, as they address social issues, uphold student morale, and liaise with parents regarding matters such as school operations and closures. While juggling external expectations and demands, principals, in their capacity as school administrators, underscored the importance of adaptability and versatility. Beauchamp et al. (2020), in their research across four regions of the United Kingdom, found that during and after school closures, principals encountered a deluge of information from various regulatory bodies and social media platforms, necessitating swift decision-making at the school level.

The advent of COVID-19 is anticipated to herald a fresh educational philosophy and demand innovative approaches to school administration. Within this new educational paradigm, school principals will need to cultivate collaborative school cultures and nurture connections among staff, with their effectiveness and leadership qualities in management processes taking on heightened importance (Harris, 2020).

Harris (2020) underscores the significance of "distributed leadership" as the primary mode of operation amidst the myriad challenges confronting school leaders (324). Given the exhaustion experienced by many, Harris and Jones (2020, 246) assert that "distributed leadership" has evolved into the default response in this modern crisis and suggest that it is essential for survival. Consequently, school leaders find themselves assuming additional planning and leadership responsibilities that were previously shared among staff members in pre-COVID environments.

Amidst the COVID-19 process, they must fulfill these responsibilities utilizing a diverse range of web applications, platforms, and technology (Pollock, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated significant changes in leadership and leadership techniques. Principals now manage their schools in unprecedented ways, guiding parents, instructors, and students remotely from their laptops. This form of leadership, which maintains distance between students and instructors, is characterized by stress and anxiety (Harris, 2020).

According to Kavrayıcı & Kesim (2021), amidst the pandemic, which constitutes a crisis moment, school principals have demonstrated selflessness, engaging in proactive measures and leveraging available resources. Staff members have been directed to work remotely to sustain educational programs. School principals have prioritized communication and coordination, utilizing various channels such as WhatsApp groups, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, email groups, SMS, school websites, and social media profiles to maintain ongoing contact. Additionally, they have focused on designing and coordinating courses, as well as overseeing instructional procedures like virtual exhibitions and online project management. Their goal has been to develop an effective and efficient crisis management approach based on available resources and opportunities.

During the pandemic, technology leadership and crisis management skills are deemed crucial, and it is imperative to bolster capabilities in these domains (Aytaç, 2020). The attributes and functions associated with quality education, effective schools, proficient management, and exemplary teaching are all poised to undergo transformation post-pandemic. Digital learning is expected to not only complement but also replace traditional face-to-face instruction. In the near future, the COVID-19 pandemic is projected to hasten the expansion of digital learning, potentially establishing it as the primary educational framework worldwide (Douglas, 2020).

To enhance capacity within a virtual learning environment, school administrators should prioritize professional development for all educators. Moreover, they should foster networks, exchange successful strategies employed in their schools, and collaborate with other educational leaders to address challenges (Anderson, 2020). In turbulent environments, like those encountered during crises such as pandemics, schools must develop and refine their adaptive responses to novel conditions. This highlights the importance of school principals continually improving their problem-solving skills as leaders (Alk, Sezgin, & Alk, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical role of educational leaders in navigating crises and ensuring the continuity of learning. However, challenges such as rapid shifts to remote learning, technological infrastructure deficits, and the need for effective crisis communication have highlighted gaps in leadership preparedness. Despite the indispensable role of educational leaders during crises, there is a notable gap in comprehensive leadership development programs tailored to crisis management in the context of pandemics. School administrators and leaders often lack specialized training and support to effectively navigate the complexities of crisis response, particularly in rapidly evolving digital learning environments.

Methodologies

This paper employed a systematic review approach, which involves summarizing quantitative or qualitative research literature through clear and reproducible methods for identifying relevant studies. Additionally, it encompasses objective procedures for analyzing and synthesizing academic findings (Cooper, 2010, as cited in Bernard, Borokhovski, & Tamim, 2014). To ensure a systematic review process, this study adhered to Cooper's (2010) seven-step framework, as delineated by Bernard et al. (2014), for conducting systematic reviews or meta-analyses:

1. Define the research problem;
2. Conduct a literature search;
3. Collect data from studies;
4. Assess study quality;
5. Analyze and integrate research findings;
6. Analyze the evidence; and
7. Present your findings

Instead of being entirely separate or distinct, these phases should be seen as pivotal checkpoints within an ongoing and cyclical process (Cooper, 2010, as referenced in Bernard et al., 2014). Crucially, these steps are not isolated; they are interconnected and iterative, permitting ongoing improvement and modification throughout the review process. Researchers continuously return to earlier phases, integrating new perspectives and adapting methodologies as required to uphold the strength and applicability of the review outcomes.

Literature Search

The next phase of a systematic review involves conducting a thorough literature search. The search was focused on peer-reviewed academic journals to facilitate more efficient source comparison. Two specific databases were chosen based on this literature review: Aklatang Emilio Aguinaldo (AEA) and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Initially, a search was conducted using keywords such as "new normal," "school management," "COVID-19," and "school leaders," and the results were evaluated against the predetermined inclusion criteria:

1. Must have been published between January 2010 and October 2021 in a peer-reviewed journal;
2. The article must be written in English or have an English translation; and
3. The article's complete text must be freely available or accessible through the researchers' institutional library subscriptions.

The initial search was conducted in the AEA database, which yielded 170 results from papers published between 2010 and 2021 using keywords such as "new normal," "school management," "COVID-19," and "school leaders." After filtering out non-peer-reviewed sources and non-English texts without translations, 40 results remained. However, 14 articles were inaccessible, leaving 26 articles for further evaluation. Of these, 33 did not meet the predetermined criteria, resulting in only 7 articles or journals being retained.

Subsequently, the ERIC database was searched using the same keywords and publication timeframe. Following similar exclusion criteria and encountering access issues with some articles, 9 peer-reviewed journals were identified as meeting the requirements. Overall, this process yielded a total of 16 peer-reviewed journals: 7 from AEA and 9 from ERIC.

Information Gathering

The third and fourth steps in conducting a review involve collecting information from peer-reviewed journals and assessing the quality of the studies to ensure their thoroughness and dependability. In this study, the 16

identified journals were systematically arranged, including bibliographic details such as article title, authors, journal, abstract, keywords, year of publication, and DOI.

Moreover, the review process utilized eleven assessment categories drawn from prior studies by Hwang and Tsai (2011), Wu et al. (2012), Baran (2014), and Bozkurt et al. (2015). These categories covered aspects like research purpose, subject, theoretical background, research method, design, data collection approach, target population, learning domain, context, type of device, and country. However, two categories, specifically "theoretical/conceptual framework" and "type of device," were excluded from this literature analysis as they were not found in the examined journals.

Research Analysis

In the fifth phase of the systematic content review process, the study findings are analyzed and integrated. Content analysis was employed to scrutinize the data in this study. According to Elo & Kyngäs (2008), content analysis is a method of examining documents that allows researchers to explore theoretical issues to gain a deeper understanding of the facts. By employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, bibliometric and categorical data can be used to identify trends in content analysis (Hung & Zhang, 2012). The evidence is interpreted, and the results are presented in steps 6 and 7 of the systematic content review process.

Results

This presented the important data of this systematic literature review regarding: publications where the peer-reviewed journals were published; countries where the peer-reviewed journals were conducted; purposes of the peer-reviewed journals; coded themes; research designs used; data collection; population groups; and research settings.

Publications

The 16 peer-reviewed articles were distributed across 9 distinct journals. Table 1 displays the distribution of articles from each journal included in this systematic literature review.

Table 1.

Distribution of Journals

Rank	Name of Journals	Count	%
1	Journal of School Administration Research and Development	5	32
2	Educational Administration Theory and Practice	3	19
3	Educational Management Administration and Leadership	2	13
6.5	Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education	1	6
6.5	Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology	1	6
6.5	Irish Educational Studies	1	6
6.5	International Journal of Advance Research and Innovative Ideas	1	6
6.5	Online Learning Journal	1	6
6.5	European Journal of Educational Sciences	1	6
TOTAL		16	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of articles from journals utilized in this systematic literature review. It is apparent from the table that the Journal of School Administration Research and Development contributed the highest number of peer-reviewed journals. This was followed by Educational Administration Theory and Practice and Educational Management Administration and Leadership.

Countries

A total of seven (7) countries were represented in this literature review, encompassing both industrialized and developing nations. The affiliation of the researchers was not considered in categorizing countries. The United States of America (7 studies), Turkey (4), the United Kingdom (1), the United Arab Emirates (1), Northern Ireland (1), New Zealand (1), and the Philippines (1) were the countries with the highest number of studies included. Notably, the United States of America and Turkey contributed the most studies to this analysis. Please refer to the Table below:

Table 2.

Distribution of Countries

Rank	Name of Journals	Count	%
1	United States of America (USA)	7	44
2	Turkey	4	26
5	United Kingdom (UK)	1	6
5	United Arab of Emirates (UAE)	1	6
5	Northern Ireland	1	6
5	New Zealand	1	6
5	Philippines	1	6
TOTAL		16	100

Research Purposes

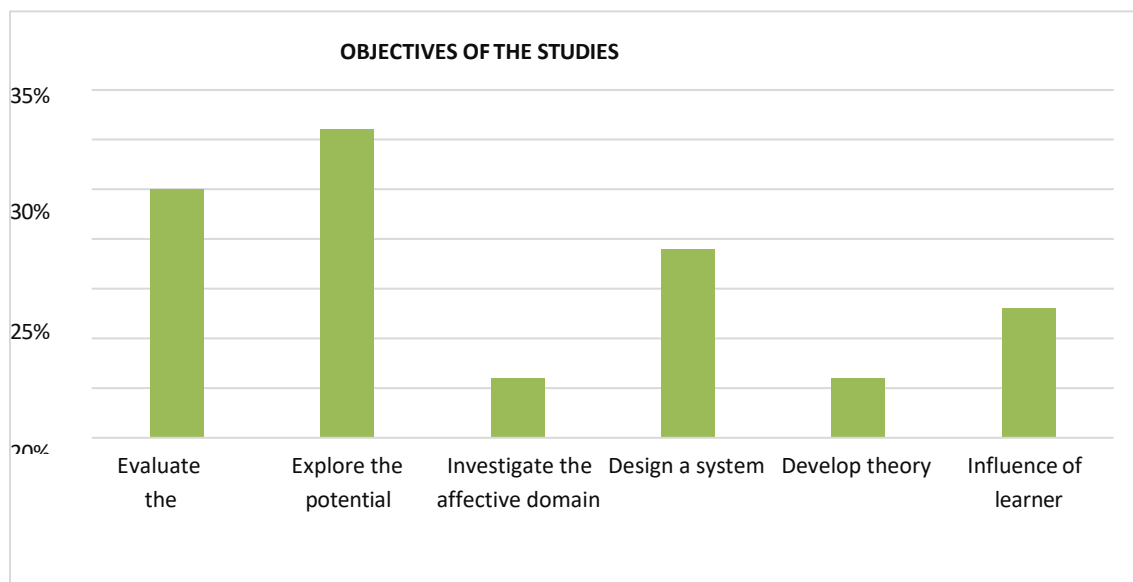
Each article was categorized based on its research purpose, using the framework introduced by Wu et al. (2012). The original four purposes were: (1) evaluating effectiveness; (2) designing an effective management approach; (3) investigating the affective domain; or (4) assessing the influence of learner characteristics. A similar classification was suggested by Hsu and Ching (2015). Additionally, the researcher introduced two additional categories for this study: (5) Developing Theory and (6) Exploring Potential, aiming to fully encompass all possible research objectives. These categories were subsequently defined as:

1. *Evaluate the effects.* Examines the challenges encountered by school administrators amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. *Explore the potential.* Investigates the experiences of school stakeholders during the crisis of distance learning (DL).
3. *Investigate the affective domain.* Explores factors such as motivation, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and values.

4. *Design a system.* Analyzes the leadership and planning strategies utilized by school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. *Develop theory.* Generates or advances new pedagogical approaches, models, theories, or frameworks in the "new normal."
6. *Influence of learner characteristics in the learning process.* Studies the impact of learner attributes such as age, gender, ability, experience, learning style, and environment on the learning process.

Figure 1.

Distribution of studies by research objectives



As shown in Figure 1, the predominant research purpose was identified as exploring the potential (31%), followed by evaluating the effects (25%), and designing a system (19%). Comparatively, these results align closely with those of Kesim (2021), indicating a similar trend where exploring the potential ranked highest, followed by evaluating the effects. However, it is noteworthy that studies delving into the affective domain and developing theories (6%)—previously less common research purposes—have gained increased attention during this period.

Themes

The categorization of studies is influenced by the researchers' areas of interest, leading to a diverse range of topics across the studies (Parsons, 2014). Some researchers segmented the impacts of the new normal on schools into separate categories. Figure 2 shows the distribution of study themes from 2010 to 2021. While many studies covered overlapping topics, each article was categorized into multiple key themes for this assessment. The most common research theme focused on technological support and professional development of teachers (12%), followed by effective communications and social connectedness (11%), and developing innovations and inspiring communities (9%).

Figure 2.

Distribution of studies by research themes

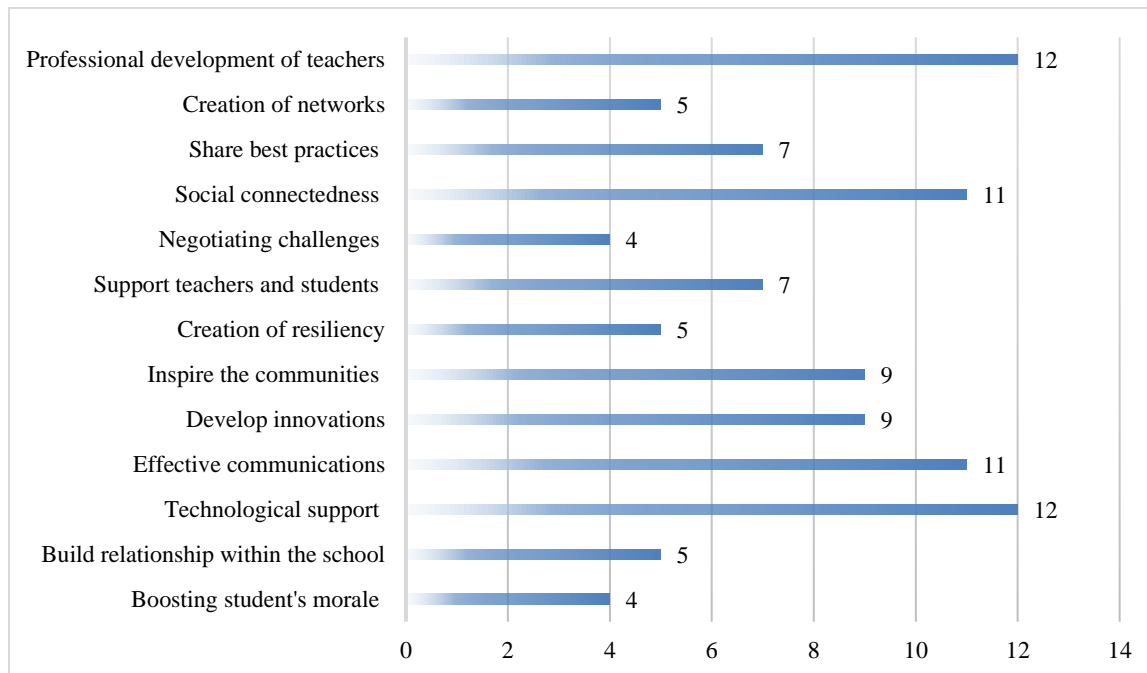


Figure 2 shows the highest proportion of themes pertained to technological support and the professional development of teachers. This finding resonates with Bagwell's (2021) assertion that school administrators were compelled to reassess the extent of change required to aid teachers and students in adapting to new technology and technical skills for virtual teaching and learning environments. Similarly, Kavrayıcı & Kesim (2021) stressed the importance of school administrators possessing technology leadership qualities, such as proficiency in social media management, online readiness, and online project management, along with the necessity of providing training and professional development opportunities for teachers and faculty members.

In the context of the pandemic, providing teachers with training in technological innovations and practices is a pressing need, and their expertise in these areas should be strengthened. Post-pandemic, the landscape of education, schools, management, and teaching roles is expected to undergo transformation. Digital learning is poised to become the cornerstone of education, whether as a supplement or a substitute for face-to-face learning. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital learning is anticipated to expand and become the primary learning modality globally in the foreseeable future (Douglas, 2020).

Effective communication and social connectivity accounted for 11% of the response. Platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet were utilized for regular staff briefings and senior leadership team meetings, with

various strategies employed to engage personnel (Thorton, 2021). Many respondents highlighted how online social connections boosted staff morale. In larger schools, individual departments managed this, while in smaller schools, all staff members were connected through a single app. Isla described how the WhatsApp group she created provided both crucial social connection and enjoyment during a challenging period.

Furthermore, principals recognized the invaluable nature of their community engagement skills, with many taking leadership roles in organizing social services to ensure children's well-being and security. Mutch (2020) emphasizes the significance of schools in their communities due to their close ties with families, suggesting that this role becomes even more vital during crises. While schools may offer physical shelter during natural disasters like earthquakes, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this aid took the form of coordinating resources and services, as well as providing emotional support. According to Mutch (2020), schools can help communities refocus and demonstrate how to move forward with determination and optimism. The importance of presenting "a clear understanding of the problem" and "how they intend to lead their community out of it" has also been underscored (Boin et al., 2013).

Many participants emphasized the need for flexibility, adaptability, and enthusiastic leadership throughout the lockdown. Flexibility was demonstrated when adjustments to online learning were made in response to feedback from students and their families, such as transitioning to synchronous engagement only in the mornings rather than throughout the day. Other principals requested that teachers reduce the frequency of emails following student complaints about the volume of correspondence.

Research Designs

The table below shows the types of research methodologies (approaches) and designs being used in the 16 selected studies.

Table 3.

Distributions of Studies According to Research Designs

Methods	Designs	Count	%
Quantitative	Survey	3	18.75
Qualitative	Phenomenological	5	31.25
	Literature Review	2	12.5
	Grounded Theory	1	6.25
	Case Study	3	18.75
	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	1	6.25
Mixed Method	Sequential Exploratory	1	6.25
TOTAL		16	100

Studies on school management systems during COVID-19 predominantly employed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed research methods, like other fields in education (Bozkurt et al., 2015). In this review, researchers investigating school management systems across various educational levels primarily utilized qualitative research (75%), followed by quantitative research (19%), with a smaller proportion of studies employing mixed methods (6%). These findings suggest that most peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2021 aimed to provide

an in-depth understanding of the experiences of school leaders during crises like COVID-19. It is noteworthy that a significant number of articles were conducted between 2019 and 2021.

In addition to the research method, the study design can also be examined within each approach. The research classification methods were adapted from Bozkurt et al. (2015) and Creswell et al. (2009). Among quantitative investigations, descriptive surveys were the most employed research design (3 out of 16). Table 3 further shows that phenomenological research design (5) was the most frequently utilized qualitative approach, followed by case study (3), literature review (2), grounded theory (2), and IPA (1). A sequential exploratory study emerged as the most popular mixed-methods research approach (1).

Data Collection

Table 4.

Distributions of Studies According to Data Collection Instruments

Instruments	Counts	%
Survey	3	18
Structured Interview	9	56
Focus Group Interview	2	13
Semi-structured Interview	2	13
TOTAL	16	100

Data collection methods were also investigated in this study. Methods were coded into four categories, adapted from Song (2014) and Cheung and Hew (2009). Table 4 shows that the most common method used was a structured interview (56%), followed by a survey (18%), and lastly, a focus group interview and a semi-structured interview (13%).

Population Groups

Table 5.

Distributions of Studies According to Data Collection Instruments

Population Groups	Counts	%
Principal	12	28
School Administrators	12	28
Teachers	9	21
Staff	4	9
Students	3	7
Parents	3	7
TOTAL	43	100

After analyzing the 16 peer-reviewed journals and articles, it was found out that most of them used the combination of principals and school administrators as respondents since they are the ones who have direct control

over the school management systems. Some studies get teachers as respondents, followed by staff, students, and parents.

Research Settings

Figure 3.

Distributions of Studies According to Settings

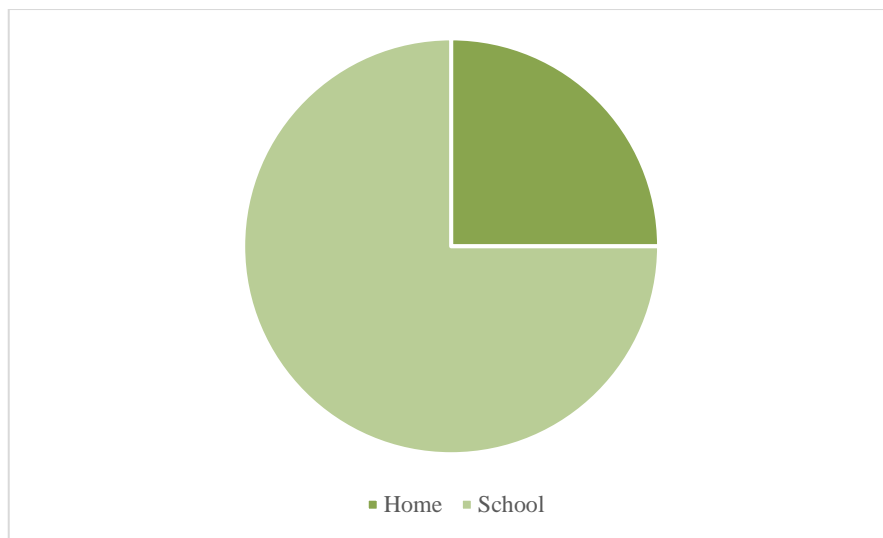


Figure 3 shows the distribution of research settings. Most of the studies were done inside the schools, and a minority were done at home.

Discussions

This literature review analysis aimed to analyze the experiences of school leaders in implementing their school management systems amidst pandemics.

While some administrators viewed remote education as a positive experience, most administrators saw it as a negative experience because of the challenges they faced. During the pandemic phase, the elimination of education process interruptions through remote education led to a favorable impression of distant education among administrators. Closing schools during the COVID-19 process was a smart decision, according to research, and resulted in a swift transition to online instruction, which pre-service teachers welcomed (Beauchamp, Hulme, Clarke, Hamilton, & Harvey, 2021).

Another good point of view among school administrators was that distance education prevented transmission that might occur in schools and thus reduced the number of cases. During the pandemic, it was discovered that the distance education procedure led to the development of technological talents in both school administrators and teachers. In addition to these findings, school administrators stated that distance education

allowed them to have more schedule flexibility and control over their students' educational activities. Along with the positive feedback, it was observed that some school administrators considered that online education activities during the COVID-19 outbreak were not as successful as face-to-face instruction. The lack of proper technical infrastructure and platforms for distant education was determined to be another factor leading to low efficiency because of this research. Internet connection and technological challenges are widespread concerns in remote education, according to the study's findings, and these issues have a negative impact on the process (Brown, O'Hara, McNamara, Skerritt, & Shevlin, 2021). According to school administrators who were skeptical of the method, distance education activities increased administrators' workload and required their technological personal improvement. Another reason for the negative reviews was the potential for security issues to arise because of the utilization of remote education platforms over the Internet.

As a result of the analysis, additional studies with similar or divergent findings were identified. Another investigation involving school administrators revealed a variety of challenges encountered during the implementation of distance education. According to this study's results, administrators encountered issues such as technical shortcomings, planning mistakes, and deficiencies in communication and information flow during online educational processes. The majority of these challenges stemmed from breakdowns in communication. Additionally, teachers expressed concerns that students who were unable to attend physical school would face social and psychological difficulties and miss out on acquiring essential values and social behaviors typically gained through face-to-face instruction.

School administrators can be categorized as those who remained at the forefront among all school personnel throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating their challenges in addressing distance education issues. Examination of school administrators' perspectives on these challenges revealed that the most significant issues revolved around the lack of technical infrastructure and remote instructional equipment, such as personal computers (PCs) and tablets. Challenges also arose due to the impractical expectation that all educators possess technological expertise in distance education. Insufficient internet connectivity and limited economic opportunities in remote areas exacerbated the shortage of tablets or computers, resulting in difficulties with distance education. Furthermore, the expectation for every student to have access to a computer or tablet proved unrealistic. This issue could potentially be alleviated through government-supported device assistance initiatives established in recent years. Another study, involving teachers, explored the obstacles encountered in distance education. Teachers expressed wariness toward distance education due to inadequate technical infrastructure and insufficient interaction opportunities.

According to the administration, other issues include teachers' technological inadequacy in distant education and students' lack of enthusiasm for courses. These issues have a negative impact on remote education's efficiency. Another consequence was that conducting practice-based and laboratory-based courses was challenging. In this context, enhancing the content of distance education could be a solution. Another issue raised by school administrators was the difficulty of conducting assessments and evaluations via remote education, particularly when considering teacher input. One of the most significant causes of this difficulty was the inability to conduct multidimensional evaluation exams, particularly in application-oriented courses.

Another issue raised by school administrators was that in face-to-face instruction, student motivation was generated by efficient communication, but during the pandemic, this was not possible. According to a study, during

the COVID-19 pandemic, effective contact between students and teachers could not be created, resulting in a drop in distance education efficiency (Schaffer & Perez, 2020).

Another study highlighted that the primary challenges in distance education revolved around issues concerning hardware and software, internet accessibility, and a lack of technical knowledge and devices. The absence of essential technology, such as tablets and desktop computers, emerged as the most significant obstacle to attending live courses. Connectivity issues, particularly during live classes, compounded problems due to time constraints. School administrators' limited technical proficiency, teachers' restricted internet access, inadequate internet infrastructure in school locations, and the absence of devices among students and some teachers were identified as factors disrupting distance education.

Administrators' comprehensive assessments of the COVID-19 pandemic process and their understanding of the associated concerns spurred them to provide directions for potential solutions to expedite progress. Enhancing internet infrastructure investments and providing PCs and tablets to students were seen as effective measures to improve the efficiency of distance education. Moreover, it was believed that increased financial resources dedicated to distance education activities during the pandemic would yield positive outcomes. School administrators also anticipated greater student engagement and increased contributions from families, resulting in enhanced efficiency. Recognizing the widespread impact of the pandemic on both students and the general population, guidance and counseling activities were deemed beneficial, especially for children facing difficulties. These activities could be further optimized by tailoring them to accommodate individual differences. Additionally, students stand to benefit from the enhanced comprehensibility of online education courses, particularly when enriched course materials align closely with the curriculum.

Furthermore, the delivery of remote education in a virtual setting necessitates the implementation of security measures, as highlighted by school officials. They assert that distance education would be more efficient if school administrators implemented cybersecurity safeguards. Additionally, instructors reported that the COVID-19 outbreak prompted them to enhance their technical skills in distance education, resulting in a positive impact on their technological utilization (Aytac, 2020).

As life returns to normal after the pandemic, virtual education activities as a complement to face-to-face schooling have proven to be beneficial. School officials advocate for hybrid education, which combines face-to-face and distance learning, as the future educational model. Future educational strategies must incorporate distance education, underscoring the need for research that considers scientific insights into the process. School administrators' perspectives on reducing education spending and addressing unexpected scenarios in distance education were also sought. Moreover, broader adoption of distance education is expected to catalyze a digital transformation in education, leading to increased reliance on technology in the future. Consequently, all stakeholders involved in the distance education process should enhance their technological skills.

Distance education will inevitably impact the curriculum in the future. School administrators evaluated these scenarios as prospective outlooks for distance education. Students also perceive the hybrid education paradigm favorably. According to a study, students prefer both face-to-face and distance learning modalities (Bishop-Monroe et al., 2021). Although distance education is anticipated to gain popularity over time, it will present both advantages and disadvantages. School administrators, being fundamental components of education, should develop competencies conducive to distance learning as part of this evolving process.

Conclusions

While some administrators expressed positive views on remote education, the majority faced significant challenges. The decision to transition to online instruction was generally regarded as wise, resulting in a swift adaptation to virtual learning environments. However, concerns regarding technical infrastructure, online platforms, and internet connectivity posed obstacles to the efficiency of distance education. A common theme among administrators was the positive impact of remote education on developing technological skills among both educators and students. Nonetheless, issues such as increased workload, security concerns, and difficulties in assessing student performance were prevalent. Furthermore, disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity highlighted the need for equitable solutions to ensure all students have equal opportunities for remote learning. Despite these challenges, administrators expressed optimism about the potential of distance education in the post-pandemic era, advocating for hybrid educational models that combine face-to-face instruction with remote learning. They emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development for educators and investment in internet infrastructure to support effective distance education. The findings of this review underscore the critical role of technological support and professional development in addressing the challenges of remote education. While qualitative research methodologies provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of school leaders, future studies could benefit from longitudinal approaches to track the long-term effects of the pandemic on educational leadership. This systematic review contributes to our understanding of the complex challenges faced by school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. By identifying key themes and concerns, it informs the development of future educational practices and policies aimed at enhancing the resilience and effectiveness of educational systems worldwide.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this literature review on school management systems during the Covid-19 pandemic, several recommendations can be made to inform future research and practice.

Firstly, researchers should aim to broaden the scope of research themes. While certain themes such as exploring experiences of school stakeholders and evaluating the effects of distance learning were prevalent, there is a need to delve into less explored areas to gain a comprehensive understanding of the field. Topics like new approaches in education technology, learner mobility, and learning analytics warrant further investigation to address emerging challenges in educational management systems.

Secondly, variety in research design is encouraged. The review revealed a predominance of qualitative research methodologies, with fewer studies employing quantitative or mixed-methods approaches. To gain a more holistic understanding of school management systems during crises, researchers should consider incorporating a broader range of study designs. This could include longitudinal studies to understand the long-term repercussions of pandemic-related changes and mixed-methods approaches to integrate quantitative and qualitative data.

Furthermore, for the schools and other institutions more ardent preparations are needed to enhance crisis management in educational settings. School leaders should prioritize early recognition of crisis signals and engage in preparatory exercises to strengthen a culture of awareness and readiness to act. This involves updating crisis leadership and management plans regularly and fostering open communication channels to share potential crisis signals and responses within school communities.

Effective and collaborative communication is also essential. The increased usage of social media platforms during the pandemic underscores the importance of leveraging these tools for timely communication with various stakeholder groups. Principals should consider how to use social media effectively in times of crisis and involve student leaders and other organizations to maximize impact.

Lastly, attending to wellbeing is crucial. Principals should prioritize understanding and demonstrating empathy towards the challenges faced by students, teachers, and other stakeholders during times of crisis. This involves actively listening to concerns, providing support, and fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment. By addressing these recommendations, researchers and practitioners can contribute to the resilience and effectiveness of educational systems in navigating future crises.

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