

Lived Experiences of School Heads in Navigating Disruptive Events: A Phenomenological Study

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2026.100500653>

Received: 25 May 2026; Accepted: 30 May 2026; Published: 10 June 2026

ABSTRACT

School heads take the responsibility of ensuring that schools remain proactive amid disruptive events, to ensure the welfare of the academic community and the continuity of instruction. This study explored the school heads' experiences in navigating disruptive events. It was conducted in the Division of Oroquieta City, during School Year 2025-2026. The phenomenological research design was used in the study, with twelve school heads as participants selected through purposive sampling. An Interview Guide was used in gathering the data that were analyzed using van Manen's method of data analysis. The study yielded the following themes: experiencing school spaces as sites of vulnerability, safety, and adaptive transformation during disruptions; embodying leadership through physical exhaustion, emotional strain, and emerging resilience; reconstructing leadership through reflection and preparedness; strengthening collaborative relationships and shared responsibility in times of crisis, and; utilizing technology and resources as essential tools for continuity and crisis response. School heads face varied, challenging experiences when confronted with crisis in the school setting; however, they prove themselves capable of responding proactively with the support received from those inside and outside the school communities. It is recommended for academic authorities to develop comprehensive disaster preparedness program so that school heads and other stakeholders can demonstrate resilience when faced with crisis situations.

Keywords: Crisis, Disruptions, Resilience, School Heads, Technology

INTRODUCTION

Disruptive events such as natural disasters, pandemics, wars, and other emergencies create significant challenges for individuals, families, and educational institutions due to their unpredictable and far-reaching impacts (Aquino et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2020; Afolabi & Olajuyigbe, 2022). During crises, effective school leadership becomes essential in ensuring educational continuity through flexible, equity-driven approaches, shared leadership, clear communication, and attention to both operational needs and stakeholder welfare (Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2022; Beauchamp et al., 2021; Netolicky, 2020). School administrators who demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and creative problem-solving are better positioned to manage disruptions and sustain school operations (Alonzo et al., 2023; Atillo et al., 2025).

Research highlights that adaptive leadership, characterized by collaboration, stakeholder involvement, trust, and innovation, strengthens school responses during crises (Cahapay, 2022; Roth, 2022). Teachers reported feeling more prepared and empowered when school leaders implemented clear crisis plans, inclusive decision-making, and structured training programs (Krishnan et al., 2021; Adefisoye, 2022). However, challenges remain, as many educators experienced exclusion from recovery planning and crisis management processes, emphasizing the need for greater teacher involvement (Alonzo et al., 2023; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020).

In the face of difficulty, these people are expected to act with clarity, fortitude, and flexibility. In difficult times, their leadership plays a critical role in determining institutional actions and maintaining educational operations (Cahapay, 2022). Anticipating potential dangers, maintaining order during disruptions, and assisting with

institutional recovery are key components of crisis management. This demonstrates that crisis management is a fundamental duty of school administrators rather than a supporting role (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023).

The local community of Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental, is likewise vulnerable to disasters, as demonstrated by severe flooding in December 2022 that resulted in class suspensions across public and private schools (PDRRMC, 2022). Although previous studies have established the importance of adaptive leadership during crises, limited research has specifically explored the lived experiences of school heads during disruptive events. Hence, this study aimed to address this gap by examining school heads' experiences and perceptions during crises and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership. The output of this research may guide school administrators, educational leaders, and policymakers in developing and enhancing crisis-responsive leadership programs and strategic planning mechanisms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on the theories Adaptive Leadership by Heifetz (1994), Crisis Management Theory by Mitroff (2001) and Resilience Theory by C.S. Holling (1973).

Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz, 1994) explains that organizational challenges are often adaptive rather than technical, requiring changes in values, behaviors, and practices. The theory emphasizes challenging existing practices, engaging stakeholders, and guiding people through change. In this study, adaptive leadership is relevant because school administrators face emergencies, disruptions, and disasters that require leadership beyond routine management. During crises, administrators must guide teachers, staff, students, and parents through uncertainty. Thus, the theory provides a foundation for understanding leadership behaviors during crisis situations. Studies show that adaptive leadership, combined with reasoning skills and emotional intelligence, strengthens leader adaptability and improves organizational outcomes by promoting flexibility and balancing competing demands (Boyar et al., 2023; Nöthel et al., 2023; London, 2023).

Crisis Management Theory (Mitroff, 2001) explains how organizations prepare for, respond to, and recover from disruptive events through systematic and proactive approaches. It emphasizes preparedness, effective response, and recovery to minimize disruption and restore normal operations. The theory is relevant in understanding how school administrators manage emergencies, disasters, and other disruptive events. School leaders must develop comprehensive crisis strategies that ensure proactive and coordinated responses within school communities. Studies suggest that crises are inevitable due to social interactions, making effective communication essential in crisis resolution (Babatunde, 2022). Research also highlights that organizational strategies and transparent communication strengthen crisis management and public trust (Liu-Lastres & Cahyanto, 2023; Korang, 2025).

Resilience Theory (Holling, 1973) refers to the ability of systems to absorb disruptions, adapt, reorganize, and continue functioning while maintaining their core purpose. It emphasizes adaptation, learning, and transformation rather than simply returning to previous conditions. Research highlights the growing importance of resilience amid increasing uncertainties caused by climate change, social instability, and other disruptions. Organizational resilience is commonly associated with resistance, adaptation, and transformation (Singh & Sharifi, 2022; Hepfer & Lawrence, 2022; Li, 2023). In this study, resilience theory suggests that school administrators should create environments that promote adaptability and continuity during crises. School communities must be able to reorganize and respond effectively to changing circumstances while maintaining educational operations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Experiencing School Spaces as Sites of Vulnerability, Safety, and Adaptive Transformation During Disruptions. Crises and disasters significantly affect children and educational systems, emphasizing the need for safe and accessible learning environments during emergencies (Ahmed, 2024). Safe and well-designed school facilities contribute to resilience, support learners' well-being, and help maintain educational continuity, as damaged infrastructure often leads to prolonged school closures (Campos, 2020; Pal et al., 2023). Creating safe schools

requires adequate funding, community support, environmental initiatives, disaster preparedness planning, regular drills, and strengthened crisis management skills among school leaders (Dania et al., 2022; Akbaba Altun, 2025).

Embodying Leadership Through Physical Exhaustion, Emotional Strain, and Emerging Resilience. School leaders, including principals and master teachers, must maintain a balance between personal and professional responsibilities due to the complex demands of leadership roles (De Lima, 2024). Exposure to crises, violence, threats, and traumatic incidents can significantly affect school administrators’ well-being (Fritz, 2025). Therefore, building resilience and implementing strategies such as manageable workloads, adequate support systems, and well-being-centered organizational practices are essential to reducing work-related stress (Jardine et al., 2025).

Reconstructing Leadership Through Reflection and Preparedness. Preparing schools for disasters requires collaboration among governments, non-governmental organizations, families, and communities, with school leaders playing a critical role beyond routine administrative responsibilities (Akbaba Altun, 2025). Reflective practices, trust-building, and post-crisis assessments improve preparedness, adaptability, and shared responsibility within school communities (Atillo et al., 2025). Strengthening resilience further requires investments in disaster preparedness, recovery management, school safety, regular disaster drills, and enhanced crisis management capabilities among school leaders (Opabola et al., 2023; Akbaba Altun, 2025).

Strengthening Collaborative Relationships and Shared Responsibility in Times of Crisis. School administrators significantly influence the learning environment by fostering trust, collaboration, and innovation through clear vision, guidance, and support. Their ability to solve problems, manage conflicts, and motivate stakeholders helps create environments where both teachers and students can thrive (Fajinmi & Oloyede, 2025). Moreover, meeting organizational standards ensures compliance, efficient resource utilization, and sustainable growth (Atienza, 2023).

Utilizing Technology and Resources as Essential Tools for Continuity and Crisis Response. School leaders carry significant responsibility for school development, requiring strong technical and leadership skills, particularly in effective crisis management (Otto & Lumapenet, 2022). As primary supervisors of school operations, principals are expected to focus on strategic initiatives and organizational improvement (Panopio, 2022). Studies also emphasize the need for policymakers to allocate sufficient funding for crisis preparedness systems and integrate business continuity measures into institutional strategic plans, regularly updating them to address emerging risks and challenges (Nyandika, 2024).

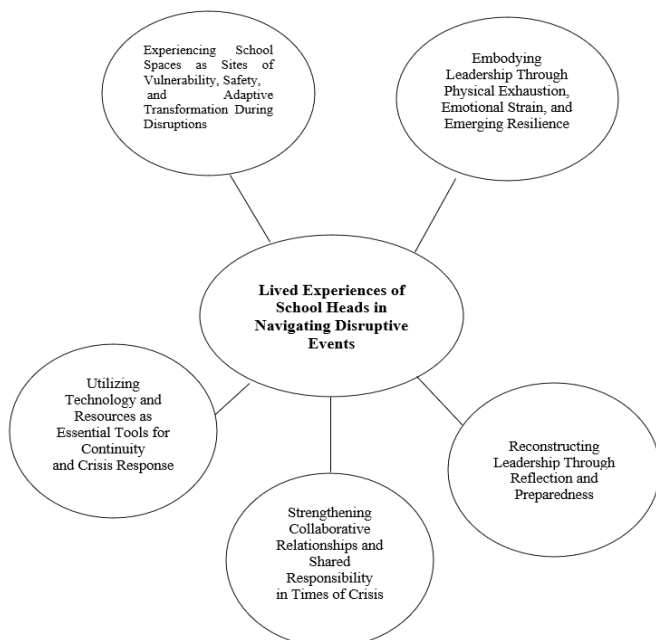


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the school heads' experiences in navigating disruptive events. The study was conducted in the Division of Oroquieta City, during School Year 2025-2026. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. How do school heads experience and perceive their school spaces during disruptive events?
2. How do school heads physically and emotionally respond to the pressures and uncertainties of disruptive events?
3. How do school heads make sense of time as they reflect on the past, act in the present, and anticipate the future amid disruptions?
4. How do school heads experience relationships with teachers, students, parents, and governing bodies during disruptive periods?
5. How do technological tools, institutional resources, or physical infrastructures shape school heads' experiences during disruptions?

Limitation of the Study

This study focused on the perspectives of school heads regarding the occurrence of disruptive events in the school setting. The perspectives of other stakeholders, such as learners, parents, teachers, and local officials who were likewise affected by crisis situations, were not included in the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological research design. This type of phenomenological study seeks to explore how individuals perceived and made sense of their world, emphasizing the subjective experience (van Manen, 1990). The design was considered appropriate for exploring and understanding the essence of school heads' experiences and perceptions as they navigated disruptive events.

Setting

The study was conducted in the Division of Oroquieta City, located in the province of Misamis Occidental in northwestern Mindanao, Philippines. Oroquieta City is geographically positioned along the eastern coastline facing Iligan Bay, characterized by lowland plains and coastal lowlands on its eastern side, and rolling highlands and mountains on its western side. This topographical diversity contributes to its susceptibility to natural disruptions, like flooding. A significant instance occurred in December 2022 when the Layawan River overflowed due to continuous heavy rains, leading to widespread flooding that damaged at least 152 classrooms across various schools in the city. In the School Year 2024-2025, classes were suspended on November 29, 2024, following the overflow of the Layawan River after persistent rainfall, necessitating the evacuation of over 300 individuals.

Participants

The participants of the study were 12 school heads in selected schools within the Division of Oroquieta City. Data saturation was reached when no new responses emerged after the interview with the twelfth participant. They were selected through purposive sampling. The following were the inclusion criteria in selecting the participants: 1) school heads of schools that were affected by a severe flood in 2022; and 2) gave consent to participate in the study.

Instrument

An Interview Guide was used to facilitate in-depth interviews with participants, focusing on school heads' experiences during disruptive events. In this study, the interview guide was carefully developed by the researcher to align with the research objective. To ensure its content validity, the guide was reviewed by experts in qualitative research who determined its relevance, clarity, and appropriateness. Pilot interviews were conducted prior to data collection to assess the clarity of the questions and to ensure that they would elicit responses relevant to the research questions. This process helped refine the Interview Guide and enhance its reliability in capturing meaningful data.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to collecting data for this study, the main author sought approval from the Dean of the Graduate School at Misamis University in Ozamiz City. After approval was obtained, a formal request was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent of Oroquieta City Division to secure permission for conducting the research in the selected public elementary schools. Informed consent forms were distributed to the participants, ensuring they were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, confidentiality protocols, and the voluntary nature of their participation. The interviews were conducted outside school duty hours and in venues as preferred by the target participants.

To uphold ethical standards and ensure a secure environment during face-to-face interviews, the researcher strictly adhered to the required protocols, including applicable health and safety measures. During the interviews, the researcher took notes using a field notebook and, with the participants' consent, used a digital voice recorder to accurately document responses. To enhance the study's credibility, the participants were given the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews through a process known as member checking. After the participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts, the data were systematically coded and categorized to uncover recurring themes, which were then analyzed and interpreted to generate meaningful findings aligned with the study's research objective.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles, particularly respect for autonomy and individual rights, by ensuring that informed consent was properly obtained prior to data collection. The paper was submitted to the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee for review and approval. The participants signed the Informed Consent forms before participating in the interviews. They were thoroughly briefed on key aspects of the study, namely: the purpose and objectives of the research; potential benefits to themselves and the broader educational community; the measures taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses; the researcher's contact information for inquiries or concerns; and the conditions of their involvement, emphasizing their right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. The data were kept in a locker for safekeeping and were accessible only to the researcher.

Data Analysis

In conducting this phenomenological study on the lived experiences of school heads during disruptive events, I followed van Manen's five-step approach (1990) to analyze the data and uncover the essence of these experiences. Throughout the analytical process, I remained conscious that my interpretations could be influenced by my own experiences, assumptions, and understanding of educational leadership. Therefore, I continuously engaged in reflexive practice by critically examining how my perspectives might shape data interpretation while intentionally remaining grounded in the participants' lived experiences. Each step of the analysis guided my exploration of participants' narratives while encouraging continuous reflection on both the meanings emerging from the data and my role in constructing those meanings.

van Manen's approach to phenomenological analysis provided a systematic framework for understanding human experiences through five existential themes: lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), lived relationship (relationality), and lived things (materiality). Using these existential dimensions, I explored the complex realities of school heads experiencing disruptive events caused by natural or human-induced crises. Throughout this process, I continuously reflected on how my assumptions and prior knowledge influenced what I noticed, emphasized, and interpreted from the participants' accounts.

The first stage involved immersing myself in the data through repeated reading and rereading of interview transcripts and qualitative materials to develop a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. During this stage, I consciously practiced reflexivity by acknowledging preconceived ideas and attempting to suspend judgments to allow participants' voices to emerge more authentically. This process enabled me to become more aware of how my own perspectives could influence interpretation.

The succeeding stage involved analyzing the narratives using the five existential themes. As themes emerged, I continuously questioned my interpretations and reflected on whether the meanings identified genuinely represented participants' experiences rather than my own assumptions. After identifying themes, I synthesized them into broader categories that captured the essence of the participants' lived experiences while remaining attentive to preserving the authenticity of their narratives.

The final stage involved constructing a narrative that integrated the existential themes into a coherent representation of participants' experiences. In presenting the findings, I intentionally incorporated direct quotations and rich descriptions to remain close to participants' accounts while acknowledging that the final interpretation was co-constructed through the interaction between participant narratives and my interpretive lens. Through continuous reflexive engagement, this approach enabled me to uncover deeper meanings surrounding how school heads navigated disruptive events while maintaining transparency regarding my role in the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Experiencing School Spaces as Sites of Vulnerability, Safety, and Adaptive Transformation During Disruptions

This theme speaks of schools as multifaceted spaces that, during times of disruption such as natural disasters, pandemics, or social crises, can become sites of both vulnerability and safety while also serving as grounds for adaptive transformation. On one hand, these spaces may expose students, teachers, and staff to physical, emotional, and social risks when routines are interrupted, resources become limited, or access to learning is compromised. The following statements were given by three of the participants:

"In our school, we consider class cancellations due to typhoons as one of the disruptive events. These situations often bring flooding, which poses serious hazards to our learners if they attempt to come to school. So, there is class suspension for safety of our learners." (P1)

"The floodwaters entered classrooms and offices, damaging school facilities, learning materials, and important records. Classes were suspended for several days." (P8)

"The situation heightened my awareness of the risks brought by natural disasters, such as flooding and unsafe school conditions. It emphasized the importance of ensuring that the school environment is secure before resuming classes." (P4)

The participants' statements collectively illustrate how school spaces are perceived as sites of vulnerability, safety, and adaptive transformation during disruptive events. The school heads described class cancellations due to typhoons as necessary because flooding created dangerous conditions for learners traveling to school. Class suspensions were caused by typhoon-induced flooding disrupted the normal flow of school operations. The

participants' statements show that school leaders prioritized learner safety by suspending classes when environmental hazards threatened the school community.

Contemporary school leadership has always been considered to be one of the most pivotal factors conducive to school effectiveness (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). Extreme stress in the workplace may cause several negative personal and performance outcomes if not managed properly. In the field of education with leadership roles, are more susceptible to mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, or worse case, depression because they work in extremely stressful workplaces (Fritz, 2025).

According to the Crisis Management Theory, crises are dynamic events that call for organized phases of reaction that include action, recovery, and learning. As leaders progress through these stages and improve their tactics in light of experience, school leadership is constantly rebuilt. In line with the recovery and learning phase of crisis management, school heads participate in post-crisis evaluation through reflection, finding gaps in their response and reviewing what went well. They are able to draw conclusions from this reflective process that help them make better decisions in the future.

Embodying Leadership Through Physical Exhaustion, Emotional Strain, and Emerging Resilience

The theme highlights the lived experiences of school leaders as they navigate the intense demands of managing disruptions and sustaining school operations. Leadership in challenging situations often requires physical endurance, as school heads must respond to emergencies, oversee recovery efforts, and manage multiple responsibilities that can lead to fatigue and burnout.

The following statements were given by a few of the participants:

“As a School Head, the occurrence of the disruptive event affected me both physically and emotionally. Physically, the demands of ensuring the safety of learners and teachers, coordinating immediate responses, and managing alternative learning modalities required long hours of work and constant vigilance, which at times left me exhausted. Emotionally, the situation was stressful and overwhelming, as I carried the responsibility of protecting the entire school community while maintaining the continuity of learning.” (P1)

“It led to burnout, making me feel emotionally drained and less secure in my role. It greatly affected me to the point where I wished to return to being a classroom teacher, as the responsibilities felt overwhelming.” (P2)

“Physically, these situations require additional time and effort in coordinating with teachers, preparing alternative learning arrangements, and monitoring the progress of learners. Emotionally, there can be concern and pressure because I want to make sure that learners continue learning despite disruptions and that teachers are properly supported.” (P3)

The participants' statements highlight the profound physical and emotional impact of disruptive events on school heads, emphasizing the burdens of leadership during times of crisis. These accounts reflect the theme of embodying leadership through physical exhaustion, emotional strain, and resilience. In this vein, school leaders navigated multiple responsibilities while ensuring the safety and continuity of education. Disruptive events affected them both physically and emotionally. Physically, the demands of ensuring the safety of learners and teachers, coordinating immediate responses, and managing alternative learning modalities required long hours of work and constant vigilance, resulting in exhaustion. Emotionally, the participant felt stressed and overwhelmed because of the immense responsibility of protecting the school community while maintaining the continuity of learning. Four participants gave the following statements:

“Physically, it required extended working hours to monitor weather updates, coordinate with local authorities, and ensure safety protocols were followed. Emotionally, I felt concern for the learners, teachers, and their families, but it also strengthened my commitment to lead effectively during crises.” (P4)

“It was physically and emotionally demanding. I spent more time observing classes, reviewing data, and planning interventions, especially for learners who needed more support, including those with special needs.” (P5)

“While such occurrences do not affect me emotionally or physically, they do make me worried for the safety and well-being of our learners.” (P6)

“Physically, the disruptive event put my body into high alert. I felt immediate stress reactions such as a racing heartbeat, muscle tension, headaches, fatigue, and difficulty sleeping. Emotionally, I felt intense worry for the safety of learners and staff, and pressure to make the right decisions quickly.” (P7)

The participants’ statements illustrate the varied physical, emotional, and psychological experiences of school heads during disruptive events, emphasizing both the burdens of leadership and the resilience that emerges in response to crises. These accounts demonstrate that while disruptive situations created stress and fatigue, they also strengthened commitment, heightened awareness, and reinforced the protective role of school leaders. Physical demands of leadership during disruptions entailed that extended working hours were necessary to monitor weather updates, coordinate with local authorities, and ensure that safety protocols were properly followed. Emotionally, the participants felt concern not only for learners and teachers but also for their families.

School leaders are experiencing increasing job demands, high turnover, burnout, and declining well-being. Given the critical role school leaders play in our community, it is crucial to explore the factors contributing to and protecting from these issues (Jardine et al., 2025). Thus, an overemphasis on individual resiliency without structural supports and system-level considerations can negatively impact school leaders (Pollock et al., 2023).

In the context of the study, the Resilience Theory highlights the capacity of individuals and systems to withstand adversity, recover from stress, and adapt positively despite difficult conditions. In the context of school leadership during disruptions, resilience theory helps explain how school heads experience intense physical exhaustion and emotional strain as part of the stress exposure process, yet gradually develop the capacity to cope, adapt, and continue functioning effectively.

Reconstructing Leadership Through Reflection and Preparedness

The theme highlights how school leaders continuously reshape and strengthen their leadership practices by learning from past disruptions, responding effectively to present challenges, and preparing proactively for future uncertainties. Through reflection on previous experiences, school heads gain valuable insights into what strategies were effective and what areas need improvement, allowing them to make more informed decisions. In the present, they take deliberate and immediate actions to address ongoing issues, ensure safety, and sustain the continuity of learning despite disruptions. At the same time, these experiences encourage future preparedness by prompting leaders to develop contingency plans, strengthen disaster risk reduction measures, improve communication systems, and build resilience within the school community. The following statements were given by Participants 1, 2, and 3:

“This event made me aware of the crucial role of a school head - not only in delivering quality education but also in ensuring the safety of all learners and teachers within the school. It highlighted the importance of preparedness, risk management, and quick decision-making in times of emergencies.” (P1)

“I realized that I needed to change how I think and how I handle negative feedback. For me leadership requires resilience and openness to criticism and feedback. I now recognize where things went wrong and have shifted my mindset.” (P2)

“My past work experience in my previous office has significantly shaped my readiness for this reassignment. However, my present work is difficult from my previous job description. Nevertheless, my time at my previous office provided me a solid foundation for navigating this transition.” (P3)

The participants' statements reflect how school heads reshape their leadership perspectives through experience, self-reflection, and adaptation. These accounts show that disruptive events and professional transitions serve as opportunities for learning, growth, and improved preparedness. They highlight that effective leadership is not static but continuously evolves through challenges, reflection, and the application of lessons learned in future situations.

While leadership involvement is significant in planning mitigation strategies in schools, emphasizing collaboration and stakeholder engagement (Kapucu & Ustun, 2018), principals play a crucial role in safeguarding students and ensuring they receive support. Often, these school heads prioritize the safety of students and staff and strict state accountability standards over their own physical and mental health. During crises, they must make sound decisions while dealing with additional pressures (Stephen, 2024).

The Crisis Management Theory emphasizes the structured management of emergencies through the phases of preparedness, response, and recovery, with a strong focus on coordination, communication, and resource mobilization. Technology and school resources function as critical enablers across all stages of crisis management. Continuous reflection on past experiences and present practices are essential for school heads to face crisis situations and respond proactively.

Strengthening Collaborative Relationships and Shared Responsibility in Times of Crisis

The theme highlights how effective response to disruptions depends on the collective efforts of school leaders, teachers, learners, parents, and the wider community working together toward a common goal. During crises, individual leadership alone is not sufficient; instead, strong collaboration ensures that responsibilities are distributed, communication remains clear, and support systems are activated to address urgent needs. This shared responsibility fosters unity, trust, and coordinated action, allowing schools to respond more efficiently to challenges such as natural disasters, health emergencies, or other disruptions. Participants 1 and 3 gave the following statements:

"During the disruptive event, I made it a priority to connect closely with teachers, learners, parents, local officials, and other members of the community. My interaction with them was collaborative and compassionate." (P1)

"I worked closely with teachers to ensure that learning materials were prepared and distributed on time. Parents were also encouraged to guide and support their children." (P3)

The participant emphasized the importance of maintaining close and meaningful connections with teachers, learners, parents, local officials, and other community members during disruptive events. The interaction was described as both collaborative and compassionate, indicating that leadership involved not only coordination but also empathy and understanding of the challenges faced by stakeholders. They described a more task-oriented yet collaborative approach, working closely with teachers to ensure that learning materials were prepared and distributed on time. In addition, Participants 4 and 6 gave the following statements:

"I maintained constant communication through group chats, text messages, and coordination with local government units. The collaboration and support from the community strengthened our collective response." (P4)

"Networking and collaboration among the school, parents, local officials, and the community are essential." (P6)

The participants emphasized the value of constant communication through group chats, text messages, and coordination with local government units. This consistent communication allowed for timely updates, quick responses, and effective coordination during the disruptive event. Working hand in hand with teachers and the community is vital in addressing issues affecting learners. The participants highlighted the need for stronger

networking and collaboration among the school, parents, local officials, and the community. Participants 11 and 12 stated:

“I coordinated closely with teachers to ensure that learners were guided and supported. I also communicated with parents and coordinated with local officials.” (P11)

“I worked collaboratively with teachers to adjust learning plans, while also reaching out to parents and coordinating with local officials and community members.” (P12)

The statements of the two participants emphasized the importance of close coordination with teachers to ensure that learners were properly guided and supported during the disruptive event. This reflects the school heads' role in providing direction and ensuring that teachers can effectively assist learners despite challenges. A collaborative and adaptive leadership approach requires working with teachers to adjust learning plans in response to the situation.

By providing clear vision, direction, and support, school heads foster an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, and innovation. Their ability to address challenges, mediate conflicts, and inspire their teams is instrumental in creating a school environment where both students and staff can thrive (Fajinmi & Oloyede, 2025). Collaborative leadership is an essential approach for enhancing coordination, decision-making, and resilience in a crisis response given the increasing complexity of modern crises (Al-Makhdobiya, 2025). Coordination among school administrators, employees, and outside stakeholders can be improved through open communication and cooperative decision-making (Atillo, 2025).

The Resilience Theory emphasizes that resilience is not only an individual capacity but a collective and relational process shaped by social support systems, trust, and shared resources. In school settings, resilience emerges when teachers, school leaders, parents, learners, and community stakeholders work together to withstand and recover from disruptions. During crises, strong collaborative relationships function as protective factors that reduce stress, distribute responsibilities, and enhance the school's ability to respond effectively to challenges.

Utilizing Technology and Resources as Essential Tools for Continuity and Crisis Response

The theme highlights the critical role of digital tools, communication platforms, and available resources in sustaining school operations and learning during disruptions. In times of crisis, school heads and teachers rely on technology such as mobile phones, messaging applications, online learning platforms, and social media to communicate urgent updates, coordinate responses, distribute learning materials, and monitor learners' progress. The following statements were given by Participants 1 and 3:

“Communication platforms such as mobile phones, messaging apps, and social media allowed me to quickly coordinate with teachers, parents, and local officials, ensuring that important updates reached everyone in real time.” (P1)

“In our school, we ensured that teachers created FB Messenger group chats with parents and collected their contact numbers. These allowed immediate communication, updates, and feedback.” (P3)

The participants emphasized the importance of communication platforms such as mobile phones, messaging applications, and social media in facilitating real-time coordination with teachers, parents, and local officials. Through these tools, urgent updates and important information could be disseminated quickly, ensuring that stakeholders remained informed and able to act promptly. Technological tools and school resources provided avenues not only for communication but also for documentation and planning. Furthermore, Participants 7 and 8 gave the following statements:

“Technological tools, school resources, and facilities helped me respond faster, coordinate people clearly, and keep learners safe.” (P7)

“We used mobile phones and social media platforms to disseminate information quickly. School resources such as emergency kits and available facilities were utilized.” (P8)

Technology plays a crucial role in facilitating communication, while physical resources and facilities support immediate crisis response, demonstrating how digital and physical tools strengthen school safety and learner protection (Barnes & Riddle, 2026). Schools also provide continuity and stability during disasters, although many teachers act as first responders without adequate training and preparedness (Atkinson & Fowler, 2023). Enhancing school resilience through improved infrastructure, safer evacuation routes, and better-designed assembly areas further strengthens disaster preparedness and response (Ahmed, 2024).

Heifetz and Linsky’s (1994) Adaptive Leadership Theory emphasizes that leadership is not about maintaining stability alone but about mobilizing people to tackle complex challenges that require learning, change, and adjustment. In the context of school disruptions such as typhoons, flooding, or other crises, school spaces become adaptive systems where leaders must continuously diagnose problems, regulate distress, and encourage collective learning rather than relying solely on technical solutions. However, these same disruptions create opportunities for adaptive work, where school leaders and stakeholders are compelled to rethink routines, adjust practices, and develop new ways of ensuring safety and continuity of learning.

Based on the themes that captured the lived experiences of school heads in navigating disruptive events, the following poem was made:

Guiding Light Through Uncertain Times

In quiet halls where silence stayed, School heads stood while plans all changed. Classrooms once filled with joy and noise, Became places of fear and worried thoughts. Windows showed uncertain days ahead, And hallways carried anxious steps instead. Yet in those weak and fearful spaces, They still shared hope and caring embraces. Every empty room seemed to say, That safety and care must lead the way. And through each challenge leaders faced, They grew stronger with courage and faith. They carried burdens hard to explain, Sleepless nights and endless pain. Their steps grew tired from so much work, Hidden tears filled many days, And exhaustion showed in countless ways. Still they stood when others fell, Helping calm fear and stress as well. Leadership was more than giving commands; It meant protecting others with caring hands. Reflection became their guide each day, Looking back to find better ways. From broken routines they rebuilt trust, Turning problems into purposeful action. What they did today helped shape tomorrow, Preparing for future struggles and sorrow. No longer did they stand alone; Communities worked together as one. Teachers, parents, students, and friends, Shared responsibilities until the end. By working together they found peace, And strength that helped their fears decrease. Technology became a guiding light, New and difficult, yet important in life. Simple resources gained greater value, Helping education begin anew. And so the story of school heads lives on, Built on sacrifice, courage, and change. Through every challenge they came to see, That leadership is shaped by humanity.

CONCLUSIONS

School heads recognize that schools are highly vulnerable during disruptions, yet they play a crucial role in transforming these spaces into safe, adaptive, and functional environments for continuous learning. Their leadership experiences during crises involve significant physical and emotional challenges, which ultimately contribute to the development of resilience and stronger coping mechanisms. School heads strengthen their leadership by reflecting on past experiences, responding proactively to present challenges and strategically preparing for future uncertainties. Effective crisis management in schools is largely dependent on strong collaboration, mutual trust, and shared responsibility among school heads and stakeholders. Technology and resource accessibility are vital in maintaining communication, operational continuity, and learning delivery during disruptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools develop and regularly update comprehensive disaster preparedness and adaptive learning environment plans to ensure safety and continuity during crises. Considering the various effects of disruptive events on school heads, higher academic authorities provide wellness programs, mental health support, and stress management training specifically designed for educational leaders. Schools incorporate reflective practices, crisis simulations, and strategic planning workshops to enhance preparedness and adaptability, mutual trust, and shared responsibility among school heads and stakeholders. School heads may likewise establish a linkage with the City Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office to foster collaboration and coordinated responses during crisis situations. Finally, the Department of Education may allocate adequate budget for the development of schools' infrastructure to make schools resilient to disruptive situations, likewise provide teachers with technology training to become more adept at responding to crisis situations.

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