



## Lived Experiences of School Heads During Post-Pandemic: Building Resilience and Navigating Schools to Recovery Amidst Disruptive Times

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### Abstract

Crisis management practices among school leaders are critical for effective emergency response and resilience. Crisis management studies are essential because unanticipated crises, such as health concerns and calamities, disrupt the learning process. This phenomenological research explores the lived experiences of school heads during the post-pandemic period when they built resilience and navigated their schools back to recovery. Adapting to changing circumstances, finding effective ways to bridge learning gaps and promoting staff and learner well-being are the major challenges facing school heads after pandemic. Real-life situations are further explored through this research to aid in crisis management. This study is crucial because it aids organizations in their effective planning, rapid response, and recovery from unexpected crises. Eight school heads from the Philippines were selected as participants. The researcher utilized a validated questionnaire to gather data on various school management strategies before and after the pandemic. The post-pandemic posed challenges, needs, and opportunities due to protocols, settings, and requirements while incorporating resilience strategies and implementing proactive school recovery approaches. The ANCHOR model was developed as a crisis management framework based on the findings and observations. This process consists of five stages: acclimatization, necessity appraisal, counter-response and handling, opportune resilience strategies application, and recovery and restructuring. It can be applied by organizations to manage crises and recover, emphasizing crisis management skills to improve organizational performance. The model can aid school heads in making informed decisions and navigate institutions to recovery. Finally, this research encapsulates that crisis management skills are essential to organizational performance, particularly in academic institutions.

**Keywords:** *Disruptive Times; Crisis Management; Resilience; Contingency Plans; Emergency Response; Post-Pandemic*

### INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 over, but school leaders now face a new challenge: guiding schools through recovery and resilience building despite the significant damage caused to the educational system. [Özlü and Öztaş \(2020\)](#) found historical pandemics dating back to the Morea War in 430 BC. They divided them into five categories: Justinian Plague, Black Death, Cholera, Smallpox, Spanish Flu, Hong Kong Flu, HIV/AIDS, SARS, Swine Flu, and Ebola. COVID-19 made its global debut in 2019, and this outbreak will almost certainly not be the last.

The sudden emergence of a worldwide pandemic proves that preparation should not be set aside but should be focused on. This study addresses the urgent need for a crisis management framework in the field of education. Organizations cannot protect themselves from unpredictable events and conditions, especially during or after a global crisis, without considering internal and external factors. Organizations and employees must grow together to survive and achieve common goals. Managers must prioritize human resource development, particularly in the post-pandemic environment ([Boroujeni et al., 2022](#)).

[Kwatubana and Molaodi \(2021a\)](#) emphasized that leaders during crises must address the crisis while maintaining normalcy. School heads, while facing the greatest burdens, are expected to find solutions to the lingering problems faced by institution members. The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a complex catastrophe that requires outstanding leadership. Global education has been

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affected by this pandemic. More than ever, there has been a need for good leadership that will help followers adapt to change (Kwatubana & Molaodi, 2021b). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) emphasized the importance of understanding teacher well-being during the COVID-19 crisis to develop effective leadership styles, emphasizing the broad and vital role of school leaders in addressing these challenges.

Brazendale et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of schools fostering student-teacher interaction, providing psychological guidance, and offering distance education during pandemics. School administrators believe that technology leadership and crisis management are critical aspects of the pandemic and should be trained to strengthen their skills. They can be taught digital/technology leadership and crisis management techniques (Aytaç, 2020).

The success of an organization greatly depends on leadership and administration. However, not all administrators are prepared for crisis management. Aytaç (2020) research showed that only half of school administrators implemented an emergency action plan during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on distance education and hygiene practices, while half followed only the Ministry of National Education instructions. School administrators also emphasized the importance of hygiene for occupational health and safety and considered emergency action plans to combat the pandemic. The need for organizations to build resilience is paramount (Ding et al., 2020), emphasizing the importance of understanding the effects of managerial competencies on organizational performance. Crisis management skills are not only needed in the field of education but also across all fields.

According to Altun and Bulut (2023), school administrators must know how to manage crises, have a crisis plan, anticipate problems that may arise in crisis scenarios, be prepared for unforeseen events, choose competent administrators, and have crisis-appropriate school buildings. All these topics emphasize the importance of school administrators being prepared for unforeseen scenarios and knowing how to handle them.

### **Theoretical Framework**

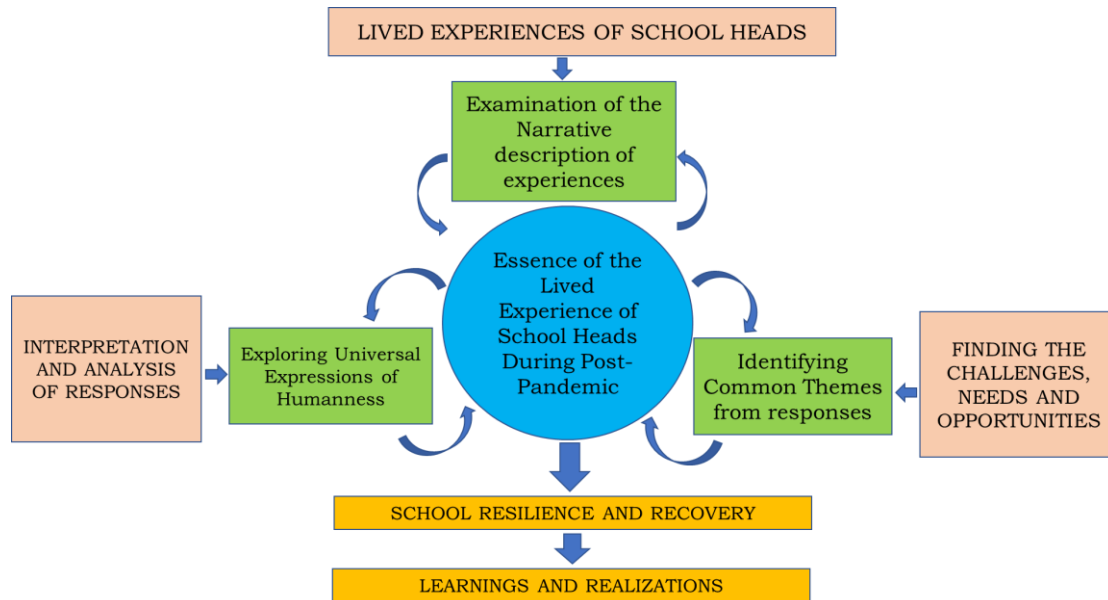
This research is anchored on various crisis management models, such as Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model and Fink's Four-Stage Crisis Model, emphasize proactive rather than reactive approaches.

In addition, the study also examines Contingency Theory, which suggests that no leadership style is perfect and that there is no "one size fits all" leadership strategy exists for an organization.

Finally, it is also drawn on Henry Mintzberg's P-O-L-C model as it outlines the main responsibilities of a manager, including interpersonal, administrative, and decisional roles. School heads should capitalize on their existing strategies and practices necessary for the changes in the educational system, focusing on the core competencies of teachers they supervise and monitor. School heads are crucial in maintaining organizational order, handling crises, and upholding excellence, thereby enhancing support for students, teachers, and the educational system during crises.

**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 presents the Research Framework of the Lived Experiences of School Heads During Post-Pandemic: Building Resilience and Navigating Schools to Recovery Amidst Disruptive Times. The main aim of the study is to collect narratives of actual experiences used to build resilience and to bring the school back to recovery.



**Figure 1.** Research Framework

The collected data will aid in the formation of a crisis management framework to address disruptive times. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does leading a school after a pandemic differ from the pre-pandemic times?
2. How did school heads address the difficulties and challenges in the post-pandemic times?
3. How did the school heads manage the perceived needs since the pandemic?
4. How did school leaders deal with the discovered opportunities in the post-pandemic period?
5. How did school heads effectively promote and incorporate strategies for fostering resilience inside their institutions?
6. How did school heads proactively guide their organizations toward recovery after the pandemic?

This study examines school heads’ crisis management strategies to identify and replicate successful leadership during difficult times. It provides insights into efficient methods for handling chaotic situations and helps educational institutions in rehabilitation and fostering resilience to prevent significant harm to the learning community. It also explores leadership styles in emergencies, emphasizing the importance of firsthand experience in managing learning disruptions, improving educational performance, curriculum implementation, and school management.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Effective leaders during crises provide direction, inspiration, and support, ensuring schools recover from setbacks and develop into stronger, more resilient institutions.

School leaders' ability to respond to staff's social, emotional, and psychological needs, demonstrating support, empathy, care, and security, is crucial for addressing concerns and providing appropriate support (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsauro, 2023). Pearson and Clair (2008) defined crisis leadership in education as ambiguity in cause, effect, and resolution, emphasizing quick decision-making to prevent negative organizational impacts. Kwatubana and Molaodi (2021a) emphasized that crisis leadership in schools differs from everyday situations, requiring careful and precise decision-making in unforeseen circumstances. To combat the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have switched from face-to-face instruction to online education. Principals also experienced extraordinary crises (Apaydin & Yalçın, 2024).

Critical times must not be taken lightly because they may cause long-term problems and havoc in the long run. Akyüz (2018) emphasized that a crisis is a trying time or depressive period in an individual's, an organization's, or an entire community's life. D'Auria and De Smet (2020) in their article entitled Leadership in a crisis: Responding to the coronavirus outbreak and future challenges under McKinsey and Company, discussed the importance of positivism in times of crisis. A democratic leadership style is more advantageous because it involves employees in some aspects of decision-making (Achnewhu-Nworgu & Nworgu, 2023). O'Day and Marsden (2022) highlighted the growing conflicts and leadership needs in the systems of elementary and high school students, parents, and local communities.

Marsh et al. (2022) highlighted the challenges public education faces in 2022, including academic and emotional struggles, and the need for crisis leadership to address these issues because most decisions are localized based on a school's situation. It is crucial to convey trust in an organization's ability to navigate a problem while simultaneously demonstrating an understanding of its seriousness (O'Day & Marsden, 2022). In light of these difficulties, it is essential for the long-term viability of these institutions to examine their governance and leadership functions as well as their decision-making procedures (Johnson & Thompson, 2020).

Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou (2023) noted that contemporary school leadership is crucial for effectiveness, change, and strategic innovation, requiring a strong vision, goals, and implementation plan for monitoring and reviewing. Several researchers have pointed out that autocratic leadership in times of crisis is not recommended due to the added pressure on community members. Thus, in times of crisis, dispersing leadership tasks is more effective than other leadership styles (Berjaoui & Karami-Akkary, 2019). This is consistent with Contingency Theory, emphasizing that an organization's leadership strategy is a case-to-case basis.

Schools are professional bureaucratic management institutions that impact local and worldwide populations and are governed by social rules, according to Dare and Saleem (2022). Principals are tasked with creating and executing curriculum expansion and enabling staff and student operations by inspiring and directing them to the needs of the school's objectives (Constantia et al., 2021). During and after the pandemic, school heads' roles evolved from managerial to regulatory and preventive, extending their responsibilities beyond their managerial responsibilities. Kaul et al. (2022) found that principals' reliance on pre-existing school circumstances varied, with differences in connections, human capital, and decision-making processes. Strong relationships boost teacher morale, empowerment, and determination. If averting a crisis is not feasible, consider its benefits and drawbacks. The goal must be to minimize harm while addressing long-term negative impacts (Özdemir & Uçar, 2020).

Cahapay (2022), stated that the results of his research revealed six emerging themes of educational leadership practices during a crisis as follows: 1.) navigating the crisis with adaptive leadership; 2.) cultivating practices in crisis management; 3.) managing through the machine; 4.) freezing the standards and patterns; 5.) promoting inclusivity in the new normal; and 6.) caring first for what is essential. Top managers and faculty and staff members should be actively involved

in the organization to ensure its future success. According to [Johnson et al. \(2019\)](#), continuous professional development programs emphasizing abilities related to the future—like scenario planning and creative pedagogies—empower teachers to better manage uncertainty. Introducing professors and staff to future thinking techniques promotes cooperative crisis problem solving and builds a culture of readiness ([Thanitbenjasith & Kamkankaew, 2023](#)).

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the significance of proactive crisis management, as it has disrupted global governance and education systems. However, schools more suited to quickly shift to remote learning were those that had previously integrated the concepts of future thinking, so there was less of a disturbance to students' academic paths ([Thanitbenjasith & Kamkankaew, 2023](#), p. 228-229). Consequently, Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model and Fink's Four-Stage Crisis Model all emphasized the value of proactive rather than reactive approaches in management.

Aspiring principals of schools need to know how to reroute curriculum and field-based experiences that emphasize the following to better prepare them to lead during a pandemic or school closures: (1) developing equitable school leadership practices, (2) leading remotely, (3) strengthening school and community partnerships, (4) leading and meeting the mental wellness of teachers and students, and (5) leading with soul ([Gonzales et al., 2022](#)). Leading with a soul fosters genuine connection and community unity, especially in crisis situations, ensuring that all members are united when facing significant challenges.

[Marker \(2020\)](#) emphasized the importance of proactive crisis management in various fields and highlighted the development of various models to enhance organizational capacity to anticipate, avert, and reduce crises. Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model (1994) described five crisis stages, which also follow a similar lifecycle progression: 1) Crisis signal detection, 2) Probing and prevention (probing refers to looking for risk factors), 3) Containment, 4) Recovery, and 5) Learning., [Fink \(1986\)](#) discussed a four-stage crisis model consisting of the prodromal, acute, chronic, and resolution stages known as Fink's Model. In this regard, he emphasized that the resolution stage marks the conclusion of the crisis and provides a chance to internalize what went wrong through root-cause analysis and put in place adjustments to make sure it does not happen again. Crisis management planning involves establishing plans and resources to restore processes after an unforeseen stoppage or incident ([Herbane, 2014](#)).

In a study conducted by [Khan et al. \(2016\)](#), they stated that theories of contingency recommend that no leadership style is precise as a stand-alone because the leadership style used is reliant upon factors such as the quality, situation of the followers, or several other variables. Contingency Theory is related to this study because it suggests that no "one size fits all" leadership strategy exists for an organization. The global education system is undergoing a significant transformation, necessitating the exploration of a new leadership style that is more suitable for the current situation and context. Employee dedication to an organization is unquestionably one of the most desired good employee attitudes by employers ([Estebal et al., 2024](#)).

[Gordon \(2022\)](#) wrote in an article in *The Business Professor* that in his 1973 book *The Nature of Managerial Work*, Henry Mintzberg expanded on the P-O-L-C model by outlining the main responsibilities of a manager. Mintzberg identified the ten (10) common managerial roles and grouped them into three major clusters: interpersonal, informational, and decisional. This theory emphasizes leadership roles in developing management skills and leveraging teachers' competencies to provide technical assistance in distance learning education during the pandemic. School heads play a crucial role in maintaining organizational order, handling crises differently and upholding excellence to create a beneficial environment for all involved. This study aligns with previous studies on the importance of crisis management in different fields.

Finally, understanding the school heads' lived experiences during this period will help us

expand our insights into effective crisis management and will also give us ideas on building strong resilience schemes. Studying this will also lead us to understand how to enhance leadership practices, effectively mitigate the negative effects of the crisis, and maintain strong connections with staff and stakeholders.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative methodology. This study applied the interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology (IHP) research design to explore the experiences of school heads during the pandemic. In addition, IHP is a qualitative methodology used to understand the subjective lived experiences of individuals using an idiographic approach—an in-depth exploration of individual experience—to develop a general claim (Paley, 2018). Moreover, the use of IHP for this study is in line with the postmodern, constructivist philosophical stance, as this methodology places special importance on the subjectivity, biases, and prejudices of both researchers and informants of the study. Hence, a shared understanding of the phenomenon under study is achieved through the reciprocal process of interpretation during the in-depth interaction of the researchers with the participants (Spence, 2001).

### **Participants and Selection Criteria**

The participants of this study were 8 school heads who were purposively selected through the following criteria: a) school heads/headteachers from small to large schools, b) school heads since pre-pandemic times, and c) school heads whose schools implemented learning recovery plans/programs since the start of the school year 2022-2023. All of these criteria are essential to gather information about the changes in management styles and adjustments they employed during the post-pandemic based on their actual experiences.

### **Research Instruments**

The data in this study was collected through virtual, individual, and face-to-face interviews that ranged from 60 to 90 min. A reflective interviewing technique was used to capture the respondents past experiences of school heads during the pandemic. The interviews were conducted to gather their experiences and the challenges, needs, and opportunities they encountered during the aforementioned period. The questionnaire was written by the researcher and was aligned and appropriate for the study. Questions were reviewed by three experts in the field of research for validation.

### **Methods of Validation**

The study instrument was validated by three experts, including the Graduate Studies and Applied Research Program Coordinator at Laguna State Polytechnic University, Los Baños Campus, to ensure its alignment with the problem statements. The questionnaire underwent ethical review by a professor and graduate studies and applied research faculty, ensuring non-intrusive, non-offensive questions, participant autonomy, and data quality, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study. The study's administrative content and data collection objectives were thoroughly validated by graduate faculty and statistical experts to ensure efficiency, fairness, and effectiveness.

### **Research Procedure**

The study involved identifying school heads who met specific criteria and obtaining their consent for participation. They were given a questionnaire to answer about their experiences as school heads during the pandemic. Participants were then interviewed structured, with interviews

lasting 60-90 minutes. Secondary interviews were conducted with the master's teachers and documentation to provide more accurate analysis. The interviews were documented through audio recordings for easy transcription. This process aims to ensure the credibility and accountability of the study results.

### Treatment of Qualitative Data

This study uses cross-validation, methodological analysis, and data triangulation to analyze information from informants and respondents. Triangulation is a research approach that can help researchers increase the validity and reliability of their findings while also reducing the existence of any research biases (Bhandari, 2023). Participants' responses are encoded and organized per question, and audio files are transcribed using an AI-powered tool. As transcription technology improves, researchers have increasingly adopted voice-to-text software (McMullin, 2021). Data is organized in Excel for easy analysis, and codes were assigned to each participant to maintain anonymity. The researcher examined interviews and archival data for similarities, differences, and emergent themes to derive meaningful insights.

### Ethical Consideration

Participants were given informed consent before the research began, discussing the objectives, methods, and rights. Confidentiality was ensured, with real names not included in written reports and interview audio recordings kept confidential. The researcher established trust between participants and third parties.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants of this study were 8 school heads who were purposively selected through the following criteria: a) school heads/headteachers from small to large schools, b) school heads since pre-pandemic times, and c) school heads whose schools implemented learning recovery plans/programs since the start of the school year 2022-2023.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile of the Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	3	37.5%
	Female	5	62.5%
<b>Age</b>	Less than 30	0	0 %
	30-45	3	37.5%
	46-55	5	62.5%
	More than 55	0	0 %
<b>Education</b>	College or Bachelor's Degree	0	0 %
	Postgraduate degree	8	100%
<b>Years in service</b>	Less than 5 years	0	0 %
	5-10 years	0	0 %
	More than 10 years	8	100%

Table 1 presents the participants' demographic profiles. As shown in the table, 5 out of 8 or 62.5% of the participants are female while 3 or 37.5% were male. This number is not surprising because of the global issue of feminization of teaching. The same scenario in terms of gender distribution can be observed in the Philippine setting. According to data from the Philippine Commission on Women from 2008 to 2009, approximately 89.58% of teachers in public elementary schools and 77.06% in public secondary schools are female (Bongco & Abenes, 2019). Evidently, these teachers will become school principals, which explains why there are more female school

principals than males.

In terms of age, three respondents (37.5%) were between the ages of 30 and 45. On the other hand, 5 (62.5%) were between the ages of 46 and 55 years old. This implies that the position is not age-exclusive. It may also imply that qualifications are more important than age in the role of school principal. This is consistent with the data on respondents' educational qualifications, which revealed that 100% of the participants had postgraduate degrees. Furthermore, all participants have worked in education for more than ten years. This demonstrates that their length of service is correlated with their experience, thereby making them more skilled in the field. According to [Nadaf \(2020\)](#), A higher degree can prepare a principal to perform at a higher level, thus reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction. It was also mentioned that more experience leads to higher job satisfaction and that administrators with higher service durations would enhance their mean scores in job satisfaction since they can handle their tasks more confidently.

After carefully analyzing the responses of the participants, several themes emerged for each category. When asked about the differences in leading a school pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, the different themes emerged: **1) change in learning modalities, needs, and protocols, 2) stronger ties with stakeholders, and 3) need for enhanced level of empathy and sensitivity.** Most participants stated that the main difference was the change in modalities, needs, and protocols. The demand for health and wellness programs and facilities is increasing, and mandatory protocols are in place to ensure contingency and prevention. According to [Kennette and Chapman \(2024\)](#), some features such as recorded lectures, electronic handouts, and e-textbooks were used more frequently during the pandemic because we had to pivot online and could no longer use paper-based resources. As a result, students experienced greater learning through technology. Due to the change in protocols, there was also an increase in ties with stakeholders and enhanced levels of empathy and sensitivity because of the lingering health risks during and after. Somehow, the pandemic has shifted the focus from prioritizing health and wellness in schools to promoting empathy and sensitivity in communities. The results of the testimonies validate Mintzberg's P-O-L-C model. After gauging the circumstances, each respondent planned, organized, led, and controlled their responses.

The data under the solutions to the identified challenges and difficulties presented several themes. Dealing with challenges and difficulties does not end with identifying them. Formulating solutions and implementing them immediately follows if we want to solve emerging challenges. From the data gathered, the subordinate themes that emerged are the following; **1) Collaboration with parents and other stakeholders, 2) Continuous promotion and prioritization of health and wellness, 3) Utilization of available technology and means of communication, 4) Intensive preparation and formulation of contingency plans, and 5) Consultation and meetings.** The themes highlighted the importance of encouraging teachers' academic freedom, fostering internal collaboration, conducting training, and offering short courses to parents as partners in bridging learning gaps. [Cresencio and Yabut \(2023\)](#) emphasized that teachers, students, and parents must be extra cautious in their homes during pandemics because these spaces are now extensions of schools where online programs are offered. This can only be achieved through collaboration and the promotion of health and wellness. Participant 4 stated, *"During this period, meetings, trainings, and stakeholder engagement are conducted to raise awareness of mental health programs for students."* Despite these challenges, school heads could still create employable solutions for their schools. This coincides with the second and third stages of Mitroff's Crisis Management Model. Probing and prevention and containment stages are emphasized to mitigate damages and logically deal with existing challenges.

Furthermore, collaborations and consultations are now welcomed, involving community members and utilizing technology for holistic child development. Health promotion and



prioritization are prioritized during the pandemic, and contingency plans are developed to prepare for various possibilities. This demonstrates shared leadership and adaptability to the new scenario. These results coincide with Lim (2019) statement that a secure and supportive learning environment and a plan of action for educational continuity are maintained even in the event of a disaster through the cooperation of all authorities, from the national level to the subnational level of education and local communities.

With regard to the initiatives and strategies employed in response to the identified needs, the themes discovered are: **1) Procurement of materials needed, 2) Communication and feedbacking, 3) Monitoring and Evaluation 4) Conduct of Literacy programs, 5) Collaboration with stakeholders** and, **6) Consultation and meetings**. Based on the responses, it was identified that one of the leading needs during this period is the production of learning materials. Participant 5 mentioned that *“Teachers worked on creating, designing, and printing learning materials.”* Because of the transition period after the pandemic, this was one of the most challenging initiatives implemented. The reproduction of learning materials is a significant challenge, as well as necessitating communication, feedback, consultations, and stakeholder collaboration to monitor and evaluate programs during and after the pandemic. However, with the collaborative efforts of the involved, proper responses are employed, and needs are met in the process.

In addition, Teacher empowerment, Initiated Mental Health programs and Adherence to the given standards by the government can also be seen in some testimonies. There is a noticeable number of responses regarding the initiatives and strategies employed. The participants' desire to meet the identified needs is reflected in this. A number of both internal and external factors, including the budget, the clientele's economic situation, the involvement of stakeholders and local government agencies, and their willingness to receive feedback, may also have an impact on their replies. Participant 3 said, *“To effectively communicate, it is crucial to actively listen to stakeholders, colleagues, and friends.”* This proves that collaboration is a key response during trying times like crisis. The results also correlate with Fred Edward Fiedler's contingency theory, which suggested that there is no “one size fits all” leadership strategy for an organization.

On the other hand, there are two ways to look at a single circumstance. The disruptive times of the pandemic and the post-pandemic period are an example of this. There may be a long list of negative effects associated with the aforementioned, but there are still opportunities discovered during these difficult times, and school heads agree to this, too.

From the data gathered, the subordinate themes for the strategies employed to capitalize on the discovered opportunities are: **1) Collaboration with stakeholders, 2) Conduct of training, 3) In-depth analysis, and 4) Continuous utilization of technological advancements**. The four subordinate themes are aligned with the discovered opportunities, which are partnerships and collaborations, technological advancements, and changes in learning methodologies. Discovered opportunities need to be capitalized to maximize their potential and make them more beneficial. During the pandemic, teachers' digital competence was crucial for maintaining fair access to education. Schools worldwide have conducted professional development to enhance teachers' digital skills (Durrani et al., 2024). In addition, collaborations with stakeholders promotes inclusivity among members of the community. Stakeholders now feel that they are involved in honing students in many ways. They are now consulted, frequently informed, and invited in schools to become a part of the process. On the other hand, the conduct of trainings and continuous utilization of technological advancements are both working toward the improvement of teachers and other members of schools. These are ways to learn and relearn different things to make work more efficient and effective in various ways. Finally, an in-depth analysis is now conducted as part of prevention and preparation. Since the pandemic, the school leaders have become more aware of

the possibilities and uncertainties that are existing which pushes them to carefully analyze the situation before making a final decision. Resilience is commonly referred to as a multidimensional construct, capability, or dynamic process. Resilience is supported by multiple assets and resources that work together to equip individuals with the skills, knowledge, and perspective to adapt successfully to unfavorable conditions in their life and surroundings and proactively prepare for future problems (McEwen, 2014). The ability to bounce back and withstand difficulties. The post-pandemic period presented schools with adversities from which school heads are expected to promote resilience during this period. Changes and protocols set by the government and higher-education departments are just one of the few considerations to look at to promote school resilience. Besides these points, the presence of learning losses and learning gaps and the health and mental well-being status of everyone involved are also points of consideration. The subordinate themes for the resilience strategies implemented or incorporated by the participants are: **1) employment of different literacy programs, 2) devising of appropriate resilience plans, 3) needs assessment and provision, 4) involvement of members of the community, 5) constant monitoring and evaluation, 6) open communication, and 7) consultations.**

Participant 6 stated, *"The strategy involved promoting positive emotions, competence, optimism, and community involvement to encourage change and resilience, with a general assembly held before class opening."* It can be seen that several resilience strategies have been implemented or incorporated by school heads. This denotes their urge to bounce back and regain what was lost during the pandemic which was a chaotic time. The results also reflect the effort rendered by the participants to the schools and communities they serve. School heads are implementing resilience strategies to recover from the chaotic pandemic and show their commitment to their schools and communities. Their diverse practices affirm Fielder's Contingency Theory, demonstrating that the most effective leadership style for any given situation is one that is tailored to the given situation.

School recovery requires proactive approaches to produce maximum positive results. Recovery must be taken seriously, especially in educational institutions. Proper recovery ensures that students are correctly placed and have the appropriate knowledge and skills that are aligned with their grade level. However, the recovery of educational institutions during the pandemic has been challenging. For the proactive approaches executed for school recovery, the subordinate themes based on their testimonies are **1) implementation of different strategies to improve literacy, 2) Continuous collaboration with stakeholders, 3) Presence of readiness and contingency plan, 4) Adaptation and flexibility to new situations, and 5) Prioritization of health and well-being.**

Implementing different strategies to improve literacy as a subordinate theme is not surprising. It was highly needed due to the presence of learning gaps and learning loss after years of being in the pandemic with so few options for learning and so many hindrances to the actual learning process. Collaboration with stakeholders can be seen as a subordinate theme repeatedly which denotes its importance and value of partnership. The presence of a readiness and contingency plan in schools is a step toward accepting the different existing factors that may hinder the learning process at any time. This means that schools are now thinking about ways to overcome possibilities and problems before they emerge. This is also highly related to the subordinate theme "Adaptation and flexibility to new situations".

Participant 4 emphasized that *"Adaptability and flexibility are crucial in navigating uncertainties in the department, even in the middle of changes not related to the pandemic."* School heads are enhancing their preparedness against crises by implementing new protocols, mandates, and rules, which are currently in effect. Positive perceptions highlight the organization's crisis management strengths, laying the groundwork for strategic program growth. These approaches strengthen organizational resilience by promoting continuous improvement and proactive crisis

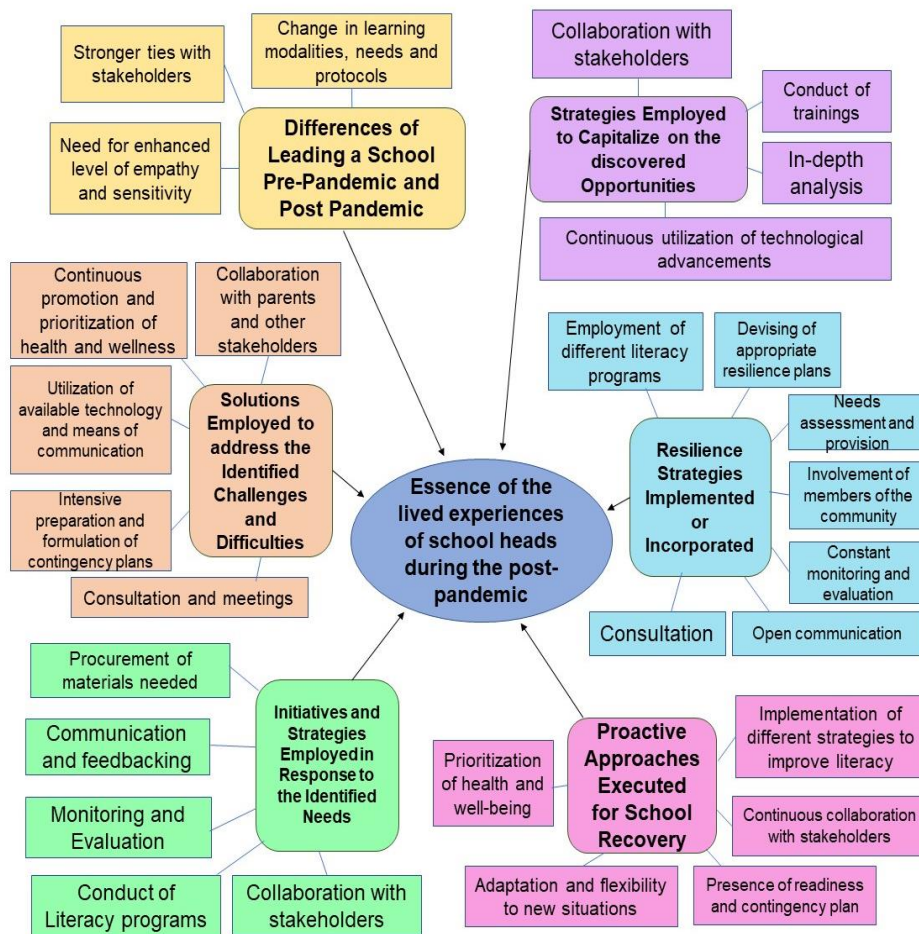
management (Calilao et al., 2024). The responses correspond to the last stage of Fink’s crisis life cycle; resolution and Mitroff’s model; Recovery and Learning stages. School heads’ approaches are geared toward school recovery despite the disruptive situation.

School heads have demonstrated exceptional dedication to achieving resilience while navigating complex challenges to restore educational normalcy and recovery. School administrators are now utilizing innovative technological methods to create flexible learning environments, while education leaders are actively working to mitigate pandemic-related losses.

P4 emphasized that *“leaders should always be ready and willing to do what is required. These changes require adjustments. Now, as leaders, we should be ready and willing to accept whatever changes are given to us, whether it is a pandemic or not.”*

P3 also stated, *“The best leadership style is a case-by-case basis.” There is no customized leadership style that you would like to apply throughout the season or semester.* By examining their individual experiences and lived experiences, it is reasonable to conclude that school administrators played a significant role as pillars and a solid scaffold in the school’s revival.

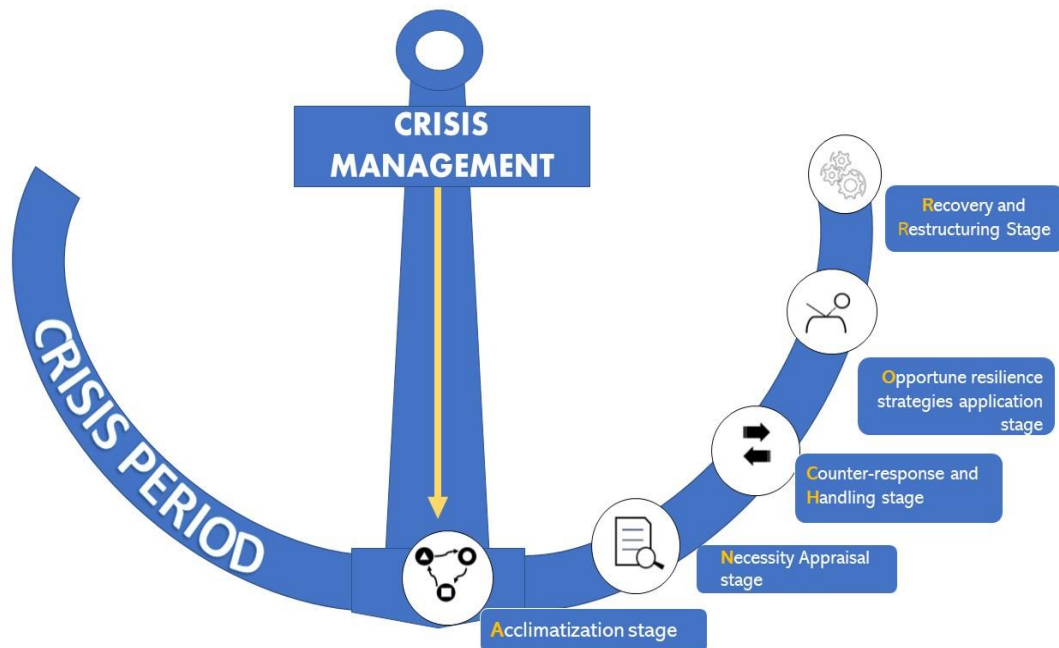
During the pandemic, school administrators were essential in putting learning strategies into practice, guaranteeing student access to education, and placing high priority on their health and safety. Action-oriented conduct toward high-level tasks allows for better leadership flexibility and elasticity (Rajbhandari, 2017). In addition, school officials can gain a better understanding by including advocates. Advocates can enhance data collection, reporting, transparency, and trust in school system officials, enabling effective resource allocation and sustainable initiatives in the post-pandemic budgetary landscape (Pitts et al., 2023).



**Figure 2.** The lived experiences of school heads during the pandemic

The study identifies six categories of school heads' post-pandemic experiences, with recurring themes like consultation and stakeholder collaboration. This highlights the importance of leadership and the vast scope of their efforts. School administrators need support to lead effectively, make wise decisions, and create a positive learning environment that promotes resilience and recovery through shared leadership and involvement. Leadership development goals are crucial for staying current in today's fast-paced academic environment (Maduforo et al., 2024).

School heads must practice proper crisis management to secure students and staff, minimize damages, maintain continuity, mitigate risks, promote readiness, and respond effectively to challenging situations. Thus, the researcher devised the ANCHOR Model as a Crisis Management Framework.



**Figure 3.** The ANCHOR Model as a Crisis Management Framework

This study introduces a novel crisis management model, the ANCHOR Model, to enhance crisis response effectiveness beyond the education sector and foster long-term resilience and sustainable recovery in the face of evolving crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. This research enhanced crisis response effectiveness beyond the education sector by fostering long-term resilience and sustainable recovery despite evolving crises.

The anchor framework structure represents stability, control, and resilience in the face of adversity, and from participant responses, the researcher developed five stages of crisis management.

1. The **Acclimatization Stage** involves adjusting to a new situation, testing survival in a critical condition, and adjusting to new protocols, ensuring everyone follows a new setting for the organization.
2. The **Needs Appraisal Stage** is a crucial stage where organizations assess their needs to continue operations during crises and identify potential new needs due to adjustments.
3. The **Counter Response and Handling Stage** involves implementing strategies to mitigate the crisis's negative impacts and resume normal operations to prevent further setbacks.
4. The **Opportune resilience strategies application Stage** focuses on minimizing negative effects and restoring operations, focusing on adaptation and flexibility to bounce back from crises.
5. The **Recovery and Restructuring stage** involve restoring normalcy, recovering losses, and

implementing significant changes to prevent future crises. Planning and strengthening contingency plans are crucial in this stage.

Finally, the crisis management framework helps organizations navigate challenging situations, facilitate response analysis, evaluate status, and facilitate decision-making. It also safeguards all involved in overcoming difficult times.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the information and data acquired from the participants, the researcher obtained a more comprehensive picture of the actual experiences of school heads during the pandemic. This allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the school heads' experiences and observe decisions from a different angle. A wide array of resilience and recovery strategies were applied by school headteachers to help schools return to recovery. The outcomes discussed and the new crisis management framework are unique contributions to the field of education and research. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Increasing staff involvement in decision-making and offering more support to school administrators is recommended because it is thought to help the school's recovery and foster more productivity.
2. Empathy training for school staff members and administrators is strongly recommended to help them fully comprehend one another's situations.
3. It is recommended that school administrators receive ongoing training, especially in the areas of compassionate management and crisis leadership, to ensure they are prepared for any future crises.
4. It is recommended that schools regularly involve stakeholders in procedures that are appropriate for them to increase their participation.

## **LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study was limited to the investigation of the real-life experiences of the (8) participating school heads during the post-pandemic period. This study focused on school heads' ways of building resilience and promoting recovery during the aforementioned disruptive times. The study also offers in-depth insights into the viewpoints, approaches, needs, opportunities, and difficulties experienced by school administrators as they navigate their institutions through a transformational period and a new normal setting.

To guarantee a complete representation of their perspectives, the research involved school administrators from different institutions who participated primarily in the learning recovery program of their department and who instituted face-to-face interventions in their schools at the start of the school year. Limitations of the study include a limited sample size, time constraints in gathering responses, personal perspectives, and other external factors. Conducting further in-depth research on school heads' resilience and recovery strategies in different settings and systems will be advantageous.

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