Education, Literacy, and Leadership in Challenging Conditions and Emergencies: A Case Study Hatay/Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a fundamental role in the personal and social development of individuals. However, in some cases, educational processes occur under challenging conditions, causing various difficulties for students and educators. Challenging conditions can result from natural disasters, wars, economic crises, or health problems. This research aimed to describe education, literacy, and leadership in challenging conditions through the opinions of teachers and schools. In this context, it sought answers to the questions of what it is, how it is, and how it should be. It aimed to analyze and evaluate schools from the perspective of principals and teachers in an emergency and difficult situation after the earthquake in Hatay, Türkiye. The research examined the challenges school leaders face in doing their jobs in an emergency or challenging circumstances, the nature of the context in which these challenges occur, and the strategies they adopt to meet these challenges. The context of the research was a situation study of urgent and challenging conditions in Hatay province, based on the opinions of school principals (in primary and high schools) working under challenging conditions in Hatay. The situation in question in this study is the management and leadership actions of education in emergency and difficult conditions caused by the earthquake in Hatay. This study included primary and high schools located in Hatay, facing challenging conditions. A descriptive analysis was performed to analyze the qualitative data. Leadership in emergency and difficult situations is an important factor in raising awareness for teachers, students, and parents to determine a common direction and combat difficulties in this process because challenging environments have a negative impact on teachers and students. It is possible to say that the most basic support element of a school's different stakeholders in this difficult situation is school principals. It was concluded that appropriate and qualified coordination and the leadership of school principals in difficult and emergency situations are important factors. Competence in education and leadership in difficult situations will increase literacy in this area.

Key words: Education, Educational Leadership, Challenging Conditions, Challenging Literacy

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that the education system has to renew, change, and transform itself under changing conditions. The nature of education is based on change and the necessity of being a self-renewing and transforming structure. Although education follows necessary conditions to adopt the change and take a stance accordingly, the existence of urgent and challenging situations requires making and implementing extraordinary decisions.

The increase in international competition, accountabilities, responsibilities, and academic and professional qualifications requires change. Learning environments also need to respond to these rapid changes since significant changes driven by globalization and technology are taking place (Duressa1 & Kidane, 2024).

It is always considered that schools and education systems face major challenges. Different needs, controversial ideologies, and the changing structure and nature of education make it compulsory (Arar & Örücü, 2021; Arar 2021). One of the most important focuses of society's demands for change is their expectation from education systems. Education is the center of a cycle that concerns almost all segments of society and in which everyone is involved.

Under urgent and challenging conditions, education systems must be involved in several situations such as responding to needs, accountability, and deciding on and managing a new formation. The challenging conditions and emergencies each society has to deal with are different. It is even possible to reduce these differences to region, city, and school levels. According to Berkovich (2018), challenging conditions are

defined as the combination of a school's internal conditions (including past performance) with external socio-economic conditions, challenging conditions, multiple socio-economic characteristics (parents' education and income, ethnic affiliation, migration status, unemployment and welfare status, urban and rural location, etc.) that are likely to be lower. However, according to Halbi (2006), children with low education conditions, poorly educated parents, one family living in one room, poorly managed schools, inadequate communication and interaction between staff, etc. are all defined as challenging conditions in schools. According to Ahumada et al. (2016), some of the major challenges are related to the impact of HIV on the student population, remote parenting, limited access to school, inadequate infrastructure, and underperforming teachers. Many of these factors are attributed to countries with low socio-economic status.

Schools in disadvantaged communities continue to be a challenge for policymakers in many countries. In such schools, academic performance is well below national norms, and this is an ongoing pattern. It is also clear that poverty is a significant barrier to access and success in education (Reynolds et al., 2006). Recently, challenges to students' learning in these schools have been recognized to deprived educational and cultural backgrounds of the students concerned, distant parenting, poverty, and lack of adequate infrastructure (Ahumada et al., 2016; Hämeenaho, 2016; Markkanen et al., 2020). Schools failing to meet and those serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities have become known as schools facing challenging circumstances (Chapman & Harris, 2004). Theoretically, indicators of whether a school is in a 'challenging context' could include a range of factors, such as free school meals, socioeconomic status, parental education, and occupation. However, challenging conditions appear to be more concentrated in poorer areas (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Gillett et al., 2016).

In the management of education under all circumstances, the management of urgent and challenging situations needs leaders. The need to manage circumstances has promoted the tendency towards educational leadership. Challenges and unpredictable circumstances at the global level raise the need to update education policies on the one hand and manage them on the other. Different studies worldwide define problems in different areas, such as terrorism, health, violence, poverty, migration, refugees, social injustice, racism, disasters as urgent and challenging educational situations.

According to the classification made by Berkovich and Grinshtain (2022) based on different research findings, schools in challenging conditions often share several challenging characteristics such as (a) students from families struggling with poverty or unemployment, (b) a student population that is dominated by a non-hegemonic ethnicity or has a multi-ethnic structure, (c) high rate of students who do not fully comprehend the language of instruction, (d) the situation of parents who are not competent enough to support students' learning and (e) compelling socio-spatial location (e.g., urban, inner-city, rural). Success under these conditions is often portrayed as having been achieved "against the odds". Therefore, it is not surprising that leadership in schools facing challenging conditions has become

a topic of research. These harsh conditions may also refer to difficult and emergency situations that arise as a result of the social mobility of people who move due to reasons such as earthquakes, fires, floods, and migration (asylum seekers, refugees, or immigrants), especially in the conditions under the socio-spatial heading. Gillett et al. (2016), on the other hand, acknowledge the challenges as high staff turnover, poor facilities, lack of resources, falling student numbers, and constant teacher turnover, as well as difficult and urgent situations due to geographical isolation.

During the first two decades of this century, terrorism, civil unrest, and climate change have created unprecedented levels of social disruption in parts of developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries. While many countries around the world have struggled strongly to integrate refugee children into their education systems, others have tried to deprive these children of opportunities to participate in education altogether. Racism, religious and ethnic intolerance, and gender-based violence have increased existing challenges and created new ones for school leaders in different contexts. These issues, which are challenging enough, have been greatly transformed by the global disruptions caused by COVID-19 in what feels like the blink of an eye (Jacobson, 2021). The severity of the challenges is directly related to the cultural, socio-political, and economic situation of a country, which also directs the scope of educational research in the context of a particular country (Arar & Örücü, 2021).

Türkiye's strategic and geographical location and its location in the earthquake zone necessitates the development of a policy and approach to the management of challenging and emergency situations. The existence of a gap in the field reveals the importance of examining educational policies in Türkiye in the context of leadership.

In the management of the multivariate nature of education, leaders at a lower level, even in the context of school organization, come to the fore as much as leaders in central administration. The fact that leaders take on tasks and roles in unexpected situations depending on their leadership style can also be seen as an important aspect. According to Hopkins (2001), in challenging situations in schools, the effects of leadership behaviors increase. Different leadership styles can have effects on different educational environments (Berkovich, 2018).

A tough-love leadership that combines "tough" and "loving" approaches, with a focus on crisis management and a positive vision of the school, is defined as a leadership of challenging and urgent circumstances (Berkovich & Grinshtain, 2022). While different countries have different policies on how to deal with emergencies and difficult situations, the most distinctive thing may be the need for leaders to manage these situations. Such a leadership style can be mentioned based on the performance of leaders in difficult and emergency situations.

School principals use autocratic and directive behaviors while promoting a culture of love, so both "loving" (e.g., nurturing, inclusive) and "tough" (e.g., autocratic, directive) behaviors seem to be central to successful educational leadership (Berkovich and Grinshtain, 2022). Therefore, the aim is to build a leadership that establishes rules and routines for the followers to help and prevent them from behaving in the wrong way.

It is an established fact that managers working in difficult conditions adopt both flexible and rigid behaviors. The combination of flexible and rigid behaviors seems to be an inseparable part of leadership in educational institutions facing challenging conditions. In challenging geographies, crisis management leaders are concerned with constantly managing tensions and issues.

School leaders around the world have to overcome these challenges and "build better", and there are additional skills and understandings they still need to develop to do so (Jacobson, 2021). Understanding the effectiveness of principals' leadership styles is a key moderator that deserves exploration given the challenging conditions schools face (Berkovich, 2018; Gillett et al., 2016). It is important to reveal the effectiveness of principals' leadership behaviors under different challenging conditions and emergencies. Leaders in schools facing challenging and urgent conditions are forced to confront the consequences of many economic, geographical, social, and psychological situations in schools. According to Gillett et al. (2016), "another contextual factor that can have an impact on the functioning of schools facing challenging conditions is teacher efficacy and accountability." The responsibility of the said competence, literacy, and accountability management also falls within the duties and responsibilities of school principals. It can be said that the differentiation of schools' areas of action within a centralized structure or decentralized structures can be mentioned. With increased levels of autonomy in local or school-based administrations, school administrators may be asked to take risks, and face and respond to more challenges and emergencies than usual. If school administrators demonstrate adequate leadership in challenging conditions and are well-literate in this area, they can increase organizational effectiveness.

Educational institutions require structural, procedural, and strategic frameworks. It emphasizes the need for principled, methodical, and strategic educational organizational management. School principals use leadership and professionalism to guide teachers, organizational systems and support mechanisms toward quality development towards excellence (Santaveesuk et al., 2024). In this sense, literacy regarding challenging conditions can be seen as a priority skill for every principal. Interest in improving schools in difficult circumstances has tended to focus on the areas of school improvement and school effectiveness. As a result, there is now considerable consensus and clarity about the characteristics of 'good', 'effective', and 'improving schools'.

Transforming schools in difficult circumstances into good and effective schools depends on identifying the difficult circumstances and focusing on what needs to be done in this context.

This research aimed to describe education, literacy, and leadership in challenging conditions through the opinions of teachers and schools. It also aimed to analyze and evaluate schools in Hatay, Türkiye following the earthquake, from the perspective of principals and teachers. The research investigated school leaders' difficulties when performing their duties in emergencies or challenging situations. It also explores the context in which these challenges arise and the approaches they use to overcome them.

By this objective, the research questions were described as follows:
1. What are the general education policies (legal regulations and enforcement) at the local and school level in challenging circumstances?
2. What are the significant challenges, emergencies, and main strengths faced by school principals in their work related to general education policies in the post-earthquake emergency and challenging conditions?
3. How do school principals deal with difficult and emergency situations after an earthquake?
4. What are the behaviors that characterize challenging leadership in schools facing challenging situations?

METHOD

The Context of the Research

The context of the research was a case study of challenging conditions in Hatay province based on the views of school principals in schools (primary and high schools) under challenging conditions. Hatay has been facing difficult conditions caused by the earthquake and refugees. The study focused on gathering information from the field in the context of school principals' leadership actions under challenging conditions, especially after the February 6, 2023 earthquake. Hatay is a city that has experienced significant destruction due to the earthquake and is currently dealing with the aftermath of both the earthquake and the Syrian civil war. Schools are therefore more likely to face unexpected and challenging situations. The earthquake demonstrated this possibility. This research was set in the context of the challenging and emergency situations in schools in Hatay following the earthquake.

Design

The study employed a case study, one of the qualitative research designs. According to Glesne (2011), in a case study, the situation can vary from an individual, a village community, or an event to a series of processes such as the implementation of a specific program (cited in Paker, 2015). This study aimed to provide a detailed and holistic description of education and leadership in emergency and challenging conditions in four schools, two primary and two high schools. Yin (2013), on the other hand, refers to a current phenomenon as a study that is questioned within its context in cases where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear.

This study intended to thoroughly analyze the management of education and leadership actions during emergency and difficult conditions caused by the earthquake in Hatay. The study was organized in a nested single-case design (Stake, 2005). In this case, the data were collected from different schools. During data collection, interviews and observations were conducted in four schools. Observations were recorded by note-taking.

Sampling

This study included two school levels (primary and high school) in Hatay, which has been facing challenging

conditions. The schools were selected from four schools in Hatay, which was affected by the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye. The criterion sampling method was used to determine the sample. Criterion sampling is a method for selecting individuals who represent a group based on specific characteristics. This method determines institutions to be included in a study according to certain criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The research included the examination of interviews with 8 teachers and 4 principals in four schools selected by the purposeful sampling method and observations in the schools. In this sense, the principals had been working in their schools for at least four years and the schools were facing challenging conditions. Four schools in Hatay, Türkiye, met the specified criteria. The schools were selected as two schools each from primary and secondary education levels. One of the secondary schools was a vocational high school. The other was an Anatolian high school, a kind of school at which only students getting sufficient scores from a central exam can study. At the primary level, one school was an elementary school (6-11 years) and the other was a secondary school (11-14 years). Individual meetings were held with the principal of each school. At the same time, group interviews were conducted with 3 to 5 teachers in each school, and individual interviews were conducted with a total of 8 teachers (2 teachers from each school). A semi-structured questionnaire was used in the interviews. The interviewed school principals had been working in the same school for at least two years. The allocated time for each school ranged between 1 and 2 hours. Group discussions lasted between 20 and 35 minutes, and individual interviews lasted 15 minutes on average. Approximately 20 minutes were allocated for the observation of the schools. Interviews were conducted with 4 school principals, 4 groups, and 8 teachers.

Data Collection

This research was conducted in schools under challenging and emergency circumstances, based on the perspectives of school principals and teachers from a range of seniority. For this reason, the identified school principals and teachers constituted the sample of this case study. School principals' and teachers' statements were used to clarify the situations significantly. Semi-structured questions were used in the interviews. These questions were;

(a) What are the general education policies of your country under difficult and emergency situations? b) How would you describe the functioning of your school under difficult and emergency situations? (c) What are the behaviors or strategies you use in your school in difficult and emergency situations?

The interviews were recorded. Unstructured observations followed by individual in-depth interviews were conducted to elicit participants' views and behaviors. Various qualitative data collection methods were employed for gathering data from the school principals, and teachers.

To provide validity, the data were transferred objectively and with integrity without changing the meaning. The principle of consensus was adhered to in the creation of codes and categories to express how the participants expressed what they said. In addition, as an interpretation criterion, it was ensured that the participants' statements were transcribed without any comments. For reliability, the data were collected and compared by the researchers to ensure consistency. During the study, the research questions were clearly stated by the researchers, and the data were collected meticulously and carefully. Each stage of the research process (questions, determination of the questions in the interview form, demographic data of the participants, data collection, and data analysis) was reported clearly and explicitly.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using a descriptive analysis approach. In the first stage, the country policies of principals and teachers regarding difficult and emergency situations at schools were examined. The second phase focused on school-level analysis of the interviews using supporting data from on-site observations, aiming to build a portrait of each school. Four principals were interviewed through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Group interviews were conducted with teachers in each school. The data were analyzed under the titles of main themes determined based on the questions. It was emphasized what the main theme or themes might be in the data examined based on the questions. The categories based on the codes and what the main theme should be as a result were determined by comparing the data obtained from the participants in different schools. As a result of this assessment, the relationship between the themes and the questions was analyzed, and the themes were renamed by their close similarities.

To identify what schools do in the face of challenges and what practices are seen to be effective in enabling them to succeed, the interviews were listened to again and then the written narratives were given to the participants for verification. Accordingly, the researchers tried to ensure reliability in matching the constructed realities of the participants with the reconstructions attributed to them.

During data collection, group and individual interviews as well as on-site observation of schools contributed to validity. At the same time, reliability was increased by cross-checking the data analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

General and Local Education Policies

It was seen that the principals and teachers were mostly uninformed about the general and local legal regulations regarding education in emergency and unforeseen circumstances across the country. It became prominent that there may be legal regulations regarding the management of emergencies and unexpected situations. Institutions are obliged to make emergency and evacuation plans specific to the institutions within the framework of the Civil Defense Law and Occupational Health and Safety Law throughout the country. It is noteworthy that the first legal regulation that comes to mind is the regulation of occupational health and safety. The

Regulation on Emergency Situations at Workplaces, which is based on the Occupational Health and Safety Law, provides a legal framework for what should be done in emergency and unexpected situations in a wide range of areas including natural disasters. The following excerpt reveals the knowledge of a manager (P1) on this subject.

> In emergencies and difficult situations, a country may have existing legal legislation, but I do not have very detailed information. We have activities related to occupational health and safety, but I cannot say that they are carried out very regularly. Under the coordination of workplace health and safety unit (ISGB) coordinators and civil defense experts, the Ministry of National Education search and rescue teams" (MEB akub teams) continue their activities. Evacuation drills are conducted in schools, and students and teachers are informed about this issue. Civil defense plans are also made. (T1)

In the Regulation on Emergency Situations; an emergency is defined as events that may occur in the whole or part of the workplace or that may affect the workplace from outside, such as fire, explosion, the spread of hazardous chemicals, poisoning, epidemic disease, radioactive leakage, sabotage, and natural disasters that require immediate intervention. Accordingly, it was emphasized that "it is necessary to make a plan that includes the work and procedures to be carried out in emergencies that may occur in workplaces and the actions for implementation. In the focus group interview with teachers (1), the following views were expressed.

> Perhaps there are many laws and regulations. But there is always a loophole in these legal regulations or they are not implemented seriously. Sometimes I think that the legal regulations are for rent-seeking purposes, to make someone rich, but then we can't find out who is going to pay for the damage that we face. Everyone blames the other. We all have a lot of responsibilities in this regard, both legislators and implementers.

P3's opinion on this issue is as follows;

> I don't know the actual regulations a lot, and I am not able to convey the right information to parents and students. Principals and teachers in particular need to be informed about what the legal basis is. Organizing should be done in this framework for implementation.

Improving the conditions for distance education was found to be one of the areas that schools should prioritize for emergency and unexpected situations. The inadequate equipment of distance education schools across the country has slowed down initiatives to meet the educational needs of students.

Excerpts from the focus group interview (FG2) summarizing this situation are as follows.

> After the earthquake, many teachers, parents, and students in the region of the earthquake suffered from internet problems. There is a need to increase the competencies of schools and staff in online education as a whole. In environments where education cannot be provided face-to-face, online education should be urgently used. It was more troublesome for students to be alone in this process and to spend time outside the school. Schools in our region never opened. We were only able to serve a very small number of students with a few volunteer teachers.

As for T6;

I think that every employee should be informed and trained on the content of legal regulations.

She drew attention to the fact that employees do not have enough information about legal regulations in schools. Urgent and challenging conditions were defined as the schooling of girls, the needs of students with special needs, the dissemination of institutions for students with special needs, the prominence of inclusive education policies, and action plans based on the emergency regulations on emergency and disaster management. It was observed that emergency action plans related to the earthquake could not be effectively implemented in this process. The opinions of P2 and P1 on this issue are as follows.

> In the first stage of the post-earthquake, none of the emergency action plans were effectively implemented. It has been observed that there is no effective legal regulation that meets all crises, and the process is tried to be carried out with official letters and circulars at the point required by the situation. (P2)

> Since the earthquake disaster was localized, the emergency regulations were inadequate. Since people's priority was survival, urgent decisions on education could not be taken, and education was seriously disrupted. School principals, who initially worked in tents and container cities for three months, were then able to focus on the repair of their schools and education-related processes. However, in this process, personal efforts and connections were at the forefront, and no regular and systematic assistance or implementation was seen. (P1)

The improvement of challenging situations can be supported by creating a structured environment in the classroom where routines, rules, and expectations are clear to students in schools. Developing knowledge about students and the issues that affect their behavior can help in challenging situations (Markkanen et al. 2020). The general structure of the school and the students are seen as a factor as an example of challenging situations (Grieve, 2009). Challenging conditions originating from students can be reduced to a lesser level with a systematic arrangement. Legal regulations are an important source of challenging conditions. School development programs that are suitable for different schools facing difficult conditions may vary according to the external and internal authority and control balance of schools, each school environment, and conditions. This research also showed that especially lack of information and uncertainty about what to do make school management difficult in difficult conditions.

Local and School Level Activities, Strengths and Weaknesses Regarding General Education Policies

Regarding the question "What are the significant difficulties-emergencies and strengths-weaknesses faced by school administrators during their work on general education policies in post-earthquake emergency and challenging conditions?", it was observed that administrators and teachers primarily ensured the establishment of a crisis desk and contributed to the coordination. However, about the establishment of the crisis desk and emergency decision-making, it was stated that the

communication network was not functioning, there was uncertainty in the first ten days about where and how to gather and under what conditions to work. It was emphasized that it took days for the realization of the incident to sink in, yet the necessary care and efforts were made to ensure that the doors of the schools were open to everyone.

The views of T1 on this subject are as follows:

First of all, I placed my children in a safe area, contacted civil society organizations, and started working with them. First of all, we ensured that the aid received was delivered to those in urgent need. However, we did not keep any records here, so I witnessed that people who did not need it received aid again and again.

Similarly, in the focus group interview (FG2):

No work was done in schools in the first days. Container cities started to be built, but schools were forgotten during this process. We coordinated with our own means and tried to continue education in tents with volunteer teachers. There was no systematic and planned organization. We spent a lot of time in uncertainty and waiting for decisions to be taken. For example, our school was one of the least damaged schools. Our school garden was also suitable for this. We had volunteer teachers who could spare time for children in difficult conditions, but we could not work with anyone in a plan or they could not include us in a plan. The management of schools requires a unique organization and planning. It didn't happen. We spent the second semester, which was supposed to start with the earthquake. Then, it was said that catch-up education would start in August, but that didn't happen, either. In September, the schools opened and we could only prepare our schools for the new academic year and it is possible to say that uncertainties still exist.

It is possible to say that there is a distinct lack of emergency action plans in the management of the education system under emergencies and difficult conditions. Inadequate communication channels created a lack of coordination. Despite the lack of communication and coordination, teachers in schools tried to organize by contacting their students and parents, and this is how the necessary aid was delivered.

T4's opinion is as follows:

Necessary research was conducted on students and those in urgent need were identified. Non-governmental organizations were contacted and some of the equipment in the school was delivered to the necessary places. Unfortunately, we could not reach our students and their parents initially because the impact area of the earthquake was too big. However, we provided routine aid later.

The opinion of P3 is as follows;

After the earthquake, many of our citizens were able to get help thanks to local social aid organizations. Our school staff embraced the school after the earthquake as before and opened its doors to those who came for help. Due to the lack of security measures, some of the furniture in our school was damaged. Subsequently, support was received from aid organizations to replace these items.

After the earthquake, a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the education system in emergency and unexpected situations emerged. Accordingly, the weakest aspects were the lack of communication, the lack of alternative areas to the buildings or the inability to create them in a short time, the large amount of debris, the complete collapse of the public transportation system, and the increased need for private vehicles. On the other hand, the strengths were every teacher and principal's efforts to contribute to the system's functioning voluntarily and willingly.

In P4's view;

After the earthquake, it was seen that the staff of our school were willing to come together and make decisions together. This was our strong point. However, our school couldn't have an economic recovery in a short time. This is true for all of the schools. I do not believe that our schools can get better in a short time.

According to T5;

Inadequate and purposeless explanations about the relocation of teachers after the earthquake caused teachers to act in an indecisive manner. Teachers were negatively affected by the lack of decisions on how to solve the accommodation problem.

According to the participant, the inability to make quick and effective decisions prevented teachers from making healthy decisions during the process. Employees of some schools found their schools' crisis management efforts to be strong.

P2 expressed his view on this issue as follows:

Our school is strong in crisis management. We have the dynamics to turn existing opportunities in favor of students. Our school lost a lot of equipment during the earthquake. However, we were able to quickly recover these losses through different aid channels.

Schools with serious difficulties need major intervention programs. If the school cannot manage improvement on its own with the usual level of support, it should be supported by an intervention program (Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002; Farmer, Reinke & Brooks, 2014). In particular, the role of school leaders in the school's support program should be consistent with their competence in understanding and managing difficult conditions. According to Potter et al. (2002) characteristics of successful improvement initiatives for schools facing socially and economically challenging conditions are as follows. Clearly, more external input and perhaps more external locus of control is recommended for less successful schools than for some schools.

Challenging conditions in schools are affected by teachers' self-efficacy perceptions and teaching skills (Lane, at al., 2011). Therefore, increasing teacher competencies makes it easier for students to manage their classrooms under challenging conditions.

School Principals' Ways of Dealing with Difficult and Emergency Situations after the Earthquake

It was observed that school principals and teachers took the first precautionary measures to move their families to a safer area in emergencies and difficult situations. For a faster and adequate adaptation to the current crisis, efforts were made to ensure the safety of relatives in need of care and protection. In this case, it can be said that the basic opinion codes of *calming*

down, reassuring oneself, creating a communication network, taking initiative, focusing on the crisis, seeking ways of persuasion, taking risks, directing, planning, authorizing, reducing bureaucracy, organizing the physical conditions of the school, and providing psychosocial support were obtained.

T5 expressed the following opinion on the subject:

For a certain period, neither the school principal nor the teachers were there. Then, we tried to get in touch with our parents and students by creating a communication network under the coordination of our school principal. T3; I think we didn't understand the magnitude of the earthquake at first. After two days in the car, I realized that the situation was terrible. Then, I tried to find a safe place for my family.

In the focus group interview (4), the need to take urgent measures against the crisis was emphasized and the importance of taking initiative and fast effective decision-making was primarily emphasized. It was emphasized that cool-headed attitudes and behaviors are important in the management of the crisis and that ways to establish strong communication networks should be sought.

T7 expressed his opinion on this issue as follows:

Our principal took a cool-headed approach to the events and communicated with all concerned, including parents, teachers, and students. In this process, the behavior of our principal made us stronger. In this framework, we were able to decide what to do and how to help people. P3;

After the earthquake, school administrators tried to cope with the difficult and urgent situation by remaining calm, listening carefully to everyone, and focusing only on possible solutions.

The school principals and teachers pointed out that there was an emergency and unexpected situation in the previous pandemic. The experiences gained during the pandemic period were useful in the earthquake process and helped them adapt to this crisis, although it was very severe. However, they discussed that education employees were directed to jobs in different fields rather than education, which disrupted education. This situation made it difficult for educators to cope with difficult conditions.

The statement of T8 regarding this issue is as follows.

School principals managed the process well, as they had done during the pandemic. However, they had to focus on different areas when they should have concentrated on their core work. This caused disruptions in finding solutions to problems in the education process and optimizing this process. It was not the right decision to assign school principals to different regions in areas that were not related to their work.

Leadership has a powerful and important effect on school improvement in schools facing challenging conditions. The leadership styles of principals and teachers can help facilitate the management of schools in challenging conditions (Harris ve Chapman, 2002). School improvement and reform studies in low-performing schools or high-performing schools support the management of schools under challenging conditions. Promoting improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of public services under challenging conditions is

necessary. In education, this involves providing information to the public about school performance through ranking tables of school results and reports on school 'functionality'. Providing this information aims to increase accountability and transparency and to help parents decide in which school they should enroll their child.

Behaviors Characterizing Difficult and Emergency Conditions Leadership in Schools Facing Challenging and Emergency Situations

Among the opinions on the basic concepts that best describe the leadership behaviors of principals in difficult and emergency situations were *motivational power, empathy, selfless teamwork, objective attitude* and *remembering that they are leaders, foresight, turning the crisis into an opportunity, and the ability to manage scarce resources* the most emphasized concepts.

T6 expressed his opinion on this issue as follows;

Local administrators were inadequate in the aftermath of the earthquake, and they should have urgently focused on the needs of parents, students, teachers, and other staff and turned to solving problems. Therefore, they should have remembered that they were leaders. I think they fell short in this process.

In the post-earthquake process, it was observed that many situations failed to reach the target audiences of both principals and teachers. It can be said that school principals who managed to reach the audience by staying calm and keeping control managed the process well.

The views of P1 and P2 are as follows;

A visionary leader is to mobilize teams to work towards their vision to create a structure and organization to guide them. (P1)

I think effective crisis management, the ability to calm the public by using communication skills, knowledge of resource management, efficient distribution of supplies, and the ability to produce solutions at the point of coordination in such a disorganized and uncertain situation are the competencies that school principals should have. (P2)

The vision of the leader manager can be considered an important quality in crisis management. The self-education of managers in the fields of information, communication, and crisis management enables them to quickly adapt to crisis.

According to Ansell (2004), the following confluence of factors has impacted schools facing challenging circumstances:

- The government's view that education is a key factor in improving economic and social conditions
- A corresponding lack of sustained growth in the provision of resources to schools in challenging circumstances
- A trend towards greater transparency and providing more information on the performance of all areas of the public services, including schools
- The development of an increasingly competitive market among schools
- Increased recognition of the 'fact' that the only consistently effective strategy for improving the effectiveness of schools is related to the development of leadership.

As can be seen, leadership is a matter of great importance in establishing an effective school under difficult conditions.
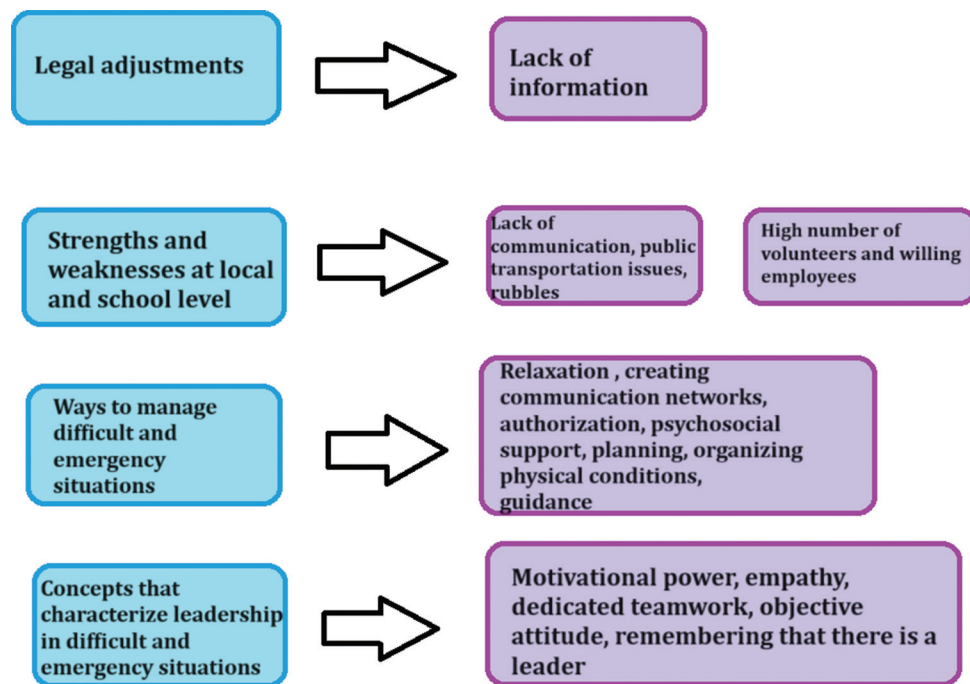
Figure 1. Emergencies and challenging circumstances diagra

The challenges leaders face due to poor performance are often daunting. Factors such as high teacher turnover, poor physical environment, family problems, and peer influences on children make leadership in such schools extremely challenging. The characteristics of "successful" leaders of schools facing challenging conditions (SFCC) are as follows: being interpersonal and intrapersonal, capacity, values, strategic, knowledge, external support knowledge, and local community knowledge. Accordingly, every school needs a leader with at least these characteristics.

CONCLUSION

In this study, conducted in two primary schools and two high schools as a holistic single case design, the situation of schools under emergency and difficult conditions in Hatay after the earthquake was examined. The research included the examination of interviews with 8 teachers and 4 principals in these schools. The aim here was to understand the experiences in schools from the opinions of teachers and principals about legal regulations in schools in emergencies and challenging circumstances.

The primary schools and high schools are the schools directly affected by the earthquake. In this framework, it was aimed to examine the views of principals and teachers within the framework of two very important primary and high school figures as school stakeholders directly affected by the earthquake regarding an emergency and unexpected situation after the earthquake.

To improve schools under difficult conditions, school principals and teachers need to take part in school improvement practices (Chapman & Harris, 2004). The instructional leadership of school principals and the quality of their knowledge and skills in difficult conditions are necessary for school improvements. In this study, it was revealed that the teachers and principals had a lack of knowledge. Therefore,

informative studies on difficult conditions may strengthen the adaptation of schools to difficult conditions.

Leadership in emergencies and difficult situations is an important factor in raising awareness among teachers, students, and parents to identify a common direction in this process and to tackle the challenges. This is because challenging environments have a negative impact on teachers and students. It is possible to say that school principals are the main support element for different stakeholders of the school in this challenging situation. There is a need to understand the leadership of school principals in difficult and emergency situations with appropriate and qualified coordination. In this context, this study helped to question and understand the leadership of school administrators in difficult and emergency situations.

According to Zurkowski (1974), an information-literate person is someone who uses information sources to produce information-based solutions to problems, has the skills necessary to use various information sources, and knows the relevant techniques. School principals can also better manage the situations they are in as people who know difficult conditions.

Robinson (2010) argued that effective school leaders need certain characteristics. Problem solving, building trusting relationships, and assessing the environment of students have been identified as essential characteristics of school leaders (Ahumada et al., 2016). School leaders can leave an important mark on the effectiveness and development of the school in a trusted environment.

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