

LEADING FROM AFAR: NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF DISTANCE MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

Dr. Aysegul ATALAY

ORCID:0000-0003-3079-801X

Faculty of Education

Van Yuzuncu Yil University

Van, TURKIYE

Received: 02/10/2024 Accepted: 03/12/2024

ABSTRACT

The use of technology to enhance distance learning has become more prevalent in recent years, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made distance learning an essential part of education. However, the management of distance learning, where students and trainers are physically separated, has not received as much attention as the practice of distance learning itself. For this reason, the investigation of how management issues and school leadership are carried out at a distance as an alternative in educational management processes has been conducted. It is a fact that teaching and learning practices in different places and times have advantages, but also some disadvantages. Therefore, it is important to consider how these processes are managed at a distance. The research investigates whether behaviours such as effective interpersonal communication, planning and monitoring educational processes, and providing effective leadership change as physical distance increases. The study involved interviews with both teachers and administrators. The findings suggest that principals faced difficulties in establishing good interaction with stakeholders. The school leaders aimed to maintain leadership from within the school, while teachers argued that principals were too controlling in administrative processes and questioned the necessity of an administrator in distance education. In conclusion, I argue that principals should display different characteristics in distance management processes compared to the leadership behaviours they exhibit in school.

Keywords: Challenges, distance, leadership, remotely, strategies.

INTRODUCTION

From the effective leadership approaches that have been acquired thus far, it is evident that management must involve people, including interaction and open communication. However, the pandemic has demonstrated the necessity for transformation in managerial processes due to the accelerated pace of technological advancement and the evolving landscape across all domains. Although the necessity for change has primarily manifested itself in the form of distance learning, it has also rendered distance management a necessity. Nevertheless, this matter has not been accorded the same degree of importance as distance education itself. In summary, the concept of distance management, which can be defined as the ability to oversee work activities from a distance, also necessitates the capacity to facilitate educational processes from a distance.

The concept of distance management has had a significant impact on the way in which leadership is perceived. It is becoming increasingly clear that leaders may need to develop a range of additional skills beyond their well-developed social skills in face-to-face communication. Zieke et al. (2019) highlight the fact that interactions between individuals depend on the ability to adapt to the constant technological changes that are taking place. This topic has also been discussed in the context of e-leadership, remote leadership, or digital leadership, and it is becoming increasingly evident that it is a crucial aspect that requires emphasis in both new and existing circumstances. In order to guarantee the success of distance learning programmes, it is of the utmost importance to pay meticulous attention to detail and to proactively manage those (Harper et al., 2004). It is therefore important to identify how school administrators develop their behaviours and responses in the delivery of distance education. This study examines the ways in which leaders interact with colleagues and stakeholders in a virtual environment, with a particular emphasis on their conduct during periods of crisis. The objective is to ensure the continuity of learning and teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “distance or remote management,” also known as “virtual management,” is used to describe the supervision of individuals or teams who are working in different physical locations. This form of management has become increasingly prevalent as a consequence of the growth in remote working and the advent of technology that facilitates effective communication and collaboration over long distances. The increasing demand for technology-enabled distance learning alternatives and services presents significant challenges for academic leaders, administrators, and support staff. While technological advancement is a pivotal factor in all aspects of education, those in administrative roles are among the most significantly impacted (Schauer et al., 2005). The responsibility for the management of educational policies in a remote capacity fall upon the shoulders of school administrators. However, the extensive implementation of distance learning and online training as a consequence of the global pandemic has positioned school management in a distinctive position. This offers a chance to assess the viability of remote leadership. The guidance of teachers and the assurance of effective planning and programming of distance learning processes in such novel situations necessitate the utilisation of a distinct skill set.

Distance management in schools is an innovative approach to managing educational institutions effectively and efficiently from a remote location. This approach allows administrators and teachers to supervise and perform various tasks without the need for their physical presence in school buildings (Shah, 2014). The use of technology and specialised information systems allows for remote management in schools, providing benefits such as real-time monitoring of student attendance, academic performance, and disciplinary issues (Khamdamov et al., 2020). Furthermore, it facilitates seamless communication and collaboration among stakeholders, thereby enabling them to make data-driven decisions and implement strategies to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Balcita & Palaoag, 2020; Zulfikar & Mirfani, 2020). Moreover, distance management enables educational institutions to automate administrative processes, reduce the volume of paperwork, and enhance operational efficiency. This approach effectively addresses challenges associated with limited resources, geographical barriers, and the necessity for flexible learning options.

The concept of remote management is increasingly regarded as a transformative approach in the field of education. The pandemic has presented numerous challenges to educational institutions and their leaders, necessitating alterations in leadership practices and roles (Schechter et al., 2022). The international evidence base on school leadership during the pandemic is still emerging. Overall, it emphasises the unpredictable and unrelenting demands on school leaders. The available evidence suggests that the personal burden on school leaders is significant, negatively impacting their wellbeing and mental health. In addition, the evidence indicates that school leaders play a critical role in supporting continuity of learning during the pandemic (Harris & Jones, 2022).

The term “remote management” is used to describe the practice of supervising and managing individuals or teams in different physical locations. This approach has become increasingly prevalent in response to the growth of remote workforces and the emergence of global teams. Effective communication and collaboration tools are essential for ensuring seamless coordination among team members. Kowalski and Slebarska (2022) posit that remote management is a challenging undertaking that necessitates meticulous planning and implementation. It is incumbent upon managers to adapt their management style to the specific challenges inherent to remote teams. This necessitates an enhanced capacity for autonomy and self-motivation among team members (Kalemba et al., 2021). In order to combat the effects of isolation in the workplace, it is essential that managers prioritise the development of relationships and the fostering of a sense of belonging within the virtual team. Moreover, the management of remote teams can prove challenging due to the existence of cultural differences. Individuals from disparate backgrounds may exhibit disparate communication styles and expectations (Cai, 2023). To this end, it is incumbent upon managers to establish transparent expectations and objectives for remote teams, and to facilitate comprehension of the specific roles and responsibilities of individual team members, as well as the collective team goals. Furthermore, regular check-ins and feedback sessions are essential for ensuring that remote workers feel supported and have the opportunity to address any challenges they may encounter (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2021).

The effective management of distance is a crucial element in the successful implementation and operation of distance education programmes. The process of curriculum development necessitates meticulous planning

and organisation of the diverse elements inherent to distance education, including the training of instructors, the provision of student support, and the establishment of an appropriate technological infrastructure. The development of a curriculum in a distance education environment requires a meticulous consideration of the learning objectives, instructional materials and assessment methods to be employed. Furthermore, comprehensive student support entails addressing individual learning needs, encouraging participation and fostering a sense of community within the virtual classroom. Furthermore, the technological infrastructure must be robust and reliable to guarantee a seamless learning experience and equal access for all students (Ferdiana, 2013; Leontyeva, 2018; Salas et al., 2002).

It is especially important that all stakeholders engaged in distance education adopt an open and cooperative approach to facilitate the smooth functioning of the programme. The regular provision of feedback, data evaluation and continuous support are essential components of effective distance education management. By prioritising these elements, educational institutions can establish a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that transcends physical barriers (Anderson, 2003). Furthermore, it is especially important to cultivate trust and a sense of community among remote team members in order to foster a positive and productive working environment. This can be achieved through deliberate efforts such as organising team building activities in a virtual environment, providing opportunities for informal interactions and valuing individual contributions (Malhotra et al., 2007; Turesky et al., 2020). Moreover, a proactive approach is essential to address potential impediments to remote working, such as feelings of isolation and disconnection. It is recommended that virtual team leaders communicate frequently with team members, establish channels for open discussion of concerns, and provide appropriate support to meet individual needs (Holton, 2001).

A further crucial element of distance management is the establishment of trust within the team. It is incumbent upon managers to cultivate trust through transparent communication, reliability, and accountability. Trust is of particular importance in remote teams, where direct supervision is limited, as it has a positive effect on team dynamics and overall productivity (Soomar, 2020). Furthermore, managers should consider the implications of different time zones and work schedules among support team units. The flexibility of scheduling meetings and deadlines can foster an inclusive team environment that accommodates different working hours (Newman et al., 2019). The promotion of a clear distinction between work and personal time, the provision of support for wellness initiatives and the facilitation of access to mental health resources can collectively contribute to the overall well-being of remote workers (Franken et al., 2021).

The advent of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has precipitated a period of rapid change and presented leaders with a series of additional challenges. The long-term sustainability of these roles is open to question (Contreras et al., 2020). As we progress in this novel working environment, those in leadership positions will encounter new challenges that necessitate adaptation for optimal success. It may be hypothesised that new approaches to leadership will be required in order to overcome these challenges (Olofsson & Karlsson, 2021). In conclusion, effective remote management requires a more nuanced understanding of team dynamics and individual competencies than is typically assumed. It necessitates the establishment of a unified and communicative virtual team culture, the cultivation of trust and community, and the proactive resolution of the distinctive challenges inherent to remote work environments.

METHOD

In order to gain insight into the implementation and significance of distance management, a data triangulation approach was employed. The study employed semi-structured interviews with nine principals and focus group discussions with five teachers as a means of collecting qualitative data. This approach was designed to cross-check sources and enhance the credibility and authenticity of the qualitative findings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2012; Patton, 2014). There are several reasons for using qualitative research in this study. One such reason is to gain insight into the lived experiences of educators and administrators who oversee distance management by conducting direct feedback interviews. Another reason is to gain rich details about distance management through participants' experiences and perspectives and to gain in-depth understanding of the challenges and strategies related to distance management in education. Another crucial reason is that distance management in education is a dynamic and evolving field. This led to the conclusion that qualitative methodology should be used initially in order to understand the training and attitudes towards this relatively

new research topic. To achieve this objective, individual interviews were conducted with school principals and a focus group study was undertaken with teachers. The objective was to gather a diverse range of data on the applicability of distance management by working with different study groups, namely principals and teachers. This approach enabled the formation of comprehensive views on the functioning and applicability of distance management. The following topics were investigated:

- The role of principals in distance management
- School leaders' communication and interactions with others (such as teachers and students)
- The challenges and strategies involved in distance management

Participants

The research was conducted with nine principals and five teachers employed at public schools in Van, a province of Türkiye. Individual interviews were conducted with the principals, while focus group interviews were conducted with the teachers. As Charmaz (2006) notes, it is not appropriate to cite a specific sample size in qualitative research if the researcher deems the data sufficient. Accordingly, the number of participants was deemed sufficient to yield satisfactory research data and to draw conclusions about the entire research project. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set forth by the relevant institutional review board and all participants provided informed consent. The school principals were assigned the codes P1 and P2, while the teachers were designated as T1, T2, and T3. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the school principals.

Table 1. The profile of the school principals.

Participant Code	School type	Gender	Seniority as a manager	Educational background
P1	Primary	Female	2	Master's degree
P2	Primary	Male	3	Bachelor's degree
P3	Primary	Male	5	Bachelor's degree
P4	Middle school	Male	3	Bachelor's degree
P5	Middle school	Female	6	Bachelor's degree
P6	Middle school	Female	3	Bachelor's degree
P7	High school	Male	6	Master's degree
P8	High school	Male	4	Bachelor's degree
P9	High school	Male	7	Master's degree

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the teachers who took part in the study and were included in the focus group.

Table 2. The profile of the teachers.

Participant Code	School type	Gender	Branch	Educational background
T1	Primary	Female	Elementary	Master's degree
T2	Middle school	Female	English	Bachelor's degree
T3	High school	Male	Math	Bachelor's degree
T4	Middle school	Male	Turkish	Bachelor's degree
T5	Primary	Female	Elementary	Bachelor's degree

Validity and Reliability

The interviews were subjected to analysis according to two distinct categories: those conducted with principals and those conducted with teachers. The data was presented in the form of figures to reveal the basic issues and themes, with direct quotes included to illustrate these issues. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher maintained prolonged engagement with the participants over an extended period of time. The transcripts were subsequently forwarded to the participants for their confirmation. At the conclusion of the focus group interview, one participant was requested to confirm the veracity of the research report. To guarantee the veracity and dependability of the researcher's assertions, an external audit was conducted (consistency) in accordance with the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Merriam, 2013). In other words the research process was meticulously documented, encompassing all interview guides, transcription procedures, and coding frameworks. To guarantee transparency in the methodology, an external audit trail was maintained. Direct quotations were employed with regularity in order to substantiate the research findings in order to ensure confirmability.

FINDINGS

The study presents its findings in two distinct categories: school principals and teachers.

School Principals

The principals interpreted distance management in two distinct ways, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Principals' Perspective on Distance Management

The study revealed that all of the principals expressed scepticism regarding the distance learning process, with a significant proportion of respondents (n:9) indicating that they believed it undermined their authority. The opinions expressed on this matter were analysed according to two distinct subheadings.

The Absence of Control Mechanisms Renders Management Ineffectual.

The majority of principals (n = 7) reported a reduction in the extent of their controlling behaviour in management practices. The presence of administrators in schools is perceived as a means of exerting control over teachers, pupils and the educational process. The following direct quotations from the principals are presented herewith:

"Even our presence in the school could contribute to the control and spontaneity of the school. How can we understand what is being done correctly in a place where we are not physically present? Why do we exist only for paperwork?" (P6)

"I think it's always better to be physically present at the school. The same goes for the management. To be honest, managing the school feels more meaningful when you are there. Otherwise, there were moments when I did not feel like an administrator. It was as if we were like someone who only checked whether things were working or not and had no other job. The burden on us was very different and made us feel insecure." (P4)

“Distance learning definitely leads to a loss of control. In digital environments, everything can be seen; the whole process can be monitored. But nothing really inspires trust like face-to-face. As a manager, I don’t really feel like a leader in these times.” (P9)

A Decline in the Efficacy of Regulatory Mechanisms

One of the pivotal findings regarding distance management is the dearth of trust that principals have in the process and educational practices. All participants (n=9) expressed skepticism regarding the efficacy of remote education and management practices, as compared to their in-person counterparts. Those in administrative roles tend to hold negative views of classroom environments and educational practices that they are unable to physically observe or access.

“Frankly, distance management has become a very dull and bland subject, as if it were an automated mechanism. I mean, frankly, even training can be done remotely in some way, but I think management cannot be done without face-to-face. It was very difficult for me to follow up and trust the training practices.” (P1)

“As an administrator, the dynamics of management change if you don’t interact with people on a daily basis. You cannot easily perceive their concerns; you cannot be with them and help them with a particular problem.” (P8)

“What we are doing is not really running education, but managing it. Obviously, the state’s decision in these difficult times is intended to prevent a setback in education. This is actually the right way to go, instead of taking a long break. But I am not sure how effective it will be. Although we administrators were not ready for it at first, we have somehow got used to it, but it is not something I would prefer. It makes me feel inadequate to meet the needs. It is not something I really believe in.” (P5)

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Management

As illustrated in Figure 2, the principals have identified a number of advantages associated with distance management.

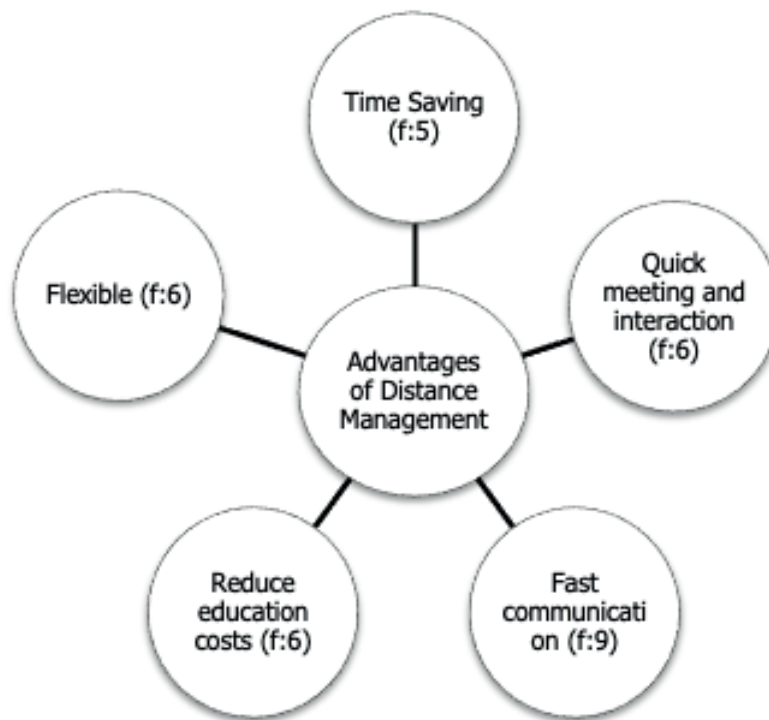


Figure 2. The Advantages of Distance Management

All participants indicated that distance school management facilitates straightforward and expedient communication, which they perceive as a key advantage. Moreover, distance management provides advantages such as expedient and adaptable interaction, diminished educational expenses, and time savings. The following direct quotations from participants are provided below for illustrative purposes:

“There are some comforts that remote management provides; you certainly do not feel like you have to do a very formal preparation. The communication is easy and rapid. This saves time.” (P2)

“This has the advantage of being able to communicate quickly. Because we interact quickly, we can ignore many of the details that are required to physically hold a meeting somewhere. It definitely provides flexibility and I can say that it also reduces the overall cost of training.” (P4)

“As a school principal, I firmly believe that distance management offers numerous advantages for our educational institution. By leveraging technology and embracing distance management practices, we can enhance efficiency, flexibility, and collaboration among our staff. Distance management allows us to streamline administrative tasks, such as scheduling, communication, and resource allocation, enabling us to focus more time and energy on supporting student learning and engagement. Additionally, distance management empowers our educators to work from anywhere, facilitating a healthy work-life balance and fostering a culture of trust and autonomy.” (P9)

Figure 3 illustrates the disadvantages of distance management as identified by the participants.



Figure 3. The Disadvantages of Distance Management

In the course of discussing the challenges of distance management, the majority of principals identified limitations in sociopsychological interactions and the emergence of technical issues as the most significant obstacles. Additional challenges include the perception of diminished control in distance management, the potential for the educational spirit to be compromised, and the challenge of interacting with stakeholders simultaneously. The following direct quotations are included below for reference:

“While I recognize the benefits of distance management, it’s important to acknowledge its drawbacks as well. One significant disadvantage is the potential for decreased interpersonal connection and collaboration among staff members. Distance management could sometimes lead to feelings of isolation

and disconnection, making it challenging to maintain a cohesive team environment. Additionally, sometimes there was technical challenges and limitations associated with remote communication and access to resources, which hindered productivity and efficiency. Furthermore, distance management sometimes posed challenges in effectively monitoring and supporting the well-being and professional development of our educators. While distance management offers flexibility, we must also be mindful of its impact on our school community's social dynamics and overall sense of belonging.” (P8)

“Distance management may exacerbate disparities in access to technology and resources among students and staff, widening the digital divide and inequities in education. For example, there were some challenges in effectively implementing certain educational strategies and interventions that rely on in-person interaction and hands-on activities in pandemic. Additionally, I had concerns about maintaining data security and privacy when managing sensitive information remotely.” (P4)

“A major concern with distance management is its impact on limiting social-psychological interaction within our school community. Whilst technology enables us to connect virtually, it cannot fully replicate the richness of face-to-face interactions. Remote management has sometimes led to feelings of isolation, loneliness and disconnection among staff and students, which are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and well-being. Without the opportunity for spontaneous conversations, collaborative problem solving and informal support networks that often occur in physical spaces, we risk losing valuable social and psychological connections that contribute to a vibrant and cohesive school culture. It is crucial that we find ways to mitigate these challenges and prioritise opportunities for meaningful interpersonal interaction, even in a remote setting, to ensure the holistic development and emotional health of our school community.” (P1)

“As a school principal, I am deeply concerned about the impact of distance management on the spirit of education. While technology has enabled us to continue teaching and learning remotely, it cannot fully replicate the vibrant and dynamic atmosphere of a traditional classroom setting. I think distance management diminished the sense of excitement, energy, and human connection that were integral to the educational experience. Without the daily interactions, shared experiences, and personal connections that occur in a physical school environment, we risk losing the essence of what makes education truly transformative. It's essential that we find ways to preserve the spirit of education, fostering creativity, curiosity, and passion for learning, even in the face of remote management challenges.” (P5)

Communication and Interaction

In relation to distance management processes, the participating principals were invited to share their experiences of communication and interaction with teaching staff, students and other key stakeholders. The methods employed by school leaders to oversee the operation of the school in a distance learning environment were as follows:

- *Social Media and Messaging Apps:* Social media platforms and messaging apps, including WhatsApp, Facebook and Remind, are utilised by educational establishments to facilitate communication with parents, disseminate information regarding school events and encourage community engagement. These channels offer an informal and accessible method of communication, facilitating the dissemination of information and the establishment of relationships.
- *Virtual Meetings:* video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams to conduct virtual meetings with teachers, staff, and stakeholders.
- *EBA* (Education Informatics Network - a platform created by the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye)
- *Phone Calls:* Another effective method for maintaining communication and connection with teachers, students, and parents is through personal phone calls.

Teachers

Following the focus group interviews, teachers expressed different views on the distance management of school leaders. Teachers' perspectives on principals' distance management are presented below.

Is There a Requirement for an Administrator in Distance Education?

In the context of the pandemic and the subsequent shift to distance learning, teachers have highlighted that they were largely responsible for the majority of the work, while the administration was primarily involved in document control. This has led to a re-evaluation of the role of the administrator in distance learning. The teachers' opinions on this matter are as follows:

"In fact, I believe that distance learning has made the administrators' job easier. They no longer have to deal with physical problems, maintain school organization, or handle discipline issues. This has significantly reduced their responsibilities. They can now follow up on work electronically, which is something we can also do. In summary, if there is a combination of face-to-face and online education, administrators will have additional planning responsibilities. However, if we are solely discussing distance education, school administration is not a significant concern." (T2)

"In distance learning, the burden of responsibility falls primarily on the teachers. Administrators have a minimal role in the process, with most of the planning and changes being the responsibility of the teachers. Administrators have a minimal role in the process, with most of the planning and changes being the responsibility of the teachers. While distance learning can be done by teachers alone, it is important to acknowledge the additional workload and support them accordingly. At the start of the pandemic, we all experienced uncertainty and panic regarding the use of certain platforms and tasks. During this time, the guidance and assistance of administrators were greatly appreciated. However, they too were experiencing the same level of panic as us. Ultimately, we had to learn the job independently, as they were in the same position as us." (T5)

"While it is important to consult with administrators on certain issues, it is clear that the majority of the responsibility for distance learning falls on the teachers! Let's give them the recognition they deserve! Teachers are doing an amazing job adapting to this new way of teaching and ensuring that students receive a quality education." (T1)

"I am now questioning whether school administrators are necessary if only distance learning is taking place. In my opinion, teachers are the main actors in the process of continuing, planning, and coordinating education. Everything is already monitored electronically, and MoNE officials can oversee this process without the need for administrators." (T4)

"However, there was always the expectation that we would eventually return to traditional face-to-face education, and fortunately, that is precisely what happened. In such circumstances, it is not always possible to immediately blame the administration. Nevertheless, I believe that the school administrators did not effectively lead this process." (T3)

The Role of the School Principal as a Planner and Mentor in the Operation of Distance Management

All teachers indicated that principals should be more involved in the planning phase of distance management, which is essential for the smooth and systematic running of the course. Furthermore, the mentoring role of the principal is especially important in distance education. School administrators should adopt the role of a psychologist who can assuage teachers' concerns and provide counsel, even from a distance. Teachers' opinions on these issues are as follows:

"To be frank, my views on the pandemic have evolved over time. In the early stages, when none of us knew what to do, the presence and guidance of managers could have been a great comfort. However, they were just as worried as we were and did not know how to guide us. Although school had already stopped, the headmaster was still the first person we turned to for information. Once we became accustomed to our new situation, we all knew what was expected of us. However, I had to rely on my own efforts to figure out what was required, as the headmaster was not very helpful

in this regard. Subsequently, we only communicated with the headmaster and deputy headmasters when it was necessary. In my experience, our culture tends to view management as something that only works when people are physically present. Therefore, I believe that remote management was not very successful in this case.” (T8)

“I agree. In general, leadership refers to the relationship between subordinates and superiors within an organization. I believe this is why they failed to lead.” (T2)

“In situations where physical distance is a challenge, some may doubt the effectiveness of remote leadership! However, it is important to note that leadership, not just management, is crucial in these scenarios. Perhaps collaboration with teachers could enhance leadership in these situations and teachers should be involved in leadership.” (T3)

“It’s completely understandable that school principals may experience worry and stress, but it’s important for them to adopt a different approach for the benefit of both us and the students. While I’m personally a bit sceptical about the effectiveness of distance learning, I do believe in distance education to some extent. While I’m personally a bit sceptical about the effectiveness of distance learning, I do believe in distance education to some extent. However, I don’t think distance management is necessary. Hey there! With guidance and digital information available, there’s no need for a manager. I had to learn everything myself, but I was able to do so.” (T5)

“Administrators should definitely have a guiding and psychologically comforting attitude during distance learning periods.” (T1)

Recommendations/Strategies for Distance Management

This section presents recommendations from both administrative and teaching staff regarding the management of distance learning. The following suggestions are those put forth by teachers:

- To establish relationships based on trust,
- To enhance supportive behaviours and develop virtual communication skills,
- School administrators should possess psychological leadership skills,
- It is imperative that there is a conscious acceptance and transformation of managerial attitudes in order to effectively lead in digital or electronic fields. The feedback received from teachers consists of statements that are generally agreed upon and expected.

The recommendations put forth by the administrators are presented in the following section.

- In-service training (f:7)
- Differentiation of distance learning, where a certain proportion of teachers and students come to the school alternately (f:5)
- Continuation of activities such as meetings in a hybrid form (f:8)

The majority of administrators (f:7) acknowledged their lack of information regarding this process and expressed a need for training on certain issues. They suggested that some meetings should be conducted in person. Furthermore, some administrators who do not support the idea of fully remote education and management put forward suggestions on this matter, stating that it would enable them to work physically as administrators in the school. The following are some of the administrators’ views:

“There should be a camera in every classroom and the teacher should come to the school (maybe 30-40% of the class can come alternately) and enter the classroom and explain and record the lesson as if there were students in front of him/her and upload it to the youtube channel and it should be compulsory for the students to watch it within that week. In the comments section, students can indicate the parts they did not understand and the teacher should give another lecture accordingly.” (P6)

“Even in the most difficult times, at least in certain groups, students and teachers can come and continue their education. In this way we can provide both distance and face-to-face leadership.” (P3)

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The management of distance in the context of school leadership presents a duality of opportunity and challenge, particularly in the context of distance learning or extended school closures. The results of the research indicate that school leaders perceive distance education to be less efficient and effective than face-to-face education in schools. In conclusion, the negative opinions expressed by principals were limited to aspects of the classroom environment or educational processes that they were unable to physically observe or access. Consequently, their scepticism of the educational process is also reflected in their management style. Those in administrative roles hold the view that the management of schools via online platforms is neither appropriate nor effective. It is evident that the control mechanisms of school principals are diminished in distance management, which they perceive as an issue. The presence of administrators in the school setting has been observed to engender a sense of comfort and control, despite their existing authority to monitor teachers and students at any given time. However, they may lack confidence in the processes that they are unable to directly observe or participate in. This observation may indicate a desire for control on the part of the administrators involved in the research. As Pelaez et al. (2021) observe, remote work can present managers with significant challenges in promoting camaraderie, teamwork, and effective communication among their staff. Furthermore, Vo et al. (2022) noted that managers who are not physically present may encounter difficulties in trusting that their employees will work consistently and meet deadlines without direct supervision. The authors posit that there is a considerable degree of mistrust between managers and employees. Consequently, the necessity for control may have been diminished as a consequence of the principals' lack of confidence in the efficacy of training and development procedures in distance management.

The advent of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic has resulted in significant alterations to leadership roles and practices, giving rise to a multitude of challenges, including the necessity for remote and limited face-to-face school management (Schechter et al., 2022). The abrupt alterations in managerial and leadership roles may have precipitated elevated stress levels among school principals. Stasel (2020) and Huber (2021) have highlighted the stress experienced by school principals during the pandemic, elucidating the gravity of the situation. The process of remote management may have caused school leaders to feel insecure, as it represented a departure from their previous comfort zone and a weakening of their control mechanisms. It is possible that this has resulted in a lack of trust or adoption of the remote management approach that was created as a consequence of the pandemic. Moreover, a dearth of confidence in the efficacy of processes and the reliability of subordinates or teachers can impede the exemplification of leadership attributes. Headteachers who prioritise physical presence and discourage delegation may adopt a bureaucratic approach to organisational and management structures.

School principals are confronted with significant challenges pertaining to infrastructure and management skills, particularly in the context of distance learning, which was introduced as a consequence of the pandemic. Consequently, they may lack the requisite skills to adequately support teachers and students in the delivery of online education. Similarly, teachers have also been found to lack the requisite preparation. The absence of guidance from administrative authorities represents a significant concern. In their study, conducted during the pandemic, Jusas et al. (2021) identified a number of challenges faced by educators in the delivery of distance education. These included a lack of clear guidelines on conducting distance education, difficulties in ensuring the necessary infrastructure, concerns about competence, and security issues.

Limited communication is an important disadvantage in distance management. Managers who have difficulty in establishing interaction argue that the lack of a realistic training environment weakens the spirit of education. Some administrators also see difficulties in ensuring motivation and the disappearance of the concept of working hours as a problem. It may not be correct for teachers to perceive this limited communication as a lack of leadership by school administrators. As posited by Nunamaker et al. (2009), deficiencies in psychological and social communication in distance management can impede the efficacy of collaboration and team dynamics. In order to surmount the obstacles posed by the limitations of psychological and social communication in remote management, it is imperative to implement strategies that foster effective collaboration and team dynamics. One effective approach is the utilisation of technology platforms and tools that facilitate real-time communication and interaction among team members. The promotion of regular video conferences, virtual team-building activities and open communication channels can assist in the mitigation of the challenges posed by physical distance (Lyons et al., 2009). Moreover, the cultivation of a culture of transparency, empathy, and

active listening within a remote team can serve to reinforce interpersonal bonds and enhance the overall efficacy of communication (Nunamaker et al., 2009). This can assist in the development of the supportive behaviours and trusting relationships that teachers require.

In the context of distance learning, the role of the administrator has been called into question by teachers. It is essential that administrators provide the necessary support to guarantee a successful distance learning experience for all stakeholders. While it is evident that this is a novel and distinct process for all members of the educational institution, teachers have expressed feelings of vulnerability. However, they have also stated that administrators have not provided enough support and were not equipped to manage the process. As a result, teachers have had to solve all educational issues by themselves. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that school administrators should provide psychological support and guidance to teachers in online educational processes. It would be erroneous, therefore, to underestimate the importance of their presence in the online educational process. It is imperative that a change in leadership roles is implemented, with a particular focus on the exploration of issues pertaining to digital or electronic leadership. As posited by Zeike et al. (2019), those in leadership roles must possess a range of competencies to prevent the introduction of new technologies from adding to the pressures faced by staff.

It appears that remote management can offer many advantages such as flexibility, time saving, fast communication and fast information transfer (Sikes, 2011). The flexibility afforded by distance management allows work to be completed at a time and place that suits the individual. The flexibility afforded by remote management allows work to be completed at a time and place that suits the individual. Once employees are used to working remotely, the organisation can adapt more quickly to disruptions without compromising productivity. Such circumstances may offer a valuable chance to persevere in the organisation, despite the difficulties (Aczel et al., 2021; Mishra & Sharma, 2022).

The study revealed some disadvantages of distance education. These factors include difficulty in maintaining motivation, a sense of loss of control, technical problems, loss of regular working hours and a weakening of the spirit of education. While distance learning offers flexibility, it can also disrupt the perception of regular working hours. Participants see the flexibility to complete task-related work at any time as an advantage. However, they also point out the difficulty of having to complete their work unexpectedly, which can negatively affect their work-life balance. While some studies suggest that remote management can help employees achieve a better work-life balance (Mishra and Sharma, 2023; Mulki et al., 2009), others argue that deviating from traditional working hours can disrupt this balance (Muldoon, 2014; Ljungkvist and Moore, 2023). Maintaining a traditional working style is important to achieve a healthy work-life balance.

The study revealed some disadvantages of distance learning. These factors include difficulty maintaining motivation, a sense of loss of control, technical issues, loss of regular study hours, and a weakening of the educational spirit. While distance learning offers flexibility, it can also disrupt the perception of regular study hours. Participants see the flexibility to complete task-related work at any time as an advantage. However, they also point out the difficulty of having to complete their work unexpectedly, which can negatively affect their work-life balance. While some studies suggest that distance management can help employees achieve a better work-life balance (Mishra and Sharma, 2023; Mulki et al., 2009), others argue that deviating from traditional working hours can disrupt this balance (Muldoon, 2014; Ljungkvist and Moore, 2023). Maintaining a traditional working style is important to achieve a healthy work-life balance.

A disadvantage of remote management is that managers may feel that they are losing control, which can make it difficult to maintain motivation. This feeling may be due to the difficulty of accurately assessing and monitoring the productivity of remote employees. Managers who are not physically present in the organisation may find it difficult to measure the progress and service outcomes of members of the organisation. Furthermore, it can be argued that distance management requires a high level of trust between managers and employees (Vo et al., 2022). In summary, with distance education, school leaders may need to change their leadership styles, increase their technological literacy, and revisit various aspects of educational leadership to effectively implement online learning. This requires an effective transformation and often a proactive and feasible approach in the educational environment.

Undoubtedly, managing a school remotely presents both challenges and opportunities for a school leader. School principals must be able to balance their capacity for empathy, adaptability and flexibility in uncertain

times. This is because it is important to have a high level of adaptability in order to cope with changing circumstances and untimely emerging challenges. This skill can also encourage the generation of alternative solutions.

Leading schools remotely can be more challenging than in many other organisations. Therefore, it requires a deep understanding of the needs, expectations and concerns of school stakeholders (teachers, students and parents). In online environments, effective communication, listening, understanding the message or concerns presented and offering support become important. Even in the absence of physical contact, trust within the school can be established through warm, sincere and empathetic communication with other stakeholders.

The welfare of everyone is important in conducting educational processes remotely. For this reason, school leaders should be able to provide solutions that can enable each stakeholder, especially teachers and students, to manage their energy correctly and to build resilience against the difficulties that the virtual environment may create. It is also important to monitor and track these well-being and well-being states. In order for remote management to be effective, organisational loyalties based on real cooperation between all stakeholders must be created. Exchange of ideas and dialogue can help to make things easier in this sense.

In conclusion, distance management requires skills and competences such as adaptability, empathy and flexibility. In this respect, school leaders need to embrace flexibility, celebrate and recognise successes, collaborate and encourage collaboration, and remain optimistic in order to overcome the difficulties that may be experienced in distance management processes. In addition, maintaining motivation in distance education business and recognising achievements in this context will be useful for effective management. Recognising or rewarding teachers who exhibit innovative behaviours and students who show success can help stakeholders to maintain their hope and beliefs.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHOR



Dr. Aysegul ATALAY is a faculty member at Van Yuzuncu Yil University, Faculty of Education. Dr. Atalay obtained both her master's and doctoral degrees in educational administration. Her research interests include artificial intelligence, distance education, education policies, education economics, digitalization and educational technologies in education, and education law. She has published more than 15 articles indexed in international indexes, 9 international book chapters and other national and international articles, papers submitted to international meetings.

Aysegul ATALAY
Educational Administration Department, Faculty of Education
Address: Van Yuzuncu Yil University, University, 65080, Van, Türkiye.
Phone: + 04324445065
E-mail: atalay.aysgl@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Aczel, B., Kovacs, M., Van Der Lippe, T., & Szaszi, B. (2021). Researchers working from home: Benefits and challenges. *PloS one*, 16(3), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249127>
- Anderson, T. (2003). Getting the Mix Right Again: An Updated and Theoretical Rationale for Interaction. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v4i2.149>
- Cai, Y. (2023). Strengthening perceptions of virtual team cohesiveness and effectiveness in new normal: a hyperpersonal communication theory perspective. *Asian Business & Management*, 22(4), 1649-1682. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-023-00225-6>

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Sage Publications.
- Contreras F, Baykal E and Abid G (2020). E-leadership and teleworking in times of covid-19 and beyond: what we know and where do we go. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 11:590271. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.590271
- Ferdiana, R. (2013, October). Distance Learning Lifecycle Management An agile approach to manage the lifecycle of a distance learning. In *2013 International Conference on Information Technology and Electrical Engineering (ICITEE)* (pp. 106-112). IEEE.
- Fraenkel, J.R. & Wallen, N. E. (2012). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. (Seventh Edition) McGraw-Hill.
- Franken, E., Bentley, T., Shafaei, A., Farr-Wharton, B., Onnis, L., & Omari, M. (2021). Forced flexibility and remote working: opportunities and challenges in the new normal. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 27(6), 1131-1149. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2021.40>
- Harper, K. C., Chen, K., & Yen, D. C. (2004). Distance learning, virtual classrooms, and teaching pedagogy in the Internet environment. *Technology in Society*, 26(4), 585-598. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2004.08.002>
- Harris, A. & Jones, M. (2022) Leading during a pandemic – what the evidence tells us, *School Leadership & Management*, 42(2), 105-109, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2022.2064626
- Holton, J. A. (2001). Building trust and collaboration in a virtual team. *Team performance management: an international journal*, 7(3/4), 36-47. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13527590110395621>
- Huber, S. G. (2021). Schooling and Education in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Food for Thought and Reflection Derived from Results of the School Barometer in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. *International Studies in Educational Administration-Journal of Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM.)* 49 (1): 6–17.
- Jusas, V., Butkiene, R., Venckauskas, A., Burbaitė, R., Gudoniene, D., Grigaliūnas, S., & Andone, D. (2021). Models for administration to ensure the successful transition to distance learning during the pandemic. *Sustainability*, 13(9), 4751. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13094751>
- Kalemba, A., Mikucka, A., & Bogajewska-Danek, J. (2021). The importance of the intra-organizational culture of communication in the context of employee mediation. *European Research Studies Journal*, 24(s5), 533-543.
- Kowalski, G., & Slebarska, K. (2022). Remote working and work effectiveness: a leader perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(22), 15326.
- Leontyeva, I. A. (2018). Modern distance learning technologies in higher education: Introduction problems. *Eurasia journal of mathematics, science and technology education*, 14(10), em1578. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejmste/92284>
- Ljungkvist, H., & Moore, M. (2023). The Challenges of Achieving Work-Life Balance in the Digital Age: A Study of Young Professionals: Exploring the Impact of New Ways of Working on Early Career Adults. (Master's Thesis, Sweden, Umeå School of Business and Economics Umeå University).
- Lyons, R., Priest, H. A., Wildman, J. L., Salas, E., & Carnegie, D. (2009). Managing virtual teams: Strategies for team leaders. *Ergonomics in Design*, 17(1), 8-13. <https://doi.org/10.1518/106480409X415152>
- Malhotra, A., Majchrzak, A., & Rosen, B. (2007). Leading virtual teams. *Academy of Management perspectives*, 21(1), 60-70.
- Mishra, A. & Sharma, M. (2022). Work from Home: Benefits and Challenges. *Management Dynamics*. 22 (2), 114-118. <https://doi.org/10.57198/2583-4932.1313>
- Muldoon, N. (2014). *An Investigation into employee's perceptions of working from home and how this impacts work-life balance* (Doctoral dissertation, Dublin, National College of Ireland).

- Mulki, J., Bardhi, F., Lassk, F., & Nanavaty-Dahl, J. (2009). Set up remote workers to thrive. *MIT Sloan Management Review*. Retrieved from <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/set-up-remote-workers-to-thrive/> on 12.12.2023
- Newman, S. A., Ford, R. C., & Marshall, G. W. (2019). Virtual team leader communication: employee perception and organizational reality. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 57(4), 452-473. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488419829895>
- Nunamaker Jr, J. F., Reinig, B. A., & Briggs, R. O. (2009). Principles for effective virtual teamwork. *Communications of the ACM*, 52(4), 113-117. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1498765.1498797>
- Olofsson, V., & Karlsson, A. (2021). Distance Leadership: The new Everyday Situation. Bachelor's Thesis. Linnaeus University, Sweden.
- Reiche, B. S., Mendenhall, M. E., Szkudlarek, B. & Osland, J. S. (2020). At The Heart And Beyond: What Can Global Leadership Researchers Learn From Perspectives On The Covid-19 Pandemic? *Advances in Global Leadership*, 13, 261-282. doi:10.1108/S1535-120320200000013010
- Salas, E., Kosarzycki, M. P., Burke, C. S., Fiore, S. M., & Stone, D. L. (2002). Emerging themes in distance learning research and practice: some food for thought. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 4(2), 135-153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2370.00081>
- Schauer, J., Rockwell, S. K., Fritz, S. M., & Marx, D. B. (2005). Implementing distance education: Issues impacting administration. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 8(3), 1-17.
- Schechter, C., Da'as, R., & Qadach, M. (2022). Crisis leadership: Leading schools in a global pandemic. *Management in Education*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206221084050>
- Shah, M. (2014). Impact of management information systems (MIS) on school administration: What the literature says. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 2799-2804. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.659>
- Sikes, N., Mason, K., & VonLehmden, S. (2011, May). Telecommuting advantages and challenges for IT management and staff. In *Proceedings of the 49th SIGMIS annual conference on Computer personnel research* (pp. 20-25).
- Soomar, Z. (2020). A framework for building and maintain trust in remote and virtual teams. *F1000Research*, 9, 1187. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.26626.1>
- Stasel, R. S. (2020). Learning to Walk All Over Again: Insights from Some International School Educators and School Leaders in South, Southeast and East Asia During the COVID Crisis. *International Studies in Educational Administration-Journal of Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)*. 48 (3). 95-101
- Turesky, E. F., Smith, C. D., & Turesky, T. K. (2020). A call to action for virtual team leaders: practitioner perspectives on trust, conflict and the need for organizational support. *Organization Management Journal*, 17(4/5), 185-206. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OMJ-09-2019-0798>
- Vo, L. H., Le, T., & Park, D. (2022). Digital divide decoded: can e-commerce and remote workforces enhance enterprise resilience in the covid-19 era? *Asian Development Bank Economics Working Paper Series*, (667). <https://doi.org/10.22617/wps220332-2>
- Wittmer, J. L. and Hopkins, M. M. (2021). Leading remotely in a time of crisis: relationships with emotional intelligence. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 29(2), 176-189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518211053531>
- Zeike, S., Bradbury, K., Lindert, L., & Pfaff, H. (2019). Digital leadership skills and associations with psychological well-being. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(14), 2628. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16142628>
- Zulfikar, A. R., & Mirfani, A. M. (2020, February). The Effectiveness of Information Technology-Based Management Information Systems in Junior High Schools. In *3rd International Conference on Research of Educational Administration and Management (ICREAM 2019)* (pp. 390-394). Atlantis Press.