The Role of Public Administration in Educational Emergencies

Ahairwe Frank

Faculty of Business Administration and Management Kampala International University Uganda

Email: ahairwefrank56@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Educational emergencies, ranging from natural disasters to pandemics, threaten the continuity of learning and the well-being of students and educators worldwide. Despite education being a fundamental human right and social service, school systems are frequently disrupted due to insufficient preparedness and inadequate public administration responses. This paper examines the multifaceted role of public administration in managing educational emergencies, focusing on policy design, resource allocation, stakeholder coordination, and technology integration. Through case studies from Hurricane Harvey in Texas and the COVID-19 response in South Korea and Turkey, the study highlights the gaps, best practices, and adaptive measures taken to ensure educational resilience. Emphasis is placed on the importance of local knowledge, educator empowerment, early childhood support, and equitable digital access. The findings underscore the need for a systemic, collaborative, and data-driven approach in public sector management to safeguard education during crises. Recommendations include strengthening communication, decentralizing emergency planning, enhancing technological infrastructure, and integrating community actors in recovery efforts.
Keywords: Public Administration, Educational Emergencies, Crisis Management, Natural Disasters, COVID-19, Policy Implementation, School Resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Weather-related natural hazards, like hurricanes and floods, disrupt school operations, increasing workloads for educators and leading to burnout. Often, emergency plans fail to account for these heightened demands and the personal lives of educators affected by such events. There is a notable lack of educational research on the implications of this oversight. This study investigates the consequences of not utilizing available resources and recognizing educators' increased demands, aiming to enhance school systems' preparedness against natural hazards. The research draws on interviews with educators from a Texas district impacted by Hurricane Harvey, highlighting unmet needs arising from actions taken post-disaster. Recommendations include improving communication and service provision for educators to better deal with storm impacts. Continuous dialogue and study are necessary to bolster educator-led responses to community needs after such events. Interventions like outdoor activities, arts, and music can promote recovery and engagement afterward. There is a belief that communities recover primarily due to secondary responses; however, local knowledge and resources, including parents and volunteers, should also contribute to primary responses. Engaging local figures like farmers or counselors is crucial. Systems must foster a culture that empowers teachers, broadening recovery options to effectively support traumatized students [1, 2].

Understanding Educational Emergencies

Education can be considered an essential social service in any society because it equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to thrive in their environment. Quality education fosters the acquisition of skills that are essential for effective engagement with other actors and institutions of significance in society. As a social service, education for all must be a right reserved for all citizens regardless of principal elements of differentiation such as age, sex, ethnicity, religion, and disabilities, amongst others. Therefore, citizens have the right to free education guaranteed by national constitutions and policy documents across nations

and regions. Schooling and learning that are tied to an academic calendar or age limit such as those stratified into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels that are mentioned below, as well as the right of citizens to free and compulsory basic education typically, from 5 to 16 years, in almost all nations, also, hence citizens have a right to schooling and learning outside the bounds of the academic calendar or as in institutions that are not recognized by the national education governance arrangements including informal, alternative or community education. Despite this necessary structure, schools and education systems have been prevented from realizing their purposes intermittently by updated or unprecedented threats such as natural disasters, outbreaks of pandemics, multifaceted conflict incidents, including civil wars and terrorism, sociocultural interference, for instance, ethnic or tribal strife, and confrontations against regimes. These threats are now termed educational emergencies or emergencies affecting education because they transcend the physical destruction of school infrastructure and impede educational development, access to quality schooling and learning, as well as overall human capital, and community sustainability more broadly in society. Education is central to the cultural, political, social, and economic development of nations. In light of its role in every aspect of development, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted by UN members in 2015, is the renewed global education agenda and hence upon an unprecedented period of humanity, these educational emergencies commensurate with grave human rights violations and challenges in respect of the undeniable concern of education [3, 4].

Theoretical Framework

This article reviews public administration's role in educational emergencies, particularly focusing on emergency management. It highlights the vulnerability of students, families, communities, and countries to educational disruptions caused by manmade incidents, natural hazards, and pandemics. Such disruptions exacerbate challenges for populations already at risk. Public administrators often grapple with balancing student safety in risky school environments against the need for social stability when making high-stakes decisions with limited resources and data. They may face challenges in risk analysis, context assessment for safety, and evaluating trade-offs between student safety and other social factors. In low-income countries with inadequate planning, administrators may struggle to find stakeholders to implement pre-developed plans or depend on unused fallback mechanisms. This article addresses the needs and challenges of public administration in educational emergencies and underscores its relevance to the education and public administration fields. Emergencies can arise more swiftly than professional responses can adapt. Even anticipated shocks require time for effective reaction, leading to potential crises necessitating public sector intervention. Additionally, common practices may fail or become unsustainable, particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, the article defines the primary inquiry into public administration in educational emergencies, examining its contributions relative to other sectors. This leads to further exploration of public administration's proactive roles and specificity within educational emergencies [5, 6].

Public Administration's Role

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the whole world; people faced uncertainties about health and planned actions. Everyone experienced the challenge of maintaining learning remotely, in which people should keep a social distance for self-defense. The education system has been substantially disrupted, as schools were locked down. Governments recommended that schools deploy online learning to avoid the abrupt stoppage of learning. Therefore, online learning has been piloted or required to be updated rapidly in many countries. In the meantime, educators have been actively involved in forming the online learning environment. The administration needed to be in action when everything changed abruptly. As one of the pillars of educational systems, public administration played an important role in managing educational systems during health crises. Accordingly, it is within the government's responsibility to ensure that education systems as public services for the public. However, the roles of public administrations varied from country to country in different settings of health crises. In this study, how public administration in online education systems was investigated. Nation-level studies are useful to understand the overall involvement of the school systems in the situation of a health crisis in each country. To this end, the research context was the first half of the online education emergency in higher education in South Korea. Framed by economic and political context, the case study of South Korea, a representative East Asian country, is shared to understand how public administration played in online education systems during a health crisis. Firstly, as public administration within the government, the Ministry of Education in South Korea (MoE) did extensive work throughout the initiation phase of online classes. In this phase, the government ensured the appropriation of education policy and secured resources, such as creating an infrastructure. Detailed and regulated guidance, which mediated different attempts of various sectors for

social consensus and access to education, was also provided. It was an active involvement of the administration in making plans for education at a national level [7, 8].

Case Studies

COVID-19 has led to school closures and the halting of early childhood education programs for children aged 0-5 globally. Educational responses focused on older children, leaving younger ones without adequate support. As the pandemic continues, concerns grow that lost months represent more than just missed learning - they signify a need for urgent efforts to help children transition back to normalcy. Young children may face anxiety and insecurity as they return to school, influenced by new rules and disrupted routines, along with increased parental stress affecting attachment patterns, potentially leading to anxiety, anger, and aggression. To address these issues, the Play Therapy Project was initiated, empowering educators, health professionals, and parents to support children's well-being through the online Play 3-Rs approach. This paper discusses stakeholder engagement and lessons learned. In high-stakes educational contexts, assessments can create unintended consequences for students and institutions, leading to vulnerability. In response, a group of developers and educators collaborated to create a predictive approach for identifying at-risk students. This project aimed to keep the predictive model largely invisible while upholding high reliability principles to ensure robustness in a low-information context. This paper documents insights from this process, addressing the challenge of protecting student information while utilizing high-stakes assessments effectively [9, 10].

Challenges Faced By Public Administrators

Impact of Public Administration on the Management of Crisis in Students' Affairs. Many organisations aim to achieve specific missions and objectives that require effective leadership to turn vision into action. Since many individuals cannot lead themselves, administrators within public administration are essential. This field focuses on implementing and managing policies across public sector entities and NGOs. Public administrators oversee and control the policies of governmental and quasi-governmental organisations to ensure the integrity and efficiency of policy execution. They shape the overall policies and ensure their implementation by recruiting management staff and providing necessary resources. Due to the complexity of day-to-day operations, public administration delegates management responsibilities. Management involves decision-making and directing people toward achieving organisational goals. The interdependence of public administration and management is crucial; neither can exist without the other. Public administration establishes organisations that require management, and autonomous management cannot thrive without its framework. Furthermore, unbiased management is ensured by public administration, as its actions are subject to scrutiny from political parties, governmental arms, investigative commissions, and the media [11, 12].

Best Practices in Public Administration

Public administration significantly influences good behavior through its role in crises. Recent experiences during disasters have led to best practices, particularly in service delivery, citizen engagement, and data-driven decision-making. The provision of public services is crucial during crises, as citizens' health and safety depend on it. Public servants must be motivated and empowered, supported by technological systems and resources. Transparency, accountability, and integrity in procurement processes are essential to mitigate reputational risks for governments. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, public institutions displayed flexibility and innovation, with research indicating that over 60% of innovations were sustainable, particularly those related to digital technologies. A culture of knowledge sharing and experimentation was vital for sustaining these innovations, suggesting necessary adjustments in service delivery for greater institutional innovation during crises. The effectiveness of public service delivery is revealed during such times, showcasing strengths and weaknesses in public administration. Successful administrations in disasters often prioritize transparency and thorough public resource allocation disclosures. They've expedited user fee payments and developed flexible grant programs. Engaging citizens in the COVID-19 recovery process has promoted transparency and participation, aiding long-term recovery and sustainable development. The pandemic's magnitude emphasizes the need for quality data in disaster risk reduction and resilience-building. Data strategies implemented during this crisis are expected to inform future public health responses. This emphasis on data availability encourages governments to enhance collection protocols, provide third-party data access, and conduct real-time reporting of crucial indicators [13, 14].

Role of Technology

Education worldwide has faced disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting many nations to implement distance learning. However, these emergency measures presented significant challenges requiring effective management by public administrations. A primary issue was addressing the digital divide, ensuring all students had access to effective learning tools. Studies on integrated education and

technology use in national policies during the early 21st century highlighted the lack of new policies aimed at addressing internet access disparities. While infrastructure improvements continued, few documents specifically addressed technology access inequalities at the local level. Post-pandemic, it's crucial to evaluate public education policies on technology access to effectively transition back to traditional schooling. This paper analyzed 55 national and local education policies in Turkey regarding their response to technological and internet access variances during the pandemic. Although not all were created before the pandemic, many were reflective of decisions made in early March 2020 related to crisis management in education. The disparities in infrastructure between urban and rural areas, the distribution of public resources, collaboration with private entities, and the need for affordable internet were identified as critical strategies. These insights aim to enhance international practices during crises and raise awareness of ongoing digital divides post-pandemic [15, 16].

International Perspectives

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) created the Global Education Coalition to mobilise partners and protect education rights by providing educational methodologies and platforms for continuity of learning. Regional and national coalitions were formed to advocate for education as a human right. Individuals often hold back their emotions, especially when anxious about significant issues. To address concerns, it is useful to ask questions related to their feelings and thoughts, focusing on what happens and its implications. The affective domain consists of three dimensions: receiving, responding, and valuing, with attention being the first step towards appreciation. The responses of students affected by educational disruptions caused by COVID-19, especially in places like Myanmar, can provide valuable data for public administration researchers. Collecting this data through open-ended questions can be done across various domains, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Resilience refers to the ability to revert to a stable developmental path after external shocks, highlighting the differences across territories for multi-level studies. Educational emergencies reveal variations in rights, administration, and delivery, necessitating adjustments in public administration strategies during such crises. Understanding educational segregation during the COVID-19 pandemic requires adapting research to local contexts. There is a pressing need for increased global, multidisciplinary cooperation among scholars and policymakers in the complex landscape of public educational administration during health emergencies [17, 18].

Future Directions

Future research should investigate the critical role that public administration plays in managing higher education and K–12 educational emergencies, and public administrators' actions and decisions that alter the course of the crisis model. Future research should guide methods and policies that public administrators may adopt to lessen struggles within the K–12 education system in times of emergency. It is paramount that public administrators seek input from those who directly execute policies and procedures. This particular perspective directly aligns with the works of. Future research must work toward a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of emergencies and education, especially in light of how emergency preparedness is often left to the education sector. Scale needs to be addressed in future research, as several emergencies warrant that school systems, districts, and municipalities are better prepared for emergencies that overwhelm individual schools. Public administrators' failures throughout an event can create a larger scope of destruction than a given emergency event would naturally create, and future research should work toward producing case studies of these failures both on local and non-local scales. Possible empirical inquiry may include a national assessment of the quality of emergency procedures and plans currently enacted in public schools and school districts. While this paper highlights a few public administrators and their actions, it is of utmost importance that more public administrators' actions and connections to K–12 education emergencies be presented in the literature. However, there is no current research regarding the larger scale of such connections, nor is there a comprehensive treatment of impactful public administrators outside of crisis events. As such, a systemic understanding of the perspective of public administration is lacking in the literature on education emergencies. Greater dissemination of these examples should be prioritized moving forward [19-23].

CONCLUSION

Educational systems are increasingly vulnerable to emergencies that compromise not only infrastructure but also learning continuity and community well-being. The role of public administration is critical in coordinating responses that are timely, equitable, and sustainable. This paper demonstrates that proactive planning, educator support, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive policy implementation are essential to navigate educational emergencies effectively. Case studies from different national contexts reveal both the strengths and limitations of current public administrative actions. Public administration must evolve to become more inclusive of local voices, responsive to rapid changes, and capable of leveraging data and

technology to address gaps in service delivery. Moving forward, research and practice should prioritize building systemic resilience by embedding emergency preparedness into education governance structures and enhancing the collaboration between government, schools, and communities. Only through such integrated approaches can educational systems withstand the shocks of future crises and safeguard the right to quality education for all.

REFERENCES

1. Cannon SR, Davis CR, Long R. Using an emergency plan to combat teacher burnout following a natural hazard. Educational Policy. 2023 Sep;37(6):1603-36.
2. Osegbue GC. Crisis intervention and response in educational institutions: developing and implementing plans in developing countries. African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies. 2025 May 18;15(1). ajemates.org
3. Ocloo J, Garfield S, Franklin BD, Dawson S. Exploring the theory, barriers and enablers for patient and public involvement across health, social care and patient safety: a systematic review of reviews. Health research policy and systems. 2021 Dec;19:1-21. springer.com
4. Dasopang MD, Nasution IF, Lubis AH. The role of religious and cultural education as a resolution of radicalism conflict in the Sibolga community. HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies. 2023 Apr 14;79(1):8469. scielo.org.za
5. Ugwu CN, Ugwu OP, Alum EU, Eze VH, Basajja M, Ugwu JN, Ogenyi FC, Ejemot-Nwadiaro RI, Okon MB, Egba SI, Uti DE. Medical preparedness for bioterrorism and chemical warfare: A public health integration review. Medicine. 2025 May 2;104(18):e42289.
6. Alhalalmeh A, Al-Tarawneh A. The Legal Implications of School Discipline Policies: Balancing Student Rights and School Safety. InFrom Machine Learning to Artificial Intelligence: The Modern Machine Intelligence Approach for Financial and Economic Inclusion 2025 Feb 2 (pp. 1213-1224). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. academia.edu
7. Morgan DF, Green DF, Green RT, Shinn CW, Robinson RK. Foundations of public service. Routledge; 2015 Jul 17.
8. DeMartino L, Weiser SG. Administrative leadership in times of a global health crisis: Voices and images from the field. In Frontiers in Education 2021 May 7 (Vol. 6, p. 617857). Frontiers Media SA.
9. Schiavo-Campo S, McFerson HM. Public management in global perspective. Routledge; 2014 Dec 18.
10. Timmons K, Cooper A, Bozek E, Braund H. The impacts of COVID-19 on early childhood education: Capturing the unique challenges associated with remote teaching and learning in K-2. Early Childhood Education Journal. 2021 Sep;49(5):887-901. springer.com
11. Zviedrite N, Hodis JD, Jahan F, Gao H et al. COVID-19-associated school closures and related efforts to sustain education and subsidized meal programs, United States, February 18–June 30, 2020. PloS one. 2021. plos.org
12. Ugwu CN, Ugwu OP, Alum EU, Eze VH, Basajja M, Ugwu JN, Ogenyi FC, Ejemot-Nwadiaro RI, Okon MB, Egba SI, Uti DE. Sustainable development goals (SDGs) and resilient healthcare systems: Addressing medicine and public health challenges in conflict zones. Medicine. 2025 Feb 14;104(7):e41535.
13. D. Andersen J. A preferred vision for administering secondary schools : a reflective essay. 2000. [PDF]
14. Marshall J, Roache D, Moody-Marshall R. Crisis leadership: A critical examination of educational leadership in higher education in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. International Studies in Educational Administration. 2020;48(3):30-7.
15. Masuku MM, Mlambo VH, Ndlovu C. Service delivery, governance and citizen satisfaction: reflections from South Africa. Journal Global Policy and Governance. 2022 May 23;11(1):96-116. transitionacademiapress.org
16. Hassankhani M, Alidadi M, Sharifi A, Azhdari A. Smart city and crisis management: Lessons for the COVID-19 pandemic. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2021 Jul 21;18(15):7736. mdpi.com
17. Vitalis PO, Aondover EM, Ogunbola O, Onyejelem TE, Ridwan M. Accessing Digital Divide and Implications in Nigeria: The Media Dimension. Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal). 2025;8(1):1-2. academia.edu
18. Ongesa TN, Ugwu OP, Ugwu CN, Alum EU, Eze VH, Basajja M, Ugwu JN, Ogenyi FC, Okon MB, Ejemot-Nwadiaro RI. Optimizing emergency response systems in urban health crises: A

project management approach to public health preparedness and response. Medicine. 2025 Jan 17;104(3):e41279.

19. Liu J. Bridging digital divide amidst educational change for socially inclusive learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sage Open. 2021 Nov;11(4):21582440211060810.

20. Aguilar P, Heusser P. The Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies: A new ally for education in emergencies. Prospects. 2023 May;53(1):3-13.

21. Lennox J, Reuge N, Benavides F. UNICEF's lessons learned from the education response to the COVID-19 crisis and reflections on the implications for education policy. International Journal of Educational Development. 2021 Sep 1;85:102429. sciencedirect.com

22. Rinta-Kahila T, Someh I, Gillespie N, Indulska M, Gregor S. Algorithmic decision-making and system destructiveness: A case of automatic debt recovery. European Journal of Information Systems. 2022 May 4;31(3):313-38. tandfonline.com

23. Gagliardi V, Tosti F, Bianchini Ciampoli L, Battagliere ML, D'Amato L, Alani AM, Benedetto A. Satellite remote sensing and non-destructive testing methods for transport infrastructure monitoring: Advances, challenges and perspectives. Remote Sensing. 2023 Jan 10;15(2):418. mdpi.com