

Identification and Classification of Challenges in Virtual Education Management During Crisis Conditions: A Qualitative Study Using Thematic Content Analysis

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Introduction, the paragraph beginning “In elementary education, these difficulties are particularly important...” is highly relevant, but it needs stronger grounding in the developmental characteristics of elementary students. The manuscript states that younger students need “direct supervision, immediate feedback, emotional support, and parental assistance,” but it should explain how these needs make virtual crisis management qualitatively different in elementary schools compared with secondary schools or universities. This would help justify why the study population was restricted to elementary school principals.

In the Data Analysis section, the sentence “initial codes were generated through open coding” should be clarified in relation to Braun and Clarke’s framework. Open coding is more commonly associated with grounded theory or qualitative content analysis, while Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis refers more generally to generating initial codes. The authors should either

justify the use of open coding within their analytic design or revise the wording to avoid methodological inconsistency. This is especially important because the study also refers to “core category,” a term that may imply grounded theory logic.

The Data Analysis section reports that “the inter-coder agreement was calculated at 87%, indicating an acceptable level of consistency.” This statement requires further explanation. The authors should identify the unit of agreement, the method of calculation, the number of coded transcripts included in the reliability check, and whether disagreements were resolved through discussion. In qualitative thematic analysis, especially if reflexive thematic analysis is claimed, inter-coder agreement is not always expected or necessary; therefore, the authors should align this procedure with their stated analytic approach.

In the Findings section, the demographic paragraph is clear, but it would be improved by linking participant diversity to the interpretation of results. For example, the manuscript states that “five principals were serving in urban areas and five were serving in rural or nomadic areas,” but later claims that infrastructural challenges were more severe in rural and nomadic areas. The authors should explicitly indicate whether this comparison emerged consistently across interviews and whether any differences between urban and rural principals were analytically examined.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The paragraph citing digital leadership and stating that “digital leadership requires more than technical familiarity” is one of the strongest conceptual parts of the Introduction. However, the manuscript should more clearly define digital leadership before applying it to the findings. At present, the concept appears as a supporting idea, but it could serve as a central theoretical lens for interpreting adaptive strategies such as communication with parents, teacher technology training, and trust-based management. The authors should consider introducing digital leadership as a guiding framework rather than only a background concept.

In the Methods and Materials section, the paragraph beginning “The present study was conducted using a qualitative research approach and thematic content analysis” needs further methodological clarification. The manuscript uses the term “thematic content analysis” but then describes Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis. The authors should clarify whether they used thematic analysis, qualitative content analysis, or a hybrid thematic content analysis approach. Each approach has different epistemological assumptions, coding logic, and reporting conventions; therefore, the methodological label should be consistent throughout the paper.

In the Study Design and Participants paragraph, the statement “The sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation” requires refinement. In Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis, “theoretical saturation” is not always considered the most appropriate criterion, whereas “information power,” “meaning saturation,” or “code/theme sufficiency” may be more methodologically compatible. If the authors retain the term saturation, they should explain how it was assessed after the tenth interview, who made the decision, and whether any additional interviews were conducted to confirm no new themes were emerging.

The Methods section states that participants were selected using “maximum variation strategy in terms of gender, managerial experience, and geographical location of the school.” This is appropriate, but the manuscript should provide more detailed participant characteristics without using a table if the journal does not require one. For example, the authors should describe how many principals were from urban, rural, and nomadic areas, whether they managed public or private schools, and whether their schools differed in student population size. These contextual details are essential for assessing the transferability of qualitative findings.

In the Data Collection Tools paragraph, the manuscript states that “The interview protocol was developed based on the theoretical and empirical background of the study and was revised after receiving the opinions of two professors.” This statement is useful but insufficient. The authors should explain how the interview guide was developed, whether it was pilot-tested, whether questions were revised after early interviews, and how probing questions were used to elicit deeper narratives.

Since the findings depend heavily on interview quality, greater transparency about the interview protocol would strengthen methodological rigor.

The Data Collection Tools section notes that “relevant school documents, including official circulars and performance reports, were also reviewed and compared with the interview data.” This is an important triangulation strategy, but it is underdeveloped. The authors should specify what types of documents were reviewed, how many documents were included, from what period they were collected, and how they were used analytically. Without these details, document triangulation may appear as a general claim rather than a clearly implemented procedure.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.