

Crisis Management Practices and Emergency Preparedness of Private Universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain: Basis for Framework Development

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The COVID-19 pandemic, unique as it seems, has a long-term effect on human capital, productivity, and behaviour. Consequently, the sudden closures of schools, colleges and universities highlighted the relevance of crisis management and emergency preparedness which have not received sufficient attention from universities leadership preparation programs. Likewise, scholars are currently digging deeper into the subject which demands deeper understanding of its theoretical underpinnings. This paper aimed to propose a reliable and valid development model that would best fit the crisis management practices and emergency preparedness of the private universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain. To understand the problem, a qualitative research method was used. Documentary analysis and WhatsApp technology were utilized to gather data in line with the current of practice of social distancing to contain the spread of the Corona virus. Consequently, purposive sampling technique was used wherein samples were chosen based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study. The results of the semi-structured interview revealed a negative response from the respondents when they were asked about the practice of crisis management policies and procedures within their university. This was supported by the results of the documentary analysis which has underscored the need for training programs and a felt-need to establish a crisis management and emergency preparedness plan which will serve as a framework within which the university will operate in the event of a crisis.

Key words: *Crisis Management, Emergency Preparedness, Crisis Management Practices, Training program, Kingdom of Bahrain*



Introduction

The educational sector faces unusual demand during crisis. At the time of crisis, schools, colleges, and universities are sometimes caught unprepared, thus, having a hard time to organise an effective crisis intervention response. Most likely, this sector may underestimate the full impact of the crisis which require a pre-planned and systematic model. Such model must identify and plan how to use a broad range of skills and knowledge of the university's response team with other collaborating professionals.

To understand the rationale why crises, occur, considerable attention to crisis management has been devoted by scholars from various disciplines. These scholars have just begun to reveal the shallow ground of crises management which demands deeper understanding of its theoretical underpinnings. Likewise, research in the past revealed that crisis management did not capitalise on opportunities to build cross-disciplinary scholarship. In addition, these scholars offered conflicting suggestions with a little consensus and integration concerning crises and crisis management (Kahn et al., 2013).

Crisis is considered an unforeseen consequence of an event that might result to some potential risks. In times of crisis, decisions must be readily available to limit the damage to the organizations. It is, therefore, necessary to identify who will serve as crisis manager as an initial action in management planning.

A well-defined policies and programs play a significant part of a crisis management about possible threat of any natural or human-made disaster. In the educational sector, the top management is given the responsibility to plan for such contingencies, likewise, the security management team is given the task of carrying out emergency response. Moreover, the responsibility is shared among security, fire and safety departments which should work together in case of emergencies and crisis situations (Fischer, Halibozek, and Walters,2019).

Consequently, training of school officials and administrators is a significant measure that will ensure appropriate response to disasters and emergencies. These school officials must acquire professional knowledge and skills coupled with technical and technological readiness to manage crisis situations. School crisis managers must, therefore, be trained in a wider spectrum of subjects related to business, public relations, rescue services, logistics and a host of others which depend on their sphere of major interest and specialties (Hoskova-Mayerovaa,2016).

Relevant to the abovementioned ideas, a model for school-based crisis preparedness and response was developed by the Office of the victims of crime (OVC.OJP 2021). Significant features of crisis response plan include guideline and the roles and responsibilities of members; crisis intervention services and its protocols; notification of stakeholders and the community of information about crisis. The model also spelled out specific guidelines on how to respond to large-scale natural disasters or criminal activities with three general areas: safety and

security; information dissemination of accurate information to school crisis responses team members and relevant stake holders including the public (OVC.OJP 2021).

Currently, COVID-19 otherwise known as the corona virus has triggered a serious economic crisis worldwide. As pointed out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the impact of the crisis has differentiating factors which include a region's exposure to tradable sectors, its exposure to global value chains and its specialization (OECD, 2020.) This pandemic with its inimitable nature, has a long-term effect on human capital, productivity, and behaviour. Consequently, closures of schools, colleges, and universities due to COVID-19 pandemic underscored the relevance of crisis management which has not received sufficient attention from school leadership preparation programs or education leadership researchers (Grissom and Condon,2021). At this juncture, crisis management plays a significant role in the prevention and mitigation of possible crisis that may occur in the future.

Based on the ideas, it is but proper to investigate the role of the educational sector on how they tackled crisis management and preparedness, civil emergency preparedness as well as other protected interests which are closely inter-related with the security research. In this study, schools, colleges, and universities are used interchangeably. As pointed out by Danko (2019), citizens must make sure that they acquire the necessary tools and skills that sets to reduce the impact of future disasters.

This study aims to propose a reliable and valid development model that best fit the crisis management practices and emergency preparedness of the private universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain with the following research objectives:

- To identify the crisis management practices of selected private universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain.
- To explore the crisis management and emergency preparedness of the identified private universities.
- To propose a reliable and valid conceptual model that may best fit the crises management and emergency preparedness of selected private universities.

Specifically, the following research questions will be answered by the study:

1. What are the current crisis management practices and emergency preparedness being applied by the private universities?
2. How are policies and procedures as regard crisis management and emergency preparedness implemented?
3. What conceptual model may be proposed that best fit the crisis management and emergency preparedness of the selected private universities?

Linkages to literature

To search for relevant literature, several data bases were utilized, i.e., government publication, scholarly journals, related articles, and other similar academic resources. Google scholar, Emerald Insight, and online library of education research and information (ERIC) were included in the search literature until August 8, 2021. These platforms were considered appropriate for a speedy review because they allow a quick overview of worldwide research. After filtering the titles/abstracts and full-text analysis, only published studies with relevance to the research questions of the current study were included.

Keywords like crisis management, emergency preparedness, university preparedness and safety during emergencies, and Covid 19 pandemic protocols were included in the search. The specific keywords crisis management and emergency preparedness revealed several hits that made it easier to collate the relevant literature needed in this paper. Only those descriptive studies published within ten years were included.

The literature below matched the inclusion criteria which are relevant to the current study.

Cordeiro, Gluckman, and Johnson (2021) undertook a study on non-state schools (NNSs) in response to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the global education system. As revealed by the findings, it was noted that private universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain leaders were worried of having safety measures to reopen as well as uncertainly as to when would reopen. To support universities in developing plans and protocols to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 upon returning to university specific guidelines were created by some international organizations.

In the same manner, Grissom, and Condon (2021) conducted a study in schools and other organizations that aimed to describe a framework for understanding crises and crisis management. The authors used the framework to discuss leaders' responses to the COVID-19 school closures in spring 2020. The authors pointed out the crucial need for crisis management training for educational leaders and to open new avenues that will enhance their abilities and skills in crisis leadership at the school and district levels.

Trump (2011) pointed out that the threat of a mass casualty incident at schools may exist and can happen in a blink of an eye. At this point, the author underscored that training program for school heads and administrators is a significant part of crisis management through practicing safety procedures which must remain flexible to account for any unforeseen circumstances which may occur.

Likewise, a qualitative case study was undertaken by Robertson (2017) who examined the preparedness of principals in a larger Urban High School District with the use of Crisis Management Life Cycle. Consequently, it was revealed the programs for school leadership



focused more on principal as an educational leader, however, crisis management training was inadequate. The study collected data with the use of interviews, focus groups, and document analyses.

Moreover, an in-depth study on crisis preparedness and response for schools revealed that while the administration and management level practices of crisis management remained satisfactory, the respondents had shown negative responses on creating awareness among students. Likewise, proper system of crisis response team, training and other measures were not existent (Javed et al, 2015).

In his study, Lenihan, (2020) compared the superintendent's perception on safety and security emergency management protocols. The study concluded that there was a gap between the level of importance given to emergency management protocols throughout the state and the superintendents' perception of protocol effectiveness.

Coutts, Elizabeth and Mohamed et al (2020) analysed in-depth the challenges posed by the Covid 19 pandemic with regard to the emergency remote learning. The study utilized a case study method that compared the educational experience of three countries, namely, Bahrain, Iraq, and Russia. Documentary evidence and interviews using Zoom technology were used to gather data and explore the lived experience of the teaching and learning methods. It was concluded that most of the countries employed distance education and online learning. Technology use was prevalent during the conduct of online classes, however, there was an early indication education inequity could be widened among participants.

Methodology

A qualitative research method was used which sought to understand the problem from the perspectives of the respondents. Initially, an interview guide was used to help the interviewer follow the topic trails. In addition, questions were prepared ahead of time while the informants were given the freedom to express their views about the topic. An interview protocol served as guide by the interviewer. Respondents were selected with the use of purposive sampling wherein samples were chosen based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study. Documentary analysis and WhatsApp technology were used to gather data in line with the current of practice of social distancing to contain the spread of the virus.

Respondents of the Study

In this study the selected respondents were the deans, department heads and faculty of three selected private universities. The selection was based on the availability of the respondents, knowledge of or first-hand information about the issues of crisis management and an agreement to freely participate in the study. The selected universities were three known universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Findings

The following are the results of the semi-structured interviews:

Most of the respondents answered in the negative.

A dean of a college answered: “No, nothing seen for the crisis management. “

Likewise, an administrative staff revealed that: “It is with regret that we don’t have crisis management polices but we are trying to have such policy in the future.”

Moreover, another faculty member said: “No, crisis management policies and procedures are non-existent, or we don’t have the chance to practice it. “

Finally, a research director of one university answered: “There is no crisis management policies and procedures.”

When asked how policies and procedures implemented in School/University, all the respondents suggested that: “*Staff should be educated about crises and be trained in their roles and responsibilities and the students /staff should practice emergency drills.*”

All respondents did not answer the third question “What type of strategies your School/University follow in the crisis management policy/procedure?” which is self-explanatory.

Results from the documentary analysis

Findings from the documentary analysis of relevant literature revealed the following:

It is noteworthy that some authors pointed out the crucial need for crisis management training for educational leaders to enhance their abilities and skills in crisis leadership at the university and district levels.



In addition, another author highlighted the need to have training programs for school heads and administrators through practicing safety procedures which must remain flexible to account for any unforeseen circumstances.

Likewise, another author revealed the programs for university leadership focused more on principal as an educational leader and crisis management training was not given adequate attention.

Finally, another study revealed that while the administration and management level practices of crisis management remained satisfactory, the respondents had shown negative responses on creating awareness among students.

Conclusions

The results of the semi-structured interview showed a negative response from the respondents as regard the practice of crisis management policies and procedures and The negative result was supported by documentary analysis which underscored the need for training programs through practicing safety procedures; crisis management training was not given adequate attention; there is crucial need to create awareness among faculty, staff and students on emergency preparedness and crisis management

Recommendations

There is a crucial need to establish a crisis management and emergency preparedness plan which will serve as a framework within the university to operate in the event of a crisis. Such plan can provide a clear guidance to reduce the impact of crisis; raise the level of awareness and instil public confidence on the ability of the University to manage natural or man-made disaster. Likewise, such framework will identify the individuals and resources necessary to adequately protect University employees, students, and business units.



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