

Exploring the Impact of Principals' Emotional Intelligence on Teaching Strategy Mediated by Principals' Instructional Leadership

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Since the civil war, Lebanon has faced continuous unrest. Political instability, intruding political powers and systemic breakdowns that have had their impact on a poorly developed public education sector. Many reasons over history were at the core of inefficient public schools; weak funding and governmental support to public schools, lack of training and support to teachers, poor infrastructure and the excessive freedom given to private schools through article 10 of the constitution (Abdulhamid & Yassine, 2020; Abourjeili & Harb, 2020; Bahou, 2015.) These longstanding issues caused the Lebanese people to lose trust in their public education with 70% of students are enrolled in private schools versus 30% enrolled in public schools. The deterioration in the status of public education is not only caused by the current crisis in the country, but it is an ongoing and protracted crisis (Abourjeili & Harb, 2020). Under these circumstances, some Lebanese public-school principals took the responsibility of initiating change, thus going beyond the scope of their formal job description. Through their actions, those principals succeeded in overcoming barriers and in bringing innovative interventions to their schools that address their most pressing priorities and respond to their aspirations. It is important to check those positive deviants and study how they managed to initiate improvement against all odds. As such this study examines the case of a school principal who led successfully school-based improvement in his public school despite constraining dysfunctional organizational systems and socio-political interferences. Studying these cases would contribute to generate a proposed model of school-based reform grounded in an Arab context that outlines the measures to be taken at the school and the role the principal can play in initiating school-based improvement while navigating conditions of systemic adversity and hindering organizational and cultural structures and norms.

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This study examined the perspectives of the school leaders and teachers about the role of the school principal in initiation school improvement in a Lebanese public school. The study had a three-fold purpose: (1) to identify the perspectives of school leaders (including principal) and teachers regarding the principal's role in initiating school improvement; (2) to examine these perspectives through comparing them with the literature on initiating effective school improvement; and (3) to identify challenges faced during change initiation and strategies followed by school principal to mitigate the challenges. This study follows a qualitative research design that is grounded in an interpretivist philosophical position. It uses a case study approach and grounded theory methodology for collecting and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2015; Merriam, & Tisdell, 2015).

Based on the reviewed literature, an initial understanding of the initiation process, the conditions that affect it and the role of leadership in the process was constructed from existing theoretical frameworks. These included the open social system theory of schools, Bolman & Deal four frames of organizations theory (2017), coherence framework (Fullan & Quinn, 2016) and the frames for understanding school improvement by Seashore Louis, Toole & Hargreaves (1999). The different frameworks helped in identifying the conditions and leadership behaviors that support the initiation process of school improvement. These conditions are: providing an enabling structure, addressing teachers' emotions, forming coalitions and networking, fostering collaborative culture, openness to external environment, vision building, maintaining communication, establishing trust and leadership that is transformational, distributed and collaborative.

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This study followed a qualitative research design that is grounded in an interpretivist philosophical position. It is an exploratory single case study that aimed at having an in-depth investigation of the role of school principal in initiating change, from the perspectives of teachers and leaders and within the natural context of one school system. The school was purposefully selected for it represents an information-rich, unique and an atypical case of Lebanese public schools. This public school is atypical because: it has been undergoing several improvement plans since the arrival of the current principal; it is well developed in terms of equipment and resources; it is considered by its community a school of choice evidenced by the continuous influx of new students; it succeeded to reduce drop-out rates; it records 100% success in official exams which is not always the case in Lebanese public schools; and the principal's profile makes him distinguished from the typical principals of public schools. The principal is young and ongoing learner who runs workshops for public school principals on school leadership. One of his major achievements was ranking first among public school principals in Lebanon in 2015, according to CERD.

The targeted participants were as follows: the school principal, 16 tenured teachers, 5 coordinators, 5 supervisors and 9 parents. However, the principal, 14 teachers, 4 coordinators, 4 supervisors and 3 parents ended up actually participating as representing the key players who witnessed the school-based improvement initiative. Contractual teachers were excluded because these are part timers and due to their short tenure and high turnover, contractual

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teachers are less likely to experience school improvement processes. Data collection tools were used including individual interviews and focus group interviews. Interviews allowed to capture people's perceptions which the researcher saw as the main source of data. After collecting and analyzing data, member checking was performed through individual interviews with one member from each group. Besides, reviewing school documents and field work journal were another tools of data collection. The quality criteria that was attended to in this study include: credibility through confirmation checks and data triangulation; dependability through keeping an extensive account of note taking (verbatim) and journal notes after each field visit and through data triangulation; and generalizability through the thick description of the context, setting and participants.

The findings revealed that despite his declared participative approach, the school principal maintained a centralized authority of decision making especially when related to the initiation of school improvement. Results also revealed that what enabled the principal to secure the resources and support needed for initiation, was his continuous engagement in establishing networks with social and political entities and governing bodies in the external environment. A process for building an action plan for improvement during initiation was also found. Besides, a number of challenges were found to impede the initiation of change including the engagement of senior teachers, teachers' turnover, time constraints, lack of funding, bureaucratic limitations and sociopolitical interferences. Strategies to curb down the internal challenge of resistance and other strategies of buffering to mitigate socio-political interferences were also revealed.

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Initiation of school improvement is critical as it sets the foundation and is the first point of entry to disrupt the status quo of the school improvement process (Baglibel et al., 2018; The actions taken during this stage are significantly conducive to the success of school improvement. The findings actually confirmed that the principal of a Lebanese public school cannot simply follow the guidance stated in the international literature to initiate change. The actions taken by the principal contradict many of the recommendations of the international literature about how initiation should be done, they were however responding to the dire situation of Lebanese public school system (Abourjeili & Harb, 2020; Bahous, 2015). Based on the discussion, a model of initiation that is informed by the international literature yet responsive to the cultural context of Lebanese public schools emerged. The model presents strategies used by the principal to initiate school-based improvement: enacting the existing school structure as a necessary preparatory step; developing the change vision; creating an enabling structure supportive to initiation; developing a climate of high hopes and possibilities; enlarging support base for change; enacting symbolic leadership; and developing the action plan to initiate change. It also pinpoints factors that shape the principal's leadership. These included: views on the role of principal in initiating school-based reform; missing a minimum structure with clear distribution of roles and functions and proper enforcement of school rules; low capacity for leading change at the school; a climate of low morale and faith in the effectiveness of innovative intervention; and a complex sociopolitical external environment and high need for help from the external school community.

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