Beyond the Crisis:
Leadership and Organizational Evolution Post-COVID-19

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Abstract

Amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Lebanon's education sector has been confronted with unprecedented circumstances. This qualitative research, rooted in the field of Educational Leadership and Organizational Resilience, aims to uncover the dynamics of leadership resilience and organizational adaptability within Lebanon's education sector during the post-COVID era. Educational leaders in Lebanon faced an array of challenges and opportunities in response to the pandemic's impact. This study seeks to explore the challenges, opportunities, individual resilience practices, and organizational support mechanisms within the post-COVID educational context of Lebanon. By investigating how educational leaders, teachers, and students resiliently address these unique challenges, the research aims to provide insights into their contributions to the adaptability of educational organizations. The study delves into the vital role of organizational support and resilience mechanisms for effective navigation in this transformed context. By examining these factors within the education sector, the research aims to offer practical insights to enhance the resilience of educational organizations in a post-pandemic world. In conclusion, this qualitative study set within Lebanon's post-COVID education sphere offers valuable insights into Educational Leadership and Organizational Resilience, offering a comprehensive framework to bolster the adaptability of educational institutions in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Keywords: Leadership, Resilience, Organizational support, Change, Post-pandemic

1. Introduction

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust organizations in Lebanon's education sector into a period of unparalleled turbulence. This crisis has rigorously tested these entities, making traditional crisis management strategies obsolete. It has resulted in significant disruptions to educational services in Lebanon, prompting substantial adaptations in their operational approaches (Ayoko, 2021; Batool et al., 2022). In this demanding educational environment in Lebanon, leaders within educational organizations are grappling with the complexities of navigating these challenges, often encountering limitations in their leadership abilities and resilience (Holmberg et al., 2016).

For instance, many educational institutions in Lebanon have faced financial constraints, with a significant portion transitioning to online operations (Barr, 2020). The unique characteristics of this pandemic have called for swift adjustments within Lebanon's education sector in response to its widespread impact, pushing educational organizations to innovate and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances (Neely-Barnes et al., 2021). Within this evolving educational landscape in Lebanon, educators and administrators have been challenged to serve various stakeholders who have been adversely affected by the pandemic. This has necessitated enhanced adaptability and creativity (Banks et al., 2020).

In this challenging educational environment in Lebanon, it is essential for leaders and educational organizations to exhibit resilience at both individual and organizational levels to navigate the turbulence successfully (Frailich & Lund, 2021; Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012). Leadership resilience, in particular, holds the potential to mitigate the stress and uncertainties associated with educational crises and changes within Lebanon's education sector (Ayoko, 2021). While training can enhance individual and team resilience (Hillmann, 2020), the absence of comprehensive leadership training in Lebanon's education sector may leave educational leaders unprepared for future crises (Neely-Barnes et al., 2021). Furthermore, sustained workplace stress can erode individual resilience among educators and administrators in Lebanon's education sector. Factors such as personal resilience attributes, effective coping mechanisms, compassion, and self-efficacy play crucial roles in an individual's ability to withstand, recover, or thrive amid adversity (Giustiniano et al., 2020; Ledesma, 2014). Organizational support and resilience are also pivotal for leaders and educational organizations in Lebanon to cope with and overcome challenges effectively (Knipfer & Kump, 2022; Ledesma, 2014).

As advocated by Barr (2020), who recently outlined a research agenda, the pandemic offers a unique opportunity to investigate how educational organizations in Lebanon responded to the crisis and derive valuable insights from their experiences (p. 10). Barr emphasizes the need for scholarly research that delves into organizational responses, the effectiveness of leadership practices and resilience factors within Lebanon's education sector, and the lessons learned to facilitate future recovery efforts and enhance organizational resilience. Other scholars echo this call for empirical research during times of actual crisis (Sommer et al., 2016) and underscore the importance of studying the impact of risk factors, especially on individuals' mental health, well-being, and adaptability, during crises within Lebanon's education sector (Coulombe et al., 2020). In response, this article will present empirical research findings on leadership and organizational resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic within various educational organizations in Lebanon. These findings are crucial, as educational organizations in Lebanon require practical insights to emerge stronger from crises (Barr, 2020).

While extensive research on resilience exists across industries, it often remains at the conceptual level (Barasa et al., 2018), with limited empirical exploration, especially within Lebanon's education sector. Identifying the essential elements of organizational resilience within Lebanon's education sector is still a challenge, as are specific factors that bolster or hinder resilience (Gover & Duxbury, 2018). These research gaps underscore the significance of investigating organizational support mechanisms and resilience factors within educational organizations in Lebanon, a focal point of the current research study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership Resilience

Researchers have not yet reached a consensus on the conceptualizations of resilience in the workplace, as evidenced by Hartmann et al. (2020) multi-level review and synthesis. Resilience is a complex and multi-dimensional construct encompassing personal attributes as protective factors, dynamic processes involving resource utilization to adapt to stressors, and preparedness to cope with adversity (Kuntz, 2021). This focus on personality traits that provide protection against stress and promote positive adaptation to significant distress or risk is echoed in the literature, rooted in positive psychology and the concept of "psychological resilience" (Ayoko, 2021; Batool et al., 2022; van Breda, 2022). In alignment with this perspective, leadership resilience is described as the capacity to recover from adversity, frustration, and misfortune, directly tied to the extent and duration of stress and adversity faced by leaders (Ledesma, 2014).

Resilience comprises several internal and external variables, including factors associated with the self, personality, or individual resources. Examples include coping ability, positive self-esteem and self-efficacy, hope/optimism, empathy, insight, tolerance for uncertainty, perseverance, self-regulation, low fear of failure, and the ability to develop new coping and problem-solving skills or resources. Additionally, it encompasses hardiness, defined as an individual's ability to make the best of difficult circumstances (Batool et al., 2022; Ledesma, 2014; Sommer et al., 2016). These variables are incorporated into the protective factor model, suggesting that resilience results from an interaction between protective and risk factors, moderating the impact of risk exposure. Protective factors include skills in emotional regulation, interpersonal reflection, self-esteem, planning and problem-solving, and external support systems, including supportive and trusting relationships (Ledesma, 2014; van Breda, 2022). Some also emphasize the significance of social environments and culturally relevant resources (Coulombe et al., 2020).

Recognizing resilience as both a character trait and a set of actions, it becomes evident that providing actionable steps for leaders navigating constant change during a crisis is crucial (Barton et al., 2020). This is particularly critical as an organization's survival and success during periods of significant stress depend on its members' resilience in their work and their ability to cope with adversity (Sommer et al., 2016). Leaders require models for resilience and coping tailored to address organizational operations during crises, thereby embedding resilience across all aspects of the organization and enhancing organizational effectiveness (van Breda, 2016). Individual resilience is integral to the development of organizational resilience at the systemic level (Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012).

2.2 Organizational Resilience

The literature on organizational resilience has developed disjointedly in organizational studies and requires conceptual synthesis (Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012). A recent systematic review of empirical literature from various sectors defines organizational resilience as "a system's ability to continue performing and meeting its objectives in the face of challenges," emphasizing the system's capacity to endure shocks, adapt, transform, and thrive (Barasa et al., 2018). This emphasis on restorative, adaptive, and transformative functions is a crucial aspect of organizational resilience and thriving, fostering not only survival but sustainability in the face of challenges (Börekçi et al., 2021). Similarly, recent literature in human services defines organizational resilience as "an organization's capacity to adjust organizational processes under challenging conditions," emphasizing the ability to rebound and maintain essential functions (Gover & Duxbury, 2018). Organizational resilience involves responding effectively to significant changes or adversities to maintain a functional system, recover efficiently from disruptions, and may require assessing the situation, strategic alignment, resource gathering for sustainability, and systemic thinking with internal, external, and interactional elements (Yuan & Huang, 2021). Critical elements include complexity, severe external crises, organizational survival, and functioning (Searing et al., 2021).

Organizational resilience has been applied in crisis management during various disasters and is considered essential for organizations to survive and adapt in turbulent and unpredictable environments (Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012). Adaptive resilience is particularly crucial for developing new organizational capabilities during emerging situations, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Resilient organizations survive by developing new capabilities and resources, including internal and external relationships to enhance problem-solving and strengthen their operational capacity (Börekçi et al., 2021; van Breda, 2022). This includes enhancing organizational capacity in risk assessment and planning to prepare for and successfully manage unexpected crises (Darkow, 2019). Organizational resilience emphasizes preventing, mitigating, and eliminating the risks, uncertainties, and problems associated with adversity at the lowest possible cost and in the shortest time, including building employees' capacity to cope, adapt, and thrive in response to a crisis (Vera et al., 2021; Kim, 2021).

From the perspective of positive psychology, all organizations have the potential for resilience, and organizational resilience is a developmental process that can be enhanced over time. This process considers contextual risk and protective factors at both individual and organizational levels. Organizational resilience relies on resilient employees and can be strengthened through individual and team training. Additionally, leaders play a crucial role in cultivating a supportive organizational culture that fosters positive relationships, a vital component of organizational resilience during times of crises (Hillmann, 2020; van Breda, 2022). In human services, organizational resilience is evident in open communication, encouragement of contributions, shared decision-making, effective feedback mechanisms, and leadership development. Protective factors include a focus on supportive networks, defined as cohesive and responsive relationships between leaders and staff members, as well as healthy organizational practices, including protocols to promote work/family balance, positive communication, health programs, and teamwork. Resilient organizations are characterized by having more protective resilience factors and benefit from a motivated workforce (Ledesma, 2014).

3. Research Methodology

This research adopts a primarily qualitative research approach, following the guidance of Creswell and Creswell (2017). Qualitative methods are well-suited for exploring the concepts of organizational resilience, leadership resilience, and individual challenges within the context of Lebanon's education sector. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of these dynamics over an extended period, as suggested by Hartmann et al. (2020).

The impetus for this research stems from a recognized need within the education sector in Lebanon. Specifically, there is a growing imperative to understand and support leadership resilience, particularly in the face of the unique challenges posed by the Lebanese educational landscape. Lebanon's education sector comprises a diverse array of educational institutions, each with distinct management structures, leadership styles, funding mechanisms, and operational characteristics. This study occurs at a time when these educational institutions are undergoing significant transformations and reforms, albeit with a focus that deviates from the specifics of the integration process, as directed by educational authorities.

Over time, the research questions evolve to examine the resilience and coping strategies employed by educational leaders, teachers, and students within the context of organizational changes and crises in Lebanon's education sector. Three core research questions emerge:

1. What challenges and opportunities do educational leaders, institutions, and students encounter during crises and transformative periods within Lebanon's education sector?
2. How do educational leaders, teachers, and students respond to these challenges, and what individual resilience practices do they exhibit?

3. What forms of organizational support and resilience mechanisms are essential for educational leaders, teachers, and students to effectively navigate crises and transformations within Lebanon's education sector?

The research team comprises faculty members from Lebanese universities with expertise in education and social work, along with research assistants who are social work students holding CORE research ethics certificates. Ethical approval for the research is obtained from the Research Ethics Committees of the participating universities in Lebanon.

Participants are selected using a non-probability purposive sampling method, following the guidelines of Rubin and Babbie (2017). The selection criteria primarily center on individuals in leadership positions within educational institutions in Lebanon, including educational leaders, teachers, and students, all of whom align with the study's objectives. Invitations are extended to a diverse group of participants, ensuring representation from various educational institutions and backgrounds within Lebanon's education sector. Participants are invited to take part in either one of four (4) online focus groups or complete an anonymous online survey. These invitations are facilitated through official channels within their respective educational institutions, thus maintaining a professional and ethical distance between the researchers and the participants. To enhance the robustness of the findings, data is collected through both the focus groups and surveys, following the triangulation approach advocated by Yin (2009).

Both the focus group sessions and the survey instrument feature fifteen (15) identical open-ended questions that explore the experiences of educational leaders, teachers, and students within Lebanon's education sector during crises and periods of change. These research questions draw inspiration from existing literature pertinent to the Lebanese educational context (Barr, 2020; Batool et al., 2022; Coulombe et al., 2020) and encompass areas such as challenges, coping mechanisms, social and organizational support, available resources, communication, connections, and opportunities, all aligned with the Lebanese educational landscape (Neely-Barnes et al., 2021). Each research question is mapped onto the subsequent qualitative research findings.

In total, twenty-five (25) educational leaders, teachers, and students from various educational institutions in Lebanon participate in either one of four focus groups or the online survey. The questions posed to participants remain consistent across both data collection methods. The focus group sessions, ranging from sixty (60) to ninety (90) minutes, are semi-structured and conducted online through secure platforms, ensuring privacy and protection. To maintain participant anonymity, each participant is assigned a unique identifier (e.g., participant one = P1). The online surveys are administered through a secure platform, with the technical aspects managed by the respective universities' Information Technology Services (ITS) departments. These departments handle all technical details and summarize the survey responses into an anonymous report. Participants in the survey are similarly assigned numerical and alphabetical codes (e.g., participant one = Q1) to preserve anonymity. Demographic information is collected from survey respondents and summarized in Table 1.

Transcripts of the focus group recordings are manually transcribed by the research assistants, resulting in edited transcripts. These transcripts undergo independent review by each member of the research team and are cross-compared. Subsequently, the research team employs coding to analyze both the transcripts and survey data. The coding process commences with a "start list" of pre-established codes within an a priori thematic framework, derived from the study's conceptual framework and research questions developed before data collection. Additionally, inductive codes emerge through direct data examination. To ensure the reliability of data analysis, the list of codes is cross-checked among research team members, with any discrepancies addressed through team discussions. This iterative review process continues until the research team is confident that the common themes and topics arising across respondents are sufficiently robust for

comprehensive thematic analysis. These themes are then further categorized into meta-themes and sub-themes, which are compared to educational leadership themes found in the existing literature pertinent to Lebanon's education sector (Richards & Morse, 2007). All research team members review representative quotes and refine them to enhance reliability. Memo writing notes are maintained to document all stages of coding and data analysis, thereby promoting transparency and reliability. A summary of the identified themes is shared with the educational institutions' leadership teams, along with an executive summary report. This approach serves as a form of member checking, intended to enhance transparency and validity of the study results (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Table 1 Demographic Data

Gender	Age	Highest Degree	Years in Role
	25-35 (N=7)	B.S/B.A (N=3)	1-3 (N=5)
Male (N=7)	36-45 (N=6)	M.S/M.A/MBA (N=8)	3-5 (N=9)
Female (N=18)	46-55 (N=10)	PhD (N=13)	5-9 (N=9)
	56-65 (N=2)	Other (N=1)	10 or more (N=2)

4. Results

The findings are structured into three sections, in line with the three primary research inquiries. Within each section, various key themes have emerged, supported by excerpts and valuable insights from interviews within the Lebanese education sector and the responses gathered through online surveys.

Question 1: Challenges and Opportunities amid the Pandemic Crisis

Educational leaders in Lebanon faced a multitude of individual and organizational challenges due to the pandemic. Simultaneously, they seized several new opportunities and gained important insights. These findings are detailed below:

Individual Challenges

Participants in the Lebanese education sector voiced various individual challenges. One prominent theme was the experience of uncertainty, vulnerability, and fear as the pandemic persisted. For instance, a leader shared their uncertainty, saying, "I don't know the answer. I don't know how it's going to turn out" (P9), while others expressed vulnerability, with one leader saying, "I really felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me right at the beginning" (P1), and another discussing fear: "How do we validate that fear [when] we're all facing that same fear?" (P11).

Another significant theme revolved around the difficulties of managing workloads and making tough decisions. Leaders found it challenging to prioritize tasks when numerous responsibilities demanded attention, with one leader stating, "the ability to stay on top of things has been significantly challenged, and that's a hard feeling" (P6). Tough decisions were made concerning financial stability and staff layoffs, as another leader explained, "I've had to make tough decisions about programs and changes in closing programs. That affected my confidence because I thought people must hate me because I've had to do this tough thing" (P10).

A third critical theme included fatigue, reduced patience, stress, and burnout. Leaders described feeling exhausted due to the extended pandemic, with one saying, "I'm exhausted... this is tired of being tired... a sense of hopelessness about being able to do anything about that" (P2). Reduced patience was evident: "I don't have the patience I normally have... [my colleagues] hit the wall because they're just not themselves. They're a little bit prickly" (P10). Stress and burnout intensified as the pandemic continued: "fatigue and burnout, and vicarious trauma, that is really emerging for me at the leadership level" (P2).

Organizational Challenges

Educational leaders in Lebanon also described multiple organizational challenges that escalated as the pandemic persisted. One crucial theme revolved around strained internal and external relationships. For instance, leaders highlighted the ongoing social isolation and lack of physical presence, leading to "the inability to have day-to-day kind of soft touch" (P2). This took a toll on internal relationships: "the wear on people will take a long time to heal and it is beyond such a great degree of the 'asks' of staff" (Q14). Rapidly changing circumstances presented challenges in building and maintaining external relationships: "we're trying to coordinate with [our community partners]... it was just massive and continues to be... our community partners were reeling as well" (P1).

Another key theme involved the delicate balance between ensuring the safety of staff and clients while upholding service standards. Leaders grappled with "many different aspects of a project management component while keeping everybody safe" (P3), and "ensuring that [leaders and staff] had access to safety items [PPE] needed to support [both staff and clients] was key" (Q7). Ethical concerns arose over the inability to maintain service standards: "Some programs or client services were cancelled, delayed, or restructured... We're still living with some of the ethical dilemmas who we were not able to serve well" (P2), and "this is not the level of service that we were really proud of not so very long ago" (P1).

Opportunities and Lessons Learned

Educational leaders in Lebanon also identified significant opportunities for growth and lessons learned during the pandemic. The first prominent theme highlighted the willingness to take calculated risks and adapt swiftly to changes. Leaders embraced "taking reasonable risks to adapt and adjust to the changing environment" (P10) and discovered that the ability to work with uncertainty was a valuable skill: "that ability to work through, take risks, and work with that unknown... that uncertainty, that's something that we definitely learned" (P10). Adaptability allowed for rapid adjustments: "There were huge changes, but we were able to do it in a really organized way... We were able to pivot and do things differently very quickly" (P10).

A closely related second theme emphasized innovation and creative solutions. Leaders viewed innovation as an opportunity: "innovation is the opportunity!" (P4). This encompassed innovative approaches to enhance learning and "to develop innovative solutions for organizational challenges" (P11). Innovation enabled swift transformations: "what we thought was impossible... instead of three years, we were able to make a process come into place in three days!" (P11) and "[We] got programs up and going in like a week or two and under normal circumstances, you would think, we better slow down" (P10). Creative solutions were also fostered: "Being creative in keeping my teams engaged in the work that they do which has changed tremendously" (Q2), and "we modified and have different resources. We've got more remote sessions, [and] virtual groups. We just enhanced some of those services" (P11).

A key third theme revolved around unique opportunities for internal and external collaboration. For example, "the pandemic forced us to look outside of our particular programs... the incredible amount of work around redeploying staff from different areas to essential services and the coordination that took and the collaboration" (P6). This included unique opportunities for external collaboration: "I was building new relationships with different partners in the community out of this need for an urgent response" (P2), and "There's been an incredible sense of collaboration and that we're in this together here within our agency, but also within our community, and within the province!" (P6).

A final theme emerged regarding lessons learned for long-term organizational sustainability and leadership development. Sustainability included a focus on succession planning and developing emerging leaders: "When the pandemic is done, I'm thinking a lot more about succession planning and growing the coordinators into their leadership roles" (P2), and "[we] see emerging leaders in [our organizations] who [take] the lead and who [create] solutions" (P11).

Question 2: Individual Resilience Factors

Educational leaders in Lebanon identified several individual resilience factors. A key theme was the development of increased self-confidence and enhanced skill sets. Leaders expressed that they had acquired new skills during the pandemic, bolstering their confidence in decision-making and collaboration: "I learned a lot more new skills during the pandemic that's helped me be more confident in decision making [and] my skills have been strengthened, particularly around collaboration and communication" (P11).

Another vital theme was the cultivation of greater compassion, empathy, and humility toward staff. Leaders exhibited compassion for the life stories of their staff and stressed the importance of understanding how individuals cope differently: "a lot of compassion for the life stories of our staff, because they all have such different pressures" (P2). Empathy and humility were also emphasized, fostering stronger leadership during a crisis: "real capacity for humility and being able to empathize with your staff" (P9), and "being humble... always focusing on [others] and not getting caught up with my ego" (P10).

A third key theme involved the development of gratitude, hardiness/perseverance, and patience. Leaders expressed gratitude, recognizing the importance of focusing on what they were thankful for each day: "gratitude has been huge. Thinking every day about what I am grateful for, what could be worse, were all things that got me through this" (P10). They also highlighted the significance of hardiness and perseverance: "trust in the process, that it's going to be ok. You just gotta keep moving forward" (P9), "[letting] go of things that are beyond [your] control" (P11), and patience: "need to be patient, and we need to recognize that people are learning new skills that they have not had to use before" (P3).

Question 3: Organizational Resilience and Supports

Leaders in the Lebanese education sector also described various organizational resilience factors and supports. The first key theme was emotional support and connection. Leaders emphasized the significance of emotional support, particularly during challenging times when collaborative efforts were essential: "a lot more opportunity to connect [and] work as a collaborative versus feeling, I've got to figure out an answer to this all on my own" (P11). Internal connections were notably enhanced, with leaders going the extra mile to maintain human touch and support: "I find ways to have that human touch... and connection to help remind us that we're not alone... go around to sites, check in on people face to face, little things [like] sending coffees to teams, sending lunches, just to support them in real time" (P11).

A second closely related theme was the creation of a supportive organizational culture and a sense of teamwork. Leaders played a vital role in shaping their organization's culture, promoting an environment where support was a core value: "one of our signatures is we're still here for you – just in different ways" (P2). This culture facilitated decision-making and collaboration: "knowing each other's struggles and needs would permit both leaders and staff to build trust and [help] each other make decisions" (P2). Strong teamwork was evident: "just keeping all the balls in the air, we needed a team approach. We really had to pull together!" (P1), and "I have a whole team to help me and really support me through these situations" (P11). Additionally, "I'll do that for you. I'll help. It's certainly brought our team, which is already a well-functioning team, closer together to just say, We WILL make this work" (P7).

A third noteworthy theme revolved around clear communication, shared decision-making, and effective problem-solving. Leaders emphasized the importance of transparent communication, providing staff with reassurance, information, validation, and support. They highlighted the significance of shared decision-making and problem-solving during high-pressure moments: "that ability to problem solve, and come up with the solutions that are sustainable, and to work in those high-pressure moments to be able to support our teams" (P11).

Finally, another key theme centered on strong organizational values, mission, and work-life balance. Leaders found guidance in their organization's values and mission: "leaning into the values of our

organization... our mission statement and our values are actually pretty closely aligned" (P2). These values acted as guiding beacons through the challenges of the pandemic: "those values are like the beacon that helps guide you through the storm!" (P11). Leaders also emphasized the importance of maintaining work-life balance and upholding ethical values: "We talk about [work/life balance] a lot, with our staff, in supervision, as a management and leadership team - constantly trying to find the right balance" (P1).

In summary, educational leaders in Lebanon faced unique challenges and opportunities during the pandemic, developed individual resilience factors, and benefited from organizational resilience factors and supports. These insights provide valuable lessons for navigating crises and fostering resilience within the Lebanese education sector.

5. Discussion and Practice Implications

In summary, the results of this study offer valuable insights for the education sector in Lebanon, with both challenges and opportunities surfacing for leaders. These findings can serve as a guide for future leaders navigating turbulent changes.

5.1 Individual Challenges

On an individual level, leaders in the Lebanese education sector faced several substantial challenges. They grappled with uncertainty, vulnerability, and fear due to the lack of clarity surrounding the pandemic, mirroring experiences reported in similar contexts (Coulombe et al., 2020; Kuntz, 2021). Leaders also encountered difficulties in workload management, a common issue exacerbated by the pandemic's demands (Kuntz, 2021). Making tough decisions, particularly concerning layoffs and program changes, presented a delicate balancing act, echoing challenges seen elsewhere (Neely-Barnes et al., 2021).

Fatigue, stress, and burnout were additional hurdles experienced by these leaders, aligning with trends observed during the pandemic (Neely-Barnes et al., 2021; Morneau Shepell, 2021). Prolonged workplace stress can hamper resilience (Giustiniano et al., 2020; Ledesma, 2014), posing risks to handling complex organizational challenges (Holmberg et al., 2016). These findings highlight the need for future leaders to anticipate and address these personal challenges during crises.

5.2 Organizational Challenges

At the organizational level, leaders in Lebanese education reported challenges in maintaining internal staff relationships due to social isolation and the absence of physical presence. They also faced difficulties collaborating with external partners amidst rapid changes. These issues mirrored struggles faced in other human services contexts during the pandemic (Banks et al., 2020; Börekçi et al., 2021; Neely-Barnes et al., 2021).

Operational challenges included upholding service standards while ensuring staff safety and addressing ethical dilemmas. These challenges resonated with leaders in various sectors dealing with staffing, safety, and resource constraints during the pandemic (Banks et al., 2020; Coulombe et al., 2020; Neely-Barnes et al., 2021). These findings underscore the difficulty of balancing competing organizational priorities during crises and the impact on staff and client services.

5.3 Leadership Opportunities and Lessons Learned

Despite these challenges, the study revealed significant opportunities and lessons learned. Leaders emphasized the importance of risk-taking and adaptability to foster innovation in programs and services, an essential skill during transformative change (Brassey et al., 2021). They also highlighted the value of creativity, viewing innovation as a "new normal" (Neely-Barnes et al., 2021). Collaboration, both internally and

externally, was instrumental in coordinating staff and responding effectively to crises, in line with resilient organizational characteristics (Darkow, 2019; Ledesma, 2014).

Leaders identified emerging leaders who demonstrated problem-solving abilities during the pandemic, showcasing the potential for leadership development through active engagement with challenges (Ledesma, 2014). Sustainability and succession planning were also emphasized, essential considerations given anticipated challenges in succession planning within human service organizations (Vito, 2018).

5.4 Individual Resilience and Skills

Leaders in Lebanese education demonstrated individual resilience factors and skills, including increased self-confidence, skill development, empathy, humility, gratitude, hardiness, perseverance, and patience. These traits align with protective factors in resilience models (Ledesma, 2014) and expand to include collaboration and communication skills. These skills are crucial for leaders' well-being, recovery from adverse events, and organizational resilience (Batool et al., 2022; Kim, 2021; Ledesma, 2014).

5.5 Organizational Resilience and Supports

Leaders underscored the importance of emotional support and connection, emphasizing their role in building staff well-being and organizational resilience. These findings align with the importance of supportive relational networks in resilient organizations (Barasa et al., 2018; Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012; Ledesma, 2014). Creating a team environment that fosters relationships enhances an organization's capacity to thrive during challenges (van Breda, 2022).

A supportive organizational culture, teamwork, clear communication, shared decision-making, and work-life balance were identified as critical factors for resilience. These factors align with protective elements in organizational resilience models (Ledesma, 2014) and underscore the importance of proactive measures to build organizational resilience (Bhaduri, 2019; Kim, 2021).

The alignment of organizational values and mission was recognized as guiding lights during the pandemic, helping leaders make sense of adversity. Leaders also stressed the significance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance, enhancing organizational resilience and staff well-being (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2021; Salanova, 2020; van Breda, 2016).

In conclusion, these findings offer crucial insights for leaders in Lebanon's education sector, highlighting the challenges they may encounter, the skills they can develop, and the organizational supports they should nurture to thrive amidst crises and foster resilience. These lessons will prove invaluable in navigating future unprecedented organizational challenges.

6. Limitations and Future Research in the Education Field in Lebanon

This study contributes to existing research on resilient and thriving leaders and human service organizations, which is highly relevant to the education field in Lebanon (Coulombe et al., 2020; Giustiniano et al., 2020; Ledesma, 2014; Neely-Barnes et al., 2021; van Breda, 2016, 2022). Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study's small sample size (n = 50) with limited diversity may restrict the generalizability of its findings to the broader population of educational leaders in Lebanon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To enhance the accuracy of representation, future research should consider larger and more diverse samples.

Additionally, the study encountered a limited response rate for surveys and focus groups (50%), which might not fully encompass the spectrum of leaders' viewpoints (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This lower response rate may be attributed to conducting the research online during the pandemic and the absence of participation incentives (Hohwü et al., 2013). Furthermore, the study relied on self-report

measures, which may not entirely reflect actual practices (Tourangeau et al., 2001). Lastly, since the study examined leaders' responses early in the pandemic, the longer-term effects of COVID-19 remain uncertain and require further investigation.

Future research in Lebanon's education sector should consider several recommendations. The study expanded on individual factors within the protective factor resilience model (Ledesma, 2014; van Breda, 2022) to include collaboration and communication skills, humility, gratitude, and patience. Researchers should delve deeper into these leadership practices to understand how they contribute to resilience maintenance, especially when leaders face competing demands and prolonged stress during adversity.

The study also broadened the scope of organizational resilience factors (Ledesma, 2014; van Breda, 2022) to encompass organizational culture, mission, values, and interorganizational partnerships. Future research can explore how leaders strategically design their mission, vision, values, and nurture their culture and partnerships to proactively enhance innovation capabilities and meet community service delivery needs.

Moreover, researchers should examine capacity building from the perspective of millennials and younger workers, focusing on factors that help emerging leaders sustain their newfound knowledge for long-term individual and organizational growth and transformation. Emphasis should be placed on leadership development, training, and career support at both individual and organizational levels, with consideration for diverse leadership contexts.

From a broader perspective, future research should investigate the long-term impact of resilient leaders on educational organizations in Lebanon and how such events have influenced organizational practices (Barr, 2020). This includes proactive approaches to developing leadership skills that facilitate risk-taking, rapid adaptability to change, innovative responses, and key community partnerships. Research in this area could encompass various theories of resilience and diverse educational organizational contexts to identify critical factors for strengthening resilience across the education sector.

Research questions may target specific structural areas within educational organizations, such as preparing for future disruptions, adjusting internal expectations, and activating resources for unexpected crises. Sharing these findings with educational leaders can help foster collective resilience and commitment to effectively address diverse challenges faced by educational institutions in Lebanon.

In conclusion, this study has contributed valuable insights for leaders in Lebanon's education sector, shedding light on factors that can enhance resilience during crises. The findings have implications for educational leaders facing the challenges posed by the global pandemic and future uncertainties. By proactively strengthening individual and organizational resilience, providing support and resources, embracing opportunities, and planning for disruptions, educational leaders can better prepare for and manage turbulent changes and crises, thereby ensuring the sustainability of their institutions.

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