

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

TEACHERS' AND SCHOOL LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES OF
THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN INITIATING SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT: CASE OF A LEBANESE PUBLIC SCHOOL

by
YASMIN JIHAD AL GHARIB

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of Education
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
April 2021

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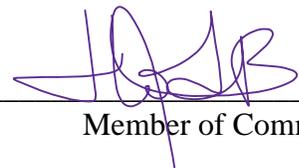
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God, the Almighty, for the strength, patience and perseverance I got to successfully accomplish this thesis.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to my advisor Dr. Rima Karami Akkary. I will be forever thankful for the unique and rich learning experience you've given me. You were the generous mentor who was overly excited and always ready to share the best of what she knows. Your rich experience and extensive knowledge have immensely contributed to the development of my learning and research skills. Not only did you help me grow professionally, but also you inspired me at the personal level with your timely advice, passion, enthusiasm and dedication. The positive vibes you extended kept on pushing me forward in moments of disappointment and despair. It was impossible to reach this stage without your prompt receptiveness, constant support, constructive feedback and encouragement. Thank you for believing in me and continuously pushing me to reach my highest potentials.

I want to deeply thank my committee members Dr. Vivian Khamis and Dr. Hoda Baytiyeh for your consent to serve on my thesis committee. Thank you for your time and quick responsiveness. I want to also thank you for your valuable comments and feedback that helped me improve the quality of my thesis work.

To those who I call the backbone of my life, my parents and my husband, I fall short of words to thank you for your love and support throughout this long journey. Mansour, I am very lucky to have a supportive, loving and caring husband like you. You endured all the difficult and busy times I passed through. You were the ultimate source of positivity, and your sense of humor turned many moments of gloom to laughs. You never complained and continued to push me till the very last day. Mom, I would have never achieved it without having you by my side. Thank you for all the days you spent babysitting my son, for all the lunches you made on my behalf, for every time you took over so I can work on my thesis. I can't thank you enough for the sacrifices and all the moral support you've given me. Dad, you've always been my role model, and I am so much influenced by you. You showed me how to be strong and resilient and endure hardships. Without your example and your words of wisdom and encouragement, it would have been much harder. I am conscious of the high standards you love to see me reaching, and I am equally aware that you will never let me settle for this degree. Yamen, my little brother, thank you for taking early the responsibility of an uncle and all the times you spent with Ram. Another big thank you for every relative and friend who supported throughout the two years.

Last but not least, I am very thankful for the principal of the case public school; you made my job easier with your openness, kindness and support. A huge thank you for all teachers, supervisors, coordinators and parents who showed interest in my research and were willing to participate. Without you, this research could have never been conducted.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Yasmin Jihad Al Gharib

for

Master of Arts

Major: Educational Administration and
Policy Studies

Title: Teachers' and School Leaders' Perspectives of the Role of School Principal in
Initiating School Improvement: Case of a Lebanese Public School

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. A number of data collection tools were used including individual interviews, focus group interviews, school documents and field work journal. Data was coded and analyzed using the constant comparative approach. The findings of the study revealed that the school principal maintains a centralized authority of decision making related to the initiation of school improvement. Results also revealed that the principal, in light of the sustained political work context of Lebanese school principals, was in continuous need to establish networks with social and political entities and governing bodies in the external environment to secure the resources and support needed for initiation. 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. Finally, the examination of the role of the public school principal in initiating change as perceived by school leaders and teachers culminated in the development of a model for change initiation in Lebanese public schools.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

School improvement and educational reform are the desired goals of all societies. Yet, change is burdensome, and a great deal of its difficulty relies in initiating it (Fullan, 1993; Fullan, 2007; Hannay & Ross, 1997; Nolan, 2007). One major cause for change difficulty in schools is the fact that schools are complex open social systems shaped by both internal and external factors (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). In light of this system, schools are affected by these factors which need to be attended to when initiating school improvement (Fullan, 2007). Literature provides an explanation of some of these various factors. One factor is teachers' response to change. Leaders supporting a school improvement initiative should be aware of the nature of teachers' emotional response especially if they are attempting to develop teachers' agency (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Priestley, 2010;). Another factor associated with initiating change is building an enabling school culture and structure with the capacity needed for school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Morrison, 2018; Foster & Hilaire, 2004; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Other factors include dealing with external community, social context, and institutional context (Baglibel et al., 2018; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 2002). The way these factors are attended to during initiating school improvement, is thought to be highly related to leadership or principal's role. This complexity is referred to as a "wicked nature" of educational change (Seashore Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999), and many authors agree that caution should be exercised while framing and exploring the change

phenomenon. Seashore Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves (1999) present the following frames for understanding the complexity of school improvement “purpose, cultural, structural, political, leadership, learning, and emotional” (259).

The wicked nature of school improvement is even more prevalent in the context of Arab region, including Lebanon. These countries have suffered from ineffective top-down initiated school improvement efforts which had failed to cause any changes at the level of schools; school culture, structure, climate, teachers’ performance and students’ achievement (Karami Akkary, 2014). Because of top-down approach to school improvement, principals and teachers at the level of schools in Lebanon don’t usually assume roles in initiating school improvement, and perceive school improvement as something that happens to them (Karami-Akkary, 2014). Literature is significantly recommending the involvement of principals and teachers in initiating school improvement, for a ‘grassroot approach’ is more conducive to successful initiation and sustainability of change processes (Casey, 2015).

Moreover, studies in the past decade started to significantly emphasize on the role of principal during process of school improvement; this role either inhibits or promotes change (Fullan, 2009). Researchers in the past decade are acknowledging this gap in the literature and accumulating efforts to examine the role of principal in depth and in perception (Fullan, 2009). Therefore, understanding the role of principal in initiating school improvement in depth and through studying the perspectives of teachers and school leaders will expand the knowledge base on school improvement.

Research Purpose Statement

Some Lebanese public school principals started to take the initiative to change at their own discretion and within the confinements of the current system, as the case of the principal in this study. This study aimed to investigate the role of school principal in initiating school improvement as perceived by teachers and school leaders, 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 to ultimately propose a model for initiation; and (3) to identify challenges faced during change initiation and strategies followed by school principal to mitigate the challenges.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated in this study:

- 1- How do school leaders (principal and administrative leaders) perceive the role of principal in initiating school improvement?
- 2- What are teachers' perceptions of the role of school principal in initiating school improvement?
- 3- What are the challenges faced by school principal when initiating change as perceived and experienced by the leaders and teachers?
- 4- What strategies does the school principal follow to mitigate these challenges as perceived and experienced by the leaders and teachers?

Rationale

Despite the growing research on school improvement, few studies explore how teachers and leaders perceive the role of principal in the process of school improvement. According to Foster & Hilaire (2004), “little research documents how educators involved in school improvement perceive who leads, how, why, and for what purposes leadership is important” (p.354). Yet, studying leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions regarding the role of leader in school improvement is what some authors emphasized (Fullan, 2009; Foster & Hilaire, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Morrison, 2018). According to Heck & Hallinger (1999), the emphasis on educators’ perceptions, from a constructivist perspective, helps in addressing blank spots in our understanding of leadership and school improvement. Seashore Louis (2010) also emphasized the constructivist perspective and calls for understanding knowledge construction and sense-making of practitioners within school, in order to create a better understanding of school improvement. Similarly, Harris (2004) explains that understanding the emerging perspectives of teachers and leaders might bridge gaps in our understanding of how leadership and the role of leader contribute to a successful school improvement process. Hence, focusing on teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions, in this study, would bridge gaps in our understanding of role of principal in initiating school improvement.

Experts on school change (Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Nolan, 2007) have told us that the initiation of school improvement is critical as it sets the foundation of the school improvement process, and is significantly conducive to the success of school improvement. Baglibel et al. (2018) argue that “most change initiatives result in failure due

to the planning and design limitations” (p.4). Baglibel et al. (2018) have also found that how well the change is planned determines the sustainability of change; when educational changes are well planned, changes are more likely to be sustained (Baglibel et al., 2018). Yet, existing literature reveals a couple of gaps in the study of initiating school improvement. The perceptions towards role of principal in initiating change is still a gap in the literature (Foster & Hilaire, 2004), and the role of principal in initiating change is poorly studied (Jones & Thessin, 2015). Accordingly, this study becomes significant as it targets these gaps in the literature, ensures a better understanding of initiating school improvement, and paves the way for a better understanding of a successful school improvement process.

Further, studying the perceptions of school leaders and teachers regarding the role of school leader in initiating change in the context of Lebanese public school, is aligned with the calls for a paradigm shift to school reform in the Arab region (Bashshur, 2005; Karami Akkary, 2014; Karami & Rizk, 2011). The Arab region, including Lebanon, has gone through various failing educational reforms that have kept the education in Arab countries in need of major improvement (Karami Akkary & Rizk, 2011) and heightened the need for more contextually relevant research to help explore and explicate the change process in the cultural context of the Arab countries. There is abundance of change reforms in the Arab countries, yet, real improvement in school processes has never been attained (Bashshur, 2005). The failure of educational reforms is attributed, in one way, to the inadequacy of the planning and initiating of improvement plans (Karami Akkary, 2014; Karami Akkary & Rizk, 2011). Initiation of improvement plans is often perceived as

adoption of readymade recipes that are imposed in a top-down manner without participation of experts and practitioners (El Amine, 2005; Shuayb, 2018). Alternative plans for improvement encourage school leaders and teachers at the level of individual schools to take the proactive role of change agents and hold the responsibility of initiating change themselves (Karami Akkary, 2014). While there is agreement about the centrality of the principal's role in reversing the existing top-down trend of educational reform in educational system of the Arab countries, it is of great value to investigate the perceptions of teachers and leaders about the role of school principal in initiating school – based improvement.

Hence, the rationale for this study is rooted in the following reasons. First, while plenty of the studies have focused on school improvement and the importance of leadership, none has delineated the role of principals in initiating change or studied perceptions of teachers and leaders about this role during change initiation (Foster & Hilaire, 2004; Fullan, 2009). Fullan (2009) explains that “while research on school improvement is in now its fourth decade, systematic research on what the principal actually does [throughout the change process] [...] is quite recent” (p. 55). Second, Fullan (2009) explains that none of the previous research studies have sufficiently studied the role of school principal or their perception of it. Therefore, it is important to study the role of principal in initiating school improvement, from the perspectives of teachers and leaders. Third, searching the literature in Arab countries using Shamaa database, none of the studies have focused on the perceptions of leaders and teachers about principal's role in initiating

change in the context of Lebanese public schools. As such this study will be filling a gap in the knowledge base in the region.

Significance

This study has implications on both theory and practice. First, the study allowed to understand reality based on the views and perceptions of those who are within the role which is essential for constructing a practical theory of change, its meaning and nature (Fullan, 2009). This study emphasized that understanding reality and the role of principal in initiating change can't happen in isolation from the perceptions and views of people involved in the process. As many scholars contend, reality is constructed by the people living it (Fullan, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 1999). Accordingly, the meanings constructed by people living the improvement will bring additional in depth understanding of how change is conceived and hence inform the construction of a theory of change.

In addition, this study enlarges the knowledge base on leadership and school improvement, and paves the way for similar research on the role of school leader in implementing and institutionalizing change. It also paves the way for further research on how leaders' successful role in initiating change contributes to a better implementation and institutionalization of change.

On the other hand, this study will encourage further research on the Lebanese public schools which is in need of further research in our context of Lebanon. Some public schools have gone through several successful attempts of school improvement as per the discretion of their principals, and are doing better than the other public schools. Therefore, it is of

great value to examine these schools in an attempt to understand in depth what led to their success by studying the role of principal in promoting and making the changes happen, from the perspective of teachers, leaders and principals who are experiencing and leading this change process. Finally, in the context of the Arab region where the education system is in need of major reform (Karami Akkary, 2014), this study provides an in depth case for researchers and policy makers of how school improvement can be initiated through a school based approach within the context of a school. This study could push for new policies at the level of Lebanese public school system.

On the other hand, the study has its implications on practice. Understanding reality of change initiation, from the perspective of teachers and leaders, addresses “the frequent lament, ‘No one understands me’” (Fullan, 2009, p. 55). This is because in the period of initiating educational change, ambiguity and uncertainty rise, and people feel they’re misunderstood. So, understanding the perceptions of key players in the change process especially about roles would enhance communication and reduces job ambiguity and confusion amongst change initiators.

Further, initiating change is often confusing to principals not knowing how and from where to start (James, 2010; Morrison, 2018; Nolan, 2007). Studies on school improvement reveal that school leaders still lack a clear understanding of their role in promoting and initiating school improvement (James, 2010; Jones & Thessin, 2015; Morrison, 2018; Nolan, 2007). Thus, understanding the perceptions of principal about their role in initiating school improvement would help principals as well as other change stakeholders in the school to understand the role played by the principal, which will

ultimately reflect in clearer job expectations and better practices during change initiation. Also, based on this study, principals will be better informed of their distinct role in initiating change. This would have positive implications in practice, and would stop principals from jumping to implementing change without proper planning and initiating (Nolan, 2007).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Improvement: An Overview

Research on school improvement has roots in the early 1950s (Seashore Louis et al, 1999). Yet, school improvement has not been considered as a distinct domain for research until the 1970s (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). Since this stage of its inception, school improvement has passed through three phases. The first phase was characterized with non-systematic and non-coherent approaches. Hopkins & Reynolds (2001) explain that there were attempts of school improvement but these initiatives were poorly linked to students' learning which makes them incomplete and non-lasting. In this early phase, research studies on school improvement, similarly, show a weak link with students' learning and focused only on the changes in the structural features of schools, school's climate, and personnel characteristics (Seashore Louis et al, 1999). Late at this stage in the 1980s, the model for successful change was still dominated by the view that external pressure to change can be more effective than the capacity building from within the school (Seashore Louis et al, 1999).

In the second phase of school improvement in the early 1990s, principals start to be considered the center of improvement not only at the level of school, but also, at the level of the community (Fullan, 2009). This phase is characterized by a focus on school effectiveness and school improvement (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). Effectiveness

perspective contributes to this phase through building a valid knowledge base of what should happen in schools to improve student's outcome (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). The school improvement approach had several contributions in this stage such as providing guidelines for the implementation of school improvement as a link between the change initiatives and classroom practices. Other contribution of the improvement perspective is bringing the focus on establishing programs and opportunities for staff development (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001).

The third phase of school improvement started in the late 1990s and extends till our current days. The focus of this phase emerged as a response to the failures of school improvement in previous phases especially when it comes to yield successful changes in schools and improve students' learning (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). The third phase is characterized by the following. First, students' learning became the focal aim of school improvement. Second, capacity building also gained center change and expanded beyond staff development to include capitalizing on external support agencies. Third, improvement became conceptualized as including cultural change and is emphasized as key to embed and sustain any change initiative. As such, there is focus on vision building and introducing system wide changes to reach this vision. Fourth, there is an emphasis that any school improvement plan should improve practice through training and staff development programs of practitioners (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001).

As a result of this staged growth in the knowledge base, different popular lenses are used by scholars to explore school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2011). This diversity suggests that there is still no one single overarching theoretical framework rather, diverse

lenses to study school improvement. On one hand some scholars defer to the knowledge base on effective teaching and learning, teacher development, or school leadership as “high leverage foci for school improvement efforts” (Hallinger & Heck, 2011, p. 3). However, many scholars have focused lately on processes associated with change as a framework for their study of school improvement. The peculiarity of studies having this latter framework is that all processes associated with school improvement are studied without any particular focus (Hallinger & Heck, 2011).

In light of the framework of change as a process, school improvement will be referred to as the journey or processes of personal, organizational or educational changes that will ultimately have impact on student learning (Foster & Hilaire, 2004; Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Fullan 2007). According to Fullan (2011), a ‘moral imperative’ to improve students’ learning should guide any initiative for change or school improvement (as cited in, Erickson III, 2015). During this process of school improvement many changes occur in structure, culture, curriculum or school’s internal and external relationships (Fullan 1993; Hannay & Ross, 1997; Hargreaves, 2002; Morrison, 2018; Nolan, 2007; Priestley, 2010).

Most scholars studying school improvement as a process see change as encompassing three phases: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization (Fullan, 2007). Ideally, any change initiative moves from initiation to implementation where a plan is put into practice. The change initiative then becomes institutionalized where it becomes sustained through being an ongoing part of the school system (Fullan, 2007). However, Fullan (2007) argues that change process is not linear, rather the three phases can intersect

and concurrently exist. Change initiative can be modified during implementation, and decisions that are already made in the previous initiation phase can be altered.

Initiation Phase: An Overview

Initiation of school improvement consists of processes of planning or preparing for change initiative (Erickson III, 2015; Fullan, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Thompson, 2018). According to Thompson (2018), “a school improvement plan is a road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement” (p. 9). Thompson (2018) thus reassures that initiating school improvement is about planning for improvement that aims at enhancing students’ learning.

Nolan (2007) used a metaphor from architecture to explain the initiation of school improvement. According to Nolan (2007) initiation is similar to “developing the appropriate support structure [...] that will stand up under the weight of implementation” (p.4). In other words, initiation is a phase for planning for change, and a process for building the necessary conditions for the change initiative to take place. Initiation phase gives also a baseline against which changes can be compared (McNaughton & Lai, 2009). According to Anderson (2010), initiation process encompasses a number of decision making activities such as decision making pertaining to the cause and need for change, drawing an image of the desired change, assessing needs, setting goals, seeking resources, and lobbying internally and externally for political support and commitment to change. These decision making activities constitute the planning for school improvement.

Additionally, Fullan (2007) reported that the discussion of 'initiation' leaves open the question of who initiates change and what is the source of change initiation. A review of the literature reveals a distinction between external and internal sources of change, and a differentiation between top-down and bottom-up approaches to change.

External vs. Internal Sources

Decisions of initiating change come from various sources (Fullan, 2007). Sources could be external, internal or a combination of both. The external and internal sources of change represent a context for organizational change and are considered to be environments that influence change (Yilmaz & Kiliçoglu, 2013). External sources of change include governmental pressures to change, new policies, community pressure, and technological, social and economic changes (Fullan, 2007). These are external forces acting as catalytic variables for initiating change (Smith, 2008). However, not all external sources are adverse forces of pressure. Smith (2008) differentiates between 'push-in' external forces and 'reach-out' external forces. 'Push-in' forces represent an external pressure where the school has no control and simply reacts to it (Smith, 2008). The 'reach-out' forces are not as inevitable as the 'push-in' forces; it is an opportunity that the school may consider and reach out to the external community for support conducive to school growth (Smith, 2008).

On the other hand, the internal sources include teacher advocacy, leadership, and school vision which trigger changes as part of school's strategic plan (Yilmaz & Kiliçoglu, 2013). In case of internal dissonance, parents, teachers, students or other stakeholders express their frustrations of the status quo and push for change. Smith (2008) explains that

the internal sources of initiating change represent an internal dissonance which is a catalytic variable to change.

Fullan (2007) argues that initiation of change results from multiple sources i.e. both external and internal. Similarly, Smith (2008) argues that there exists a symbiotic relationship between the internal and external forces of change. External forces might push for internal dissonance and trigger internal forces to change. Also, internal dissonance may push school to reach out to the external community in order to trigger change. Finally, whether change is originated internally or externally, Fullan (2007) argues that “it matters less where the innovation comes from than it does what happens during the process of change” (p. 68).

Top-down vs. Bottom up Approach

The discussion about sources of initiation includes the dichotomy of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Top-down approach to change is when change is imposed from those at the top hierarchy to those at the bottom of hierarchy (Fullan, 2007). For example, teachers and principals can be at the bottom hierarchy when they are forced to follow changes imposed by the government or ministry. Yet, bottom-up approaches is the opposite of top-down approaches, given a say for teachers and principals to be the decision makers in the change process is an example of bottom up change. The engagement of stakeholders in initiating change is often associated with success of the change initiative (Morrison, 2013). The more opportunities to engage stakeholders, the higher the chances of success of the change initiative.

Nevertheless, many scholars suggest that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. King & Stevenson (2017) explain that both approaches can be combined to initiate change. Using a grassroots approach to change with support from top reflects a symbiotic relationship between the parties at the top and those at the bottom. King & Stevenson (2017) found that this symbiotic relationship empowers teachers at the bottom, increases their autonomy and boosts their feelings of self-efficacy as it reflects a shared power. Hence the combination of both approaches is considered to be an effective approach to get the change initiated. Fullan (2007) explains that the choice between these approaches is a dilemma faced by school leader during the initiation of change. However, Fullan (2007) argues that top-down and bottom-up approaches need to be integrated in an ongoing and dynamic manner; the process which Fullan (2007) called “permeable connectivity” (p.262). The interaction between all levels i.e. school, community and government is necessary during the school improvement process (Fullan, 2007).

Therefore, the discussion about sources of change doesn't yield a definitive answer. According to the reviewed literature, it is a combination of internal and external sources, as well as, top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Factors supporting the Initiation of School Improvement

This study is based on the premise that how change is planned and initiated is significantly conducive to its success or failure. For this reason, the researcher is studying the factors that affect the initiation of school improvement, in order to identify the factors and strategies that increase the chances of success of change initiation. Attending to these factors is considered a key aspect of the role of the principal especially when this latter is

actively engaged in the initiation of change (Morrison, 2018; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Michalinos, 2010; Hargreaves, 2005; Thompson, 2018). Factors supporting the initiation of change as a result of reviewing more than 45 literature resources are related to culture, structure, teacher's emotions, micro-politics, vision of change, and relation with external environment. Studying the enabling factors to initiation is significant to learn more about the role of leader in initiating change. It is worth mentioning that reviewing these resources shows almost no studies focusing on the perspectives of teachers and leaders about the role of principal in initiating change.

It is important to note that the terms 'change' and 'school improvement' are used interchangeably in the literature on school improvement, although some scholars tend to emphasize the distinction between the two. In this study, the two terms will be used interchangeably, leaving it to other literature to delineate the definitions and the distinctions (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). In the following sections, factors that support the initiation of school improvement will be presented, and they include: developing collaborative culture, engaging different stakeholders, securing trust, building enabling structure, attending to teachers' emotions, seeking resources from external environment, investing in micro-politics and building a shared vision.

Developing Collaborative Culture

Collaboration is found to support the initiation of change because it provides the needed learning, strength, confidence and creativity to embark on change (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Morrison, 2018). Through collaboration, teachers will be able to learn from each other and better understand the need for the change initiative

(Fullan & Quinn, 2016), its practicality and relevance; something that is crucial in the initiation phase of school improvement (Jones & Thessin, 2015).

Collaboration is more likely to support change only when it is valued as a norm within a collaborative culture and shapes teachers' attitudes and practices (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Yet, if collaboration is not part of the cultural core of an educational institution it cannot facilitate change initiatives unless the school values, rituals and stories reflect valuing collaboration.

In her study on a state primary school in New Zealand, Stringer (2009) found that teachers, who worked in a collaborative culture where there is networking among teachers and between teachers and leaders, are more likely to learn about change and develop capacity for improvement. Similarly, Fullan & Quinn (2016) argue that teachers will improve their capacities and professional learning in a collaborative culture where teachers will perceive each other as a source of information, feedback and support. Seashore Louis et al. (1999) reported that unless teachers talk, observe and help each other, little will change. Moreover, professional collaboration supports the formation of a learning community where peers exchange learning and exert a positive peer pressure for initiating change (Fullan, 2010).

The exchange of learning and support in a collaborative culture reduces ambiguity and uncertainty and develops clearer expectations about the change and also boosts teachers' confidence and certainty about what change is going to be like and how they are going to achieve its goals (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Teachers will be more likely to "talk the walk" (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 33) i.e. they will articulate the goals of change,

the strategies to be followed, and their role in making the change happen (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Collaboration, thus, enables stakeholders to develop a deep and shared understanding of the change initiative and allows for meaning making through purposeful interactions (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Collective efficacy and collaborative expertise needed to start off the change will, hence, be developed through collaboration (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). This will improve teachers' strength and readiness to accept and start off the change, which is what a successful initiation phase entails (Jones & Thessin, 2015).

In addition to teachers' learning about change, collaboration makes the responsibility to change be perceived as a shared responsibility among the different teachers, which is found to increase teachers' willingness to initiate change (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Through collaboration, there is a shift of focus from change being an overwhelming individual and isolated responsibility to a collective and shared responsibility (Smylie & Hart, 1999). With the perception of collective responsibility, the burden of change will be distributed, and teachers are more likely to be motivated and secured to initiate change.

Besides distributing responsibility, collaboration increases creativity among teachers which is needed in the initiation of school improvement. First, exchanging ideas, knowledge, experiences, and diverse viewpoints will increase teachers' creativity as they plan the change and design solutions and strategies (Fullan, 1993), something that is likely to facilitate the initiation of change (Stringer, 2009; Thompson, 2018). Second, valuing collaboration ensures that collectivism and individualism are equally valued and practiced. Fullan (1993) adds that the balance between collectivism and individualism improves

creativity because it maintains diversity and the capacity to think and work independently in a group. He argues that moving towards greater collaboration doesn't negate the emphasis on individualism. He also argues that fresh and creative ideas come from a balance between diversity and keeping in touch with one's inner voice and personal reflection (Fullan, 1993). This increase in creativity is needed in effectively initiating school improvement.

Engaging Different Stakeholders in the Initiation Process

Engaging different stakeholders supports the initiation of school improvement as it increases commitment to change and secures sensitivity to school needs of change (Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Thompson, 2018). Teachers, administrators, school principal and parents are stakeholders whose engagement in the planning of change supports the initiation of school improvement.

Engaging different stakeholders in the initiation process of school improvement increases commitment to change. Leithwood et al. (2006) explains that engaging the different stakeholders in identifying a need for change and developing corresponding plan for change, which are essential steps in the process of initiation, secure ownership, commitment and a more successful implementation of the plan (Leithwood et al., 2006). Engaging stakeholders during initiation not only raises commitment to the plan, but also commitment to the implementation of the plan later on.

Besides increasing commitment to change, O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996) explain that engaging stakeholders in the planning of school development is necessary for

successful identification of needs of change, for they know best what are the local needs and how best to respond to those needs. This is what Thompson (2018) called “context-sensitive prioritization of needs” (p.10), and which Thompson (2018) associated it with effective school improvement planning.

Therefore, initiation is supported when different stakeholders are engaged because their engagement is conducive to their commitment to change during initiation as well as implementation. Also, their engagement contributes to a more successful identification of needs of change, in the initiation process, for the stakeholders are more sensitive to school needs.

Securing Trust

As conceptualized for this study, trust refers to the trusting relationships between teachers and leaders. As such, trust is based on a social contract that defines the relationships between individuals in an organizational setting, e.g. relation between teachers and leaders, based on the organizational norms (Seashore Louis, 2007).

Scholars have affirmed the relationship between developing trust and supporting change (Fullan, 2010; Hollingworth et al, 2018; Jones & Thessin, 2015; Morrison, 2018; Seashore Louis, 2007). There is a consensus among scholars that change is hardly to be initiated unless the leader first secures the trust of the teachers. Studies on trust reviewed for this study, tend to focus on how trust can be secured and be a supportive factor of change. While these studies did not explicitly emphasize on initiation, it can be inferred that when trust is secured through shared decision making, transparency of data, visibility and

approachability of leader, teachers will be encouraged for appropriate risk taking, hence they become willing to enact and support the initiation of change (Hollingworth et al., 2018; Morrison, 2018; Seashore Louis, 2007).

Trust is built when there is teachers' involvement in decision making (Seashore Louis, 2007). Teacher's engagement in decision making will create a climate of trust which will support change and facilitate its initiation (Jones & Thessin, 2015). In her 3-year study conducted on 5 schools, two of which are of high trust environment and three are of low trust environment, and where quality management principles are applied as a school improvement effort, Seashore Louis (2007) discussed that teachers who are not engaged in decision making, as in the schools of low trust environment, react by withdrawing trust which hinders the change initiative from being successfully initiated and implemented (Seashore Louis, 2007).

Besides, transparency and access to information is another condition to secure trust and support change initiation. Transparency will present teachers with clear evidence about the reasons and goals of the change initiative which will develop teacher's trust and make them more likely to embrace the change (Hollingworth et al, 2018). According to Fullan (2010), transparency of information as well as transparency of the goals, practices and strategies is essential during early stages of change, as it develops trust and creates positive pressure to initiate change.

Further, trust is secured during early phases of change through approachability and visibility of the leader which are conducive to success of change initiatives (Hollingworth et al., 2018; Morrison, 2018). Principals build trust that are conducive to effective change,

when they keep an open door policy, empathize with teachers and listen to their concerns pertaining to the change (Jones & Thessin, 2015). In their multiple case study on four US principals examining their role in building a positive school culture that supports the implementation of change initiatives, Hollingworth et al. (2018) found that cultivating trust through establishing informal and formal communication channels and being deliberately visible early in the process of change, is an important condition for change to be initiated. Leaders' visibility when initiating change makes teachers feel safe and supported at a stage where ambiguity and confusion dominate (Hollingworth et al., 2018).

Building Enabling Structure

An enabling structure retains bureaucracies, but bureaucracies that are means to support change and not to constrain it (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Such bureaucracies are characterized by flexible rules and regulations, and flexible hierarchy that enables two-way communication between teachers and leaders (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The notion of enabling structure is referred to by Hoy & Miskel (2008) as places where principals and teachers work in collaboration, yet, maintain authority boundaries and distinctive roles.

An enabling school structure supports the initiation of school improvement as it establishes vertical and horizontal relationships permitting bidirectional support and collaboration between different hierarchy levels when planning the change (Baglibel et al., 2018; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Fullan, 1993). Also, an enabling school structure allows for flexibility in time allocation which supports the initiation of school improvement (Fullan 1993; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Hannay & Ross, 1997; Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Enabling structure supports the initiation of change through facilitating vertical and horizontal relationships that enable bidirectional support between different levels of the hierarchy when planning the change (Baglibel et al., 2018; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Fullan, 1993; Priestly, 2010). An enabling school structure provides flexible rules and hierarchy that enable collaboration, open communication and shared decision making between bottom and top hierarchy which facilitate the initiation of change (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Priestly, 2010). In their study on primary and secondary school in a province in Turkey about factors that affect the sustainability of change initiatives, Baglibel et al., (2018) have discussed that pressure, support and ongoing communication and negotiations that are enacted in both directions in a non-rigid structure i.e. from top hierarchy to bottom and vice versa, support the change initiation and ensure the sustainability of change. Priestly (2010) discusses that an enabling structure permits bidirectional support, not only between top and bottom hierarchy but also between members on the same hierarchy level. The enabling structure removes boundaries between different school departments, establishes horizontal relationships and allows for more collaboration which supports change (Priestley, 2010). Therefore, an enabling structure enables bidirectional support through well-established vertical and horizontal relationships, which provide a positive pressure to start off the change (Fullan, 2010).

In addition to bidirectional support, an enabling structure supports change initiation through strategies of 'retiming' (Hannay & Ross, 1997). Retiming strategies include changing the time allocated for the different chores of teachers. Teachers' chores include preparation, classroom teaching, meetings, administrative chores and professional

development. In their multiple case study in Ontario, Canada on eight secondary schools that are in the phase of initiating change, Hannay & Ross (1997) found that schools that are successfully initiating change have undergone restructuring processes to support the initiation of change. In these schools Hannay & Ross (1997) found that as part of the restructuring processes is the retiming processes where teachers have been given more time to convene with other teachers and leaders in order to initiate the change. This flexibility in time allocation is an aspect of the enabling structures that schools in the phase of initiating change are following for a successful initiation of the change (Hannay & Ross, 1997).

Attending to Teachers' Emotions

The relation between teachers' emotions and school change has been emphasized on in the literature on school improvement. It is argued that attending to teacher's emotions throughout the change process will reduce resistance and develop ownership and commitment to change which is highly conducive to the success of the improvement plans (Hargreaves, 2007; Karami-Akkary et al., 2019).

Attending to teachers' emotions supports the initiation of change for it helps in cultivating positive perceptions, feelings and responses towards the proposed change. Attending to teachers' emotions happens through various means or strategies, including: engaging teachers' in decision making, starting small yet thinking big, working through resistance and not avoiding it, being aware of the generational mission of teachers, age and career stage (Hargreaves, 2007; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Karami-Akkary et al., 2019; Park & Jeong, 2013; Priestley, 2010; Seashore Louis, 2007; Nolan, 2007; Thompson, 2018).

One way to attend to teachers' emotions for supporting change initiation is through developing teachers' agency and engaging them in decision making since the inception of change (Priestley, 2010). Thompson (2018) argues that the degree of involvement of stakeholders in decision making and in planning for improvement determines the level of commitment these members have to the school improvement initiative. Engaging teachers in decision making and planning for change allows teachers to develop feelings of being valued, and "their level of commitment [to change] will be affected by that sense of being valued" (Thompson, 2018, p. 20). Nolan (2007) explains that engaging teachers in decision making enables teachers to construct personal meaning of the change, its goals, rationale and practices in the early phase of change; initiation. In this case, teachers are more likely to develop positive feelings toward the change, own it, and commit to it (Nolan, 2007). In their case study on a public school in Beirut, Karami-Akkary et al., (2019) have conducted interviews with seven members of the leadership team (that include teachers) in the school to investigate about their emotions during periods of identified change, and learn about their coping strategies. The results of the study have affirmed that failing to involve teachers in decision making of change yields in higher chances of fear, anxiety, resistance and reluctance to accept and commit to change. Karami-Akkary et al. (2019) also found that not involving teachers in decision making of change develops a minimum understanding of the change initiative among teachers, which arouses negative emotions and prevents teachers from successfully applying the requirements of the change. Surveying the principals and teachers of 32 public vocational high schools in Korea, Park & Jeong (2013) found that teachers show higher resistance to change when they have no voice in the decisions pertaining to the change process. Based on their results, Park &

Jeong (2013) recommended that teachers' voice needs to be recognized when planning and preparing for the change process. Therefore, the higher the agency and engagement in decision making and planning for change, the more positive feelings and perceptions will be developed towards the change, supporting the initiation of change.

In addition to engaging teachers in decision making, nurturing positive emotions toward change can happen through starting small with change, yet, thinking big (Hollingworth et al., 2018; Nolan, 2007). Starting with small changes while committing to grand ideas (e.g. impact of change on students' learning, teachers' professional work in classrooms, and school wide processes) is more self-fulfilling and develops teachers' commitment to initiate the change (Nolan, 2007). Feelings of self-efficacy will be developed as teachers will think of achieving the grand ideas and attribute the change to their own efforts. This strategy is followed by principals to initiate change and to produce effective change (Hollingworth et al., 2018).

Besides, attending to teacher's emotions through accepting resistance and understanding its underlying reasons supports the initiation of school improvement (Nolan, 2007). Having resistance at the beginning of every change is normal and an indicator that change is genuinely taking place (Nolan, 2007). Resistance might be an indicator of faults in the proposed change plan (Nolan, 2007). So the best way to attend to this emotional response is through accepting resistance and looking at flaws in the proposed innovation, facilitating the initiation of this innovation (Nolan, 2007). Also, Hargreaves (2007) explains that teachers' resistance to change indicates feelings of nostalgia to the past. It is important to embrace teachers' nostalgia and memories of the past because memory, which is the

collective learning of accumulated experience and wisdom, is essential for initiating and sustaining change (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves, 2007). Refusing past experiences through anti-nostalgia strategies would multiply resistance to change and inhibit change initiation (Hargreaves, 2007).

Besides, understanding teachers' age, generation and career stage is another strategy to attend to teachers' emotions and facilitate change initiation. Teachers' age, generation and career stage affect their emotional response to change, so understanding teachers' age and career stage helps anticipate resistance to change and facilitate the initiation of change (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Zembylas, 2010). In his study on 50 elementary and secondary teachers of various ages and career stages in Ontario, Canada, Hargreaves (2005) studied the difference of emotional responses to change according to age and career stage. Findings confirm previous findings in classic studies about how age and career stage affect response to change (Hargreaves, 2005). It was found that young teachers in early stages of their career are more receptive and adaptable to change as opposite to teachers in their later careers who express resistance to change and nostalgia to their old practices (Hargreaves, 2005). Therefore, understanding teachers' generational mission, age and career stage, helps understanding and addressing teachers' emotions and responses to change, which ultimately supports the initiation process of change.

Seeking Resources from External Environment

External environment relates to the whole surrounding context of the school, including parents, local community, experts, universities, mandates, ministry of education etc. (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The external environment is, thus, resource-rich and connecting

to it makes it indispensable for the success of change. Reaching out to the external environment, minimizes the limitations and maximizes the opportunities for change (Stringer, 2009). Any lack of internal resource to initiate change in the school is considered a limitation that can be minimized through reaching out to external environment for external resources.

Hargreaves (2002) explains that reaching out to external environment happens through what he called ‘network geographies’ which encompasses a complex web relationships and interaction between members inside and outside schools. Hargreaves (2002) explains that the latter are forces that promote change. The network geographies corroborate to continuous learning, professional support, shared knowledge, and resource provision which are necessary for initiating change (Hargreaves, 2002). Abrams & Gibbs (2000), in their study about planning change in California, found that the external agents in the environment played a major role in providing grants and necessary financial support needed to plan and implement the change.

Investing in Micro-Politics to Promote Change

Micro politics refers to the formal and informal power used by individuals and groups at the level of organizations to achieve certain goals (Blasé & Björk, 2010).

Literature has argued that micro-politics is an indispensable factor for the success of change initiatives. Blasé & Björk (2010) explain that politics constitutes the “central mechanism through which [...] school change and reform are produced” (p. 240).

Micro-politics is an essential strategy and supporting factor for planning and initiating change. According to Blasé & Björk (2010), micro-politics is a needed strategy to adopt change prior to its implementation phase (Blasé & Björk, 2010). Micro-politics supports initiation of school improvement through a number of tactics including establishing coalitions and networking, in addition to, engaging teachers in decision making (Blasé & Björk, 2010; Caruso, 2013; Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Networking and coalitions are forms of political tactics that support change initiation as they help in gaining more support to change and connecting to stakeholders internally and externally (Blasé & Björk, 2010; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Seashore Louis et al., 1999). School leaders can hardly initiate change using their formal and positional power solely, so they resort to bringing people together and developing overt and covert relationships formally and informally for the sake of promoting change (Blasé & Björk, 2010; Caruso, 2013). In the study of the role of two novice principals in dealing with micro-politics to promote educational change in two public schools in the United States, Caruso (2013) found that the principals have developed relationships with key influencing personnel and established grapevine structures with colleagues, subordinates and superiors in order to prepare for educational change (Caruso, 2013). As found by Caruso (2013), change agents start by lobbying by which they go beyond their positional powers and market for the change through key influencing members (Caruso, 2013). These members will influence others to accept change through their expert or referent power (Caruso, 2013; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Networking and formation of coalitions, where group of influencers are grouped together to push for change, produce a large support base for change (Hoy&

Miskel, 2008). Besides, networking and coalitions can also extend to external environment through ‘macro-politics’ (Blasé & Björk, 2010). Macro-politics describes the external relationships of schools with the institutional and governmental level (Blasé & Björk, 2010). Through networking with external parties, more political partners and alliances are band together for supporting change (Caruso, 2013; Blasé & Björk, 2010; Fullan, 1993). Therefore, networking and coalitions support change initiation for they secure a large support base to change through connecting with members internally and externally.

In addition to networking and coalitions, Blasé & Björk (2010) explain that strategies of teachers’ empowerment such as participation in decision making can be also considered a political tactic whereby power is shared among the leaders as well as teachers. Blasé & Björk (2010) reported that ‘control oriented political approach’ (p. 244) where the principal refuses to share power with teachers impedes any improvement plan. Rather, good politics is needed to promote change that includes empowerment and collaborative decision making as strategies conducive to successful initiation of change (Blasé & Björk, 2010).

Building a Shared Vision

A shared vision is a primary condition to drive the initiation of change. Fullan (1993) describes vision as the focus and energy to drive change and push for learning. Also, Morrison (2013) explains that “it is the ability to articulate your vision [...] that provides the foundation for effective change” (p. 416). A vision that supports the initiation of change is a shared vision that is developed collaboratively (Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Morrison, 2018).

In his study on the characteristics that lead to effective change, as perceived by school leaders, Morrison (2018) followed a mixed method research design. Out of the 365 leaders who participated in an online survey, five leaders were chosen for qualitative study based on their records of excellence and accomplishments in the context of international schools. The data collection tools were developed based on the Leithwood and Riehl's model (2003) that constitutes of three categories of leadership characteristics during change: setting direction, developing people, and developing the organization (Morrison, 2018). Findings of the online surveys and semi-structured interviews showed that being visionary and setting directions is the most important factor to support effective change initiation.

Besides, Morrison (2018) found that vision that drives the initiation of change has to be a shared vision where input from different stakeholders are employed to construct one common and shared vision. Engaging in a collective process of developing a vision creates a sense of urgency to initiate change and sets new directions for change (Morrison, 2018; Fullan, 2010). Collectively, teachers will be able to see the deficiencies and flaws of the status quo and, thus, become more willing to take risks, to set directions and to plan changes of the status quo, which facilitate the initiation of change (Morrison, 2018; Nolan, 2007). Besides, Fullan & Quinn (2016) explain that having a shared vision reduces too many ad hoc and disconnected goals which facilitates the planning of the change during initiation. A clear and shared vision allows to focus on a few goals and respective clear strategies when planning for change (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Leadership and Change Initiation

The literature reviewed for this research emphasizes on the significant role of leader during the process of change. While the majority of resources addresses the change process in general, some have emphasized on the role of leader, specifically, in the initiation phase of change (Day et al., 2016; Liu, 2015; Morrison, 2013). Morrison (2013) reported that “it has been argued that the principal plays a fundamental role in initiating change and in ensuring that effective change comes to fruition” (p. 418).

There is a consensus in the literature that no one single leadership approach is effective to promote and support school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Day et al. (2016) referred to the process of selecting, combining, and integrating leadership approaches as ‘layering’ process. Effective change depends on the combination of different leadership approaches at different phases of the improvement process (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). It has been inferred from the literature reviewed (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Harris, 2004; Harris, 2007; Krüger, 2009; Liu, 2015; Morrison, 2013; Morrison, 2018; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Yang, 2014) that transformational and distributed leadership approaches are especially needed at the early phases of school improvement i.e. initiation. The following section presents how each of the stated leadership approaches is needed for the initiation of school improvement.

Transformational Leadership

Literature has extensively discussed the relationship between transformational leadership and school improvement or change (Day et al., 2016; Krüger, 2009; Liu, 2015; Morrison, 2013; Morrison, 2018; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Yang, 2014). While the definitions

of transformational leadership are numerous in the literature, one definition is highlighted hereafter. As per the review of Liu (2015), transformational leadership is about arousing member's commitment and inspiring them to achieve a new shared vision.

Transformational leadership is needed particularly when initiating change as it focuses on setting directions for change (Day et al., 2016). Transformational leadership is necessary for the initiation of change for it reduces uncertainty associated with change and secures commitment as it compiles all efforts to develop and achieve one common vision of change (Liu, 2015; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Yang, 2014).

Transformational leadership is needed when initiating change for it sets the directions for change. Day et al., (2016) conducted a mixed research design where 20 different principals were interviewed as part of 20 in-depth case studies, in addition to national surveys for primary and secondary schools in England. Interviews were conducted with the school principals to track the trajectory of school improvement. Four phases of school improvement were found. As per the findings, the first phase which is foundational phase, or the phase where planning of change takes place, encompasses different strategies related to transformational leadership such as, developing a vision, setting direction, and changing the structure to fit the new vision. Day et al. (2016) found that the principals undergoing school improvement plans in their schools, adopt in the foundation phase a transformational leadership approach to change where they start off the change process with developing a vision. The findings by Day et al. (2016) suggest that transformational leadership with its aspect of building a vision is needed in the initial phase of the change process to start off the change and sets the foundation for the other phases.

Transformational leadership supports the initiation of change as it focuses on achieving one shared vision, which reduces uncertainty and increases commitment to change (Liu, 2015; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Yang, 2014). Surveying 75 school principals and 586 teachers who experienced change, Oreg & Berson (2011) found that leaders using transformational leadership provide a compelling vision which reduces uncertainty associated with change, and thus, help in boosting teachers' intentions to embrace change. In a transformational change, a shared vision clarifies the destination as well as inspires teachers to achieve this vision resulting in less uncertainty and clearer expectations of change.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is often referred to as “the active distribution of leadership authority and agency” (Harris et al., 2007, p.339). It is where “the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals” (Harris, 2004, p. 20).

Distributed leadership supports initiation of change as it entails a purposeful distribution of leadership role, empowers teachers and develops their feelings of self-efficacy which supports the initiation of school improvement plans (Day et al., 2016; Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2007; Yang, 2014).

Following a distributed leadership, a purposeful distribution of leadership roles takes place to facilitate the initiation and implementation of change (Harris et al., 2007). In a distributed leadership, leadership gets “distributed to those who have, or can develop, the knowledge or expertise required to carry out the leadership tasks expected of them” (Harris

et al., 2007, p. 343). Not everyone will participate in a distributed leadership as this will hinder rather than support the change process (Harris et al., 2007). Distributed leadership is when roles are distributed according to relevance and expertise which is conducive to a successful initiation and implementation of change (Harris et al., 2007).

Distributed leadership supports initiation as it empowers teachers and develop feelings of self-efficacy (Day et al., 2016; Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2007; Yang, 2014). Studying 20 cases of Chinese primary schools, Day et al. (2016) found that during early phases of school improvement i.e. initiation, strategies of distributed leadership are applied including the development of new roles and responsibilities for shared leadership. These strategies of power sharing were found in the study to be associated with successful change as they empower teachers to start off the change (Day et al., 2016). Similarly, studying two primary Chinese schools, Yang (2014) found that power sharing and distributed leadership followed in the schools were important strategies for promoting school improvement. This distribution of power among the teachers through new roles and responsibilities is conducive to more expansion of power (Yang, 2014), which empowers teachers and develops their feelings of self-efficacy as they become in charge of initiating the change within their particular leadership role (Harris, 2004). This will increase teachers' morale, decrease resistance to change, and hence support the initiation of change (Harris, 2004).

Process of Initiating Change

Despite the fact that research on school improvement has been conducted since the 1970's, and despite the enormous amount of discussions, documents and deliberations on the topic, there is still no consensus on how exactly school improvement can be carried out,

nor there is a clear model or blueprint on how to conduct school improvement (Doss, 1998; Thompson, 2018). Thompson (2018) also ascertains that no one common and clear model is found in literature about the initiation phase. Literature reveals different models on initiating school improvement applied in different context. Models reviewed about initiating or planning for school improvement range between models with clear and sequential steps of initiating change (Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Erickson III, 2015) to models or frameworks broadly presenting the interconnection between elements and procedures needed in the process of initiation, without getting into sequencing steps (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Arnaiz et al., 2016; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Thompson, 2018). However, after reviewing the following models: Coherence model (Fullan & Quinn, 2016); school improvement model developed and tested in 10 Canadian schools (Leithwood et al., 2006); school-community collaboration model for planning for school change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000); CAID model for school improvement planning (Thompson, 2018); school development planning (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996); school-based self-assessment by Arnaiz et al. (2016), and initiation of school improvement by Erickson III (2015), it was found that the models overlap at different common points despite the variations in the ways of presenting the initiation phase. One way to capture the commonalities between the different models reviewed on initiating school improvement is through outlining steps of initiating school improvement, which are found across these different models, whether clearly stated or inferred. It is noteworthy that no one model encompasses all steps, rather, the steps are constructed from tracking commonalities between one model and the other. The steps are: establishing a decision making group, assessing the needs and prioritizing them, developing a plan of change, and communicating

the whole plan with the different stakeholders (Erickson III, 2015; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2006).

Establishing a Decision Making Group

One first and common step among the models reviewed, whether explicitly stated or inferred, is developing a decision making group in the school as it facilitates the engagement of different stakeholders (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2006; Thompson, 2018). O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996) found that developing a decision making group is the first stage in school improvement planning process. The decision making group for school improvement planning involves school administrators, teachers, parents and also students (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996). While O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996) clearly outlines the establishment of decision making group as a first stage in the school improvement planning process, other models state that tapping into the different sources of support and information of stakeholders is necessary for decision making prior to the initiation of any school improvement plan (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2006; Thompson, 2018). Therefore, it is inferred from the different models reviewed that establishing a decision making group which involves different stakeholders is a primary step in the initiation process of school improvement.

Assessing the Needs and Prioritizing them

Every school improvement initiative ideally originates from a need for change (Arnaiz et al., 2016). After developing the decision making group, the process of initiating school improvement starts with identifying the need for change, as agreed by the majority

of the reviewed models. The need for change is the problem that needs to be resolved (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Erickson III, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996).

A consensus among the models by Arnaiz et al. (2016), Leithwood et al. (2006) and O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996) is that identifying the needs is about engaging in self-assessment where the strengths and weaknesses of the school are studied, reflection is exercised and the priorities to change are set. Studying strengths and weaknesses, engaging in reflection and setting priorities support the analysis of status quo whereby needs of change are detected and prioritized (Arnaiz et al., 2016; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996). McNaughton & Lai (2009) reassure that needs assessment happens through a collective exercise of reflection and identification of strengths and weaknesses where teachers and other stakeholders participate collectively in this step. Hence, needs assessment is the foundational and primary step in the initiation process where decision making group engages in collective reflection, identification of strengths and weaknesses to come up with a need to change.

Developing the Plan of Change

After the need of change is identified and agreed upon, the decision making group moves to a next step which is the development of a plan of change to address the need. While all of the models agree that the development of the plan is a stage in the initiation process, they exhibit a slight variation on what is included in the plan (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Erickson III, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Thompson, 2018).

To start with the common points with respect to the steps of developing the plan, no variations are noticed regarding the formulation of strategies to fulfil the need for change. All models agree that coming up with strategies or solutions to address the need of change should come first when developing the plan of change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Erickson III, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Thompson, 2018). Also, all models talk about resource allocation when developing the plan of change, on top of which is financial resources. There is another consensus among the models about including new roles and responsibilities in the plan of change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Erickson III, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Thompson, 2018). The implementation of change may require new roles which have to be planned and prepared in the planning phase. Further, consideration of school vision is an important element in the plan of change, which is included in the all of the models reviewed. There is an agreement that vision provides a focused and clear direction when planning for change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Erickson III, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Thompson, 2018). Fullan & Quinn (2016) consider that having a vision is fundamental in planning for coherent change.

Despite the commonalities between the models, a number of variations were noticed across the models on what is included in a plan of change. Only Leithwood et al. (2006) and O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996) emphasized that the plan of change should include a plan for evaluating and monitoring the execution of change and setting indicators of success. Also, only Leithwood et al. (2006) has explained that teachers' training should be

also planned when developing the plan of change, for this helps builds teachers' capacities to successfully implement the change in following stages.

This study's position is that the plan should include the needs of change, the strategies to achieve the needs that turn out to be the goals, the resources needed, the members responsible for achieving the goals, the process of monitoring and evaluation, indicators for success and a timeline for achieving the goals (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2006; Scheerens & Demeuse, 2005). It has to be clear, in the plan, the periods and the methods of monitoring in order to identify flaws and improve accordingly. According to Scheerens & Demeuse, (2005), any plan of school improvement is itself a "cyclical improvement process" (p. 383); that is, through continuous monitoring the plan itself can be improved to better achieve the school improvement goals. It also has to be clear in the plan the new roles of members in conducting the change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000).

Communicating the Plan with Stakeholders

After the plan for improvement is set, it has to be communicated with the different stakeholders (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Erickson III, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Thompson, 2018). The models collectively agree that the plan of change needs to be communicated at the end, yet, they also agree that communication is necessary throughout the whole process of initiation.

O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996) found that communication of the plan is the last stage in the school improvement planning process. Leithwood et al. (2006) emphasized

that maintaining communication between decision makers and other members is important especially during the planning of change (Leithwood et al., 2006). According to Erickson III (2015), “throughout the initiation phase of the change process constant, clear and coherent communication is essential to gain buy-in for the initiative” (p. 40).

Hence, as agreed by the different models, communication of the plan comes as a last step in the process of initiation. However, it is important to perceive communication not only as discrete final stage, but also as a practice incorporated in the different stages of initiating school improvement.

Challenges Faced when Initiating Change

It is commonly known that change process is accompanied with challenges, and the literature provides evidence for that. Despite the number of studies that address the challenges faced during change process in general, studies that examine the particular challenges faced when initiating change are infrequent (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Reviewing the literature, one study was found by Abrams & Gibbs (2000) whose findings reveal a list of challenges faced particularly when initiating change. Since similar studies attending to the particular challenges faced when planning for change are rare in the literature, the list derived from the study by Abrams & Gibbs (2000) will be adopted to present the challenges in this section of the literature review. Abrams & Gibbs (2000) present that the power struggle is the most challenging and complicated issue when planning for change. Conflicting backgrounds, needs and interests is also a major challenge when embarking on change journey (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Also, time constraints is a challenge faced with the too many tasks at hand (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Teachers’

resistance is also a major challenge faced when planning for change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000).

Challenges faced during initiation of school improvement are presented under the following headings: power struggle, Divergent backgrounds, interests and needs in the school's community, time constraints and teachers' resistance (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000).

Power struggle

Power struggle is the struggle over important decisions between different stakeholders who have equal power in decision making (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). This challenge is prevalent in the initiation phase of school improvement, for it is at this stage that stakeholders make important decisions about the planning for school improvement. The more stakeholders are engaged in planning change, the higher the chance of power struggle, as each member exercises his/her influence on decision making (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000).

Abrams & Gibbs (2000) found that in the initiation phase, power struggle emerged around major decisions related to allocating and distributing funds, planning curriculum, staffing etc. Also, Abrams & Gibbs (2000) explain that when planning for school improvement, power struggle doesn't only happen between members inside the school, but also between school external community members who are engaged in the planning of change. Taking one school that is undergoing planning of school change as a case study, Abrams & Gibbs (2000) found an example of power struggle between parents and school educators. Parents argue they should have a say in their children's learning, however,

school members consider that parent's involvement will threaten the professional autonomy of teachers and educators in the school (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). The struggle between parents and school members over school improvement decisions that affect students' learning is one sample of power struggles that may occur in the initiation phase, between members having equal say and equal power in deciding and planning for change.

Conflicting backgrounds and needs in the school's community

Stakeholders in the school's internal and external community often come from different backgrounds and carry diverse interests and needs (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). This diversity has counter effects on the provision of political and financial support needed for initiating the change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Thompson, 2018).

To start with, the divergent views, backgrounds and needs in the community renders the political support to change fragmented and ineffective (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Thompson, 2018). Abrams & Gibbs (2000) found that tensions among stakeholders due to disparities in background and interests is one weakness of the school improvement planning year in the school under study that had counter effects on the planning process. Similarly, Thompson (2018) claim that stakeholders are usually of various backgrounds and perspectives which hinder the collaborative process of planning school improvement. These differences among stakeholders are conducive to a state of fragmentation and complexity of the planning process i.e. initiation because of the divergent needs and interests of the stakeholders. The disparity of needs and interests will lead to disputes among members inside the school as well as disputes with external members which hinder any sort of political support to school improvement initiation (Thompson, 2018).

Besides the lack of political support, the divergent views of stakeholders about change impact the provision of necessary funds needed for change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Abrams & Gibbs (2000) found that the fragmented support to change is more likely to reduce the amount of funds granted to change initiative from the external community. This has a direct effect on schools because financial resources are not always within the reach of the school, and the latter often rely on external community to fund school improvement plans (Thompson, 2018). In the absence of necessary funds, the school is not able to successfully plan for change and take it to the next level of implementation.

Time constraints

Time constraints is another major challenge faced by school members when initiating change. Literature shows that time constraints, when initiating change, is due to the big number of tasks associated with planning the change and the limited time in school, which has adverse effects on teachers' commitment to the change (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Porter, 2005).

Abrams & Gibbs (2000) found that one weakness or challenge in the planning year of school improvement is time constraints and the big number of tasks required. When embarking on school improvement journey, a congestion of innovations is marked (Fullan, 2007). School principals and other stakeholders will have to plan for varied innovations and prepare for the complex and various tasks accompanying the innovations within a limited timespan (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). As a consequence of the time constraints when planning the change, teachers and school members will face the difficulty to assimilate the different changes and tasks within the limited time they have in schools. This will reduce

their commitment and ownership to change for they will have limited time internalizing the change as part of their norms, beliefs and deep assumptions (Porter, 2005). According to Porter (2005), having time constraints during the initiation of change prevents the change from being ingrained in the school culture.

Teachers' resistance

Teachers' resistance is a challenge faced during the initiation of change for the introduced changes threatens teachers' constructs, brings new norms, and changes teachers' expectations of their jobs (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Chaar, Khamis & Karami Akkary, 2016; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2002).

Introducing a change brings with it new constructs and knowledge of in-school processes. From a constructivist perspective, teachers construct knowledge within particular social settings (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). When planning for change, teachers' pre-constructed knowledge gets distorted, and teachers are threatened of constructing new knowledge and understanding of the context. This process of getting rid of previous understanding and constructing new understanding elicits resistance among teachers when initiating change.

In addition, change process in school carries with it new work norms, and "resistance to change also occurs when proposed changes oppose the existing norm systems of the school" (Sergiovanni, 2002, p.329). For example, in case of collaborative approach, collaboration and participative decision making are new norms that oppose the norms of

isolation and individuality in the school (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). It is normal, then, that teachers resist these changes at the first stage of school improvement, that is initiation.

Besides, change is resisted as it “upsets this equilibrium of role definition and expectations” (Sergiovanni, 2002, p.328). Teachers’ perceived role and expectations are altered upon the changes introduced. This kind of disequilibrium of role definition and expectations when initiating change (Sergiovanni, 2002), results in job ambiguity which nourishes the resistance to change. The issue of job ambiguity supports what Fuller (1969) has called “concerns for the Task” (as cited in Chaar, Khamis & Karami Akkary, 2016). This includes teachers concerns of the time and the energy required to accomplish the task, how their role as teachers would be different, and how their teaching and management is expected to change. These are the kinds of concerns that accompany the planning of change prior to its implementation. Chaar, Khamis & Karami Akkary (2016) found that concerns for the task is a major cause for teachers’ resistance to change.

Strategies to Address the Challenges

A number of strategies have been inferred from the literature that play a role in mitigating the challenges faced during the initiation of school improvement (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Thompson, 2018). These are clarification and understanding of new roles, provision of time and buffering strategies.

Clarification and Understanding of New Roles

Mutual understanding of the new roles is necessary to curb down power struggles between the different stakeholders (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Abrams & Gibbs (2000) argue

that role clarification should ideally occur at the very beginning of the planning phase i.e. the initiation phase, through continuous meetings between the different stakeholders. The agreement over the new roles enables successful power sharing and belittles the struggle over power; each member will hold on to the power granted by the new role. Abrams & Gibbs (2000) add that members from the internal and external community of the school should agree on each other's new roles when planning for change, and receive the needed training to understand the new roles.

Provision of time

Provision of time through acts of restructuring, such as changing teachers' schedules and timetables, reduces the burden of time constraints (Nolan, 2007; Fullan, 2007). As discussed by Abrams & Gibbs (2000), ample time should be given for planning and preparing for change, for this will cease pressure on school members to quickly adopt the changes. It is in the planning phase where members understand and internalize the changes so that they commit to the change and then implement it (Porter, 2005).

Buffering strategies

The external environment sometimes exerts pressure on the initiation of change and hinders the school from planning the change, especially when external environment shows different needs and interests to change. Buffering strategies comes as a solution to protect the school from external environment pressure when initiating the change. Buffering is a process of insulating the organizational processes, functions and individuals from effects of the environment and whose goal "is to make the technical core as near to a closed system"

(Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p.264). Abrams & Gibbs (2000) recommend that setting limits to the relation between school and external environment is sometimes recommended when planning and preparing for change, for it focuses the energy and efforts inside the school and delimits the pressure from external sources.

School Improvement in the Arab Region

After reviewing literature by Arab scholars on school improvement in Arab region, one commonality that can be found among the different resources is the minimal, almost passive, role of school principals, as educators, in school improvement in the Arab region (Bashshur, 2005; El Amin, 2005; Karami & Rizk, 2012; Karami Akkary, 2014; Shuayb, 2018). While there wasn't a direct reference to the role of principal in initiating school improvement, it can be inferred that the principal has a minimal role in planning for change as a result of the following issues: connection of change initiatives with foreign sources and agendas, disconnection between practice and policy, and top-down approach to school improvement.

Connection of Change Initiatives with Foreign Sources and Agendas

Change initiatives in the Arab countries are closely connected with foreign agendas and adopted from foreign sources which renders the role of school level educators in initiating change scant (Karami & Rizk, 2011; Karami, 2014; El Amin, 2005). In the context of the Arab countries, principals and teachers, have minimum input in planning the change, for the change is driven, funded and supported by international and external parties (Karami, 2014). According to El Amin (2005), adopting change from external sources

oversimplifies the planning of school improvement whereby the improvement plans will be adopted as ready-made recipes. Adopting change that is readily prepared and planned devalue the role of Arab educators and practitioners in planning for school improvement (El Amin, 2005). Therefore, having improvement plans of foreign sources and agendas is one reason for the minimal role of school principals in initiating school improvement in the Arab Countries.

Disconnect Between Practice and Policy

The disconnect between practice and policy, when developing school reforms and improvement plans in Arab countries, explains the lack of practitioners' input i.e. educators, principals, teachers etc., in policy related to school improvement (Shuayb, 2018). The Lebanese context provides an example of how the disconnect between practice and policy renders the role of school principals in planning for change limited. Shuayb (2018) reported that academicians and teachers from public and private schools were poorly represented when planning the education sector development plan in the Lebanese context in 1994. The planning process of this reform included forming a committee of 10 ministers (policy makers) representing the different political and religious groups, in addition to a committee of members from CERD (Shuayb, 2018). The authority over the planning phase was restricted to these two committees that excluded teachers and practitioners from the process. Although the plan had ambitious goals for improvement, it wasn't successfully implemented. Shuayb (2018) attributed the failure to the weak cooperation between the policy makers and practitioners when planning the reform. Also, another change reform was launched in 2010 entitled as National Educational Strategy. Planning for this reform

happened through joint efforts between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education ‘MEHE’ and the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies ‘LAES’ (Shuayb, 2018). While this initiative shows connection between policy and research, it neglects practice as practitioners (teachers, principals etc.) were not involved in the planning process (Shuayb, 2018). This is another sample of improvement plans showing the minimal role of school principals in planning for change versus the major role of policy makers in this regard. Therefore, the disconnect between practice and policy rules out the role of practitioners, such as principals, from the planning of school improvement, leaving it for policy makers to come up with development plans. This is another issue contributing to a minimal role of principals in planning for school improvement.

Top down Approach to School Improvement

A top-down approach for planning school improvement is generally followed in the Arab countries according to which principals play no role in the planning of change (Bashshur, 2005; El Amin, 2005; Karami, 2014; Shuayb, 2018). Karami (2014) found that in light of top-down approach, teachers and practitioners assume passive roles in planning and initiating change in Arab countries, and perceive themselves as mere recipients and implementers of the change. According to Karami (2014), “decision-making authority—especially related to planning for improvement—is accorded strictly to those in formal positions at the top of a steep hierarchy [...]” (p. 187). Maintaining this top-down approach to school improvement prevents a wide participation of stakeholders, limited initiatives to change, less sharing of the burden of change, and absence of group thinking (El Amin, 2005). Bashshur (2005) claims that the top down approach to school improvement in the

Arab countries undermines the role of schools as center for developing improvement plans. It is, then, undermining the role of practitioners, teachers and principals in planning for school improvement. Therefore, the top-down approach to school improvement is one of the issues behind the minimal role of school principals in initiating and planning for school improvement in the Arab countries.

In conclusion, the principal has a minimal role in initiating and planning for school improvement in the Arab Region. This limited role is due to a number of issues in the approach to school improvement in this region. One issue is the connection of school improvement plans with foreign agendas. Many of the improvement initiatives are adopted from external sources as ready-made recipes which annul any role of school principals and other stakeholders in planning for school improvement. Another issue is the disconnect between practice and policy whereby planning for improvement is restricted to policy makers without engaging practitioners such as principals, teachers etc. in the initiation process. Also, the top-down approach to school improvement leaves those at the top hierarchy, mainly the governments in the Arab region, with the major role of planning school improvement. Accordingly, principals, being at lower levels of the hierarchy, have no role in planning or initiating the change.

Paradigm Shift to School Improvement in the Arab Countries – TAMAM Model

Literature has mainly attributed the failure of school improvement efforts in the Arab countries to the top-down approach followed when planning for the change that produces one universal model for school improvement, without taking into consideration the specific needs and particularities of each school (Bashshur, 2005; Karami & Rizk,

2011; Karami & Rizk, 2012; Karami, 2014). Accordingly, educators and scholars are calling for a paradigm shift for approaching educational reforms (Bashshur, 2005; El Amin, 2005; Karami, 2014; Karami & Rizk, 2012; Shuayb, 2018). There are calls for following a school based bottom-up approach to school improvement in the Arab region (Bashshur, 2005; El Amin, 2005; Karami, 2014). This new approach views the school as the origin and not the recipient of change initiatives (Bashshur, 2005). The school, as per the new paradigm, is the nucleus of change as described by Bashshur (2005).

One of the emerging initiatives in the Arab region in response to the calls for new paradigm is the TAMAM project that approaches school improvement from a school-based bottom-up approach. TAMAM is an acronym for the Arabic wording of “school based improvement” (Karami & Rizk, 2012). It is a joint project between schools, university professors and policy makers to support the schools in their improvement process.

TAMAM supports school leaders and teachers in initiating school-based improvement. It is based on the premise of engaging school staff in the school improvement process since its initiation phase (Karami & Rizk, 2011). Besides engagement, empowerment of the school team, including principal, is another premise of TAMAM which is necessary to support the role of the school team in initiating change (Karami & Rizk, 2011; Karami & Rizk, 2012). According to Karami & Rizk (2011), teachers and school leaders are the initiators and the decision makers of changes addressing issues related to their specific school context. The project with schools starts with identifying school teams including principals, teachers and/or other members (Karami & Rizk, 2011). The school team plays a significant role in initiating school improvement

through identifying the need of change in their school, selecting school projects to address the needs, and developing action plans (Karami & Rizk, 2011). Therefore, in TAMAM the school team, including school leaders and teachers, is responsible for initiating change. The role of principal in initiating change is, thus, significant and supported in this project.

In addition to engagement of staff, TAMAM works on the empowerment of school leaders and teachers in order to strengthen their role in initiating school improvement (Karami & Rizk, 2011). As stated earlier, the school team has a major responsibility in identifying needs for change and developing action plans, in the planning phase. However, the school team might not have the readiness and needed capacities to initiate and promote the school improvement. TAMAM, thus, build the capacity of the school team to develop skills of inquiry, reflection, collaboration, leadership, and develop evidence based decisions, which are all needed for them to initiate change in their schools (Karami & Rizk, 2011). The process of building the capacities of the school staff for initiating the change is accompanied with continuous mentoring from the university professors (Karami & Rizk, 2011). Mentoring is another practice in TAMAM that empowers and supports the principals and teachers in initiating school improvement. Therefore, TAMAM empowers school leaders and teachers participating in school improvement processes to initiate change through capacity building activities and continuous mentoring.

In conclusion, TAMAM promotes the initiation of school-based improvement, as it supports the role of school principals and teachers in initiating school innovative interventions and is based on the premise of engagement of stakeholders in the initiation. Equally important to engagement is the empowerment of these participants, especially

school staff, for an effective change. Empowerment happens through capacity building activities in TAMAM that focus on collaborative action research, reflective practice and evidence based planning and decision making. These skills will help the school team in identifying needs for change and develop respective plan to address the needs during the initiation of change. Thus, the approach followed by TAMAM empowers practitioners through building their capacities, promotes the voice of practitioners, and endorses their input in decision making and choice of priorities during the initiation of change. The approach, thus, sets the conditions conducive for not only successful initiation, but also effective change process.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, the researcher reached an understanding of the initiation process, the conditions that affect it and the role of leadership in the process. The researcher was able to construct a conceptual framework from a number of theories that she reviewed. These are the open social system theory of schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2008), 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 study's conceptual framework is constructed and synthesized from these four theories that are briefly presented hereafter.

Bolman and Deal's (2017) theory presents the four frames of organizations; structural, cultural, individual and political. These are lenses through which school functioning, conditions, leadership behavior as well as challenges during the initiation of school improvement can be seen. Seashore Louis et al. (1999) presented seven frames for

understanding school improvement; purpose, structural, cultural, political, leadership, learning and emotional. These frames help understand school improvement and its challenges, and they help see the school conditions and leadership behavior during the change process (Seashore Louis et al., 1999). Also, the coherence framework by Fullan & Quinn (2016) explains that having a shared and in-depth meaning of the nature of the school work and the nature of change builds coherence and helps school system to successfully embark on improvement process. This shared understanding is built through purposeful interaction between people working on same agenda and continuously making meaning (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Coherence framework thus has the following components; common direction, collaborative culture, learning and capacity building, and leadership. Finally, the open social system theory of schools emphasize that schools are open to their environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008), and the openness to input from external environment provides the necessary conditions for the success of the initiation process of school improvement.

The different lenses and frameworks, presented above, help in identifying the conditions and leadership behaviors that support the initiation process of school improvement. The structural frame by Bolman and Deal (2017) and Seashore Louis et al. (1999) frames and conceptualize the condition that supports the initiation, which is the enabling structure. An enabling structure supports initiation through its decentralized hierarchy, flexible rules and formalization, as well as allocation of time, space and resources (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Also, the individual frame identifies other conditions to support initiation. Addressing teachers' emotions, motivation and resistance to change,

engaging teachers in needs assessment and development of the change plan, empowering teachers and building their capacities and learning are important conditions to accept, plan, and initiate any school improvement initiative (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Seashore Louis et al., 1999). Besides, the political frame pinpoints to conditions needed to push for initiating school improvement such as creating coalitions, political pressures, networking, negotiations, and allocating resources (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Seashore Louis et al., 1999). Further, the symbolic frame sheds light on cultural conditions that support the process of change initiation (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Seashore Louis et al., 1999). This frame helps us see that the shared in-depth understanding among school members about the nature of school's functioning and nature of change initiative builds coherence which is a condition supporting change initiation (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). In addition to the shared meaning, a collaborative culture is another condition seen by the symbolic and cultural frame that supports change initiation (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Seashore Louis et al., 1999).

Moreover, the open social system model of schools emphasizes the interrelationship between school and external environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008) and points at the openness to external environment can include conditions that supports change initiation. The external environment provides resources, materials, equipment and other conditions needed for change initiation (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Besides, the leadership frame allows to see the leadership behavior as another condition supporting change initiation (Seashore Louis et al., 1999). Leadership that is transformational, distributed and collaborative supports the initiation of change (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Harris, 2004; Morrison, 2013; Morrison,

2018). Leadership behaviors like vision building (Fullan & Quinn, 2016), maintaining communication (Leithwood, 2006) and establishing trust (Seashore Louis, 2007) are conditions conducive to success of change initiation. On a last note, leadership functions as the glue that brings together the different conditions conducive to the success of school improvement (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). In other words, the leader's role is at the core of nurturing the conditions conducive to the success of initiation process of school improvement.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the role of principal in initiating school improvement through understanding the perspectives of school leaders and teachers regarding the principal's role in initiating school improvement, in a Lebanese public school. The perspectives of teachers and school leaders about the challenges faced during change initiation were also investigated. The perspectives were analyzed and discussed in light of the relevant literature reviewed by the researcher.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design. Qualitative research facilitates the exploration of a wide range of dimensions of the world including participants' perspectives and understandings of phenomena occurring in the real world (Mason, 2002). The phenomenon in this study is the role of school principal in initiating school improvement, and the study explored the perspectives and understandings of this phenomenon. Mason (2002) provides a working definition of qualitative research, that is, qualitative research is grounded in an interpretivist philosophical position that is concerned with how the world is interpreted, perceived and have its meaning constructed. Therefore, this study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, uses a qualitative case study design and follows the guidelines of the grounded theory methodology for collecting and analyzing data.

Interpretivist paradigm

Education research is usually underpinned by big theories: positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and postmodernism (O'Donoghue, 2006). This study follows an interpretivist paradigm. Choosing an interpretivist paradigm reflects ontological and epistemological positions. The ontological position reflects an emphasis on participants' perceptions, viewpoints, experiences and interpretations (Mason, 2002) of the role of principal in initiating school improvement, which the research questions of this study aimed to explore. Epistemologically, a joint construction of meaning between researcher and participants is required to understand the role of principal in initiating change (Stringer, 2009). This epistemological position is translated in interacting with people, listening to them, gaining insight of their viewpoints (Mason, 2002). Knowing that people's perceptions is what this research is concerned with in order to understand the role of principal in initiating school improvement, adopting an interpretivist paradigm in this study is highly significant for it brings the focus on people's perceptions of the role of principal in initiating school improvement, knowing that "the important reality [...] is what people perceive it to be" (O'Donoghue, 2006, p. 20). It also guides the data needed to construct theories based on the constructed meaning of a phenomenon by those experiencing it (i.e. role of principal in initiating school improvement) (Corbin & Strauss, 2012).

Methodology

The study relies on grounded theory methodology for data collection and data analysis. Grounded theory is developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967), and it follows "an inductive, iterative, interactive, and comparative method that provides systematic guideline

for gathering, synthesizing, analyzing, and conceptualizing qualitative data for the purpose of theory construction” (Charmaz, 2015, p.402). In fact, grounded theory aims at constructing and not describing, as well as, developing and not applying existing theories (Charmaz, 2015). Following a grounded theory method, researcher came up with inductive data, out of which concepts and categories were developed, and relationships between the derived concepts were drawn (Charmaz, 2015). Following grounded theory, the process is iterative, for the researcher went back and forth between data collection and data analysis (Charmaz, 2015). The value of alternating data collection and analysis is that it provided the researcher with direction, sensitivity to data, and allowed the researcher to adjust probes for interview questions as need be (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). The process of deriving concepts and categories, in a grounded theory methodology, is based on participants’ perceptions, meaning and interaction with reality (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Therefore, the methodology followed in this research aligned with the theoretical paradigm and served the purpose of the study of exploring the perspectives of teachers and leaders regarding principal’s role in initiating school improvement.

Case study design

This study is an explanatory case study that aims at understanding the role of principal in initiating school improvement in depth and within “its real life context” (Yin, 2003, p.13). It is explanatory as it aims at answering ‘Why’ and ‘How’ questions to gain deeper insights on the topic under study (Yin, 2003).

The study is a single case study because it aims 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 is a single case that represents a unique and not a typical case of Lebanese public schools, and has been undergoing school improvement plans (Yin, 2003). Also, because the aim of the study was to have an in-depth investigation on leaders' role in initiating change, an information rich case was needed (Patton, 1990, as cited in, Stringer, 2009). The school chosen for this research was information rich as it allowed for a great deal of learning about the issue under study.

Participants and Study Site

In this section, a description of the case which is the school is presented. This section presents information about the school justifying why this particular public school was chosen, and how it helped in understanding the phenomenon of the role of principal in initiating school improvement in the context of the Lebanese public schools.

Study Site - Case: The School

As mentioned earlier, the school under study is an atypical case of Lebanese public schools i.e. unlike the majority of Lebanese public schools, for reasons that are going to be presented in this section. Yet, before presenting these reasons it is worth mentioning the value of studying atypical cases. An atypical case often presents richer information on a particular phenomenon than a typical case (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2003). Also, an atypical case is chosen because it represents a unique case (Yin, 2003) that though it doesn't exemplify other cases but presents a unique model to be followed (Bryman, 2012).

The school is a public intermediate school K-9 in Mount Lebanon area. The researcher has repeatedly heard about the school as becoming highly reputable in its community. The school was found to be an atypical public school not only because of its student achievement, but also because of all improvements that have happened since the arrival of the current principal. To start with, the ministry of Public Works has launched new building in 2014 in line with the school's plan of development. As part of improvement plans the school has gone through, the school is now equipped with laboratory, library, theater, art exhibition, computer lab of 64 computers, overhead projectors in classrooms, and three playgrounds. New initiatives were created such as the development of environmental club that engages students with the community. A new building was launched in 2019, that is equipped with facilities for special needs students. Relative to the Lebanese public schools, this school is way well developed in terms of equipment and technology. According to Hamdan (2012), typical public schools suffer from the lack of resources, equipment and facilities particularly related to students with special needs. The development plans that the school has been undergoing makes it indeed an atypical public school.

Another fact that makes it an atypical public school is the fact that it is considered by its community a school of choice evidenced by the continuous influx of new students at the beginning of every year. Families are attracted to this public school mainly because of quality and not just because of adverse economic conditions. Since 2010, a hike in enrollment has been witnessed in the school under study specifically after the current principal was assigned. At the beginning of the academic year 2019- 2020, the school

witnessed additional migration of students from private schools, and had a considerable share of the more than 18,000 students moved from private to public schools due to the financial crisis many Lebanese are facing (Chehayeb, 2019). People who are currently shifting from private to public schools due to the financial crisis are preferring this school over the public schools in their own villages. It has been recurred in the news that this public intermediate school (referred to by its name) has been facing a huge influx of new students, where 700 students were registered and 1007 remain on the waiting list at the beginning of this year (Astih, 2019). Migration to the school is not only taking place from private schools, but also from other public schools in the area, which suggests that quality is the main reason of having families move their children to this school.

Comparing the facts presented above about this public school to the literature on Lebanese public schools strengthens the argument of this school being atypical public school. Based on two studies by Hamdan (2012) and Bank Med (2014), the number of students enrolled in private schools is much higher than the number in public schools. According to Hamdan (2012), more than five hundred thousand students (504,024) were enrolled in private schools in the scholastic year 2010-2011, while 276,119 students were enrolled in public schools. The huge discrepancy in enrollment rates between public and private schools remains evident in 2014 where 509,979 students are enrolled in private schools and 275,655 are enrolled in public schools (Bank Med, 2014). With these numbers suggesting that private schools are generally preferred over public schools, yet, this is not the case of the public school under study. Thus, having remarkable number of students moving from private schools to the studied public school every year suggests that this

public school has become a school of choice for many families, which is a further indicator that this public school is worth studying.

Another unique characteristic about the school is that it succeeded to reduce drop-out rates from 4.4% in 2012 till 1.5% in 2016. Moreover, the drop-out rates in primary and intermediate levels are 6.7% and 17.3% respectively, according to Bank Med report (2014). The school under study is an intermediary school that records far better results in drop-out rates compared to other public schools.

Finally, the school records 100% success in official exams which is not always the case in our public schools. According to the education sector development plan - Quality Education for Growth - issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in 2010, public schools suffer from low achievement which is attributed to the low qualifications of teaching and administrative staff, and the absence of a conducive teaching and learning environment in terms of infrastructure, equipment and resources. Therefore, the high achievement in official exams recorded in this public school provides extra evidence about the improvement efforts which are worth studying in this atypical public school.

Examining the above characteristics in light of studies on public schools in Lebanon, shows that this school can be considered an atypical public school especially with regard to initiating school improvement. According to Mattar (2011), public schools often face a number of problems which render them to be poor performing schools unlikely to initiate change. These schools face adverse conditions like poor equipment and absence of technology which lead to low students' achievement. As a result, public schools are rarely schools of choice, and are mostly the destination of students with weak academic

achievement. This case school, in contrary to public schools as found by Mattar (2011), has engaged in many improvement initiatives that equipped the school building with technology and secured the educational resources needed. The school has been experiencing a huge influx of students, not restricted to low achievers because of it is continuous success in scoring high achievement results on official exams.

Participants

The principal is a male in his thirties. He has a biology background and science teaching diploma. He used to be a biology teacher in 5 private schools, for 8 years, as well as science coordinator in a private school. He was assigned as principal in the public school since 2010. In addition to his science background, he works on expanding his knowledge in the field of leadership. He has conducted research studies under the supervision of university professors in the Lebanese University and Lebanese American University. The principal was also asked by the Ministry of Education to run workshops for public school principals on the topics he researched. One of his major achievements was ranking first among public school principals in Lebanon in 2015, according to CERD. Therefore, the principal profile represents another atypical dimension for the study school compared with Lebanese public school principals.

As for teachers, and according to the school's records, 88% of teachers are females and 12% are males. Only 34% of tenured teachers have a university degree. Results also showed that majority of tenured teachers belong to the age group (53-60) years old.

There were 16 tenured teachers in the school. The researcher excluded contractual teachers because these are part timers whose presence at the school is restricted to delivering their classes, and are rarely informed about activities at the school beyond their classroom. Moreover, and due to their short tenure and high turnover, contractual teachers are less likely to experience school improvement processes, opposite to tenured teachers who are full time teachers who spend long working hours at the school and engage in many activities beyond the classroom. In the Lebanese public school system, contractual teachers are allowed to teach in different schools concurrently, have their contracts signed on annual basis which renders the length of their tenure in the school to be short indicating that they haven't been settling down in the school and didn't have the chance to understand and experience the change. In addition, there were five supervisors, five coordinators and a parents' committee of 9 members who have been participating in initiating school improvement since early stages.

The targeted participants in the case under study 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 in the school-based improvement initiative (see table 1).

Table 1*Responsibility, Teaching Cycle and Years of Experience of the Participants*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Participant code</u>	<u>Cycle</u>	<u>Responsibility/Role</u>	<u>Years of experience</u>	<u>Years of tenure in this school</u>
Participant 1	T1	Cycle 3	Teacher	25	20
Participant 2	T2	Cycle 2	Teacher	25	25
Participant 3	T3	Cycle 1	Teacher	25	25
Participant 4	T4	Cycle 3	Teacher	18	10
Participant 5	T5	All cycles	Teacher	18	18
Participant 6	T6	Preschool	Teacher	39	31
Participant 7	T7	All cycles	Substitute Teacher +Activities	40	31
Participant 8	T8	Cycle 3	Teacher	39	33
Participant 9	T9	Cycle 2 & 3	Teacher	37	33
Participant 10	T10	Cycles 1 & 2	Teacher	38	33
Participant 11	T11	Cycle 1	Teacher	32	31
Participant 12	T12	All cycles	Special needs Teacher	38	33
Participant 13	T13	-	Librarian	33	33
Participant 14	T14	All Cycles	Health counseling	37	33
Participant 15	C1	Cycle 2 & 3	Coordinator	39	33
Participant 16	C2	Cycle 1 & 2	Coordinator	37	33
Participant 17	C3	Cycle 1, 2 & 3	Coordinator	36	33

Participant 18	C4	Cycle 2 & 3	Coordinator	22	8
Participant 19	S1	Cycle 3	Supervisor	24	5
Participant 20	S2	Cycle 2	Supervisor	37	33
Participant 21	S3	Cycle 1	Supervisor	38	38
Participant 22	S4	-	General Supervisor	38	38
Participant 23	P	Preschool, elementary and middle school	Principal	10	10

Sampling Procedure

Purposeful sampling was followed to identify the participants in the study. According to Robinson (2014), using purposive sampling, criteria need to be specified to identify the potential participants. In the context of this study, the criteria followed to identify the sample universe was two-fold: a) school principal (school improvement started when he was appointed); b) teachers, coordinators, administrators and parents who witnessed the initiation of the change process since its inception. Based on the criteria specified, up to 26 participants (principal, teachers, coordinators, administrators and parents) participated in the study. Finally, sample sourcing happened through holding on the identified criteria and using school public documents to gather the necessary information on teachers, coordinators and administrators to complete the purposeful selection of participants.

Data collection Tools and Procedures

Following an interpretivist approach, the researcher saw people's words, perceptions, interpretations, understanding and meaning as the main source of data (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research uses methods of data collection that are flexible and sensitive to the social context. One of most popular methods in qualitative research is qualitative interviewing which refers to in-depth, semi-structured, or loosely structured forms of interviewing (Mason, 2002). One of the reasons for the use of interviews as a method of data collection in qualitative research is its ability to capture the complexity of participants' perceptions and meaning making (Mason, 2002). Two types of qualitative interviewing were conducted: focus group interview and individual interview. The researcher also conducted interviews aiming at member checking

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with the principal and each of the supervisors, coordinators and parents who have experienced the initiation of the school improvement. These members were at the school before or since 2010, for it was the year the current principal was appointed, and the school has started to experience school improvement initiatives. The interviews were generally semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions. Probes were prepared to guide the interviewees in case they didn't get the question or are going out of topic (Appendix A). These interviews took between 30-40 minutes to complete.

Because data analysis starts during data collection in a grounded theory methodology, the researcher continuously examined the questions and checked if anything

needed to be adjusted or added. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to preliminary analysis before the researcher was engaged in deep data analysis.

Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews are highly significant for they give the researcher an insight about how interactions take place in the studied context, and how issues are conceptualized and discussed, in a very organic manner (Mason, 2002). Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers to collect data. The 14 teachers including librarian and health counselor were grouped into three groups (2 interviews included 4 teachers and one interview included 6 teachers). An attempt was made to cluster them by cycle but because of time constraints, not all teachers in the same cycle were found available at one time. These interviews took around 40 minutes.

After collecting and analyzing the data from the individual interviews, researcher went back to participants for member checking. However, as mentioned under the limitations of the study, it was extremely difficult in light of the lockdown and the less efficient tools used for online communication at the public school (they only use Whatsapp) to conduct a second round of focus group interviews. It already took a lot of negotiation to conduct the first round and waited for a day where all teachers were available at the school for end-of-year meeting back in June 2020 which enabled the researcher to conduct the first round of focus group interviews. For this reason, member checking was performed through individual interviews with one member from each group. These interviews took around 30 minutes. Participants' perceptions on the analysis done by the researcher was crucial to check upon any bias or misinterpretation the researcher would inadvertently fall into. This

step is crucial in qualitative interviews because it assures that the creation and production of meaning is a joint affair between the researcher and the interviewee (Mason, 2002). Table 2 summarizes the research questions and the corresponding data collection tools to answer the research question. It also presents the number of individual interviews and focus group interviews, as well as who was involved in each interview.

Table 2

A Table Showing the Data Collection Tools Used for Each Research Question

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Methods for collecting data</u>	<u>Participants</u>
How do school leaders (principal and administrative leaders) perceive the role of principal in initiating school improvement?	Individual interviews	Nine individual interviews: Principal and 4 supervisors and 4 coordinators (in addition to 3 parents) Three individual interviews happened with three leaders: the principal, one supervisor and one coordinator. (for member checking)
What are teachers' perceptions of the role of school principal in initiating school improvement?	Focus group interviews	Three focus group interviews 14 teachers distributed as: FG1: 4 teachers FG2: 4 teachers FG3: 6 teachers

<p>What are the challenges faced by school principal when initiating change, and what strategies does the school principal follow to mitigate these challenges as perceived and experienced by the principals and teachers?</p>	<p>Individual interviews</p> <p>Focus group interview</p> <p>Journal notes</p> <p>Documents analysis</p>	<p>Principal and 4 coordinators and 4 supervisors and 3 parents</p> <p>With teachers</p>
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Documents, Artifacts and Media Analysis

In addition to interviews, documents and analysis of documentary sources is another method of data collection in qualitative research (Mason, 2002). These documents can be text and non-text or visual forms. Documents were referred to because they provided a source of concrete and legitimate evidence of what has happened in the past, so they helped developing a rooted understanding of the phenomenon under study. The school has documented and established a database that included text and visual documents as evidences to the changes happened in the school. These documents were reviewed by the researcher to gain insight about the principal’s role in initiating the changes.

Field Work Journal

Researcher kept a journal for every school visit where interpretations, emotions, insights, mistakes, concerns were recorded (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). These reflected the method of participant observation for collecting data in qualitative studies.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

Blumer (1969) claims that analysis involves interpretations of researcher (as cited in, Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Researcher was engaged in interpreting and analyzing data since the early stages of data collection; interpretation and analysis of data is an ongoing, changing, unpredictable and unfinished process (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). The analysis of the data followed was an in-depth analysis with emerging codes and categories/themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). The process of data analysis started with generating codes, concepts, and finally categories/themes. Corbin & Strauss (2012) describe coding as digging for deeper meanings of participants' words and coming up with concepts through questioning and comparing different sets of data. Further, concepts were derived from the data collected, and they reflected an "analyst's impressionistic understandings of what is being described in the experiences, spoken words, actions, interactions, problems, and issues expressed by participants" about the role of principal in initiating school improvement (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, p. 50). Concepts informed by the literature and examined against the field data through the constant comparison methods helped organize the data and generated codes under distinct categories. The researcher moving in her analysis from codes to themes reflected what Corbin & Strauss (2012) describe as going up

the conceptual ladder i.e. from data which holds the power of description and detail, to codes, and finally to categories or themes which is highest level of abstraction.

The data analysis methods employed in qualitative study allowed for the understanding of the complexity, details and depth (Mason, 2002). So one strategy, that the researcher started her data analysis with, was microanalysis. According to Corbin & Strauss (2012), microanalysis is a form of open coding which examines closely every piece of the data, and it is recommended at the outset of analysis; as if the researcher is using a microscope to delineate the data and examine every piece separately. Microanalysis also helps in generating different possibilities through generating various codes, at the beginning, and selectively maintain or discard the codes based on the new set of data obtained (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Therefore, the steps of data analysis were as follows: 1) coding the data, 2) compare the different incidents and codes through identify similarities and differences to come up with categories, 3) identify the common themes, 4) organize the data codes under the relevant themes, 5) compare the emerging themes from data analysis to the literature.

This process includes constant comparisons that were used when analyzing the data. Comparisons were made at the level of codes through comparing the similarities and differences between the different codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). This comparison of the codes was essential as it helped in organizing codes under categories and themes, differentiate between the themes and helped understanding the properties and dimensions of the themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2012). Data organized under themes was then interpreted

and compared to what the literature says on the role of principal in initiating school improvement, in order to answer the research questions.

A subsequent step of data analysis was developing a model, based on the perceptions of teachers, school leaders (coordinators and administrative staff) and school principal, of the role of principal in initiating school improvement and of the challenges faced when initiating the improvement plans.

For the sake of keeping the participants anonymous, each participant was given a code to preserve privacy.

Quality Criteria

Quality criteria was attended to in this study with a number measures in an attempt to meet these criteria. Quality criteria is essential in qualitative research to ensure “empirical groundedness, generalizability, and minimization of bias” (Franklin & Ballan, 2011, p. 273). These criteria include credibility, dependability, and generalizability.

To start with, dependability, which is referred to reliability in quantitative research, is concerned with the study being replicated and obtaining consistent findings (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). Different measures were taken in order to ensure the study’s dependability. Dependability is enhanced in qualitative studies through keeping an extensive account of note taking (verbatim) and journal notes after each field visit (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). The researcher used a field work journal where an extensive note taking was recorded including observations, interpretations, emotions and insights following every interview. Further, the in depth and detailed explanation of how data was collected, analyzed, coded,

and classified under concepts and categories ensured dependability (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). Further data triangulation, that is examining and comparing data collected through interviews, document analysis, and field work journal contributed to improving dependability.

Credibility in qualitative studies or trustworthiness of study findings, is referred to validity in quantitative research (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). Credibility relates to the degree to which the research findings reflect reality which is internal validity in quantitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). Credibility was achieved through following data triangulation using different sources of data (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). The researcher referred to individual and focus group interviews, field work journal and documents analysis. Confirmation checks was another measure, including insider checking and outsider checking to improve credibility (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). Insider checking was about involving participants in the study to check whether the codes and concepts generated by the researcher represent the participants' initial words and their intended meaning. Outsider checking involved having another researcher checking the codes which is another source of credibility. The extensive note taking also contributes to higher credibility and transparency.

On the other hand, transferability or generalizability is about how research results can be transferred or generalized from one context to the other (Franklin & Ballan, 2011). Generalizability or transferability was promoted through the thick description of the context, setting and participants. Further, Robinson (2014) explains that the more explicit and clear the sample universe is, the more “valid and transparent any generalization can be”

(p.28). The clearly stated sample universe and criteria to identify the potential participants would help readers identify where can this study be applicable, and where it can be generalized.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations which need to be considered. First, there is a limitation pertaining to the design of the study being a case study. Following a case study design makes the generalization of the results an ingrained limitation. Another part of the limitations is attributed to the constraints forced by the lockdown due to Covid-19. Despite the sincere and major efforts made by the researcher to minimize the implications of this limitation, its effects were retained at different aspects. Due to the lockdown, interviews were made online, and not all participants accepted to go for an online interview. This has resulted in a slightly less number of participants than planned, and the number of participants who actually participated was to some extent less than the targeted number of participants. Turning to online mode and the absence of efficient online platforms used at the public school with a complete reliance on Whatsapp as a tool for online communication, made it challenging to conduct virtual focus group interviews. The researcher had to wait for the end-of-year meeting that was conducted in June 2020 where the majority of teachers were present at the school to conduct the first round of focus group interviews. Not all teachers were present which also resulted in less number of participants on the focus group interviews than planned. The same challenges faced during the first round of focus group interviews reappeared when conducting the second round for member

check. Teachers were still completely working from home using Whatsapp, which made it extremely difficult to have focus group interviews, as initially planned, for member check. This has forced the researcher to replace focus group interviews intended for member check with individual interviews.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study investigates the role of school principal in initiating school improvement as perceived by teachers and school leaders, in a Lebanese public school. The study has 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. In this chapter, the findings of the study are reported under four sections. The first and second sections present the definition and aim of school improvement as perceived by the different participants. The third section addresses the first and second research questions about the role of principal in initiating change by presenting the different actions taken by the principal in initiating change from the perspective of teachers and school leaders. The fourth section presents the challenges faced when initiating change from the perspective of the participants and hereby answers the third research question. The last section answers the fourth research question through presenting the strategies followed to mitigate the challenges faced when initiating change. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' responses in both individual and focus group interviews are presented in the Tables 3-7.

Definition of School Improvement

Based on the analysis of the participants' responses, school improvement is viewed as a process of continuous change that comes in response to ongoing changes in the world to which the school is open. Improvement process, as per the participants, can touch every element in the school system and can cause large scale changes at the school level. Moreover, change is viewed by some participants to occur as a function of the school leader actions, and sometimes seen as strictly limited to the school leader's actions. In what follows more elaboration of the definition of school improvement will be presented under the following titles: a) school wide change, b) ongoing change, c) change restricted to school leader actions. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' responses in both individual and focus group interviews about the definition of school improvement are presented in table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of Responses of the Participants about the Definition of School Improvement

Title	Theme	Code	Total frequency	Participants					Documents (Number of times the code appears in the documents)
				Pr	S	C	T	P	
Definition of school improvement	School wide change	School wide change	4	1	1	1		1	
	Ongoing change	Ongoing change	9	1	4	3	1		
	Restricted to school	Restricted to school	3		1	1		1	

School Wide Change

During the individual interviews, four participants, the principal, one supervisor, one coordinator and one parent, stated that the school improvement is a change that encompasses the scope of the whole school, while none of the teachers had mentioned this point in the focus group interviews. Those who spoke of school improvement as school wide change agreed that it consists of a set of initiatives that are part of a large scope project that introduces change to different aspects of the school overturning how it is functioning. C2 stated, “school improvement is an overturn of the whole school system.” S1 clarified that, “this includes keeping up with everything new from curriculum, teaching methods, infrastructure.”

While all four participants emphasized the notion of school wide change as characteristic of school improvement, they did not necessarily equate it with a drastic change where everything is changed at once. They viewed change as a succession of events that unfold at various paces targeting different aspects of the school but eventually resulting in a comprehensive change. According to the principal, the school’s improvement plan he initiated is wide in scope encompassing different domains yet gradually implemented.

He explained:

School improvement in our school encompasses different domains (areas), but at first it starts with the organizational structure in the school through developing clear

descriptions of roles and responsibilities [...]. It then moved to professional development for teachers, PD for supervisors, school environment and school climate (including equipment and resources), technology in teaching and training teachers, developed connections with NGOs, international organizations and local community, equipment etc. [...] Change in our school happens per domains; it hasn't yet reached all domains, but all domains will be covered.

Ongoing Change

Almost all school leaders including the principal, 4 supervisors and 3 coordinators, as well as one teacher defined, without probing, school improvement as ongoing change. They perceived the continuity of the change as a process that is on-going and that doesn't stop at the end of one improvement initiative, rather it is one that continues beyond a particular initiative as if one initiative triggers the next resulting in ongoing change at the school. For them, what warrants this continuity is the massively and rapidly changing world forcing schools to continuously improve to keep up with those changes.

While there is an overall conviction that school improvement is a continuous process, six participants out of nine, the principal, 3 supervisors and 2 coordinators, emphasized in the individual interviews a characterization of school improvement as a continuous process. They stated that continuity is a core characteristic of school improvement, and that it cannot be considered as a "real" improvement if it is not continuous. S2 explained that, "school improvement is a process, and a process is ongoing in itself." All 6 participants explained that achieving the goals of one improvement plan brings to light further needs for improvement, and therefore, a new school improvement

initiative is triggered making school improvement an ongoing process. As C3 argued, “school improvement is definitely a continuity, if we stop improving means we’re dead. The more we improve, the more we find more areas for improvement.”

Four participants out of nine, the principal, one coordinator and one supervisor, in addition to one teacher from the focus group interviews, mentioned that school improvement is about responding to changes worldwide. While one teacher mentioned it in one of the focus group interviews, all other three teachers in the group showed agreement. According to the four participants, school improvement is about responding to ongoing changes happening in the educational, social and other arenas in the world. As S2 explained, “school improvement needs to follow the improvement that is happening at the level of education in Lebanon and in the world, such as social media, advanced technology etc.” The three leaders and the teacher agreed that a school is not isolated from its surrounding and needs to respond to the various changes to survive. Given the fact that the world is continuously changing, schools need to respond through continuously initiating and planning for improvement.

As argued by C1:

We are in an era where it is no more possible to remain stagnant where we are, we are in a continuous state of progression [...]. It is a continuous process. Everything around us is changing, and we should keep up with these changes.

Change Restricted to School Leader Actions

While this wasn't common among all participants, only three of them in the individual interviews, 1 supervisor, 1 coordinator and 1 parent, saw school improvement as restricted to the actions of the principal. While this wasn't explicitly mentioned by teachers on the focus group interviews, teachers' responses showed that they saw school improvement being restricted to the principal's actions. According to them, school improvement is defined through the actions and leadership traits of the principal and cannot be conceived outside their scope.

As argued by S4 that, "it is a process that is profoundly bound to the school leader qualities and actions. School improvement is about having a good leader who is open, responsive, cooperative and resilient."

Aims of School Improvement

While school improvement was conceived by the participants as a multi-purpose process, there were two broad aims of school improvement frequently mentioned. These are reaching an overarching vision and improving students learning. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' responses in both individual and focus group interviews about the aim of school improvement are presented in table 4.

Table 4

Frequency of Responses of the Research Participants about the Aim of School Improvement

Title	Theme	Code	Total frequency	Participants					Documents (Number of times the code appears in the documents)
				Pr	S	C	T	P	
				1	4	4	1	3	
							4		
Aim of school improvement	Reaching a dream vision	Reaching a dream vision	5	1	1	1	1	1	
	Improving Student Learning	Providing infrastructure for an environment conducive to students' learning	5	1	1	2	1		
		Developing teachers' pedagogical capacities	11	1	2	3	4	1	

Participants singled out a key aim for school improvement, that of fulfilling an overarching school vision at which all improvement efforts are directed. They expressed that the aim of all improvement efforts is to reach a dream vision of having a public school that is competitive with top schools in Lebanon. In order to reach this vision of a competitive public school, the participants focused on improving student learning in the improvement initiatives. According to S4, “all the principal’s improvements start by having a vision of public school. He wants to change the image of public school and lessen parents’ fears through providing their kids with good education and develop their trust in public schools.” The participants considered improving students learning to be at the core of the aims of any school improvement. They explained that student learning is improved through providing an environment conducive to students learning and through developing

teachers' capacities. According to the participants, building a school environment that is conducive to student learning and developing teacher's capacities improves students' learning and subsequently helps in reaching the school vision of being a "competitive" public school. In what follows, more elaboration will be presented on the aims of school improvement as perceived by the participants under the following titles: reaching a dream vision and improving students' learning.

Reaching a Dream Vision

A total of 5 participants, one from each of the categories; supervisors, coordinators, teachers, parents in addition to the principal mentioned that the aim of school improvement is to reach a dream vision. The principal explained that school improvement aims at developing the school from a poorly developed state to a more developed one as projected by the school vision. As expressed by the principal, "school improvement is change process of the status quo in the school for the purpose of reaching a predefined dream." On the same line, all the 5 participants in the individual interviews talked about reaching the dream vision as an aim of school improvement. They considered the dream vision to be the development of a public school that competes with other big schools and that changes the society's image of the underperforming public schools. As stated by T12, "especially since we are in a public school, we need to improve to change the society's perceptions of a public school." Similarly, C1 stated that, "we need improvement to prove to the society that the public school is capable of keeping up with all improvements."

Improving Students' Learning

The majority of the school leaders, and some of the teachers and parents mentioned that improving students learning is a fundamental aim of school improvement. Participants kept emphasizing that improving student learning is a key goal of school improvement while at the same time talking about the strategies to be followed to achieve this goal. Namely, developing the pedagogical capacity of teachers was perceived by the participants as a strategy conducive toward this goal. Similarly, respondents who emphasized student learning as a goal, highlighted the importance of acquiring the needed resources that establish an environment conducive to learning for those students. In what follows participants' responses pointing at these two strategies to improve student learning will be explained under two titles: providing infrastructure for an environment conducive to students' learning, and developing teachers' capacities to improve teaching & learning process.

Providing Infrastructure for an Environment Conducive to Students' Learning

Two coordinators in the individual interviews, the principal, one supervisor and one teacher from the focus group interviews mentioned that in order to improve students' learning as the core aim of school improvement, school improvement should include strategies that provide the infrastructure they consider necessary for an environment conducive for students' learning. According to them, improving students learning means developing the student holistically; educationally, psychologically, physiologically, socially etc. In order to achieve these objectives, they believed that an infrastructure rich in variety

of resources is needed to prepare an environment conducive to the intended holistic learning of the child.

As explained by S4:

School improvement in our school aimed as a first step to have a well-established school building with equipment and resources since before that students used to come with their blankets to school, windows were broken, no internal playground, no theater, outdoor corridors between classrooms [...]. The child's learning, physical and emotional safety were at risk.

All the five participants, 2 coordinators, supervisors, principal and teacher, specified that high quality infrastructure including technology and equipped school building are crucial for building an environment conducive to learning. As explained by C4, "development of building, technologies, materials, equipment, tools motivate student to learn and love what she/he is learning."

Developing Teachers' Pedagogical Capacities

During the individual interviews, the principal, two supervisors, three coordinators, and one parent mentioned that school improvement aims at improving students' learning through developing teachers' capacities. Four teachers mentioned this during three focus group interviews, where two teachers were from same focus group interview. According to these 11 participants, school improvement is not only about improving school buildings and providing infrastructure, but what is more important is building teachers' capacities to enhance students' learning. All 11 participants explained that building teachers' capacity

has a positive impact on student learning. According to S3, “the aim behind every improvement is a child, who needs to have his thinking, learning and personality developed and this can only be done through developing teachers and teachers’ performance.” As T4 explained, “school improvement is about improving teachers, and when we improve ourselves as teachers we will eventually improve our students’ learning and develop better generations.”

Two leaders and one teacher elaborated that developing teachers’ capacities includes providing professional development opportunities that help teachers refine their teaching methods which will positively impact student learning. Gaining the approval of every teacher during the focus group interview, T6 argued:

Although we have to work with the same outdated curriculum, but teaching methods can be changed through trainings as part of the improvement plans to deal with students in a way that improves them psychologically and educationally [...] Everything that serves the students’ interest, mainly, is considered to be school improvement.

C3 similarly argued that developing the capacities of the people who are working in the school including mainly teachers through continuous training, allows the teachers to keep up with the advanced teaching methods for the sake of their students.

She stated:

It is important to develop the people who are working in this building including teachers, so that they keep up with the new teaching methods for the sake of their

students, and subject them to continuous training and workshops. All this can be considered under the aims of school improvement.

Actions Taken by the Principal While Initiating School Improvement

Based on the data collected, initiating school improvement encompasses the principal taking a number of actions. These actions, according to the participants, include: developing need based plan, implementing organizational policies at the school, establishing additional communication channels, enhancing documentation, mapping the external environment to locate resources, engaging stakeholders in decision making, building trustful relations and enlarging support base to change through political tactics beyond the school level. More explanation on the nature of these actions and implications on the initiation of school improvement will follow. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' responses about the actions taken by the principal while initiating school improvement are presented in table 5.

Table 5

Frequency of Responses of the Participants about Principal's Actions during Initiation

Title	Theme	Code	Total frequency	Participants					Documents (Number of times the code appears in the documents)
				Pr	S	C	T	P	
Actions taken by the principal while	Developing a need based plan	Assessing the needs for improvement	10	1	3	1	5	4	

initiating school improvement	Developing decision making team	3	1	2				11
	Setting the Plan	6	1		1	4		
	Communicating the plan	6	1		3	2		
Setting the school organizational structure	Developing clear roles and responsibilities	7	1	4	2			1
	Formalizing the processes in the school	13	1	4	3	4	1	
Establishing additional communication channels	Establishing additional communication channels	11	1	3	1	5	1	
Enhancing documentation	Enhancing Documentation	2		1	1			
Mapping external environment to locate resources	Mapping external environment to locate resources	8	1	4	1		2	5
Engaging stakeholders in decision making	Engaging stakeholders in decision making	18	1	4	3	9	1	

Building trust with key stakeholders	With internal stakeholders	10	1	4	2	1	2
	With external stakeholders	4	1	1	1		1
Enlarging support base to initiating improvement through political tactics	Enlarging support base to initiating improvement through political tactics	7	1	2	1	1	2

Developing a Need Based Plan

All school leaders, principal, supervisors and coordinators, and most of the teachers mentioned that one important action taken by the principal to initiate change is developing a need based plan. As demonstrated by the responses of the participants, a need based plan is a plan for improvement that is developed based on identified needs for improvement. According to them, needs assessment is considered the first step in the process of developing a need based plan. Participants responses indicated that needs are best identified collectively through self-evaluation tools. They indicated that the process continues with developing a decision making team to examine the identified need and set up a corresponding improvement plan. After the team develops the plan, the latter is communicated to different stakeholders in the school. Further elaboration about the process of developing a need based plan, as an action taken to initiate change, will be presented

under the following titles: assessing the need for improvement, developing decision making team, setting the plan and communicating the plan.

Assessing the Need for Improvement

Most of the school leaders, 1 principal, 3 supervisors, 1 coordinator, and five teachers mentioned that assessing the needs for change is the first step towards developing the needs based plan of improvement when initiating school improvement. According to the participants, every improvement plan starts with assessing the needs to change. All 10 participants explained that assessing the needs for change is an action taken when initiating improvement that includes understanding the status quo by identifying strengths, weaknesses and gaps which will inform setting the improvement goals. As noted by the principal, “we evaluate the status quo at different levels, study strengths, weaknesses and risks, and collect data to base any decision for school improvement on data.” The principal added that the process of understanding the status quo happens through the tool of SWOT analysis whereby strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are identified and are all documented and archived for further reference. One coordinator (C2) illustrated, when talking about assessing the need of improvement as a primary step to developing an improvement plan during the initiation of change, that prior to the renovation of the school lab, the teachers assessed the current school’s situation, identified gaps and based on which they identified the need to have a laboratory.

The responses of two supervisors and three of the teachers showed their perception that needs assessment, as an action taken during the initiation of change, is a process of reflection and self-evaluation to one’s own practices and school practices. One supervisor

(S1) explained that needs assessment is a first step in the process of developing a plan for improvement. He identifies improvement needs based on which objectives and goals for improvement are set. S1 explained, “we reflect on our practices, identify strengths, weaknesses and set our needs for change. Objectives for improvement are then set and plan of improvement is developed.” On the same line, in one focus group interview T5, T6, and T10 agreed that needs assessment is reflecting on one’s own practices and engaging in self-evaluation of oneself and the school to identify needs for change.

According to T6:

We undergo a constructive self-criticism/reflection [...] we undergo self-reflection altogether as this helps us see our performance raise points of strengths and weaknesses and identify areas that need to be improved in our teaching practices and school practices in general.

Evidence from the school documents assured the use of self-evaluation tools when assessing the needs for improvement. A form for teacher’s self-evaluation, as per the school document, designed to solicit data from personal reflection was used and guided the identification of gaps to be addressed through school improvement. Each form consists of different domains with underlying criteria for evaluation, and can be used also by coordinators and supervisors for self-evaluation.

The principal added that identifying the needs of improvement is not sufficient alone to initiate improvement, rather the identified needs have to be prioritized first. According to the principal, it is not realistic to initiate simultaneous improvement initiatives

at the different school levels. Focusing on one level or domain in the school, that is of the most need to change, and subjecting it to further evaluation is more practical to identify specific needs for improvement. Needs that are most urgent will be addressed first in a need based plan for improvement, and other needs that are less urgent will be subsequently addressed.

As explained by the principal:

It is impossible to start a school improvement process at all levels at the same time [...]. I am involved with supervisors and coordinators in general evaluation for different domains. From this evaluation, we come out with data to know where are we with respect to every criteria of the domain we are evaluating. We then choose the domain that is found to have more weaknesses. This domain will be considered as a domain of highest need to change [...] we then go deeper in our self-evaluation and underneath the big domain that we choose, we identify specific needs to which we develop a plan.

Developing Decision Making Team

Three of the leaders, 2 supervisors and the principal, stated that developing a decision making team is central to the development of the improvement plan, an action necessary for the initiation of improvement initiative. All 3 participants explained that forming this team is essential before initiating any change, and every improvement initiative must be led by a decision making team. All three leaders agreed that the team must be representative of the different school staff. The principal explained that it is

essential to have representatives of the different stakeholders so that everyone will have his/her voice communicated and have a say in the decision making process of initiating school improvement. According to the principal, “for every improvement initiative, we firstly chose a team from teachers, coordinators, supervisors. Those will express their voice and suggestion and on behalf of other school members’ voice.” Evidence from a school document pointed out that a committee was formed as a decision making team for setting the general improvement plan team and is made up of the coordinators, supervisors, one teacher representative and one parents’ representatives alongside the principal.

Further, the principal and one of the supervisors explained that team members are chosen based on their relevance to the topic under improvement. Both, the supervisor and the principal agreed that not anyone can be placed in the group, but he/she has to be knowledgeable about the identified need for improvement in order to better contribute to the plan. According to them, this is the reason why for every initiative there has to be a separate team whose experience and knowledge are relevant to the nature of the improvement initiative.

As S1 stated:

There isn’t a fixed team of same members all the time that work on planning, but every idea is worked out by a group who are able and have the knowledge to work all together as a team on planning for it.

Setting the Plan

The principal, one coordinator and four teachers explained that after forming the decision making team for developing the improvement plan during the initiation of change, the next stage is to develop the improvement plan. The principal explained that by this stage, the needs of change have been already identified and prioritized, so goals are then identified for improvement. According to the principal, after goals are identified, the team will subsequently set the objectives based on which an action plan will be developed. As stated by the principal, “we, in the team, then develop general objectives, specific objectives and action plans that touch upon all objectives.”

All six participants agreed that for any initiative, the action plan includes different elements such as the objectives being addressed, the actions, the people responsible, resources needed, timeline etc. As stated by the principal every plan includes, “who is responsible, the timeline, financing, budget, logistics, financial needs and resources, trainings.” One coordinator (C2) gave an example of the action plan of renovating the school lab while talking about the components of the improvement plan that need to be considered when setting the plan.

She stated:

For our plan to develop the lab, we had our objectives set, ...we set for ourselves a one-year period to have the laboratory ready [...]. The financial aspect is very fundamental to renovate the lab, we need to find a source to finance the project.

Moreover, all four teachers agreed that it is essential to keep the vision in mind while developing improvement plan during the initiation of change, for developing an improvement plan should eventually serve the achievement of the vision though achieving its specific objectives. T10 explained, “we have a vision, for which we develop specific objectives that we work on achieving.” In the focus group interview, T6 supported by T5 stated, “the principal presents to us on a large screen during every meeting the vision and mission to remind us that every objective we set for improvement plan should meet this vision.”

Communicating the Plan

The principal, three coordinators and two teachers mentioned that after being developed by the decision making team, the plan is communicated to everyone in the school. All 6 participants agreed that the last step that an improvement plan takes, during initiation, is to be disseminated and be known to the school staff and every stakeholder. All three coordinators and two teachers stated that the plan is usually communicated in a large meeting whereby the principal presents thoroughly the plan to all the school members who were not part of the decision making team. As explained by C1, “a follow up and detailed meeting is held for us to explain all decisions and plans produced by the previous administrative meeting.” Similarly, T13 affirmed that “everything planned to be improved is communicated to us beforehand, and the plan is then shared with us in a large meeting.”

Setting the School Organizational Structure

According to the participants, initiating school improvement starts with a basic action of setting the school organizational structure. Setting the organizational structure includes, based on the participants' responses, assigning formal roles and responsibilities and rules pertaining to administrative and supervisory procedures. Hence, as per the participants, setting school organizational structure encompasses developing clear roles and responsibilities and formalizing the processes in the school. During the interview with the principal it became clear that at the time when he assumed his responsibility as the principal of the case school, both the clarity and the enacting of the existing school structure were missing. As such, when asked about initiating improvement, the principal enlisted this aspect as an integral part of the initiation process. According to the principal, "school improvement encompasses setting the organizational structure in the school, through developing clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities and monitoring and evaluating based on these identified roles and responsibilities." More elaboration about setting the school organizational structure as an action to initiate school improvement, will be presented under the following titles: developing clear roles and responsibilities and formalizing the processes in the school by enforcing clear rules and regulations.

Developing Clear Roles and Responsibilities

All four supervisors, the principal and two coordinators mentioned that developing clear roles and responsibilities, must be one of the first actions taken by the principal when initiating change. There was a consensus among most of the school leaders that developing clear roles was in itself an important change initiative and a preliminary step to the

initiation of all other changes in the school. Evidence in a school document showed a written description of the roles of each of teacher, coordinator and supervisor. These latter are also documented in the minutes of a meeting done with teachers showing that all roles were made clear to the staff.

Most of the leaders agreed that having clear roles that are fairly distributed, is essential for a successful initiation of change. They agreed that it organizes internal relationships, enhances cooperation and reduces conflicts as it limits role ambiguity and ensure fairness in the distribution of the responsibilities allocated to each role. As noted by the principal, “the description of roles created positive feelings among the members and made them feel that they are all doing their roles equally and fairly.” Similarly, S1 argued that “when everyone knows his limits and terms of reference and respects it, we can improve, and this is what we have. Everyone is aware of his/her work without messing up with the others work.” C2 explained that roles are fairly distributed over the school staff and are complementary to each other so that staff can accumulatively contribute to successful completion of tasks including those of the initiation of school improvement. She stated that, “new roles and responsibilities of every member complement each other for the success of change [...] all roles are well known and interconnected for the success of work.”

Formalizing the Processes in the School

The principal, all supervisors, most of the coordinators, some of the teachers and one parent mentioned that setting clear rules and regulations and enforcing them is another aspect of setting the school organizational structure when initiating change. They all agreed

that the enforcement of the internal rules and regulations is an important condition that helps in increasing commitment and discipline and reducing conflict and chaos in the school. As P2 described that enforcing rules was critical to the ability of the principal to initiate and engage in school improvement:

The principal is strictly enforcing the school rules. The school was a chaos, some teachers leave school during school hours to go home... one leaves because her daughter has delivered, another leaves to prepare lunch... other teachers make personal phone calls using the school's landline... The principal put limit to all this through enforcing rules otherwise the schools wouldn't have improved.

One teacher (T8) explained that enforcing school rules was a source of support to teachers during the period of initiating change as it organizes their work and clarifies expectations of their duties at school and when initiating change. She stated, "there is the internal order, we become used to it, and we feel that is helpful for us in our daily practices and helped us to change. It makes us more organized and disciplined."

One supervisor and one coordinator argued that the enforcement of the internal rules and regulations reduces the possibility of conflict between staff and principal during the initiation of change, because all behaviors will be controlled by the mandate of these internal rules and regulations.

As C3 explained:

The internal order supports change through following up on staff based on the rules and regulations. And if anyone objects to a certain issue, the principal would answer that this is according to the internal order and you can't ignore it.

S2 views came in alignment with that of C3 stating that, “the enforcement of the internal regulation and implementing it helps in achieving the improvement as it is used to settle disputes and objections; the principal says that this is what should be done as per the law.”

Other two coordinators and a supervisor explained that to ensure a proper enforcement of rules and regulations when implementing organizational policies during initiation, the principal has to make school rules clear, visible and well understood by everyone. As C1 explained, “the principal hangs the order in teacher's lounge and asks everybody to please read and take a copy. It is everyone's right and responsibility to know the order. He is very keen about this point.” Similarly, S4's view made on another individual interview was strongly aligned with C1.

She stated:

School improvement initiatives was supported by the principal through making everyone read and understand and be aware of the internal order of the school. So law enforcement helped us to achieve School Improvement [...] The first thing the principal did was bring a hard copy of the internal order, put it on board in-front of all of us and asked us to read and be well aware of his/her duties, roles and responsibilities. So we should apply the rules first.

Establishing Additional Communication Channels

The principal, three supervisors, one coordinator, five teachers and one parent mentioned that initiating change necessitates the establishment of additional communication channels. According to the principal's responses, while these channels are viewed as essential in order for the staff to communicate with the principal, parents, and among each other during the initiation of change, they need to encompass as many stakeholders as possible.

He explained:

Communication is the most important title for planning change [...]. We were able to have change leadership that is able to plan for change, this definitely needed good communication with the all members inside and outside the school, teachers, coordinators, janitors, buses, parents.

Parents, in their turn, confirmed during the individual interviews that the principal has expanded communication with them which, as they believed, allowed them to talk about change, raise complaints and participate in initiating the change.

As stated by P3:

Very high communication takes place between the principal and the parents. This helps us as parents to share with the principal any issue we would like to, problems and complaints and share our opinions in the changes that are taking place.

The responses of the participants revealed a number of communication channels that were additionally developed while initiating school improvement. These include: utilization of social media, conducting regular meetings, periodic reporting and direct communication channel through open door policy. To start with, two supervisors and one teacher explained that the additional communication channels include the utilization of social media. All three participant agreed that social media communication channels allowed for prompt communication during initiation of change and between large number of stakeholders which provided motivation and quick support to the staff when needed during the initiation of change. As stated by T13, “we are continuously motivated through the ongoing communication. The principal simply sends a Whatsapp message.” S4 also stated that “communication is facilitated through prompt channels like Whatsapp groups between admins and teachers, teachers and students, and admins and parents.” Similarly, S2 explained that, “taking the initiative to create a Whatsapp group with parents, where parents can quickly be informed about school issues, plans, etc. and even for parents to raise complaints. [...] has significantly helped us in our change to remote learning.”

Besides the use of social media, conducting regular meetings and allocating time for this on staff timetables is another additional communication channel that most participants mentioned it was in place and used during initiating improvement. According to the participants, conducting regular meetings support the initiation of change as it provided more room to share problems, issues and identify areas of improvement and improved relationships between stakeholders. As S2 stated, “ongoing and regular meetings take place between the principal, coordinators and supervisors of each cycle to assess what needs

improvement and discuss problems and solutions.” Likewise, S4 response confirmed stating that, “the principal also allocated an hour for meetings in the timetables of coordinators and teachers, which was not before.” This was also reported by T8 who explained:

We have continuous communication with parents. We, in the KGs for example, can meet with parents twice a week and discuss any problems, successes or areas that need improvement. Continuous communication is really conducive to success of change because this establishes rapport between us, parents and administration also.

Furthermore, periodic reporting about progress is another communication channel established when initiating improvement to keep the principal updated on the implementation of the action plans on daily basis. As stated by S3, “principal focused on reporting, coordinators need to regularly send reports about teachers’ performance, problems, students achievement, complaints, issues, areas for improvement etc.” Similarly, C3 stated, “we as coordinators need to submit reports at the end of every month. Each coordinator in his specialized subject.”

On another hand, the principal explained that he established a direct communication channel between himself and all the school staff through adopting an open-door policy during the initiation phase. As S2 stated, “students and teachers are never hesitant to walk in to the principal’s office at any time, as they know that there is someone there to listen.” Not only is the principal open to teachers and student but also to parents.

According to P3:

This humility of the principal makes him listens to everyone in a school where the previous principal used to sit in his office locking his door and making everyone wait to take meet him. As if he is someone! Parents were highly disrespected. However now, the door is always open welcoming anyone at any time.

Enhancing Documentation

Only two participants, one supervisor and one coordinator, mentioned that documentation is an action taken by the principal while initiating change. As per the two participants, all data related to planning and initiating change is documented. Evidence from school documents showed different types of data documented while initiating school improvement. This included the minutes of the meetings conducted throughout the initiation. The examined documents showed the title of change initiative, date and place of the meeting, people participating (depending on the topic of change) and decisions made. In addition to the minutes of the meeting, the reviewed documents also contain all offers, and exchanges with suppliers and external parties to locate resources for the change plan. Photos of meetings, such as those with the EU delegation to finance the improvement plans are also documented.

Two participants, C1 and S4, explained that documentation enables every staff member, whether present in a meeting or not, to be aware of any decisions made concerning the initiation of improvement initiatives.

C1 explained:

With respect to the principal, he stated that everything must be documented. If he wants to conduct a meeting, the agenda and decisions of the meeting will be typed, documented and shared with us; whether we took part in the meeting or not.

Mapping External Environment to Locate Resources

The principal, four supervisors, one coordinator and two parents mentioned that one important action taken by the principal when initiating improvement is locating resources through mapping external environment. While most of the leaders and parents stated this, none of the teachers referred to locating resources for the improvement plan during initiation. The school leaders explained that when initiating improvement, prominent figures in the local community, municipalities, politicians, local and international NGOs are identified to locate resources and financial support needed for the implementation of the plan at a later stage. According to S1, “the established relationships with external community facilitate and made the school accessible to the community and gets what it needs from resources and support.” C2 similarly explained that, “the good relations with NGOs helped to provide support mainly resources for equipment purchase, such as LCDs that were provided by an NGO.” As was revealed per the documented welcome speech delivered by the principal to the Italian Governor of Toscana, the principal has established connections with the Italian Cooperative Council and another Italian NGO to equip classrooms with student furniture. The responses of the principal showed that he capitalized on every opportunity to connect with national and international bodies to serve the initiation of improvements. The Syrian Refugee crisis made the school open to local and international NGOs with whom the principal has strengthened his connections to locate

resources that support the plan of his change initiatives. In fact, the principal had extensively explained:

Since my entry to this school, I was keen to have good communication with all political parties, NGOs, clubs, associations in the village and outside it and with ministries. Thanks to the minister of works, we were able to receive grant one million 600 hundred thousand dollars to renovate the school buildings and provide equipment [...]. We had a large communication network, what helped me a lot was that in my first year here at school I got the chance to be with INEE (global network for education in crisis). At that time in 2010, there was the Syrian refugee crisis in our public schools. Thanks to this crisis I had a large communication network and connections with different international organizations [...]. These connections enabled us to receive a large array of equipment and resources. Thanks to this Italian NGO we received our first funding worth 90 thousand dollars. The school became equipped with computers, programmes, furniture [...] our relation with this Italian organization opened the door for us to connect with European commission. The EU visited our school with 6 EU countries ambassadors whereby the school received more funding [...]. I consider this large network of communication as the main pillar of change in our school.

On the other hand, parents believed that they were engaged in the initiation process mainly in providing resources. One parent explained that they, as outsiders, can significantly map the external environment to locate resources needed for the improvement plans. According to P2, “the principal shares with us written improvement plans and goals

he has [...] We are mostly engaged in providing resources for plans that he shares with us through overseeing budget and finding resources and allocating the money.”

Engaging Stakeholders

According to the participants, engaging stakeholders in the decision making when initiating change is another important action in the process that is typically taken by the principal. As explained by the participants, stakeholders’ were engaged in the decision making process at different stages during the initiation of change. However, analysis of their responses revealed that while the intent of the principal is to practice participative decision making, this participation is mostly consultative where teachers and parents are invited to give input on strategic plans already developed by the principal, or develop action plans to implement the strategic vision.

The principal, one coordinator, one supervisor and four teachers mentioned that they are engaged in a participative decision making when initiating school improvement. They, alongside the principal, one coordinator and one supervisor, explained that the principal doesn’t take any decision, regardless of how simple it is, without the engagement of teachers, supervisors and coordinators. Teachers reported that their participation in decision making start from the very early stages of developing a plan for initiating improvement by getting notified about the plan and being invited to discuss it. One teacher (T3) explained that their participation extends from the early discussions about needs assessment for change to the development of a full plan of school improvement. Two other teachers in the same group interview, showed agreement with what T3 expressed. They also agreed that their participation includes setting action plans for the strategic vision

brought forth by the principal. As explained by T3, “the plan is not about points the principal writes and imposes on us. We are involved. We write down objectives, action plans and the final plan is shared by the principal with everyone.” In his turn, the principal explained what he considered as stakeholders’ participation in the initiation of school improvement that includes soliciting their input on every step of the initiation process. He stated:

To design the plan for improvement and put the general objectives, to agree on objective or domain for improvement, I used to send surveys for each member or conduct meetings so that everyone participates in setting the priority of change [...] This is one way to involve members in the decision making when initiating change; in prioritizing the objectives or choosing the plan.

Additionally, the principal, one supervisor and one teacher agreed that staff members’ participation in the initiation process is taking place because teachers are always invited to put action plans by themselves and to share it with everyone for discussion. S4 assured that the principal encourages everyone to come up with change initiatives and develop a proposal for an action plan to be discussed with him and other members in the school, showing all support to help achieve their plan. In his turn, the principal explained that:

There is chance for any member to develop a full [action] plan with objectives, resources, what is needed to achieve the objectives of the [strategic] plan, who is responsible to supervise it, costs, timeline etc. and then we chose collectively which plan to take.

On the other hand, one teacher (T2) illustrated, when she was talking about teachers' engagement in developing improvement plans, that the principal supported them in the science department to come up with a short term initiative for renovating the school lab. She explained that the science coordinator and teachers brought the initiative of renovating school lab, prepared an action plan and shared it with the principal. She noted:

We, in the science department, sat together with the coordinator and prepared plan to renovate the school's laboratory and then we present it to the principal. We set the objectives, the time (we planned to renovate it in 3 months), the equipment needed.

Despite the agreement to label the approach of the principal as participative, and to highlight the opportunities offered to engage in the initiation process, three supervisors, two coordinators, five teachers and one parent described their engagement in decision making when initiating improvement as following a consultative decision making approach. While only five teachers explicitly mentioned this approach, they gained the support of the all other teachers present with them in the focus group interview, making the majority of the teachers agree on the use of this approach as a strategy for participation in decision making. These teachers and the 5 leaders explained that teachers, leaders and parents' role in initiation of improvement was limited to discussing an already developed strategic plan by the principal. S3 argued that "the principal is the one who introduces the plan for change and that we as supervisors and also coordinators discuss it, amend it and accept it positively." They all agreed that in most cases the principal prepares the plan during the initiation of improvement, actions to be taken and general objectives and shares them with

the staff in a large meeting or through coordinators of each subject. The school members described that they read the plan, discuss it, and suggest minor modifications to the plan. As C3 explained:

The principal had a plan already developed for creating new positions for coordinators, and he presents the plan to us. We agreed on the need of having coordinators and this was followed by negotiating the plan, discussing it, and amending it. The plan was communicated to everyone on this general meeting. Every plan is negotiated this way, not only that of coordinators.

Similarly, one teacher and one parent explained that they just give their opinion on the plan after it is prepared by the principal during the initiation of change. T11 explained, “the principal came up with all initiatives like the plan of coordinators, he proposes them to us, we discuss them, and give our opinion.” P1 agreed and stated that, “the principal shares with us written improvement plans and goals he has, we discuss and give our opinion.” Teachers seem all in agreement that the scope of their engagement is limited to suggesting minor modifications and that the assemblies are opportunities for the principal to secure their consent rather than ensure their full participation since the strategic decision is already set.

Building Trust with Key Stakeholders

Most of the leaders and parents mentioned that building trustful relations is an important action taken by the principal during the initiation of change. They distinguished between building internal trustful relations and external trustful relations. Internal trust is

built with the school staff, and external trust is built with the community and governing bodies. There was a consensus among the leaders and parents that both internal and external trust acted as a leverage to push forward with the initiation of the change. Eight leaders explained that internal trust is built through the principal being transparent about data and decisions, being influential, and having the knowledge and expertise to change. With respect to external trust, two leaders and one parent pointed out that it mainly helped the school in securing resources needed to initiate changes. More elaboration about building trustful relations during initiation of change with internal stakeholders on one hand, and external stakeholders, on the other hand, is presented hereafter.

Building Trust with Internal Stakeholders

Most of the leaders, the principal, all 4 supervisors and 3 out of 4 coordinators, mentioned that the principal was committed to building trustful relationships with the staff when initiating change. According to them, principal succeeded in building trustful relations with stakeholders inside the school through being transparent and having knowledge and expert power.

With respect to transparency, one supervisor and 2 parents mentioned that the principal builds trust through his ability to demonstrate being transparent. One supervisor (S2) explained that the internal trust is built when the principal is clear about processes, decisions and data in the school, including those pertaining to the initiation of any improvement initiative. According to S2, “trust is established through having everything in front of us, nothing is hidden or happening in secret, so why can’t we trust?” Along the same line, P3 explained that the principal’s continuous communication demonstrated his

intent to be transparent with everyone and leaves no room for questioning hidden intents or information.

Further, four supervisors, two coordinators, principal, one teacher and one parent mentioned that the principal builds trustful relations when initiating change through his knowledge and expert power. One teacher (T11) explicated that, “we trust him to the maximum, he has knowledge and skills no one can mess up with this.” The principal also explained, in his turn, the importance of principal’s expertise and knowledge, especially about the improvement initiative, in building trust in the principal when initiating improvement. He explained that, “trust is the foundation when planning for any change. It is built by having the potential, capabilities, abilities and knowledge for change to occur.” Similarly, there is a consensus among the 8 participants that the expertise, knowledge, competencies and charisma of the principal establish staff’s trust to the principal, and influence the staff to act like the principal and follow his lead to change.

S4 explained:

The trust was established through seeing this principal working from bottom of his heart from all of what he has from potential, capacities, energy, time, sacrifice from his personal life, and nerves! This all builds trust. [...]. He presents a model which encourages all of us to work like him and be like him! he inspires us and allow us to work with all our potential to support him and the school improvement.

One coordinator (C3) explained that since the principal has the expertise and influence, staff trust that every decision taken by the principal when initiating change will

definitely be for the best sake of the school, staff and students. She clarified, “in most cases we trust that he is right and that’s why we change our opinion about change. He has the ability to influence us in a positive way.”

Building Trust with External Stakeholders

The principal, one coordinator, one supervisor and one parent mentioned that building trust with stakeholders that are outside the school is an essential action taken by the principal when initiating change. One parent (P2) explained that external parties from political and social figures trusted the principal and supported him in initiating his improvement plans. She stated, “everyone does trust him! Hadn’t they trusted him, they wouldn’t have supported him.”

Both leaders, one coordinator and one supervisor, agreed that building trustful relations with external stakeholders during the initiation of change is important to provide resources for the plan of improvement. The echo of the school success makes people outside the school trust the principal and trust his decisions for change, which makes them more willing to provide support for improvement plans. Accordingly, C2 explained that:

The moment the principal calls people in the local community to ask for resources and material needed, people were never hesitant to say Yes. They are confident that what they give to the principal will be put to serve the school.

Also P2 explicitly talked about how external trust supported the initiation of school improvement projects through having influential figures showing willingness to provide any sort of help the school needs when initiating its improvement plans. He stated, “a

number of ministers and prominent figures visited the school and were amazed by the work and were ready to provide any help the principal asks for.” Further, as explained by one teacher, the trust of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in the principal also supported him in the provision of resources for initiating the changes. As T5 reassured, “the principal was trusted by the ministry which made him receive the necessary support to any changes.”

Enlarging Support base to Initiating Improvement through Political Tactics

The principal, 3 leaders, one teacher and 2 parents mentioned that the principal played macro-politics in the form of developing connections with MEHE (Ministry of Education and Higher Education) when initiating change in order to gain broad base support for the change intends on initiating. As stated by one of the parents P1, “what also helps is the support of the ministry. He is very well known down (i.e. in the ministry).”

The principal explained that, improvement initiatives, in a public school, are constrained as they are governed by the mandates of the public school policies which sometimes could hinder the initiation of improvement. The school has adopted changes which are sometimes not in compliance with the public school policies. But, the principal argued that his good connections with the governing bodies made the latter overlook any violation and left him a space of freedom to take exceptional decisions. Talking about how the political tactics he used and the special connections he established with key stakeholders at the Ministry enlarged the support base for the initiation of improvement projects, the principal illustrated about the improvement plans related to English language.

He stated:

We don't fully abide by the official English books, we spend from the school's budget to provide facilities to the school which is against the law, we take initiatives that are not always permitted by law. But since the ministry trusts and sees our achievements, they overlook many things, even the inspector doesn't comment or complain anymore.

Anticipated Challenges

According to the participants, initiation of school improvement can be hindered by a number of challenges spanning over the individual level, to the organizational level and to the external socio-political environment. At the individual level, the majority of the participants agreed that teachers constitute a potential source of resistance to change, mainly the seniors of them. The latter showed negative attitudes to change as they often lack the skills and knowledge needed to trigger or implement the change, underestimate the principal's ability to change and show indifference to actively engage with change initiatives as they approach the retirement age. Besides the individual level, existing organizational arrangements can be another potential source of challenge to the initiation of school improvement, as communicated by the participants. While time is an important organizational factor mentioned by many participants, schools' leaders and teachers manage different tasks leaving limited time to initiate school improvement plans. Added to that, public school law and state funding to public schools are other organizational aspects that can restrict change initiation.

Moving beyond the internal individual and organizational levels, it was explained by some of the participants that external interferences of prominent social and political figures can potentially hinder the principal's attempts in initiating changes. More elaboration of the challenges faced during the initiation of change is presented under the following titles: teachers' related challenges, organizational challenges, and socio-political pressures from the external environment. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' responses in both individual and focus group interviews about the challenges faced during the initiation of school improvement are presented as follows in table 6.

Table 6

Frequency of Responses of the Participants about Challenges faced during Initiation

Title	Theme	Code	Total frequency	Participants					Documents (Number of times the code appears in the documents)
				Pr	S	C	T	P	
				1	4	4	14	3	
Anticipated challenges	Teachers related challenges	Engaging senior teachers in the improvement initiatives	15	1	4	3	5	2	2
		lacking skills needed to implement the change	3			1	2		
		Teachers turnover	1	1					

Organizational challenges	Time constraints	7	1	3	3		
	Lack of funding	4		1	1	2	
	Bureaucratic limitations	3	1	1			1
Socio-Political pressures from external environment	Socio-Political pressures from external environment	7	1	2	1	1	2

Teachers' Related Challenges

The majority of the participants agreed that teachers' related challenges were the most prevalent and significant challenges faced during the initiation of change. The responses of most of the leaders and some of the teachers demonstrated their belief that teachers can significantly challenge the initiation of change when they perceive themselves as surpassing the principal in seniority, lack the expertise and knowledge to initiate change, resist the initiation of change and have a mismatching vision with that of the principal/school.

Engagement of Senior Teachers

Two supervisors and two parents mentioned that one of the challenges faced during the initiation of change at the school stems from senior teachers underestimating the principal's ability to succeed in initiating improvement due to the imbalance in the seniority

level between the principal and teachers. They explained that the fact the principal was a former student of some of the teachers and supervisors at the school, led all supervisors and senior teachers to treat him as if he is still their former student. Their actions were based on their belief that they surpass him in knowledge and experience, especially the one they accumulated over the years in this same school. S2 explained that one of the first challenges they faced at school upon the arrival of the principal was that he was their student, and didn't accept that he will turn out to be their supervisor.

She explained:

The principal is much younger compared to us, the moment he was assigned, I told him you will have a tough job to succeed since he was a student in this school and he can't come now and make a boss on us.

One parent argued that in addition to having a young principal, the school was in crisis when the principal was assigned which made everybody think that the principal's failure is inevitable. He (P2) explained, "the principal was challenged because he was young and everyone expected him to fail, he was assigned as a principal in a school that was about to collapse."

Most of the leaders and five of the teachers mentioned that resistance to change, mainly the resistance of senior teachers, is a major challenge facing the initiation of change at the school. As reviewed in the school data, 47% of the school teachers are older than 50 years with more than 30 years of experience which makes resistance more common. The principal noted that senior teachers often refuse any change initiated by the principal to the

teaching methods. He explained that because these teachers are habituated to old teaching methods, they face difficulties and feel insecure to change their accustomed practices.

He argued:

We have senior and old teachers who couldn't go along with the change process I have developed such as keeping up with technological advancement [...], they were satisfied with what they have and the experience they have gained, they didn't accept easily the use of technology.

On the other hand, the principal, one supervisor and one coordinator explained while talking about the teacher resistance, that senior teachers don't usually see the worth of initiating any change while clinging to their old practices. They think their practices have been working very good for so many years, and it won't make a difference to change being close to retirement. As explained by S3, "many teachers thought that we are about to retire why should we work on computer...we've been working in the same good way for years." C1 similarly clarified that, "teachers' attitude during change will be like: I still have one year and I retire, so why should I change."

Lacking Skills Needed to Implement the Change

Two teachers and one coordinator mentioned that teachers' lack of skills in the areas targeted by the initiated improvement is another teacher related challenge facing the initiation of improvement. They explained that the lack of knowledge and experience in the subject of improvement, makes the underlying tasks of the improvement initiative hard on teachers to learn and cope with. All the three participants elaborated on this challenge

referring to the same improvement initiative which is the use of technology in instruction as an example. They highlighted that teachers' lack of skills in using computers was a challenge to the initiation of this initiative, for it was hard on teachers to develop computer skills quickly and in a short period of time. As stated by C4, "I am one of these teachers who doesn't have any background in technology. So I had to learn computer skills very fast to cope with the school changes quickly and this was a challenge for me." T9 reassured, "integrating technology in class was a challenge to some of us since not all of us are well trained to use computer and technology." Evidence from the school document entitled 'the challenges facing the introduction of new teaching strategies', also showed that teachers considered the new teaching strategies as challenging for they require more time and effort from their side to understand them.

Teachers Turnover

Despite the fact that only the principal mentioned this challenge, he emphasized on how significant it is during the individual interview. Given that 47% of staff started to retire already, this put the principal under the challenge of recruiting new teachers at the time when he was initiating change. He explained that having new teachers on board during change initiation is an extra burden and challenge initiating change. This is because, as he explained, recruiting new teachers brings with it the challenge of making new teachers believing and committing to the school vision and accepting to implement change plans in a manner that leads to reach the school vision. The principal added that when new teachers are not committed to change and improvement, they constitute a hindrance to the initiation process of any improvement initiative. Moreover, the principal explained that working with

novice teachers is a challenge as it requires him to provide the necessary time, support and training for them to internalize the vision and commit to it, which is in itself an extra burden to change.

As he explicated:

A number of tenured teachers have retired and continue to retire a couple of years from now. These teachers have gone through a lot to accept the change and played a major role in the school improvement. Getting new teachers on board is a challenge since these need a lot of work, time and training to understand our school strategy. Had they not been trained they shall play a negative role in achieving school's mission and vision.

Organizational Challenges

Besides teacher related challenges, challenges related to the school organization, and in particular the governance structure of public schools prevail and hinder the initiation of school improvement. Based on the participants' input about organizational challenges, time constraints challenge schools to manage what they consider to be excessive tasks associated with school improvement. Other organizational challenges relate to the organizational structure of public schools in particular. Public schools are organized under a centralized governance of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. This makes public schools, according to the participants, constrained by many of the policies mandated by the Ministry limiting their discretion to making decisions especially those related to the limitations on public financing of school improvement. More elaboration on the nature of

these organizational challenges that hinder the initiation of school improvement will be presented under the following titles: time constrains, lack of state funding, and bureaucratic limitations.

Time Constraints

Most of the leaders including the principal mentioned that time constraint is a major organizational challenge that hinder attempts to initiate change. They explained that school personnel are overwhelmed with many formal responsibilities that span over a multitude of managerial and instructional tasks. According to them, there are countless issues that congest the timetables of principal, supervisors, coordinators and teachers.

As explained by S2:

We are always pressured with time, we always have activities, things to follow up, evaluate, changes etc... This puts us at pressure of finishing what is required, following up on students, communicating with parents, raising awareness and have more meetings.

According to the principal, the many formal responsibilities and time constraints that result make it hard on school stakeholders to assume additional responsibilities and tasks that often come with engaging in school improvement. As explained by the principal:

Time is always limited to us. We have many things going at the same time. As a principal I need to keep an eye on the teaching and students' achievement, on administrative issues which are many especially in a public school we have to refer

on every single thing... that's all on one hand and our change projects on another hand. We indeed have a lot to do and we're always short of time.

The coordinators explained that initiating school improvement carries with it many additional tasks and responsibilities that are expected to be squeezed into the same schedule of school teachers and staff adding up to the time constraints and resulting in challenging the initiation of change. One coordinator explained that initiating improvement requires time for abundant meetings, self-reflection, connection with people inside and outside the school, something that is often in short supply.

As C1 stated:

The school is large and every one of us as coordinators, is also a teacher. I teach 2 grade 9 sections. So between my duties inside the class, and coordination, I don't find time to meet with teachers or with other coordinators [...] We have a very pressured timetable, so we don't have time to convene and share our ideas. Large meetings that need a big number of teachers to discuss a shared subject like those dedicated for improvement are hard to find time for.

One coordinator explained that another challenge to initiating change results from the time consuming task of trying to convince others to buy into the idea of change. As argued by C3:

Of course we are pressured and the lack of collaboration of some members puts more pressure to sit altogether and talk about the change and develop a plan in a

short time. The negligence of some members and taking time to be convinced takes a lot of time to move on with the improvement [initiation] plans.

Lack of Funding

One coordinator, two parents and one teacher mentioned that lack of funding is another organizational challenge facing the initiation of school improvement. The main governing body and source of funding of a public school is the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. However, they all complained that the ministry has reduced its public schools budget due to the financial situation of the country which resulted in shortage of state funding at the level of every public school. Accordingly, the two parents, the coordinator and the teacher clarified that the school suffered from lack of funds available to support the initiation of its improvement initiatives which impeded the initiation of some plans and ceased the initiation of others. C4 illustrated that lack of state funding impeded the initiation of improvement of the new school building. She stated, “there were financial challenges, the principal was building new building and you know that he needs money. The ministry has shortened its payment for the public schools and couldn’t help at all in funding for the new building.” Similarly, one parent and one teacher explained that state funding allocated for this public school wasn’t sufficient to initiate all improvement initiatives the school has planned to undergoes. P3 mentioned that, “we came up with a number of change initiatives and we had a lot of plans but what hindered us was lack of financial resources and funding that should be allocated to the parents’ councils from the state.” On the same line, T14 explained: “had the ministry been able to provide more

resources and financial support, we would have been able to achieve even more improvement.”

Bureaucratic Limitations

The principal, one supervisor and one parent mentioned that initiation of improvement is sometimes hindered by the organizational challenge of bureaucratic limitations. As the three of them explained, a public school is governed by the mandates of an internal policy which individual schools can't override. One parent (P3) explained that as mandated, internal policies often hinder the successful initiation of improvement. P3 explained that, “knowing that it is a public school we have a lot of ideas but not sure to what extent these ideas can always be implemented in a way that doesn't violate the law of public schools.” All three explained that this same policy controls the functioning of public schools, and controls initiatives for improvement. As explained by S4, “the principal had many plans in mind but couldn't apply all knowing we are in a public school and limited with laws.” The principal in his turn explained that a number of ideas for change were generated but not all ideas were initiated and had their plan developed as they were stopped by the constraints of existing policies. According to the principal's responses, the abundance of policies constraining the school ability to initiate improvement have resulted in principal deciding to ignore compliance with policy in order to initiate change. However, breaking the policy didn't always remove its constraints, and the initiation of change often remained impeded. As explained by the principals:

We don't fully abide by the official books, we spend from the school's budget to provide facilities to the school which is against the law, we take initiatives that are

not always permitted by law. This works sometimes, but doesn't work in other time this is because the law stops us.

Socio-Political Pressures from External Environment

While many participants touched upon this challenge but they were hesitant and reserved to talk about, only four leaders, one teacher and two parents explicitly mentioned the pressure from social and political bodies as a factor that often challenged the initiation of change. All 7 participants explained that the principal is facing a lot of pressure from members of the community. They explained that, while the perceived success of his improvement initiatives in the community increased, he became a prominent figure in the village and the vicinity. As a result, they believed that his success at the school has resulted in him gaining a good reputation, and have increased his popularity in the community, which triggered a sense of competition towards him from other prominent influential figures, including those connected to political parties. One supervisor explained, that in addition to the principal becoming more prominent and influential, social and political bodies have particular interests and try to manipulate the functioning of the public school to fulfill these interests. According to this supervisor, given the fact that the school is open to its local community, subjects it to the different needs, interests and views of the people in the village, and the social and political bodies and hinder the initiation of change. S1 explained:

We faced many challenges on different levels; from social aspect, we are in a village and there are disparities and diversities that school needs to cater for in the village, some are supportive to the principal others are not. Some feel the principal

is achieving and progressing and feel happy, others feel bad as the principal is becoming more prominent, not to mention the interference of political parties who try to influence the principal's work... People want the good reputation for themselves.

The principal and one coordinator explained that these political and social bodies hinder the initiation of improvement plans through controlling the provision and allocation of resources from the external environment. One coordinator explained that the reluctance of some key members of the community to offer the support needed for initiating change affected the completion of the new school building, which was the first biggest improvement plan of the school. Participants further explained that this reluctance was often politically motivated.

C4 explained:

The principal was building new building and you know that he needs money. He can't afford this alone [...]. At the same time, there were people in the area who were not supportive to his project of the new building and try to diminish the financial resources. Political parties also interfere, some important figures etc.”

One parent and one teacher mentioned another source of competition from the social environment, that of the principals of the nearby private school, which adds to the social pressures and hinder the initiation of change. They explained that principals of the nearby private school felt that this public school was competing with them as its good

reputation of student achievement and students' enrollment spread around the area. As P1 explained:

He was faced with challenges like every person who is successful and active. People tend to put obstacles in the path of a successful person. He was greatly challenged by the principals of nearby public schools accusing him of closing the private schools.

Strategies to Mitigate Anticipated Challenges

Based on the results of the study, a number of internal and external challenges to the school system can affect the initiation of change. In order to mitigate these challenges, participants elaborated on a number of strategies that were followed to address what significantly challenged the initiation of change in the school, internally and externally. More elaboration about these two main strategies is presented under the following titles: alleviating teachers' resistance and protecting the school from external interference. The themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' responses in both individual and focus group interviews about the strategies followed to mitigate the challenges faced during initiation of school improvement are presented in table 7.

Table 7

Frequency of Responses of the Research Participants about the Strategies Followed to Mitigate the Challenges

Title	Theme	Code	Total frequency	Participants					Documents (Number of times the code appears in the documents)
				Pr	S	C	T	P	
				1	4	4	14	3	
Strategies to mitigate anticipated challenges	Alleviating Resistance	Enhancing collaboration	13		4	1	8		2
		Empowerment through recognition	11	1	4	2	3	1	
		Raising awareness of the need of improvement	3	1	1	1			
		Exercising pressure and support on internal stakeholders	10		4	3		3	
	Reallocation of formal positions	6	1		1	4		3	
	Modeling the change	3	1	1			1		
	Protecting the school from external interference	Protecting the school from external interference	1	1					

Alleviating Teachers Resistance

Teachers resistance was found to be a major challenge during the initiation of change. Participants responses pointed out that, based on their belief, people tend to reject

change the moment the idea is introduced. In the aim of alleviating resistance, participants explained that it is essential to follow strategies that work on: developing staff's understanding of the task associated with change through collaboration and exchange of learning; developing staff familiarity with the change behaviors through modelling the change behavior; raising awareness of the need of change; recognizing teacher's contribution to encourage others to change; rearranging positions of resisting members; and forcing change given that all the needed support is provided. More elaboration of the strategies is presented under the following titles: collaboration, empowerment through recognition and giving new roles, combining pressure and support on internal stakeholders, reallocation of formal positions, modeling the change, and raising awareness of the need of change.

Enhancing Collaboration

Eight teachers, four supervisors and one coordinator mentioned that enhancing collaboration is a strategy that can reduce resistance associated with initiating a change. Working collaboratively as a team of principal, coordinators, supervisors, and teachers makes the task of change seem less of a burden, as per the participants. According to these teachers and leaders, collaboration is an important strategy because it enables teachers to learn from each other about the new tasks brought by the change, provide technical assistance and support each other to understand the initiated change. As S1 explained: “we think that we work as a team [...] we all work together as a whole group to help each other understand the change and make a school change succeed so that we all succeed.”

The responses of the eight teachers and 5 leaders show that collaboration, as a strategy, supports mainly senior teachers in adoption of new tasks associated with the change initiated. Based on the teachers' accounts of the school improvement initiative of introducing LCDs, technical difficulties of not knowing how to use the LCD was the main reason behind the refusal of mainly senior teachers to use it. However, having technology-literate teachers working collaboratively with teachers who are less competent with technology to provide technical assistance helped in making senior teachers accept the use of LCD.

As stated by C1:

One teacher wants to work on LCD but lacks the needed skills; she still doesn't know how. So I go to her classroom when she wants to use the LCD and computer, prepare the LCD, provide her with all technical assistance, so that she can deliver her lesson. [...] So this kind of cooperation between us encourages every teacher to change.

Talking about the same change initiative, T5 in agreement with all 8 teachers explained that collaboration allows for a kind of training on the task of change delivered from teachers to teachers. She stated: "we trained each other, a group of 4-5 teachers sat with each other in the teacher's lounge and learn on the computer together."

Empowerment through Recognition

The responses of most of the leaders, three teachers and one parent demonstrated their belief that teachers' empowerment reduces resistance to change, especially in its early

stages. They believed that empowerment, as a strategy to reduce resistance, happens through recognition of the efforts exerted by teachers when initiating. All of them agreed that they feel empowered when every small initiative of improvement made by teachers was recognized by the principal and praised as contributing to the improvement plan in front of all the school community.

As explained by S3:

Every member who achieved anything any initiative was announced to everybody, recognized and praised in front of everyone in the school; [...] Principal doesn't waste any achievement, any initiative, all is being announced to everybody and recognized. He gives the credits to anyone as much as he deserves.

The principal in addition to the majority of the leaders and some teachers perceived giving recognition an effective strategy to reduce resistance. They all agreed that it makes staff members develop feelings of self-worth that they have done something of high importance which push them to go the extra mile to change and reduce their resistance. Recognition, as also shown in the principal's responses, is considered effective when it targets particularly the resisting senior teachers. He explained that recognition conveys to senior teachers the message that their knowledge and experience are highly needed to initiate improvement.

As explained by the principal:

I let everyone recognize the importance of his position and what he is doing. I make them feel that their presence and role is highly important to the school [...] I put

some resisting members in the forefront and recognize every single thing they do regardless of how silly it is. I make them feel that what they are doing is highly important to the improvement plans and because of them we can improve.

Additionally, it was argued by the principal, one coordinator and one teacher that recognizing teachers' work in front of everyone in the school, encouraged everyone to imitate and initiate change themselves. As explained by T2: "the principal encourages every initiative, whatever idea we present he encourages us to develop it more and shares it with the whole group so that everyone would see an example of how we as teachers can make improvement."

Raising Awareness of the Need of Improvement

Only three of the leaders, the principal, one coordinator and one supervisor mentioned that raising awareness of the need to improve is a strategy to reduce resistance to initiating improvement. They argued that having the staff understand the urgent need for the improvement initiative is a first stepping stone towards accepting the improvement with minimal resistance. As argued by the principal, "before initiating any change, I worked hard on promoting the acceptance of change and making everyone understand the need of this change. It was my first strategy and a foundation stone to succeed on the process of change."

The two leaders and the principal argued that by understanding the relevance and necessity of improvement for the school as a whole as well as for their own benefit, teachers are more likely to acknowledge the need for this improvement. S3 illustrated the

importance of raising awareness of the need of having coordinators as a strategy to reduce resistance. She stated that, it is critical that everyone become aware that “coordinators improve teachers’ teaching and induces them to give more. The coordinator will be a resource for teacher to help and support when needed.”

In more general terms, C3 similarly stated that being aware of the need of change will not only reduce resistance during the initiation of improvement, but can help solve emerging challenges throughout the process. She expressed: “when we are interested and convinced to change, and having this conviction that we need this change shared among the team, any challenges can be addressed”.

Exercising Pressure and Support on Internal Stakeholders

Most of the leaders and all the parents have mentioned that one of the strategies to support the initiation of change and alleviate teachers’ resistance consists of the principal using combined pressure and support on internal stakeholders to bring them on board while initiating change. All supervisors, coordinators and the parents talked about the pressure exerted by the principal; they stated that they could feel it even though they didn’t mention any explicit example of pressure. However, the principal illustrated how he manipulated his teachers and exerted pressure on them when talking about the strategies he believed should be used to alleviate their resistance.

He stated:

I also do tricks on teachers such as asking them to write reports (evaluation reports for their use of LCD). At the beginning when we first introduced LCD

and trained teachers, in order to encourage teachers to use LCD and learn, I told them that you will write report about what you learned and how you improved and tell them the MEHE has asked us to do so. Reports need to be typed and sent by mail. Such tricks will make teachers take things seriously and commit.

There is a consensus among the coordinators, supervisors and the principal that for this strategy to be successful to overcome the challenge of teachers' resistance the principal needs to exert pressure to initiate change while providing simultaneously the needed support to the staff. While none of the teachers have explicitly mentioned this combination of pressure and support as a strategy of the principal, their responses demonstrated that they are aware of the different strategies used by the principal including the support he provided while he was pushing for initiating change at the school. Different forms of support provided for teachers were mentioned by the participants including the flexibility towards enforcing the laws, provision of training, openness to everyone and resilience of the principal.

To start with flexibility towards enforcing the laws, there was a consensus among the four supervisors, 2 coordinators and all the parents that the principal is firm in enforcing the law and decisions taken yet shows significant responsiveness to his context and flexibility in approaching its challenges. This flexibility was perceived by his teachers as a form of support despite his constant attempts at applying the law as the basis of school decisions. They all seemed to accept the interplay between pressure and support in enforcing the law and considered them necessary to succeed in alleviating teachers' resistance. S1 response represented this agreement, she stated that, "if there is flexibility

only, you lose things especially at the time of change. No let there be firmness and at the same time in a flexible way. [...] the rules are applied but not as a ruler.”

Talking about the same strategy of combining pressure and support to reduce resistance and support the initiation of change, participants mentioned the provision of training as another form of support given by the principal while initiating change. Based on the participants’ responses, teachers are provided the needed training but then are held accountable to implement what they have been trained on. This is what P2 has explained. She stated: “he gives every teacher her right, he follows a special way with them, he gives on one hand but asks on another hand. This is his tactic; teachers were trained and then asked to change.” Similarly, S3 highlighted the importance of providing training, especially with senior teachers, while pushing to initiate the change. She confirmed, “many teachers thought that we are about to retire why should I work on computer. But the principal didn’t give up on this group of teachers, he engaged them in trainings and workshops, even by force if needed.”

Most of the supervisors, coordinators and two of the parents mentioned a third form of support provided by the principal which was his openness to everyone while talking about the strategy of combining pressure and support to push for initiating change. They perceived that the principal being a good listener to people’s concerns, fears and complaints at the beginning of change is an important source of support. As P3 stated: “he listens to everyone and tries to understand [...] So his concern was to have every voice raised and listened.”

Moreover, the participants pointed at the principal resilience as a factor conducive to alleviate teachers' resistance. The principal, as explained by the participants, is receptive to new ideas and shows willingness to amend his decisions based on any valuable input from the staff. His genuine openness to other voices renders the staff also open to the principal's ideas and not adamant to accept his decisions. C3 explained that the principal initiate while projecting resilience and persistence in providing the support his teachers need. She clarified, "the principal is highly confident and is resilient. He listens to us, convinces us or amends his decisions. This adds positivity to his relationships with everybody and pushes us to accept his words and ideas." On the same line, S2 expressed that, "the principal is resilient. He achieves what he wants in a polite and easy way so teachers get embarrassed to say no to the work, even if the work is tiresome."

Reallocation of Formal Positions

The principal, one coordinator and four teachers mentioned with clear examples how the reallocation of formal positions of staff has been followed as a strategy to reduce resistance to the initiation of improvement. According to them, this strategy includes rearranging positions of mainly senior teachers or those who are a major source of resistance to the change that is being introduced. All six participants agreed that a resistant teacher, coordinator or supervisor who is in an initial position that is directly affected by the change are removed to a position that is less directly affected by the changes introduced. Evidence on this strategy was found in the reviewed school documents stated as: giving administrative chores, such as library chores, to teachers who are close to retirement for there is difficulty convincing them to use new teaching strategies and everything that is new

and advanced. This aligns with C3 characterization of the principal's action of reallocating formal positions as a strategy to manage teachers' resistance to initiating change by protecting students from its negative impact. She stated:

I think the principal has placed some members of this group of teachers in different positions such as a librarian, insurance. His aim was to remove them from classroom, fill in their schedule with chores that have less harm on students.

Similarly, the principal explained that the first rationale behind reallocating formal positions is placing every person in the right position for him/her, and second helps in managing their resistance to initiating improvement. Giving an example of a resisting coordinator, the principal explained:

I think leadership during change is seeing where every person fits and place him/her to support the change. For example, I realized certain issues with the mathematics coordinator; her department is working less than others and still following old teaching methods. She doesn't want to follow up the changes with us I asked her if it is ok to give coordination to another teacher and promised to give her a better supervisory position with the general supervisor. she provided spectacular performance and succeeded more in this new position, [...], I gained more productive and effective staff members for each of the two positions.

On the same line, the principal explained that rearranging formal positions to alleviate resistance is about bringing to the new position members who are known to be more familiar with the initiated improvement which might help in. An example was given

by the principal about an Arabic teacher who has been moved into a new position with responsibilities to serve special needs students, where she showed big interest in the new responsibilities and proved to be more successful in performing its tasks. That same teacher (T14) referred to the same instance affirming in her turn: “I used to be a grade 7 teacher, I was promoted as special needs teacher. I love special needs and worked hard to improve and make a difference after being stuck in grade 7 for 20 years.”

Furthermore, the principal explained that rearranging formal positions included sometimes replacing tenured senior teachers with contractual teachers. Evidence on these actions as a strategy was found in the school documents. As it was documented, assigning contractual teachers will add new blood to the school. The principal similarly explained that contractual teachers have introduced new ideas and were more motivated to initiate improvement. He stated, “the flame of change in the school was the contractual teachers.”

Modeling the Change

The principal, one supervisor and one parent mentioned that one of the strategies followed by the principal for reducing resistance to the initiation of improvement is his strategy of modeling the behaviors that are planned to be introduced. To encourage everyone to change, the principal explained that he resorted to modeling the change and not imposing it. Being the main initiator of improvement and the one who asked for changing behaviors, he worked on modeling the desired behavior so that everyone would imitate. He stated: “I motivated them [to change] through making them feel that I am one of the them, I started working on ground before them, I did not make a boss on them.”

One supervisor (S4) explained how principal's modeling of good listening has encouraged her to initiate her own self-improvement with regard to her relationships with teachers. She said:

I used to have harsh and very strict attitude with teachers [...] Seeing how the principal deals with teachers and have positive attitudes that allow him to reach what he wants from teachers, taught me that I can achieve what I want with teachers through positive attitude, good listening and understanding others' ideas and emotions. I reached this based on [...] how we see him acting so we do like him and reach what we want.

One parent also explained the principal's strategy of modeling a desired behavior related to initiating change so that the behavior will be replicated among others. He expressed:

The principal directly started with the change on ground. Since the very first few days of being assigned as a principal, the principal went to the playground and started cleaning it in front of everyone. students got surprised and started cleaning with him.

Protecting the School from External Interference

Only the principal has mentioned protecting the school from external interference as a strategy that supports the initiation of change. According to the principal, external interference can come from various sources including mainly the interferences from influential community and political figures. It also takes different forms all capable of

potentially influencing the internal school functioning and its attempts to initiate school improvement. This challenge, as explained by the principal, is addressed through a strategy of protecting the school from the aforementioned interferences. The principal responses showed that the strategy of protection of the school from external interference happens through setting limits to the relationships of the school with its external environment. This protection strategy, based on the principal's responses, includes maintaining the relationships with external environment to an extent where these relationships can serve the school and support it with its initiation of improvement, however, relationships are controlled through applying limits set by the principal the moment they start to interrupt the school functioning.

As expressed by the principal:

With respect to external pressure, I think because we have an effective communication we are diluting all kinds of external pressure. [...] we draw lines that limit this influence but on the contrary we have good relations with political parties, NGOs, organizations, MEHE, community..."

Summary of the Results

The majority of the participants referred to school improvement as a continuous process that responds to continuous changes in the world. According to the participants, every improvement initiative paves the way for more improvement initiatives which triggers ongoing change. There was also an agreement that school improvement is large in scope and encompasses different areas in the school system, but as viewed by the

participants, it happens gradually whereby every area in the school is improved at a time overturning, eventually, the whole school system. A small number of participants perceived school improvement as highly contingent on the traits of the principal and restricted to his actions. There was a consensus that the key aim of school improvement is reaching a vision of having a public school that is highly reputable and competitive with other schools. To reach this vision, participants explained that, when initiating change, there should be a significant focus on improving students' learning in the public school through developing teacher's capacities and building a school environment that is conducive to student learning.

When asked about the actions taken by the principal when initiating change, the majority of the participants agreed that initiating change includes primarily the development of a need based plan. They explained that a need based plan starts with a process of needs assessment and self-evaluation to identify needs of improvement. This is followed by forming a decision-making team responsible for the development of the plan. After the plan is developed, participants explained that it is communicated with every school member to learn about the changes initiated. Other actions taken by the principal during the initiation of improvement include the ensuring the implementation of organizational policies whereby clear roles and responsibilities are developed and school processes are formalized. As per the participants, initiation of school improvement necessitates the establishment of additional communication channels to expand communication with the different stakeholders such as utilization of social media, conducting regular meetings, period reporting and direct communication channel through

open door policy. Further, participants agreed that documentation is extremely important to keep every school member in the loop of the decision making when initiating change. Participants highlighted mapping the external environment to locate resources as another important action taken by the principal when initiating change. Further, there was a consensus among the participant that engaging stakeholders in the decision making of initiating change is an indispensable action for the successful initiation of this change. Participants viewed that engagement is necessary since the very early stages of initiation. However, they considered it satisfactory for their participation to be restricted to being consulted to offer feedback on the strategic plan prepared by the principal, being asked to develop action plans, or advance short term improvement initiatives that gets the approval of the principal. Also, building trustful relations with internal stakeholders and external stakeholders is identified by the participants to be a necessary step in the initiation of change besides following macro-political tactics with external stakeholders to enlarge the support base to change.

When asked about the challenges faced during the initiation of change, participants' responses focused on teacher related challenges including mainly teachers' resistance to change, and organizational challenges including time constraints, lack of funding and the bureaucratic limitations within the current organizational structure of public schools that exacerbate the other challenges. Beyond the institutional level, some of the participants referred to socio-political pressures from the external environment as another challenge facing the initiation of school improvement.

When participants were asked about the strategies that could mitigate the anticipated challenges faced during the initiation of school improvement, participants explained that alleviating teachers' resistance strategies are crucial and include enhancing collaboration among the school internal stakeholders, empowering those contributing to the change through recognition, constantly communicating awareness of the need of improvement, practicing a combination of pressure and support on internal stakeholders as a mean to influence their actions, reallocation of formal positions and modeling the behavior associated with the initiated change. Finally, only the principal referred to the strategy of protecting the school from socio-political pressures as important strategy to reduce external pressures on the initiation of change.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the role of the principal in initiating change from the perspectives of the school leaders including the principal himself and teachers. The study mainly aimed at (1) identifying the perspectives of school leaders (including principal) and teachers regarding the principal's role in initiating school improvement; (2) examining these perspectives through comparing them with the literature on initiating effective school improvement; and (3) identifying challenges faced during change initiation and strategies followed by school principal to mitigate the challenges. The study relied on the grounded theory methodology to understand the role of the principal in initiating change. Data were collected using individual interviews with the school principal, supervisors and coordinators and focus group interviews with teachers. Data analysis was made through the constant comparison approach where comparisons were made at the level of codes to organize under themes, followed by comparisons of the themes with the literature. The examination of the role of a public school principal in initiating change as perceived by school leaders and teachers culminated in the development of a model for change initiation in Lebanese public schools. This chapter starts with discussing the results followed by a conclusion that sets the ground for recommendations for practice and further research.

Discussion

Participants in this study were asked to define school improvement and determine its aim, to present what actions they think the principal takes when initiating school improvement, to share the challenges they anticipate to hinder the initiation of change and finally to present the strategies that are followed to mitigate the corresponding challenges.

Almost all participants have provided the definition and aim of school improvement spontaneously and without probing. However, more probing was used when asking about the principal's actions taken when initiating change, the challenges faced by the principal and the strategies to mitigate these challenges. With respect to the actions, participants were aware of some of the principal's actions, however they weren't able to elaborate on the actions and their link to the specific phase of initiation of school improvement without the necessary probing. This indicates that at some points, the participants exhibited incomplete understanding of the actions taken by the principal when initiating change. All participants have referred to the challenges effortlessly, yet, probing was needed to explain the strategies followed to mitigate the challenges. Probing during the data collection has helped the participants to reflect on their understanding of the actions and strategies taken by the principal when initiating change, and one evidence for their developed understanding is that representatives of the participants approved fully the results of the study when shared with them at the end of the data analysis.

In this section, the perspectives of the principal, school leaders and teachers are discussed while comparing them with the international literature and with findings of studies on the Lebanese context about conceptions of school improvement, actions and

conditions of initiating change, challenges faced when initiating change and the respective strategies.

Conception of School Improvement by the Participants

There is a consensus among the participants that school improvement is a continuous process that responds to ongoing changes in the school's external environment. Participants also defined school improvement as a large scope plan that overturns many functions of the school. Participants also perceived that reaching school's vision is a central aim of any school improvement initiative. Another central aim of school improvement perceived by the participants is the development of students' learning.

Interestingly, the results of the study mostly offer an affirmation to the conceptions of school improvement in the international literature. Conception of school improvement shared by all participants significantly converge with what the international literature presents regarding the definition and aim of school improvement. Participants defined school improvement as a continuous process that comes in response to the continuous changes in the world. This perception of school improvement is commonly referred to in the international literature and is connected to the view of the school as an open social system (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). This view emphasizes the affinity of schools to be influenced by its external environment exposing the school's internal functions to political and institutional factors in its environment. The on-going changes in this environment necessitates school improvement as a survival response and justifies the emphasis on its continuity at the school.

Participants definition of school improvement as a large scope plan that overturns the functions of the school, is also highly compatible with dominant conceptions in the literature that mainly relate school improvement to school's system wide changes. According to Fullan (2007), effective school improvement is viewed as the journey of changes at individual and organizational levels that will alter the functioning of the whole school system. Further, participants' perception that reaching school's vision is a central aim of any school improvement initiative, is convergent with what many international scholars agreed on. According to Hopkins & Reynolds (2001), focusing on reaching school vision and following system wide changes to reach this vision is considered to be the main overarching aim of school improvement.

Another alignment with views on school improvement in the international literature is one that consider that a central aim of school improvement is the development of students' learning. According to Fullan (2011), there is a moral imperative to improve students learning in every school improvement initiative. In fact, participants' responses reflect their focus on student learning as they explained that providing professional development, a major component of school improvement a strategy to build teacher capacities which will ultimately result in improving students' learning. Hopkins & Reynolds (2001) discussed that school improvement often encompasses professional development opportunities provided for improving teachers' practices aimed at improving students learning.

However, further analysis of the results of the study revealed a view of school improvement that portrays it as a grand act performed by an exceptional leader. Participants

agreed that school improvement is a process that results in school wide changes for the aim of improving students' learning and ultimately reaching a school wide vision. Based on this view, school improvement is seen as a process that results in school wide changes and that are mostly triggered by the actions taken by a leader with exceptional power. In fact, some of the participants from coordinators, supervisors and teachers saw school improvement being as highly contingent on the traits of the school principal. The latter's responses, taken at face value, show an opposite conception suggesting a difference in the conception of school improvement between the principal and all other participants. However, the responses of the principal shows that the leadership practices he shared still reflect a "one person show" and that the decision making process he follows is closer to an authoritarian model rather than a participative one. Most examples he provided about engaging stakeholders in the decision making process were about getting their input through surveys for his consideration, or encouraging them to develop action plans to execute his strategic plan. There was no indication in the responses of a voting process that leaves room for teachers to reject any of the principal initiatives. The principal coming from a background as a young teacher who has received training in leadership in education and has acquired the more internationally recognized conception of school improvement, was able to articulate his espoused theory about participative decision making and engagement of different stakeholders while his practices seem to still lag behind reflecting this conception.

This result was echoed in studies of Lebanese principals, who identified this aspect of the conception as unique to the Lebanese sociocultural context, when compared to Western conceptions of the role and the characteristics of its effectiveness, reflecting an

authoritarian view of the principal's role, one that is found to be still prevalent in our Lebanese society (Harb and Karami, 2014, Karami, 2014; Maatouk, 2020; Mattar, 2012). As found by Karami (2014), the authoritarian nature of the principal's role is a unique aspect of the Lebanese principal-ship whereby the principal is perceived to have the highest knowledge levels and utmost authority to make decisions and direct other members in the school. Similarly, Harb (2014) found that Lebanese practitioners conceive of an effective school leader as a superhero having exceptional skills, and all the needed knowledge and experience to solve any problem and take all decisions. Similarly, the participants in this study held this conception and perceived school improvement mostly restricted to the principal who is viewed to be the most knowledgeable source to take all decisions pertaining to school improvement on his own.

Role of the Principal in the Initiation as Perceived by the Leaders and Teachers

The participants viewed the role of the principal when initiating change as engaging stakeholders in decision making, developing a need based improvement plan, enhancing collaboration, building trust, seeking resources through mapping external environment, enlarging the support base to change, restructuring the organization and building an overarching school vision for change. Those views represent the perceptions of the majority of participants about the role of the principal in initiating change. However, when examining the participants' perceptions against the dominant conceptions within the international, Arab and Lebanese literature some discrepancies between principal's perceptions and those of the others emerged. In fact, the principal's perceptions of the role of principal in initiating change is more aligned with that in the literature than those of

other participants. This might be attributed to the formal education he has received in Education Leadership and his engagement in continuous professional development with experts in the field. However, even though the views of the role shared by the principal showed an understanding of initiation and the change process that aligns with best practices reported in the international literature, further analysis of the results reveal that his actions show less alignment than his conceptions of initiation and the change process. In fact, the responses from the other participants though they confirm some aspects about the role of principal in initiating change, they, however, uncover aspects of these conceptions unique to the context of Lebanese public school.

Engaging Stakeholders in Decision Making

There is an agreement between the majority of the participants that engaging teachers and coordinators in the decision making of initiating change is expected from the principal by considering the input of these stakeholders regarding the plan of improvement in order to ensure their commitment for the plan. This view of the role of principal in initiating change emphasizes a level of engagement of stakeholders in decision making, something that many in the international literature advocate for (Leithwood et al. 2006).

However, at close examination, there is discrepancy in the views of the participants about the quality and level of stakeholders' engagement followed by the principal when initiating change that diverge the conception of the participants from the international literature. The views of the majority of the teachers and leaders about engagement reflect a less participative approach of engagement than that of the principal. Based on the majority of the participants' responses, teachers' engagement is restricted to discussing a plan of

improvement initiative that is already prepared by the principal and presented to them. This negligible level of engagement, however, was praised by the participants, since in the organizational structure of public schools where everyone is accustomed to mandates and imposition of decisions (Mattar, 2010), asking for teachers' opinion on a developed plan was perceived as a breakthrough in practicing participative decision making. However, this consultative approach of engagement in initiation falls short of allowing for the kind of active participation in the decision making recommended in the literature. Many participants' responses reflected a view which put them as passive recipients of the directives in the improvement plan and not as active decision makers in shaping it. This discrepancy, in the perceptions of the participants, points at a level of participation that still maintains the centralization of the authority of decision making related to initiating the improvement in the hands of their principal. Comparing this finding with other findings from literature in the Arab region, confirms the prevalence of the authoritarian approach of Lebanese principals within a centralized educational system, keeping it a unique aspect of the principal-ship in the Lebanese context. As confirmed by the findings of Mattar (2010), the majority of the teachers interviewed in 10 Lebanese public schools were not satisfied with the principal's centralized approach to decision making as they perceived him to be the sole decision maker; more than 60% of the 403 teachers participated were not satisfied with their degree of engagement in the decision making process. In fact, the prevalence of this authoritarian approach leaves the initiation process at risk of failing despite the stated awareness of the principal of the recommendation in the international literature. Leithwood et al. (2006), asserts that stakeholders' engagement contributes best to successful initiation of change when they are engaged in a participative decision making since early stages of

developing a plan for change during initiation. Similarly, Arab scholars attributes the failure of school improvement in the region to the fact that most attempts are characterized by the centralization of authority found in the study. The top-down approach of school improvement in the Arab region results in teachers being mere recipients and not initiators of the improvement plans, while the responsibility of initiating change remains restricted to those with formal positions at the top hierarchy (Bashshur, 2005; El Amine, 2005; Karami,2014).

Developing a need based improvement plan

The participants' responses gave a view of the role of principal in initiating change where developing a need based plan consisting of assessing needs, developing decision making group, setting the plan and communicating the plan. Based on the results, principal developing an improvement plan when initiating change starts with assessing the needs of change which is a process of identifying the strengths and weaknesses in certain areas of the school functioning. Forming a decision making group that represents the different stakeholders is also a step towards developing the improvement plan. Further, the improvement plan includes action plans consisting of different elements including goals, strategies, resources, people responsible for implementation, evaluation, professional development, timeline and indicators of success. After the plan is developed, it is communicated with all school members.

When compared with the international literature, this role of the Lebanese principal in developing a need based plan and the steps associated with this process converge with the different models of initiation found in the international literature (Abrams & Gibbs,

2000; Arnaiz et al., 2016; Erickson III, 2015; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996; Thompson, 2018). According to these models, the principal, with the participation of the different stakeholders, lead the development of a need based plan when initiating change through a process of four steps; the development of decision making group, assessment of the needs to change, development of the plan of change and communication of the plan.

Further analysis of the participant's responses reveals that while they all agreed that needs assessment is a process of reflection and self-evaluation that needs to take place as a first step in the process of developing the improvement plan, only the principal viewed that this step is participative and engages all school members in assessing these needs. In addition, the views of teachers and supervisors did not include viewing themselves as equal decision making partners engaged in needs assessment, identifying and prioritizing the needs. In fact, teachers' and coordinators' responses didn't indicate any reference to the development of decision making group as a step for developing the improvement plan during initiation. This is a view that contradicts the principal's views and invites an explanation that the principal actions are still centralized in his decision making despite him masking his centralized approach with some aspects of consultation rather than real participation.

Despite that the participants' views on participation in assessing and prioritizing needs did not align fully with those in the literature, these views strongly converge with the findings of studies in the Lebanese context (Bahous & Nabhani, 2008; Mattar 2010; Mattar 2012; Karami,2014). Karami (2014) found that Lebanese principals remained in charge of

deciding when there is a need for engaging teachers, and often reported that they consider that teachers are not ready to actively and continuously participate in decision making especially when related to school improvement.

Enhancing Collaboration

All participants described collaboration as a strategy originating from teachers' individual initiatives to provide technical assistance to their colleagues. Enhancing collaboration is not perceived by the participants, both leaders and teachers, as a purposeful strategy taken to support initiation, rather as an act of caring and support in response to a need that emerges unexpectedly. In fact, the principal's responses didn't show any mention of a purposeful intent to promote collaboration nor a view that considers collaboration a necessary strategy for initiating change. Comparing this perception of the participants about collaboration with the international literature reveals a clear discrepancy. While participants perceive collaboration as a reactive caring response, the literature recommends that collaboration needs to be purposefully enhanced by the principal when initiating change through developing a culture of collaboration. According to Fullan & Hargreaves (1991), collaboration is more likely to support initiation when it is a value at the core of school culture and reflected in school's rituals and norms, a position that is incompatible with the Lebanese participants' views of collaboration as an instantaneous response to provide support when and if the need arises for it. Moreover, according to Fullan & Quinn (2016), collaboration allows for purposeful and deep interactions between participants about the nature and meaning of the change initiated. A view that was completely overlooked by the participants as they never seem to be concerned with forming a unified conception of the

nature of the change and its potential implications in transforming their views and practices. This comparison with the international literature suggests the limited understanding Lebanese participants have of the meaning of collaborative culture and its implications on the decisions and tasks associated with change initiation.

Building Trust

Participants' responses about the role of principal in initiating change revealed their understanding that building trust with internal and external stakeholders is essential to the initiation process. All participants agree that the principal builds internal trust through transparency and approachability throughout the process of initiating the change. They also agree that the principal establishing connections with people in the local community will build trust with external stakeholders.

The participants' conceptions of the role of the principal in building internal trust through transparency and approachability of the principal when initiating change converge with the views reported in the international literature. Hollingworth et al. (2018) discussed that internal trust is promoted through the principal being transparent about the change, its strategies and processes, access to data as well as the presence and approachability of the principal.

In addition, participants' views of the principal building external trust through establishing strong connections with local community in the village converges with findings of the literature about the roles of Lebanese principals in the specific context of rural areas. Karami (2014) found that public school principals in rural areas are actively

involved in social events in the local community, and are trusted by parents and people in the community to solve social issues beyond the scope of their roles. So it comes as no surprise that the participants saw an added value in building this interconnectedness with the community, and conceived of this action as essential to the initiation process, making it an action that is shaped by the Lebanese context. This seems to be based on the characteristics of effectiveness of Lebanese principals (Harb, 2014) that views success in his formal position strongly connected with the strength of his relations with the local community and the degree of trust he has acquired from people in this community.

Seeking resources through mapping external environment

Participants agree that mapping the external environment to locate resources for the improvement plan is an action that the principal ought to take in initiating change. All participants view that the principal established connections and built trust with the local community, and with social and political figures non-governmental organizations, and official bodies are necessary to secure the resources needed to initiate improvement plans. Comparing this conception with the literature, a strong agreement is revealed. According to Hargreaves (2002), the complex web of relationships that the principal established between the school and external bodies allows for provision of resources needed for change, which confirms the views of the Lebanese participants.

Enlarging the support base to change

Perceptions of some of the participants about the role of principal in initiating change emphasize enlarging the support base to change through engaging in political tactics

beyond the school. Participants' considered establishing connections with Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the main governing body of public schools, as a necessary political tactic to facilitate the initiation of any change. This is because connecting with the ministry might open the room for securing special provisions that alleviate the systemic barriers embedded in the politicized bureaucracy that characterizes the work context of the principal. In fact, establishing good rapport with high ranking officials at the ministry along political affiliations, is more likely to grant the principal more resources and flexibility in enforcing the policies that are needed for change initiation.

Participants' perceptions about the principal's role in enlarging support base to change through engaging in political tactics are in alignment with the international literature. According to Blasé & Björk (2010), the principal building external relationships with governmental level, described as macro-politics, develops more political partners and alliances that support the principal in initiating the intended change, a conception from the literature that confirms those of the participants.

However, and despite this similarity, the views of the participants on the necessity of establishing connections with political bodies to facilitate the initiation of change converge with the findings of studies highlighting this aspect as uniquely shaped by the sociopolitical context of Lebanon. Karami (2014) found that if the public school refuses to establish connections with political leaders, it will lack resources and suffer from the lack of support from the central administration. This alignment confirms that the more the principal develops relations with political figures who have authority on the governing body of public schools, the better relations the principal will have with that governing body

and ultimately the more support he will receive from the latter to initiate his intended changes. In the Lebanese context, the power is for the politician more than it is for those in formal position in the governance structure, which necessitates that the principal establishes relations with the politically powerful individuals or entities to enlarge the support base for the changes he is planning to initiate.

Restructuring the Organization

Participants' views about the role of the principal in initiating change included taking actions towards redesigning the organizational structure of the school. The participants' responses as well as the documents examined for this study revealed an organizational landscape in the case public school that was lacking clarity in the formal role assigned, and enforcement of the internal policy mandated by the MEHE. Accordingly, when asked about the actions he took to initiate change at his school, putting things in order with regard to the organizational structure of the school emerged as a preparatory step in the process of initiation, that was needed prior to launching any improvement. While all participants mentioned this action, the principal responses emphasized it and elaborated extensively on the various actions taken to achieve it. In fact, participants' views about the role of the principal in initiating change encompassed redesigning the structure of the school through enacting school internal policy by clarifying the rules, building additional communication channels and identifying individuals' roles and responsibilities. The participants agreed that making school internal rules and regulations clear to everyone is a critical action in the initiation process as it creates supporting condition to initiating school wide improvement. Also, the participants agreed that the clear roles and responsibilities that

the principal has developed for every member in the school reduce job ambiguity and conflict and hence facilitate the process of initiating change.

However, the convergent views of both leaders and teachers on restructuring the school when initiating school wide improvement, is a finding that doesn't align with literature on the role of the principal in the initiation of change, rather it aligns with the literature about school organization's life cycles. Based on this literature, it became clear that what the participants considered part of the initiation is rather an urgent response to rectify the fact that before the initiation of school improvement, the school was still at an early stage of its life cycle where structure was absent, formalization and clear rules were weakly established, and roles were poorly distributed (Walsh & Dewar, 1987). In this life cycle stage, it becomes extremely difficult to engage in initiating pedagogic interventions informed by best practices. Consequently, the principal engaged the school in a process of formalization through developing clear rules and regulations and distributing roles which act as important conditions towards building the school's capacity to respond and benefit from change initiative. According to Walsh & Dewar (1987), formalization emerges with young schools who are trying to cope with their increasing growth as it helps in reducing uncertainty and supports the achievement of noticeable improvements. This comparison with the literature on school's lifecycle explains why redesigning the structure of the school through setting rules and regulations and identifying roles and responsibilities becomes an important action for a Lebanese principal of a public school to take if he is to succeed in initiating school wide changes and eventually take the school to the next more developed phase in its lifecycle.

Moreover, participants' explained that some of restructuring went beyond enacting existing policies to attempting to reduce resistance to improvement initiatives. In fact, results showed that redesigning the structure included reallocation of formal positions of teachers who were resistant to change making sure that they don't occupy a position that is directly affected by change. The principals explained that this is mainly the case of senior teachers who are often major resisters to change and that reallocation of formal position was often about removing senior teachers and substituting them mostly with contractual teachers. However, considering the reallocation of formal position of resistant teachers as an action in the initiation process does not align with the international literature. There were no studies found that advanced this form of reallocation as a strategy to avoid or minimize resistance.

Further comparison reveals that the participants' acceptance and consideration of rearranging formal positions as a normal part of initiation through having contractual teachers replacing senior teachers reveals a unique aspect in initiating change shaped by the work context of the Lebanese public school principal. In light of hiring freeze for civil servants in Lebanon and due to the large number of tenure teachers that were forced into the system under minimum conditions of training and preparation (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020), the number of teachers with dismal capacity to improve and change has been increasing. This in turn was often a catalyst for recruiting contractual teachers, eager to learn and improve especially in Lebanese public schools whose principals are interested in initiating improvement at their schools (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020). In fact, there is a heavy reliance on contractual teachers in the Lebanese public schools reaching a total of twenty thousand in 2017 compared to twenty-one thousand civil servants (Abdul-Hamid &

Yassine, 2020). Those teachers are generally novice teachers with university based pedagogical training and great enthusiasm to do their best and contribute to initiating change. A principal who is eager to initiate change can rely on them to initiate that change since contractual teachers are viewed to be more motivated to accept new ideas associated with change compared to the senior teachers.

Furthermore, participants' perceptions about the actions involved in initiating change emphasized building an enabling structure through establishing additional communication channels. The principal redesigning the school structure involved building additional communication channels between teachers and leaders and between teachers themselves for the purpose of enhancing dialogue about change when it is initiated. Participants views are convergent with the literature about building an enabling structure during initiation. According to Priestly (2010), an enabling structure allows for horizontal relationships between members on the same hierarchy level and vertical relationships between members of different hierarchy levels which allows for bi-directional support and collaboration when initiating change. Similarly, Baglibel et al. (2018) discussed that communication, taking place from top to bottom hierarchy and vice-versa, enables two-way negotiation and exchange of support about the change initiated. This convergence adds to our understanding of the role of the Lebanese principal during initiation that involves restructuring the school, through building an enabling structure with additional communication channels, during the initiation of change.

In addition, participants' perceptions about the role of the principal in initiating change emphasized restructuring of the school through introducing substantial changes to

school calendar. This included the allocation of additional time to tasks necessary to support the initiation of change. The participants considered that the principal introducing fixed timing in the teachers' timetable for coordination provides them with time to discuss areas for initiating improvements. While all participants' views converged on this action of initiating change, comparing their views with the literature reveals an incomplete understanding of the strategies that are recommended in the literature to enhance collaboration and negotiations about change. According to Hannay & Ross (1997) more flexibility in time allocation should be followed in a school that is initiating change for staff member to convene and have a high level talk about change beyond the simple talk about school's daily operational matters. This discrepancy suggests that one-hour for coordination taken by a Lebanese principal is not sufficient to allow the needed extended deliberations on change initiation.

Building an overarching school vision for change

Participants' views about the role of the principal in initiating change emphasized building an overarching vision. Participants agree that when initiating change, the principal starts with an overarching vision that directs all initiatives to change in the school. Initiating any change initiative of school improvement will ultimately aim at achieving this vision.

However, examining their views closely, the participants have discrepancies in their views about how this school vision for change ought to be built. Only the principal viewed that the school vision is built jointly in collaboration with all stakeholders, however other participants viewed the vision as the principal's vision that is communicated to them by the principal. Despite that all participants perceived the achievement of school vision as the

ultimate aim of school improvement, the understanding of a shared school vision that emerged from the responses of the teachers and the supervisors seem synonymous to them buying into the vision that the principal advanced. There was no evidence that they viewed an active role for themselves beyond acceptance of this vision. In contrast, the principal response spoke of “collaboration” while building the vision, although his discourse focused on the outcome of this collaboration that of ensuring the presence of a shared vision. There was no evidence in his views on collaborative steps taken to build this shared views. Rather his accounts included mere instances of political tactics he used to ensure the buy in of teachers and supervisors among others into his own vision. The principal response reflects that participants were not actively participating in the development of the shared vision, rather the principal developed it and introduced it to the participants, a position that completely contradicts with the recommendations of the international literature. According to the findings of Morrison (2018), a vision that supports the initiation of change has to be a shared vision that is collectively constructed based on input of the different stakeholders as it increases everyone’s commitment and sense of urgency to initiate change. This misalignment between the conceptions of Lebanese participants and the international literature about building a shared vision confirms one more time the lack of adopting a participative approach by the principal in the context of Lebanon.

Challenges Faced during initiation

The responses of the participants reveal a number of challenges faced during initiation including resistance of senior teachers, time constraints, imbalance in seniority level between the teachers and the principal, teacher’s turnover, lack of state funding,

bureaucratic limitations in terms of restricting policies and socio-political interferences. Examining these perceptions of the participants against the international and Lebanese literature reveals some alignment between the participants' views about the challenges and those found in the literature emerged suggesting that some of these challenges transcend the difference in the cultural context and emanate from the nature of the change process itself. In fact, time constraints and resistance of senior teachers are two challenges perceived by the participants and also found in the international literature.

However, the remaining challenges stemming from the imbalance in seniority level between the teachers and the principal, teacher's turnover, acute lack of stable state funding, restrictive policies and socio-political interferences, when compared with the literature, seem to be unique to the work context of Lebanese public school principals as shaped by organizational arrangements at the school level and by its surrounding socio-political and cultural conditions.

Challenges aligned with the international literature

Participants' responses about the challenges faced during the initiation of change revealed their understanding that resistance of senior teachers is a major challenge to the initiation of change. There is a consensus among the participants that senior teachers are often resistant to change because change brings new ideas, norms and tasks that teachers are not used to which often results in their resistance to the change initiated. The fact that initiation process brings difficult new tasks and alter norms and practices, is an aspect that is found common among the findings of international and Arab literature suggesting that the challenge of resistance to change is common across cultures. In fact, the reason

participants attributed to cause this resistance converges with the findings of the international literature that posits that teachers are more likely to resist the initiation of change that brings in novel ideas for this will challenge their existing norms and professional habits and raise concern on the level of their self-efficacy. According to Abrams & Gibbs (2000), change initiatives bring new norms that are often opposing to the normal behavior in school which triggers refusal to change. Also, participants' perceptions of the difficulty of the task associated with change and their lack of skills to implement the task is another cause for resistance perceived by the participants that aligns with the findings of the studies about teachers' emotional responses to change. As found by Chaar, Khamis & Karami Akkary (2016), teachers will resist change for they will develop at the beginning of change concerns of dealing with the difficult tasks associated with change, changing and understanding their new roles, and spending more time and energy to implement the change.

In addition, the participants' perceptions of the challenges faced when initiating change emphasize time constraints, another challenge to initiation of change that is commonly found in the international literature. Participants viewed that all school personnel are already limited on time because of the vast array of managerial and instructional tasks they are expected to do. They explained that the change initiative brings with it added multiple tasks that makes finding time to allocate to these added tasks an impossible endeavor. Similarly, Abrams & Gibbs (2000) found that the principal and school members have to manage a big number of complex tasks accompanying the initiation of improvement initiatives alongside other school tasks which add to the time

constraints. This similarity confirms that finding the time for the initiation of change is a challenge faced by leaders initiating change in their schools across cultural contexts.

Challenges unique to the context of Lebanon

Participants' perceptions about the challenges faced during the initiation of change emphasize the imbalance in seniority level between the teachers and the principal. There is a consensus among the participants that having a young principal with less seniority than other teachers trigger the resistance of the senior teachers to actions and decisions taken by the principal, especially those of change initiation. This challenge presents one that is unique to the context of the school under study since given the career path of principals, it is highly unlikely to have a case with such large gap and where the principal is assigned to the same school he attended as a student. So it comes as no surprise that this is an aspect that is not often studied in the international literature, and explains why it was completely missing from the reviewed literature including the one about Lebanese principals. In fact, according to Karami (2014) assigning a senior teacher with long experience in teaching is a common strategy followed to select public school principals (Karami, 2014). In the past ten years, new policies were instituted that have introduced new criteria based on which Lebanese public school principals are selected. The first criteria for selecting public school principals remains, however, that the candidate principal is from the tenured educational staff of the public schools (Maatouk, 2020). In practice their selection remains subjected to a number of socio-political factors and those with seniority in teaching in the same school are still given priority in the selection process. Given this fact about selecting public school principals in the Lebanese context, the assignment of the principal of the case public school

is in contradiction to the norm especially among the senior teachers at the school who might have been themselves aspiring for the position the current principal occupied. So it comes as no surprise that the participants saw the principal, who is not a senior teacher, as someone who does not have adequate qualifications to question their practice or to propose changes at the school that will require them to adopt new teaching techniques. The uniqueness of this challenge might justify the actions of the principal in reallocating those senior teachers to positions that gives them symbolic power while moving them away from the teaching learning process targeted in the change that he was initiating.

Another challenge that emerged from the findings as unique to the context of Lebanese public schools is the limited authority principals have in recruiting, retaining or dismissing teachers at their school. While teachers seem to be unaware of this challenge, the principal spoke extensively about the challenges faced regarding having to deal with novice teachers, or loose teachers that have already been trained and socialized at the school at the critical juncture of him initiating change. Having to deal with newly appointed novice teachers at the time when change is initiated, becomes a challenge to be faced since they are not aware of the school vision and require time and effort to get trained which add burden to the efforts needed while initiating change.

Compared with the international literature, the challenge of teachers' turnover and teachers' recruitment is not found in the international findings on change initiation. However, studies on the principalship in Lebanese context help explain its causes. In fact, Lebanese public school principals have limited discretion in teacher's recruitment, and accordingly have no input in recruiting teachers whose vision matches the school vision

and who can eventually support the change initiated at the school. In the public school system, the central office takes the full responsibility of recruiting and assigning teachers in public schools in a centralized approach (Bahous & Nabhani, 2008; Karami, 2014; Maatouk, 2020; Mattar, 2012). In light of the centralized system of public schools, it becomes justified that the principal perceived teachers' recruitment itself as a challenge to the initiation process.

Another challenge faced during initiation that is unique to the Lebanese context and emphasized by the views of the participants is the lack of state funding. Participants agree that many improvement initiatives were not pursued because of the lack of state funding. The ministry has a limited budget per public school which does not allocate any funds for initiating improvement. According to Abdul-Hamid & Yassine (2020), there is general lack of state funding for public schools, and most of the improvement projects are funded sporadically pending the receipts of foreign relief funds. In 2015, only 1.8% of the GDP and 5.5% of the total public expenditure go for general education (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020). They explain that public expenditures on general education in Lebanon are generally fully allocated to salaries and benefits of civil servants and contractual teachers which constitute 82% of the total budget, as an average between 2013-2015. In fact, the limited state funding for Lebanese public schools and more specifically the limited budget to initiate improvement plans in public schools increases the dependency of the funding on other national and international bodies and adds to the difficulties for the principals to receive these funds.

In light of these contextual conditions, it is expected that participants' views about lack of state funding to public schools and specifically to improvement plans, as a challenge impeding the initiation of change, are aligned with other studies on the Lebanese context. According to Karami (2014), the fact that the budget allocated to public schools falls short of meeting the expenses and needs of public schools, the school principal will have to rely more on his initiatives to connect to political parties and social bodies to locate resources and subsidize the school budget. Baroudi (2019) also highlighted the large dependency on international bodies to fund improvement plans; a plan for education sector development in 2011 raised US\$2.4 million relying largely on external sources of funds of international organizations namely the US agency for international development, World Bank, European Union, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP. Similarly, Shuayb (2018) found that the Centre for Education Research and Development, concerned with education research and curriculum development, has its activities mainly funded by international donors in the past ten to fifteen years. The above challenges also add to the complexity of initiating change in the Lebanese context, as the need for resources becomes one of seeking support from social and political figures external to the educational system to use their political power on behalf of the school to secure the needed funds for initiation of improvement. and to compensate for the lack of state funding.

Furthermore, bureaucratic limitations in terms of restricting policies to initiating change at the level of public schools was a challenge highlighted by all the participants that in their views impede attempts to initiate change at the school level. All participants agreed that the limited authority given to public school principals in light of the centralized system

impedes him from taking important decisions pertaining to initiating improvement at his school. In fact, according to Maatouk (2020), the mandates of the centralized decisions in the public education sector limit the decision making power of the public school principals. Maatouk (2020) found that public school principals faced the challenge of limited authority in taking decisions important to the school functioning such as recruiting teachers, enrolling and registering students and introducing changes to the curriculum, The fact of having a centralized decision making approach in the governance structure of Lebanese public schools and having policies that limit discretion of school principals are other challenges to change initiation shaped by the bureaucracy of the public school system in Lebanon.

Lastly, another challenge faced during the initiation of change that is unique to the Lebanese context, are the political interferences from external stakeholders in the school's functioning and decisions, influencing them away from being based on best educational practices towards favoritism that gives gains to political figures at the expense of the best interest of the schools and the students it serves. All participants agree that members of political parties interfere in the school decisions to serve particular needs and interests of their followers which often results in tensions between the different interfering parties and the educators at the school. While not all participants had the courage to explicitly mention this challenge, the responses of the majority of the participants revealed their awareness of it. Challenges faced by school leaders that resulting from political pressure on schools are well documented in the international literature. Abrams & Gibbs (2000) found that power struggle happens between school internal parties and external parties exerting mutual pressure on the school's decisions and processes to meet their needs. However, the nature

of the political interferences that the participants categorized as impeding attempts at initiating change bears uniqueness that makes it peculiar to the Lebanese context. As found by Karami (2014), in the context of Lebanese public schools, and in the face of extreme scarcity of resources and a high level of corruption at the level of the ministry, school principals are forced to affiliate themselves and their school with influential members of political parties seeking favors from them as they try to secure the resources needed for the schools basic functioning as well as those needed to initiate improvement. This affiliation leaves the principals at the mercy of these political figures, having to carry the burden of returning these favors in the form of making and tailoring educational decisions to serve the purposes of the political party. A great deal of political interference is more likely to alter the school's internal functions and decisions to meet the political needs and interests making it a unique challenge especially for initiating school based improvement.

Strategies Used to Facilitate Initiation of Change

Participants' perceptions of strategies followed to mitigate the anticipated challenges faced during the initiation of change generally focused on strategies to reduce the internal challenge of teachers' resistance to change and strategies to reduce the external challenge of socio-political interference. Participants' views about the strategies that deal with the internal challenge of resistance focused on empowering teachers through praising them, raising the awareness of the need to change, combining pressure and support, and modeling the behavior associated with the intended change. However, participants' views about the strategies that deal with the external challenge of socio-political interference focused on applying buffering political tactics. While there was major overlap in the

strategies used by the principal with those found in the reviewed literature, a more nuanced comparison of the participants' perceptions of the strategies against the recommendations of the international literature, uncovered some aspects of the strategies unique to the context of Lebanese public school.

Strategies to Deal with Internal Challenge of Resistance

Participants perceptions of strategies that reduce the main internal challenge of resistance when initiating change emphasize empowerment of teachers through praise and recognition. Participants show agreement that during the initiation phase, the principal reverts to praising and recognizing teachers' efforts, regardless of how simple it is in front of the school community. They all agreed that this had the effect of reducing the resistance of the concerned teacher and of encouraging other resisting teachers to change as well. Participants' views of considering empowerment through praising teachers and recognizing their efforts as a strategy to reduce resistance to the initiated change are in alignment with the findings of a similar study on the Lebanese context. Karami et al. (2019) found that applying emotional support mechanisms like praise and positive encouragement will elicit positive emotions towards change and push teachers to take the risk and accept the change at its early stages. However, comparing the participants' views of empowerment as a strategy with the international conception of teachers' empowerment reveals a different understanding of the participants about the use of empowerment as a strategy to reduce resistance to change. According to Thompson (2018), engaging teachers in the decision making process is one of the most important strategies of empowering teachers. However, participants' responses referred only to the affective dimensions and didn't make any

reference to engagement in the decision making of initiating change. In fact, teachers explained that they were not engaged in a participative process of decision making during the initiation of change, which might leave their characterization of empowerment as a strategy for overcoming resistance, questionable. The absence of the critical role of participation in decision making from the perceptions of the Lebanese participants about empowerment might have resulted in the centralized organizational structure in the Lebanese educational system, and the dominance of the authoritative/ paternalistic leadership approach among Lebanese principals (Karami, 2014; Mattar, 2012).

Another strategy identified by the participants for alleviating resistance during initiation consisted of raising the awareness for the need to change among school members. Participants agree that making everyone understands the need of change will raise their commitment to the change. By understanding the need of change, teachers meant that change is rationalized as needed for the benefit of the students, teachers and the whole school. By accepting the change, they will be doing something of high benefit for the school community. Participants' views about this strategy are aligned with the recommendations of the international literature, confirming the importance of raising awareness of the need to change in reducing resistance when initiating change. According to Jones & Thessin (2015), making everyone understand the need of change during the initiation of change is important to raise teachers' commitment through the subsequent implementation phase of the change process. Similarly, according to Nolan (2007), initiating change while thinking of achieving grand ideas behind it develops teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and commitment to initiate the grand changes.

Another strategy identified as necessary by the participants for reducing resistance when initiating change is applying a supervisory approach that include a combination of pressure and support to push for change. Participants views seem to expect that the principal be the one pushing for the change and this pushing can include using his authority to force the members of the school to engage in the change he is initiating. However, they all agreed that this pushing need to be accompanied with providing simultaneous and abundant support to reduce any potential resistance associated with this pressure of change. Participants view that providing support can take different forms while pressuring the change such as active listening of the principal and his openness to all teachers concerns as well as provision of training. The participants' advocacy for this combination of pressure and support as a strategy to alleviate resistance for change aligns with the international literature on initiating change. Govender & Sookrajh (2013) found that school principals, as change agents, need to listen to teachers and engage in dialogue with them when pushing for change in order to acknowledge their voice, listen to their concerns and provide the needed support. Ibrahim & Al-Mashhadany (2012) found another form of support that is training teachers on new educational methodologies enabling teachers to embrace change and exhibit less resistance.

On the other hand, the participants' responses revealed another form of support in addition to provision of training and active listening, which is not found in the international literature, that is the flexibility of the principal in enforcing the school policies. The fact that the school is a public school in a rural area where the principal and teachers are people belonging to the same community, the principal is more likely to have developed personal

and social relations with people from that rural area (Karami, 2014). These kinds of relations dominated by kinship, in the context of a Lebanese village, makes it difficult for the school principal to draw lines between personal relations and enforcing school rules and regulations. So being flexible about enforcing school policies in favor of strengthening personal relations explain why this flexibility was valued and seen by the school members as a form of support that reduces resistance when initiating change, making it a strategy shaped by the Lebanese context.

Participants' responses about the strategies to reduce resistance when initiating change also revealed their understanding about the importance of modeling the behavior associated with the intended change. Participants view that principal modeling the behavior will make everyone understand the change better, be convinced about it and perceive it as a less difficult task than they initially perceived as a first reaction. These perceptions are aligned with international literature confirming the importance of modeling the change to reduce resistance when initiating change. Hollingworth et al. (2018) found that when initiating school improvement, principals model for teachers the behavior they want them to imitate as this will show teachers that change can be doable, increase their buy-in to the change and give them the impression that improvement is a shared responsibility.

Strategies to Deal with External Challenge of Socio-Political Interference

The principal's responses about the strategies to deal with the challenge of external political interferences reveal his understanding about buffering strategies as counter political tactics to protect the school. The principal views strategies of maintaining balanced relationships with external environment up to an extent that serves mobilizing

support for the initiation of change, while setting the boundaries that ensure that these relationships will not make attempts at negatively influencing the school's internal operations. While only the principal mentioned this strategy, it is in significant convergence with buffering strategies recommended in the international literature. Abrams & Gibbs (2000) recommended that setting limits to the relation between school and its external environment is important for a smooth initiation of change for it reduces the effect of external pressure on the school and focuses the energy and efforts inside the school on initiating the intended change. According to Hoy & Miskel (2008), while being open to the external environment in an open social system of a school, it becomes important to protect the school's technical core of teaching and learning and the school's internal functions from external interference through what is called buffering strategies. This strategy aims to balance between establishing connections with external environment and setting limits to these connections when they start to constitute a threat on the school's internal operations. This convergence between the principal's perceptions and the literature confirms that, in light of the significant political interferences Lebanese schools face, buffering strategies becomes an indispensable strategy the principal has to consider when initiating change in order to protect the school's internal functioning and decision making.

Conclusion

Based on the obtained results and the discussion, this concluding section of the study presents a model of initiation that is informed by the international literature yet responsive to the cultural context of Lebanese public schools. The model will constitute the foundation of the recommendations that will follow for practice and for further research.

The selection of the case of a school principal who has succeeded in initiating change at the level of his school, despite the prevailing restrictive organizational conditions and the absence of wide support for school based improvement, comes in response to the calls for a paradigm shift in the Arab region in reversing the existing top-down approach to school reform (Bashshur, 2005; Karami Akkary, 2014; Karami & Rizk, 2011). In fact, the emphasis on examining the perceptions of teachers and leaders about the role of principal in initiating change in this study, offered an opportunity to examine in depth this experience and contributes to our understanding of initiating a bottom up school-based improvement and the role of leadership in setting the conditions for a successful initiation of school improvement grounded in the Lebanese context.

Based on the results of the study, an understanding of the role of the principal in initiating a school based change is developed. A school principal needs to engage stakeholders since the very early stages of initiation through a participative approach to decision making to identify the needs of change and develop jointly with the participants the plan of improvement. Also, the principal during initiation builds trust with internal stakeholders through transparency, visibility and responsiveness to concerns and complaints. Building trust with external stakeholders is of equal importance during initiation for it provides the needed moral, financial and political support. Connecting with influential social and political figures secures resources necessary for initiation and enlarges the support base to change. It is indispensable to maintain connections with political figures not only to receive financial resources but also to secure the support of the central offices in the governance structure of public schools needed for initiating the

changes. Besides, restructuring the organization structure of the school was found to be a primary preparatory phase for initiating improvements. It is also pivotal that the principal builds an overarching school vision that directs initiation and that is shared by all participants. Participants' views about the above actions taken by the principal when initiating change appeared first to be aligned with the international literature and gave the impression that the role of Lebanese principal in initiating change is similar to their western counterparts.

However, examining closely the views about the actions taken by the Lebanese principal in this case school reflected discrepancies between the role of Lebanese principals in initiating change and that of other principals in other parts of the world. According to Hofstede (1980), culture is “collective mental programming” of people who live in the same environment, are conditioned by same experiences and are influenced by the same national culture. It came as no surprise that the principal's views converged with those of teachers on a dominant role for the principal for leading the initiation of change at the school level given that they all have their views shaped by the same cultural values and norms. This concentration of power at the level of principal reinforces what Hofstede (1980) labeled as large power distance between superiors and subordinates something is often found to characterize our national culture (Harb, 2014; Maatouk, 2020; Mattar, 2012). The fact that the perceptions about the role of principal in initiating change are shaped by the national culture reinforces that, like leadership (Hallinger, 1995), initiating change is a culturally dependent process and any model of initiation is shaped by the unique context where initiation is taking place.

Based on the results of the study and the reviewed models of Bolman & Deal four frames of organizations theory (2017) and the different models of developing an improvement plan during initiation by Leithwood et al. (2006), O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996), Erickson III (2015), Abrams & Gibbs (2000), Arnaiz et al. (2016) and Thompson (2018), a model of initiation in Lebanese public school is generated that portrays initiation as a process of a number of steps, without necessarily a fixed order. The results of study about redesigning the organizational structure as a preparatory phase for initiation as well as building a school vision were the foundational steps of the model generated in this study. The finding on restructuring the school as a preparatory phase for initiation that was discussed as uniquely shaped by the Lebanese context makes the enacting of the existing school structure a primary step of the initiation of change within the context of Lebanese public schools. A school principal needs to precede initiation process with developing clear roles and responsibilities for staff and enacting school rules and policies. Besides, based on the conceptions of school improvement discussed in this study, reaching a school vision is the ultimate aim of any initiated school improvement. Accordingly, building a school vision becomes another primary step that should precede any initiation of change in order to provide the needed direction for change (Figure 1).

On the other hand, enabling conditions for initiation were categorized through the four frames of Bolman and Deal (2017). The enabling conditions of enabling structure, climate of high morale, enlarged support based and symbolic leadership were elaborated respectively through the organizational, human, political and symbolic frames of Bolman and Deal (2017).

After the enabling conditions are provided, the last step in the generated model of initiation is building the action plan of initiating change composed of needs assessment, building decision making group, developing the plan and communicating it. The latter are drawn from the results and also constructed from the different models of Leithwood et al. (2006), O'Donoghue & Dimmock (1996), Erickson III (2015), Abrams & Gibbs (2000), Arnaiz et al. (2016) and Thompson (2018) about the steps of building a plan of change. Figure 1 presents the model and is followed by an elaboration of its components.

Figure 1

The Model for Change Initiation in Lebanese Public Schools

1. Enacting the existing structure
 - Developing clear organizational roles and responsibilities,
 - Enacting school rules and policies
2. Building of the school vision
3. Setting of enabling conditions to facilitate the initiation
 - A- Enabling Structure:**
 - Forming a decision making team
 - Establishing new communication channels
 - Reallocating formal positions of resistant teachers
 - Establishing processes for facilitating the implementation of the initiation plan
 - B- Climate of high morale:**
 - Empowering teachers through continuous recognition and praise
 - Engaging teachers in the decision making
 - Listening to teachers' concerns and voice; being approachable
 - Being visible to teachers
 - C- Enlarged support base for change:**
 - Networking with external stakeholders
 - strengthening internal connections

D- Symbolic leadership:

- Creating sense of meaning and purpose
- Ensuring buy-in to the school's vision

4. Developing the action plan to initiate change

Enacting the existing school structure is a preparatory phase for initiation that a Lebanese school principal needs to attend to when initiating school improvement. Based on the results of the study, the case school, as one of the Lebanese public schools, lacked, before any initiation of school improvement, a clear and elaborate organizational structure and was characterized by an informal distribution of tasks and weak enforcement of school rules and regulations. There was a lack of clear roles and responsibilities and a general atmosphere of role ambiguity which impeded any attempt to improvement. The relation between developing clear roles and having a successful change is highlighted in the international literature. As Muijs & Harris (2006) found, structures with clearly defined roles for teachers increase the latter's willingness to take initiatives and contribute to school change. Besides, the school rules and regulations were reported to be poorly enforced before initiating school improvement something that represents another obstacle to initiate improvement as per the international literature (Walsh & Dewar, 1987). In the case of Lebanese public schools, many factors within the socio-political context of Lebanon can play a role in aggravating the aforementioned problems which risks to impede successful initiation of change. From the perspective of social relations, the principal, specifically in rural areas, falls short of enacting the rules and determining fixed roles given the strong bonds of kinship that are prevalent in Lebanese rural areas (Karami, 2014). From the perspective of political interference, the public school principal usually faces a significant

interference from political figures in the decision making process which impedes the enforcement of school rules and regulations in favor of responding to the requests and favors of the political body interfering (Harb, 2014). Also, the local politics interferes in the role expectations in public schools (Akkary & Greenfield, 1998, as cited in, Bahous & Nabhani, 2008) which renders roles and responsibilities poorly determined. Accordingly, a principal of a Lebanese public school who is willing to initiate school improvement needs to start his process of initiation with enacting the existing structure through enforcing school rules and regulations and developing clear role responsibilities and tasks for staff.

Building a school vision is necessary when initiating change as it provides a direction for improvement initiatives. A school vision, with the common direction it provides, makes the different improvement initiatives purposeful and complementary to each other, as it reduces the possibility of having too many fragmented and disconnected change initiatives that would impede school-wide improvement (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). It is important that principals in the Lebanese public school secure commitment of the staff to the school vision for initiation to be successful. For this reason, engagement of the staff in building the vision becomes an indispensable condition (Morrison, 2018). However, in the case of Lebanese public schools where change is a less familiar process and staff lack the know-how of change and the knowledge about a school vision for change (Karami, 2014), asking the staff to engage in building a vision for change might be too challenging. Accordingly, having the Lebanese principal initially developing the vision and communicating it with the staff would give the latter an impression about how a school vision looks like and where is the school heading with its change process. Nevertheless,

bringing a vision to the staff should not be equivalent to imposing the principal's vision on them. Rather, the principal should give leverage for teachers' engagement allowing them to safely provide their critical input, discussing the vision and even suggesting changes to the vision to not only secure staff's commitment to the vision but also ensure that they develop a shared conception of its rationale and aims. Eventually, the aim is to have a shared vision that is internalized by the staff members and provides a common direction to succeed on initiating school improvement plans.

Forming an enabling structure is considered to be a necessary condition to facilitate the initiation of school improvement. Based on the results of the study, a Lebanese public school principal intending to initiate school improvement needs to establish an enabling structure through forming decision making teams, establishing new communication channels, reallocating formal positions of resisting members and focusing all school processes to facilitate the implementation of the improvement plans. In fact, a decision making team is considered also as an element of an enabling structure (Hoy & Miskel, 2008) as it limits the centralization of decision making at the level of the principal and allows for distributing the power of decision making pertaining to initiation over the staff. In this case, the staff will develop ownership of the change initiated and commitment to the initiation itself for they were engaged in the decision making of designing this process. Besides, establishing additional communication channels allows for two-way communication between superiors and subordinates which is another element of an enabling structure (Baglibel et al., 2018; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Open and frequent communication between the principal and the teachers supports initiation as it ensures the

visibility and presence of the principal to address any questions or concerns raised by teachers about the change initiated (Hollingworth et al., 2018).

Further, based on the results of this study, Lebanese principal can reallocate the formal positions of resistant teachers and create a structure supportive to initiation. In this case, resisting teachers are placed in positions on the school's organizational structure that have less influence on the initiation of change and where their resistance will less likely be an impediment to initiation. Finally, as part of an enabling structure found in this study, it is important that the Lebanese public school principal facilitates the subsequent implementation of the initiated change through executing the policies mandated by the ministry in the most conducive way possible.

Developing a climate of high morale is another enabling condition for the initiation of change. Based on the results of the study, a climate of high morale requires empowering teachers through continuous recognition and praise, engaging teachers in the decision making, listening to teachers' concerns and voice and being visible to teachers on ground. It is important that the principal continuously praises teachers and recognizes any simple improvement in their attitude toward change for this will promote teachers' satisfaction and positive feelings towards change (Karami et al., 2019). Also, engaging teachers in decision making will improve teachers' feeling of self-worth that their voice is valued and can have an influence on the decision making of change initiation (Thompson, 2018). Further, the principal's visibility to teachers and his responsiveness to questions and concerns develop feelings of security and tranquility among teachers (Morrison, 2018) as it communicates to the latter that they are not left alone during change, rather the principal is there to provide

all kinds of support needed. Based on the literature and the results of the study, developing a climate of high morale constitutes an enabling condition that will reduce any potential resistance and hence support change initiation.

Another enabling condition to be considered by Lebanese principals during change initiation is enlarging the support base to change. The principal can enlarge support base to change initiation through networking with external stakeholders and strengthening internal connections. Based on the results of the study, the principal needs to establish connections with external stakeholders including governing bodies, social and political figures to enlarge the political support base to change that is highly needed in the political work context of Lebanese principals. Securing political support will in its turn help remove many of administrative and financial barriers typically faced by principals within a highly politicized bureaucracy (Karami, 2014). In addition, enlarging the support base to change must take place also inside the school. A number of tactics need to be followed by the principal to convince school members of the change. This could happen through lobbying, forming coalitions and empowering strategies (Blasé & Björk, 2010; Caruso, 2013; Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Enacting symbolic leadership can also generate enabling condition for initiating school improvement in the context of Lebanese principals. Acting as a symbolic leader, the principal inspires people by making change and the direction of the school feel distinctive and of high stakes (Bolman & Deal, 2017) and by creating a sense of purpose and meaning to change (Bolman & Deal, 2017) that convinces the staff of initiating the change. The

vision of change, hence, becomes appealing and motivating which secures staff's commitment to initiation.

After enacting the existing school structure, building the school vision and setting the enabling conditions for change initiation, the principal needs to develop the action plan to initiate change in collaboration with other school members. It is important that the Lebanese principals follow a participative approach and consider engaging school members early and in all steps of the process of developing an action plan (Thompson, 2018). The action plan starts with assessing the needs of change at the school. Needs assessment is a process of reflection and self-evaluation that school members should be engaged in (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2006; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996). After identifying a number of needs for improvement, the needs should be prioritized and addressed according to their priority. The prioritized need will turn out to be an objective that will be addressed in an action plan (Arnaiz et al., 2016). A decision making team should be formed to address the identified need or needs with highest priority, and must be constituted of members that represent the different stakeholders and have relevance to the topic of change depicted by the need (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1996). The team will work on developing the action plan with all its components; the objectives, actions, people responsible, timeline, resources, indicators for success. After the team finalizes the action plan, it will be communicated with all stakeholders in the school. At this point, the initiation plan will be ready for its subsequent phase of implementation.

Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

The scarcity of international, Arab and Lebanese studies that address the role of the principal in school improvement (Maatouk, 2020), specifically the initiation of school improvement, and the perceptions toward this role (Bashshur, 2005; Foster & Hilaire, 2004; Jones & Thessin, 2015), triggered the interest of this researcher in conducting this study. It came to fill in the gaps in the literature about the initiation process of change, role of principal in initiating change, perspective of teachers and leaders about this role, change initiation and the role of principal in the Lebanese context and particularly in public schools.

However, other studies of larger scale are still needed to examine the role of school principal in initiating change and overcome the limitations in the generalizability of the results of the study beyond the case it examined in depth. These studies can repeat this research in different Lebanese contexts to check if the model of initiation generated in this study can still be applicable and generalized. Other studies can focus on the difference between the perceived role of principal in initiating change in public compared to private school in Lebanon. Another study can also focus on the perceived role of public school principal in initiating change in rural compared to urban areas, since the cultural context and diversity of population might differ between urban and rural areas which could result in different perceptions of the role of principal in initiating change.

Besides, one peculiar finding of this study to the Lebanese context relates to having the public school principal depending on contractual teachers to support the initiation of school improvement. Accordingly, further studies can examine the impact of the presence

of contractual teachers on the school improvement processes in terms of the role and the nature of contribution they have. It is noteworthy that recruiting teachers on contractual basis has been significantly prevalent in the public sector in Lebanon (Abdul-Hamid & Yassine, 2020), however, their contribution, especially in term of their agency to engage or initiate change has been poorly studied in the Lebanese literature. So this study recommends further studies to examine the impact of contractual teachers on school improvement, but also recommends larger scale studies to examine the nature of contractual teachers' impact, on the internal functioning of public schools in Lebanon pertaining to their capacity to generate school based improvement.

On another level, this study presents a couple of recommendations for practice. The fact politicized nature of the educational system in Lebanon compromises subjecting its employees to rigorous performance appraisal that holds them accountable (Karami-Akkary, 2014) senior tenured teachers tend to become resistant to change initiatives. For this reason, it is recommended during change to reallocate responsibilities of senior tenure teachers away from having a central role in the change being initiated. Also, the change initiated might sometimes require additional talent and skill which necessitates bringing in contractual teachers that have the needed skills and are open to professionally develop themselves. In addition, as it was discussed, the principal has been trained on international conceptions of initiation, however, his practices didn't always reflect the views he has been trained to. This suggests that different kinds of job-embedded training be done for the school principals that is based on the cultural context of the school. This training can be facilitated through CERD (Center for Educational Research and Development) that can

provide coaching for principals intending or are undergoing school based improvement, particularly on how to initiate school improvement. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education can also play a similar role through the DOPS (Counseling and Guidance department) in sending coaches to support the principal and provide job-embedded training while going through the process of initiation. Besides, prior to the initiation of change, it is highly recommended that schools form teams as a requirement before initiation for these teams will be receiving training on initiation. The TAMAM model (www.tamamproject.org) for school based improvement in the Arab region can be followed to build leadership capacity of the team members and provide training on a number of competencies, knowledge, skills and attitudes including reflective practice, evidence based decisions, need based actions and decisions, collaboration, participative leadership and building positive attitudes towards change (Karami Akkary & Rizk, 2011) which are all competencies and attitudes that the initiation of change requires based on the model generated in this study. Moreover, the capacity building provided by the TAMAM model ensures a sustainable school based improvement and self-renewing school.

APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1- In your opinion, what is school improvement and what does it aim for?

Possible Probes: What is its purpose? What actions does it encompass? Do you think it is a process/journey or aims for a specific product?

Since you were assigned as a principal, list some change initiatives that you've introduced to the school.

Choose one or two that you think are most significant and impactful.

Please keep these initiatives in mind, and provide examples as you answer the following questions.

2- In your perspective, what was your role as a principal in the process of initiating these improvement initiatives? What steps did you follow to initiate/plan for the change initiative?

Possible Probes:

- a- How has the need of change been identified? Who was involved?
- b- What was the goal behind these changes? Did they aim to meet the school's vision?
- c- Was there a plan? Who was involved in developing the plan? What did the plan include (strategy addressing the need, resources, roles, responsibilities, timeline, monitoring and evaluation process etc.)

- d- Was the plan communicated with staff? What strategies did you use to communicate the plan to the staff?
- 3- How do you describe your leadership approach when initiating and planning for the change initiatives?

Possible Probes:

- a- Were others involved in the decision making process? Did you act like a coach? Colleague? Or manager? Were you inspiring to achieve the school's vision? Were you distributing leadership roles?
- 4- From your perspective, what conditions/factors you think you provided that supported and facilitated the initiation of school improvement?

Possible probes:

- a- Did you focus on motivating the staff to initiate the change? What strategies were used to motivate them?
- b- Did you encourage collaboration between the different members? How?
- c- Did the staff participate in decision making when initiating change? Describe in what manner?
- d- What is the importance of trust during change initiation? How was trust established?
- e- How were the school rules and regulations supportive to the initiation of change? Were there any new rules?
- f- What kind of relationship exist among the staff? How did the horizontal and vertical relationships between school staff support the initiation of the school improvement initiatives?

g- What were the roles and responsibilities of staff during the initiation of change?

Were there any new roles?

h- Was the time properly managed to accomplish different duties including those of initiation? How?

i- How did networking inside and outside the school support the initiation of school improvement?

a- How does it help in gaining support to change?

b- How does it help in finding resources, especially financial resources?

5- From your perspective, what were the challenges faced when initiating and planning for the change?

What forces (internal and external) have influenced the initiation of the changes?

6- What were the measures taken to deal with the challenges and facilitate the initiation of the aforementioned change initiatives?

APPENDIX B

COORDINATORS, SUPERVISORS, SUPERVISORS, PARENTS, INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1- In your opinion, what is school improvement and what does it aim for?

Possible Probes: What is its purpose? What actions does it encompass? Do you think it is a process/journey or aims for a specific product?

Since the principal was assigned, list some change initiatives that were introduced to the school.

Choose one or two initiatives that you think are most significant and impactful.

Please keeping these initiatives in mind, and give examples as you answer the following questions.

2- In your perspective, what was the principal's role in the process of initiating these improvement initiatives? What steps did he follow to initiate/plan for the change initiative?

Possible Probes:

a- How has the need of change been identified? Who was involved?

b- What was the goal behind these changes? Did they aim to meet the school's vision?

c- Was there a plan? Who was involved in developing the plan? What did the plan include (strategy addressing the need, resources, roles, responsibilities, timeline, monitoring and evaluation process etc.)

d- Was the plan communicated with you? What strategies were used to communicate the plan to you?

3- How do you describe the principal's leadership approach when initiating and planning for the change initiatives?

Possible Probes:

Was he the sole decision maker? Did he involve others in decision making? Did he act like a coach? Colleague? Or manager? Was he inspiring to achieve the school's vision? Was he distributing leadership roles?

4- From your perspective, what conditions/factors were provided by the principal to support and facilitate the initiation of school improvement?

Possible probes:

a- Did the principal focus on motivating you to initiate the change? What strategies were used to motivate you?

b- Did the principal encourage collaboration between the different members? How?

c- Did you participate in decision making when initiating change? In what aspect? And in what stages of the initiation?

d- What is the importance of trust when initiating change? How was trust established?

e- How were the school rules and regulations supportive to the initiation of change?

Were there any special provisions that were introduced to support the change?

f- What kind of relationship exist among you, as staff? How did the horizontal and vertical relationships between school staff support the initiation of the school improvement initiatives?

g- What were the roles and responsibilities of staff during the initiation of change? Were there any new roles?

h- Was the time properly managed to accomplish different duties including those of initiation? How?

i- How did networking inside and outside the school support the initiation of school improvement?

a- How does it help in gaining support to change?

b- How does it help in finding resources, especially financial resources?

5- From your perspective, what were the challenges faced when initiating and planning for the change?

What forces (internal and external) have influenced the initiation of the changes?

6- What were the measures taken to deal with the challenges and facilitate the initiation of the aforementioned change initiatives?

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

TEACHERS

My name is Yasmine Al Gharib. I am pursuing my Master's degree in Education Administration and Policy Studies at the American University of Beirut, and I am currently working on my thesis. I am conducting this research to understand the role of the principal in initiating school improvement. Literature has revealed that the role of principal, particularly in initiating change, is still not clear. Accordingly, I am interested in exploring your perspectives regarding the role of principal in initiating school improvement, as you have experienced the change process in this school since its inception. First, I will ask about the role of the principal in the process of initiating school improvement, and the steps he has followed to initiate the change. Second, I will ask about the leadership approach followed by the principal when initiating the change. Third, I will ask about the conditions/factors that supported and facilitated the initiation of change. These are conditions provided by the principal to support the initiation of change. Finally, I will ask about the challenges that were faced when initiating change and what strategies were followed to mitigate the challenges. I guarantee that no names are going to be mentioned and confidentiality will be maintained. Also, I ask you to please respect the confidentiality of your colleagues. Please note that you can skip a question if you don't wish to answer. This interview will take around 60 minutes. I'd kindly ask if you don't mind recording the interview to facilitate the note taking, and I ensure that the recording will never be disclosed.

Introductory question:

In your opinion, what is school improvement and what does it aim for? (*Its purpose, actions it encompasses etc.*)

Core questions:

List some change initiatives that were introduced to the school, and choose one or two initiatives that you think are most significant and impactful.

Please keep these initiatives in mind, and answer the following questions.

- 1- In your perspective, what was the principal's role in the process of initiating these improvement initiatives? What steps did he follow to initiate/plan for the change initiative? (*Assessing needs, meeting school vision, developing the plan, communicating the plan etc.*)
- 2- How do you describe the principal's leadership approach when initiating and planning for the change initiatives?

Possible probes: Did he involve others in decision making? Did he act like a coach? Colleague? Or manager? Was he inspiring to achieve the school's vision? Was he distributing leadership roles?
- 3- From your perspective, what conditions/factors were provided by the principal to support the initiation of school improvement? (*Motivation, collaboration, shared decision making, trust, enabling rules and regulations, relationships, time, networking to gain support and resources, roles and responsibilities etc.*)

- 4- From your perspective, what were the challenges faced when initiating and planning for the change? (Internal and external forces)
- 5- What were the measures taken to deal with the challenges and facilitate the initiation of the aforementioned change initiatives?

Closing question: Is there anything else that you wish to add or comment on?

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR MEMBER CHECK WITH TEACHERS, SUPERVISORS, COORDINATORS

The aim of this interview is to seek participant's feedback on the conclusions I reached after analyzing the data collected from all participants through individual interviews and focus group interviews. I will present each of the interview questions with their corresponding answers or results. These results are in the form of initial categories and themes that were obtained from the analysis of all interviews collectively. This interview is expected to take between 30 and 40 minutes.

After the themes developed by the researcher, as results of the interview questions, are presented, please comment on them.

Do these themes represent your views on the role of principal in initiating school improvement?

- His role in the process?
- The leadership approach followed when initiating school improvement?
- Enabling conditions provided when initiating change?
- The challenges faced and the strategies followed to deal with the challenges?

Do you have anything to add? Do you recommend any changes to the themes?

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE OF CATEGORIZING DATA UNDER THEMES

<u>Code</u>	<u>Participants' responses</u>
Formalizing the processes in the school	<p>Pr: Rules and regulations that support change weren't present at first. No rules were enforced. The change started by making everyone subjected to the rules.</p> <p>S1: the school rules are applied. They control things so that everyone knows his rights and obligations</p> <p>S2: the enforcement of the internal regulation and implementing it helps in achieving the improvement as it is used to settle disputes and objections; The principal says that this is what should be done as per the law.</p> <p>S3: The internal regulations have helped in achieving the changes through proper implementation of the rules and regulations</p> <p>S4: Most of the teachers and administrators, prior to the arrival of this principal, were not aware of the school rules. School improvement initiatives were supported by the principal through making everyone read and understand and be aware of the internal rules of the school. So the enforcement of the rules helped us to initiate school improvement.</p> <p>C2: Rules and regulations were strictly implemented</p> <p>C1: The principal hangs the order in teacher's lounge and asks everybody to please read and take a copy. It is everyone's right and responsibility to know the order.</p> <p>C3: The internal order supports initiation of change through following up on staff based on the rules and regulations. And if anyone objects to a certain issue, the principal would answer that this is according to the</p>

internal order and he can't ignore it; I think, this is one additional reason for his success.

T5: the internal school regulations is for all public school but what distinguishes us is that we apply the rules

T8: there are limits that we need to respect. There are the internal rules, we become used to them, and we feel that they are helpful for us in our daily practices and helped us to change. Rules make us more organized and disciplined

P1: principal strictly enforced the school rules. The school was a chaos, some teachers tend to leave school during school hours to go home... one leaves because her daughter has delivered, another leaves to prepare lunch. other teachers make personal phone calls using the school's landline... The principal put limit to all this through enforcing rules others otherwise the schools wouldn't have improved

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