AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE ROLE OF GOVERNANCE IN ENABLING AND SUSTAINING SCHOOL-BASED IMPROVEMENT: THE TAMAM PROJECT EXPERIENCE WITH THE LEBANON HUB

by
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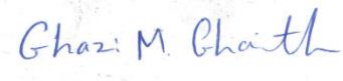

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ABSTRACT

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Title: The Role of Governance in Enabling and Sustaining School-Based Improvement: The TAMAM Project Experience with the Lebanon Hub

This study explored the role that governance plays in enabling and sustaining school-based improvement through the TAMAM project experience with six public schools which have been partnered with it since 2015 and which constitute part of its hub in Lebanon. It aimed to find out which governance components have challenged or facilitated the selected schools' organizational performance, particularly the implementation of their improvement projects and staff's readiness to innovate.

The study adopted a qualitative methodology and collected data mainly through the analysis of documents. This documented data was of a wide variety and comprised transcripts of raw data, memos from interviews, project progress reports, and technical reports. The analyzed data fell into two main categories: those primarily accessed through a subset of the TAMAM project databank and secondly those made publicly accessible on governmental websites in the form of legislative decrees.

Following this, I analyzed data using mainly a deductive process with predetermined codes developed from a conceptual framework which I synthesized from the lessons learnt of prominent researchers' empirical studies about how we can sustain school improvement through governance as well as studies which explored practical applications of a decentralized governance model known as the school-based management model. I then sorted this data into these generated codes and made a comparison between the two to form an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon. As a final step, I left room for some form of inductive analysis to occur and alternative themes to emerge.

The study found three governance components which facilitated schools' implementation of their improvement projects in the context of the study. Namely, these were the established trust and positive informal communication channels with governmental supervisors; the informal mentorship that school principals received from officials versed in the governance structure and system functioning; and the municipal financial support. As for the governance components which were found to hinder implementation, the study found seven of them. The first three were the absence of formalized two-way, consistent communication with governmental supervisors; the lack of municipal coordination in support of schools' improvement initiatives; and the lack of clear communication and sufficient information provided by the ministry about mandated educational policies and initiatives. The remaining four were overloading schools with top-down projects which were not aligned with their own initiatives; the centralized decision-making process in the ministry; the mismanagement in the task allocation of schools' human resources; and

the absence of regular teacher training opportunities which are responsive to the needs of teachers. As for the second part of the study's research question exploring the effect of governance on school lead team's readiness to innovate, the study only found derailing governance components. Namely, these were the presence of an outdated, restrictive mandated curriculum; the absence of mentors limiting teachers' ability to generate innovative ideas; prescribed professional development that does not cater to teachers' personal aspirations; lack of sustainable resources for teachers' engagement in innovation; and lack of emphasis on professional qualification in teacher recruitment.

Finally, the study discussed the results through a comparative lens with the proposed conceptual framework and the literature to help generate informed recommendations for future research and practice. One recommendation for future research was to conduct a comparative study between schools which are partnered with TAMAM and public schools whose practitioners have only taken part in top-down improvement initiatives mandated by the ministry or schools whose practitioners have yet to acquire the needed competencies to lead and enact school-based improvement. As for the recommendations for practice, one of the study's main recommendations was to devolve more decision-making power to regional education office staff members so that educational decisions become informed by schools' needs and are responsive and timely to requests submitted by schools.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
AUB	American University of Beirut
CIB	Central Inspection Body
CERD	Center for Educational Research and Development
DG	Director General
DOPS	Department of Guidance and Counseling Directorate
D-RASATI	Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools' and Teachers' Improvement
EDP	Education Development Project
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PD	Professional development
QITABI	Quality Instruction Towards Access and Basic Education Improvement
RACE	Reaching All Children with Education
REO	Regional education office
SBM	School or site-based management
SIP	School Improvement Program
TAMAM	Al-Tatweer Al-Mustanid ila Al-Madrasa
UBD	Understanding by Design
US	United States

USAID	United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background, problem statement, and the study's rationale. Furthermore, the chapter presents the research purpose, question, and the significance of the study. Specifically, the background and problem statement section introduces school improvement as a process which enhances schools' performance, the challenges of extending it to the systemic level and of sustaining it, and decentralized governance models as potentially promising solutions for these challenges. Additionally, it presents key governance areas in need of reform to help sustain improvement initiatives as identified in the lessons learnt of prominent researchers' empirical studies. The chapter also introduces the research problem in the context of ministries of education in the MENA region, the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education in particular, and the active school-based improvement initiatives in the Arab region and in Lebanon more specifically.

Background and Problem Statement

There is growing consensus among researchers that one way by which schools can enhance their performance is through engaging in improvement. School improvement bears multiple conceptual definitions that seem to converge on viewing it as a process involving "collectively supporting factors in the organization that enhance students' possibilities for learning in relation to a complex surrounding world" (Mogren et al., 2019, p. 508). But while individual schools around the world have been able to produce gains in student achievement, these enhancements have yet to spread to the systemic level.

With that realization in mind, many stakeholders were determined to learn how to extend improvement from the school to the system level. After years of experience with reform implementation, they found that this could be achieved by devolving authority to local governments. As a result, educational governance systems especially in the Western hemisphere gradually became more decentralized in the second half of the twentieth century with district superintendents, local school boards, municipalities, or school-level councils being vested increased autonomy in key decision-making areas. The rationale behind this move was that it would ultimately maximize local governments' effective use of resources in fulfillment of state and national goals while giving them enough flexibility to account for schools' local needs (Lytle, 2007; Stone et al., 2001).

However, the issue then turned into a question of how to sustain systemic improvement because out of the many reforms which have been enacted over the years, only a small percentage has actually brought about lasting improvement. After conducting extensive empirical research on large-scale international reforms, it became evident for many prominent researchers that this sustainability would entail two types of systemic changes: cultural and structural in integral areas. These areas are communication, shared leadership, local capacity building, effective use of community resources, structural arrangements that stimulate innovation, and accountability (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Levin & Fullan, 2009; Myung et al., 2020).

In the case of the MENA region, the centralization of most education ministries' governance structures has been acknowledged by researchers as an impeding factor for reform success and the quality of education offered in the region (٢٠١٧ ,العماري؛ Al-

Yahmadi, 2013; Alghamdi, 2019; Almutairi, 2017; Alyamani, 2016; Bashur, 1997, 2005; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; Malas, 2019; Romanowski & Amatullah, 2016). While some ministries have attempted to respond to this issue by adopting decentralization models such as the charter school or school-based management models, their attempts have insofar not had the intended effect because the key tenets of these models were improperly applied (إبراهيم, ٢٠١٣). This is why those researchers and school practitioners recommend that future restructuring attempts give more attention to granting increased operational autonomy to school practitioners, involving them in the design and implementation of reforms, sufficiently training them to competently enact their roles in reform implementation, and establishing a rigorous database which feeds information from public schools to the larger education system and vice versa (Bashur, 2005; El-Amin, 2004; Karami Akkary, 2014).

In the Lebanese context in particular, it becomes evident how outdated the educational management system adopted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) actually is, with origins dating back to the early 1940s and only sporadic notable amendments being made to it since then (El-Amin, 2004). And while the ministry's governance structure is depicted as being led by a Minister of Education who shares decision-making power with multiple units and governmental supervisors who report to him, the reality couldn't be further off (MEHE, n.d.-d). In actuality, decision-making power tends to be concentrated at the highest-level executive officials, namely with the Minister of Education and the Director General. It is for this reason that El-Amin (2004) calls for restructuring MEHE's educational management system such that direction remains centralized and reform implementation becomes decentralized. He argues that for the system to become a coherent and interconnected whole with

mutually supportive components, it must be restructured in four key areas: capacity building, a rigorous database, participation, and autonomy. In his opinion, it is only when this prerequisite is met that purposeful, evidence-based reforms can be designed for sustainable improvement to take place in Lebanon's educational sector.

Now, in both of these contexts, the broader MENA region and Lebanon in specific, several school-based improvement initiatives have been working on building practitioners' capacity in a limited number of schools to equip them with the competencies they need to engage in school-based improvement (Malas, 2019). While some of these projects are collaborations between MEHE and international funding agencies in the case of Lebanon, others are non-governmental research and development projects. An example of the former group is the Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools' and Teachers' Improvement (D-RASATI), a reinforcing project for the overarching Education Development Project (EDP 2) initiated by MEHE in 2012 (MEHE, n.d.-a). D-RASATI was funded by USAID to provide leadership development and training to public school principals as part of a capacity building program known as the School Improvement Program (SIP). This program aimed to equip participants with the skills needed to design and implement improvement interventions which address their schools' needs. As for the latter group, a prominent example which has been ongoing for the past 15 years and has been expanding in the Arab region is Al-Tatweer Al-Mustanid ila Al-Madrasa (TAMAM) project (Jureidini, 2018; Malas, 2019). This initiative aims to prepare a foundation conducive for engaging in school-based improvement by first offering an intensive capacity building program to prepare lead team members to embark on the process of engaging in school-based improvement and collaboratively plan, initiate, and implement improvement interventions. Based on the

TAMAM School Improvement Journey, school lead teams then engage in an iterative process to select an intervention suitable for their schools' needs, plan and implement it, monitor the progress being made, and evaluate the generated impact, all while being continuously guided by TAMAM coaches (TAMAM, n.d.-b). However, the main challenge in both types of projects goes beyond just implementing their strategies to build school practitioners' capacities. Instead, it lies in attempting to turn school-based improvement into an ongoing, self-renewing process where school-based initiatives can overcome barriers generated by an educational system with an overarching governance that is centralized, often politicized, and rarely supportive of school-based improvement initiatives (Karami et al., 2021).

Rationale

There are several reasons which justify this study's selected focus. To begin with, in the wake of many enacted education reforms, researchers have realized that the key to reform success has more to do with contextual adaptability than the intended design (David & Peterson, 1984). It is for this reason that they have increasingly recommended examining the factor affecting reform implementation as one component of organizational performance. Instead of being outcome-oriented, the concept of implementation highlights the multistage, iterative process of engaging in school-based improvement during which new or unexpected challenges and school needs emerge and for which amendments to the original intervention are accordingly made. It also reveals the organizational impediments that often derail improvement initiatives from achieving their goals (McLaughlin, 1987). This focus on implementation makes it very fitting to examine the experience of the TAMAM project which partnered with schools and developed their capacity to lead and implement improvement while supporting them to

defy existing centralized structures to understand the interplay of governance components and sustainable school improvement.

Asides from the implementation of improvement interventions, staff's readiness to innovate was selected as a second component of organizational performance to examine in this study. The purpose behind that was to form an understanding of how educational governance in Lebanon affects school practitioners' engagement in innovative practices after they have acquired the needed competencies to lead school-based improvement. This allows me, the researcher, to accordingly make informed recommendations about the changes that are needed at the governance level to better enable school practitioners to be creative, especially after their capacity to lead has been built as in the example of schools which have completed the TAMAM School Improvement Journey.

Additionally, for an external initiative like TAMAM which has been advancing teacher leadership and some form of school-based decision making, studies examining the factors impacting the sustainability of its interventions are yet to be conducted. Hence, before this project can make further claims about its generated impact on school practitioners' capacity, an understanding of the barriers affecting the sustainability of its improvement attempts in the Lebanese context is first needed. And since it's been established in the literature that there is an association between governance and schools' organizational performance (Earley, 2003; Gabris & Nelson, 2013; Land, 2002; Leechman et al., 2019; Luschei & Jeong, 2021), then we can expect some of the emergent challenges to the schools' organizational performance to be governance-related. These findings help inform what changes are needed to the educational

governance structure in order to better enable and sustain TAMAM's improvement efforts and long-term impact in Lebanon.

Asides from the aforementioned reasons which justify the study's chosen focus, there is one gap in the literature which makes this research timely and an added value to existing research in this area. Primarily, there are scarce studies exploring the overall association that governance has with schools' organizational performance and even rarer attempts have insofar been made to establish this link in the context of reforms aimed at generating sustainable school improvement (Bandur, 2018; Earley, 2003; Land, 2002; Leechman et al., 2019). This is the case despite there being ample evidence that school improvement is a process which positively reflects on schools' organizational performance and that decentralized governance models show promise as potential means of sustaining this process (Chapman & Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Levin & Fullan, 2009; Mogren et al., 2019; Myung et al., 2020).

While the previously identified gap in the literature helps contextualize this study's research problem and focus, this study specifically aims to help fill the gaps in the literature pertaining to the MENA region and Lebanon specifically. In the overall context of the MENA region, researchers have recurrently called for restructuring the management systems of ministries of education such that school practitioners become more involved in reform design and implementation and are given increased autonomy in decisions concerning school operations (العماري, ٢٠١٧; Almutairi, 2017; El-Amin, 2004; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; Romanowski & Amatullah, 2016; إبراهيم, ٢٠١٣). As such, the emergent findings from this study may support these calls and generate recommendations informed by the input of school practitioners themselves as well as governmental supervisors for how we can effectively amend the governance structures

of ministries of education in the MENA region and Lebanon in particular so that they become more enabling and sustaining for school-based improvement initiatives.

As for the specific case of Lebanon, this study aims to help fill the gap about the interaction between the two subsystems, public schools and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, as the focus in the literature has insofar been centered on one or the other. On the one hand, there are studies which have identified school-level factors that are conducive for sustainable school-based improvement such as teacher leadership and internal capacity building (Jureidini, 2018; Katerji, 2020; Malas, 2019). On the other hand, there are those which have examined the role that entities such as teacher unions–which interact with MEHE but are not institutionalized in its governance structure–play in education reforms (Ghosn, 2016). More specifically, attention has yet to be accorded to the type of facilitations needed within the educational governance system in Lebanon to better support and sustain improvement initiatives in schools. Whenever support towards schools' improvement projects is identified as impactful, it has oftentimes referred to support which is offered through external initiatives. These initiatives typically fall into two categories: independent research and development projects such as TAMAM or improvement projects such as D-RASATI which are funded by international agencies like USAID and the World Bank. In either case, the challenge with this type of support remains that it is tied to the duration of the projects. In other words, once these projects get completed and their goals are achieved, support towards schools' improvement projects gets cut off, leaving no room for sustaining their long-term impact. This is why conducting this study promises to have far-reaching implications. Specifically, by forming an in-depth understanding of the ways in which governmental units and their occupants have either facilitated or hindered the selected

schools' improvement projects, informed recommendations can be made at the end of the study for how this role can further be improved so that it becomes more supportive of and sustaining for these types of projects.

Purpose of Study and Research Question

This study aims to understand the role that governance plays in enabling and sustaining school-based improvement initiatives in Lebanon through looking at the TAMAM project experience with six public schools comprising part of its Lebanon Hub. As such, it is driven by one main objective: finding out which governance components have insofar challenged or facilitated the selected schools' organizational performance in the context of their improvement projects. In this study, governance is a multifaceted term comprising structure; interactions based on mutual assistance between various interest groups; distributed decision-making power in curriculum management, student management, resource allocation, and budgeting; and explicitly expressed and legally delegated operational rights (Shava & Heystek, 2019; Wang, 2007; Wu, 1996; Yuan, 2000; Zhao & Wang, 2020; Zheng & Wang, 2000). As for organizational performance, it is conceived in the literature as a complex interrelationship between seven performance criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, quality, productivity, quality of work life, innovation and profitability (Rolstadås, 1998). However, for the scope of this study, I focused on only two of these components, namely effectiveness as manifested in the implementation of schools' improvement projects and lead team members' readiness to innovate. Hence, this study is guided by the following research question:

Which governance components have challenged or facilitated the TAMAM Lebanon Hub's school organizational performance, particularly

a. the implementation of schools' improvement projects?

b. lead team members' readiness to innovate?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to a better understanding of the overall relationship between governance and two components of schools' organizational performance, namely the implementation of their improvement projects and lead team members' readiness to innovate. In the MENA region, the present study corroborates existing calls in the literature for further decentralization of education ministries' governance structures to improve the quality of education offered in the region. As for the specific case of Lebanon, this study aims to help fill the knowledge gap about the interaction between both subsystems, public schools on the one hand and governmental units and supervisors on the other hand. Furthermore, it responds to recommendations calling for restructuring key components in Lebanon's educational management system–namely capacity building, an information system, participation, and autonomy. To do so, it may generate recommendations at the end about the changes that are needed at the governance level to be more supportive of and sustaining for schools' improvement projects as well as lead team members' readiness to innovate.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The second chapter of the thesis presents the literature that situated my research problem and guided the conceptual as well as contextual framing of my study. In it, I define the study's key conceptual terms, namely, governance and organizational performance. Second, I explain the overall relationship that governance has with schools' organizational performance while pinpointing the particular components within it of considerable influence. Thirdly, I present three decentralized governance models adopted in the second half of the twentieth century as a way of bringing about systemic improvement. Fourthly, I delineate in a conceptual framework my initial understanding as a qualitative researcher of the governance areas in need of restructuring for systemic school improvement to be sustained. This framework was synthesized from the lessons learnt of leading researchers' empirical studies on large-scale international reforms as well as studies which explored practical applications of a decentralized governance model known as the school-based management model. Fifthly, I present the centralization of ministries of education in the MENA region as a derailing factor for reform success and the integral governance areas in need of restructuring according to researchers. Sixthly, I describe the educational governance system in Lebanon while highlighting the key roles of governmental units and supervisors towards schools in the improvement process. Finally, I report on the origin and rationale behind the TAMAM project, its adopted theory of change, its offered capacity building program catered to school practitioners, the way its improvement cycles function, and its main encountered challenge in Lebanon.

Conceptual Definitions

Governance

Governance is viewed as multifaceted and is delineated through explicating its multiple components. For the purpose of this study, I have highlighted the following components that many scholars agree to be essential constituents of this multifaceted concept. These include the following: structure; mutually assistive relationships between stakeholders; distributed decision-making power in areas of curriculum management, student management, resource allocation, and budgeting; and explicit, legal operational rights granted to stakeholders (Shava & Heystek, 2019; Wang, 2007; Wu, 1996; Yuan, 2000; Zhao & Wang, 2020; Zheng & Wang, 2000).

Structure. In a study conducted by Shava and Heystek (2019), principals identified organizational structure as comprising "issues of school governance, material resources, positional levels, and committees established in the school system" (p. 62).

Stakeholder Relationships. Zhao and Wang (2020) identified relationships between various interest groups as a second component of governance. They claim that in an ideal governance structure, these relationships should be mutually assistive.

Distributed Decision-Making Power. To ensure that the larger system functions effectively, governance also entails an allocation of power and responsibilities amongst stakeholders such that each has a role to play (Wang, 2007). Specifically, more decision-making power should be granted to school practitioners in curriculum management, resource allocation, and budgeting as these are the most impactful areas (Zhao & Wang, 2020).

Explicit, Legal Operational Rights. Finally, to ensure that all stakeholders stay within the bounds of their allocated duties, these duties should be clearly delineated in laws and regulations (Wu, 1996; Yuan, 2000; Zheng & Wang, 2000).

Organizational Performance

It is a complex interrelationship between seven performance criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, quality, productivity, quality of work life, innovation and profitability (Rolstadås, 1998). In this study I examined organizational performance through two of those criteria: effectiveness as manifested in the implementation of improvement projects that constitute the central operational goal of school-based improvement in the context of the TAMAM project and lead team members' readiness to innovate.

Relationship Between Governance and Schools' Organizational Performance

Amongst scholars, there is a widespread belief that effective local governance gives rise directly to high-performing schools, but research investigating this claim has insofar been scarce, especially in relation to its translated effect on student achievement (Earley, 2003; Land, 2002; Leechman et al., 2019). In particular, the impact on schools' organizational performance and student achievement has been linked in the context of the modern Western democracies to a few components within governance, namely school board and school-level dynamics (Gabris & Nelson, 2013; Luschei & Jeong, 2021).

School Board Dynamics

In this context, the influential school board dynamics are those pertaining to board members' behavior and interactions such as the established trust between them, post-decision unity, and healthy board-executive relationships (Gabris & Nelson, 2013;

Luschei & Jeong, 2021). According to Delagardelle (2008), these dynamics eventually seep into students' academic achievement through the policy decisions that are issued by the school board. After such decisions are announced, they start making their way into school cultures, administrative decisions, and classroom instruction to ultimately get reflected in student performance. More specifically, Luschei and Jeong (2021) were able to narrow down the scope of these impactful board decisions to budgeting which was the only decision-making area out of three in their study to have a significant, positive correlation with student achievement across all school subjects.

School-Level Dynamics

As for the impactful school-level dynamics, these can be narrowed down to the degree of autonomy that is granted to schools across various domains (Gabris & Nelson, 2013; Luschei & Jeong, 2021). In their study, Luschei and Jeong (2021) discovered a consistently positive, significant association between greater involvement of teachers in the overall school decision-making process and student achievement across three subjects: math, reading, science. When they differentially examined this link across three decision-making areas, the aforementioned association remained significantly positive across all subjects in staffing-related decisions and only two of the three subjects in curricular and pedagogical decisions. Furthermore, Fuchs and Wößmann (2007) and Wöbmann et al. (2007) found this impact to be more far-reaching in schools which were held accountable by local stakeholders, insinuating that a level of monitoring is still needed by governmental units and positional level administrators in cases when school practitioners are granted increased school autonomy. In the same vein, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2016)

reported larger implications of principals' autonomy for student achievement in the presence of an external accountability culture.

However, the association between the autonomy degree granted to schools and student achievement has been conflicting and varying across diverse contexts (Hanushek et al., 2013). While it is shown to be positive in developed and high-performing countries which have access to a lot of resources, it has insofar been negative in developing and low-performing countries which lack the needed resources to engage in school improvement. As such, this discrepancy warrants further research into the contextual factors hindering developing countries from improving their educational system.

Decentralized Education Governance Models

The latter half of the twentieth century saw educational governance systems worldwide advocate for systemic improvement through the improvement of whole districts (Lytle, 2007; Stone et al., 2001). To accomplish this, they evolved from highly centralized to decentralized models, transferring authority unto local governments' hands to leave them with enough leeway to account for schools' local needs. While the type of local governmental unit which had this widened decision-making power tended to vary across contexts, the responsibilities overlapped. In the following section, these different types of local governments are presented along with their expected educational duties.

The US Governance Model

In the United States, the 1960s and 70s witnessed considerable effort to honor the differences in districts' cultures, needs, resources, and capacity (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014). To that end, the power scales were shifted such that the district

superintendent and local school board were granted additional authority in educational decisions concerning their districts.

District Superintendent. While the role of district superintendents has evolved over time, key characteristics remain unchanged (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). First is this idea of district superintendents as teacher scholars or master teachers. In this capacity, they are expected to act as educational leaders, providing the needed vision and planning to improve student learning in their districts. They also develop and evaluate professional development workshops, instructional programs, and curricula and oversee teachers' implementation and engagement with them. Second is this notion of them as managers tasked with "budget development and administration, standardization of operation, personnel management, and facility management" (p. 81). Third, they are democratic leaders who strategize and lobby for their districts' needs in support of any initiatives they take. Fourthly, they are social scientists who apply scientific inquiry to the problems they face in their practice. Finally, they act as liaisons between boards and state education departments on the one hand and schools and boards on the other, relaying curriculum policy mandates and school-related information to board members.

Local School Board. As for the school board, it acts more as an advisory committee in concert with the superintendent because its members tend to lack technical knowledge pertaining to the education field. The board's main responsibility is to develop curriculum and student policies that are both aligned with state and federal standards and informed by school-related information which the superintendent provides. If it fails to adhere to these centralized standards, it risks losing crucial funding which cannot be compensated through local taxes. Additionally, because these

members are usually not versed in technical knowledge, they resolve themselves to managing the daily systemic functions (Andero, 2000).

The Municipal Governance Model

Asides from the aforementioned local governance model of district superintendents and school boards sharing decision-making power, an alternative model adopted in some states in the US as well as other countries like Sweden and Finland devolves educational authority to the municipality instead (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2020; Lewis, 2015; Williams, 2003). Again, the rationale behind this power redistribution is to pave the way for municipalities to effectively allocate resources in fulfillment of state and national goals. To enact this rationale, any legislative articles which limited monetary transfers from the central government to the local government for the use of resources were eliminated when Finland enforced this change. However, this decentralization of power ended up creating discrepancies across municipalities based on varying financial capabilities that were influenced by population numbers, a problem that many countries are still grappling with and taking measures to rectify while sustaining the authority granted to the municipalities (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2020).

The School-Based Management Model

Yet another decentralized governance model which became popular in the second half of the twentieth century is the school or site-based management model (SBM) after a series of curricular and instructional reforms in the 1960s and 70s yielded unsatisfactory results (Cheng, 2012). When modernized management generated positive outcomes in industrial and commercial organizations in the 1980s, people began to realize that education systems called for a similar restructuring if they were to improve. Hence, the school-based management model came into being, transferring authority

from the hands of central authorities to that of a school-level council made up of school practitioners who accordingly receive extensive training for their new roles through school-based activities such as professional and curricular development. The rationale for adopting SBM was that giving school practitioners considerable autonomy and building their capacities would instill local ownership in them and a commitment to improve student achievement, thus maximizing school effectiveness in the long run (Arar & Abu Nasra, 2020; Dimmock, 2013). However, an argument then arose that a complete decentralization of power could not ensure that schools would effectively use their increased autonomy, so an amendment was made to one of the key tenets of the SBM movement: both central authorities and school staff would share decision-making rights (Cheng, 2012). Therefore, in light of this alteration, SBM came to endorse granting schools more autonomy in specific decision-making areas such as the management of curricula, general affairs, personnel, and budgeting as long as this autonomy was bounded by a centrally defined framework of guidelines and accountability measures (Arar & Abu Nasra, 2020).

As has been previously mentioned, a key tenet of the school-based management movement is that it is founded on the principle of shared decision-making. To make this a feasible and practical endeavor, new positions which allow school practitioners to participate in school-related decisions through a school-level council are legally formalized in the overarching governance. This entails the issuance of updated laws and regulations which reflect this power redistribution amongst stakeholders and explicitly draw boundaries around it. Furthermore, to guarantee that school practitioners do not overstep their predetermined legal limits, control and accountability rights become vested upon school practitioners as well as governmental supervisors. In doing so, local

monitoring gets maximized, a sense of ownership gets instilled in school practitioners, and transparency increases amongst stakeholders involved in the school improvement process. Now, to ensure that school practitioners have the needed skill set to perform their expanded duties, continuous learning opportunities are made accessible to them during which they can develop their skills and expertise under the guidance of a coach or mentor. Hence, if one were to summarize the power dynamics between governmental supervisors and school practitioners in a school-based management model, it would be one of advisor and advisee respectively, with governmental supervisors supporting and guiding school practitioners as they navigate the school improvement process (Bandur, 2018; Cheng, 2012; Dimmock, 2013).

Sustaining School Improvement through Governance: A Proposed Conceptual Framework

According to Mogren et al. (2019), school improvement is a process that consists of introducing a combination of organizational factors which are favorable for student learning. In light of this definition, sustaining initiatives that support student learning becomes not so much about ensuring innovative longevity as much as laying a conducive foundation for practitioners to continuously engage in creative practices that serve that purpose (Fullan & Sharratt, 2009). And while the literature does not offer a direct answer for how we can achieve sustainability through governance, there are key takeaways and lessons learnt offered by prominent researchers in the field that come close when pieced together. After conducting extensive empirical research on large-scale international reforms, these researchers realized that the sustainability of school improvement mainly hinges on both structural and cultural systemic changes in key areas. These areas are namely communication, shared leadership, local capacity

building, effective use of community resources, structural arrangements which stimulate innovation, and accountability (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Levin & Fullan, 2009). Furthermore, these governance components are also consistent with components which came up in practical applications of the school-based management model in various contexts that increased its chances of being successfully implemented.

Communication

According to Levin and Fullan (2009), communication entails honest, two-way consistent conversations between governmental supervisors and school practitioners about attempted initiatives, faced challenges, and accomplishments that are supported by formal channels. Examining this component in the context of the study helps us understand the type of the communication channels which school principals and teachers had access to and whether they were able to readily voice grievances they had concerning their improvement projects, as well as share their success stories.

Leadership

As for the second governance component, leadership means that the larger educational system recognizes that it takes both top-down and grassroots efforts to bring about sustainable reform. Hence, it makes an effort to not confine leadership to official positions and instead cultivates teacher leaders at the school level who can step up and assume additional authority, working hand in hand with governmental supervisors to sustain improvement initiatives (Levin & Fullan, 2009). Integrating this governance component in the proposed conceptual framework for this study helps us better understand the power dynamics at play between school practitioners and governmental supervisors: if they approach improvement initiatives collectively or individually.

Local Capacity Building

Arguably one of the most integral governance components for sustaining school improvement that has been identified in the literature is local capacity building that prepares the school practitioners to initiate and implement school improvement. This component comprises both an investment on the part of the educational system in school practitioners' professional development and a willingness from centralized units and supervisors to learn from the insights practitioners can offer for designing and leading improvement initiatives (Levin & Fullan, 2009; Myung et al., 2020). That is why including this component in the proposed conceptual framework for this study gives us an in-depth understanding about the types of continuous training opportunities made available to school practitioners and whether governmental units and supervisors see that there's anything for the system to learn from grassroots improvement initiatives.

Effective Use of Community Resources

In terms of resources, many researchers found that abundance of funds alone is not the key driver for successful improvement initiatives but rather it is the effective use of resources at the disposal of governmental supervisors and school practitioners (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; Levin & Fullan, 2009). Essentially, in the context of improvement, scholars recommend that newly allocated budgets be spent on professional development, in-school coaching, and leadership cultivation to better support teachers' engagement with improvement initiatives (Myung et al., 2020). Moreover, this also entails governmental supervisors making informed decisions about allocating existing resources and properly matching school personnel to the objective of the school improvement initiative. This necessitates that the governance structure

ensures that there are policies that protect teachers and administrators from being frequently moved around to allow for the long-term individual and organizational learning that effective and sustainable improvement needs (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Examining this governance component in the context of the study helps us determine if new money is being invested by the Lebanese educational system into teachers' professional training and if existing resources are being used effectively.

Structural Arrangements that Stimulate Innovation

Given the potential that innovation has for improvement initiatives, a strong feature of the larger educational system must be to stimulate the innovative ideas of school practitioners. To do so, it must first make these creative ideas readily accessible to school practitioners through surrounding them with professional communities that are conducive for reflective, enriching dialogues to take place. Second, it must also invest in continuously building school practitioners' capacities which will increase the likelihood that they will come up with innovative ideas on their own (Fullan & Watson, 2000). Integrating this component in the proposed conceptual framework for this study helps us understand whether the collective and individual environment surrounding teachers is conducive for them to adopt creative practices or not.

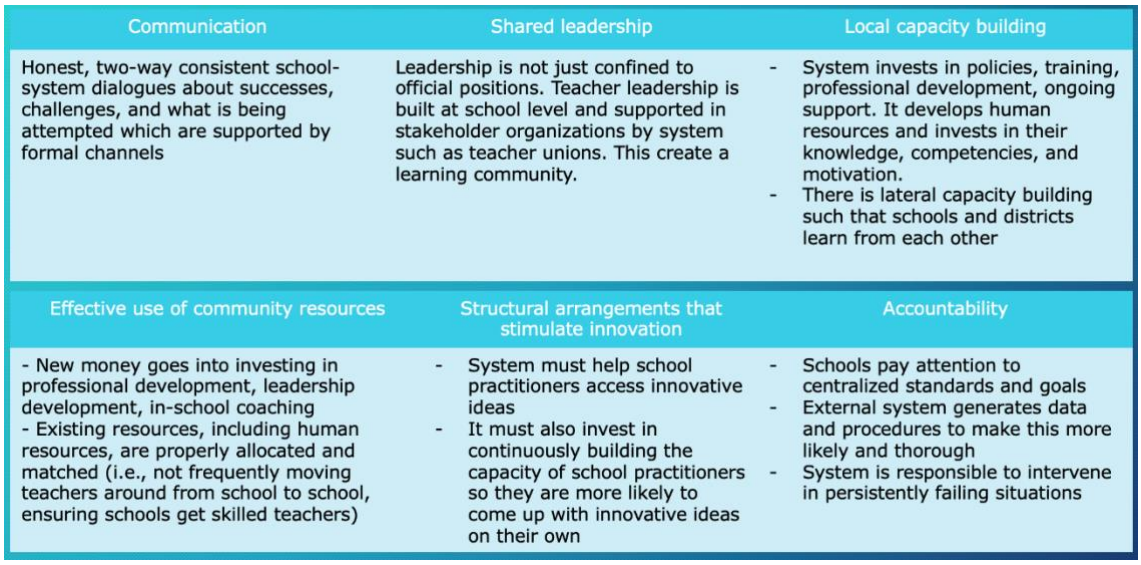
Accountability

The final governance component which was identified as crucial for sustaining school improvement by Fullan and Watson (2000) is a rigorous, external accountability system. According to them, such a system must develop centralized standards and goals which schools are expected to adhere to. To further facilitate enforcement of these standards, the system breaks them down into more explicit, concrete indicators and procedures that make it easy for schools to follow. In specific situations when a school

fails to adhere to these set standards, governmental supervisors have a right and an obligation to intervene and impose punitive consequences. Examining this component in the context of the study helps us determine how readily available and explicit centralized standards are to school practitioners and how often governmental supervisors feel the need to interfere and impose sanctions on schools that fail to adhere to these standards.

Figure 1

A proposed conceptual framework for governance that sustains school improvement



Note. Figure based on the following sources: (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Levin & Fullan, 2009; Myung et al., 2020).

Centralization and Ministries of Education in the MENA Region

In the MENA region, many researchers have narrowed down the leading reasons behind the failure of most enacted educational reforms and the decline of the education quality offered in these countries to shortcomings found in their governance. They found that foremost amongst these reasons is the centralized decision-making process which is time-consuming because decisions have to pass through the numerous tiers of ministries of education before getting approved and which does not involve key

participants such as school practitioners in the process (العماري, ٢٠١٧; Al-Yahmadi, 2013; Alghamdi, 2019; Almutairi, 2017; Alyamani, 2016; Bashur, 1997, 2005; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; Malas, 2019; Romanowski & Amatullah, 2016). Some ministries in the region have tried adopting more decentralized governance models such as the charter school or school-based management model, but they did not reap the desired results because they inaccurately applied the founding principles of these models (إبراهيم, ٢٠١٣). To effectively address this issue moving forward, scholars and school practitioners recommend restructuring education ministries across the MENA region in four integral areas: increased school practitioner autonomy and participation, sufficient capacity building opportunities made readily available to them, and a formalized database disseminating data from public schools to the larger system and vice versa such that the system can learn from its own endeavors (Bashur, 2005; El-Amin, 2004; Karami Akkary, 2014)

The Educational Governance System in Lebanon

Within Lebanon's educational governance system, there are several units and governmental supervisors that have the potential to play integral roles in the school improvement process. While some of these are directly affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, there are others in parallel which fall under the authority of different governmental structures.

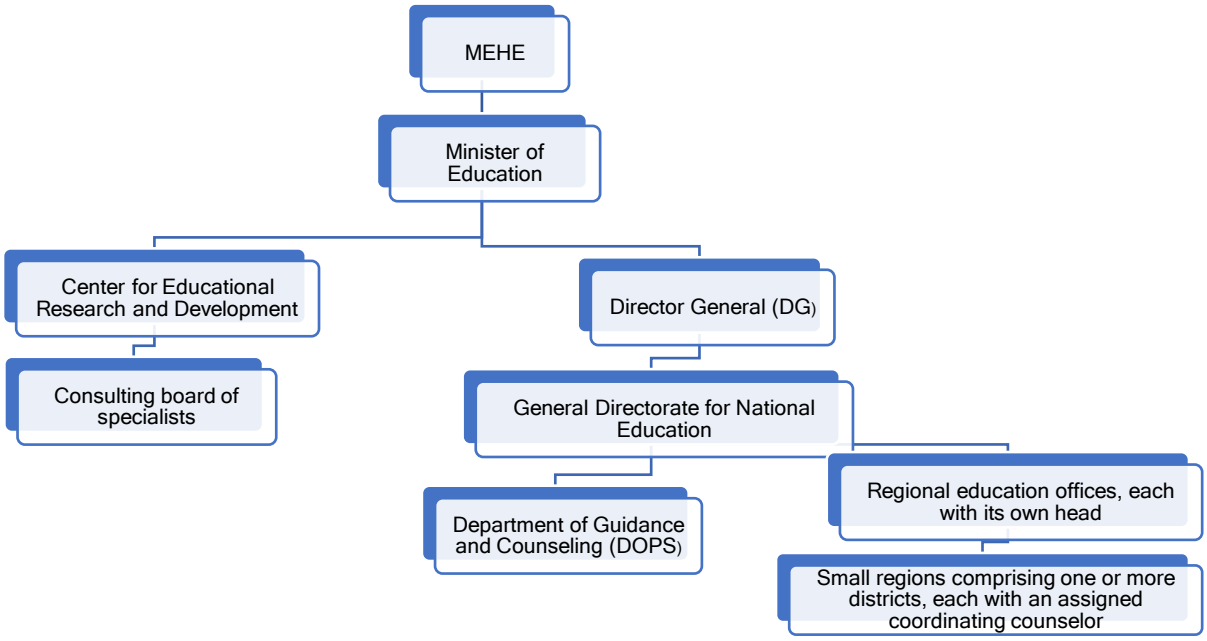
MEHE-Affiliated Units and Governmental Supervisors

As per the organizational chart uploaded on MEHE's website and several decrees outlining its structure, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon is headed by the Minister of Education (MEHE, n.d.-d). Branching out from underneath this minister are various units which play key roles in the decision-making

process, especially when it concerns national reform initiatives. Chiefly amongst these units are the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) and the General Directorate for National Education which is in turn headed by a Director General. Further nested underneath this aforementioned directorate are several subunits: The Department of Guidance and Counseling Directorate, otherwise known by its acronym DOPS, and regional education offices spread out across eight governorates: Akkar, North Lebanon, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Nabatieh, Beqaa, Baalbeck-Hermel, and South Lebanon. These eight regional education offices are then subdivided into smaller regions comprising one or more districts with an assigned counselor to help coordinate guidance matters in them. Upon close examination of the responsibilities of these units and governmental supervisors, several functions are identified which are presented in the following sections.

Figure 2

Key MEHE-Affiliated Units and Governmental Supervisors in the School Improvement Process in Lebanon



Note. Figure based on the following source: (MEHE, n.d.-d)

The Minister of Education. As previously mentioned, the Minister of Education is the highest-level executive official in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's hierarchy. Naturally, this means that he holds the majority of decision-making power pertaining to educational matters, with some of this power being delegated to the Director General which I later delve into. Hence, it follows that no decisions can be made without first receiving the minister's approval. And while his job description is not readily accessible on MEHE's website, it is known that the Minister of Education acts as a designated policymaker for MEHE. In his policymaking capacity as a minister, he has the right to propose laws to the Cabinet of Ministers, some of which even make their way to Parliament.

The Director General (DG). As per the available public information, the Director General heads a unit falling directly under the Minister of Education's authority: The General Directorate for National Education. The Director General is the second in command after the Minister of Education. He is the highest ranked, non-politically appointed positional level administrator. Being at the top of the hierarchy, he is the highest executive employee in the ministry. As such, he holds vast decision-making power in educational matters. And while it is not clear what his precise scope of authority is from the information made available on MEHE's website, most of the decisions passing through the ministry cannot get enacted without both his and the minister's approval. Additionally, even though he does not directly contribute to building school practitioners' capacity, he is in fact tasked with bringing about funds and reform projects which might encompass capacity building opportunities for in-service teachers based on Articles 8 and 12 in Legislative Decree No. 2869. Asides from that, the articles also stipulate that he is responsible for equipping public schools with laboratories and visual and auditory aids (LU, n.d.). The DG directly oversees a number of units affiliated with the ministry of education. Those include the Department of Guidance and Counseling (DOPS) and the regional educational offices.

The Department of Guidance and Counseling (DOPS). The Department of Guidance and Counseling is a performance monitoring subunit established within the General Directorate for National Education. Known by its acronym DOPS, this subunit is responsible first and foremost for advising the Director General and secondly for monitoring the performance of principals, subject matter coordinators, and teachers during the academic year and providing the support they need to meet the expectations set by the ministry for instructional and pedagogical effectiveness. To carry out its

supervisory role, DOPS counselors are tasked with coaching in-service teachers and subject coordinators when present in all matters pertaining to the curricular and pedagogical support functions at the school level. To that end, they pay visits to schools and observe ongoing classes and often give teachers direct feedback which can help improve their performance, especially in small schools which lack local subject matter coordinators. Additionally, the department is asked to be the executor of all coaching responsibilities required by national reform initiatives that MEHE is responsible for implementing under the supervision of the international funding agencies. DOPS also contributes to making educational data more readily available by publishing studies and reports focused on student-related aspects level that are typically required by the international non-governmental agencies which typically provide MEHE with the funds needed for large-scale school improvement (MEHE, 2016, n.d.-e).

Regional Education Offices. Asides from DOPS, the regional education offices are yet another subunit nested within the General Directorate for National Education. As per Article 40 in Legislative Decree No. 2869, these regional education offices represent the various specialized units within the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and are responsible for supervising the administration of public schools and staff and for monitoring private schools (LU, n.d.). Additionally**,** given that decisions pass through several specialized units and positional level administrators in MEHE's centralized administration, these offices also serve as communication channels between these units on the one hand and school practitioners on the other hand, facilitating communication and coordinating conducted affairs between them (MEHE, n.d.-c). They are also tasked with providing schools with physical spaces, equipment, supplies, and maintenance; examining requests to open private schools, relocating them, and

weighing in on their potential; contributing to providing official exam centers and the appropriate number of proctors in accordance with the Department of Exam's instructions; and preparing the curriculum dictating the work of specialized DOPS counselors as well as supervising them (LU, n.d.). Furthermore, some of their other responsibilities entail collecting statistical information pertaining to schools in collaboration with the statistics unit in MEHE's centralized administration and conducting investigations assigned to them by the centralized administration, in addition to other tasks delegated to them in accordance with the enforced laws and regulations.

The Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD). The Center for Educational Research and Development is a unit falling directly under the Minister of Education's authority which largely contributes to the decision-making processes running through the ministry. Its contributions towards MEHE's decision-making process are in three main areas: advising through a consulting board of specialists, capacity building, and accountability.

Consulting Board of Specialists. Based on article 4 of Legislative Decree No. 2356, CERD is legally mandated to be an integral participant in committees tasked with educational strategic planning and with the implementation of reform projects brought about by international donors (CRDP, n.d.-a). In this capacity, it serves as an advisor to the Minister of Education through a consulting board of specialists made up of the heads of most units and subunits falling under the Minister of Education's authority: The president of CERD, the Director General, the director of DOPS, in addition to the head of the General Educational Inspectorate which is a governmental unit not directly affiliated with MEHE (CRDP, n.d.-b). This consulting board offers the Minister of

Education guidance in matters pertaining to school curricula, educational planning projects, regulation and production of textbooks and materials to be adopted in schools, technical and health requirements for school premises, qualifications of school teachers, the format and content of official exam questions, and educational training projects that do not involve CERD employees. Owing to the significant role played by CERD, this consulting body is also responsible for coordinating matters between the research center and the centralized MEHE administration to facilitate and synchronize the state of conducted educational affairs between them. It plays a capacity building role as well as an accountability role which are explained below.

Capacity Building Role. Asides from its responsibilities towards the Minister of Education, CERD also has a role to play towards school practitioners. In fact, it is partly responsible for training in-service teachers in regional spaces known as Teachers' Colleges or *Dar al M3almeen* where workshops centered around specialized topics are held so that teachers can competently enact their roles in the classroom (CRDP, n.d.-a).

Accountability Role. In addition to its advisory and capacity building roles, the Center for Educational Research and Development also helps promote a culture of accountability and transparency. It does so by firstly monitoring the implementation of national educational plans which it contributes to, secondly designing teacher performance standards and monitoring protocols, and thirdly collecting and disseminating data. Data generation and dissemination happens through publishing educational studies, statistical bulletins, educational magazines, and performance indicators of the overall Lebanese education system and of general education more specifically (CRDP, n.d.-a; MEHE, n.d.-b).

Units Affiliated with Other Governmental Structures

Although not directly affiliated with MEHE's centralized administration, there are two other units in parallel to MEHE that are worth mentioning when discussing educational governance in the context of school improvement, and they are the Central Inspection Body (CIB) and the municipality.

The Central Inspection Body. The Central Inspection Body is the first of two units which are involved in the school improvement process but are not directly involved with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Instead, this unit falls under the direct authority of the Cabinet of Ministers, and it was legally created in 1958 based on Legislative Decree No. 115 (CIB, 1959a). As per the content of subsequent Legislative Decree No. 15317, the jurisdictional authority of this unit extends to all public administrations, institutions, departments, municipalities, and their employees, including the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the public schools it governs. Within this inspection unit is a centralized administration and several specialized general inspectorates, including the General Educational Inspectorate which is assigned monitoring and guidance duties towards all public pre-university educational institutions based on Article 15 in Legislative Decree No. 2460 (CIB, 1959b, 2019). This article mandates that educational inspectors pay schools visits in order to monitor the state of conducted affairs in them, teachers' competence and performance of assigned responsibilities, adherence to official exam policies and guidelines, and the performance of DOPS counselors. Additionally, the jurisdictional authority of the General Educational Inspectorate enables it to serve on three types of specialized committees: task-oriented committees covering issues such as legal studies, educational

evaluation, and publication and statistics; academic subject committees; and regional coordination committees.

The Municipality. Asides from the Central Inspection Body, the municipality is a second unit not directly affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education that is worth mentioning when discussing school improvement. Based on Article 49 in Legislative Decree No. 118, the municipality is tasked with contributing to public school expenses in adherence to school policies, monitoring educational activities and the state of conducted affairs in public and private schools, and filing reports to the specialized educational governmental structures (" قانون البلديات في لبنان: المرسوم الاشتراعي رقم 118 سنة 1977 وتعديلاته"). Additionally, subsequent Article 50 also grants municipalities the jurisdictional authority to initiate, self-lead, lead by delegation, contribute to, or facilitate the implementation of public-school projects.

TAMAM: A School-Based Reform and Improvement Project in the Arab Region

In response to the persistent challenges and ineffectiveness of educational reforms in the Arab region, a non-governmental research and development project called TAMAM was launched in 2007 as part of a memorandum between the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Arab Thought Foundation (Karami-Akkary & Rizk, 2011). Run through partnerships between academics and practitioners, this initiative is driven by a theory of change grounded in the belief that effective education reforms start as bottom-up initiatives in schools (TAMAM, n.d.-a). This is done with external coaches and trainers continuously supporting school practitioners as they acquire the competencies they need to enact school-based improvement which must then be sustained through top-down support from policymakers. To fulfill this theory of change, TAMAM offers an intensive capacity building program guided by eleven principles

deemed essential for enacting school-based improvement in the Arab region. Once school practitioners complete this program, they are expected to have gained the leadership competencies needed to exercise their agency and initiate innovative improvement interventions in their own schools using a strategy known as the TAMAM School Improvement Journey. This strategy is focused on an iterative process during which school lead teams select a focus for their improvement project that is informed by their schools' needs, vision, and mission. Once they have narrowed down the goals and focus of their improvement project, they design a suitable intervention for it and implement it while monitoring its ongoing progress and evaluating its generated impact. When the first cycle of this improvement journey concludes, school lead team members reflect on the generated impact of their chosen intervention and work collaboratively with administrators to introduce the necessary organizational conditions which will help formalize the improvement process in schools and pave the way for subsequent improvement cycles to be undertaken. However, despite the advancements which the TAMAM project has been making in the area of school-based improvement, its main encountered challenge has been trying to institutionalize this process and make it continuous and self-renewing within the larger public education system whose governance structure is highly centralized, often politicized, and rarely supportive of school-based improvement initiatives (Karami et al., 2021; Karami-Akkary et al., 2016).

Chapter Summary

The second chapter in this thesis first covered the definitions of the two conceptual terms, governance and organizational performance. Second, it explained the overall association that governance has with schools' organizational performance,

particularly that of school board and school-level dynamics. Third, it presented three decentralized governance models adopted in the second half of the twentieth century which are promising for systemic improvement. Fourth, it proposed a conceptual framework for how we can sustain systemic improvement through governance based on the lessons learnt of prominent researchers' empirical studies on large-scale, international reform and practical applications of the school-based management model. Fifth, it delved into the centralization of ministries of education across the MENA region as a derailing factor for reform success and a component in need of reform as per researchers' calls. Sixth, it delineated the educational governance system in Lebanon with its MEHE and non-MEHE affiliated units and governmental supervisors who have the potential to play key roles in the school improvement process. Finally, it presented TAMAM as an active school-based reform and improvement project, traced back its origin, explained its driving theory, and described the capacity building program it offers schools; its iterative improvement cycles; and its main encountered challenge in the Arab context and that of Lebanon in particular.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The third chapter of this thesis describes the methodology of the study and is divided into eight sections. The first lists the research question which guided this study, and the second describes the adopted paradigm. As for the third and fourth sections, they delve into the study's main methodology and method of collecting data. The fifth section highlights the sources of data reflected in the analyzed documents whereas the sixth describes the context of the study. Finally, the seventh details the analytic processes used to examine the data, and the eighth section explains the quality criteria used to establish the study's trustworthiness.

Research Question

This study focused on the role that governance plays in enabling and sustaining school-based improvement through an in-depth examination of the TAMAM project experience with six public schools which have been involved with it for eight years. These schools are also part of its Lebanon hub which comprises a total of 10 active public and private schools. Each of the schools has a leadership team that is constituted of the principal with 4-6 teachers who have received extensive training to build capacity for leading school-based improvement. The study particularly aimed to examine the ways in which the Lebanese educational governance structure has challenged and facilitated these schools' organizational performance in the context of sustaining school-based improvement. In this study, governance was conceived as a multifaceted term encompassing the following components: structure; mutually assistive relationships between stakeholders; distributed decision-making power in areas of curriculum management, student management, resource allocation, and budgeting; and

explicit, legal operational rights granted to stakeholders (Shava & Heystek, 2019; Wang, 2007; Wu, 1996; Yuan, 2000; Zhao & Wang, 2020; Zheng & Wang, 2000). As for organizational performance, it is defined in the literature as a complex interrelationship between seven performance criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, quality, productivity, quality of work life, innovation and profitability (Rolstadås, 1998). However, for the scope of this study, it was narrowed down to the schools' effectiveness vis a vis implementation of their improvement projects and lead team members' readiness to innovate. Therefore, the research question which the study investigated is the following:

Which governance components have challenged or facilitated the TAMAM Lebanon Hub's school organizational performance, particularly

1. the implementation of the schools' improvement projects?
2. lead team members' readiness to innovate?

Paradigm

To conduct the study, I adopted an interpretive paradigm to form an understanding of the enactment of school-based improvement while being attentive to the nuances of the situated context and the processes influenced by it (Walsham, 1993)., This paradigm has four main claims. First, it is guided by the principle that all human understanding is formed through an examination of interdependent parts as well as the whole they add up to (Gichuru, 2017). Second, it requires a "critical reflection of the social and historical background of the research setting" (p. 1). Third, it necessitates a thorough look into how data was socially constructed through researcher-participant interactions. Fourth, it involves relating the study's findings back to some guiding theories with a sensitivity to any emergent contradictions between the two. Fifth, it

embraces multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon as studied by different researchers. Lastly, it considers the possibility of participant bias affecting the collected data.

Methodology

For my study, I opted for a qualitative methodology due to the importance it ascribes for forming an in-depth understanding of complex issues in an authentic context (Prior, 2008; Simons, 2009). Additionally, this type of research is particularly deemed useful for studying aspects in the educational leadership field in diverse cultural contexts because they are highly dependent on societal culture (Hallinger, 2018). More specifically, I employed the analysis of documents as my main method of data collection. However, those documents were of a wide variety and comprised transcripts of raw data, memos from interviews, progress reports, and technical reports. I did this using a qualitative interpretive approach for data analysis and a conceptual framework which I synthesized from the recommendations in the literature for how we can sustain school improvement through governance as well as empirical studies on practical applications of the school-based management model.

Data Collection Method

In this study, I mainly used a subset of existing data from the TAMAM project databank. This documented data was originally collected by the TAMAM project team using a variety of methods and tools: individual interviews, focus group interviews, and templates filled about the foci of schools' improvement projects. This subset was available to me in the form of raw data and memos from interviews; technical reports published by the project steering team on TAMAM's website as well as reports published by school lead teams about their improvement projects; and the TAMAM

team's own coaching journals which included project progress reports and memos. Furthermore, I also examined a secondary source of existing data in the form of publicly accessible government documents as documents have been deemed to be as insightful and integral sources of data for the social sciences as "an anthropologist's informant or a sociologist's interviewee" (Prior, 2008, p. 230). These documents mostly comprised legislative decrees made available on websites of the Lebanese public newspaper, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), and the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD). Together, the two categories of analyzed data attempted to paint a comprehensive picture of how the Lebanese educational governance has insofar enabled or derailed the implementation of schools' improvement projects and lead team members' readiness to innovate in the context of the study.

Sources of Data

The selected sampling method for the sources reflected in the analyzed data was purposive sampling. According to Kelly (2010), purposive sampling is a sampling technique which is conveniently and intentionally chosen to target participants who "are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" (p. 654). It is especially suitable for gaining comprehensive insight into a particular subject without wasting resources (Palinkas et al., 2015). The rationale behind adopting this sampling method is that there is a particular group of people who share valuable information and views that must be taken into consideration in order to formulate a well-rounded understanding of a specific topic (Campbell et al., 2020). In light of this, the existing subset of data was intentionally chosen to include the perspectives of school practitioners who had already acquired the needed competencies for engaging in school-based improvement and had

taken part in several initiatives as well as governmental supervisors who had extensive knowledge about the inner workings of MEHE-affiliated and non-MEHE affiliated units involved in the school improvement process. This was done to try to paint a representative picture of the actual roles that these units play towards schools in the improvement process since the available information on the ministry's website is brief and tends to contradict the enacted reality.

Existing Data in the TAMAM Databank

As previously mentioned, the analyzed subset of data which was accessed through TAMAM's larger databank comprised project progress reports, technical reports, and de-identified interview transcripts with school practitioners and key governmental stakeholders in the improvement process. I extracted this subset from the larger databank because I deemed it to be particularly relevant and useful for answering the study's posed research question. However, given the heavy documentation of the TAMAM project, it is worth mentioning that this data was originally collected for different purposes.

Project Progress Reports. These reports included the ongoing meeting minutes between the TAMAM project steering team and one school throughout the duration of the project. The sources of data which were reflected in them were project steering team members, the school's principal, teachers, and the TAMAM coaches.

Lebanon Hub Technical Report. The Lebanon Hub technical report delved into the details of the six schools' individual and collective experiences throughout the project from initiation until culmination, including the obstacles they faced from the ministry. The data sources which were reflected in it are the project steering members, school principals, and teachers.

De-Identified Interview Transcripts with School Practitioners. The de-identified interview transcripts with school practitioners comprised raw data and memos from an interview conducted with one school principal and transcripts of interviews conducted with school teachers. The reflected source of data in the former document is that of the school principal whereas in the latter, the sources of data were the school teachers and the TAMAM project director.

De-Identified Interview Transcripts with Governmental Stakeholders. As for the de-identified interview transcripts with key governmental stakeholders in the school improvement process, they included the transcript of an interview conducted with staff from a regional education office and another conducted with an educational inspector. The reflected sources of data in the former transcript are the staff from the regional education office, a school principal, and the TAMAM project director whereas in the latter transcript, it was only the educational inspector.

Public Governmental Documents

As previously mentioned, the study also examined governmental documents in the form of legislative decrees which were made publicly accessible on the websites of the national public newspaper, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and the Center for Educational Research and Development. While the available information was certainly not comprehensive, it did somewhat supplement the information provided by the subset of the TAMAM databank.

Articles 49 and 50 from Legislative Decree 118. Articles 49 and 50 from Legislative Decree 118 outlining municipalities' responsibilities in public school projects were available on the websites of the national public newspaper and the

Ministry of Education and Higher Education. As such, the reflected sources of data in them were the municipality and the ministry.

Legislative Decree 2356. Legislative Decree 2356 outlining the responsibilities of the Center for Educational Research and Development in public education was available on the center's website to access. As such, the reflected source of data in it was that of the center itself.

Table 1

Sources of data for the first and second parts of the study's research question

Research Question Part	Type of Existing Data	Data Sources
1 & 2	Progress reports	- Project steering team members (PST) - School principal - School teachers - TAMAM coaches
1	Lebanon hub technical report	- PST - School principals - School teachers
1	Raw data and memos from an interview with a school principal	School principal
2	Transcripts of interviews with teachers	- School teachers - TAMAM project director

1 & 2	Educational district staff interview transcript	- Educational district staff - School principal - TAMAM project director
2	Educational inspector interview transcript	- Educational inspector
1	Articles 49 and 50 from Legislative Decree 118 regarding municipal responsibilities	- The municipality - The Ministry of Education and Higher Education
2	Article 4 from Legislative Decree 2356 about CERD's responsibilities	- The Center for Educational Research and Development

The Context of the Study

The data that was examined for this study was documented by the TAMAM project as part of its ongoing research and development activities between 2015-2020 with six public schools spread out across different regions in Lebanon. These schools have been involved in the TAMAM project since 2015 and constitute part of its Lebanon Hub. Three of these schools are located in the north, two in the south, and one in Mount Lebanon. The practitioners in the six schools have received extensive capacity building on leading school-based improvement based on the TAMAM project model. The TAMAM capacity building model engages school teams in a cycle of job-embedded training where a school team initiates, designs, implements, and evaluates a school improvement intervention that aims to address the school's identified needs (Karami et al., 2012). These schools have been specifically selected because they have

not only been involved in the TAMAM School Improvement Journey since 2015 but have also participated in improvement projects either brought about by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education such as the D-RASATI and QITABI improvement projects or internally initiated by school practitioners themselves. Their demographic information as of 2015/2016 when the TAMAM team first collected data from them is summarized in the table below.

Table 2

Schools' demographic information as of 2015/2016

Schools	Student number	Total teacher number	Tenured teachers only	Contractual teachers	Lead team members	Additional support team members
1	243	31	8	23	5	
2	852	60	22	38	6	
3	250	36	11	25	7	
4	160	44	43	1	8	3
5	657	57	24	33	5	
6	407	50	38	12	7	

Data Analysis Methods

Following data collection, I then analyzed data mostly using a deductive process. The process began with me skimming through the existing data with a general checklist of main questions and probes which I developed from the predetermined codes included in the study's proposed conceptual framework for sustaining school improvement through governance. Namely, these codes comprised communication,

shared leadership, local capacity building, effective use of community resources, structural arrangements that stimulate innovation, and accountability. Using these codes, I did a preliminary reading of the existing data and highlighted texts that fit under these parent codes which could potentially answer the first and second parts of the study's posed research question. After skimming, I proceeded to conduct several rounds of more in-depth reading of the analyzed data, further breaking down highlighted texts into smaller units which fit the generated codes' descriptions in the literature while leaving extensive pointers and notes for myself throughout the process. At the end of this process, some room was left for alternative themes to emerge. Once that was done, it was time to make sense of the extracted data and interpret it in a way that comprehensively answered the posed research question. That is when an excel sheet was created with the generated codes and their descriptions from the proposed conceptual framework serving as the main guiding categories for the extracted data while also creating a spreadsheet for themes which emerged from the inductive part of the analysis for each research question. Finally, to synthesize the answers for each research question from the extracted data, I reexamined the generated categories through the study's conceptual framework and made modifications to them to ensure a balance between conceptual clarity and representativeness of the field based on the data I collected.

Establishing Trustworthiness

For a study to have meaningful contributions to practice and theory in any field, it must meet the trustworthiness criteria of the type of research that it adopts. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), there are several criteria to take into consideration when establishing a qualitative study's trustworthiness. However, these criteria have slightly

different terminologies than in quantitative research which are better aligned with its philosophical underpinnings. They are namely credibility, consistency, and transferability, and there are several ways of ensuring each which I delve into in the following sections.

Credibility

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), internal validity or credibility examines the alignment between a study's findings and the reality of the studied phenomenon. Since researchers cannot guarantee complete objectivity in qualitative research, there are several strategies that I, as a researcher, resorted to in an attempt to boost the credibility of my study's findings. The first one is triangulation, a technique of using multiplicity in one of four ways: data collection methods, data sources, researchers, or theories to confirm emergent themes (Bryman, 2004; Creswell, 2012). In my study, I tried to employ triangulation through incorporating the perspectives of multiple sources from school practitioners to governmental supervisors reflected in the various types of analyzed existing data. Furthermore, I also tried to do that by examining both a subset of TAMAM's existing databank as well as governmental documents in the form of legislative decrees. Secondly, I kept going back and forth to the existing data until I deemed the emergent findings to be saturated and recurrent without leaving out data which disproved my expectations. Thirdly, since my advisor was the main researcher when the analyzed data from the TAMAM project databank was first collected, I also attempted to use peer review as a way of confirming the study's emergent findings with her to make sure that they accurately reflected the analyzed data and to minimize the influence of personal bias. In cases when my advisor felt that an emergent theme did not accurately reflect the studied phenomenon, she

made sure to point that out to me and we had in-depth discussions to better contextualize the analyzed data and amend the emergent themes so they stayed true to the analyzed data.

Consistency

As for the second criterion used to establish trustworthiness in a qualitative study, it is the reliability or consistency of a study's results with the collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Contrary to its traditional meaning which is focused on the replicability of results in quantitative research, reliability in qualitative research is more concerned with how much a study's findings make sense to an outsider if he were to be given the collected data. To make sure that a qualitative study's findings are reliable, a researcher can opt for several strategies, namely peer examination and an audit trail. As previously mentioned, since my advisor was the main researcher when the analyzed data from the TAMAM project databank was first collected, I tried to use peer examination as a method of increasing consistency by confirming the emergent themes I had extracted with her to ensure that we had both reached the same conclusions with our analysis of the data. As for the audit trail, I attempted to be as explicit as possible with my description of my data collection and analysis methods to increase the chances of future researchers arriving at similar conclusions if they were to adopt the same processes.

Transferability

With regards to the third criterion ensuring a qualitative study's trustworthiness, external validity or transferability refers to the applicability of a study's results to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the extent to which a study's findings are generalizable largely lies with the knowledge that the researcher possesses pertaining to

the study, the researcher has an obligation to provide a detailed description of the study's site, participants, and findings so that readers can compare the compatibility between their study's context and the researcher's. This is a strategy which I have also tried to employ in this study through being as detailed as possible about the context of the study, the background of the school practitioners in the examined schools, and the study's findings.

Chapter Summary

The third chapter of the thesis described the methodology of the study with its posed research question, paradigm, main adopted methodology, means of collecting data, sources of data, the context of the study, analytic processes, and quality criteria used to establish trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study aimed to examine the role that governance plays in enabling and sustaining school-based improvement through the TAMAM project experience with six public schools comprising part of its Lebanon Hub. It was driven by one main question, split into two parts. The first part was concerned with finding out which governance components have facilitated or challenged the implementation of schools' improvement projects whereas the second examined which of these components have enabled school lead team members to innovate or hindered them from doing so.

This chapter presents the findings of the study's research question, in the form of facilitators and hindrances and is divided into two main sections pertaining to each part of the question.

The Implementation of Schools' Improvement Projects

For the first part of the study's research question exploring the governance components that have played a facilitating or challenging role in the implementation of schools' improvement projects, there were ten main findings. Three of these were in the form of facilitators whereas the remaining seven were in the form of hindrances.

Governance Components that Facilitated Improvement

Starting with the facilitators for the implementation of schools' improvement projects, three main themes emerged from the analyzed data. These were the established trust and positive informal communication channels between school lead teams and governmental supervisors, informal mentorship from officials versed in the governance structure and system functioning towards these teams, and municipal financial support towards the improvement projects. They are presented in the following sections.

Established Trust and Positive Informal Communication Channels with Governmental Supervisors. The first facilitator for the implementation of schools' improvement projects which emerged in the analyzed data is the trust and positive informal communication channels that school lead teams had established with governmental supervisors. These channels gave lead teams access to a select group of governmental stakeholders like the head of the local district and the educational inspector who became supportive of their improvement projects. Through them, school principals were able to influence some of their key supervisors into providing the needed support for the implementation of their improvement projects. For example, school principals reported that when they put additional effort into informing governmental supervisors with the details and added value of their improvement project activities, the supervisors were more likely to embrace them and find ways to facilitate their implementation. An expressive situation of this is one narrated by a project steering member about a school whose assigned inspector was initially very critical and doubtful about the TAMAM project in general and the school's improvement project in specific when she first started attending meetings with the school's TAMAM lead team. However, this did not discourage the principal from continuing to invite the inspector to meetings during which the lead team took time to explain to the inspector the rationale of their actions and inform her about what they were doing and the impact they were making while implementing the project. When she became attentive to the progress that the school was making, how much lead team members were learning, and how dedicated they were to the implementation of the project, the inspector became excited about it and transformed into an advocate who eagerly paid additional visits to the school and joined all the lead team's training sessions. Not only that, but she also began

spreading the news about the school's outstanding work, even communicating this message to her supervisor. The blessing this inspector received from her supervisor enabled her to align her originally assigned responsibilities in the school with the lead team's work in the improvement project. As a result, she became more supportive of the project and refrained from asking lead team members to do other tasks which were not necessarily synchronized with its goals and interventions. Furthermore, because she came to understand the improvement initiative they were doing, she adopted the indicators that lead team members had set for themselves in their improvement project when evaluating their overall performance of the school.

However, while this school was successful in turning its assigned inspector into an advocate of its improvement project and gaining her support and facilitation, this situation was not consistent across all schools and was more of an exception rather than the rule with many schools being assigned governmental supervisors who maintained a rigid approach adhering to the prescribed tasks and who refused to make any adjustments that might have facilitated the implementation of the improvement project. As a result, the exceptional observed desired outcome with the inspector in the school remains triggered by unstructured, personally established connections rather than formally structured relationships. Oftentimes, this outcome was also not achieved in part because the ability of these newly acquired advocates was typically limited by the scope of their decision-making authority and their own informal connections with their supervisors. Additionally, establishing these connections took extra effort on the part of school principals and their lead teams because they not only had to inform their supervisor of what they were doing but also convince her that it was worthwhile enough for her to make accommodations to support and expedite its implementation.

Informal Mentorship from Officials Versed in the Governance Structure and System Functioning. The second facilitator for the implementation of schools' improvement projects which emerged in the analyzed data is the informal mentorship that some school principals received from officials versed in the governance structure and system functioning. Even though there was nothing in these officials' job descriptions that required the presence of a mentor, some principals received the support of informal mentors who helped them navigate the bureaucratic requirements of the ministry personnel in charge of supervising the school. Those informal mentors trusted the principals' potential and were appreciative of the improvement work they were doing within their schools. In doing so, they became a much-needed source of support for principals in an accountability system that if operational, would be punitive for them rather than supportive of their improvement and development work. In the analyzed data, this informal mentorship was manifested in several instances when experienced officials such as staff members from the regional education office or a veteran educational inspector guided principals particularly in their submission of paperwork and requests so that they end up getting approved and benefiting schools' needs. Because these officials had served in the system for an extended period of time, they were familiar with its inner workings which allowed them to navigate the system's requirements to the advantage of schools. In particular cases when there were opportunities to interpret policies that were not necessarily straightforward and that fell in grey areas to the benefit of schools, they worked closely with principals and provided much-needed instructions for them to phrase their requests in specific ways to increase their chances of getting official approval for those requests. The tips received to reframe the interpretation of the policies made the process of request submission smoother for

principals which in turn allowed them to make special provisional requests that facilitated the implementation of their schools' improvement projects. An example of this informal mentorship is one narrated by a staff member from a regional education office. Because this member had established trust with the principal of a participating school and had come to understand that most requests submitted by her were for the sake of improving her school, he started helping her in her submission of requests and gave her specific instructions on how to get approval for them. This commitment to mentor the school principal was evident in his words when he said, "I can help the principal whenever she calls. I know this is not a personal request rather it is for the sake of improving the school. And even if this request may be against the law, I would make it work. I would just know it is for school improvement because I have gotten to know the principal."

Municipal Financial Support. A third facilitator for the implementation of schools' improvement projects is the financial support schools received from their local municipalities as per Articles 49 and 50 in Legislative Decree 118. According to Article 49 in the municipal law and section four in MEHE's organizational law, the coverage of public school expenses is distributed between many governmental entities. The ministry is in charge of covering the salaries of school personnel and registration fees whereas the municipality is responsible for covering the cost of school supplies and facilities. Furthermore, Article 50 grants the municipality a jurisdictional responsibility to support public school projects. Hence, in light of both these legislative articles, while the municipality is not the only designated governmental entity that is responsible for covering public school expenses, it is currently the only governmental entity that can allocate a budget for school improvement per its mandate. However, since there is no

clause in these legislative articles that stipulates that municipalities consult public schools about the purpose of this allocated budget beforehand, the practice of these municipalities has been to independently set their own agendas. This practice meant that schools end up receiving funds that they can spend on improvement initiatives sporadically and unpredictably. Nonetheless, even with the unpredictability of these funds, they still constituted a much-needed source of funds for improvement which many schools benefited from. Some TAMAM principals took the initiative of approaching their local municipalities to share their schools' needs and lobby for them to be funded within the scope of the municipality's mandate. In fact, in the case of TAMAM schools, lead team members had been empowered and were coached on how to approach their local municipalities, presenting their schools' needs and building a case to have them financially covered. This ability to advocate for their projects resulted in schools' improvement project needs and resources to be met, hence the projects were implemented more effectively than they would have been in the absence of these funds. For instance, in many cases, these allocated funds were able to cover contractual support in the form of compensation for teachers and educational counselors or basic school necessities such as generators. Other times, they were also sufficient to cover student transportation to activities organized outside school premises, supplementary material resources such as educational bulletin guides, and professional development in the form of diagnostic workshops for teachers that redirected them to specialized centers for further training.

Governance Components that Hindered Improvement

Moving on to the governance components which hindered the implementation of schools' improvement projects, there were seven which emerged from the analyzed

data. The first three were the absence of formalized two-way, consistent communication with governmental supervisors in support of school improvement projects; the lack of coordination with the municipality in reinforcement of these projects; and the lack of clear communication and sufficient information provided by MEHE about its initiatives and policies. As for the remaining four themes, they were overloading schools with top-down projects that are not aligned with their improvement projects; the centralized decision-making process within MEHE; mismanagement in the task allocation of schools' personnel; and the absence of regular training that is responsive to teachers' needs for the implementation of schools' improvement projects.

Absence of Formalized Two-Way, Consistent Communication with Governmental Supervisors in Support of School Improvement Projects. The first notable hindrance for the implementation of schools' improvement projects which emerged from the analyzed data is the absence of formalized two-way, consistent communication between school lead teams and various governmental supervisors in support of their improvement projects. In the analyzed data, there was no indication that such communication existed between the two parties to provide information or assistance needed for the implementation of schools' improvement projects. In light of this, school staff did not receive the reassurance, feedback, and help they needed about their work to confidently continue implementing their improvement projects because governmental supervisors were not overseeing what they were doing, causing them to feel unsure and unsafe as a result. This lack of formalized communication was experienced with governmental supervisors throughout the various levels in the governance structure from localized units such as the regional education office to higher-level executive officials such as the Director General. For instance, without

direct access to formal communication with the DG, school lead teams were not able to directly relay requests and voice grievances they had concerning the barriers they were facing during the implementation of their improvement projects. This made them feel left alone in the process and insecure about the work they were doing. Moreover, in the rare instances when some sort of communication was going on with governmental supervisors, it was usually communication initiated by school principals reaching out for urgent help due to an impending crisis or to obstacles they faced. Often, these obstacles came from directives made at the ministry level with no consideration to schools' needs or to the support they needed for their improvement projects, thereby creating problems for the projects. For instance, there was a situation related by a project steering team member about a principal whose improvement project was at risk of being disrupted in the midst of implementation due to a directive from the ministry calling for merging the school's English and French branches. If enforced, this directive would have had "severe repercussions on parents, students, and the school, especially its improvement project because the teachers who are part of the TAMAM team and who were trained to take part in the implementation would have had to move away to a different school with a large number of the students". In response to this directive, the principal had to go out of her way appealing to her immediate superior, the head of the regional education office, to keep the project untouched by "continuing coordination with her until she finally convinced her to transfer kindergartens to the elementary school and to leave the English and French branches untouched in the school." Frequently, direct appeals to the supervisor fail. This leads to situations where principals must plead with a higher-level executive, the Director General to annul or override the teacher transfer directive to ensure that the leadership team stays on-site.

This appeal is crucial for the ongoing training and support of the team leading the school improvement initiative and for keeping the momentum of the improvement project unaffected.

Lack of Coordination with the Municipality in Support of School Improvement Projects. A second hindrance for the implementation of schools' improvement projects which emerged in the data is the lack of coordination on the municipality's part to align its intended contribution to the schools with the goal of the schools' initiated improvement projects. In the analyzed data, there seemed to be a lack of interest from the municipality to reciprocate schools' attempts at coordination in reinforcement of their improvement projects. This lack of coordination prevailed despite the lead teams' attempts at enacting the municipality's jurisdictional rights and its role in supporting school activities granted to it per Article 50 in Legislative Decree No. 118. This article stipulates that the municipality has the right to initiate, self-lead, lead by delegation, contribute to, or help in the implementation of public schools' projects. However, in spite of all the attempts initiated by schools, there seemed to be an underlying lack of understanding and perception on the municipality's end of what a school's role and scope of authority entail when it comes to initiating and organizing extracurricular activities. At the root of this seemed an even larger misunderstanding in how the municipality viewed its own jurisdictional role in public school projects which warranted it to act as if it were the only responsible entity for these extracurricular activities and as if the school principal and teachers had no right contributing to this role, thereby undermining rather than supporting schools' improvement projects. An example of this is a situation related by a project steering member about a school whose lead team had paid the municipality several visits to inform its head of their planned

extracurricular activity and to invite him to the welcoming event during which the school's led innovative intervention would be presented to the parents. However, despite the attempts made by the team to involve the municipality and inform the municipality leadership about the activity and its goals, the mayor did not acknowledge the school's improvement initiative in his speech during the event even though he had been asked repeatedly by the principal to reflect the municipality's support for it in front of the audience of parents. Not only that, but the mayor completely undermined the activities incorporated in the school improvement plan which the municipality could have supported by showcasing the municipality's agenda and even extended an invitation to parents to suggest a new improvement initiative that the municipality could directly work on for them with no indication of any intent to collaboratively plan this initiative with the school principal.

Lack of Clear Communication and Sufficient Information by MEHE about its Initiatives and Policies. A third hindrance which emerged in the analyzed data is the lack of clear communication and sufficient information provided by MEHE to schools about national initiatives and policies. In the analyzed data, the ministry failed to communicate new policies to schools and clearly inform them about ongoing initiatives taken by it and what their targeted outcomes and rationale were. As a result, school staff had no means of being updated about them and in the rare event they were informed, the provided information was not sufficient for them to optimize and benefit from the implementation of these policies. An example of this lack of clear communication is a situation that occurred with a participating school during the implementation of the ministry's RACE strategic improvement initiative in support of Syrian refugees in 2014. This initiative was taken by the ministry to provide Syrian

students with equitable access to quality education. However, schools were not informed beforehand about many of the activities falling under its scope which made it difficult for them to plan their yearly activities and determine the needed resources to effectively implement those mandated initiatives and sustain their impact. Moreover, when the school lead team identified their improvement priorities and designed their own strategies to achieve their improvement goals to improve the services provided to the Syrian refugees at their school, they were unable to align their activities with those prescribed by the ministry to optimize the usage of the resources available. This was the specific case of a participating school which developed its own initiative in support of Syrian refugees' education by organizing a career fair for students. However, because lead team members did not know about many of the activities that were part of the RACE implementation, they missed out on the opportunity to build on the ministry's mandated initiative and connect it with their own to increase the generated impact. Furthermore, another part of the problem is in the lack of specificity when directives calling for school staff to implement these new national policies are communicated to schools through the regional education offices. This is because staff members from the regional education offices often do not receive sufficient information about these policies themselves so that they can clearly communicate them to school principals. In an interview that was conducted with some of these members, they expressed their distress because of the insufficient information they receive from the ministry about its policies and projects. To help address this problem, one member said that he took the initiative and "requested that he be informed about these laws and procedures so that he can understand them enough to send them to principals of the schools." Hence, even in such cases when directives to implement the ministry's new projects and policies are

relayed to schools through the regional education office, school staff are left with many unanswered questions about the implementation of these mandated initiatives. As a result, they end up not knowing how to carry them out or adapt them to their schools' context to align them with their own improvement initiatives. This results in many missed opportunities to effectively achieve their improvement project goals or increase the impact of their innovative interventions.

Overloading Schools with Top-Down Projects not Aligned with Their Improvement Projects. A fourth hindrance for the implementation of schools' improvement projects which emerged in the analyzed data is the excess of mandated improvement initiatives by the ministry that do not respond to the schools' priorities and are often not aligned with the need-based improvement projects that the school teams developed while being supported by the TAMAM project steering team. In the analyzed data, there were many instances when participating schools were given directives by the ministry to implement national projects. These directives were often passed down in a top-down manner and did not take into consideration schools' context, staff's available capacity, or the priorities they had identified for themselves as a pressing problem to address or a strategic goal they chose to achieve. As such, the mandated projects came as an additional burden, often as obstacles rather than opportunities. They challenged the school leadership teams to figure out how they can fulfill the terms of the ministry's mandates while staying focused on achieving the goals of the improvement project they designed and deemed a priority for their school. They reported "success" when they managed to implement the ministry's projects in a way that aligns with the vision of the larger TAMAM project as well as that of their own school improvement initiative without altering the course and compromising the goals

and targeted outcomes they had set for themselves. Because these members were supported throughout their participation in TAMAM, they were coached on how to invest the mandated training, provided resources, acquired skills from implementing the ministry's mandated projects into their own improvement initiatives in a way that ends up complementing them. However, that was never an easy task to accomplish as the top-down projects were numerous, and the challenge particularly lay in attempting to fit all of them under the school's strategic plan that the lead team developed with the help of the TAMAM coach. An example of this top-down project overloading is a situation narrated by a school principal about a meeting she had just had with the Director General during which he presented a new inclusion project initiated by the ministry that would elapse over five years. While the school lead team saw an added value in transforming their school into an inclusive school, the mandate came with a shortage of the resources needed in terms of experts and only provided limited training and coaching support. Moreover, this top-down project differed greatly from the improvement goals that the school formulated after a thorough examination of their most pressing need, namely the disengagement of the majority of their students in school activities and their demotivation towards learning. The mandated initiatives resulted in all members of the lead team being summoned to attend what they reported as a series of information-loaded training sessions that were not followed by the promised resources for implementation. As a result, the limited human resources at the school were depleted while juggling their participation in the mandated training and their attempts at implementing the improvement activities centered on increasing engagement in seventh graders' school life that they designed after deeming that goal necessary to solving one of their school's most pressing needs. With a lot of effort and

sacrifice of personal time, the school lead team with the support of their TAMAM coach invested long hours to figure out how to best implement the ministry's project in a way that ends up supplementing their own project and serves its interests. Touching on this particular hindrance, when the TAMAM project director was informed about this meeting with the DG by the school principal, she noted that "the challenge for the TAMAM coach is always to identify and have sufficient information to understand the goals of all of the unexpected national improvement projects and try to guide the school teams to remain focused on their priorities and on serving the strategic goals of the school and to not be demotivated by what feels to them like a bombardment of irrelevant and cumbersome demands."

Centralized Decision-Making Process within MEHE. A fifth hindrance for the implementation of schools' improvement projects which emerged in the analyzed data is the centralized decision-making process within MEHE. In the analyzed data, it became apparent that any decision concerning schools, including the most minor ones, needed approval from the central office in Beirut. While there were functional regional education offices, their personnel lacked any concrete decision-making power and acted as mere facilitators and communication channels, relaying requests from schools to the central office and vice versa. This centralization and concentration of decision-making power in higher-executive officials' hands made the process of school principals receiving relevant and timely approval for their requests very tedious and difficult to happen. For instance, whenever they made requests to the regional education offices to respond to urgent needs in support of the implementation of their improvement projects, the only scope of authority that staff in these offices had was to examine and analyze the requests to check if they would be approved and sometimes to advocate for them

within the central office. After analyzing a school's request, staff refer it to the director of the regional education office who then relays it to the Director General, a process that takes a long time and often results in rejection from the central office despite positive recommendation from the regional office. According to staff members from the regional education office, their task became one of figuring out ways to protect the schools and ensure that their requests do not get rejected by the Director General. They helped schools either phrase their requests differently so that they end up getting approved or they coached them on how to optimize the use of the resources already made available to them to address their improvement projects' needs. However, these accommodating strategies meant that schools ended up with limited resources that were responsive to their improvement project needs and that were provided to them in a timely manner. Realizing the potential that this discretionary power of regional education office staff members has in helping schools with their requests in light of the absence of direct communication channels with the Director General and the limited scope of principals' decision-making authority, principals spent a lot of time and put in a lot of effort to establish strong relationships with these staff members. This created an extra burden on them as they tried to turn staff members in the regional office into advocates of their schools and their improvement initiatives. Speaking to the implications that such well-established relationships have for schools in a centralized system, a school principal stressed that the success of any improvement initiated at the school level is strongly dependent on the ability of the regional education office directors to act as advocates for schools within the central office, "championing their causes and helping them resolve their issues and overcome their challenges," and thus compensating for their lack of decision-making power to support their schools directly.

Mismanagement in the Task Allocation of Schools' Personnel. The sixth hindrance which emerged from the analyzed data for the implementation of schools' improvement projects is the mismanagement in the task allocation of school personnel. In the analyzed data, there were multiple issues in how the ministry distributed tasks to personnel either working directly in a school or alongside it on a project initiated by the ministry. This appeared in many instances when governmental supervisors issued directives to alter the job description of a group of teachers, at times even transferring them to different schools altogether to enact their new roles, oftentimes in the middle of the school year. This usually meant that teachers on school lead teams had to compensate for this by being assigned the former tasks of the transferred personnel, making it difficult for them to balance the added teaching workload with that needed for implementing the school improvement project. For instance, there was a situation related by a school principal about an English teacher who was transferred to another school as a consequence of a directive being issued from the ministry. When the principal asked the head of the regional education office to provide a replacement, she was told to add six teaching hours beyond the legal requirement to the workload of a current teacher who happened to be serving as a member of the TAMAM leadership team and provide the remaining hours by hiring a contractor. This took place while the principal was in the process of submitting a request to the DG asking him to count hours worked by the teacher on the improvement project towards her legal requirement, thereby avoiding a situation in which her workload is so heavy and packed that she doesn't have any time to spare for the improvement project. Consequently, the request from the DG to reallocate this teacher was described as devastating to her and a major hindrance to the school's ability to continue with the implementation of its

improvement initiative. However, with the support of the TAMAM project steering team which petitioned on the school's behalf that the teacher's task reallocation be canceled, the principal managed to keep the lead team member's teaching hours as is and instead opted to hire a contractor for the entirety of the needed hours so that the teacher could have sufficient time to work on the school improvement project. Thus, the altered roles assigned to members of the lead team or teachers involved in the implementation of the school improvement initiative often deprived the school of much-needed human resources and ones that were specifically trained to implement its planned activities and fulfill its intended goals. By having these personnel removed, the quality of the projects' activities suffered a huge loss. Additionally, in the rare cases where the needed personnel are assigned to improvement projects, the challenge arises from unexpected decisions by the central office to reallocate these assigned resources in the middle of the school year, leaving the principal and teachers to deal with the crisis generated by this reallocation. This is best exemplified by a situation in which a school was selected by CERD to be part of an inclusion project, and a special education expert was assigned to the school to help staff work on it. As a result, the school proceeded to accept students who needed special services counting on the presence of the support of this expert. The school enjoyed a few months of smooth implementation of the mandated inclusion project, where the expert adjusted well with the TAMAM school lead team and guided members' interaction with special education students in alignment with achieving the goals of their own improvement project. However, midway through the academic year, the school was suddenly pulled out from this inclusion project because the DG's office had realized that it had been "accidentally" selected to participate in the national project. The school then received a follow-up directive from

the MEHE administration calling for transferring the special education expert since she was no longer needed. This meant that the principal was left alone with the special needs students she admitted, and she and her school lead team had to juggle completing the school year in the absence of such a critical resource. Additionally, the removal of the inclusion expert had a detrimental effect on the implementation of the school's improvement project, with teachers who were learning to accommodate these students in their classes while at the same time working to improve the low engagement of their peers in the learning process. The removal was perceived by the lead team as a huge demotivating loss especially that it happened after they noticed positive changes in the teachers' ability to successfully implement the school's improvement initiative in tandem with the mandated inclusion project. In the principal's own words, "In a matter of 10 days, the quality in the criteria of identifying special education students and interacting with them had changed, and the team became ready and willing to work per the expert's guidance."

Absence of Regular Training Responsive to Teachers' Needs for the Implementation of School Improvement Projects. The final hindrance for the implementation of schools' improvement projects which emerged in the analyzed data is the absence of regular training that is responsive to lead team members' needs for the implementation of their improvement projects. While there was regular and frequent training provided by the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), however this training was predetermined and often did not address what lead team members needed to learn and the skills they needed to hone so they could more competently implement their improvement projects. As a result, school principals did their best to expose their teachers to as many topics as possible, hoping that they would

be of use. They also tried to find ways to use the skills targeted by the mandated professional development workshops in enhancing the implementation of their improvement initiatives. However, because of the misalignment between the provided training topics and teachers' learning needs, especially those needed for their improvement goals, teachers found themselves feeling overloaded by having to attend these mandatory workshops which they perceived as taking a lot of time away from the implementation of the school improvement project. An example of the negative implications that the time-consuming nature of these workshops had for schools' improvement projects is a situation narrated by the TAMAM project director. She reported an incident with a participating school which couldn't work on its improvement project for an entire month because it was preoccupied with attending one of CERD's mandatory workshops. Furthermore, the other aspect of the problem is that these mandatory workshops not only consumed the time and effort of teachers but also of school principals who often tried to protect their teachers' time by negotiating with the head of the educational regional office to have their lead team members be exempted from attending these workshops. Given that these workshops were neither responsive to teachers' needs for the implementation of their improvement projects nor necessary given the extensive training conducted by TAMAM, this energy could have easily been spent elsewhere. An example of this is a situation with a second participating school whose staff were expected to attend a CERD workshop about creative thinking. However, because it would have been too overwhelming for them to balance out the workload with that of implementing the school's own improvement initiative and because they had already undergone thorough training with TAMAM

about an overlapping topic, the principal fought hard to receive an exemption request from the head of the regional educational office.

School Lead Team Members' Readiness to Innovate

As for the second part of the study's research question examining which governance components have facilitated or challenged school lead team members' readiness to innovate, there were five main findings which emerged from the analyzed data, all of which were hindrances. These factors were namely the presence of an outdated, restrictive mandated curriculum; absence of mentors limiting teachers' generation of innovative ideas; prescribed professional development that does not cater to teachers' personal aspirations; lack of sustainable resources for teachers' engagement in innovation; and finally lack of emphasis on professional qualification in teacher recruitment. They are presented in the following sections.

The Presence of an Outdated, Restrictive Mandated Curriculum

The first hindrance which emerged in the analyzed data for lead team members' readiness to innovate is the presence of a mandated curriculum that is widely perceived as outdated and restrictive. As per Article 4 in Legislative Decree 2356, the Center for Research and Development (CERD) has a responsibility to revise school curricula every four years, but this had not been done since 1997. When interviewed about it, many teachers perceived a resourceful and up-to-date curriculum as a prerequisite for them to continuously improve themselves. As one participant put it, "When the curriculum is well developed even if the teacher is not well equipped s/he will be forced to improve herself/himself to keep up with this curriculum." However, the teachers explained that because curriculum revision had not been done in so long, the nature of the mandated textbooks neither inspired creative practices nor provided the resources that teachers

needed to translate innovative ideas into action. Some participants noted that they attempted to introduce additional learning material they sought from the textbooks used in private schools, going beyond the mandated textbooks, including in them more innovative content to fill in the gaps they identified in the mandated material. While these gaps presented teachers with an opportunity to try out the innovative ideas they had, their actions constituted a violation of the policy that strictly required that they use the textbook issued by CERD and the ministry. This is why when teachers reported doing these actions, it sounded as if they and the school principal were carrying out a covert operation ensuring that their supervisors from CERD, the educational inspection, and DOPS did not notice the changes they introduced. An expressive example of how these gaps in the mandated textbooks provided teachers with an opportunity to innovate is a situation narrated by a teacher participant. She reported that while these prescribed textbooks expect students to be able to read proficiently, they do not teach them how to do so by starting with the basics and enriching their knowledge base about the alphabets. To help address this gap, teachers in the school decided to instead develop their own approach towards teaching reading by spending two full months solely on the instruction of alphabets. Highlighting the innovative initiative he took, the teacher said, "Even for example, I was supposed to teach a letter, the text doesn't include any teaching from the letter. This is a challenge. At the beginning we didn't know about that but later we learned. We learned that we need to teach the shape and sound of the letter and how it is connected. So once I realized that I decided to do that on my own. With my action we got curriculum improvement."

Absence of Mentors Limiting Teachers' Ability to Generate Innovative Ideas

The second hindrance for lead team members' readiness to innovate that emerged in the analyzed data is the absence of mentors which school-level educators saw as limiting teachers' ability to generate innovative ideas because it deprived them of the kind of support that could challenge them to think outside the box and trigger their creativity. In the analyzed data, the majority of teacher participants felt that the role of the supervisors available to them, whether DOPS counselors, inspectors, or regional education office staff did not include any mentoring because in their interaction with teachers they never created spaces for collective reflection or challenged teachers to improve their instruction. Rather, these supervisors were mostly preoccupied with monitoring teachers' actions and sporadically providing these teachers with resources that could help them solve problems they reported facing with students while implementing the mandated curriculum. For example, when these supervisors paid visits to schools, they had a tendency of inspecting the work of teachers to ensure that they were following the specifics of the mandated textbooks. When teachers tried to question the prescribed approaches or offer alternative ideas that they deemed more beneficial for their students, the supervisors shot their ideas down and insisted on adhering to the mandated curriculum, thereby stifling teachers' creativity. Moreover, another aspect of the problem is that the input typically offered by these supervisors was oftentimes irrelevant to current students' needs or devoid of practical application in the classroom. Such behavior made teachers feel limited in their ability to design innovative instructional strategies. This was quite demoralizing for them because they reported considering themselves capable of bringing forth more innovative ideas and achieving beyond what those supervisors expected from them. An example highlighting the

dissonance between supervisors' inspector-like feedback and teachers' innovative potential is a situation narrated by a teacher participant who reported carrying out innovative practices in her classroom. In spite of that, her assigned DOPS counselor kept referring her back to the mandated textbook and did not offer her any encouragement to continue engaging in creative endeavors. In her words, "There are things in the curriculum from long time ago and still the supervisors are working with it. I am doing much more than what is written on the copybook." She continues, "I am much further than this. This is my personal opinion I may be judging but what these supervisors are doing is not complementary...this is no more evaluation … they are just proctoring and not helping".

Prescribed Professional Development that Does not Cater to Teachers' Personal Aspirations

A third hindrance which emerged in the analyzed data for school lead team members' readiness to innovate is the prescribed professional development that did not cater to teachers' personal aspirations or challenge them to be more innovative in their classrooms. In the analyzed data, many teacher participants felt that the predetermined training topics provided by CERD did not address areas they would have liked to work on for professional growth. They noted that those sessions were often "repetitive and irrelevant" and did not teach them any new strategies they could bring back to their classrooms and school. This irrelevance is best exemplified by the words of a science teacher who shared her experience attending these workshops and reported that she did not benefit from them. In her words, "For instance, all the workshops on science I have already acquired the needed knowledge. The workshops on science I feel they provide problems and not solutions." On the other hand, these teachers were able to identify an

added value in some of the TAMAM workshops they attended such as the workshop on an innovative curriculum design strategy known as Understanding by Design (UBD). This particular strategy was intended to equip teachers with techniques that could make them capable of making changes to the prescribed curriculum, allowing them to introduce creative activities in their classrooms. Because teachers had learnt about the potential for innovative approaches from this strategy, they gave it as an example of a professional development opportunity that triggered them to innovate in their classrooms. Highlighting the creative potential and added benefit offered by UBD in classrooms, a teacher participant said, "The UBD taught us how to be more open there is more creativity in it, more than the curriculum and the textbooks. It opened a lot of things for us and for the students." She continues by providing an example of an activity she conducted in her classroom based on this curriculum design:

> We had a theme about stories, so I added the main objectives of the lesson. These are our curriculum objectives. Then we added something that is about imagination so that I teach my students that not everything that I provide them, they go and just implement it. I told them we are not machines we need to think and be creative. They had done a spectacular job as each has created a story of their own. They had freedom to design and do whatever they want. I just provided them with a rubric on how to write a story.

Furthermore, another aspect of the problem with the prescribed CERD workshops is that they happened too frequently. As a result, teachers did not have sufficient time to reflect on what they learned in them and transform it into implementable action in classrooms. This is in addition to the fact that teachers were also constrained by the limited time they had to cover the mandated curriculum. As a result, most of them chose

to prioritize teaching the mandated curricular content to ensure student comprehension over experimenting with implementing innovative ideas they learned in their professional development (PD) sessions. According to the teachers, transforming their PD learning into action needed time and resources that they were always short on. Touching on the dilemma teachers typically face when trying to be more creative with their practices is a hypothetical situation narrated by a teacher participant who weighed out the option of innovating against teaching the mandated curriculum. She said, “What inhibits me from using these innovative ideas is the additional vacations and the need to cover the program. We need more time.” She continues, “For example, if I gave an audiovisual activity there is a need for a follow-up activity inside the classroom. I think the explanation should be mostly inside the classroom so that the student can understand more. But because there is little time, I can’t do such activities.”

Lack of Sustainable Resources for Teachers’ Engagement in Innovation

A fourth hindrance which emerged in the analyzed data for lead team members’ readiness to innovate is the lack of sustainable resources provided for teachers to engage in innovation. In the analyzed data, it became apparent that most resources needed by teachers to innovate were either provided at the school level by the administration, the subject coordinators, teachers themselves or at the project level by the TAMAM team. An example of this is a situation narrated by a teacher participant who noticed a positive impact on her ability to innovate when the school administration provided her with a smart board. She said, “The active board for me is a good initiative… The administration is working with us. Now, in science, everything we need to be creative is provided for us. We have laboratories, smart board, projectors.” She continues reflecting on the impact that the absence of these resources would have otherwise had

on her innovative potential: “If the administration didn’t provide us with these resources I wouldn’t be able to innovate in my classroom. If you go back in time, at the beginning, I faced difficulty in the materials available to me. However, now all the materials are provided.”

In the rare event that the ministry took it upon itself to distribute resources to schools, they oftentimes were only basic resources, rarely anything advanced to enable teachers to be creative and design innovative instructional approaches. Moreover, these few resources that were made available by the centralized MEHE administration tended to be unevenly distributed across schools. As a result, some schools were able to get resources and hence managed to take on creative endeavors whereas others were held back from doing so and were limited to using traditional practices. An example of this uneven distribution of resources is a situation narrated by a teacher participant who noticed a difference in her former and current schools’ access to resources and how this impacted her potential to innovate. She said,

> We have many problems in terms of school infrastructure. This school doesn’t have this problem, we are provided with everything we need to be creative. However, in other schools they have this problem, they are not provided with the minimum resources that help students to learn. This is part of the ministry’s responsibilities that it needs to provide.”

Additionally, often the additional educational resources that could be conducive to innovation are not directly funded by MEHE. Rather, they are provided as part of improvement initiatives in the form of large-scale projects funded by international agencies. Participants reported that these improvement initiatives would have both their own predetermined goals and a limited time to achieve them and accordingly, the

resources would only be available to staff for a short period time. In one instance, these resources included providing active boards to a number of schools, but when the projects ended, the schools neither had the funds needed to maintain those boards nor received the continuous training their teachers needed to optimize the usage of these boards in their teaching practices. As a result, many teachers reverted back to traditional approaches, making students lose out on the learning opportunities the presence of the active board would have triggered. The inconsistency in the availability of resources discouraged school staff from initiating innovation and made them dependent on the sporadic funding. Because of that, many wouldn't even attempt to be creative without it under the pretense that they lacked the resources needed to do so.

Lack of Emphasis on Professional Qualification in Teacher Recruitment

A final hindrance which emerged in the analyzed data for lead team members' readiness to innovate is the lack of enforcement of high professional qualification during teacher recruitment. In the analyzed data, teacher participants reported that the recruitment decisions oftentimes enacted by the ministry when recruiting teachers were not driven by candidates' professional qualification. Instead, the ministry's focus was on filling vacant positions often without matching teachers' specialization with the subject matter they get assigned to. This resulted in schools being populated with many unqualified, struggling teachers, some of whom end up teaching subjects they are not even trained to teach. An example of this is narrated by a science teacher who expressed her frustration with the incompatibility between recruited teachers and their assigned subject matter. She said,

> I think the ministry forces us as teachers to fill in the workload hours legally required of us even if it is not the subject we were trained to teach. How can I

> teach a topic that I am not knowledgeable in. I will not be competent as I am teaching my own subject. Their focus is just on filling the workload.

Furthermore, this lack of emphasis on professional qualification in teacher recruitment also had a negative impact on expert, innovative teachers. These expert teachers found themselves surrounded by struggling peers who were unwilling to join them in brainstorming or reflections that could generate innovative ideas to improve their practices because those peers couldn't master teaching their subject matter to begin with, let alone attempt to advance further than that. An example of this restrictive environment that innovative teachers often found themselves in is a situation between an expert ninth grade math teacher and her colleague who was also teaching math at the same level but who had specialized in a different subject matter. One time, she caught him making a mistake and offered him some constructive feedback with the intention of helping him improve his practice. However, she was met with a defensive reaction as he outright rejected her input and carried on adopting the same ineffective practices as before. In her words,

> When I first started working here, there was a teacher that was older than me, with more experience, and teaching grade 9, but he had a major that was not math. Still this teacher was able to deliver knowledge to students in a good way but he often made mistakes related to math content. Once I noted for him a mistake, I was very cautious because I was worried that he may not accept it. Indeed, he refused this note from me. That is, not all people who are unqualified to teach their subject matter are willing to admit it and accept critical feedback. And this is a huge problem for the students.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the role that governance plays in enabling and sustaining school-based improvement through the TAMAM project experience with six public schools which had already received training on leading school-based improvement through partaking in the project and which were part of its Lebanon Hub. This study was guided by one research question, split into two parts. The first part examined the governance components which have either had a facilitatory or challenging role to play in the implementation of schools' improvement projects. As for the second part, it explored the governance components which either enabled school lead team members to innovate or hindered them from doing so.

When asked about the factors pertaining to governance which have facilitated the implementation of schools' improvement projects, participants identified three main ones. The first was the trust and positive informal communication channels that lead team members, specifically principals, had established with key governmental supervisors who hold decision making positions that can assist the principals to overcome bureaucratic hurdles especially while they are trying to implement their school-based improvement initiatives. The second was the informal mentorship offered by officials who are versed in the governance structure and system functioning to school lead team members. This mentorship was also initiated and sustained through personal initiative from the school principals. The last was the financial support that the schools managed to secure from local municipalities for the implementation of their improvement projects.

On the other hand, when asked about the governance-related factors which hindered the implementation of schools' improvement projects, participants identified

seven. The first was the absence of formalized two-way, consistent communication between governmental supervisors and school lead teams especially when members of those teams needed guidance or help for their improvement projects. The second was the challenge to coordinate the municipalities' initiatives to support the schools with the schools 'own improvement initiatives. The third was the lack of clear communication and sufficient information provided by the ministry to the schools about the educational policies and initiatives the schools are mandated to implement. The fourth was the fact that schools were often overloaded with top-down projects which were mandated without any consideration to the improvement projects that the schools had initiated on their own. The fifth was the centralized decision-making process in the ministry. The sixth was the mismanagement in the task allocation of schools' personnel. The seventh was the absence of regular teacher training opportunities which are responsive to the needs of teachers, especially those involved in school-based improvement.

In the area of innovation, when participants were asked to identify the governance components which have either enabled them to engage in creative practices or prevented them from doing so, they were only able to identify hindering factors which amounted to five main ones. The first was the presence of an outdated, restrictive mandated curriculum. The second was the absence of mentors which limited teachers' generation of innovative ideas. The third was the prescribed professional development which did not cater to teachers' personal aspirations to innovate. The fourth was the lack of sustainable resources for teachers' engagement in innovation. The fifth was the lack of emphasis on professional qualification in teacher recruitment which made it difficult to have a critical mass of qualified teachers ready to engage experiential and innovative endeavors.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In the discussion chapter, the study examined the results of the posed research question through a comparative lens with the proposed conceptual framework. This conceptual framework was synthesized from the lessons learnt of researchers' studies on governance components in the context of large-scale international reform as well as studies which examined practical applications of the school-based management model. These researchers identified the adopted governance components as those that are conducive to sustainable school improvement. The study then presents the discussion under each of these recommended governance components with an emphasis on the factors that the study found to be perceived as facilitators or hindrances to schools' implementation of improvement projects and lead team members' readiness to innovate. The discussion interprets those findings in light of the existing literature as well as pinpoints the key contributions of this study. Following this, there is a section in which I delve into the governance components which were unique to the study's context. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the key discussed findings and generates recommendations for practice and future research based on the study's limitations.

The Effect of Governance Components on Sustaining School Improvement

The governance components which researchers have identified as conducive for sustaining school improvement initiatives that are adopted in this study are six: communication, shared leadership, local capacity building, effective use of community resources, structural arrangements that stimulate innovation, and accountability (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Levin &

Fullan, 2009; Myung et al., 2020). Furthermore, these governance components are also consistent with components which came up in practical applications of the school-based management model in various contexts that increased its chances of being successfully implemented. In such practical examples, it was found that devolving decision-making power to the school level and adopting a more distributed leadership style with school practitioners facilitated school improvement attempts (Bandur, 2018; Heyward et al., 2011). The discussion of the study's results on whether and how elements of each component hindered or facilitated school improvement in the context of the study schools is provided below.

Figure 3

A proposed conceptual framework for governance that sustains school improvement

Communication	Shared leadership	Local capacity building
Honest, two-way consistent school-system dialogues about successes, challenges, and what is being attempted which are supported by formal channels	Leadership is not just confined to official positions. Teacher leadership is built at school level and supported in stakeholder organizations by system such as teacher unions. This create a learning community.	- System invests in policies, training, professional development, ongoing support. It develops human resources and invests in their knowledge, competencies, and motivation. - There is lateral capacity building such that schools and districts learn from each other
Effective use of community resources	**Structural arrangements that stimulate innovation**	**Accountability**
- New money goes into investing in professional development, leadership development, in-school coaching - Existing resources, including human resources, are properly allocated and matched (i.e., not frequently moving teachers around from school to school, ensuring schools get skilled teachers)	- System must help school practitioners access innovative ideas - It must also invest in continuously building the capacity of school practitioners so they are more likely to come up with innovative ideas on their own	- Schools pay attention to centralized standards and goals - External system generates data and procedures to make this more likely and thorough - System is responsible to intervene in persistently failing situations

Note. Figure based on the following sources: (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Levin & Fullan, 2009; Myung et al., 2020).

Communication

Levin and Fullan (2009) describe communication as a component which entails honest, two-way consistent conversations between governmental supervisors and school practitioners about attempted initiatives, faced challenges, and accomplishments that are

supported by formal channels. According to the results of the study, this component was identified as a facilitator when there were ongoing dialogues between school practitioners and some governmental supervisors who welcomed their engagement in improvement and found an added value in their involvement with TAMAM. Practitioners reported that they mostly initiated this communication to share their achievements as well as to seek guidance and support when faced with challenges. Through these conversations, school practitioners were able to gain the trust of some of their supervisors and turn them into advocates for their improvement projects within the larger governance structure. This trust in turn facilitated the implementation of their projects. Healthy and sustained relationships established on a foundation of trust between key stakeholders involved in the school improvement process have been identified by several researchers to have a positive impact on schools' cultures, administrative decisions, and classroom instruction where they ultimately get reflected in student achievement in the context of school improvement (Delagardelle, 2008; Gabris & Nelson, 2013; Luschei & Jeong, 2021), thus increasing the chances of sustaining the desired effects of this improvement.

However, while acknowledged to act as a facilitator, the reported communication itself was sporadic and informal which threatened its anticipated positive impact on sustaining school improvement. According to the results, most of the communication was initiated by the school principals and was informal requiring a lot of effort on the part of principals. The accidental, inconsistent aspect of this desired component can be explained by the lack of formalized channels of communication between supervisors and decision makers on one hand and the practitioners at the school level on the other. Initiating these conversations was made more difficult by the

excessive centralization of the Lebanese educational system which limits direct interactions between decision makers and practitioners at the school level and makes the flow of two-way communication slow and often non-existent. The rarity of interactions is also the result of the absence of formal channels of communication aimed at supporting learning and improvement between schools and those in charge of supervising their operation. In the study's analyzed data, there was no evidence of any policy that outlines the formal communication channels through which the implementation of improvement projects initiated at the school level is monitored or supported. Rather, the scope of the responsibilities of the instructional supervisors in DOPS was strictly limited to providing instructional guidance that is confined to ensuring the strict implementation of the mandated official curriculum. Additionally, there was no evidence of efforts to formalize the relationships through legislative decrees or to clarify the expected roles of supervisors towards practitioners involved in leading and implementing improvement initiatives. This resulted in an absence of much-needed support and might have contributed to the reluctance of school practitioners to engage in school improvement. In fact, many researchers have iterated how important it is that stakeholders' duties be laid out in laws and regulations to draw clear boundaries around them while engaging in school improvement (Bandur, 2018; Bolam, 2013; Cheng, 2012; Wu, 1996; Yuan, 2000; Zheng & Wang, 2000). In addition, the absence of these formalized communication channels threatens to cause discrepancies in school practitioners' access to supportive governmental supervisors who are ready to vouch and advocate for their projects within the central office. Principals in less fortunate localities risk to remain deprived of this kind of internal support and are forced to put in extra effort to advocate for their projects and safeguard

their ability to initiate school improvement. Looking at less centralized governance models around the world, it is often the district superintendents who are formally tasked with lobbying for the schools' needs in any improvement initiatives taken by them (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). Within this decentralized formalization, the roles of supervisors towards school practitioners leading improvement projects is more likely to be clearly communicated to all who are involved which enhances smooth implementation and increases the possibility of sustainability of the aimed impact.

Furthermore, the absence of communication between school practitioners and the governmental supervisors assigned to their school was also pinpointed as a major hindrance in the study's results. Practitioners reported feeling left completely alone to figure out how to effectively implement their improvement projects. Given the training they received on leading school improvement, the school lead teams were fully aware that there was a missed opportunity in which they could have been engaged in a collaborative endeavor with governmental supervisors to effectively implement their project and overcome the challenges that might hinder its sustainability. Furthermore, whenever communication happened between the two parties, it was usually reactive in response to a crisis situation often triggered by top-down decisions taken by the ministry's central office. Such decisions included for instance transferring the members of the lead team to another school while in the midst of the implementation stage of their improvement initiative, something that would have had a detrimental effect on its prospect of achieving its goals.

The absence of formalized two-way communication channels between school practitioners and their immediate governmental supervisors that support school-based improvement is possibly due to the ministry's perception of improvement as ministry-

level decisions that are taken in a top-down manner with school practitioners expected to comply with those decisions, rather than as initiatives at the grassroots level that the ministry ought to support and sustain. In reality, it is precisely this centralized decision-making process which has been reported as the main reason behind the failure of most enacted education reforms in the MENA region (العماري, ٢٠١٧؛ Al-Yahmadi, 2013; Alghamdi, 2019; Almutairi, 2017; Alyamani, 2016; Bashur, 1997, 2005; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; Malas, 2019; Romanowski & Amatullah, 2016). Those scholars affirm that without an effort to acknowledge the ongoing grassroots improvement initiatives and maintain consistent ongoing communication with school practitioners in support of these projects, educational reforms cannot succeed and the impact of any improvement attempt, whether top-down or bottom up, cannot be realistically sustained in the long run.

Leadership

For Levin and Fullan (2009), leadership is when the larger educational system recognizes that it takes both top-down and grassroots efforts to bring about sustainable reform. Hence, it makes an effort to not confine leadership to official positions and instead cultivates teacher leaders at the school level who can step up and assume additional authority, working hand in hand with governmental supervisors to sustain improvement initiatives.

Based on the findings of the study, the power dynamics at play between school practitioners and governmental supervisors reveal that teacher leadership is absent and the approach for leading improvement initiatives is authoritative and centralized. Most decisions concerning school improvement were taken by highest-level executive officials with improvement projects being imposed on school practitioners in a top-

down manner without even accounting for ongoing grassroots initiatives, capacities, resources, and identified needs. In fact, this lack of involving school practitioners in leading education reforms in the MENA region has been identified by numerous researchers in the field as a major derailing factor for the success of education reforms (العماري, ٢٠١٧؛ Al-Yahmadi, 2013; Alghamdi, 2019; Almutairi, 2017; Alyamani, 2016; Bashur, 1997, 2005; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; Malas, 2019; Romanowski & Amatullah, 2016). Due to this concentration of power within the hands of governmental stakeholders at the highest levels of the governance structure, school practitioners in the context of the study reported not receiving responses to their calls for support in a timely manner and felt overburdened trying to implement top-down mandated initiatives in a way that does not compromise the goals they had set for themselves in their own improvement projects. Without this power distribution, the Lebanese educational system is operating in a way that does not serve schools' best interests. This concentration of power at the top of the hierarchy and the lack of distributing the responsibilities for reform amongst school-level stakeholders is reported to be detrimental for the effectiveness of school improvement and its potential for sustainability (Arar & Abu Nasra, 2020; Dimmock, 2013; Levin & Fullan, 2009).

Local Capacity Building

Arguably one of the most integral governance components for sustaining school improvement that has been identified in the literature is local capacity building that prepares the school practitioners to initiate and implement school improvement. This component comprises both an investment on the part of the educational system in school practitioners' professional development and a willingness to learn from the insights practitioners can offer for designing and leading improvement initiatives (Levin

& Fullan, 2009; Myung et al., 2020). Both of these subcomponents were absent from the study's findings and were identified as major hindrances to school practitioners' efforts to lead school-based improvement.

Investment in Teacher Training. With regards to the system's investment in teacher training, implicit in the description provided by researchers in the literature is the grassroots, bottom-up nature of this investment where training is grounded in assessing school practitioners' needs while implementing improvement initiatives and helps address them through continuous professional learning and ongoing support. However, the study's findings instead pointed to the absence of continuous professional learning opportunities made available to school practitioners that are relevant to their improvement initiative needs. It also showed an absence within governmental units of structures and procedures that facilitate providing timely training and support for school-based improvement initiatives in the form of responsive, continuous, and relevant capacity building opportunities. Instead, what the findings revealed are instances that point to the centralization of the decision making pertaining to professional development activities that also does not include procedures to collect data that can help inform top decision makers of schools' pressing needs. Data revealed that mandatory training topics were being forced on school practitioners even if they were not relevant to the skills they needed to competently implement their improvement projects and adopt creative practices in their classrooms. As a consequence, teachers ended up feeling overwhelmed by having to attend these mandatory workshops which did not benefit them and took much-needed time away from implementing improvement projects and trying out creative activities in classrooms. According to the literature reviewed, when a decentralized approach is adopted, such in the US, there is a

regional district office responsible for designing and evaluating professional development workshops and examining teachers' engagement with them (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). Within this district office a regional supervisor is the one working in close proximity to school practitioners, with the authority to assess teachers' learning needs and strategically develop workshops which address them. However, in the context of the study, this duty was reserved to a centralized unit known as the Center for Educational Research and Development which had no mechanism in place to evaluate teachers' professional learning needs, especially those pertaining to innovative interventions that were being initiated at the school level.

Lateral Capacity Building. As for the subcomponent pertaining to centralized units and supervisors demonstrating a willingness to learn from practitioners' offered insights, the study found no evidence of the presence of lateral capacity building. Despite school practitioners' multiple efforts to reach out to their supervisors and to local municipalities to collaborate on their improvement projects, they refused to see them as equal partners and did not acknowledge their agency in initiating improvement at their school. Contrary to what is proposed in the literature about local governmental supervisors and district units supporting grassroots initiatives taken by schools (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2020; Kowalski & Björk, 2005), the municipalities in the study felt like they had nothing new to learn from collaborating with schools on improvement projects and did not consider leading improvement projects to fall under school practitioners' capabilities. This conception of what a school and its practitioners' role– or lack thereof –entails in leading improvement might be explained by the text of Articles 49 and 50 in Legislative Decree 118. While the decree describes the municipality's role in public school projects, it fails to specify an active role for the

school practitioners as the de facto partners in any initiative that the municipality intends to launch. The issuance of updated laws and regulations which manifest power distribution amongst stakeholders and explicitly draw boundaries around it is a key principle advocated by the school-based management model as well as researchers who have discussed governance more generally (Bandur, 2018; Cheng, 2012; Dimmock, 2013; Wu, 1996; Yuan, 2000; Zheng & Wang, 2000).

Effective Use of Community Resources

In terms of resources, many researchers found that abundance of funds alone is not the key driver for successful improvement initiatives but rather it is the effective use of resources at the disposal of governmental supervisors and school practitioners (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; Levin & Fullan, 2009). Essentially, in the context of improvement, scholars recommend that newly allocated budgets be spent on professional development, in-school coaching, and leadership cultivation to better support teachers' engagement with improvement initiatives (Myung et al., 2020). Moreover, this also entails governmental supervisors making informed decisions about allocating existing resources and properly matching school personnel to the objective of the school improvement initiative. This necessitates that the governance structure ensures that there are policies that protect teachers and administrators from being frequently moved around to allow for the long-term individual and organizational learning that effective and sustainable improvement needs (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Examining this governance component in the context of the study showed some similarity with what was reported in the literature on the role of community-based entities. Municipal funding was mostly identified in many countries as a facilitator that increased the schools' ability to engage in school improvement. The presence of

policies in Lebanon that stipulate municipalities provide schools with funding in support of improvement were beneficial to schools. They provided this much-needed source of funds to cover the cost of personnel or resources needed for them to carry out their activities. This finding is consistent with many general recommendations for the municipal governance model adopted in some states and countries (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2020).

However, the manner in which this support was offered reduced its impact, turning it often to a source of hindrance. In fact, the examined reports show that decisions on resource allocation in municipalities disregarded the needs and priorities of schools unless principals had established congenial informal connections with the heads of municipalities which resulted in exceptional allocation of funds in support of the school project. Furthermore, because these schools' infrastructure was not maintained, the allocated funding was used in most cases to cover the cost of rudimentary resources such as generators. Instead of being used to fund what the literature identifies as critical to the success of improvement attempts, such as the cultivation of teachers' skills as proposed by Myung et al. (2020), the secured funds were spent on crisis responses. Moreover, the findings also show that the municipal funds available for improvement were limited. Municipalities in the context of the study had no designated funds for improvement but rather, the policy mandates that it is up to municipalities' discretion to allocate the funds. On the other hand, scholars strongly recommend that central governments increase the flow of funds to them (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2020). As such, the practice in the decentralized municipal governance model adopted in many countries, aims to maximize municipalities' opportunities for effective allocation of resources in fulfillment of state and national goals for school improvement.

Furthermore, in the context of the study, the improper matching of human resources and the mismanagement in their task allocation were rarely conducive to effective implementation of improvement initiatives either mandated by the ministry or generated at the school level. The study's findings revealed a recurrent pattern by the ministry to disregard teachers' qualification and skill set as determining criteria for leading and sustaining improvement. Consequently, schools were deprived of the opportunity to both maintain the impact of their improvement initiatives and to elevate the innovative potential of activities tried out in classrooms. Contrary to this practice, the literature recommends allocating this responsibility to the district superintendent instead as he is in the best position to make an informed decision on the matter to avoid the shortcomings of tasking the centralized administration with personnel management given that it is not at a vantage point to know where teachers' skills are needed most (Kowalski & Björk, 2005).

Structural Arrangements that Stimulate Innovation

Given the potential that innovation has for improvement initiatives, a strong feature of the larger educational system must be to stimulate the innovative ideas of school practitioners. To do so, it must first make these creative ideas readily accessible to school practitioners through surrounding them with professional communities that are conducive for reflective, enriching dialogues to take place. Second, it must also invest in continuously building school practitioners' capacities which will increase the likelihood that they will come up with innovative ideas on their own (Fullan & Watson, 2000).

However, in the study's findings, the capacity building opportunities that were made available to school practitioners were not identified as facilitators but rather only

as hindrances which reduced the possibility for innovation to be initiated and sustained. In fact, the provided mandatory training topics never addressed areas that teachers needed specifically to build their capacity to lead school improvement. Because of their skill set that was limited to teaching the mandated curriculum, teachers did not feel qualified nor encouraged to creatively explore innovative practices they could try in their classrooms. In fact, decentralized governance models such as the school-based management model have emphasized how important it is for teachers to undergo professional and curricular development that extend beyond just learning the basic skills needed to teach school curricula. Instead, scholars recommend that they become opportunities for teachers to work closely with coaches or mentors on skills they would like to develop or knowledge they would like to gain to competently adopt more creative practices in their classrooms. In cultivating the skills they have identified as areas for professional growth, teachers develop an ownership in the school improvement process and become more dedicated to enhancing student achievement (Bandur, 2018; Cheng, 2012; Dimmock, 2013).

Moreover, there was also no evidence in the study that structural arrangements with the potential to stimulate improvement were made available to leadership teams in the school. While the data showed instances in which the team had acquired the capacity needed to lead school improvement, it also demonstrated how they faced many hindrances in their attempts at implementing their innovative ideas due to the highly centralized governance structure and the absence of formalized procedures to configure schools as professional learning communities. This was manifested in decisions to frequently transfer competent teachers, not freeing up sufficient time in their schedules for them to try out creative ideas they had learnt in workshops, and not granting them

special provisions to engage in innovative interventions if these entailed not adhering to the mandated curriculum. These centralized decisions to move lead team members to other schools dismantled their ability to sustain their collaboration and distracted them from achieving their shared improvement goals, compromising the impact that could have been otherwise generated by them had a more school-based management model have been adopted. In decentralized governance models such as the school-based management model, because school practitioners are expected to receive extensive training to enact their widened roles and because decisions are made by a school-level council, sufficient time is blocked in teachers' schedules for training purposes. Implicit in this structural arrangement is a respect and understanding by school-level councils for the time needed by school practitioners to innovate and lead school-based improvement (Bandur, 2018; Cheng, 2012; Dimmock, 2013).

Furthermore, there was also no evidence in the facilitators that pointed to the presence of a deliberate effort from MEHE's central decision makers to establish structures or positional levels for administrators that facilitate initiating and sustaining innovative ideas aimed at school improvement. Instead, the system demands that these supervisors assume inspector-like duties, making their central role ensuring the verbatim implementation of the national curriculum, depriving teachers of the opportunity to be part of a professional learning community with the potential to trigger their creative thinking and challenge them to innovate as recommended by scholars in the literature (Bandur, 2018; Cheng, 2012; Dimmock, 2013). Within decentralized governance models, regional personnel include developmental supervisors who act as master teachers to school practitioners, helping them think outside the box and strategize a plan and vision to improve student learning in their districts (Kowalski &

Björk, 2005). However, in the context of the study, the supervisors with the potential to mentor teachers such as regional educational office staff members and DOPS counselors had a tendency to focus on administrative procedures such as guiding school principals in their submission of paperwork and ensuring that teachers followed the mandated curriculum. Instead of taking advantage of working in close proximity with teachers to reflect on their practice together and think of innovative ways to improve it, they resolved to only performing the administrative duties expected of them per the ministry's policies.

Accountability

The final governance component which was identified as crucial for sustaining school improvement by Fullan and Watson (2000) is a rigorous, external accountability system. According to them, such a system must develop centralized standards and goals which schools are expected to adhere to. To further facilitate enforcement of these standards, the system breaks them down into more explicit, concrete indicators and procedures that make it easy for schools to follow. In specific situations when a school fails to adhere to these set standards, governmental supervisors have a right and an obligation to intervene and impose punitive consequences.

In the context of the study, there was no evidence in the existing governance structure of a unit that is charged with monitoring improvement projects whether these are top-down or initiated at the grassroots level. As reported by the principal and the inspector, the central inspection unit is only responsible for ensuring the implementation of the mandated curriculum and that teachers are not violating any existing administrative policies. The need for accountability that leads itself to recommendation for improvement was clear in the experience of one of the principals who emphasized

the importance of having their superiors as external evaluators examine the improvement project she initiated at her school. Examination of the policies revealed a complete absence of an accountability system that includes standards to monitor and evaluate the impact or the implementation process of improvement initiatives. Rather, there were many instances of school practitioners lamenting the lack of accountability. They highlighted that the role of inspectors from the central inspection unit constituted a hindrance to their ability to innovate or implement improvement initiatives. Additionally, they expressed their worry of being misunderstood while implementing their innovative interventions. There were instances where school practitioners reported that supervisors from CERD, DOPS, or the educational inspection unit would reprimand them for adopting more creative practices in their classrooms not adhering to the prescribed curriculum. As such, these supervisors' approaches were perceived as a hindrance rather than a source of accountability that could lead to effective implementation of improvement and to further individual or organizational development. In fact, autonomy in curricular decisions coupled with a culture of healthy, local accountability has been identified by researchers in the literature as an impactful school-level dynamic for schools' organizational performance (Luschei & Jeong, 2021; OECD, 2016; Wöbmann et al., 2007; Zhao & Wang, 2020). Alternatively, a practice which is adopted in more decentralized systems such as the US is to allow regional offices and even schools to develop curricula which resonate with their communities' values while ensuring that their schools are effectively performing. Authority is given at the local level to develop their own curricular policies as long as they are aligned with state and national standards (Andero, 2000). These decentralized

practices are often associated with sustainable school improvement and with enhancing innovative practices (Ponder, 1983; Wither, 2001).

Governance Components which were Unique to the Study's Context

One of the study's findings revealed a governance component that was not found in the reviewed literature in association with sustainable school improvement. Namely, the reliance of school principals on the informal mentorship they received from retired or current officials versed in the governance structure and system functioning seems to be unique to the Lebanese context.

The results showed multiple instances when principals who were engaged in school-based improvement received informal mentorship in the form of personal favors and as a part of a crisis response to assist school principals to problem-solve and navigate the abundant hindrances stemming from the system to their attempts at improvement. Interestingly, the informal mentorship that they received from officials versed in the governance structure and system functioning tended to focus on helping the principals navigate the structural constraints to their improvement projects. Such coaching on basic technical, administrative procedures is typically reported to be embedded either in institutionalized induction programs for novice principals and embedded within the governance structure and communicated as job descriptions or standard procedures through formal channels (Barnett, 1995; Crow & Matthews, 1998; Daresh, 2004; Kirkham, 1995). Moreover, mentoring conversations, which should have been tailored to advance the principals' understanding of their role demands to a higher-order level and to create opportunities for these two parties to discuss schools' attempted improvement initiatives (Bandur, 2018; Cheng, 2012; Dimmock, 2013), were instead mostly focused on guiding school principals while navigating the complex

centralized governance structure. The focus of this mentorship reflects a fundamental problem in the relevance, accessibility, and clarity of educational policies in Lebanon. Unlike the widely accepted recommendation for school systems to develop policies that are universally understood by governmental supervisors and school practitioners (Fullan & Watson, 2000), the existing policies are often ambiguous and inaccessible. This creates situations in which principals are forced to seek informal help to understand policies, and design strategies to petition to get approval for securing basic resources or removing barriers to ensure smooth implementation of their improvement initiatives. Interestingly, several researchers have highlighted this ambiguity and the difficulty of accessing existing policies and recommended that ministries of education in the MENA region set up rigorous databases which facilitate the dissemination of data and policies to and from schools (Bashur, 2005; El-Amin, 2004; Karami Akkary, 2014).

Conclusion

The results of this study point to the presence of many governance components that are associated in the literature with supporting school improvement and enhancing its sustainability. Namely, ongoing dialogues between school practitioners and governmental supervisors as well as the funding received from local municipalities. As such, these findings add support to some results of international studies which explored the implementation of school-based management policies in contexts such as Indonesia and found communal communication to be a determining factor for facilitating school improvement (Bandur & Gamage, 2009). On the other hand, the study's results showed that most of the governance components that are associated with enhancing school improvement were missing and their absence resulted in the schools facing structural challenges to their attempts at improving their schools. These structural challenges were

nine. The first three were the overdependence on inconsistent, informal conversations between governmental supervisors and school practitioners; centralized decision-making processes stifling innovative ideas; and unwillingness from local governmental supervisors and units to work collaboratively with schools on their improvement projects. As for the next four, they were the absence of training opportunities that are responsive to teachers' local improvement needs; the allocation of funding to basic needs rather than to fund improvement projects; the frequent transfer of teachers; and the lack of recruiting qualified teachers. The last two hindering components were the absence of structural arrangements with the potential to stimulate teachers' innovation and the absence of an accountability system aimed at improvement with centralized standards which made it difficult for schools to receive sufficient formalized support to implement their improvement initiatives. These results resonate with findings of international studies which found centralized decision-making, inadequate training, and the absence of professional learning communities to be derailing factors for school improvement (Bandur, 2018; Fullan & Watson, 2000).

On the other hand, the study found one facilitatory governance component which was unique to the study's context. This was the excessive reliance on informal mentorship that school improvement-oriented principals received from officials versed in the governance structure. This informal mentorship evolved from personal connections and was not supported by formal organizational arrangements to ensure its continuity and consistency as the literature recommends (Bandur, 2018; Cheng, 2012; Dimmock, 2013).

In my study, I initially set out to understand the role that governance plays in enabling and sustaining school-based improvement initiatives in Lebanon through the

TAMAM project experience with six public schools comprising part of its Lebanon Hub. In fulfilling the study's main objective and answering its posed research question, the study added understanding of the relationship that governance has with aspects of organizational performance, namely the implementation of schools' improvement projects and lead team members' readiness to innovate. In the context of the MENA region, the study's findings add support to existing calls in the literature for further decentralization of education ministries' governance structures to improve the quality of education offered in the region (Bashur, 2005; El-Amin, 2004; Karami Akkary, 2014). Its results lead to adopting recommendations from models such as school-based management to distribute decision-making power to school practitioners in areas that are central to improvement initiatives such as the management of curricula, general affairs, personnel, and budgeting (Arar & Abu Nasra, 2020; Gabris & Nelson, 2013; Luschei & Jeong, 2021). They also point to the importance of enforcing a centrally defined framework of guidelines and measures to hold them accountable for their actions. Many researchers agree that this will increase school practitioners' commitment to lead and enact school-based improvement because it instills a sense of local ownership in them (Arar & Abu Nasra, 2020; Dimmock, 2013).

As for the specific case of Lebanon, this study has helped fill the knowledge gap about the interaction between public schools and the educational governance structure. Additionally, its results also respond to scholars' recommendations calling for restructuring key components in Lebanon's educational management system–namely capacity building, an information system, participation, and autonomy (El-Amin, 2004). As such, informed recommendations can be generated from the study's findings about the type of changes that are needed to make the educational governance system in

Lebanon more conducive and sustaining for schools' improvement initiatives and their lead team members' readiness to innovate.

Limitations of the Study

Just like any other study, this one had several limitations of its own. Firstly, the study depended fully on the existing TAMAM project databank. As such, the sample compiled from purposively selected data sources might have missed the opportunity to include additional perspectives of participants. These participants could have been in the form of more school practitioners and governmental stakeholders involved in the school improvement process beyond the context of schools that partnered with the TAMAM project. Doing so might have helped further enrich and corroborate the emergent findings. This limitation might have restricted the extent to which the study's findings can be generalizable to other schools within Lebanon. However, those who are familiar with the Lebanese context know that it is quite challenging to gain access to representatives on behalf of governmental entities, primarily due to unwillingness to cooperate with researchers. Secondly, some of TAMAM's analyzed data might not accurately reflect updated information which could have helped answer the posed research question since data was last collected from schools in 2018. As such, this might have compromised the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the findings. Thirdly, the analyzed legislative decrees made publicly accessible on governmental websites were very brief and did not capture the nitty-gritty, hands-on details of the expected roles of governmental supervisors and units in the school improvement process. As such, they might not have painted a representative picture of the reality of their roles. Fourthly, given the condensed duration of a master's program and my timeline of pursuing a PhD degree, the time constraint prevented me from employing interviewing

as a second method of data collection which in turn might have affected the effectiveness of triangulation as a method of boosting the study's credibility and the consistency of its findings with the collected data. Fifthly, I intentionally narrowed down the scope of my study by selecting the proposed conceptual framework and implementation of schools' improvement projects as well as lead team members' readiness to innovate as two components of organizational performance to examine. As such, the study might have overlooked integral ways in which governance has impacted the organizational performance of the schools aside from these two components. As a consequence, it might have limited the extent of my conceptual analysis of the data and compromised the comprehensiveness of the discussion and conclusion reached. Sixthly, in the inductive part of my analysis, I recognize that I might have been prone as a novice researcher to influence by the predetermined codes which were developed based on the lessons learnt from the literature for what is needed to sustain systemic school improvement through governance. Another potential source of influence is my initial understanding of the lack of involvement of governmental stakeholders in the school improvement process prior to conducting the study. Both of these sources of influence might have compromised the findings and limited my ability to benefit from the organic nature of the open, axial, and selective coding stages. I might have unknowingly attempted to align the emergent codes with those I have come across in the literature and with my understanding of the reality of governmental units' and stakeholders' functioning towards schools in the improvement process.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the aforementioned limitations of my study, there are several directions that future researchers can take to further explore this topic in more depth.

First, they can choose to examine the effect of governance on the remaining components of organizational performance. Second, they can employ interviewing as a second method of data collection and target diverse governmental supervisors to form a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and facilitations in the face of school-based improvement. Third, they can conduct a more thorough analysis and search about the legislative decrees outlining key governmental supervisors' and units' roles in the school improvement process. This could be coupled with targeting participants who are versed about the content of these decrees such as lawyers and specifically attempt to construct a more representative understanding of their outlined duties. Fourth, they can conduct a comparative study between schools which are partnered with TAMAM and schools whose practitioners have only taken part in top-down improvement initiatives mandated by the ministry. Alternatively, these comparative studies could also be conducted between TAMAM schools and other public schools whose practitioners have yet to gain the capacities needed for improvement. Furthermore, more comparative research is needed across Arab countries to better understand the contextual differences which are either conducive or derailing for the sustainability of school improvement efforts. Finally, they can adopt different conceptual frameworks that are a bit more specific like those of the decentralized governance models presented in the literature review or even an educational network framework to produce alternative enriching interpretations of the studied phenomenon.

Recommendations for Practice

This study aimed to understand the role that governance plays in enabling and sustaining school-based improvement initiatives in Lebanon. Its findings demonstrate the strengths of the Lebanese educational system as well as its shortcomings when it

comes to supporting school-based improvement initiatives, in light of what scholars have already pointed out in the literature. While the system had some facilitatory aspects to it, its hindering facets outnumbered them, warranting room for improvement in the form of structural and cultural organizational changes to support and sustain grassroots improvement initiatives. As such, based on the governance components which were found to either facilitate or hinder school improvement in the context of the study, there are several informed recommendations for practice which could be generated to make the Lebanese educational governance structure more conducive for sustainable school improvement. First, the system needs to formalize communication channels between school practitioners and governmental supervisors so that both parties can have enriching conversations about improvement initiatives taken either in a top-down or bottom-up manner. Second, it must devolve more decision-making power to regional education office staff members so that educational decisions become informed by schools' needs and responsive and timely to requests submitted by schools. The expansion of the decision-making authority to encompass stakeholders that are closer to the school level should especially take place in the following domains: curriculum management, personnel management, and development of professional development workshops. Third, the system must revise Legislative Decree 118 to recognize both municipalities and school practitioners as equal partners in the school improvement process. Fourth, the ministry must increase the budget allocated to local municipalities and designate specific funds for the purposes of school improvement. Fifth, the system must prioritize qualification in the recruitment of teachers and governmental supervisors and prepare them to serve as mentors for teachers. Sixth, it must make structural arrangements which enable these teachers to engage in innovative practices like

designating enough time for them to implement creative practices, granting them special provisions to do so, and not abruptly moving them from their schools to allow them time to institutionalize their improvement initiatives. Finally, it must build an accessible database that encompasses all its policies so that they get efficiently disseminated to schools and become accessible to school practitioners and governmental supervisors alike.

APPENDIX

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

First part of the study's research question: Which governance components have challenged or facilitated the TAMAM Lebanon Hub's school organizational performance, particularly the implementation of schools' improvement projects?

1. Which aspects of the school's success in implementing its planned intervention can be attributed to existing governance components either directly pertaining to MEHE or to other governmental structures?
2. Which units and administrators directly affiliated with MEHE or other governmental structures advised, guided, and supported school staff as they implemented their improvement projects?
    a. Were these units the Guidance and Counseling Directorate? The General Educational Inspectorate?
    b. What kind of support was offered by each of these individuals or units?
    c. What formal communication channels were established between the centralized MEHE administration and school staff?
        i. Were they done through regional education offices? The General Educational Inspectorate? CERD? The Director General? The Guidance and Counseling Directorate?
    d. What were the coordination mechanisms in place between the school and the governmental units and individuals?
        i. The Minister of Education?
        ii. The Director General?
        iii. DOPS?

iv. Regional education offices?

v. CERD?

vi. The General Educational Inspectorate?

e. How did these units and individuals give school staff room for flexibility and adaptability?

3. What were the subunits (committees, teams) created by units and individuals directly affiliated with MEHE that school staff were a part of which helped them participate in the decision-making process?

   a. What kind of help was provided through participation in these subunits?

   b. What was the composition of these committees?

   c. What roles and responsibilities were formally specified for the members?

   d. What was the scope of the decision-making authority for those members within these subunits?

   e. What kind of support was provided for school staff in their decision-making process?

      i. Was there help in disseminating centralized data to the schools?

      ii. What other services were provided by the following units?

         - The regional education offices
         - The Guidance and Counseling Directorate
         - CERD
         - The General Educational Inspectorate

4. Were there opportunities provided to school staff for training, development, support, and resources through mentoring, coaching, cooperative exchange of experts?

a. What was the nature of these opportunities?
b. Which units provided these opportunities?
    i. Was it CERD? The Guidance and Counseling Directorate? The General Educational Inspectorate?
    ii. In what forms did they provide these opportunities?
c. What formal communication channels were established to communicate school staff's needs to the centralized MEHE administration?
    i. Were these established through the regional education offices? The General Educational Inspectorate? CERD? The Director General? The Guidance and Counseling Directorate?
    ii. In what ways did these units connect school staff to resources?
    iii. What were the formal and informal processes, if any, followed to facilitate the school personnel's access to these resources?
d. Was innovation, research, development stimulated at the school level through a specialized data-gathering research center?
    i. If yes, which unit was responsible for this function?
    ii. Was it the regional education offices, the Guidance and Counseling Directorate, CERD, or the General Educational Inspectorate?
    iii. What were the impactful responsibilities of these units?
    iv. How was this responsibility performed?

5. Was there an ongoing feedback/evaluation/monitoring system directly established by MEHE or other governmental structures to allow the school and the larger system to learn from each other?

a. What were the forms of this feedback/evaluation/monitoring provided by each of the units?
b. Who/which unit was responsible for it?
c. Was this established through CERD, the regional education offices, or the General Educational Inspectorate?
d. What were the tasks covered and the procedures followed?

Second part of the research question: Which governance components have challenged or facilitated the TAMAM Lebanon Hub's school organizational performance, particularly lead team members' readiness to innovate?

1. Were there opportunities provided to school staff for training, development, support, and resources through mentoring, coaching, cooperative exchange of experts?
    a. What was the nature of these opportunities?
    b. What units provided these opportunities?
        i. Was it CERD? The Guidance and Counseling Directorate? The General Educational Inspectorate?
        ii. In what forms did they provide these opportunities?
    c. What formal communication channels were established to communicate school staff's needs to the centralized MEHE administration?
        i. Were these established through the regional education offices? The General Educational Inspectorate? CERD? The Director General? The Guidance and Counseling Directorate?
        ii. In what ways did these units connect school staff to resources?

iii. What were the formal and informal processes, if any, followed to facilitate the school personnel's access to these resources?

d. Was innovation, research, development stimulated at the school level through a specialized data-gathering research center?

i. If yes, which unit was responsible for this function?

ii. Was it the regional education offices, the Guidance and Counseling Directorate, CERD, or the General Educational Inspectorate?

iii. What were the impactful responsibilities of these units?

iv. How was this responsibility performed?

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