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Educational Resilience, Institutional Trust, and the Formation of Citizenship: Student Experiences as a Reflection of the Challenges of School Leadership

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Abstract

This study examines educational resilience as a process of dynamic adaptation between students' expectations and schools' institutional responses during crises. In this context, institutional trust emerges as a critical mechanism for fostering resilience, serving as the connective tissue that enables educational organizations to maintain functional cohesion and collective effectiveness. This process is closely linked to the formation of citizenship, as students' experiences with school institutions shape the pre-political frameworks through which they perceive democratic values, institutional credibility, and their own future participation in the public sphere. This conceptualization is further reinforced by a thematic analysis of 40 semi-structured interviews with Greek public secondary school students, revealing low levels of institutional trust resulting from school relationships and managerial issues. These kinds of mistrust erode not only the resilience of school organizations but also the process of civic engagement and restrict students from developing experiences of participation, accountability, and democratic ethos within the school institution. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for school leadership, which is called to act as an agent of transformation by strengthening both the institutional conditions for resilience and the pedagogical environment that fosters the cultivation of active and critical citizenship.

Keywords

Resilience; Trust; Education; Crices; Leadership; Citizenship

1. Introduction

Although educational resilience has become a cornerstone of efforts in the current context of ongoing and multiple crises, the concept still lacks scientific validity, theoretical coherence, and clear empirical evidence (Plotkin, 2021; Cameron et al., 2024). In addition to definitional issues, there has been a recent shift in emphasis. While the term initially referred to students' developmental (Masten, 2016; Ungar et al., 2023) and academic resilience (Wang et al., 1997; Martin & Marsh, 2009; OECD, 2011), over the past decade, the focus has increasingly shifted to the continuity of education as part of the education in emergencies (EiE) approach.

Within the EiE approach, educational resilience is defined as "the capacity of an education system to absorb, resist, and adapt to disturbances while ensuring the continuity of its vital actions" (Dülks et al., 2023). It aims to avoid or minimize the impact of disruptions in schools and education, as, on the one hand, they represent a significant violation of children's right to education (Tarritone et al., 2021; Dülks et al., 2023) and, on the other, are considered interdependent with community or societal resilience (Benavot et al., 2024; Cameron et al., 2024; Dülks et al., 2023). At the same time, the concept of citizenship becomes a critical factor, as student participation in school decision-making and the cultivation of social responsibility strengthen both the resilience of the education system and the development of active citizens (Biesta, 2011).

This paper argues that the EIE approach, while valuable and critical, has two shortcomings. First, the EIE approach primarily addresses school disruptions caused by emergencies that originate outside the school and affect the continuity of education. By emphasizing educational responses during emergencies and crises, it appears to overlook organizational issues that could jeopardize educational resilience from within, regardless of whether an external emergency or crisis occurs. Furthermore, given that trust can be a powerful predictor of human behavior (Fehr, 2009; Yamagishi, 2011), which is fundamental in crisis response, the EIE approach does not sufficiently account for stakeholders' trust. Therefore, greater consideration should be given to school stakeholders' decisions to trust or not trust the education system during shocks, crises, and emergencies. This second point also reflects a gap in the relevant literature. Although a growing body of research examines the link between trust and resilience in organizations (Chandler, 2014; Otola et al., 2024), and although trust contributes to psychological and organizational resources (such as well-being, motivation, and cooperation) that underpin resilience in educational contexts (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2017; Niedlich et al., 2021), the specific role of stakeholders' trust in educational resilience has been underexplored.

This paper addresses the above shortcomings by proposing a conceptualization of educational resilience that recognizes organizational issues as potential latent threats and considers institutional trust and citizenship as prerequisites, mediators, and requirements for educational resilience. By highlighting the link between educational resilience and institutional trust, this conceptualization sheds new light on the role and responsibilities of school leaders in this process. On the other hand, strengthening citizenship is closely linked to trust: students who develop trust in institutions and actively participate in collective processes enhance social cohesion and the school's ability to address internal crises. Student participation in school governance, expressing opinions, and taking initiative are expressions of active citizenship and are critical elements of educational resilience (Sánchez-Hernández, 2024; Putnam, 1993).

To investigate this position, the study uses Greece as a case study to explore how secondary education students perceive the effectiveness of crisis management in their schools. Students are selected as a critical reference group because of their ability to persist through difficulties and their multiplier effect within their families and local communities (Crul et al., 2017; Wright, 2023; Mendoza et al., 2024).

The following section draws on organizational resilience literature to propose a conceptualization of educational resilience as a "problem of fit" that requires the emergence of complex properties. Then it draws on the social component of schools as complex adaptive systems, to highlight the relationship between educational resilience and institutional trust. Finally, the relationship between institutional trust and citizenship is presented, along with its importance for school resilience. The third section presents the results of the thematic analysis of 40 semi-structured interviews with public secondary school students in Greece. The discussion examines resilience in education through the lens of students' institutional trust and considers the implications this conceptualization of educational resilience may have for school leaders. The paper concludes with the theoretical, methodological, and policy implications of the study.

2. Educational Resilience: The Organizational Perspective

2.1 Resilience as "a problem of fit"

In organizational resilience literature, resilience is conceptualized consistently as 'a problem of fit" between the organization and its environment. In particular, the social-ecological approach describes resilience as the ability of a system to absorb disturbances and reorganize itself while changing and maintaining the same function, structure, identity, and feedback (Holling, 2001; Folke, 2006). The extent of this capacity depends on the extent to which (a)

a system can absorb disturbances while remaining in the same area of attraction, (b) a system is able to organize itself rather than being organized by external factors, and (c) a system can build and improve its capacity to learn and adapt (Carpenter et al., 2001; Folke et al., 2006). Second, in the resilience engineering approach, the endeavor of fitness is clearly operationalized in Wood's (2015) conceptualization of "gracefully extensibility". According to Woods (2015), "graceful extensibility" refers to a system's ability, when faced with unforeseen situations, to expand its flexibility and improve performance beyond its boundaries and limitations to prevent brittleness. In the latest stream of resilience as meta-capability, the concept of "fitness" is operationalized into specific skills, competencies, and forms of capital that are diversified and specific in each one of the anticipation, coping, and adaptation phases of resilience building (Chen et al., 2021; Duchek, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023; Hollands et al., 2023). In sum, in the organizational literature, resilience as "a problem of fit" means that resilience arises from the alignment and continuous adjustment between a system's capacities (absorptive, adaptive, and transformative) and the nature and scale of disturbances or environmental changes it encounters. The better the fit, the more resilient the system; the worse the fit, the higher the risk of failure or maladaptation.

2.2 Complex behavior as a prerequisite for achieving "fitness"

Conceptualizing resilience, a "problem of fit" highlights that a system's ability to function as a complex adaptive system (CAS) is a critical prerequisite for its resilience. CAS are a special class of systems known for their adaptive capacities and emergent properties. They form and use internal models to predict future states and adjust accordingly, resulting in complex and hard-to-foresee behavior (Holland, 1992, pp. 3-11). These systems are nested, comprising different agents (Axelrod & Cohen, 2008), and are characterized by relational interactions, adaptive capacities, dynamic processes, openness, contextual determinacy, and emergent novel properties (Preiser et al., 2018).

Scholars argue that schools share many characteristics of CAS, as they, like any other organization, "comprise a population of diverse rule-based agents located in multi-level and interconnected systems in a network shape" (Keshavarz et al., 2010). They are nested within educational supra-systems, with specific autonomy despite external system constraints (Davis & Sumara, 2014, p. 6); and they adapt, evolve, and change through learning (Argyris, 1999; Schon, 1983). But in social systems like schools, the nature of rules, control, and interactions is different. According to Keshavartz et al. (2010), schools can be viewed as "social complex adaptive systems" (SCAS) with unique characteristics that set them apart from other CAS, including rapidly changing rules, ethos, and informal norms influencing agent behavior, and partial rather than full distributed control.

2.3 From schools as SCAS to institutional trust

The social component of schools as complex adaptive systems emphasizes the role of institutional trust. Institutional trust is a form of social trust, defined as the belief in the competence, honesty, or benevolence of governmental institutions (McKnight & Chervany, 2000), and as the perceived probability that institutions will fulfill their responsibilities to a satisfactory degree (Hudson, 2006). According to Campbell (2004, p. 402), "institutional trust is exogenous to the political sphere, originating in long-standing and deeply rooted cultural norms and is an emergent property of interpersonal trust projected onto political institutions."

Institutional trust is a complex, differentiated, context-dependent, and dynamic phenomenon that encompasses rational, emotional, moral, individual, and macro-level factors. It refers to citizens' confidence or expectation that institutions will produce positive outcomes (Eurofound, 2018, pp. 11-12). Institutional trust is particularly associated with public confidence in the competence, reliability, and effectiveness of institutions in managing accidents and crises (Tavares et al., 2010), belief in the quality, comprehensiveness, and fairness of public institutions (OECD, 2015), and citizens' conviction that state institutions perform their tasks with competence and integrity and act for the general good of society (OECD, 2017).

As Sapienza (2021) noted in the Policy Brief by the United Nations Development Program, institutional trust is defined as the belief that public institutions, as actors or systems, will act consistently with positive expectations despite uncertainty. In this report, institutional trust is linked to the relationship between the trusted object (the institution), the trusting subject (the citizen), and a set of expectations regarding the institution's conduct. In this context, institutional trust is based either on the trustworthiness of individual actors or on the reliability and design of the governance system itself. Institutional trust, therefore, depends on the perceived legitimacy, professional competence, and ability of institutions to perform their assigned tasks efficiently (Fornalé et al., 2023) and consists

of three components: the trusted object (the institution), the trusting subject (the citizen), and a set of expectations regarding the institution's behavior (Sapienza, 2021).

Institutional trust is a critical driver of educational resilience, as it serves multiple functions. It: a) influences the social vulnerability of communities and their resilience by shaping risk perception, the effectiveness of communication, and commitment to risk governance measures (Tavares et al., 2010b) enables institutions to sustain their legitimacy, navigate crises, implement changes, and recover from disruptions, ultimately reinforcing their resilience (Bachmann, 2018c) increases compliance with laws and regulations, supports difficult policy decisions, and enables the implementation of structural reforms that involve short-term costs but provide long-term benefits (Eurofound, 2018); and d) increases institutional legitimacy and participation in collective action (Bachmann, 2018; Fornalé et al., 2023, pp. 1-2), enables better crisis management, responsiveness, and accountability, and empowers communities and institutions to absorb shocks, adapt, and recover effectively from disruptions (Sánchez-Hernández, 2024).

2.4 From institutional trust to citizenship

The current argument concerning what resilient schools are reveals how crucial it is to understand both social and institutional systems in enabling school communities to address all forms of problems and transformations without losing their ability to function and their worth (Folke, 2006). We see how trust in institutions and citizenship are essential concepts that shape how people relate to one another, work with each other, and what they expect from each other in school ecosystems. As stated by Giddens (1990) and Sapienza (2021), institutional trust is one method to reduce uncertainty since public institutions behave fairly, predictably, and effectively.

This type of trust in the school context goes well beyond central administration; it plays out day in and day out when students, teachers, and parents talk to school leaders. Principals are particularly significant because they bind systemic legitimacy and school reality. The school community also perceives the school as institutionally trustworthy to the level that the school members are competent, honest, and consistent (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In contrast, citizenship refers to the democratic values, attitudes, and behaviors that influence citizens' interactions with institutions and their participation in public life (Marshall, 1950; Biesta, 2011). In the school setting, citizenship is more than just being taught; it is also developed and is reflected in the manner in which the school is established, with respect to the rules, decision-making processes, and quality of people's relationships, as well as who owns what and what it is. In this sense, school is somewhat a version of a democratic society, with the kind of school leadership and the way administrators manage things leading students and parents to associate differently with the political community.

Accordingly, the nexus between the two ideas is structural, rather than coincidental. Institutional trust is necessary for citizenship in that individuals tend to avoid political processes and eventually abandon the political processes if they do not think that institutions function as the institutions they are supposed to (Luhmann, 1979). Citizenship also fosters trust in institutions as it encourages and makes them more transparent, responsible, and likely to act in a democratic manner. This reciprocal relationship is clear in schools as socially complex adaptive systems (Keshavarz et al., 2010). Schools are learning, growing, and reorganizing so that they can easily adjust to new circumstances. This can only happen if there are networks of collaboration, information sharing, and trust within a community. Part of helping people be strong now is the role of principals. Principles are crucial in establishing social norms and organizational practice. They can foster a trust-building climate and a citizenship in their schools. When people believe they have a say in local actions, people want to see others involved (or involved in matters like community governance), they believe that things are fair and common systems are held together (Bachmann, 2018). These behaviors demonstrate good management and also build a resilient school system that can continue to operate without the turmoil of a crisis. In addition to this, school leaders have the opportunity to facilitate a school that can leverage its own capital (when things do go awry) by fostering citizenship through involvement in processes, providing children a louder voice, and fostering a climate of collaboration (Fornalé et al., 2023).

And resilience isn't just about dealing with crises; it's also about ensuring the school can learn and adapt and set its own rules. These mechanisms operate better where the school community has faith in its leadership and where it perceives the school as a place that adheres to democratic norms (Putnam, 1993). At the end of the day, the value of schools is not a matter of organization; it is also political. It requires institutions of trust and school leaders who live their civic values (Sánchez-Hernández, 2024). By weaving these two ideas into the theoretical conversation about educational resilience, we come to better imagine schools as living institutions that not only survive but also change and retain legitimacy in a world that is becoming more nuanced by the day.

3. Research Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate how Greek secondary education students perceive the crisis and the effectiveness of crisis management in their school. Informed consent forms were created in compliance with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (revised edition, 2017) and with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, EU, 2016/679). The interviews were conducted after both students and their parents signed an informed consent form, with a duration varying between 20 and 35 minutes. Interviews were conducted via Zoom during school hours.

To increase the information power of our sample, purposive sampling was used to recruit public secondary education students aged 13 to 17 from three Greek regions. The sample was then divided between urban and suburban areas in Greece. At this level of stratification, students from urban areas comprised two-thirds of the total sample to reflect the initial population distribution. The sample was further stratified to include participants with a wide range of backgrounds to capture diverse perspectives. The final sample consists of 20 girls, 12 boys, and 8 LGBTQ+ students, while 28 students were from low SEC backgrounds and 12 from upper SEC backgrounds.

To ensure the adequacy of the sample size, data saturation was determined empirically when no relevant new data emerged for either codes or categories. In this case, the code and category matrix had already stabilized during the initial twenty interviews across all socio-demographic categories (with approximately five interviews per subcategory). To provide strong empirical confirmation of data saturation, this number was doubled to forty interviews.

Finally, Greece was chosen as a case study because the country was and still is facing the effects of overlapping and acute crises: an acute austerity crisis (from 2009), an unprecedented refugee crisis (2015), and the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, Greece is one of the countries most economically affected by the pandemic (Thedoropoulou, 2022), but has also suffered from the legacies of the previous economic crisis (Ervasti et al, 2019; Adam & Papatheodorou, 2016; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2016) and refugee crises (Chtouris & Miller, 2017). As all of these crises have had a significant impact on education, Greece is an ideal case study to investigate whether resilience characteristics have emerged in the 14 years since the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2009.

Code Matrix Browser

Code System	Girls	Boys	LGBTQ+	LSEC	UPPER SEC	Special difficulties	Immigrants	Roma	SUM
DEMOGRAPHICS									0
GENDER									0
GIRL	20			16	4	6	4	8	58
BOY		12		7	5	2	4		30
LGBTQ+			8	5	3				16
AGE									0
17	5	2	3	5	5	2		4	26
16	7	1		6	2	2	3	1	22
15	1	7	1	6	3		3	1	22
14	3	1	3	7		2	2		18
13	4	1	1	4	2	2		2	16
AREA									0
SEMI-URBAN AREA	5	5	2	6	6	3		3	30
URBAN AREA	14	8	6	21	7	4	9	5	74

Figure 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

4. Results

Provide a concise and precise description of the experimental results, their interpretation, as well as the experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed, and the open coding strategy (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was performed on the collected data. A thematic analysis based on the MAXQDA coding system was used to perform a

reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Several rounds of refinement, definition, and naming of themes led to the results presented in the following section.

The axial coding stage produced the following eleven categories of analysis (Images 2-11), organized under four pillars: a) definition, frequency, and types of crisis at school; b) school effectiveness in crisis management, sources of information, and trust in the past; c) obstacles to effective crisis management, the role of teachers, and the impact of time; d) suggestions for further improvement.

4.1 Pillar 1: Definition, frequency, and types of crises at school

Students predominantly defined a crisis as something bad or negative, resulting from a deficiency or disruption, which may relate to specific problems or people (Figure 2). Moreover, twenty-one out of forty students reported that these crises occur often or very often (Figure 3), twenty-four students stated that these crises are relationship problems, and ten attributed the school's inability to manage crises as the cause (Figure 4).

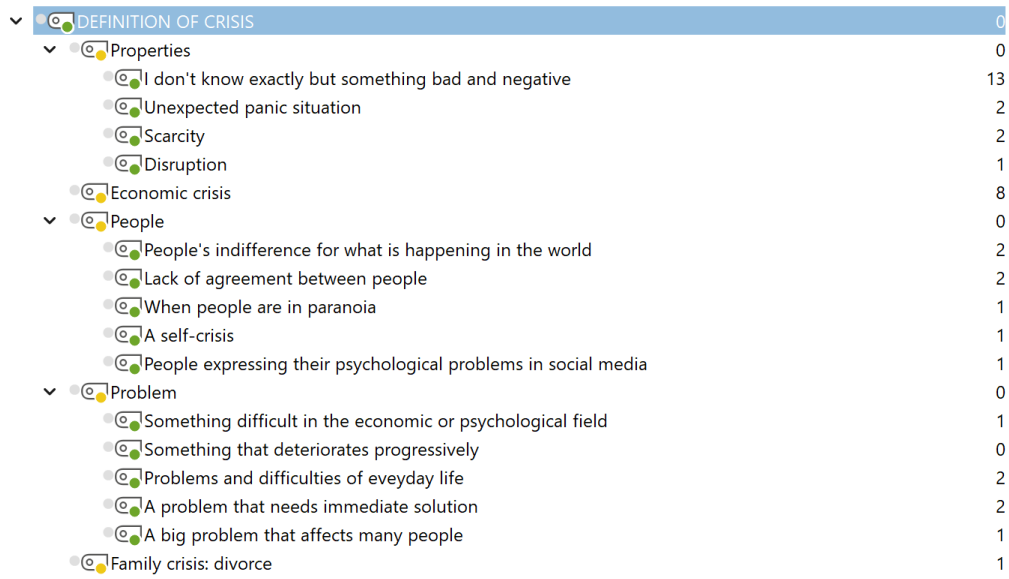

Figure 2. What does the word "crisis" mean to you?

- Crisis that... Something bad is happening, I would say. Yes, something is not right. (5S)
- A. I know. It's difficult. Very... This crisis is affecting all areas. It's in the economy. It's also in psychological things. Because with everything we hear, it's a little difficult. It's a little difficult. (6S)
The crisis. I believe that the crisis we are experiencing is not necessarily economic or in any other area. I believe it is unique. Because, apart from the pandemic, which was a crisis, during which we went through very difficult times, I believe that we have all now turned to the voice within us. We are all trying to get by on our own. So, I believe that this crisis has mainly to do with ourselves. Beyond the economic crisis and various other social crises, etc. I believe that this crisis mainly has to do with us. (24S)
- For me, the crisis is that people see what is happening in the world and just sit there with their arms crossed. For me, the crisis is not when someone has no money. For me, the crisis is the world's insensitivity. (38S)

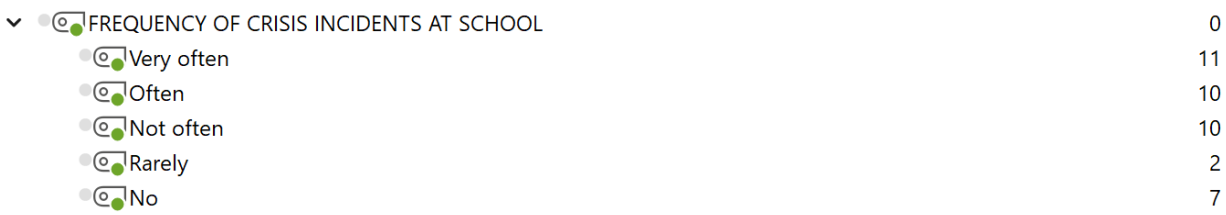

Figure 3. Frequency of crisis at your school.

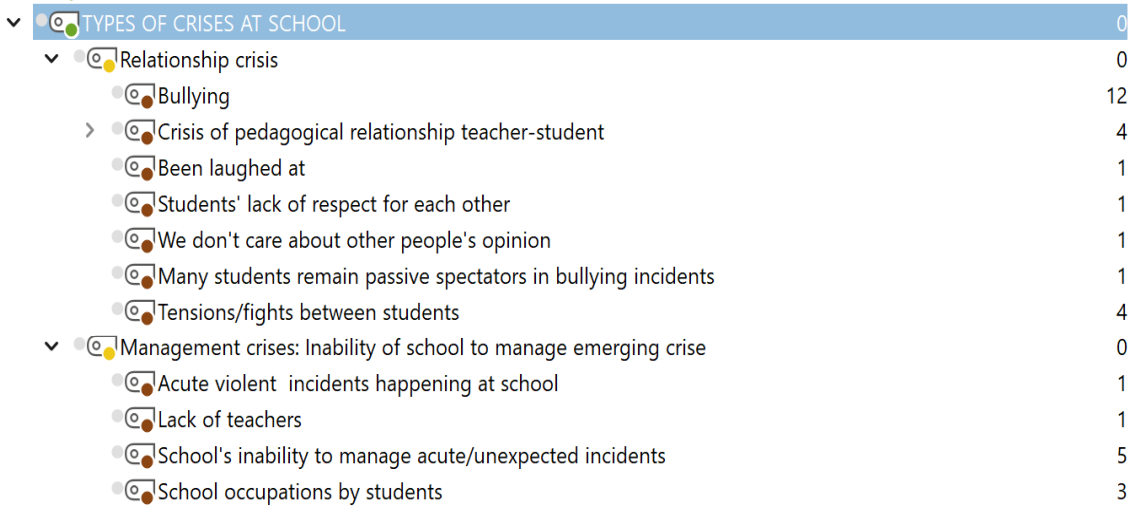

Figure 4. What types of crises occur at your school?

- Let's say there are many cases of bullying, which I definitely believe is a crisis. Not only for the victims, but often for the perpetrators as well. Because for someone to be driven to do this, it means that they too have some weakness, something that caused them to do this. So, I definitely think these are cases of bullying. Now, it could also be a learning crisis, I would say. (14S)
- Yes, let's say, in the news, as I told you, we see some children being caught.
The rest don't stand out and just stand there with their arms crossed. (18S)

4.2 Pillar 2: School effectiveness in crisis management and sources of information and trust in the past

The findings of Pillar 1 are also confirmed by students' answers in Pillar 2. Only twelve students find that their school handles crises effectively or very effectively (Figure 5). Parents (twenty-six students) and friends (eighteen students) were mentioned as their main networks of trust (Figure 6), and friends were predominantly cited as the first source of information in previous crises in thirty-five cases (Figure 7).

Figure 5. Do you think that your school is effective in crisis management?

- I would rate them as average, because when they know something is happening, sometimes they try to solve it and other times they don't. In other words, they solve the most superficial issues to look better on the outside. In other words, so as not to be...(12S)
But unfortunately, these are things they don't understand (31S).
They don't evaluate the clues we have, the information, correctly (8S)

Figure 6. Whom do you trust when a crisis happens at school?

Figure 7. Who did you trust for getting informed in the previous cases of a crisis at school?

From my classmates. Because the headmistress would have a problem with that. So, she wouldn't be able to tell us. So, I think it was from my classmates. (2S)

4.3 Pillar 3: Obstacles for effective crisis management

To explore the question further, students were asked to identify the main barriers to successful crisis management in their school, the role of teachers, and the impact of time. Most students cited teachers and the school itself as the biggest barriers to effective crisis management (Figure 8). This finding was supported by the next two questions, which showed that teachers have a low level of awareness of what is happening in the school (Figure 9) and that a significant number of students reported lack of time and lack of concern as obstacles (Figure 10).

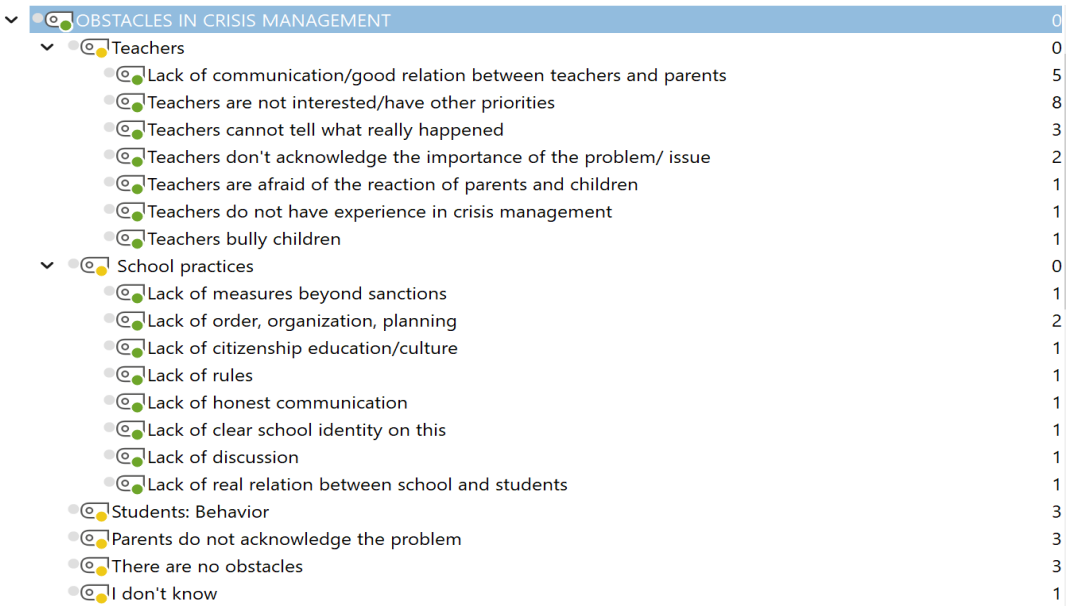

Figure 8. What are the main obstacles for effective crisis management at school?

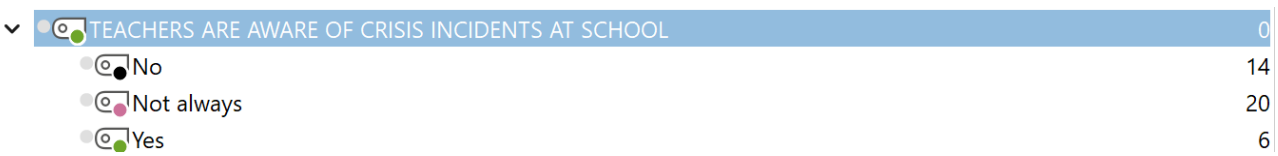

Figure 9. Are teachers aware of what is happening at school?

- And I know when you turn your back, one child bullies another. I believe that sometimes you don't realize the harm that has been done. (36S)
- Many teachers, many people, not just teachers, don't understand many things. But it's not because, you know, they don't get it at that moment. There are many people who don't even care. I mean, you can tell them, and they won't care. But there are also people who, when you tell them something, will rush to help you, will be there with you, by your side. (39S)

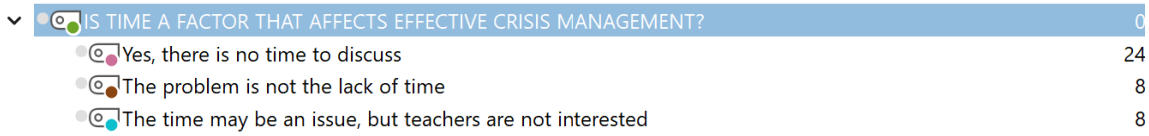

Figure 10. The impact of time on the effectiveness of crisis management at school.

- Time is very pressing. Very much, so definitely. Because when there is more time, we can examine an issue better. Now, I have heard from acquaintances of mine in the schools they go to, while in Greek schools, because we are pressed for time, we cannot spend two or three hours on one issue, because there are other obligations that must be scheduled by those in charge. (4S)
Let's say, I know, a teacher may have seven hours of lessons and not understand a problem correctly. Maybe, I know, a child might shout about it; maybe it's the child's fault, but I'm sure that because this happened at my school, they might shout about it the next day, they need to understand it, I know, they should apologize because teachers are people who come into a classroom, teach for seven hours, and get tired like the students, and it's only natural that at some point the students will lash out. (11S)
Of course there is. And that's what I wanted to say now, that, you know, our headmistress, if she's running around all day, she can't see if a child is being bullied or physically abused. That's it. (15S)

4.4 Pillar 4: Suggestions for improvement

Finally, when students were asked to suggest ways to improve crisis management, they primarily emphasized the need to enhance relationships (18 cases) and communication (12 cases) within the school (Figure 11).

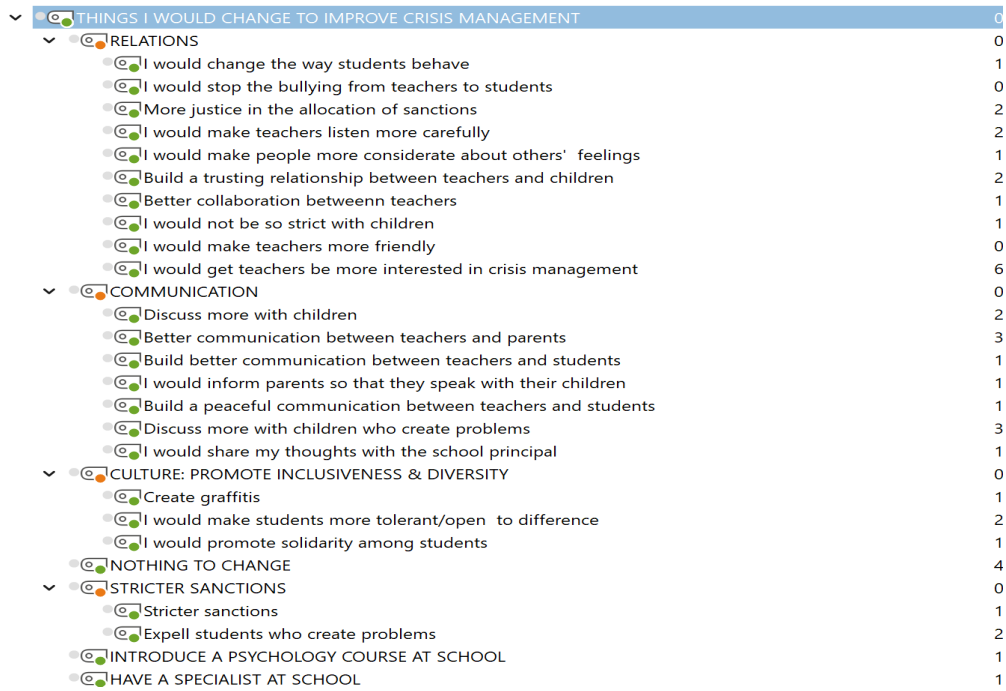

Figure 11. If you wanted to improve crisis management at school, what would you change?

- Yes. Because that's how we build trust. If something happens at school that bothers us or we don't like, or anything, we can more easily confide in them and say... "Oh, you know, this has been happening to me lately," or "this and that happened." (24S)
- I would stop those children who don't come to school just to pass the class. I mean, they don't come to learn things. To have a better life. That's it. They have no goal. Nothing. I just wouldn't want to change them, to chase them away. I would like to change their perspective. That school isn't just for passing the class. (35S)

5. Discussion

5.1 Educational resilience is an internal property of the system

The results of the thematic analysis showed that Greek student participants had significantly low institutional trust in their school's ability to manage internal crises. This indicates a limited potential for educational resilience at the school level, given the relationship between institutional resilience and trust.

Specifically, Pillar 1 showed that at least half of the students in our sample reported that crises occur often or very often at school (Figure 3) and that these crises mainly involve internal relationships and managerial issues (Figure 4). Pillar 2 indicated that most students do not trust their school's ability to manage crises effectively (Figure 5). The other two questions in this pillar confirmed this finding, revealing that parents and friends were the primary sources of information and trust during previous crises (Figures 6 and 7). Pillar 3 showed that, according to students, teachers, and the school itself are the main barriers to effective crisis management (Figure 7). Students reported that teachers are not aware of what is happening in the school (Figure 8), supporting this finding. The organization's lack of time and teachers' lack of willingness to discuss what is happening (Figure 9) further supported the findings of this pillar. Pillar 4 showed that students prioritized improving relationships (18 cases) and communication (12 cases) among stakeholders in the school to improve crisis management (Figure 17).

These findings are valuable in two ways. First, they confirm that previous definitions of educational resilience – which describe an institution's ability to withstand shocks, adapt, and continue to function effectively in the face of environmental changes, crises, and threats (Bachmann, 2018; Fornalé et al., 2023) do not account for internal organizational issues that undermine educational resilience from within. Second, they reveal an "expectations gap" (Fornalé et al., 2023), supporting our initial discussion of educational resilience as a "problem of fit" between students' expectations and the school's ability to adapt and respond to internal challenges. In addition, the observation that students turn to their parents and friends as primary sources of information and support aligns with literature suggesting that people prioritize social forms of trust when institutional responses are perceived as responsible for the crisis or inadequate in their response (Hetherington et al., 2008; Torcal, 2014).

Finally, our findings are consistent with the two types of institutional trust described in the UNDP Policy Brief (Sapienza, 2021), which distinguishes between: a) actor-based trust, based on an assessment of an individual actor's inherent qualities – their trustworthiness; and b) system-based trust, based on an assessment of the governance system's "directive" capacity – its ability to foster trustworthy conduct through a mix of incentives and safeguards. In all four pillars of the thematic analysis, our findings showed that students have low levels of interpersonal trust toward teachers in particular, along with very low levels of institutional trust in their school's managerial capability to manage crises effectively.

In sum, the findings support our initial position that organizational issues should be considered when studying educational resilience. Our research confirms Gallopin's (2006) assertion that resilience is an internal attribute of the system. It also aligns with Chandler's claim that "coping," "adapting," and "recovering" are effective when the problem is external to the systems and processes involved, but not when these systems are themselves part of the problem.

This finding is crucial, given that educational scholarship on trust has so far focused predominantly on relational rather than institutional trust, such as the sharing of best practices among teachers, participation in reflective dialogues, and peer coaching (Kalkan, 2016; Guhao & Sioting, 2023), or the impact of trusting relationships between teachers and students on students' engagement, well-being, and learning outcomes (Niedlich et al., 2921; Jederlund & von Rosen, 2022).

5.2 School leaders at the crossroads between institutional and social trust

The role of school leaders in the relational approach to trust has been established in relevant scholarship. Establishing trust-building processes in schools is considered the most important characteristic of a successful leader (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). School leaders can foster trust by shaping a climate of trust among stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997; Akbay & Zeybek, 2023) or by demonstrating individual charisma as benevolent, honest, open, competent, and reliable leaders (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Although the EiE approach identifies school leaders as key actors in maintaining continuity of teaching during disruptions, providing psychosocial support, organizing resources, and developing safety protocols (Tarricone et al.,

2021, p. 51; Mirzaei et al., 2019), our conceptualization of trust for school leaders introduces a novel parameter that extends beyond the relational approach. In this framework, school leaders must act proactively and create conditions that enable schools to remain resilient during hectic and demanding circumstances in times of uncertainty.

Our findings indicate two directions regarding the new roles and responsibilities of school leaders. On one hand, the fact that institutional trust is constructed as a special type of social trust that depends on individuals' personal experiences in interactions with institutions (Thoresen et al., 2018) highlights the critical role of school leaders in ensuring institutional trust. This underscores the need for a strategic and timely focus on macro and micro school dynamics that hinder institutional trust and, consequently, undermine the school's capacity for resilience building long before a crisis, shock, or emergency occurs. On the other hand, given that institutional trust is subject to variations due to changing political and socioeconomic circumstances, school leaders could increase social trust within their school community as a compensatory mechanism for the lack of institutional trust. Social trust could compensate for the lack of institutional trust at the individual school level, considering that social trust is formed in childhood and changes only slowly thereafter due to experience (Erickson, 1993). Social trust refers to the belief that others behave trustworthily (Gambetta et al., 2000; Glanville & Paxton, 2007) and tends to remain stable during shocks (Aassve et al., 2024).

In sum, positioning school leaders as institutional or social trust builders draws on the fact that "institutions are patterns of relationships" (Harrold, 2024). This also aligns with the necessity of bottom-up approaches to ensure the engagement, relevance, acceptability, and sustainability of people and communities (WHO, 2022; COE, 2023), as well as with previous studies that underline trust as an enabling factor for resilience building (Demir, 2015; Fornalé et al., 2023; Scharte, 2025; Sánchez-Hernández, 2024).

5.3 School leadership: trust and citizenship in resilient schools

By responding from the perspective of institutional trust, the students revealed the key to improving our resilience and their commitment to citizenship amongst schools. Students reported inadequate lines of communication between teachers and parents and inadequate time for dialogue at school (Figures 8 and 10). This is a theoretical indicator concerning weak frameworks of institutional trust because the process of effective communication and transparency facilitates students' and parents' trust in institutions (McKnight & Chervany, 2000; Luhmann, 1979). That students and parents were included in dialogical processes is an example of active citizenship and contributes towards greater democratic engagement in educational institutions (Pateman, 1970; Giddens, 1990).

Students want more equity in the implementation of sanctions and a more trustworthy relationship with educators embedded in person-to-person relationships. Justice is an important aspect of the social aspect of school resilience because it enables students to maintain stability and to engage with the school (Preiser et al., 2018). Building trust in relationships with one another that are fair and predictable prepares the school to cope with and pivot in the face of change, demonstrating the relationship between institutional trust and resilience (Bachmann, 2018; Fornalé et al., 2023). In this article, we discuss the positive conversations for the students about communication and culture in schools, and also about the acceptance of values such as diversity and solidarity, as shown in Figure 11. The cultivation of a democratic society enhances the development of citizenry by enabling students to play a part in rule-making and support in strengthening institutional collective legitimacy (Sapienza, 2021). Open culture and participatory culture lower the risk of social vulnerability and also make it easier for schools dealing with crises (Tavares et al., 2010). These thoughts must be put into practice, and principals in schools play a key role in this.

Principals using fair procedures, improving communication, and promoting participatory procedures can build trust for the school and citizenship for the individual in the trust of the principals. This is critical, as it enables a school to be more resilient; open, fair, and participatory schools are better able to cope with shocks and adapt to change and bounce back from disruptions (Bachmann, 2018; Preiser et al., 2018; Fornalé et al., 2023). It seems that the nexus between the student reports and institutional trust and citizenship demonstrates that the success of school resilience lies not only in the organizational approaches in supporting school improvement, but also in the moral and social dedication of principals in creating a participatory, equitable, and adaptive learning environment.

6. Conclusions

There are, however, several important findings of interest. First, this study rearticulated educational resilience as an organizational issue, rather than one limited to external threats to education that have the potential to disrupt

education and affect vulnerable students. Second, it reinforced links between educational resilience and institutional trust, which is more critical to a world that is very uncertain and intertwined, but that trust is more fragile in times of crisis. By connecting educational resilience and institutional trust, new roles for school leaders were identified as well. Finally, apart from their research contribution, our findings provide practical recommendations for incorporating building trust in school leadership training, monitoring institutional trust as a component of resilience measures, and guiding EiE models to accommodate internal dynamics in schools.

Our professional background in Greek public education in our early career, our academic position and expertise in human geography and school leadership, together with our personal experiences with the effects of the current crisis on the education system of Greece, set us up to contribute to the research questions. The semi-structured nature of the interviews used in this study allowed a rich qualitative context within the Greek context, but limits the generalization of the findings. The findings would greatly aid the argument of this paper in that the data presented are consistent with previous research on institutional trust and resilience, but that comparative studies across countries, longitudinal designs tracking institutional trust over time or mixed-methods approaches that include both surveys and interviews could be used to strengthen this argument.

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