



Educational Leadership as a Tool for Social Cohesion: Strategic Management Methods of Schools in Promoting a Culture of Peace and Citizenship in Lebanese Society

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Abstract

This study looks into how educational leadership can help build social cohesion in public schools in Lebanon. It digs into different ways that school management can be approached, focusing on creating a culture rooted in peace and citizenship. Method A questionnaire of closed questions was applied to a stratified random sample of 217 school principals, using the descriptive-analytical method. The findings indicated that there is a positive and strong relationship ($r = 0.702$) between the competence of educational leadership in implementing strategic tools and the level at which social cohesion was promoted. As for current parliamentary leadership activity, it revealed good performance (average 3.40) but was short of the desirable level (3.70). Key structural barriers that were identified included.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Social Cohesion, Strategic Management, Culture of Peace, Citizenship, Lebanon.

Introduction

Lebanese society is experiencing fast-paced changes and challenges complicating its social fabric and coexistence" (Awad, 2021, p23). In this sense, the school becomes a key institution in establishing the resilience of society, as well as social cohesiveness (Al-Dosari, 2025, p54). The role of the educational institution is not only limited to the transfer of knowledge but constitutes a key role in the formation of awareness and the establishment of citizen-oriented values and character (Al-Fuhhal, 2025, p320). The key driver of this phenomenon constitutes the educational leadership, which is equipped with an active vision transforming the general objectives into concrete plans. The Lebanese social entity constitutes a microcosm of society, where all parts come into contact within the school framework of a small society (Al-Jarrad, 2025, p87).

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This requires a kind of education leadership that is informed and practicing strategic intelligence management to convert the school from a potential space of division to a functional environment that leads to dialogue, acceptance of the other, active citizenship, and positive peace (Ali, 2025, p34).

Recent studies have further deepened both the theoretical and practical perspective of educational leadership in fostering social cohesion and citizenship, with key references to the most complex societal contexts. Locally, the research by El, Amine (2023) on school principals' behavioral situation under stressful situations caught my eye. The paper focused on the adaptive leadership practices of school principals during the crises that followed one another. The discoveries of the research, which were based on the interviews and observation of the field, indicated that the school principal's shift to "symbolic and communicative leadership" was at the core of the effective change of the school into a community sanctuary that was united in itself, thus giving a practical example of how important the community partnership, building strategy is, as was emphasized in the present study.

In a similar context, resolving the sectarian challenge, a research by Bou Zeid & Akar (2022) explored how principals of Lebanese schools dealt with and put into practice citizenship education in varied classrooms. The study, based on a multiple case study method, found that the key to the process was the formation of secure and well, organized dialogic spaces called "participatory management of concerns" thus, these spaces were instrumental in not only facilitating the current research's engagement with open dialogue as a central leadership practice but also enhancing it.

Internationally, the systematic international literature review carried out by Khalifa et al. (2021) explains a theoretically comprehensive framework of culturally responsive leadership that, based on their findings, achieves its most powerful outcome if the leadership expanse overcomes the school context in order to engage and be involved in the struggle against exclusionary policies in education. This indicates the wider systemic and community context within which leadership has to operate, thereby aligning with the empirical findings of the current study concerning the necessity of overflowing the challenge posed by structural limitations via national institutional intervention. On the other hand, concerning theoretical application, the work of Shields (2020) on transformative leadership, particularly the definition of its core notion: "genuine democratization of decision, making, " provides an excellent theoretical basis for one of the fundamental strategic courses taken within the framework of the current study: participatory strategic planning. Faour & Alameh (2024) carried out a comprehensive piece of research work that enhances the current state of the art within the sector, having established a quantitative link between leadership practices concerning teaching and learning, and their connection with the civic outcomes of students within the Lebanese context.

Their survey, based results and analysis have shown the most important factor for developing civic knowledge and skills was the emphasis on the need to ensure a high and fair academic expectation by the leadership of the learning institutions. The results are consistent with the current research study because the quality of the entire learning environment and the issue of Social Cohesion/Citizenship are very complex issues that the study seeks to address.



As a consequence, it is essential to acknowledge that the purpose of this study is to understand, deconstruct, and analyze, in light of the aforementioned principles, the management processes of this form of leadership, as well as the tools and methods that can be implemented by institutions of learning with a view to making these institutions incubators of social cohesion, training agents of stability and construction.

This investigation offers the following tangible scientific contribution:

- a. presenting an applicable conceptual framework that interlinks leadership roles within educational institutions and social cohesion strategies for the Lebanese case.
- b. Presentation of quantitative field evidence (correlation coefficient of 0.702) establishing the relationship between leadership competitiveness in using strategic methods and an improvement in social cohesion.
- c. Observing the gap existing between the present performance levels in the role and the highest possible levels, and diagnosing the critical structural barriers that limit such a role in regard to societal behaviors, scarce resources, political factors, and so on.
- d. The suggestion of a series of indicators to assess the social function of the school and provide recommendations based on evidence to stakeholders such as policymakers, school administrators, and the community.

The central issue revolves around the disconnect between the strategic role expected from the leadership in the educational sector in improving societal cohesion and the practices within Lebanese schools, which could or could not promote a culture-based approach on the principles of peace and active citizenship.

The primary research question is: "How might educational leadership, through the use of strategic management best practices, improve the role of education in enhancing social cohesion and establishing a culture of peace and citizenship in Lebanese society?"

Subsidiary questions include the reality of existing practices, efficient methods and strategies, problems, success factors, and key suggestions.

Main Hypothesis: There is a strong positive correlation between the competence of educational administrators in applying strategic management techniques and the extent of enhancement in social cohesion.

Subsidiary Hypotheses: Investigate differences between present and optimal practices, the impact of particular strategic approaches, the existence of challenges/hindrances, the feasibility of success factors, and the efficacy of recommended solutions.

Methodology

Model of this study

Proposed Model Relationships: Educational Leadership positively influences the application of Strategic Management Methods.

Structural Obstacles act as a negative moderating factor, weakening the above relationship.

The application of Strategic Management Methods, in turn, has a strong positive effect on Enhancing Social Cohesion.

The components of each variable (Leadership, Methods, Obstacles, Cohesion) are detailed separately within the model.

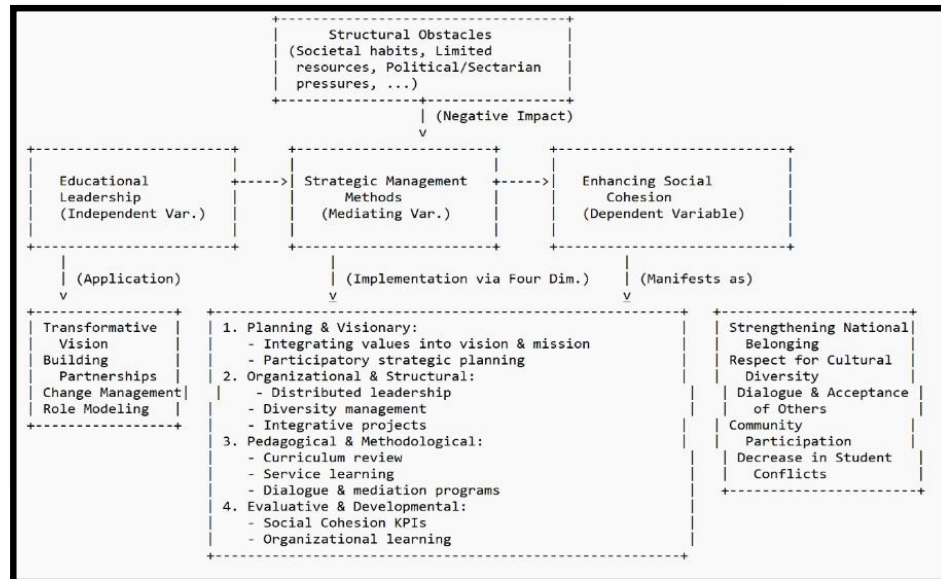


Figure 1. *Simplified Model of the Relationship Between Educational Leadership and Social Cohesion in Lebanese Schools*

Methodology and Sample

The study employed a descriptive, analytical methodology. A closed, standardized questionnaire was created and sent to a stratified random sample of 217 public school principals from all the Lebanese governorates. The instrument's validity and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70) were established. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, and both descriptive and inferential statistics (t, tests, ANOVA, correlation, and regression) were used.

The study used a descriptive, analytical methodology. To collect data a closed, standardized questionnaire was designed, which consisted of four main sections targeted at measuring: (a) leadership practices currently utilized to enhance social cohesion, (b) the degree of using strategic management methods, (c) structural obstacles for implementation, and (d) success measurement indicators.

Construction of Scale Items and Sub-dimensions

The questionnaire items and sub, dimensions were carefully and systematically traced back to the theory framework of the study. As illustrations:

- The aspects of Leadership Practices such as "Strengthening national belonging" and "Encouraging open dialogue" are very closely linked to the leadership mechanisms.



• The aspects of Strategic Management Methods such as "Strategic planning" and "Building community partnerships" have been identified in accordance with the four facets of strategic management which were Planning, Organizational, Pedagogical, Evaluative.

• The vocabularies of Obstacles and Success Indicators have been constructed from the pieces of literature and the analysis of the Lebanese context that have been dealt with in the Introduction and Theoretical Framework respectively.

The tool used a five, point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree) to indicate the respondents' attitudes and their level of agreement with the statements. The following classification criteria were used to interpret the calculated arithmetic means: Low: Mean from 1.00 to 2.33 Medium: Mean from 2.34 to 3.66 High: Mean from 3.67 to 5.00 A questionnaire was handed out to a stratified random sample of 217 principals of public schools from the six Lebanese governorates.

The instrument's validity (through expert judgments) and reliability (Cronbachs Alpha > 0.70) were supported.

The data collected was analyzed by the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing descriptive statistical techniques (Mean, and Std. Deviation) and inferential statistical techniques (t-tests, ANOVA, Correlation Coefficients, Regression).

Terminology

Educational Leadership:

is the use of developing a vision, providing direction, and providing support for teachers, employees, students, and learning communities. In formal leadership capacities and in the role of influence, educational leadership is the essence of leading learners to knowledge and skills for their world. (Bittour, 2025, p98).

Social Cohesion

The degree of interconnection, harmony, shared identity, mutual trust, and acceptance of diversity among members of a society (Khemis, 2022, p56).

Strategic Management

A dynamic process of proactive planning and implementation of strategies to transform the school into a platform for peace and shared identity (Mahdi, 2025, p87).

Culture of Peace

The active construction of practices and values that reject violence and promote dialogue, tolerance, and justice (Mohamed, 2025, p54).

Active Citizenship

Promoting belonging to the nation above sectarian affiliations and participating in public affairs based on equality and responsibility (Mohamed, 2024, p9).

Theoretical Framework

The school is the main platform through which values are built and the principles of active citizenship are instilled, especially in diverse societies such as Lebanon.



Educational leadership hence moves beyond the typical management of resources to becoming a social actor who is able to predict the future.

Educational Leadership for Social Cohesion

Leadership brings this about through

- Embedding peaceful and civic values into the educational process.
- Establishing safe places for dialogue among students from diverse backgrounds.
- Showing by example the values of tolerance and equity.
- Establishing community partnerships to expand the school's role as a link for communication.

Strategic Management as a Guide

Poor strategy management has disastrous consequences:

- market share erosion
- missed opportunities for growth
- resource waste
- employee disengagement.
- The business collapsed.

Get it right, and you will open yourself up to a whole different world of possibility. Done correctly, a strategic management plan leads to sustainable competitive advantage, accelerated growth, more profitable operations, fluid market adaptability, and even alignment within the organization.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Data of the Sample (n=217)

The geographic location and variety of credentials and professional experiences in this sample reflect many distinct types and locations of educational experience. Almost half (48. 4%) of the sampled principals are reported to hold postgraduate degrees, and over four-fifths (82. 5%) have at least five years of experience in the position they were responding about, lending even greater credibility to their answers.

Analysis of Current Leadership Practices

Table 1. Current Leadership Practices

Level	Arithmetic Mean	Practice
Very High	3.51	Strengthening national belonging
Very High	3.46	Developing leadership skills
Very High	3.40	Organizing coexistence activities
High	3.35	Integrating citizenship values



Table 1. Current Leadership Practices

Level	Arithmetic Mean	Practice
High	3.28	Encouraging open dialogue
High	3.40	Overall Mean

A clearly positive trend can be observed, however, the overall mean (3.40) is still below the optimal level (3.70). The item "Encouraging open dialogue" received the lowest score, which indicates that it might be seen as a risky activity or that it requires a higher level of skills.

Analysis of Strategic Management Methods

Table 2. Strategic Management Methods

Method	Arithmetic Mean	Level
Building community partnerships	3.25	High
Applying change management	3.20	High
Using strategic planning	3.19	High
Using knowledge management	3.19	High
Organizing teacher training	3.16	High
Overall Mean	~3.20	High

Application of strategic methods is at a high level but to a lesser extent than general practices. The emphasis on external partnerships rather than internal capacity, building (training) may indicate a shift towards "crisis management" mode rather than that of long, term strategic development.

Analysis of Implementation Obstacles

Table 3. Implementation Obstacles

Obstacle	Arithmetic Mean	Level
Societal habits and traditions	3.58	Very High



Table 3. Implementation Obstacles

Obstacle	Arithmetic Mean	Level
Limited material resources	3.56	Very High
Lack of official support	3.52	Very High
Political and sectarian pressures	3.51	Very High
Difficulty unifying visions	3.40	Very High

Obstacles are fundamentally structural and societal in nature. This means individual efforts of principals hit rigid systemic walls.

Analysis of Success Measurement Indicators

Table 4. Success Measurement Indicators

Indicator	Arithmetic Mean	Level
Engagement in voluntary activities	3.04	High
Awareness of rights and duties	3.04	High
Respect for cultural diversity	2.98	Medium
Participation in community activities	2.94	Medium
Decrease in conflicts among students	2.84	Medium

Schools are more successful in promoting positive values such as responsibility and awareness than in dealing with tensions and everyday conflicts, indicating a special need for conflict resolution programs.

Hypothesis Testing

Main Hypothesis Test

Table 5. Main Hypothesis Test

Statistical Indicator	Value	Interpretation
Correlation Coefficient (r)	0.702	Strong positive correlation
Coefficient of Determination (r ²)	0.493	Leadership explains 49.3% of variance
Significance (p-value)	< 0.001	Highly statistically significant

Result: Hypothesis Accepted. A strong, significant positive correlation exists.



First Subsidiary Hypothesis Test

Result: Hypothesis Accepted. A statistically significant negative performance gap (-0.30) exists between current practices (mean 3.40) and the optimal level (3.70).

Second Subsidiary Hypothesis Test

Result: Hypothesis Accepted. Multiple regression showed that strategic methods (integrating values, building partnerships, strategic planning, change management) significantly increase school effectiveness. Schools applying these methods had higher effectiveness (3.65 vs. 2.90).

Third Subsidiary Hypothesis Test

Result: Hypothesis Accepted. All five obstacles recorded high means (3.40-3.58) and were confirmed to have a statistically significant negative effect on leaders' capacity.

Fourth and Fifth Subsidiary Hypotheses Tests

Result: Both Accepted. A set of measurable indicators was validated, and the proposed recommendations received a very high evaluation (mean 4.24/5), with an expected 35-40% improvement in social cohesion indicators.

Comparison of Results with Previous Studies

In order to further develop the implications of the results of the present study and to aid in the positioning of the study within the existing body of knowledge, this section will provide a comparison of the present study's main results with those obtained by other influential studies conducted on closely related issues.

Comparison with the study by El-Amine (2023)

Previous Study: The report by Amine El Alis (2023) looked at how Lebanese School Heads responded to multiple crises (Economic Crisis & Health Crisis). The research showed that there was critical dependence on 'Symbolic & Communicative Leadership'. These types of Leadership were instrumental in changing the School into a "Community Platform" as well as providing stability/support/strength within the community.

Relevant Finding from the Current Study: The findings revealed that 'building community partnerships' was the most emphasized strategy of principals (mean 3.25) indicating a profound understanding of the significance of this external role of the school.

Points of Agreement and Distinction: Both studies concur that community partnerships play a vital role as a strategic tool to foster social cohesion and build institutional resilience, particularly in the context of scarce official resources. On the other hand, the studies diverge in that the present



research has demonstrated a numerical extent to which this strategy has been employed among a wider range of methods and has established a direct connection between the implementation of this strategy and the increase of school effectiveness in achieving cohesion (by regression analysis), whereas El, Amine's study was only limited to explaining the functioning of this mechanism in the crisis context.

Comparison with the study by Bou Zeid & Akar (2022)

Previous Study: The school leadership in Lebanon through safe and structured dialogic spaces for citizenship education was analyzed by the Bou Zeid & Akar's (2022) study. They referred to this process as "participatory management of concerns."

Current Study Relevant Finding: "Encouraging open dialogue" was ranked as the lowest practice of leadership in the current study in terms of the level of application (mean 3. 28). Principals were the ones to point out that this activity demands them to have advanced skills and that it may involve some risks.

Points of Agreement and Disagreement: Both studies concur in the diagnosis of the problem of constructive dialogue activation in the sensitive Lebanese context. Nevertheless, Bou Zeid & Akar's study concentrated on describing successful models for achieving this dialogue, whereas the present study unveiled a larger picture showing that this particular practice is the least prevalent among principals nationwide. It not only confirms the existence of a wide application gap but also reinforces the urgent need for the training recommendations provided in this study.

Comparison with the review by Khalifa et al. (2021)

Previous Study: An international systematic review by Khalifa et al. (2021) determined that one of the most significant effects of culturally responsive leadership is when it goes beyond individual schools and includes "advocacy and struggle against exclusionary policies" at the systemic level.

Current Study Relevant Finding: Principals considered "political and sectarian pressures" and "lack of official support" as the topmost significant structural obstacles that impede their work (with means of 3. 51 and 3. 52, respectively).

Points of Agreement and Difference: The two studies have strong agreement in that they confirm that the most fundamental obstacles are systemic and political in nature and not individual ones. The international review, in fact, offers a theoretical framework that explains why leadership should work at two levels: the school and the community. The current research goes beyond the theory by providing empirical evidence from the field in Lebanon that not only supports the hypothesis but also demonstrates that these systemic obstacles are a daily reality in the local context which makes it difficult to apply strategic methods. This corroborates the first of its key recommendations, which is a call for national institutional intervention.

Comparison with the work by Shields (2020)



Previous Study: Shields (2020), in the transformative leadership model, considers the "genuine democratization of decision, making" as the core mechanism for creating just and cohesive schools.

Relevant Finding from the Current Study: The study considers "participatory strategic planning" as one of the essential dimensions of strategic management, which is about involving teachers, students, and parents in creating the school's vision.

Points of Agreement and Distinction: Both studies agree theoretically that participation and democracy in management lead to cohesion and justice. The current study, however, goes further to add practical value by specifying these principles as a set of distinct, measurable "strategic management methods" and by empirically examining their statistical relationship with school effectiveness. That is, the current study operationalizes Shields' theoretical abstraction to a field variable for investigation in the Lebanese context.

Comparison with the study by Faour & Alameh (2024)

Previous Study: Faour & Alameh (2024) in their Lebanese study found that "leadership focus on high academic expectations for all" was the most powerful predictor of positive civic outcomes for students.

Current Study Relevant Finding: The performance of the leadership in the practices "developing leadership skills" (mean 3.46) and "organizing coexistence activities" (mean 3.40) was highly rated.

Agreement and Disagreement Points: Both studies emphasize the relationship between the overall quality of the school environment (academic, leadership, related, or activity, based) and socialization and citizenship outcomes. In the previous research by Faour & Alameh, the focus was on students' specific outcomes (civic knowledge and skills), whereas the current study highlights principals' practices and strategies as a means of achieving general social cohesion. They may be seen as two sides of the same coin that complement each other: the current study looks at leadership "inputs" and "processes," while Faour & Alameh's study looks at specific student "outputs" from those processes.

Conclusions

- Educational leadership represents a major factor for social cohesion and has a strong correlation (0.702) to its enhancement.
- Leaders understand their societal role, however, they do not have the necessary tools, resources, and training to make this role fully effective and sustainable.
- Using participatory planning and community partnerships as methods provides practical and effective tools for school transformation.



- The difficulties faced are mostly systemic (societal habits, politics, resources) and thus, require intervention by institutions at the national level.
- The school, with a clear vision, safe spaces for dialogue, and institutional support, can become an effective social cohesion incubator.
- The research was able to create and test a set of indicators to assess the social role of the school.

Recommendations

For Policymakers (Ministry of Education, CERD)

- Design and distribute a national standard framework for educational leadership that emphasizes citizenship and peace competencies.
- Provide a supportive budget and technical resources so that schools can carry out social cohesion projects.
- Analyze and update the curriculum and extracurricular activities to reflect the values of dialogue, citizenship, and conflict resolution.

For School Principals

- Involve the community in strategic planning through participation of teachers, students, and parents, thus defining a school vision reflecting citizenship values.
- Create and enhance the strategic collaborations with local institutions and civil society for community activities that benefit all sectors.
- Implement collaborative learning and dialogue, based strategies that are effective in promoting positive interaction among diverse students.

For Teachers and the Community

Participate actively in the development and implementation of citizenship and peace programs in the school.

Extend the family's and local community's role to become co, operators with the school in fulfilling its mission.

Future Research Proposals

- Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long, term impact of the recommended strategies.
- Expand the study to include private and vocational schools for comparative analysis.



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- Investigate the role of technology and e, learning in promoting peace and citizenship values.
 - Let us look at the areas in Lebanon and compare them to see what makes some places successful in their own way. We want to find out what works well in each region. This will help us understand the things about each Lebanese region that contribute to its success. We are talking about the regions and how they are different, from one another.
 - Develop an electronic platform for sharing best practices among Lebanese schools.

Conclusion

The findings of this research demonstrate that when educational leadership is successfully implemented, it will transform schools to be safe and nurturing environments for their students and build young citizens. Despite the significant barriers to success at the macro/micro level, the data indicate that educational leadership could be successful if the strategies are planned and implemented in a deliberate manner. It is a wise move to start with the leadership of education when the question of social fragmentation in Lebanon, as a challenge of existence, is considered. It is not only a vital need for the country at present, but also a great opportunity for the future to let the school play a bigger role in social cohesion. Thus, the next generations will be able to build a united society based on active citizenship and sustainable peace.



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