Highlighting the Factors That Foster a Culture of Trust in Schools: A Mixed-Method Approach

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Abstract

The present article examines the critical factors fostering a culture of trust within school communities, with specific emphasis on the impact of sustained societal crises (termed "permacrisis") on educational culture and relational dynamics.

The research employs a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative analysis of trust dimensions with qualitative investigation through in-depth interviews. Quantitatively, the study operationalised trust through survey instruments measuring three core dimensions: interpersonal trust, organisational trust, and trust in leadership. Qualitatively, semi-structured interviews were utilised to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers and principals with regard to trust-building processes.

It is the understanding of trust dynamics that is paramount for educational resilience, particularly within the context of continuous external challenges that strain school communities. This research addresses a significant gap by empirically investigating how trust functions as a foundational element for collaboration, climate, and effective policy implementation during protracted crises.

Quantitative analysis identified effective communication, transparency, and organisational justice as pivotal underpinnings across all three trust dimensions. The qualitative findings revealed both persistent challenges and emergent opportunities for nurturing trust-based relationships, highlighting the complex interplay between individual actions and systemic structures. It was found that principals occupied a central role in cultivating a trust-oriented culture.

The conclusions of the study indicate that establishing a sustainable culture of trust requires deliberate and structured initiatives. It further recommends the formal adoption of institutional trust protocols to systematise collaboration and reinforce positive climate. Moreover, the findings emphasise the necessity to enhance stakeholder comprehension of educational policies, thereby facilitating effective navigation of contemporary challenges within the context of evolving educational realities.

Keywords: trust culture, education, mixed-method approach

1. Introduction: Research Context and Aims

Contemporary educational systems operate within a state of "permacrisis"—a condition of sustained societal instability encompassing economic, health, geopolitical, and environmental crises (Collins, 2022; Panagopoulos et al., 2023) (Note 1). These frameworks become increasingly restrictive and normative. The permacrisis's socio-economic consequences, including the welfare state's decline, have significantly impacted the Greek educational system (Panagopoulos et al., 2023).

The term 'permacrisis' was introduced into scientific discourse to encapsulate the prolonged instability and insecurity that has become a defining feature of the current era (Collins, 2022). The Collins dictionary selected the term 'permacrisis' as its word of the year, reflecting its growing prevalence in both academic and popular discourse, which incorporates all crises (health, economic, environmental, geopolitical, and economic) (Collins, 2022; Panagopoulos, Adamopoulou, Gouga, & Kamarianos, 2023). In indicating the 'crisis continuum', it is possible to commence with an examination of 2010, when Greece formally petitioned the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance (Gouga & Kamarianos, 2011).

The underfunding of the Greek welfare state has significant consequences for Greek education (Zagkos, Kiridis, Kamarianos & Fotopoulos, 2022). Similarly, the refugee crisis is also evolving in parallel with the developments occurring at the social and political levels of the international and national environments. These developments include the rise of extreme policies that challenge democracy. The 2020 pandemic will have a more significant impact than previous crises because of school closures and the transition to distance learning. The war in Ukraine (2022), the first significant conflict on European soil since the Second World War, will significantly impact the food and energy crisis, confirming the ongoing nature of the crises in Greek social and economic life. These will have considerable educational consequences (Panagopoulos et al., 2023). The effects of climate change and the rise of extreme post-political expressions will contribute to a continuous crisis that will exhaust social subjects' subjective and collective resilience (European Policy Centre, 2021). In the context of the 'permacrisis', teachers and learners across all levels of education, from preschool to higher education, appear to comprehend and orient their actions and perspectives in accordance with the principles of uncertainty and liquidity (Bauman, 2000).

Considering the extant international and Greek literature on the above topic, the present study aims to reframe the debate on the phenomenon's impact and analyze the permacrisis's repercussions on establishing factors conducive to forming trusting relationships within the school community. In the context of this analysis and from the standpoint of the sociology of education, the present study will endeavor to explore and comprehend the factors that engender trustful behaviors within an efficient and effective school culture whilst investigating the issues and conditions of establishing a culture of trust within the school unit. In this regard, the proposition that relations of trust have fractured and that the collective identity of those engaged in educational work has been eroded represents a fundamental point of departure (Panagopoulos, Adamopoulou, Gouga & Kamarianos, 2023).

The aforementioned acceptance of the proposition regarding the repercussions of permacrisis as a crisis of trust in social relations and the deterioration of relations in the classroom prompts us to acknowledge the imperative to investigate the conditions for the formation and transition from a state in which crisis is a structural element of school life to an initial exploration of the factors for the establishment of a "school culture of trust".

It is therefore essential to employ a methodological approach in order to investigate the factors that cultivate trusting relationships, since these are critical to the contemporary organisational culture of the modern Greek educational system. In order to contribute to the aforementioned discussion, a mixed-method approach will be employed to explore and understand the factors that facilitate establishing a trust-based culture.

The exploration and understanding of the factors that facilitate the development of trust-based protocols is of the utmost importance at both the macro and micro levels. These protocols serve as a crucial foundation for facilitating a positive school climate. A school unit that encourages trust-based behavior establishes a positive and inclusive climate in which students feel secure, supported, and motivated to learn. Moreover, a culture of trust in schools can facilitate enhanced communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution, which can, in turn, lead to positive academic outcomes. By strengthening relationships between students, teachers, administrative staff, and parents, a culture of trust can foster a sense of community and belonging while addressing some of the key challenges teachers face today, including reducing bullying and conflict. By promoting understanding, empathy, and positive interactions, a culture of trust can help prevent complex social phenomena characterized by repeated negative actions or behaviors such as bullying and conflict.

To elaborate further, this study aims to explore and understand the factors that facilitate trust-based behaviors amongst educational community members to develop trust-based protocols. This process is of the utmost importance at both the macro and micro levels. The study is based on mixed-method empirical research conducted in Greek primary schools. The existence, degree, and quality of trusting relationships, teacher professionalism, authenticity, and accountability were identified as key areas of interest for further investigation. Furthermore, the study examines the variation of professional identities and their relationship with the quality of trusting relationships.

In conclusion, while existing scholarship acknowledges trust as a cornerstone of effective educational environments, significant empirical gaps persist regarding the mechanisms through which trust is cultivated amid protracted crises, particularly within understudied contexts such as Greece's austerity-impacted education system (Zagkos et al., 2022).

This study addresses these gaps through a comprehensive empirical investigation of trust dynamics within Greek primary schools during permacrisis. Its primary aims are threefold: to identify the constitutive dimensions of trust (interpersonal, organizational, and leadership-related) and their underlying antecedents; to examine stakeholder perceptions of trust-building processes; and to develop evidence-based protocols for institutionalizing trust cultures in crisis contexts. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the factors that encourage the development of a culture of trust in primary schools in Greece, which are functioning in an environment of permacrisis?

2. How do quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal facilitators and barriers to trust cultivation?

3. How might structured protocols mitigate trust erosion in educational settings experiencing sustained crises?

2. Trust in Education: Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Exploration

In the light of school sociology, everyday social life as we know it would not be possible without trust. Therefore, it is important to consider the social context in which trust is formed in schools. The school environment can play an influential role in how students interact with and perceive their school. In this study, trust emerges as a formative dynamic for school relationships and an important factor in shaping school culture.

Trust can also be defined as a subject's belief that the other subject in contact is trustworthy and will be true to the integrity of his/her words (Schlesinger, Cervera, & Perez-Cabanero, 2016). Another definition, simpler but like the previous one, is when a subject considers the other subject trustworthy and establishes a relationship with him/her based on this approach (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Trust can be divided into three types and these are a) interpersonal trust, b) organizational trust, and c) institutional trust. The concept of trust is fundamental to the understanding of everyday social life as we know it. Without trust, the social structures that underpin our daily interactions would not be possible. It is, therefore, important to consider the social context in which trust is formed in schools. The school environment can significantly influence how students interact with and perceive their educational institution. This study identifies trust as an essential formative dynamic for school relationships and a significant school culture determinant. An alternative definition is both more concise and aligned with the preceding description. This alternative definition characterizes trust as a situation in which a subject considers another subject trustworthy and subsequently establishes a relationship with them (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). As mentioned above, it is possible to classify trust into three distinct categories.

More specifically, interpersonal trust is found in face-to-face contacts, long-term acquaintances, and, more generally, relationships that require mutual respect and trust. Interpersonal trust is divided into specific and generalized trust. Organizational trust describes the extent to which an individual trusts an organization. Essentially, he/she has positive expectations of that organization. Organizational trust is the belief that employees or general participants carry towards the organization that it will act in their best interest or at least not harm them (Terzi, 2016). But where does trust in an organization come from? One approach cited by Terzi (2016) is that of Gilbert and Tang (1998), in which trust in an institution can be traced to four factors, which are: a) open communication in the organization, b) the participation of the individuals who make up the organizational structure in the decision-making process, c) the exchange of information, and d) the expression of feelings and expectations among individuals. According

to Ellonen, Blomqvist, and Puumalainen (2008), trust attributed to an organization is distinguished between interpersonal and impersonal.

It is also noteworthy that "trust" has a dual meaning. Firstly, the certainty of trust's existence (or lack thereof) as a pivotal shaping characteristic of the school relationship influences attitudes within that environment. Conversely, the certainty of whether trust is a key shaping characteristic of the school relationship also affects our awareness of the attitudes of other actors. This particular theoretical option directs our attention to the theoretical framework put forth by the German thinker Jürgen Habermas (1981) on the subject of 'Communicative Action' and the approach proposed by John Dryzek (2002) on the topic of 'Deliberative Democracy'.

Investigating the quality of trusting relationships between members of an educational institution is of great importance as these relationships are fundamental to the organization's smooth functioning and the quality of the school culture. The latter is a vital aspect of the institution's daily activities and a key factor in fostering awareness of the collective's common goals. Therefore, the presence of trust among the members of an organization has a beneficial effect on their attitudes, behavior, and performance (Van Maele, Van Houtte, & Forsyth, 2014).

Trust constitutes a fundamental component of an effective institution. Trust plays an integral part in facilitating productive communication and collaboration, which are essential for establishing and sustaining positive relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). The presence of a culture characterized by trust and support within an institution (school) enables teachers and principals to pursue their goals, thereby fostering the development of teacher leadership (principal) (Angelle, Nixon, Norton & Niles, 2011). Teachers can be considered as co-creators of trust. Cultivating distrust in educational settings where a lack of trust is already present is possible.

Schools with high levels of trust will also exhibit high levels of collaboration; this was one of the findings reported by Tschannen-Moran (2011) in her research. In particular, high levels of trust in parents and pupils are likely to result in high levels of collaboration with parents and other teachers. A teacher's level of trust in others is contingent upon the attitude of the school's teaching staff towards them. Tschannen-Moran (2011) posits that the processes within that institution shape a teacher's trust in an institution (school).

In conclusion, as trust is the primary focus of this investigation, it is essential to define the terms "distrust" and "mistrust." According to Sztompka (2003), 'distrust' may be defined as a denial of trust. It is, in essence, an inherently negative assumption; this entails negative expectations regarding the actions of other individuals and a defensive response, potentially even one that prioritizes self-security. In discussing distrust, it is important to note that it arises when there is a perceived violation of trust or when doubts are raised about the trustworthiness of an individual or entity (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

Considering the above, it is evident that undertaking research into the concept of trust represents a challenging and arduous endeavor, particularly given the lack of consensus regarding the precise definition of this multifaceted term. The term 'trust' is a concept of

considerable intricacy, a phenomenon in a constant flux state that assumes many forms contingent upon the circumstances in question (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

3. Methodology: Integrated Mixed-Method Design

The research employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), comprising distinct yet interconnected quantitative and qualitative phases.

More concretely, to investigate the factors that cultivate relationships of trust and, more specifically, to ascertain the degree and quality of such relationships regarding teachers' professionalism, we implemented a mixed-method approach to examine the issue of establishing trust-based protocols. This represents a significant perspective at the administrative and educational levels, whether at a school unit or the institutional level (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, J. 2009; Creswell & Plano, 2017).

As previously stated, implementing mixed methods research was considered an appropriate methodological approach for implementing the present research and examining the primary research questions (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

The questionnaire and in-depth interviews were the principal instruments used to collect research data for the current study. Researchers commonly use these two instruments to investigate perceptions on a range of subjects, including various issues and phenomena. The instruments' design and subsequent deployment in the field are two indispensable stages in the completion of the research project (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Integrating quantitative and qualitative research techniques within a mixed methods research strategy allows for attaining a comprehensive and nuanced view of complex phenomena. This integrative approach permits researchers to gather numerical data and rich, contextual insights (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

3.1 Key Advantages of Mixed Methods Research

Most notably, the mixed-methods approach permits the integration of diverse methods for the cross-validation of findings. By comparing results from different sources, researchers can enhance the reliability and validity of their study. The distinguishing qualitative attribute of the mixed methods approach can thus be complementarity (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). Qualitative and quantitative methods can complement each other, providing a more complete picture. For example, quantitative data can identify trends and patterns, while qualitative data can help explain the underlying reasons for these trends. Implementing quantitative research methodologies enables researchers to identify patterns, trends, and statistical relationships within large datasets, as the numerical data collected allows for identifying patterns and relationships that may otherwise be obscured. This data is frequently gathered through structured techniques and statistical analysis. Researchers can derive empirically based conclusions and make predictions by quantifying variables and measuring their relationships. In addition, a qualitative methodological approach offers a comprehensive and contextualized insight into the social and educational experience and perspective. This data is typically

gathered through inductive methods, such as interviews, observations, or focus groups. Qualitative research enables researchers to elucidate the subtleties of human behavior, motivations, and beliefs, facilitating a more profound comprehension of the fundamental factors underpinning quantitative findings (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano, 2017).

Applying the mixed methods approach by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods can offer many advantages, such as validating findings. Quantitative data can validate or challenge qualitative findings, enhancing the overall credibility of the research. For example, if a qualitative study suggests a particular trend, quantitative data can confirm or refute that trend on a larger scale. In addition, the current methodological choice may be advantageous for deeper insights. Qualitative research can help explain the "why" behind quantitative results (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). Researchers can better understand the phenomenon being studied by exploring the underlying reasons and motivations. The impact of this methodological choice is important for building more robust theories. By synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data, this study developed more comprehensive. It contextualized theoretical approaches involving quantitative and qualitative variables related to investigating factors important to the quality of trusting relationships in the school community. This integrated approach can potentially develop more robust and generalizable theories (Foster et al., 2021).

In conclusion, mixed methods research constitutes an efficacious methodological strategy for researchers aiming to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of complex phenomena such as trust relations in school units. Combining the strengths inherent to quantitative and qualitative research methodologies allows researchers enhanced capabilities to produce more rigorous, insightful, and impactful research data and analysis.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Exploring the Factors Undermining Trust in School Communities: The Quantitative approach

Using a quantitative approach within the framework of a mixed-methods approach represents a powerful combination that offers a more comprehensive and multifaceted analysis of social, educational, and scientific phenomena. Mixed methodology combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to leverage the strengths of both approaches while bypassing the limitations that each method might have when used alone.

Within the mixed-methods framework, the quantitative approach provides objective and measurable data, which typically form the basis for deriving findings applicable on a larger scale and allow for formulating hypotheses and theories. The rigor and objectivity of quantitative analysis are particularly useful when the researcher aims to compare different groups or measure variables objectively (Bryman, 2016). When the quantitative approach is incorporated into a mixed-methods design, its integration strengthens the reliability and validity of the findings (Fetters, Curry & Creswell, 2013). Quantitative data offer a clear and

discernible picture of statistical trends and relationships. At the same time, qualitative analysis, which focuses on understanding participants' experiences, opinions, or social contexts, can shed light on the underlying causes or reasons behind these results. The interaction between these two approaches can lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano, 2017; Bryman, Bell, Reck & Fields, 2021).

Consequently, given the quantitative approach embedded in a mixed-methods factor analysis. In the quantitative phase of the study, a sample of 327 primary school teachers from western Greece (the prefectures of Achaia, Ilia and Aitoloakarnania) participated in a survey. The operationalisation of trust in the survey was achieved through the use of validated instruments, including adaptations from the Eurobarometer (2022), Paine (2003) and Kask & Titov (2022). The survey measured three core dimensions: interpersonal trust (e.g. reciprocity, mutual support), organisational trust (e.g. transparency, procedural justice) and trust in leadership (e.g. principal competency, vision). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to identify latent trust structures, with the application of parametric statistical tests given the sample size exceeded 300 cases.

A set of research questions was developed to examine aspects of school climate, with emphasis on relationships, collective bodies (e.g. teachers' council), institutional trust, and perceptions/approaches of teachers/school administrators in managing daily school life. A questionnaire was designed to address these questions, with items measuring the identified variables while ensuring clarity, conciseness and freedom from ambiguity. The questionnaire was implemented in a self-completion format.

To develop the trust-related questions, we drew upon established survey instruments, including those used in the Eurobarometer, the World Values Survey, and prior research by Paine (2003), Adams (2008), Kask and Titov (2022), and Hameed et al. (2013). This study employed a quantitative methodology, utilizing random sampling to ensure the representativeness of the teacher sample (N=327). Given the sample size exceeding 300, parametric statistical tests were deemed appropriate, aligning with the assumption of a normal distribution (Roussos & Tsaousis, 2020; Panagopoulos & Kamarianos, 2024) (Note 2).

The investigation of trust within educational settings, mainly through factor analysis, underscores the critical role of a quantitative approach within a mixed-methods research framework. Quantitative methods provide a robust foundation for identifying and analyzing underlying patterns, relationships, and factors influencing trust dynamics. In this study, the deployment of factor analysis revealed distinct dimensions of trust, such as interpersonal trust, organizational trust, and trust in leadership. To elaborate further, the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) implemented in this study demonstrated that trust plays a pivotal role in fostering collaboration, communication, and a sense of belonging within the daily operations of a school community, including students, teachers, and parents.

The adopted quantitative methodological approach has identified the importance of trust, respect, and transparency in building trust-building protocols. The initial focus was on effective communication in the school unit, especially its quality and flow. Ensuring the repeatability and stability of the communication framework is also important, so its consistency is notable.

The consistency characteristic is vital for both the communication and regulatory frameworks. It ensures fair and consistent application of rules and consequences across all members of the school unit. Our analysis and related studies have demonstrated that the decision-making protocol is essential for the school unit climate (Panagopoulos et al., 2024). Furthermore, disputes of any kind between members of the school community are to be resolved in a timely and transparent manner; this is to be achieved by the implementation of a structured process for conflict resolution and dispute settlement, the fundamental principles of which are to be fairness and impartiality (Table 1) (Panagopoulos & Kamarianos, 2024).

Table 1. Summary of Fundamental Principles on Trust Relationships between Teachers

No.	Principles (between Teachers)
1.	Reciprocity in trust relationships
2.	Mutual support
3.	Belonging
4.	Communication and understanding
5.	Climate
6.	Managing cautiousness
7.	Reduction of selfish acts
8.	Cooperation

The implementation of a trust protocol is contingent on the establishment of a positive school climate. It is crucial to encourage and demonstrate trustful interactions among all members of the school unit. The study's findings underscore the pivotal role of the school Principal in fostering a culture of trust (Table 2) (Panagopoulos & Kamarianos, 2024).

Table 2. Summary of Fundamental Principles on Trust Relationships between Teachers and Principals

No.	Principles (between Teachers and Principals)
1.	Feedback
2.	Strategy
3.	Vision
4.	Transparency
5.	Efficiency
6.	Reliability
7.	Sense of justice
8.	Satisfaction of colleagues
9.	Accomplishments
10.	Competency

Establishing trust means participants must behave trustingly towards students, colleagues, and parents. Actions must be rigorously evaluated. The effectiveness of the model must be regularly checked for necessary adjustments to continue promoting a trusting and inclusive environment. Community diversity must be acknowledged and appreciated; this highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing the unique qualities that people add to the school community (Panagopoulos & Kamarianos, 2024).

In conclusion, the findings of the quantitative approach, as indicated by the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), demonstrate the approach's efficacy in enhancing the reliability and depth of research in mixed methods research. The following section attempts to present the data from the in-depth interview as part of the qualitative approach. As demonstrated in the following, the combined implementation of methods and techniques offers a more comprehensive picture, allowing researchers to combine the power of quantitative analysis with understanding social or educational phenomena that come from qualitative techniques and strategies.

Quantitative research validates qualitative insights, offering a comprehensive understanding of trust dynamics. Statistical and qualitative methods work together to reveal trends and nuances. The capacity to quantify the trust relationships between stakeholders (teachers, principals, and other actors involved in the activities of the school community) facilitates the implementation of targeted interventions and the development of protocols that address specific needs; this, in turn, fosters a positive school climate.

4.2 Understanding the Factors Undermining Trust in School Communities: The Qualitative Approach

To comprehend the elements that engender a positive school climate, it is essential to adopt a qualitative approach to investigating the phenomenon. More concretely, implementing the qualitative approach within the framework of the mixed method approach is crucial for gaining a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the social phenomena under study. The Mixed Methods Approach combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies, enabling researchers to leverage both methods' advantages by analyzing numerical data and personal experiences or the social contexts related to the phenomenon (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano, 2017).

The qualitative approach uses collection and analysis techniques, including interviews, observations, and textual analysis, to understand behaviors, opinions, and social phenomena. When integrated into a mixed methodology, qualitative analysis enhances the researcher's ability to understand general trends and the qualities and characteristics of relationships as social dimensions. The qualitative approach lets researchers thoroughly explore social subjects' meanings, perceptions, and experiences (Patton, 2015); this helps researchers understand the interactions, social dynamics, and cultural contradictions that influence the studied phenomenon. The synergy between qualitative and quantitative methodologies engenders a multifaceted data perception (Creswell, 2009).

For example, qualitative data can reveal causes or pose new research questions for a quantitative study, while quantitative data can corroborate qualitative findings, enabling

generalizations. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches offers researchers a multidimensional perception of the data. Qualitative data can reveal underlying causes or pose new research questions that can be examined quantitatively. Quantitative data can corroborate or reinforce qualitative findings, enabling the researcher to derive generalized conclusions based on the subjective information collected (Bryman, 2006; Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano, 2017).

The issue of trust is a recurring theme in international and national studies that require a comprehensive interpretation. These studies have identified the importance of fostering trustworthy relationships as a foundation of a school unit's organizational culture. In the context of the consequences of the "permacrisis", this premise highlights how trust crises have affected school culture; this is achieved by examining the erosion of trust relationships among school stakeholders due to the persistence of crises (Panagopoulos, Adamopoulou, Gouga & Kamarianos, 2023).

More specifically, the current qualitative focus on trust seeks to examine and investigate factors that facilitate or hinder the development of a culture of trust and its impact on the school community. It also explores stakeholder perceptions of trust within the school context. Implementing trust protocols would benefit principals and teachers at the micro level, school units at the meso level, and the broader educational institution at the macro level. The pressures of the "permacrisis" are particularly evident in the education system, with schools experiencing the macro-level effects of societal instability at the micro-level of daily classroom interactions. The advent of flexible labor relations, bureaucratic complexities, and technological advancements has resulted in significant shifts in the dynamics of the educational sector; this has compelled teachers and students alike to adapt to an environment characterized by uncertainty and risk (Panagopoulos et al., 2023).

The challenges previously mentioned are recognized by teachers, who often adopt individualized strategies to navigate the uncertainty. The liquidity (of everyday life) replaces traditional linear structures, thereby embedding uncertainty and complexity into personal and collective identities. The "permacrisis" phenomenon also affects school leadership and administration (Panagopoulos et al., 2023). Through this prism, the current study seeks to understand the factors that undermine trust in school communities, focusing on teacher councils and school principals' leadership in fostering trust. Data analysis follows a thematic approach to identify recurring patterns and meanings. We conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with teachers and school principals. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with some conducted in person and others digitally via the Zoom platform. In conclusion, the objective is to develop trust protocols to enhance administrative and educational outcomes at individual schools or across the broader educational system.

4.3 Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data

One of the key challenges identified is establishing trust in times of permacrisis. The basic principle in the conception of the relationship among school administrators is the legal framework as a normative power. In times of crisis, normative stability is a fundamental management approach:

"...the school holds meetings to inform teachers, parents and of course children about the relationships between them. There is also the internal regulation on pedagogical matters. We are trying to communicate trust to parents, but it is difficult.... I am now thinking if the teacher trusts the education itself, but I do not have an answer... is committed to obeying the laws and following the leadership."

For example, some principals emphasize collaborating and communicating to build trust. However, they also note the absence of established pathways or protocols for fostering trust within school units. Establishing trust is not an easy process, but overcoming the crisis necessitates it. The school principal considers the relationship of trust necessary in three ways: leadership, teacher, and parent.

"It is necessary to trust the teachers of my school. It is part of school life... if you do not talk, do not expect trust.....Trusting relationships exist if the teacher feels the principal is there for them. Something similar happens with parents; for example, if the teacher shows concern for the child and informs the parent, then the parent trusts him/her."

"Trust for me arises from collaboration... through actions that are sometimes insufficiently implemented," one participant noted.

Principals see themselves as key figures in cultivating trust but acknowledge limitations, including personal biases and systemic constraints. Trust-building often relies on informal processes, highlighting the need for structured protocols.

In this effort, the principal will seek a social partner, a psychologist, or a social worker. Specialization as a response to individualization is changing how the educational community was formed until yesterday.

"Perhaps both social workers and psychologists can play an important role in trusting relationships."

Collaborative relationships are a crucial factor in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of educational and administrative processes within the school unit. However, there are also no established and consolidated pathways or protocols for fostering trust within the school unit.

"Trust for me stems from collaborative relationships... through actions - which sometimes do not happen to the extent they should."

"We do not have a trust alphabet; we go into fermentation with the community so that a certain school culture exists."

"Trust means proper communication relationships, pitching, and collective decisions. If a teacher helps me, I can have more trust in them."

Ultimately, the thematic analysis of the data reveals that anxiety about the forthcoming day, which is a consequence of and characteristic of a society in a state of crisis and risk, and the lack of trusting relationships are issues that demand particular attention. The principal perceives their role as primarily responsible for trusting relationships within the school unit.

"The reality is that the principal trusts very few people".

"I will end with one sentence. I should have mentioned it to you from the beginning: The principal does not trust those who are not interested in the school or those who deviate too much from his/her views. And I clearly state that an authoritarian principal does not inspire trust."

"The school culture, however, is that to get somewhere, you do not find it ready-made; the principal creates it..."

In conclusion, the thematic analysis carried out has revealed factors of trust-based behavior as a fundamental element of school culture. Amid the prevailing "permacrisis," trust relationships are critical for navigating systemic challenges. Furthermore, the analysis revealed significant trust deficits in school units, emphasizing the need for a cultural shift. Transitioning to a "trust culture" requires deliberate actions and structured approaches, with principals playing a central role. The development of trust protocols can address micro-level interactions between administrators and teachers, meso-level dynamics within school units, and macro-level institutional challenges. These findings align with international discussions on the role of trust in education (Panagopoulos et al., 2023).

The pressures of the "permacrisis" manifest acutely in the education system, with schools experiencing the macro-level effects of societal instability at the micro-level of daily classroom interactions. Flexible labor relations, bureaucratic complexities, and technological advancements reshape school dynamics, compelling teachers and students to adapt to uncertainty and risk. As demonstrated in the findings of this examination, members of the teaching faculty and the student body both internalize the consequences of these challenges, frequently resorting to individualized strategies to navigate the resulting uncertainty. Contemporary life is characterized by a shift away from traditional linear structures towards more dynamic and unpredictable models. This transition has significant implications for personal and collective identities and the establishment of trust frameworks by principals to respond effectively to crises. Principals recognize their role as pivotal in fostering trust, yet they are also aware of their limitations, which include personal biases and systemic constraints. The trust-building process frequently relies on informal mechanisms, emphasizing the necessity for developing structured protocols. The findings emphasize the necessity of transitioning from fragmented practices to structured trust protocols. Such protocols can address micro-level dynamics among the school community members (teachers, pupils, parents, and principals). The qualitative approach's strength lies in its ability to explore complex social phenomena like trust, offering a detailed perspective that enriches quantitative findings.

Finally, in the context of factor qualitative analysis, integrating qualitative insights helps identify key variables and their relationships, strengthening theoretical models. This mixed-method approach highlights the importance of trust as a systemic issue, which aligns with international research on developing an organizational culture in education. "Trust culture" is cultivated through deliberate and systemic actions, with school leaders navigating and mitigating crises in educational institutions.

5. Discussion: Integrated Analysis and Scholarly Contributions

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative evidence reveals a dialectical interplay between structural and relational dimensions of trust cultivation. Quantitatively derived data underscored the primacy of institutional antecedents—notably codified transparency protocols, equitable decision-making frameworks, and systematised conflict-resolution mechanisms—as foundational to organisational trust. Conversely, qualitative insights illuminated the relational micro-dynamics through which trust is negotiated daily: the principal's performative consistency in crisis response, tacit reciprocity among staff navigating resource constraints, and the vulnerability inherent in teacher-principal dialogues concerning professional autonomy. This methodological synergy substantiates that protocol-based interventions must concomitally address systemic architectures (e.g., standardised communication channels) and interpersonal praxis (e.g., empathy in leadership) to mitigate permacrisis-induced fragmentation.

The study advances trust theory and educational practice through three pivotal contributions. Firstly, while corroborating the established multidimensionality of trust (Sztompka, 2003), it identifies crisis resilience as a distinct dimension emergent within permacrisis contexts. This dimension manifests not merely as organisational stability but as adaptive capacity—cultivated through deliberative protocols (e.g., stakeholder forums for policy co-creation) that transform Habermasian communicative action (1981) into institutional praxis. Where Habermas theorised discourse ethics as countering systemic colonisation, this study empirically demonstrates how structured deliberation—when embedded in trust protocols—fosters collective agency against crisis-driven atomisation.

Secondly, the analysis signifies a critical empirical advancement: leadership trust emerges as the most crisis-sensitive dimension, exhibiting significant volatility under permacrisis pressures. This finding contravenes Terzi's (2016) organisational-centric model, which positions institutional procedures as the primary trust anchor. The divergence suggests trust's dimensional salience is *context-contingent*—in protracted crises, leadership legitimacy becomes the critical variable stabilising or destabilising the trust ecosystem.

Thirdly, the centrality of teacher-principal dyads in trust cultivation during crises challenges Tschannen-Moran's (2011) parent-teacher nexus as the relational core of school trust. Permacrisis conditions recentre trust dynamics inwardly towards *professional solidarity*, as external stakeholder engagement becomes secondary to internal cohesion. This reorientation highlights permacrisis not merely as a backdrop but as an active determinant reconfiguring trust hierarchies.

Consequently, this study contends that effective trust-building amid permacrisis necessitates dually targeted protocols. Firstly, structural rigour requires embedding transparency, procedural justice, and accountability into institutional operations. Secondly, relational scaffolding entails facilitating structured principal-teacher dialogues that explicitly acknowledge crisis-induced vulnerabilities. These dialogic spaces must further enable the co-construction of context-responsive adaptive strategies. The former establishes systemic reliability through codified norms and audit mechanisms. The latter nurtures interpersonal resilience via deliberative engagement with lived professional challenges. Together, they

address both organisational architecture and human dimensions of trust erosion. This integrated approach repositions crisis not as mere disruption but as catalyst for institutional renewal.

Such protocols resist crisis fatalism by transforming uncertainty from a trust-eroding force into a catalyst for deliberative renewal—a theoretically and pragmatically significant recalibration.

Consequently, this study contends that effective trust-building amid permacrisis necessitates dually targeted protocols. Firstly, it is evident that structural rigour necessitates the incorporation of transparency, procedural justice, and accountability into institutional operations. Secondly, relational scaffolding is defined as the facilitation of structured dialogues between principal and teacher, with a focus on acknowledging and addressing vulnerabilities that are induced by crises.

These dialogic spaces must further enable the co-construction of context-responsive adaptive strategies. The former establishes systemic reliability through codified norms and audit mechanisms. The latter fosters interpersonal resilience through deliberate engagement with professional challenges experienced in the field.

Collectively, these elements address both the organisational architecture and the human dimensions of trust erosion. This integrated approach redefines the concept of crisis, moving beyond a mere perception of disruption to recognise it as a catalyst for institutional renewal.

Such protocols have been shown to resist crisis fatalism by transforming uncertainty from a trust-eroding force into a catalyst for deliberative renewal. This represents a theoretically and pragmatically significant recalibration.

6. Conclusion

The present study set out to explore and understand the factors that facilitate trust-based behaviors among members of the educational community, with the goal of developing trust-based protocols. Such a process is fundamentally important at both macro and micro levels within educational systems. The study is grounded in mixed-method empirical research conducted in Greek primary schools, and it identified several key factors for further investigation: the existence, degree, and quality of trust relationships, teacher professionalism, authenticity, and accountability. Furthermore, the research examined variations in professional identities and their connection to the quality of trust relationships, offering valuable insights into fostering a culture of trust within educational environments.

The investigation of trust within educational settings, mainly through factor analysis, underscores the critical role of a quantitative approach within a mixed-methods research framework. Quantitative methods provide a robust foundation for identifying and analyzing underlying patterns, relationships, and factors influencing trust dynamics. In this study, the deployment of factor analysis revealed distinct dimensions of trust, such as interpersonal trust and trust in leadership. These dimensions highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of trust in schools, shaping communication, collaboration, and a sense of belonging within the educational community.

Quantitative research complements qualitative insights by allowing for the empirical validation of observed phenomena. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of trust dynamics, as statistical patterns elucidate broader trends, while qualitative methods provide the context and nuances necessary for deeper interpretation. The ability to quantify trust relationships between stakeholders (teachers, principals, and other educational actors) allows for targeted interventions and the development of protocols that address specific needs, ultimately fostering a positive school climate. This study enhances the theoretical understanding of trust by leveraging the strengths of quantitative approaches within a mixed-method framework. It provides practical recommendations for cultivating a culture of trust in schools. This integration represents a dynamic and evolving methodology essential for addressing complex socio-educational challenges in contemporary settings. A qualitative approach is needed to understand positive school climate, especially when studying social phenomena. Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods helps get a more in-depth understanding (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano, 2017). We employed a qualitative data collection approach, utilizing in-depth interviews to examine the characteristics of relationships within the school community as social dimensions. This method was chosen because the qualitative approach allows researchers to delve into social subjects' meanings, perceptions, and experiences (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2009). Integrating qualitative insights into the research process allowed us to identify key factors and their interrelationships, strengthening the theoretical models.

In lieu of a conclusion, the methodological framework adopted in this study, rooted in a mixed-methods research design, underscores the critical importance of trust as a systemic phenomenon within educational contexts. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this approach facilitates a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of trust, addressing its quantifiable attributes and the contextual variables that shape it. Conceptualizing trust as a systemic issue underscores its fundamental role in shaping schools' organizational structure and culture, extending its influence beyond interpersonal dynamics to encompass institutional policies and practices across multiple levels. Furthermore, this methodological stance is congruent with international scholarship on cultivating organizational culture in education, enhancing the study's relevance and positioning it within the broader global discourse on organizational development in educational institutions.

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Notes

Note 1. See: Permacrisis (2022), *In Collins' online dictionary*, Retrieved from: https://www.collinsdictionary. com/dictionary/english/Permacrisis

Note 2. For the demographic characteristics of the sample, please see the Appendix.

Appendix

Our research sample included 327 teachers from schools in the Region of Western Greece (Prefectures of Achaia, Ilia, Aitoloakarnania).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Teachers (N=327)

Gender	Male	81	24.80%
	Female	246	75.20%
Age (y)	<25	4	1.20%
	25-34	57	17.40%
	35-44	91	27.80%
	45-54	93	28.40%
	55-64	81	24.80%
	>65	1	0.30%
Living or working	No	283	86.50%
outside the country	Yes	40	12.20%
Marital Status	Married	222	67.90%
	Single	71	21.70%
	Widowed	1	0.30%
	Divorced	18	5.50%
	Living apart	1	0.30%
	Engaged	7	2.10%
	Other	7	2.10%
Prior educational	0-10	83	25.50%
experience (y)	11-20	92	28.20%
	21-30	97	29.80%
	more than 30	54	16.60%
	n.a.	1	0.30%

Informed consent

Obtained.

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Data sharing statement

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