School leaders' resilience: does coaching help in supporting headteachers and deputies?

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School leaders' resilience: does coaching help in supporting headteachers and deputies?

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ABSTRACT

Using the qualitative case study approach, the following research focuses on the connection between coaching and resilience. Using an interpretative approach, based on the principles of grounded theory, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore this relationship in depth. The findings of the study suggest that when headteachers felt supported by coaching, they perceive an improvement in their performance and higher levels of resilience. The support in the form of coaching or having any senior mentor were identified as the critical sources of support, as headteachers were able to build self-evaluation practices, share ideas and reconsider goals and visions.

Practice points

(a) To which field of practice area(s) in coaching is your contribution directly relevant? Please state as a brief sentence.
(b) all school leaders and educators. Also, to all professionals working in the design and implementation of coaching initiatives.
(c) What do you see as the primary contribution your submission makes to coaching practice? Please state in one or two sentences.
(d) promoting coaching practices as a way to improve resilience and well-being to all school leaders.
(e) What are its tangible implications for practitioners?
  • The recognition that coaching practices are valuable and require in school context
  • The relevance of promoting coaching as a policy accessible to all school leaders
  • The necessity to establish collaborative coaching practices between school leaders and teachers

Introduction

Coaching have had a meteoric rise in popularity and have been working as key strategies in career development and professional learning (Hawkins, 2008). The term 'coaching' is not only used in the sports industry, but also in business, management and education.

Coaching is considered to trigger personal ideas that enhance performance without guided instruction for professional tasks and goals. Currently, it has been well reported that educational leaders are facing challenges such as isolation, work–life balance, task management and stress during the implementation of change (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). After confronting these challenging situations, they are expected to perform well for their students, staff and school. For this reason, educational leaders need high levels of resilience to cope with it. Therefore, this study tried to explore the connection between coaching and resilience.

Gradually, 'coaching has gained in popularity in the UK over the last decade in private, public and third sector organisations. It is widely used in education, health, charities and across industrial, retail, professional services and finance sectors' (Lane, 2010, p. 155). In 2005, the UK Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) established coaching programmes for the national framework under the Coaching and Mentoring Continuing Professional Development Capacity Building Project (Lofthouse, Leat, Towler, Hallet, & Cummings, 2010). It is considered as a cost–effective way to manage school budget, beneficial for student learning and school improvement (Cordingley, 2005). A survey conducted by the Charted Institute of Personnel and Development on Human Resources (2006) for the UK 'showed how 80% of respondents worked in organisations that were investing in one or more forms of coaching' (Hawkins, 2008, p. 29). This survey highlights the indulgence and acceptance of coaching in various organisations of western countries. But, the effects of coaching may vary from one organisation to another.

Furthermore, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) presented a four-term programme specifically designed for new headteachers which sought to provide: 'Access to a tailored knowledge base … coaching, peer mentoring, e-networks, shared enquiry and group problem-solving activities' (Hobson & Sharp, 2005, p. 27). Moreover, it is considered to be an effective way to support newly appointed heads to deal with new and challenging situations. For this reason, this study seeks to explore coaching as a support system, which can be beneficial in establishing resilience.

Because of the subjective nature of coaching, it is difficult to discern which methods that produce effective results. In western countries, research concerning coaching activities demonstrated success, but it is difficult to explain what exactly determines effective coaching due to the difficulty in measuring the results (Rosha & Lace, 2016). For this reason, participants' perspectives were considered in order to more accurately observe coaching and its connection to resilience. We will analyse the extent that this support helps develop resilience in educational leaders. Building resilience, a work–life balance and developing good well-being are also prominent terms in the educational field for headteachers and teachers. As it is mentioned in 'a report from the National Foundation for Educational Research which recommended coaching as a useful method for helping them to deal with their new situation and challenges' (Southworth, 1995, p. 18).

The purpose of this study is to explore the connection between coaching and resilience through the perception of headteachers in the London United Kingdom. First, their challenges and support systems were explored. Secondly, their perception about coaching and resilience were probed, and lastly, the link between coaching and resilience was examined from the participants' point of view. Leadership positions are considered to be stressful due to the fact that these people deal with more responsibilities at the

workplace. Consequently, it is important that they take care of their well-being and resilience, because 'the role of the head teacher is recognised as being pivotal to school improvement and raising educational standards' (Hobson & Sharp, 2005, p. 29).

As previous research indicates, many new headteachers experience various problems including loneliness and professional isolation, and difficulty managing their time and handling a range of tasks simultaneously (Earley et al., 2011; Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Side by side, coaching is emerging as a way to support headteachers. Therefore, this study can contribute to the field of coaching to build resilience in educational leaders through the perception of participants. This study aims to explore some objectives such as:

- Challenges and support for headteachers and their coping strategies
- Coaching as a support system for educational leaders
- Effects of coaching on building resilience

Literature review

It has been assumed that educational leaders are playing a vital role in school improvement and student learning because 'leadership is a core task within any school' (Coates, 2008, p. 14). For some researchers, leaders directly or indirectly influence staff development, student learning and creating healthy environment for everyone (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). Literature shows different kinds of leadership styles, such as transformational, collaborative, distributed and learning-centered leadership, but the core purpose of their leadership is affiliated with learning and accountability in every aspect of school, whether it concerns the staff, students or the headteachers themselves (Barker, 2007; Seashore Louis, Knapp, & Feldman, 2012).

Moreover, it has been argued that leaders can be sources of motivation for staff members (Evans, 2001) or they can be the ones who contribute to their demotivation (Shen, Cooley, & Wegenke, 2004). In addition, it has been mentioned that leaders are capable of creating a strong impact and have full charge on organisational factors. Therefore, 'leaders and managers who are themselves motivated will be successful in motivating others' (Bush & Middlewood, 2013, p. 119). Nevertheless, it is challenging for leaders to analyse which factors are increasing staff motivation and morale and which aspects are generating demotivation and creating dissatisfaction among them.

Other than maintaining morale and staff motivation, leaders are presently encountering various challenges in schools. As explained by Kelly and Saunders (2010, p. 129) 'contemporary headship is a complex, demanding and multifaceted job with wide-ranging accountabilities'. Either those leaders who entered into this field as a new headteacher or experienced headteachers who have taken the charge of running school; they are kind of well-prepared for specific challenges and shocks. These challenges such as loneliness (López, Ahumada, Galdames, & Madrid, 2012), work–life balance (Bisschoff & Watts, 2013), stress and frustration, task and time management (Hobson, 2003) and rapid change in educational policies (Starr, 2011) can contribute in the demotivation of headteachers and staff members**.**

Headteachers are expected to lead change and improvement within the schools (Destler, 2014; Meyer-Looze, 2015). During the process of change, many challenges are expected, and 'when educational teams are operating as fulcrum of change or innovation

they face the problem of implementation' (Coates, 2008, p. 64). This change is either implemented by policy-makers or leaders, and sometimes staff is not expecting or ready to cope with it so abruptly. Additionally, some leaders are not ready to handle sudden and continuous changes in education policies. They see 'the decision to leave headship as coinciding with a period of accelerating change within the education system with which they [are] no longer prepared or equipped to cope' (Flintham, 2003, p. 4). Flintham mentions several reasons for why headteachers leave headship early, one being that they 'burn out through the failure of their sustainability strategies to cope, resulting in stress-related or ill-health retirement' (p. 3). Therefore, leaders' personal well-being and work–life balance is as important as for teachers or any other staff.

Flintham (2003) highlighted the term 'reservoirs' of hope, which refers to internal and external hope. External reservoir of hope can be gained by providing spiritual and moral leadership to the school. On the other hand, the internal reservoir of hope should be present in educational leader and it is 'the calm centre at the heart of the individual leader' (p. 2). This calm and 'still' point helps to sustain personal self-esteem while undergoing critical challenges and external pressures. The internal reservoir can be refilled by 'personal sustainability strategies', otherwise, 'there will be individual burn out or drop out' (p. 2). The leaders who are well-prepared for the initial shock of extreme demands of time management and work–life balance (Earley et al., 2011) are the ones who can manage their sustainability, relentless persistence and resilience.

One of the commonly used and highly recommended support strategies is networking among headteachers, as well as support from previous headteachers (Earley et al., 2011; Hobson, 2003). Peer support and networking are linked with mentoring in which 'experienced practitioners provide advice and support to new heads including providing feedback on performance' (Hobson, 2003, p. 3). Accroding to Hobson and Sharp (2005), there are various roles of mentors, such as: mentor as model, acculturator, sponsor and supporter, but one form is closely linked with coaching, which is 'mentor as educator: to listen, to coach and to create appropriate opportunities for the mentee's professional learning' (p. 26). The authors explain that coaching is one of the aspects of mentoring which focuses on an individual's skill development or improvement.

Methodology

Research questions

As previously mentioned, there is one main question and three sub questions to support the core theme of the research. The core question is:

- How do headteachers perceive coaching for creating and sustaining resilience?

The sub questions are as follows:

- Which kinds of challenges have been faced during headship and which support systems have been provided?
- What is their perception about coaching and resilience?

- How and why is resilience important for headteachers and how is the coaching process linked with creating and sustaining resilience?

Moreover, sufficient flexibility has been given to the core and sub questions. As Corbin and Strauss (2014) mention, flexibility can be helpful to explore those questions in detail. The next section of this chapter will explain the research approach, design and instruments that were used to explore these questions. And finally, the selection of the participants, data analysis, ethical consideration and limitations are explained.

Research design

A suitable research design is of the utmost importance in order to explore the research question, because the methods or instruments used to explore it must agree contextually. For that reason, 'Scholars must have a clear understanding of: what they are studying and which design is most appropriate for that topic, phenomenon, dynamic, person or place' (Brooks & Normore, 2015). Only face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted from headteachers and deputy head to explore their perceptions about coaching and its effects on creating and/or sustaining resilience.

These interviews were selected as the primary source of data collection, because 'Interviewing is a flexible research tool' (Briggs, Morrison, & Coleman, 2012, p. 250). There are different kinds of interviews such as, structured, semi-structured and un-structured interviews. In structured interviews, questions are pre-planned and 'completely scripted' (Cook & Cripps, 2008, p. 207). The limitation attached with this kind of interview is, it 'deprives interviewers of most of their traditional autonomy, and takes much of 'fun' out of interviewing' (p. 207). On the other hand, 'a semi-structured interview (i.e. individual and focus group) is an overarching term used to describe a range of different forms of interviewing most commonly associated with qualitative research' (Brooks & Normore, 2015). Also, this kind of interview 'enables the interviewer to observe visual clues', such as 'body language', which can indicate the comfort and discomfort of the interviewee.

Participants

According to Briggs et al. (2012, p. 226) 'most qualitative research studies use a small number of individuals and cover material in depth'. Qualitative research is not generalisable over wider population, and its basic purpose is to explore the core themes and supporting questions in depth. For that reason, every participant was selected 'purposefully', in order to represent a 'homogenous' group with 'distinctive characteristics' (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 174).

A total six headteachers or deputy heads were contacted who have attended coaching sessions. These prospective respondents were approached by email. In response, only two headteachers and one deputy head responded that were willing to participate in the research. With a limited number of participants, data were collected carefully to ensure that all core themes and areas of research would be covered through these semi-structured interviews. The participants wished to remain anonymous, and therefore aliases are assigned in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Name	Jenny	Becky	Jim
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Designation	Headteacher	Headteacher	Deputy Head
Primary/secondary school	Secondary/boarding school	Primary	Secondary
School category	Independent	Trust school	Independent
Gender of students	Girls/boys	Girls/boys	Girls/boys

Data collection

During data collection, a systematic approach must be taken in order to ensure consistency throughout the interviews. Firstly, because of the nature of semi-structured interviews, much depends on the characteristics of the person being interviewed and the empathy of the interviewer (Briggs et al., 2012). Secondly, as the interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, it was the first priority to consider their convenience and comfort. Special consideration was given to the location in order to ensure that each interview would not be interrupted. Moreover, all the interviews were recorded with a specialised recording device, and notes were also taken. Table 2 presents the main questions of the interview.

Data analysis

The analysis was led by the principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). After the collection of qualitative data, the first step is to 'sort and organise the data, by coding it in some way' (Seers, 2012, p. 2). Coding is a way to distinguish the major themes from the

Table 2. Interview questions.

Background	For how long you are working as a headteacher?
Challenges	What do you think about your overall experience of headship?
	2) Have you face challenges during this period?
	• If yes____ Can you elaborate those challenges? Which kind of challenges?
Support	Have you got any support from government i.e. LEAs etc?
	• If yes____ Can you elaborate, which kind of support you got?
	2) What do you think about this support or facilitation?
	3) Which kind of support you think was very helpful?
	• If there is any support which was helpful _____ Can you elaborate that how it was helpful?
Coaching	1) Have you received coaching support?
	• If yes____ what do you think about this support?
	• Who recommends you these coaching sessions?
	• Was this coaching support was mandatory or volunteer participation?
	• What was your perception about coaching before taking these sessions?
	2) Generally, what do you think about those sessions? Is it helpful or not?
	• If yes_____ how it was helpful? Can you elaborate it?
Resilience	1) What do you think about resilience?
	2) Is resilience important for headteachers?
	• If yes____ why it is helpful? Can you elaborate?
	3) What do you think, is there any kind of effects on your resilience after attending coaching sessions?
	• If yes____ can you elaborate it? How it was effective?
	4) Is there any sustainability of these effects?
	• If yes____ As compared to normal/usual training sessions, what do you think about these effects after coaching sessions?
	5) In future, are you going to continue with coaching sessions or not?
	• If yes or no ____ why, can you elaborate this?

'raw data', then 'categories can be formed, and from categories, more encompassing themes are developed to describe the data in a form which summarises it, yet retains the richness, depth and context of the original data' (Seers, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, the analysis is expected to be 'as rigorous and as transparent as possible' (Brooks & Normore, 2015), as the discussion and conclusion of the study is dependent on it. Accordingly, as we approach each interview transcript we identify and coded key words, sentences and paragraphs related with our research question. These codes were later connected in larger narrative which became the three main findings presented below. For storing and coding the data, data analysis software from NVivo was used.

Findings and discussion

The findings from the collected data are divided into major themes and emerging themes. In each interview, every theme was covered, but during conversation, a few emerging themes had been raised and these are pointed out in the findings, which will be discussed in a separate section. Moreover, as already mentioned, this study is preliminary in nature, therefore the main themes will be discussed in detail and the findings will not be generalised.

Challenges and support for headteachers/deputy headteacher

Challenges of the headship

The first set of questions that were addressed focused on the participants' journeys to headship. The questions were deliberately designed to examine the challenges of headteachers and to pinpoint any new challenges other than those presented in existing literature. For this reason, participants (Jenny, Becky and Jim) explained their previous and current challenging situations in detail.

The first participant, Jenny, described her challenges related to working long hours, restructuring her institution's system in terms of changing staff, upgrading the level of student performance, enrolment and hurdles in embedding coaching culture. She entered into the journey of headship and found it challenging because staff was not ready to adapt changes for improvement. The staff was already assumed that school is quite fine therefore, there is no need to bring change in school. Furthermore, she mentioned about her senior leaders and their attitude towards change. They were not open to change. The second participant, Becky, expressed about challenges such as thankless job and sense of responsibility for staff which increases anxiety and stress. The third participant, Jim, reflected on his challenges about headship which is linked with a lot of hard work. Though it is enjoyable, inspirational and rewarding work but dealing with students, colleagues and parents are challenging sometimes. According to him, headteachers required to learn various roles, get different expectations, responsibilities and facilitating all staff members. He explained that managing staff is challenging because everyone has different needs and wants.

Support for headteachers

All of these participants mentioned their support systems in detail. Two of the respondents stated that their support came from an independent school, and a local education authority (LEA) supported the other respondent. Jenny comment:

> we are independent school, fully funded by school fees and we get an appropriation … so money is on the charge … and that's it … so we got no support … all of this was done with the skills from the governing body and from myself and … we did it, so we have no consultant in subsequent of them.

The second participant, Becky, explained her personal support system, as well as the support she got for her school development. On the topic of personal support, she described:

> my line manager, he is amazing … he is a really good friend … so he is hugely supportive. so he … basically ended up being more my pastoral support and emotional support and he put himself into the place of a coach … so head of executive coaching … so it was six times on skype … but basically that involved that whole 360 degree survey, so I had that for over 2 years.

Regarding professional support, she explained: 'because it was a new school, so we had the Department for Education (DfE) adviser. he provided some support in mobility development planning'. She also stated that: 'we got funding from EFA … so EFA provided support through whole capital development of the school so they provided huge amount of support with planning, building'. In summation, she added: 'I had an amazing support from the governors … including two people who were headteachers … formally headteachers … that was great'. The third participant, Jim, also mentioned personal and professional support through networking and collaboration. He said that:

> independent schools have very good network of support … and there are opportunities to learn from others … remarkable courses to share experience and obviously its cooperative state sector, you know … I don't believe in two sectors being independent … I think its great opportunity to cooperation and collaboration so I believe in that

Discussion

Bisschoff and Watts (2013) mentioned one of the challenges that headteachers face is that they are not only responsible for their own performance, emotional well-being and professional ethics, but that they are also accountable for their staff and students as well. This type of responsibility increases stress and anxiety among headteachers. One of the participants (Becky) already mentioned this kind of challenge.

Independent schools have different challenges compared to those schools that are supported by LEAs or DfE. For instance, Jenny mentioned the financial challenges that she faced. She is responsible for taking care of funding because it is linked with student enrolment. The more students enrolled in her institution, the more funding the school receives. This is one of the factor that can add extra pressure on a headteacher. On the other hand, Becky was supported in funding, planning and various other supports related to safeguarding, IT, building and capital development. Therefore, according to the perception of participants, the support system can give confidence to deal with challenges.

According to the participants, the overall journey of headship was challenging, but they also mentioned various kinds of support that gave them confidence and energy, as well as and strategies to cope with stress. As previously stated, two of the participants belonged to an independent school system and referred to their support system within their organisations. Although their systems are not quite comparable with the LEA, their basic purpose to provide support to headteachers was achieved. However, when comparing

Jenny's account with those of Becky and Jim, it was noticed that Jenny had conditions that are more overwhelming. She was managing her major challenges on her own, not like Becky and Jim. During Becky's and Jim's interviews, we observed more confidence and good support systems to aid them in their journey to headship. Therefore, support is essential for them to cope with challenges.

All participants mentioned coaching support from various sources such as: formal coaching sessions from line managers and informal coaching from friends, and alluded that it was a huge help during challenging times. Hobson (2003) and Earley et al. (2011) comment on this kind of support and assert that these are appreciated and subsequently adopted by headteachers in the UK to cope with challenging situations. Their results showed that coaching gave courage to headteachers to deal with issues and avoid over-whelming conditions. However, one participant mentioned this support as an expensive source of help.

Perceptions about coaching

The interviewees mentioned coaching as one of the main forms of support that they got from various people. In light of this, their views on coaching were explored. Jenny described her coaching experience in previous job as an assistant head in another school. She implemented coaching sessions for her staff and explained that: 'I tried in my faculty and my faculty really moved on'. She also expressed her views about it and said:

> we had the fantastic faculty … we were all friends, we were all open to ideas … we were open to criticism … we were open to sitting down and talking because I think for coaching you need to speak … you need to listen … but in tension … it doesn't work … we were working collaboratively and coaching was the centre of what we did.

Becky shared her experience and her involvement with coaching. Her first impression about coaching was not a positive one, and she thought that it was not appropriate for her leadership. She proclaimed: 'my situation was unique and in addition to having a unique situation … I was absolutely overwhelmed by the weight and quantity of work that needed to be done … so coaching was almost an obstacle for me'. She described contextualised coaching and its benefits:

> contextualized coaching … who is very experienced … but have skills to coach … and also understand the context and has experience of similar context … that can be profoundly helpful … because frankly, it can just be faster because you don't have to explain the context … it can also be very helpful because that person is often aware of potential strategies and things to support.

Accordingly, Jim shared his coaching experience and he said that:

> we just had the two days coaching training … I think we were 18 of us, so senior middle leaders of the school working with an organisation … going through coaching and learning huge amount form each other

Discussion

With regard to the second theme, the participants found coaching to be very beneficial for their own personal support, as well as for the staff. Jenny had the advantage of working in a

school where the coaching culture was already embedded. Therefore, she made a comparison to the culture of school where she joined as the headteacher. She mentioned a hindrance in the staff's willingness to adapt coaching due to rapid change in the school, and then explained her previous experience with successful coaching culture. Becky explained her first experience with coaching and that she was unable to accept coaching sessions due to her workload as a headteacher. Jim spoke about coaching favourably, but he also mentioned few shortcomings. In addition, there are certain important aspects of coaching that were highlighted by some participants, and they are discussed below.

Roger's model of coaching explained that there are two elements, namely 'being self' and 'doing self' (Rogers, 2012). Jenny's school and staff are lacking in 'being self', as they are not ready to learn new skills or adapt current changes. Consequently, introducing and trying to embed coaching culture was not successful in combination with other rapid changes in this school.

Coaching can be seen as a burden or another liability for headteachers. Becky's first impression of coaching was that it was a time-consuming activity. She thought it was not as important to her development and her career as the other tasks she needed to accomplish. She considered those sessions as an increment of stress level. Becky's experience match Thornton (2014) theory that a lack of time can be a barrier for coaching.

Resilience and coaching

The participants expressed their opinions about resilience, how important it is and what the connection between coaching and resilience. In this section, their views will be represented. Jenny highlighted the importance of resilience and said that: 'in terms of resilience, resilience comes when you have the vision and you know exactly where you are going' and also 'to be a resilient is the one you push the idea … you are the one … it's your initiative … it's your project so want to see it true'. She said:

> When I looked into previous inspection reports and saw all the weaknesses, I liked it, that for me coaching was the answer … to stretching into the teachers … looking out how we deal with the SEN pupils … and I think … not only coaching for staff, but coaching for pupils as well … because we are skilled up … we can pretty much coach the children to break the barriers to their learning.

Becky expressed her thoughts about the importance of resilience for headteachers. She said that: 'for headteachers particularly … one of the things that really impacts on resilience, stress or anxiety … it's the fact that you are responsible for other people'. Then she mentioned that:

> resilience is not about snapping or breaking in the face of the challenge … it's the ability to go back and actually still work … I think its more complex than just bounce back and recovery.

Jim conveyed his thoughts on the importance of resilient nature for headteachers. He said: 'this is not an easy job … so you definitely need to be resilient as a deputy head' and 'I certainly have to find new pools of resilience in this job because it is very challenging … very demanding, it is great fun … I love it but it's challenging and hard work'. Additionally, he explained that persistent calmness in challenging situations can build resilience. He clarifies this as follows:

> I try to keep preventive perspective … I called it critical distance to keep everything … to keep myself away from emotion … I just see things rationally and calmly … and not to get too personally involved in anything … because then your emotions start to bit crowded.

According to Jim, the most vital ingredient to being resilient is reflecting back on your past experiences, which increases self-awareness. He also highlighted the benefits of coaching in that: 'in terms of sustain resilience … it helps you to prevent making the same mistakes over and over again so … it breaks patterns' and 'in breaking patterns … you become more able to deal with stressful situations'. Moreover, he said that: 'you're more resilient in terms of dealing with those factors that you might find annoying or frustrating so you don't react'.

Discussion

The findings of this theme are linked with the participants' viewpoint about resilience and the connection between coaching and resilience. All of the participants expressed that having a resilient nature is important for headteachers, as well as for every other human being. Sometimes certain responsibilities add more pressure and stress on headteachers. Therefore, a resilient nature makes them strong enough to deal with challenges, stress and anxiety. One of the participants mentioned that being resilient is not just about bouncing back, but described it as being more complex than that. Another impact on resilience has to do with the amount of responsibility a headteacher has. The participants mentioned that a clear vision, goal and initiative contribute to resilience, and that support systems increase both confidence and resilience.

The findings clarified certain aspects of resilience and its importance, not only for educational leaders, but also for staff members. Moreover, it has been extracted that there are some factors that give them a boost, allow them to stay resilient and do more work. Because leadership is stressful (Steward, 2014) and challenging. Leaders need pool of resilience to cope with challenges. Therefore, remaining calm in challenging situations can add resilience. Also, any support system within a school or organisation can be another factor that increases resiliency, because conveying a sense of support can give staff the impression that leaders care about their well-being (Klar & Brewer, 2013).

There are certain aspects that can enhance resilient nature. First of all, according to each participant's perspective, a clear vision and goal (Busher & Harris, 2000) can contribute to resilience, because with 'the discovery of uncovering an ideal vision of yourself, you feel motivated to develop your leadership abilities' (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). This motivates headteachers because it helps them to establish their goal or vision and they feel more comfortable owning their decisions. Secondly, 'self-awareness skill' (Hobson, 2003, p. 20) and self-reflection (Goleman et al., 2002) can contribute to resilience. Also, coaching promotes avenues that emphasise self-learning (Lane, 2010, p. 156). Coates (2008) refers to this in his lectures about leadership and self-development. However, stress and anxiety about all responsibilities (Steward, 2014) can disconnect to stay resilient.

Conclusion

The focus of the study was to explore headteachers' perceptions of coaching and its connection with building resilience. The current literature describes the challenges that

educational leaders face in the UK, as well as their support systems. Due to the challenging situations, stress and anxiety were increased among leaders, and in response to this rise in stress, different support systems were introduced. Mentoring from former or senior head-teachers was a prominent way to support staff. Based on the literature, we can assume that coaching might be more suitable for headteachers because they are able to discuss their situations openly and open themselves up to new thinking patterns and feedback, and as a result, achieve their goals in a more efficient way. Moreover, their well-being and resilience were important to maintain, because they are not only responsible for their own performance, but for other staff members as well. Therefore, the connection between coaching and sustaining resilience was explored in this preliminary research.

The findings of this research mentioned the participants' perceptions about coaching. Because they have all attended coaching sessions in different forms and they indicate it as a supportive tool. They also mentioned the importance of resilience, which enables them to recover and bounce back from stressful situations. It also allowed them to be able to go back to work. As far as coaching and resilience is concerned, they mentioned that when they felt supported, it increased their confidence and enhanced their resilient nature. However, some participants mentioned shortcomings that are connected to coaching and embedding it as a culture. It relates to the high cost of training sessions and the time it takes away from the teachers.

The study showed that headteachers are facing various challenges. In independent schools, they receive support within their organisation, but the results varied from school to school. For instance, one deputy head felt more confident when he received support from a senior headteacher. In contrast, the headteacher who works on her own and gets less support (especially emotional support) expressed having more challenges and felt that there is less support coming from the independent governing body. Also, responsibility for all staff members is one aspect that increases stress and anxiety.

Moreover, all participants highlighted their positive experiences with coaching. They mentioned the benefits that go along with it. They explained that coaching is beneficial to increase resilience and confidence, cope with stressful situations, bounce back from obstacles and emotional detachment from practical perspective. It helps to break typical thinking patterns, broaden views, open trainees up to receiving feedback and gives them the chance to 'see the forest for the trees'. Because stressful conditions narrow down the possible solutions and typical thinking patterns. Coaching does have its shortcomings, however. Time and budget are often an issue when it comes to implementing coaching sessions. The best way to introduce coaching is to make sure that friendly environment is already present for staff, and that they are ready to accept the changes. It is important to note that too much change may lead the staff towards fatigue, but with a clear vision and proper communication, coaching can be beneficial for professional and personal development.

Notes on contributors

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Disclosure statement

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