

Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Teacher Leadership in Yucatán, Mexico

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Abstract

Research on teacher leadership takes place in various Western countries. However, little is known about its application in other global contexts. This study explored the meaning, context and key attributes of teacher leadership in Yucatán, Mexico, focusing on primary school teachers' perceptions. This research also examines the perceptions of faculty in a teacher preparation program concerning the meaning and attributes of teacher leadership. Data collection used a parallel-convergent mixed methods design, including a survey of in-service teachers and qualitative interviews with teacher educators. The findings indicate that primary teachers broadly recognize the components of teacher leadership and highlight the role of colleagues and school leaders in fostering its development. In contrast, teacher educators expressed dissimilar views about the meaning of teacher leadership, most of which centered on pedagogical leadership. However, there were some agreements on attributes identified across participants such as teacher collaboration, accountability, and teamwork.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership; Pedagogical Leadership, Primary teachers, School Leaders, Teacher preparation program

Introduction

The concept of teacher leadership emerged in the early 1970s in the United States, at a time when the educational system at all levels was undergoing reform (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2014; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). In this context, documents such as the report *A Nation at Risk* (1983), produced by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, reflected the nation's growing concern about competitiveness and presented a strong critique of its educational system. The report noted that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." Specifically, in the section on leadership and financial support, the report emphasized the need to promote deep reform by involving outstanding teachers—referred to as "master teachers"—in the design of training and mentoring programs for novice teachers, fostering leadership skill development among principals and school administrators to build consensus and organize necessary resources, and integrating teachers into the planning,

implementation, and supervision of professional development programs. In doing so, it outlined an early vision of teacher leadership as a collaborative strategic practice, linked both to individual professional growth and to the collective success of schools.

Over time, interest in the study of teacher leadership has increased among educational researchers (Webber & Okoko, 2021), policymakers, and leading school organizations, as it is recognized as a key element in international school reform efforts. Teacher leadership is also deemed the second most influential factor, after classroom instruction, in terms of its impact on student learning (Bush & Glover, 2014; Song et al., 2023; Tortolero & Carreón, 2022). According to Leithwood et al. (2006), teacher leadership is a catalyst for beneficial outcomes, including student learning.

Conceptualizations of the term and its precise meaning have evolved significantly; they have shifted from a focus on formal roles to a more complex and dynamic perspective (Adams, 2018; Cosenza, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

In the 1990s, teacher leadership was defined by specific roles. These included leading school projects, overseeing curriculum design and adaptation, and serving as a liaison with parents and the community. These functions were responsibilities that teachers assumed within the school organization (Kenjarski, 2015). Researchers such as González, Palomares, López, and Gento (2019); López (2019); Al-Taneiji & Ibrahim (2017); Fairman & Mackenzie (2014); Crowther (2008); Danielson (2006); York-Barr & Duke (2004); and organizations such as the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) have expanded the concept to include teachers' influence on improving learning both inside and outside the classroom, reshaping school culture through the development of new collegial relationships, taking responsibility for students' academic development, navigating and transforming school culture in challenging contexts, facilitating learning communities, and fostering a culture of success driven by achievement and a shared vision aligned with institutional goals.

Gratacós, Ladrón de Guevara, and Salazar (2024) say that the interest in studying teacher leadership is primarily linked to teachers' ability to foster genuine change within educational institutions, because teachers face the complexities of teaching and are in contact with the realities and challenges faced by their students and their environments. Because of that, they can transform both their workplace and the educational dynamics of their schools. Likewise, authors, including Joe-Ototo (2022) and Schott, Van Roekel, and Tummers (2020), Lumpkin, Claxton, and Wilson (2014), and Katzenmeyer and Moller (2011) emphasize that although teacher leadership has been described in various ways, most definitions refer to a set of skills that enable teachers to instruct their students, work collaboratively to effectively address current educational demands, and, equally important, to exert influence that goes beyond the classroom.

Authors like Caena (2021) highlight that teacher leaders exert influence over their colleagues, principals, and school communities, primarily in efforts to improve curricula, teaching practices, and student outcomes, as well as through their role in innovation and as mentors for new teachers. Similarly, Álvarez, Pérez, González, and Rodríguez (2021) emphasize that understanding, taking responsibility for student learning, collaborating with colleagues, and improving practices inside and outside the classroom are key responsibilities of teacher leaders. Gento, González, and Silfa (2020) emphasize that a crucial characteristic of teacher leaders is their engagement and collaboration with the administrative team, fellow educators, and various stakeholders involved in the functioning of the school's operation.

Similarly, Çetinkaya and Arastaman (2023) and Ghamrawi, Shal, and Ghamrawi (2023) describe teacher leaders as individuals who serve as role models, sources of inspiration and

motivation for their students, manage responsibilities inside and outside the classroom, and take on additional challenges beyond their teaching duties, all to improve student learning and educational quality. These findings are consistent with the *Global Education Monitoring Report* (GEM) (UNESCO, 2025), which notes that, given the increasing complexity of school objectives, distributing leadership responsibilities among key stakeholders can make a significant difference. The report emphasizes that teachers can take on formal leadership roles that have a direct impact on student learning and school performance, a position supported by researchers such as Gurr (2023) and Lipscombe, Tindall, and Lamanna (2023).

Regarding the understanding of teacher leadership, researchers from the *International Study of Teacher Leadership in International Contexts* (Webber, 2025) found differences between participants from Western nations and those from Latin American countries. For example, while there is more consistency in the research findings from countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States regarding the concept of teacher leadership, in Latin America—and particularly in Mexico—leadership is more commonly associated with principals or school directors (Domínguez-Castillo et al., 2024; Aravena et al., 2020; Flores, Bailey, & Torres, 2021). In these contexts, institutional support, openness to project development, delegation of responsibilities, and formal recognition are often tied to principals, which can either facilitate or constrain the exercise of teacher leadership.

More recently, however, the Nueva Escuela Mexicana (NEM), introduced through the 2019 educational reform, has sought to reposition the role of teachers within the public education system. The NEM envisions a more inclusive, equitable, humanistic, and community-oriented education, where teachers are expected to become social change agents who not only deliver content but also foster environments of collective reflection, intercultural dialogue, and contextualized learning. Within this framework, teachers are increasingly seen as central figures in promoting student well-being and holistic development, as well as in creating participatory spaces that address diversity and individual needs (Diario Oficial de la Federación [DOF], 2024; Ley General de Educación [LGE], 2019).

These challenges are not unique to Mexico. Similar patterns have been observed in Argentina, where Vivas and Gratacós (2023) describe how the current organization of secondary schools constrains opportunities for sustainable improvement. A particular obstacle is the phenomenon of the so-called “taxi teacher”, whereby teachers must move between multiple schools, limiting collaboration with colleagues and weakening their sense of commitment to individual institutions. In addition, the formal roles and functions of school leaders often leave little room to create the necessary conditions for teacher leadership to emerge and thrive.

On the other hand, in Mexico when principals and supervisors provide support to teachers, the latter tend to participate in school improvement and innovation initiatives (Cisneros-Cohernour, 2021). This is consistent with the findings of Conway and Andrews (2016), who found that when there is principal support, teachers engage in initiatives for improving their schools.

In addition, research, utilizing analysis of policy documents regarding teachers work in a comparative study between Mexico, Colombia and Spain, showed that teamwork is a desirable characteristic for teachers, but in those countries, this is promoted by school authorities, and it focuses on pedagogical aspects (Pineda-Báez et al., 2023).

Teacher leadership, commonly defined as the capacity of teachers to influence their peers, foster collaboration, and contribute to school improvement, may also be shaped by sociodemographic factors. Prior studies have shown that characteristics such as age, gender,

professional experience, and education level can influence leadership practices and teachers' perceptions of their professional roles (Berhanu, 2025; Weinstein, 2016). These findings suggest that teacher leadership, like other forms of educational leadership, could also be associated with demographic variables, underscoring the relevance of examining these relationships in different contexts.

Pedagogical Leadership

In today's educational context, pedagogy is expected to foster in students the capacity to continuously question existing knowledge and to strengthen critical thinking based on the deconstruction and transformation of learning (Osberg, 2010). As a result, in recent decades the study and analysis of pedagogical leadership have gained prominence, since improving the quality of teaching and students' learning experiences has become an imperative at all educational levels.

Research, particularly in higher education, highlights the relevance of pedagogical leadership in creating motivating, student-centered learning environments oriented toward meaningful outcomes. Participation in stimulating educational experiences not only enhances students' understanding of themselves but also deepens their awareness of their relationship with the world around them (Elo & Uljens, 2024).

Against this backdrop, strengthening the teaching–learning process and, more importantly, enhancing the role of the teacher as a pedagogical leader is essential. This role involves planning conducive learning environments, organizing, supporting, assisting, and motivating students (Casas, 2019; Lugo & Villasmil, 2019).

Pedagogical leadership is therefore understood as a process through which teachers influence student learning by designing and creating teaching environments that contribute to improved academic achievement (Saavedra, 2018). As Bolívar et al. (2017) argue, the study of pedagogical leadership also contributes to building healthy school environments and learning communities focused on improving academic performance, thereby providing a solid foundation for effective teaching and learning.

Grounded in efficient curricular management, pedagogical leadership strengthens and enhances teaching performance by fostering communities of educators focused on the development of meaningful learning outcomes. Achieving this vision requires continuous support, monitoring, and appropriate evaluation of student learning, without losing sight of the overall improvement of the teaching–learning process (Ibarra, 2022). In practice, this mediation takes place in the classroom through curriculum implementation and evaluation. The first is reflected in innovative practices aimed at enhancing learning and adapting to student diversity (Male & Palaiologou, 2017; Seiser, 2020), while the second involves assessing results, identifying student progress, and providing feedback not only on teaching practices but also to guide institutional decision-making (Fonsen et al., 2020).

According to Acevedo (2021), the main attribute of a pedagogical leader is to act as a mediator of teaching, generating learning opportunities that consider the needs, interests, pace, and expectations of each student. Such leadership motivates participation through participatory and creative strategies that foster the development of both disciplinary and holistic competencies. Within this framework, planning and decision-making become essential stages to ensure that instructional strategies respond to real needs, thereby strengthening the relevance of the educational process and providing more coherent and effective learning experiences (Yang & Lim, 2020; Zohar & Cohen, 2016).

In this way, pedagogical leadership reinforces the teaching–learning process by integrating reflection, collaboration, and continuous improvement as the core pillars of educational practice.

Pedagogical Leadership and Teacher Leadership

From an educational perspective, the relationship between teacher leadership and pedagogical leadership is structured as a hierarchical and functional articulation, in which the latter constitutes a specific and operational manifestation of the former. Teacher leadership is understood as a set of higher-order skills that enable teachers to achieve genuine change within the school, considering the complexities of teaching, the broader context, micropolitics, and challenging environments.

Pedagogical leadership has recently become an important aspect of teacher leadership. It involves the ability to positively impact students through innovative teaching methods, collaboration among professionals, and a commitment to ethical practices. Therefore, pedagogical leadership not only stems from teacher leadership but also is grounded in everyday practices, making it a practical and adaptable force in educational contexts.

In summary, both concepts share goals centered on educational improvement, but they differ in their scope. Teacher leadership articulates an institutional vision oriented toward strategic objectives and accountability for student achievement, and pedagogical leadership enacts that vision through teacher engagement and management of the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

Given the limited research on teacher leadership in Mexico and the emergence of new research on pedagogical teacher leadership, the purpose of this study was examining the meaning, context, and attributes of teacher leadership from the perspectives of elementary school teachers and teacher educators, with a focus on the conceptual understanding of this construct. We also analyzed teacher educator responses to determine if their view of teacher leadership is closer to the concept of pedagogical leadership or to the broad concept of teacher leadership. Our work is part of the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL), which is jointly conducted by researchers from South Africa, Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Spain, Mexico, Morocco, Romania, Tanzania, and Turkey (Webber & Okoko, 2021).

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

- What is the meaning, context and attributes of teacher leadership from the perspective of elementary school teachers?
- What are the meaning and attributes of teacher leadership for teacher educators?
- Are the participants' views of teacher leadership closer to the concept of pedagogical leadership or the broad view of teacher leadership?
- What differences exist between the perceptions of teachers and teacher educators about teacher leadership?

Method

The study included a convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2017), that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to examine the perceptions of teachers and teacher educators regarding teacher leadership. We collected quantitative and qualitative data at the same time from different actors and then compared their perceptions in relation to the meaning and attributes of teacher leadership to have a better understanding of the concepts. The decision to use different methods was also based on the needs of their participants and their availability.

The following section describes the quantitative phase, including information about the participants and the characteristics of the instrument used.

Participants

Phase 1: In-service Teachers

In this phase of the study, a total of 37 teachers participated, with 83.8% identifying as women (n = 31) and 16.2% as men (n = 6). As indicated in Table 1, the most prevailing age group among participants was 25 to 34 years, followed by those aged 35 to 44 years. The majority held a bachelor's degree and worked in primary education, with teaching experience ranging from 2 to 9 years. Notably, most participants did not occupy formal or informal leadership positions. Additionally, most worked in schools with an enrollment of 600 to 800 students.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	N	%
Sex		
Female	31	83,8
Male	6	16,2
Age		
25 or younger	3	8,1
25-34	14	37,8
35-44	9	24,3
45-54	7	18,9
55 or older	4	10,8
Education level		
Below higher education	2	5,4
Bachelor's degree	22	59,5
Graduate studies	13	35,1
Teaching level		
Primary	29	78,4
Secondary	3	8,1
High School	1	2,7
Postgraduate	4	10,8

Years of teaching experience		
1 year or less	3	8,1
2-9 years	17	45,9
10-19 years	6	16,2
20 years or more	11	29,7
Leadership role		
No leadership role	35	94,6
Informal leadership role	1	2,7
Formal leadership role	1	2,7
School enrollment		
200-399 students	2	5,4
400-599 students	6	16,2
600-799 students	29	78,4

Procedures. Data collection was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the Teacher Leadership Questionnaire was administered (Webber, 2018). Specifically, the Spanish version (Gratacós & Ladrón de Guevara, 2023) of the instrument is part of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership*, which includes participants from Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The second phase of the study involved individual interviews. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, with a link provided to the participants.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on frequencies of participant responses in each of the three dimensions of the questionnaire. Additionally, correlations and group comparisons were also conducted when relevant.

Instruments and Techniques

Teacher Leadership Questionnaire Overview. In this study, the questionnaire developed for the *International Survey on Teacher Leadership* was utilized. This instrument was designed following a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, and its content validity was established through assessments by international and national experts in the field (Gratacós & Ladrón de Guevara, 2023; Webber, 2018).

The Teacher Leadership Questionnaire is structured into three main sections: (1) the concept of teacher leadership, (2) the contexts and stakeholders that foster teacher leadership development, and (3) the attributes of teacher leadership. The internal consistency of these three dimensions indicates a high degree of reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .80 in all cases (Concept $\alpha = .94$; Context and stakeholders $\alpha = .88$; Attributes $\alpha = .90$).

The questionnaire also includes a section dedicated to exploring participants' demographic information. This section included the following characteristics: the educational level at which the teacher was employed, sex, age, highest level of education attained, years of teaching experience, leadership roles held, and size of school enrollment.

Phase 2: Teacher educators

Participants in the second phase of the study consisted of nine university professors from the School of Education at a public university. All participants were involved in training future teachers and included three men and six women, with ages ranging from 26 to 52 years. In terms

of academic qualifications, six participants held master's degrees and three held doctoral degrees. Their teaching experience varied from 2 to 30 years. Five participants were full-time faculty members, while the remaining four held coordination or administrative roles, which included positions such as undergraduate program coordinator, audiovisual resources coordinator, social service coordinator, and coordinator of academic advising and tutoring.

Procedures. All qualitative interviews focused on the participants' responses to two guiding questions, conducted individually. The first question related to the meaning of teacher leadership and the second one to the attributes of teacher leaders. These semi-structured interviews took place at the participants' workplaces and were audio-recorded with prior informed consent. Each interview was fully transcribed. To ensure accuracy, member checking was employed to verify the interpretations made of the participants' responses.

In the second phase of the study, once the data from the qualitative interviews were transcribed, they were stored electronically and organized around the study's themes. This analysis aimed to identify emerging themes from the participant responses, then classify them into categories and compare them with the previously identified attributes of teacher leadership in the literature.

Results

The following section presents the results of the teacher survey together with the findings from interviews conducted with teacher educators from a public institution. First, we report the descriptive information obtained from the items within each of the three dimensions explored. Second, we analyze and present the results of comparisons and associations with relevant demographic variables. Finally, we provide the qualitative findings derived from the interviews with teachers.

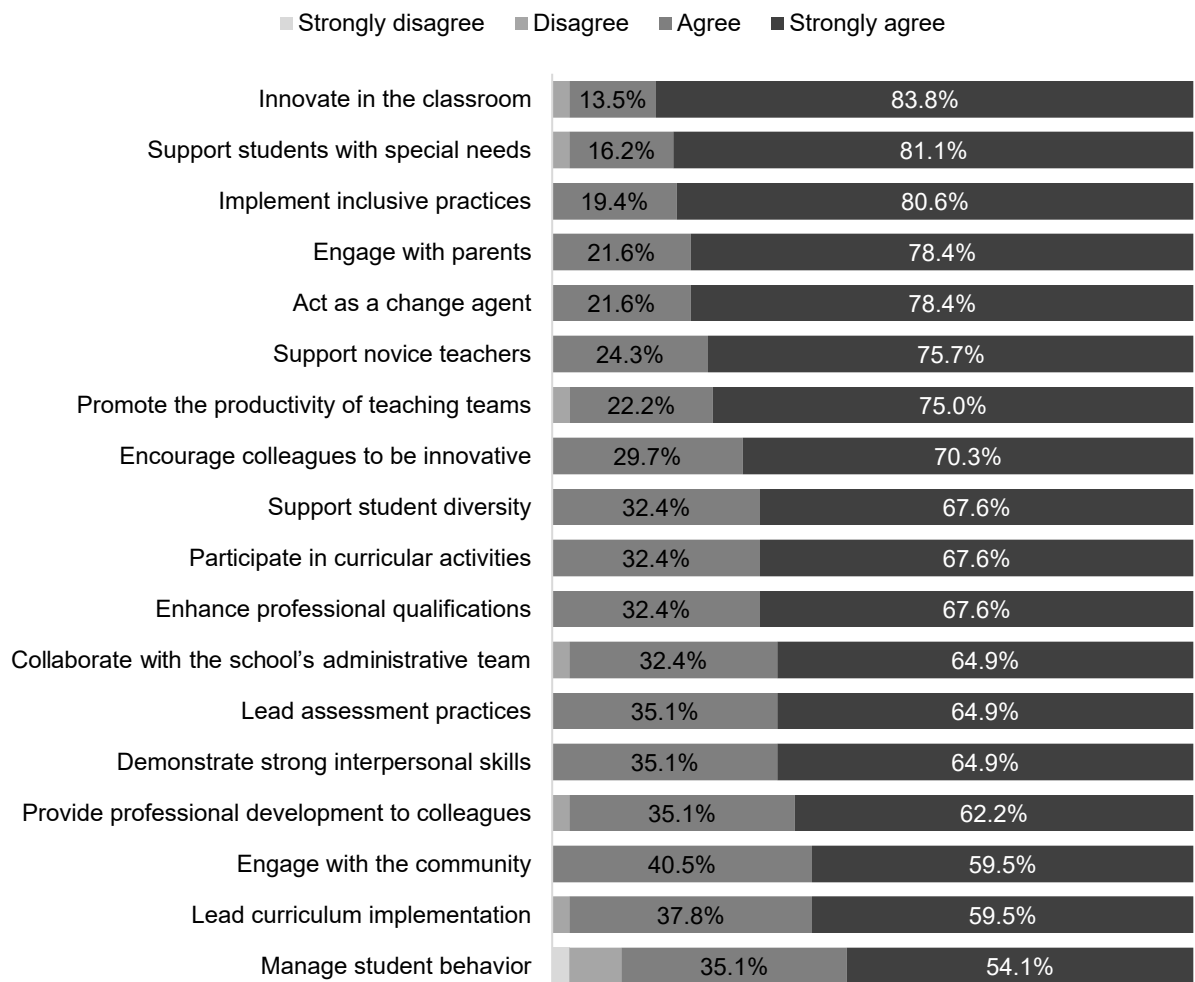
Teachers' perspectives on the meaning, context and attributes of teacher leadership

The survey results reflect teachers' perceptions about the characteristics of leadership, the contexts that promote it, and the attributes of teacher leadership.

Characteristics of Teacher Leadership

The study initially explored the key characteristics of teacher leadership, as illustrated in Figure 1. Participants most commonly identified the following elements as defining features of teacher leadership: the ability to innovate in the classroom (83.8%), support students with special needs (81.1%), implement inclusive practices (80.6%), build relationships with parents (78.4%), act as agents of change (78.4%), assist novice teachers (75.7%), and enhance the productivity of teaching teams (75.0%). In contrast, the characteristic that was least frequently linked to teacher leadership was the control of student behavior (54.1%).

Figure 1
Characteristics of teacher leadership

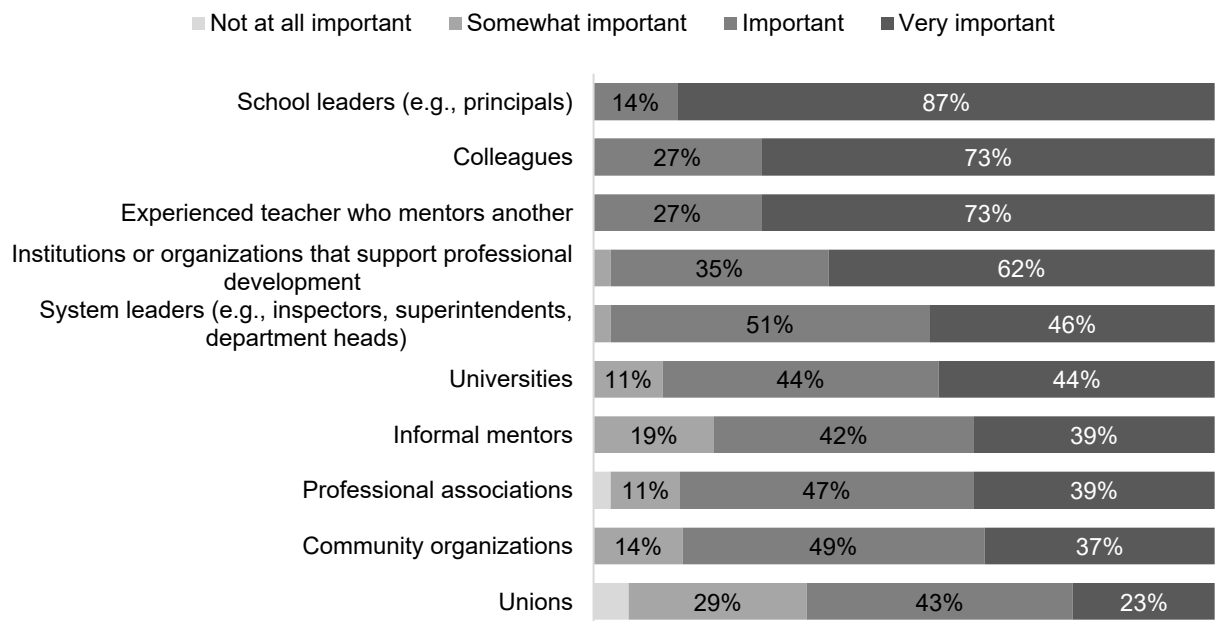


Contexts That Promote the Development of Teacher Leadership

The main promoters of teacher leadership identified in the analysis include school leaders (87%), colleagues (73%), and experienced teachers acting as mentors (73%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Contexts and agents that promote the development of teacher leadership



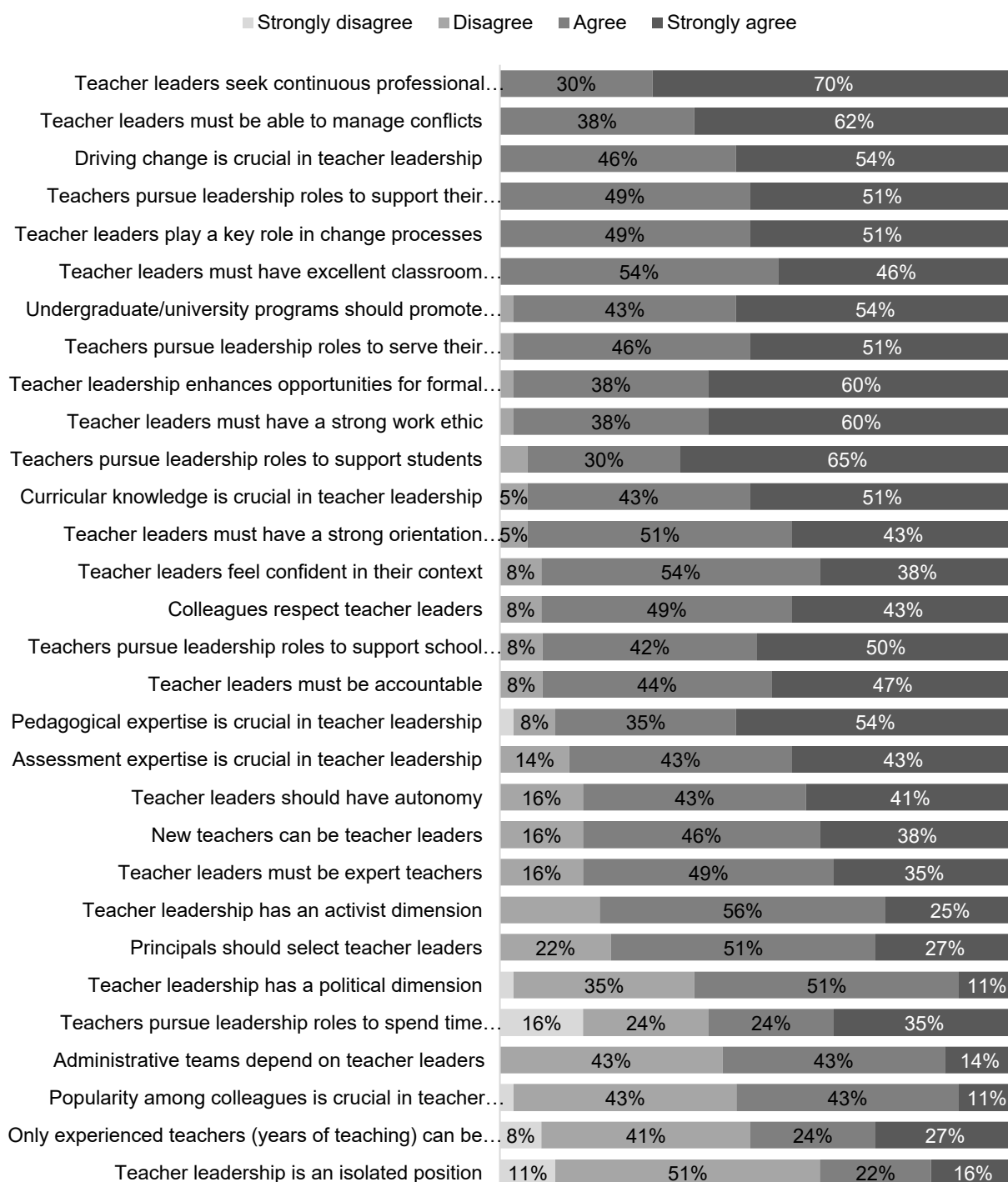
The least relevant contexts for promoting teacher leadership include informal mentors (39%), professional associations (39%), community organizations (37%), and unions (23%). The latter was considered the least influential in the development of teacher leadership.

Attributes of Teacher Leadership

The attributes of teacher leadership are illustrated in Figure 3. The key characteristics identified by the participants include the following: Commitment to continuous professional development (70%); Conflict management skills (62%); Driving change (54%); Supporting colleagues (51%); and Active participation in institutional transformation processes (51%). Conversely, attributes that are considered less relevant include: The belief that administrative teams should depend on teacher leaders (14%); The idea that popularity among colleagues is necessary for leadership (11%); The notion that only experienced teachers can be leaders (27%); and The perception that teacher leadership is an isolated role (16%).

Figure 3

Attributes that define teacher leadership



No significant differences were observed between men and women across any of the three dimensions of the questionnaire, as assessed using the Mann-Whitney U test. This suggests that both groups performed similarly across all dimensions (see Table 2).

Table 2

Comparisons of scores on teacher leadership characteristics, contexts and agents promoting its development, and defining attributes by gender

Dimension	Men (n = 6)		Women (n =31)		U	d	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Characteristics	4.37	0.79	4.38	0.69	87.5	-0.01	.834
Context and agents	3.38	0.52	3.43	0.44	89.0	-0.11	.885
Attributes	3.12	0.40	3.28	0.33	73.5	-0.48	.433

Similarly, no significant associations were observed between the three dimensions of teacher leadership and the sociodemographic characteristics analyzed, as assessed using Spearman's non-parametric correlation (see Table 3). These findings suggest that perceptions of teacher leadership, its contexts, and attributes are relatively independent of gender, age, years of professional experience, school type, and the specific role performed by the teacher.

Table 3

Associations between demographic variables and teacher leadership characteristics, contexts and agents promoting its development, and defining attributes

Variables	Characteristics	Context and agents	Attributes
Age	.092	.032	-.076
Educational level	.060	.074	.083
Years of experience	.131	-.042	-.086
Formal leadership role	-.036	.348	.277
School size	.134	-.095	-.053

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Teacher Educators' Perspectives on the Meaning and Attributes of Teacher Leadership

The interviews with teacher educators revealed that there was less consensus in their responses regarding the concept of teacher leadership (See Table 4). In fact, some participants described it in ways that more closely align with pedagogical leadership, which refers primarily to processes of teaching and learning within the classroom. For example, they highlighted teachers' awareness of students' needs, their ability to adapt instruction, motivate learners, and manage the classroom effectively. These perspectives illustrate how some educators equated teacher leadership with pedagogical tasks, emphasizing elements such as guiding students toward educational goals, promoting participation, modeling strategies, and ensuring student development.

Table 4

Teacher educators' perspectives on teacher leadership as pedagogical leadership

Themes	Teacher quotes the question: what is a teacher leader?
Likened teacher leadership to aspects of pedagogical leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>He or she is aware of each student's needs and adapts his or her instruction accordingly.</i> • <i>Guides students toward educational goals by outlining the necessary steps and processes, as well as modeling strategies to achieve learning objectives and enhance learning.</i> • <i>Promotes participation among all students in the classroom.</i> • <i>Fulfill classroom duties and meeting expectations.</i> • <i>Serve as a strong motivator who inspires students.</i> • <i>Someone with the ability to lead others to learn, to achieve their goals, develop their capabilities and grow personally.</i> • <i>Someone who manages the activities and decisions that impact his or her students' learning.</i> • <i>A teacher shares his or her knowledge and inspires his or her students to be critical thinkers so they can contribute to solving problems or needs.</i> • <i>...knows and identify the best strategies and resources to ensure their students' learning. They are interested in student development.</i>

At the same time, other participants provided a broader view of teacher leadership, one that went beyond the classroom to include responsibilities with colleagues and the school community. This group underscored that teacher leaders not only guide students but also collaborate with peers, share knowledge, and assume responsibilities that extend to the improvement of the school as a whole. Their descriptions highlight the collegial, collaborative, and socially oriented dimensions of teacher leadership. In this sense, they portrayed leaders as individuals capable of coordinating with diverse stakeholders, delegating tasks, and seeking a form of social transcendence through their professional work (see Table 5).

Table 5

Teacher educators' perspectives on teacher leadership beyond the classroom

Themes	Example Quotes
Broad view of Teacher leadership: Included pedagogical aspects but also other responsibilities beyond the classroom when responding to the question: what is the concept of teacher leader?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Manage responsibilities both inside and outside the classroom, sharing knowledge, and encouraging students to think critically so they can contribute to solving social problems or needs.</i> • <i>Collaborates with peers to improve education within their school.</i> • <i>He or she is aware of the needs of each of her students, colleagues, and administrative staff and works in a coordinated manner with various stakeholders. He or she is collegial and can delegate and relinquish power.</i> • <i>It's someone who works with peers, with colleagues to lead work teams and get tasks done. It is someone who seeks social transcendence.</i>

Teacher educators' perceptions on the attributes of teacher leaders

When asked specifically about attributes of teacher leaders, participants identified several qualities. However, they did not provide descriptions as detailed as those included in the survey, instead offering brief mentions such as empathy, responsibility, or collaboration. Five teacher educators emphasized empathy, four mentioned responsibility, and three stressed the ability to make decisions collaboratively while maintaining clear goals (See Table 6). Additionally, two participants highlighted self-confidence, integrity, a service-oriented attitude, and respect for others. Although these descriptions were brief, the interviews themselves offered further insights into how participants understood these attributes in practice, particularly in the way they connected them to the broader meaning of teacher leadership.

Table 6

Attributes of teacher leaders identified by teacher educators

Theme	Example Quotes
Teacher leadership attributes identified by teacher educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “...teacher leadership is often said to be limited to the classroom... yet there are also activities beyond the classroom that involve managing external opportunities with students... in this sense, the teacher assumes responsibility for all activities and decision-making, ensuring that students can learn.” “...a teacher leader is someone who works collaboratively, who has a clear sense of the goals to be achieved with students and colleagues, and who knows how to make decisions jointly to reach them.” “...a teacher leader must always demonstrate a service-oriented attitude, show respect toward students and colleagues, and be willing to support others whenever needed.”

Most of these teachers equated teacher leadership with being a good teacher. Unlike former studies that related leadership to principals or administrators' instructional responsibilities.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

A comparison between in-service teachers and teacher educators revealed differences in emphasis. Teachers tended to identify both personal and institution-related attributes of teacher leaders, whereas teacher educators primarily highlighted personal traits.

Despite these distinctions, both groups converged on three key attributes that are consistent with the literature on teacher leadership: collaboration, accountability, and teamwork (See Table 7). These attributes also resonate with the framework proposed by Webber, even though not all aspects of that framework were explicitly identified by participants.

Both groups pointed to collaboration as a defining feature, albeit expressed through different lenses: teachers emphasized peer-oriented practices, while teacher educators foregrounded collegial work and shared decision-making. Accountability was evident in both strands but held less prominence relative to instructional and collaborative priorities. By contrast, teamwork emerged as a central, enacted practice, associated with distributed roles and delegated responsibilities.

A notable difference concerns the scope of leadership. Teachers tended to frame leadership in ways that are closely tied to classroom activity—suggesting an emphasis on pedagogical leadership—whereas teacher educators, while also highlighting classroom functions, more readily acknowledged leadership beyond the classroom, involving responsibilities with

peers and the wider school community. These patterns are summarized in Table 7, which consolidates the complementary evidence from both sources.

Table 7

Shared attributes of teacher leaders among in-service teachers and teacher educators

Category	In-service teachers (quantitative, n = 37)	Teacher educators (qualitative, n = 9)
Collaboration	Collaboration appears as enacted support among peers. Teachers report assisting novice colleagues (75.7%) and emphasize promoting the productivity of work teams (75.0%). They also indicate that leadership is promoted by school leaders (87%), colleagues (73%), and experienced teachers acting as mentors (73%), while the notion of leadership as an isolated position receives low endorsement (16%).	Teacher educators describe collaboration as collegial practice and shared decision-making, noting that a leader “works collaboratively, ... has a clear sense of the goals to be achieved with students and colleagues, and ... knows how to make decisions jointly to reach them,” and that effective leadership “promotes participation among all students in the classroom.”
Accountability	Accountability is present but not among the top-ranked characteristics in the teacher data: 47% strongly agree and 44% agree (i.e., 91% agreement) that it is a leadership attribute, yet it sits at approximately the 17th position of 30, making it important but not primary. Related items—such as “Fulfill classroom duties and meeting expectations”—are acknowledged but do not outrank instructional or collaboration-oriented functions.	Qualitative descriptions tie accountability to the assumption of responsibility for learning and for the decisions that secure it, including statements that teacher leaders take responsibility for learning outcomes and assume responsibility for activities and decision-making so that students can learn.
Teamwork	Teamwork is framed as a principal characteristic of leadership: teachers point to increasing the productivity of work teams (75.0%) and supporting colleagues (51%), signaling leadership carried out with and through teams rather than individually.	Educator-educators echo this view by stressing team-based practice and delegation, characterizing the leader as one who “is collegial and can delegate and relinquish power.”
Beyond the classroom (scope)	In the survey profile, external agents outside the classroom/school are seen as less influential in promoting teacher leadership: only a minority identify professional associations (39%), community organizations (37%), or unions (23%) as promoters, whereas internal enablers (leaders, colleagues, mentors) are more salient. At the same time, teachers’ endorsement of classroom-related practices such as “the ability to innovate in the classroom (83.8%)” reflects the salience of pedagogical work within their broader leadership view.	Among educator-educators, two emphases coexist. Several accounts center leadership on classroom-based, pedagogical functions—for example, attending to individual student needs, guiding toward educational goals by modeling strategies, and promoting classroom participation. Others explicitly recognize that leadership can occur beyond the classroom, pointing to activities that involve managing opportunities with students outside class and sharing knowledge inside and outside the classroom as well as collaboration with peers and the wider school community.

Conclusions

Numerous countries have investigated the concept of teacher leadership, focusing on its potential effects on the professional development of colleagues and student learning. Research conducted in Latin America, Spain, and the Middle East reveals a growing interest in understanding this concept, especially in non-Western contexts.

In this study, we explored how elementary school teachers and teacher educators from a public university understand the concept of teacher leadership. To gather data, we administered a survey to primary school teachers and conducted qualitative interviews with the teacher educators.

The findings suggest that teachers view all the elements included in the survey as integral to the concept of teacher leadership. They identified school leaders and colleagues as the most significant influences on their leadership roles, while unions were perceived as the least impactful in shaping their leadership. Furthermore, teachers agreed that all the leadership attributes outlined in the questionnaire accurately represent the essence of teacher leadership.

The perspectives of teacher educators on the meaning of teacher leadership varied significantly. Approximately sixty-six percent of teacher educators identified the concept with pedagogical leadership, aimed at supporting students (4 participants). In contrast, some educators viewed leadership primarily as a responsibility of school principals (2 participants), a smaller group of three participants aligned their views more closely with the definition of teacher leadership presented in the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* (Webber & Okoko, 2021). This latter group perceived teacher leadership as extending beyond classroom duties, commitment, and teamwork, emphasizing instead collaboration with colleagues and active engagement with the broader school community. Participants consistently highlighted collaboration, accountability, and teamwork as essential attributes of effective teacher leaders. This conclusion is consistent with the findings reported by Pineda-Báez et al. (2023) and also resonates with other studies conducted in Mexican schools (Elizondo, Gómez, & Alemán, 2019; Lázaro & Hernández, 2020; Nava, Huerter, & Carro, 2020). These studies suggest that teacher leadership is not yet a prominent feature in the Mexican educational system and underscore the need for further research on this topic. They also point to the importance of aligning educational policies and guidelines with strategies to strengthen teacher leadership as a means of improving learning outcomes. Within the framework of the Nueva Escuela Mexicana (NEM), this would imply repositioning teachers as social change agents who facilitate collective reflection in intercultural and context-sensitive environments, thereby motivating their peers toward continuous professional development with a critical and transformative vision.

These results align with the work of Achach-Sonda and Cisneros-Cohernour (2023), who highlighted a scarcity of research on teacher leadership in Mexico. Notably, two years after their publication, there seems to be an increasing interest in exploring this phenomenon more systematically, supported by a robust theoretical foundation.

In examining the factors that shape teachers' perceptions of teacher leadership, no notable differences emerged between male and female primary teachers. Among teacher educators, while both male participants and one female participant identified leadership attributes aligned with teacher leadership, the majority emphasized pedagogical leadership. Consequently, the variations observed appear to be more closely related to the participants' interpretation of leadership rather than their gender. These results differ significantly from those reported by Domínguez-Castillo et al., (2024) in their study conducted within a higher education faculty.

This discrepancy highlights the need for further investigation, especially considering the unique structural and cultural characteristics inherent to educational organizations.

No significant differences were observed between teacher educators who held academic coordination roles and those who were solely engaged in teaching. These findings stand in contrast with the results reported by Gurr (2023).

Some differences were found between in-service teachers and teacher educators regarding the meaning of teacher leadership. While teachers expressed agreement with the meaning of the construct as stated in the survey, some teacher educators saw teacher leadership as pedagogical leadership while others described teacher leadership as a broad concept that included pedagogical leadership. More research is needed in this area, given the growing trend of examining these concepts in Spanish speaking countries.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of developing initiatives—such as professional development programs or awareness campaigns—aimed at promoting teacher leadership. These efforts should help in-service teachers recognize that leadership does not necessarily entail holding a formal administrative position. It is crucial to broaden the understanding of teacher leadership beyond the classroom context. When leadership is confined to pedagogical practices within the classroom, its transformative potential is significantly constrained. Teachers should be encouraged to envision their leadership extending to the broader school environment and even to the surrounding community. This expanded perspective is particularly relevant in light of recent educational reforms in Mexico, such as the Nueva Escuela Mexicana, which positions teachers as key agents of community leadership. Without dedicated spaces for reflection and critical engagement with this vision, there is a risk that such policies will be implemented in a superficial or fragmented manner.

As for the study's limitations, the relatively small sample size should be acknowledged. Even within a quantitative framework, the number of participants holding formal leadership roles was notably smaller than the group of in-service teachers, which may have impacted the precision of certain statistical estimates, such as standard errors and confidence intervals for these subgroups. This limitation could have obscured potentially meaningful findings. Future research should strive for larger and more balanced samples, with greater representation of teachers in leadership positions.

Future studies should delve deeper into the factors that hinder the effectiveness of teacher leaders, as well as the barriers faced by individuals of both genders in these roles. It is essential to examine not only gender-related challenges but also cultural and contextual issues, particularly for educators in rural areas or those located outside major urban centers. This is especially crucial in Mexico, where the educational system is highly centralized. Schools located farther from the capital frequently experience significant resource constraints. Moreover, many teachers in these remote schools tend to be less experienced, as early-career educators are often assigned to rural communities during their initial years in the profession.

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