Teacher Leadership in Argentina: An Approach to the Conception

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the conception of teacher leadership among teachers in different positions within compulsory education. It is conducted as part of the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL) research network (Webber, 2023). From a methodological view, data were collected through a questionnaire developed by the network's research team and adapted to the local context. The purposive sample consisted of 204 participants. Data analysis included exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The results indicate that teacher leaders are distinguished by having a strong professional profile as a foundation. In addition, they are characterized by a combination of seniority and experience, a supportive attitude towards others, and a social justice orientation, as well as a certain popularity. The possession of these attributes and the recognition of them by their peers through multiple interactions in and out of school is what enables them to become leaders. Their influence extends to their students, peers, principals, families and even the community.

Keywords: Leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, factor analysis, Argentina

Introduction

Over the past six decades, the field of school leadership has seen a marked increase in the level of scholarly attention it has received (Lusquiños, 2025; Tintoré & Gairín, 2024). The predominant rationale for this phenomenon stems from the prevailing consensus, substantiated by empirical evidence, that leadership practices play a pivotal role in shaping organizational conditions conducive to high-quality teaching, the attainment of enhanced student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020) and school improvement (Bush, 2016; Elmore, 2010; Grissom et al., 2021; Gumus et al., 2018; Harris & Jones, 2023). While these practices were initially limited to the principal, subsequent studies incorporated leadership in other positions and actors, particularly from a distributed perspective (Gronn, 2002; Gurr, 2023; Harris, 2012; Spillane, 2006). Among the actors under consideration, teachers are of particular significance, as every teacher has the potential to become an organizational leader (Harris, 2003), in addition to exerting direct influence on student's learning (Leithwood et al., 2020).

According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), the concept of teacher leadership can be defined as the process by which teachers, either individually or collectively, exert influence over their colleagues, principals and other members of the school community to strengthen teaching practices with the aim of improving student learning and performance. This seminal definition has been followed by many others. Hargreaves (2025) posits that teacher leadership is inextricably linked to collaboration. In schools where collaboration is deeply entrenched, all

teachers, to varying extents, assume leadership roles over their colleagues and students. Nguyen et al. (2020), for their part, conceptualize teacher leaders as pivotal agents of change and sources of innovation. These educators aim not only to enhance their own instructional practices but also to extend the reach of their efforts to the school level and beyond, with the overarching objective of promoting enhanced student learning outcomes.

Despite the abundance of literature addressing this concept, there remains a paucity of consensus among authors regarding the precise definition of teacher leadership. Gurr and Nicholas (2023) continue to express reservations regarding the existence of a distinct definition. The authors of the study caution against the persistent lack of precision and overlap with research related to distributed and intermediate leadership. Furthermore, they contend that many of the characteristics and effects attributed to teacher leadership, in reality, correspond to the conception of a "good teacher." Leithwood (2007), a seminal figure in the field of educational leadership, characterized teacher leadership as a movement rather than an evidence-based practice. He proposed that extant literature on teacher leadership characterizes teacher leaders as engaging in tasks that, in the majority of professional domains, would be considered standard responsibilities, rather than leadership per se.

In this ambiguous state regarding its nature and definition, and despite the limited extant research on the prediction of student achievement from factors specific to teacher leadership (Harris, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), there is a high level of expectation for its contribution to improvement. This phenomenon is particularly salient in the context of mounting global expectations for enhanced teacher accountability and student achievement (Shen et al., 2020); in addition to the need to distribute leadership as a strategy to address the diverse and rapidly evolving scenarios characteristic of the contemporary educational landscape (Azorin & Fullan, 2022; Harris, 2003; Lusquiños, 2019). In this sense, the transition from intuitive approaches to distinctive conceptual elements that feed practice is still a developing process (Chen et al., 2020). This is particularly important during periods of rapid technological, social, economic, and demographic change, such as the present, which require a renewal of schools and school practices (Fernández-Enguita, 2023; Mehta, 2022).

In this sense, the objective of this paper is to explore the conception of teacher leadership in Argentina. This country has seen minimal research activity in the field of educational leadership, with a limited number of publications addressing topics such as principal leadership (Lusquiños, 2021; Lusquiños, 2025; Romero, 2025; Vivas, 2024), distributed leadership (Lusquiños, 2019; Narodowski, 2025), and teacher leadership (Vivas & Gratacós, 2023).This study is part of the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL), a research initiative that began in 2018 when a group of scholars became interested in exploring the topic in different contexts.

Theoretical framework

In general, and in agreement with the seminal definition by York-Barr and Duke (2004) already cited, Bush (2020) adds that a central element of leadership definitions is the existence of an intentional process of influence exercised by both an individual and a group, regardless of their positional authority. Other authors have clarified that this influence must be positive and must contribute to directing collaborative efforts towards the institution's vision and mission or the achievement of its objectives (Hunzicker, 2022; Sterret, 2022). It is evident that in the absence of a unified vision and a shared cultural framework that provide cohesion and coherence

to the actions of each teacher, individual leadership may act in a manner that is counterproductive to the achievement of desired results (Elmore, 2010; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008). Furthermore, it is imperative that the vision, mission and the general objectives of an educational institution include student learning as core (Leithwood et al., 2020).

These elements correspond to the general definition of educational leadership and are applicable to each agent's conception of leadership. The fundamental difference lies in whether or not they occupy a position of formal authority, as in the cases of principal or intermediate leadership. In such instances, individuals who assume management responsibilities as department heads, for example, exert influence derived from their positional authority and from the asymmetrical relationship they have with others. The concept of teacher leadership, as outlined here, refers to an informal leadership style, since it is not exercised from a position of formal authority. However, it is genuine because it is based on peers recognizing their peers as leaders within their shared professional context. Therefore, it is considered more precise to refer to teacher leaders rather than teacher leadership in general.

The ISTL, the framework in which this study is included, has contributed extensively to the conceptual development of teacher leadership (Gratacós et al., 2024; Tintoré et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2023; Webber & Okoko, 2021). Among the numerous antecedents evaluated for its development, four systematic reviews of the literature on teacher leadership emerge as significant contributions to the understanding of this subject. These are the works of Nguyen et al. (2020), Schott et al. (2020), Wenner and Campbell (2017), and York-Barr and Duke (2004). Subsequently, the contributions of the analysis of Gurr and Nicholas (2023) are added and the framework is expanded in new publications (UNESCO, 2024).

In an initial work, Webber et al. (2023) posited that the concept of teacher leadership remains ambiguous within the extant literature. However, they argue that:

> … Nguyen et al. (2020, p. 67) provided a useful overview of "four common hallmarks of teacher leadership." They include teacher leaders as influencers, professional practices based on collaboration and trust, leadership within classrooms and throughout school communities, and a focus on teaching, learning, and school effectiveness. Although not a definition per se, the four hallmarks provide a viable framework for discussing teacher leadership. (Webber et al., 2023, p. 4)

On this basis, the authors proceed to analyze fundamental aspects of how teacher leadership is conceptualized. On the one hand, the attributes of a teacher leader and, based on them, the ways of interaction through which they become such. On the other hand, the extent of their influence as a leader through certain actions and practices. The two conceptual lines form the central aspects of this study.

Attributes and Ways of Interaction to Become a Leader

In the ISTL framework (Webber, 2023), the attributes that characterize a teacher leader include having a shared vision, prioritizing student learning, respecting diversity in all its forms, collaborating as a team, making decisions inclusively, conducting oneself professionally, and engaging in sustained reflective practice. Additionally, openness to change, controlled risk-taking, the stability and sustainability of actions, and responsibility and accountability are critical (Webber, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2018). These attributes drive the development of these teachers into leaders through their interactions with other members of their community.

Recognition of their abilities by their peers in these interactions results in increased self-confidence and peer appreciation (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Gurr and Nicholas (2023) point out that "personal connectedness" is a fundamental component that distinguishes teacher leaders. This encompasses their knowledge and experience, the quality of their interpersonal relationships, the trust they inspire and their willingness to collaborate with colleagues and provide support in the form of advice on work-related issues.

This interactive leadership development requires a cultural and organizational environment that allows teacher leadership to germinate and flourish. This involves a school culture characterized by support and collaboration; a flexible structure that provides resources, time and space; and favorable managerial leadership that is open to participation and conducive to the necessary conditions (Angelle & DeHart, 2011, 2016; Gratacós et al., 2024). Conversely, restrictive contexts characterized by rigid structures, poor institutional support, inadequate resources, poor incentives, and insufficient recognition can hinder the efforts of teachers committed to promoting change and introducing innovations. This can result in adverse consequences such as frustration and loss of motivation (Schaap et al., 2025).

The process of becoming a leader is influenced by social expectations about teaching roles, as well as the social image and prestige of the teaching profession in each culture. Consequently, teacher leadership is a social construct cultivated from social perceptions and the cultural and organizational characteristics of schools (Webber et al., 2023). It can be fostered from an early stage, during initial training, as stated by Angelle and DeHart (2016) and Webber (UNESCO, 2024).

Spheres of Influence and Responsibility

Webber et al. (2023) identify four spheres in which teacher leaders manifest their influence and responsibility. They delineate these spheres or domains of influence as concentric circles that originate at the personal level, expanding to encompass the classroom environment, and subsequently extending to school and community policies and practices.

The initial sphere refers to the personal domain. The foundation of this concept is the notion that teacher leaders engage in reflective practice, which involves the process of examining and critically evaluating the underlying beliefs and assumptions to their professional practices. Through this introspective examination, they seek to enhance their professional performance and contribute to the enhancement of the teaching-learning process. As teacher leaders evolve in their self-understanding and self-efficacy, they develop the ability to predict the outcomes of their students' work and intervene appropriately.

The second sphere of influence encompasses the classroom environment and the students within it. Teacher leaders possess a deep understanding of the curriculum and a fervent dedication to their pedagogical responsibilities. They establish strong bonds with their students, while leading innovations that improve learning. One of the competencies exhibited by these educators is their ability to generate the conditions associated with enhancing student learning, for example: classroom management focused on learning, clear success criteria and integration of advanced teaching methodologies (Hattie & Zierer, 2017).

The third area of influence extends beyond the limits of the classroom to encompass interactions with colleagues and students throughout the educational institution. In accordance with Fairman and MacKenzie (2025), teacher leaders feel compelled to serve the interests of students and colleagues in their schools. They model professional engagement, share ideas and resources with colleagues in their schools, also advise and collaborate with them on the use of

new curricula and materials. The visibility of teacher leaders in their school communities causes others to identify them as leaders because of their willingness to learn, take risks and advocate for their interests. They are also sensitive to making intervention proposals to address cross-cutting issues affecting colleagues and students, such as unmet needs, segregation issues, or safety problems, among others, that threaten the conditions necessary to carry out the teaching-learning process.

The fourth sphere reaches out to families and the community. The role of teacher leaders extends beyond the confines of the school environment, encompassing the influence on the trust and commitment of families and the broader community. In this sense, Zepeda et al. (2013) posit that perhaps the most important relationship a school can forge is with parents. They point out that having parents as allies favors student learning, develops joint problem-solving skills, and contributes to decision-making on issues that involve them.

With the aim of shedding light on the concept of the teacher as a leader, Hunzicker (2022) distinguishes between actions and practices belonging to the teacher's personal sphere and the classroom environment, from those transcending these limits to meet organizational and community objectives and conditions. He refers to the former as acts of professionalism and considers the latter to be acts of leadership.

Within this framework, the general objective of this study is proposed as follows:

- To explore the conception of teacher leadership in Argentina from the perspective of principals and teachers.

The specific objectives are:

- Characterize the attributes of teacher leaders and the interactions that enable their recognition by peers and their development as leaders.
- Identify the actions and practices of educational leaders according to the scope of their influence and responsibility.

To this end, the following research questions were posed:

- What attributes characterize a teacher leader and what interactions enable their development?
- How far-reaching is the influence of teacher leaders through their actions and practices?

Methodology

This exploratory study utilizes a non-experimental, ex-post-facto design, employing a quantitative approach.

Sample

The purposive sample included teachers, in different positions, from different jurisdictions in Argentina (n: 204). The sample was intended to be broad, with no major inclusion restrictions other than holding a school position requiring a teaching degree.

However, demographic variables (age, gender, jurisdiction in which the student works) and professional profile (system level, state or private school department, and teaching seniority) were considered later, as these could potentially influence response variability.

But due to the low variability of the participants' sociodemographic characteristics and professional profiles within the sample, it was not possible to conduct specific subgroup

analyses. The majority of the cases were female (82.8%) and teachers (61.3%). They worked in secondary schools (61.8%) and in subsidized private schools (63.2%) (Table 1).

Table 1
Distribution of the sample

Variable	Categories	n	%
School			
Jurisdiction (in which he/she works)	Buenos Aires	34	16.7
	Autonomous City of Buenos Aires	21	10.3
	Córdoba	98	48.0
	Misiones	11	5.4
	Río Negro	6	2.9
	Santa Fe	15	7.4
	Others	19	9.3
Dependency (School Management Sector)	State	50	24.5
	Private subsidized	129	63.2
	Private unsubsidized	25	12.3
System level (which the teacher's school belongs)	Initial	14	6.9
	Primary	36	17.6
	Secondary	126	61.8
	Tertiary	11	5.4
	Other	17	8.3
Personal/Professional profile			
Position	Principal	26	12.7
	Classroom Teacher	132	64.7
	Other positions	46	22.6
Gender	Female	169	82.8
	Male	35	17.2
		Mean/ Median	s
Age		43/43	9.3
Seniority		15.6/15	9.1

Instrument

The instrument used was a questionnaire developed by the International Survey on Teacher Leadership research group, which comprises academics from fourteen (14) countries (Webber, 2023). The questionnaire was developed in accordance with a comprehensive literature review and has been validated by international experts who constitute this research group. To translate and adapt the content to the Argentine context, the Spanish experience was taken into account (Gratacós et al., 2024). The questionnaire is a single version for all teachers, with general questions for all teachers and some specific questions for those in managerial positions. These questions refer to:

- ∉ Sociodemographic variables: personal of the teacher (sex, age, teaching seniority) and of the school in which he/she works (jurisdiction, dependency, system level, enrollment).

Additionally, central variables on:
- ∉ Attributes of a teacher leader: a question composed of twenty-two (22) items in which the response is selected on a Likert scale of five (5) levels that measure the degree of agreement.
- ∉ Ways of interaction (to develop teacher leadership): A question composed of nine (9) items in which the response is selected on a Likert scale of five (5) levels that measure the degree of agreement.
- ∉ Practices and actions of teacher leader influence: A question composed of eighteen (18) items in which the response is selected on a Likert scale of five (5) levels that measures the degree of agreement. The items cover the spheres of influence considered in the theoretical framework.

Fieldwork

The administration of the questionnaire occurred through the utilization of an online form, which was disseminated extensively via electronic mail. The body of the email contained a reproduction of the header from the form, accompanied by explicit instructions stipulating that the sole prerequisite for responding was to be an active teacher. In the header of the form itself, a brief description of the study was included, as well as the research objectives and an anticipation of the topics covered in the questions. This was done to respect the willingness to respond. Subsequently, in accordance with national legislation on personal data protection, informed consent to respond was requested, and information was provided on how to protect the confidentiality of the data. The contact information of the individuals responsible for the study was also provided to facilitate the resolution of any queries or concerns that potential respondents may have.

Data Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied for data analysis. This multivariate dimension reduction technique attempts to discover a smaller number of underlying, unobservable factors representing the original set of variables with the least possible loss of information (López-Aguado & Gutiérrez-Provecho, 2019).

Previously, factor analysis required assessing the adequacy of the sample through two tests. The first is the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test (KMO), which measures sampling adequacy and indicates whether the correlation matrix is suitable for factor analysis (expected value: >0.7). The second test is Bartlett's test of sphericity, which determines whether the correlation matrix differs significantly from an identity matrix (expected significance p-value: <0.05).

Once the sample had been confirmed as adequate, the Pearson correlation matrix was calculated for pairs of items. High coefficients suggested that the items may share underlying factors. The communalities were also calculated. A high initial communality value in each case indicated that a large proportion of the variance is explained by the extracted underlying factors.

Once these assumptions have been met, the initial factor extraction was performed using the "Principal Components" option, and the components matrix is examined to identify the most relevant factors in terms of their ability to explain the variance. In the present study, variables with factor loadings equal to or greater than 0.6 were considered, with no upper limit on the number of factors.

A Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization was then applied. This rotation maximized the loadings of the variables on a single factor and minimized the loadings on other factors, resulting in a simpler, more interpretable factor structure that reflects the underlying factor structure. Each factor was assigned a designation according to the conceptual significance of the variables it includes.

Results

The results are presented in the order that the research objectives and questions were posed. The first section presents two subsections with the EFA results related to teacher leader attributes and the interaction ways to become a teacher leader. The second section presents the EFA results relating to the practices and actions through which teachers exert their influence, considering the spheres described in the theoretical framework.

For each section or subsection, the scale reliability test used and the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is presented. The results of each EFA include a sample adequacy analysis, the total variance explained, and the matrix of rotated components.

For space reasons, the tables corresponding to the Pearson correlation matrix of pairs of items have been omitted from each EFA. These tables show high coefficients for more than 70% of the items, suggesting that they may share underlying factors. Similarly, the tables of initial communalities have also been omitted. High values in these tables indicate that a large proportion of the variance is explained by the extracted underlying factors.

Attributes and ways of interaction to become a leader

Attributes of a Teacher Leader
Reliability of the Scale
According to Cronbach's Alpha test, this scale presents high reliability (.88). This value would be reduced if some of the items considered were eliminated. The highest correlation value (Square Multiple Correlation) between items reaches .50.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

First, it is necessary to evaluate whether the sample size is adequate for EFA in this particular theme (Table 2).

Table 2

EFA of Attributes of teacher leader: KMO and Bartlett's Tests

KMO		0.862
	Approx. Chi-Square	1506.39
Bartlett's Test of	df	190
Sphericity	Sig.	.000

The KMO value indicates the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The value obtained (.862), close to 1, suggests that the data are highly factorizable. On the other hand, the significance of Bartlett's test result (Chi-Square = 1506.39, p .000), less than .001, indicates that factor analysis is appropriate for the data (Table 2). The good results of both tests for assessing the adequacy of the sample allow us to move forward with the factor analysis (Table 3-4).

Table 3

EFA of attributes of teacher leader: Total explained variance

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation sum of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	Variance	Cumulative
1	6.253	31.263	31.263	3.712	18.560	18.560
2	2.234	11.172	42.435	2.777	13.885	32.445
3	1.466	7.330	49.765	2.340	11.700	44.145
4	1.144	5.722	55.487	1.736	8.680	52.825
5	1.094	5.472	60.959	1.627	8.134	60.959

Of the twenty (20) initial components, those five with an initial eigenvalue greater than 1 (one) are retained. In this factor analysis, the variance explained reaches 60.96% of the total variance from the identification of five factors (Table 3).

The analysis identified five factors with attributes or characteristics of a teacher leader. The items associated with each factor are listed in the table above. The first factor, labelled "Professional model", explained 18.56% of the variance and included five items. The second factor, called "Attitude of support to others", explained 13.885% of the variance and included four items. The third factor, called "Professional experience", explained 11.70% of the variance and included three items. Two complementary factors explain less than 10 % of the variance each. One of them is "Social justice orientation and popularity" (8.68 %) and includes two items, and the other is "Inexperienced but capable" (8.13 %), which includes only one item (Table 4).

Table 4
EFA of attributes of teacher leader. Matrix of rotated components (a)

| Items | Component | | | | |
The teacher leader:	1	2	3	4	5
Is fundamental in change processes	.782				
Is capable for conflict management	.776				
Has a strong work ethic	.684				
Has initiative for change	.678				
Has excellent classroom management skills	.608				
Shows supportive attitude/purpose to their colleagues		.791			
Shows supportive attitude/purpose to students		.774			
Shows attitude/purpose of support to the principal		.772			
Shows attitude/purpose of service to their community		.707			
Has experience in evaluation			.757		
Possesses pedagogical experience			.744		
Has years of teaching experience			.624		
Shows social justice orientation				.780	
Has popularity				.646	
Is a novice, but capable					.758

Note: (a) Rotation of 9 iterations.

Ways of Interaction to Develop Teacher Leadership
Reliability of the Scale
According to Cronbach's Alpha test, this scale presents high reliability (.84). This value would be reduced if some of the items considered were eliminated. The highest correlation value (Square Multiple Correlation) between items reaches .55.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)
First, it is necessary to evaluate whether the sample size is adequate for EFA in this particular theme (Table 5).

Table 5
EFA of Interaction ways. KMO and Bartlett's Tests

KMO		0.833
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	793.78
	df	36

Sig.		.000

The KMO value indicates the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The value obtained (.833), close to 1, suggests that the data are highly factorizable. On the other hand, the significance of Bartlett's test result (Chi-Square = 793.78, p .000), less than .001, indicates that factor analysis is appropriate for the data (see Table 5). The good results of both tests for assessing the adequacy of the sample allow us to move forward with the factor analysis (Table 6-7).

Table 6
EFA of interaction ways: Total explained variance

Com-ponent	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation sum of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	Variance	Cumulative
1	4089	45.432	45.432	3.525	39.168	39.168
2	1683	18.697	64.128	2.246	24.960	64.128

Of the nine (9) initial components, those two with an initial eigenvalue greater than 1 are retained. In this factor analysis, the variance explained reaches 64.128% of the total variance from the identification of two factors (Table 6).

Table 7
EFA of Interaction ways. Matrix of rotated components (a)

Items	Components	
Teachers become leaders by:	1	2
Interacting with the principal or managers	.877	
Interacting with specialists	.704	
Interacting with colleagues	.785	
Participating in community associations		.824
Participating in professional associations		.790
Participating in trade union associations		.782

Note: (a) Rotation of 3 iterations

The analysis identified two factors associated with the ways of interaction to become a leader. The items associated with each factor are listed in the table above. The first factor, labelled "Interacting inside the school", explained 39.17% of the variance and included three items. The second factor, called "Interacting outside the school" explained 24.96% of the variance and included three items also (see Table 4).

Actions and Practices of Influence of the Teacher Leader According to Their Scope
Reliability of the Scale

According to Cronbach's Alpha test, this scale presents high reliability (.85). This value would be reduced if some of the items considered were eliminated. The highest correlation value (Square Multiple Correlation) between items reaches .45.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

First, it is necessary to evaluate whether the sample size is adequate for EFA in this particular theme (Table 8).

Table 8
EFA of Actions and practices of influence of the teacher leaders. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO		0.785
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	858.368
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

The KMO value indicates the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The value obtained (.785), close to 1, suggests that the data are highly factorizable. On the other hand, the significance of Bartlett's test result (Chi-Square = 858.368, p .000), less than .001, indicates that factor analysis is appropriate for the data (Table 8). The good results of both tests for assessing the adequacy of the sample allow us to move forward with the factor analysis (Tables 9-10).

Table 9
EFA of Actions and practices of influence of the teacher leaders. Total explained variance

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation sum of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	Variance	Cumulative
1	4.428	27.675	27.675	2.385	14.908	14.908
2	1.640	10.248	37.923	2.016	12.602	27.510
3	1.509	9.433	47.356	1.965	12.279	39.789
4	1.206	7.540	54.897	1.847	11.543	51.332
5	1.028	6.427	61.324	1.599	9.992	61.324

Of the sixteen (16) initial components, those five with an initial eigenvalue greater than 1 are retained. In this factor analysis, the variance explained reaches 61.324% of the total variance from the identification of five factors (Table 9).

Table 10

Factor analysis of actions and practices of influence of the teacher leader. Matrix of rotated components (a)

Items	Component				
The teacher leader:	1	2	3	4	5
Supports students with special needs	.804				
Supports student diversity	.661				
Innovates in the classroom	.638				
Supports professional development of colleagues		.707			
Supports colleagues to be innovative		.690			
Promotes team productivity		.633			
Supports novice teachers		.629			
Engages with families			.817		
Engages with the community			.777		
Involved with the management team			.631		
Improves personal qualification				.674	
Demonstrates strong relational skills				.646	
Leads curriculum implementation					.841
Leads assessment practices					.755

Note: (a) Rotation of 7 iterations.

The analysis identified five factors that characterize the profile of a teacher leader. The items associated with each factor are listed in the table above. The first factor, labelled "Classroom Sphere", explained 14.9% of the variance and included three items. The second factor, called "School Sphere", explained 12.6% of the variance and included four items. The third factor, called "Principal and Community Spheres", explained 12.3% of the variance and included three items. The fourth factor, called "Personal Sphere", explained 11.5% of the variance and included two items and the fifth factor, called "Professional Sphere", explained 9.99% of the variance and included two items also (Table 10).

In summary, the results of the EFAs when approaching the conception of teacher leadership from the two conceptual dimensions mentioned in the theoretical framework follow. Teacher leaders are characterized by a set of attributes, such as being a "model professional" with a "supportive attitude toward others", having "professional experience" or being a "talented novice", having "social justice orientation" and "popularity". Together, these factors together explain 61% of the data variance. In addition to these attributes, the developmental ways to becoming a leader include, first, "interacting within the school" with all its members and, second, "participating outside the school" in education-related organizations. These factors together explain 64.1% of the data variance.

Regarding the extent of their influence as leaders through certain actions and practices, teacher leaders primarily influence the "classroom setting," followed by the "school organizational setting," then the "principal and school community setting," and finally the

"personal setting" and the "professional setting". Together, these factors together explain 61.3% of the data variance.

Discussion

From a classical leadership perspective, the teacher leader is perhaps the most genuine form of leadership in education. Teacher leaders are recognized by their peers for their personal characteristics, professional practices and their ability to positively influence the school and its community. Unlike the principal's leadership, teacher leadership does not confer a formal position that legitimizes his or her authority over their colleagues or establishes an asymmetrical relationship with them that could be used to influence their behavior. Although the weight of circumstances in this regard is clear, nothing obliges a teacher to recognize a colleague as a leader.

In this first exploratory study conducted in Argentina, the results obtained show that teacher leaders are recognized as such when they possess certain attributes or characteristics that make them a "model professional". They have high personal and professional standards and have demonstrated competence in effectively managing classroom environments and resolving conflicts. These characteristics are also accompanied by a strong work ethic and the initiative to drive change, which are considered fundamental in a leader.

Teacher leaders are also considered to be characterized by their "attitude or intention to support" each and every member of the educational community. At the same time, they have extensive "professional experience". This is measured by their experience of teaching and evaluation, as well as their years of work in the education system. However, in the case of novice teachers, this can be substituted with expertise, considering that they are "inexperienced but capable". Finally, they consider that the teacher leader is popular among colleagues and is clearly "oriented towards social justice".

On the other hand, principals and teachers believe that good teachers become leaders based on the aforementioned characteristics and their recognition by peers through various forms of interactions. First, they do so through 'interactions within the school' with principals, specialists and colleagues. Second, they believe that teachers become leaders through "interactions outside the school", participating in groups outside the school, such as community associations, professional associations and unions. Other ways such as interactions with mentors and supervisors and the possibility of achieving it through university training were excluded.

In relation to the second objective of this study, and considering the theoretical framework, it is evident that teacher leaders exert influence through different actions and practices in domains of increased scope. The results suggest that the most significant factor relates to the second domain which is "classroom sphere". Teacher leaders exert significant influence in this sphere through their innovative classroom practices, particularly in supporting students with diverse needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

A second factor relates to the third domain "school sphere", which primarily concerns school colleagues. Teacher leaders impact team productivity. They facilitate the professional development of their colleagues and encourage innovation, paying particular attention to novices. A third factor relates to the third and fourth spheres of influence, concerning the principal's team and families, and the wider community, respectively. Teachers recognize that leaders engage with all these groups and their interests.

The final two factors relate to the first theoretical domain which refers to the "personal and professional sphere". Specifically, teacher leaders enhance their professional qualifications,

positioning them as leaders in curriculum implementation and general assessment. They also demonstrate an ability to establish and maintain relationships with others. So, it is considered that the teacher leader has influence in domains of increased scope, from classroom to community, but is weaker when it comes to himself or herself, in terms of enhancing one's own abilities and practices.

Based on the results obtained, it can be affirmed that the findings are consistent with the ISTL framework of which this study is a part (Webber et al., 2023), including those of Nguyen et al. (2020), Gratacós et al. (2024), and Tintoré et al. (2023). In all cases, the concept of teacher leader considers students and their learning to be fundamental and a priority. It also recognizes that professionalism and interpersonal skills are the basis on which a teacher can become a leader by being recognized as such by his or her colleagues. This profile includes innovation, promotion of change, attention to diversity, and involvement with all aspects of the school and the community. This study found all these aspects in the conception of teacher leadership in Argentina, though there was a greater emphasis on popularity than on accountability.

Additionally, they recognize their capacity to influence in increasing spheres. These aspects are also found in other definitions of teacher leaders, such as Gurr and Nicholas (2023), who state that being a 'good teacher' is not enough to be a leader. Rather, their influence must extend to the school and its context, including support links with colleagues, managers, families, and the community. This highlights the element of "connectivity" that these authors distinguish in teacher leaders. Similarly, it coincides with Hunzicker's (2022) distinction between teacher professionalism, which involves good classroom practices and teaching responsibility, and leadership, which extends its influence to the school, families, and community.

Suggestions for Further Research and Implications for Practice

These results, when added to the theoretical models that are still under construction, enable us to suggest some ideas and questions for future research. First, Gurr and Nicholas's (2023) study affirms that many of these characteristics, practices and interactions resemble those of a 'good teacher'. Hunzicker, on the other hand, distinguishes between acts of professionalism and acts of leadership. Therefore, beyond the attributes and the relational capacity of a teacher leader, what other factors or circumstances contribute to a 'good teacher' becoming a leader?

Second, this study recognizes the teacher leaders for their attributes and the ways of interacting to become a leader, as well as their influence in spheres of increasing reach, from the classroom to the community. Traditionally, they would be considered 'total leaders'. However, is it possible to identify some essential practices that specifically contribute to the implementation of a planned distribution of school leadership (Gronn, 2002)?

Additionally, considering methodological terms in the context of predictive studies of learning, how can the dual effect of the teacher leader's influence be measured? On the one hand, there is the direct effect of teaching and, on the other hand, there is the indirect effect on organizational and community conditions. Additionally, in practice, what indicators can also help a principal to identify teacher leaders and assess their capacity to participate in leadership distribution or establish an informal support network? Finally, could some in-service learning options be implemented to develop basic teacher leadership practices to facilitate this distribution of leadership?

Based on the findings of this study, we advance two recommendations for practice. First, for principals, it is crucial to adopt a leadership style that acknowledges the potential distribution

of leadership among school members, especially teachers. Without such recognition, teacher leadership has limited chances to emerge and be sustained. Consequently, school leaders are encouraged to promote strategies and criteria to identify teacher leaders and to provide them with concrete development opportunities. Concurrently, it is necessary to build an institutional environment that supports collaboration and provides adequate resources, like time, space, and incentives, that enable teacher leaders to broaden the reach of their influence.

Secondly, teacher training, both initial and continuing, provides a conducive environment in which to begin developing teacher leadership from the earliest stages of their professional career. This raises several key questions: What content should be incorporated? What formative experiences should be offered? Reviewing teacher education programs in light of the findings presented in this study represents an opportunity to embed teacher leadership across both initial training and ongoing professional development.

Conclusion

This exploratory study is an initial step in researching teacher leadership in Argentina. It offers an approximation of its conception, considering two aspects. On one hand, attributes and ways of interacting that lead to becoming a leader and, on other hand, it considers the scope of influence through actions and practices in increasing spheres. However, due to the characteristics of the sample, exploring variations of this conception based on teachers' sociodemographic and occupational differences remains to be done.

The main findings indicate that teacher leaders are distinguished by certain attributes. The most important attribute is a strong professional profile, which includes professional experience or expertise among novices. Their professionalism is complemented by a supportive attitude toward others and a commitment to social justice. Unlike other studies, in this one, teacher leaders are recognized as popular among their colleagues. While these attributes are necessary, they are not sufficient. It is considered that their peers must recognize them as such through different ways of interacting with all members of their school or through actions in educational organizations outside their school. However, these interactions do not include relationships with school supervisors or university training.

It is conceived that teacher leaders extend their influence beyond the classroom to their colleagues, the school, and the community. Although it is expected that they continually seek to improve their professional qualifications, the personal sphere of influence is the least significant. These findings resemble those obtained in other research with minor differences and represent a step forward that will hopefully pave the way for future studies.

As previously mentioned, the field of educational leadership has not received much attention in Argentina. However, given its close relationship to teaching and learning, as well as its potential for improving schools, this trend should be reversed. In a context that urgently calls for improving poor educational outcomes, the present study aims to contribute to this effort.

Acknowledgments

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