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Exploring teacher leadership: A study of leadership practices among TESOL professionals in the Arab world

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Abstract: This exploratory study delves into the concept of teacher leadership within the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) context in Qatar. It investigates the strategies employed by TESOL professionals to enhance their leadership practices and identifies factors influencing the realization of teacher leadership in this particular setting. Utilizing an interpretive approach, the study employs semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data from TESOL professionals serving as teacher leaders in five different universities in Qatar. The findings reveal several strategies employed by teacher leaders to enhance their practices, including collaborative team efforts, maintenance of reflective diaries, participation in international conferences, attendance at professional development courses, and volunteering as editors and reviewers. These strategies support teacher leaders in their roles, facilitating on-the-job learning and keeping them abreast of new developments in English Language Teaching (ELT). The study also uncovers various factors that negatively impact teacher leaders' practices. These include a lack of professional autonomy, the absence of teachers' voices in the decision-making process, increased workload and accountability, and a lack of trust and support. Inadequate professional development opportunities and lower levels of intrinsic motivation hinder teacher leaders from developing leadership skills, acquiring knowledge, and shaping a strong leadership identity.

Keywords: EFL context; professional development; teacher leadership; TESOL professionals; leadership structures

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, educational leadership models have shifted their emphasis towards encouraging widespread participation in organizational affairs. In educational settings, distributed leadership has supplanted more traditional and hierarchical leadership models, offering teachers numerous opportunities to assume diverse leadership roles within the classroom, the profession, and the organization [1]. This evolving model of distributed leadership has introduced a new theoretical perspective, particularly in the form of teacher leadership. This involves teachers throughout the institute taking on instructional leadership roles and contributing to organizational outcomes.

Teacher leadership has become an integral aspect of change and reform in educational contexts worldwide. Advocates of teacher leadership insist that educators should expand their engagement beyond instructional responsibilities and actively participate in organizational activities. They argue that educators, equipped with firsthand experience in students' learning needs, curriculum design, teacher professional development, and contextual challenges, can significantly contribute to

organizational effectiveness through this extension of their role.

This demand is also noticeable in the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) profession, where TESOL teachers are expected to surpass their classroom duties and assume various middle-level leadership roles, including curriculum designers, academic coordinators, mentors, lead teachers, and teacher trainers. TESOL professionals working in the Arabian Gulf are not exempt from this demand and practice. Observation indicates that teacher leadership in TESOL does, to some extent, exist in the Arab world. Teachers in the region, particularly those working in the higher education sector, not only teach courses in the English language programmes of the universities but also shoulder additional leadership responsibilities. These teachers also actively participate in various forms of professional development activities to enhance their leadership capacity, even though such development is not a formal institutional requirement or structure. This voluntary undertaking by teachers occurs without institutional support.

However, despite this observance of practice, there is a dearth of empirical studies on teacher leadership practices among TESOL professionals in the Arab world. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the dynamics of TESOL professionals' practices of teacher leadership in this part of the world. Current research tries to bridge this gap by qualitatively investigating these practices in the case context of Qatari higher education. The overarching research questions leading the research are:

- 1) How do TESOL professionals in higher education institutions in Qatar enhance their leadership practices as teacher leaders?
- 2) What factors may influence the teacher leadership practices of TESOL professionals in higher education institutions in Qatar?

Qatar's education system, characterized by a commitment to providing high-quality education in alignment with international standards, plays a pivotal role in fostering a knowledge-based society. Education is compulsory for all Qatari citizens, and the government places a strong emphasis on developing skills and competencies that align with the nation's economic and societal goals. Within this framework, the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) holds significant importance. As Qatar positions itself as a global hub, proficiency in the English language becomes crucial for effective communication, international collaboration, and participation in the global economy. TESOL majors, therefore, play a vital role in meeting this demand by equipping students with the linguistic skills necessary for success in an interconnected and diverse world. Their significance is further underscored by the invaluable contribution they make to Qatar's educational objectives, aligning with the nation's vision of cultivating a workforce capable of engaging on an international scale. Within this dynamic educational landscape, the demand for teacher leadership within the TESOL profession becomes even more critical. Recognizing the unique context of Qatar as a global hub with a commitment to international engagement and linguistic proficiency, this setting stands as a representative and suitable case study for understanding teacher leadership practices within the broader Arab world.

2. Literature review

The term teacher leadership has been extensively discussed in the literature since its introduction in 1916 by John Dewey, who proposed an active role for teachers in school governance. Its formal use began in the 1980s during the educational reform movement in the US and has since evolved through three waves, as highlighted by Silva et al. [2]. In the first wave, teachers were viewed as administrative leaders including roles as head teachers, master teachers, department heads. The second wave identified teachers as instructional leaders encompassing positions such as professional development specialists, curriculum experts, and mentors. The third wave broadened the scope to include team leaders, change agents, and advocates of collaborative and shared leadership practices [2].

Despite the criticism of these waves [3], a recent study by Shah [4] identifies glimpses of all three waves in various teacher leadership roles in the Saudi EFL context. At the beginning of the 21st century, TESOL gained recognition as a profession, and language teachers assumed roles similar to those in the third wave [5]. Consistent with the three waves, Harris [6] outlined three developmental phases: formal positions, such as a department head or school principal; instructional leadership roles including curriculum developer or mentor; and the most recent phase in which teachers are “viewed as central to the process of generating organisational development and change through their collaborative and instructional endeavors and efforts” [6, p. 206].

Although scholars have not provided an explicit and universally agreed-upon definition of teacher leadership [3,4,7,8], the existing literature often share some features of the third wave [2] and the three developmental phases [6]. Despite the acknowledgment that the concept of teacher leadership “continues to be ill-defined in the research” [9, p. 2], it is essential to include these definitions to comprehend the conceptual complexity of teacher leadership.

According to the most cited definition in the literature by Katzenmeyer and Moller [10], teacher leaders “lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of that leadership” [10, p. 6]. The first-ever meta-analysis on teacher leadership by York-Barr and Duke [3] defines teacher leadership as a “process by which teachers, individually and collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” [3, p. 287]. Similarly, in their review of studies on teacher leadership, Wenner and Campbell [7] describe teacher leaders as “teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” [p. 5].

Building upon the definition by York-Barr and Duke [3], Öqvist and Malmström [11] theorize teacher leadership as “a behavior, a mobilization of the available attributes of teachers to influence students at the ground level during their daily activities at school, within and outside the classroom, and beyond” [p. 156]. Similarly, Smith et al. [12] consider it “an influential, non-supervisory process focused on improving instructional practice, with student learning as the paramount goal” [p.

267]. Shah [4] posits that the definitions by York-Barr and Duke [3] and Katzenmeyer and Moller [10] fit in the Saudi higher education context as teacher leaders “lead within and beyond the classroom premises and are not completely detached from classroom teaching. In addition, their leadership roles are assigned to them in the light of pedagogical and professional expertise, enabling them to influence their colleagues, work together towards a common goal, and achieve institutional outcomes” [10, p. 36]. A summary of all these characteristics of teacher leadership can be seen in the definition by Criswell et al. [13]:

- 1) An individual gains a deep understanding of educational practice, and of oneself in relation to that practice and to the system, both locally and more broadly.
- 2) Through these understandings, the individual can collaborate with others to develop a vision for producing innovation in the system, which, within school systems, means improving the practice of teaching and learning.
- 3) As part of realizing that vision, the individual is capable of empowering others to promote change and can modify and marshal available resources in a manner that ensures that this change is both productive and sustainable.

2.1. Pathways to improving teacher leadership practices

Numerous empirical studies have investigated the strategies employed by teacher leaders to enhance their leadership practices in diverse educational contexts worldwide. For instance, Inman [14] delved into the lifetime experiences of leader-academics, examining their journey to leadership in UK universities. Utilizing semi-structured and biographical interviews, the study revealed that critical incidents, the influence of significant individuals, self-directed learning, on-the-job informal learning, formal mentoring, participation in networks, and reflection on practices were key strategies assisting academic leaders in fulfilling their roles. These findings align with Stephenson [15] study, which explored the perspectives and identity formation of five TESOL leaders globally.

Interpretive studies in the US context by Rhodes and Brundrett [16] and Newsom [17] uncovered similar approaches, including collaborative efforts, a commitment to professional learning, providing opportunities for direct leadership experience, mentorship, engagement in formal and informal professional development activities, the ability to transition between various leadership roles, and the cultivation of constructive working relationships with colleagues and administrators. Qualitative studies in the western school context also identified diverse pathways to improving teacher leadership practices. These pathways encompassed an understanding of school and cultural issues, shared motivation, content and pedagogical knowledge, critical reflection, and interpersonal skills [18]. Other studies highlighted aspects such as learning through leadership experiences, exposure to research-based practices, self-efficacy, a commitment to organizational effectiveness within professional learning communities [19], informal experiential learning, leadership experiences outside the workplace, and participation in formal professional development opportunities [20].

Furthermore, research emphasized the importance of powerful learning experiences, self-confidence, and professional collaboration [21], as well as the significance of professional relationships, informal collaboration, trust, and

collegiality [22]. Additional factors contributing to teacher leadership practices included initial impactful events, the presence of driving passions, and the role of administrators in the development and support of teacher leaders [23]. These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of teacher leadership development and provide valuable insights into effective strategies and practices across various educational settings.

Effective leadership practices have been consistently associated with the ongoing professional learning and capacity building of teachers in leadership roles. The literature underscores the importance of creating conducive conditions for teacher leadership development [24], providing continuous professional support from top leadership [4], and fostering collaborative learning within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as advocated by DuFour [25]. Preskill and Brookfield [26] propose that effective leaders enable others by providing “opportunities to employ fully their experience and talents” [p. 4]. Similarly, Stephenson [1], in her narrative inquiry of five TESOL leaders, identified three crucial elements contributing to their leadership capacity: informal leadership development opportunities, the pivotal roles of leadership learning, and leadership development through mentoring/coaching and relational leadership.

Highlighting the essential traits of EFL teacher leaders—collegiality, collaboration, and reflection—Shah [4] underscores the role of PLCs and Communities of Practice (CoPs) in an EFL context. In these settings, EFL teachers in leadership roles can learn and develop leadership knowledge and skills through both formal and informal means. This emphasizes the significance of creating a supportive environment, continuous learning opportunities, and collaborative structures to enhance the leadership practices of teachers in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

In the realm of informal learning and the enhancement of leadership practices, Shah [4] proposes a theoretical model grounded in four major theories from the literature, supporting the development of teacher leaders in an English Language Teaching (ELT) context. These theories include Lave and Wenger’s [27] Community of Practice (CoP), DuFour’s [25] Professional Learning Community (PLC), Vygotsky’s [28] Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and Kolb’s [29] Experiential Learning Theory.

Lave and Wenger’s [27] practice-based theory views learning within the context of lived experiences through social involvement in CoPs. CoPs provide a platform for social interaction, situated experiences, and shared activities. Similarly, DuFour’s [25] PLC offers organizational-specific learning to transform individuals’ dispositions and enhance their skills collaboratively. The essential characteristic of PLC lies in its commitment to organizational effectiveness, as it is dedicated to the idea that the organization exists to ensure that all students learn essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Participation of teacher leaders in CoPs and PLCs fosters a collaborative school context, where interactive activities with colleagues’ aid in the development of their ZPD and enhance their ability to accomplish tasks.

Moreover, Kolb’s [29] Experiential Learning Theory and reflective models by Dewey [30], Schön [31], and Wallace [32] support teacher leaders’ professional learning through experiencing leadership roles in an informal and unstructured

manner. Reflecting upon their leadership practices, making sense of their experiences, and attributing meaning to their actions contribute to the continuous development of teacher leaders.

2.2. Challenges to teacher leadership

Teacher leadership is a phenomenon specific to its context and can manifest differently in various educational settings, including English Language Teaching (ELT) institutes worldwide. Scholars have identified several organizational and professional barriers that may impede the implementation of teacher leadership and the development of teacher leaders in educational contexts. For instance, Murphy [33] and Sanocki [19] argue that a collaborative and learning school culture may be challenging to achieve in the presence of highly bureaucratic and hierarchical school cultures of authority. Silva et al. [2] also emphasize that “organizational characteristics and structural components can adversely impact the work of teacher leaders” [p. 790]. Other researchers have documented challenges deeply rooted in traditional teacher professional norms, such as privacy, restrictive organizational structures, egalitarianism, and isolation [3,4,7].

One of the key features of hierarchical structures is control and accountability, which can result in the failure to achieve a common organizational goal [34]. Such organizations often assign additional responsibilities, heavy workloads, and lack professional support, leading to burnout, anxiety, and isolation for teacher leaders in a school context [35]. In the Saudi higher education context, Shah [4] found that a top-down bureaucratic system hindered teacher leadership practices; however, teacher leaders managed to achieve organizational goals through collaborative and reflective practices. Operating in the middle of the organizational hierarchy as teacher leaders, they effectively filled the leadership gap [36].

In a recent study, Zydziunaite et al. [37] identified teacher workload, teacher self-esteem, and time allocated to a wide range of activities as major challenges that directly affected teachers’ roles as leaders in a school context. Such determinants impact teachers’ performance and teaching quality and have been widely investigated in educational contexts. However, there is little empirical evidence demonstrating their relevance in teacher leadership studies, particularly in ELT. Hence, “the relationship between teacher workload, time allocation, self-esteem, and leadership need to be defined and managed at the institutional and individual levels to avoid potentially undesirable effects and counterproductive teaching and learning behaviors” [37, p. 948].

3. Methodology

This research has adopted a qualitative research methodology withing an interpretative approach to study teacher leadership practices of TESOL professionals, understand their perspectives, and make sense of their varied and context-specific experiences. According to Smith [38], “For interpretive approaches, the object field to be studied is the acts and meanings ascribed to events by actors in a particular social context” [p. 140]. This resonates with Marshall and Rossman [39] argument that, “For a study focusing on individual lived experience, the researcher could argue that one

cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to these actions, their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds” [p. 57]. As this study aims to explore the TESOL professionals’ lived experiences in their leadership roles in five different Arab countries, an interpretivist methodology is appropriate for this research to give meanings to their context-specific experiences.

In line with interpretivist methodology, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from five purposively chosen TESOL professionals. Semi-structured interviews helped me acquire “thoroughly tested knowledge” [40, p. 3] from the participants. The interview questions (please see Appendix) were developed based on the reviewed literature and my personal observation of leadership practices of TESOL professionals while working in two different Arab countries. All the participants were interviewed on Microsoft Teams, and the interviews were recorded on a password-protected MacBook Pro. The average time that the interviews lasted was 40 min. All interviews were conducted in English.

3.1. Participants

This study employed a purposive sampling technique to gather qualitative data from five TESOL professionals well-positioned to provide in-depth insights into the nature of teacher leadership practices in Qatar. Initially, twelve TESOL professionals from five different universities were contacted via email. However, only five of them expressed interest in the study and subsequently signed a consent form. All participants were briefed on the study’s objectives and data collection procedures. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms chosen by the participants were consistently used throughout the study. Further details about the five participants are provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Research participants’ details.

Pseudonym	Nationality	Academic qualification	Teacher leadership role	Total years of leadership experience	Years of leadership experience in Qatar
Joseph	South African	MA in Curriculum Development	Head of Curriculum Unit	18	10
Sarah	British	MA TESOL	Professional Development Specialist	15	8
Ahmad	Canadian	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Head of the department	15	5
Susan	American	PhD Applied Linguistics	Director Research Centre	20	7
Omer	Pakistani	EdD in TESOL	Academic Coordinator	17	6

3.2. Data analysis

Following the guidelines outlined by Creswell and Poth [41] and Saldaña [42], a thematic analysis approach was employed to analyze the data in five distinct stages.

Initially, the interview transcripts were read multiple times to gain an understanding of the participants' lived experiences and enhance familiarity with the content. In the second stage, the first cycle of open coding was initiated, resulting in the development of 120 initial codes. Subsequently, common patterns in the data were identified, leading to the condensation of codes to 70 in the third stage. In the fourth stage, these 70 codes were grouped under 12 broad categories, as presented in **Table 2**. Finally, these categories were consolidated into two overarching themes in the concluding stage.

Table 2. Thematic categories.

Theme 1: Approaches to leadership development	Theme 2: Factors affecting teacher leadership practices
1) Teamwork and collegiality	7) Professional autonomy
2) Collaborative research	8) Professional development opportunities
3) Diary writing and critical reflection	9) Workload and accountability
4) Membership of international organisations	10) Intrinsic motivation
5) Professional courses	11) Content knowledge
6) Membership of editorial boards/journals	12) Trust and support from top leadership

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Approaches to leadership development

The participants unanimously emphasized the crucial role of collaborative practices in undertaking leadership roles and achieving organizational outcomes. Teacher leadership is deemed effective when there is cooperation and interaction among TESOL professionals, leading to improved leadership practices and facilitating on-the-job learning [14,16,17,21]. *“Nothing can be achieved without teamwork and open communication. A task is never done by one person and teamwork is always required. As a leader, working in a team exposes you to new learning”* (Susan).

Collegiality is particularly significant in a context where teachers from diverse cultures and countries collaborate within the same organization. *“We come from different backgrounds with different beliefs and perceptions. In a leadership role, it’s extremely important to take this aspect into consideration and see things from others’ lens as well. It’s an easy way to develop collaborative leadership model”* (Joseph). Collaboration closely aligns with the concepts of Community of Practice (CoP) and Professional Learning Community (PLC), providing individuals with a platform to exchange ideas and learn from each other in informal and unstructured ways. Moreover, the participants’ capacity to work together provides them with opportunities for on-the-job learning and the development of leadership skills, resembling a form of experiential learning [29].

Collaboration as a means of achieving leadership outcomes is a commonly employed strategy. However, the participants highlighted collaborative research as a novel approach. All participants expressed research interests and engaged in joint studies that aid them in both their instructional and leadership roles. This approach enables them to align their leadership practices with research-based practices from

other contexts [43,44]. *“One thing that really made me a different leader is my research. I read, write, reflect on the findings, and share with colleagues. Every time, I publish a study, I find myself a better person. No doubt, group research is more effective in terms of quality and learning”* (Ahmad). Another notable approach mentioned by the participants is diary writing, which contributes to their learning and development as teacher leaders. Each participant considers it a deliberate effort to evaluate their own practices and plan future projects. This practice involves critical reflection, which becomes more effective when expressed in writing [14]. *“Diary writing is my way of jotting down what goes well or wrong every day. It’s very time consuming but a wonderful way of assessing my own practice as a professional development specialist”* (Sarah). Omer explained the impact of diary writing on his leadership practice: *“I have lots of tasks every day and it’s not easy for me to memorise everything that takes place at the department. So, I write everyday to reflect on my daily activities and think about the next day”* (Omer).

In general, universities in Qatar encourage teachers to showcase their research in international conferences and become part of conference organizing committees. All the participants have active memberships in international organizations, such as TESOL Qatar, TESOL Arabia, IATEFL, and TESOL International, which allow them to network and develop their capacity as teachers and leaders [1]. *“I eagerly wait for the conferences around the world to attend as well as present my research findings. There are lots of learning opportunities in conferences for experienced and novice researchers”* (Susan). These conferences contribute to the leadership development of TESOL professionals as pointed out by Sarah: *“There’re workshops and short courses offered by leaders in the field. I personally find them very helpful in keeping myself up-do-date as a PD specialist.”* Formal learning opportunities manifest in the form of professional development (PD) courses; however, collaborative and collegial practices serve as informal learning opportunities that equally contribute to the enhancement of leadership practices for TESOL professionals in Qatar [22].

The participants demonstrated a commitment to their professional development as TESOL leaders by investing both time and money. They engaged in PD courses, both online and on-campus, and actively volunteered for editorial roles in international journals. *“As a research director, I have to keep on improving my research skills and for that I frequently review articles for peer-reviewed journals and attended a summer course on Research Methods at Manchester University, UK”* (Susan). Participating in editorial boards serves as an effective avenue for professional development, where participants engage in reviewing articles, providing feedback, and interacting with other professionals in the field. *“It’s a community service to help journals with article review, but I believe it’s a great way to keep myself in touch with new developments in the field”* (Omer). This proactive approach underscores the participants’ constant pursuit of professional growth, demonstrating their commitment to learning from both informal and formal opportunities [43,44].

4.2. Factors affecting teacher leadership practices

Several factors surfaced in the data that can have a negative influence on the teacher leadership practices of TESOL professionals in Qatar. Due to typical top-down

leadership structures, teachers as leaders often lack a voice in the decision-making process, leading to ineffective leadership practices [3,4,7,8]. *“As a leader in the middle of the hierarchy, I sometimes feel helpless and hapless due to the bureaucratic structures of the university where decisions are made at the top and teachers’ views are given zero importance”* (Joseph). Omer also emphasized the role of teacher empowerment in fostering teacher leadership skills. Additionally, in the presence of a trust deficit, teachers may not be able to perform to the best of their abilities. *“Top leadership has to develop a culture of trust and interdependence. An institution can obtain its goals only if teachers have autonomy and their relationships with leadership are based on trust”* (Omer).

The findings further indicate that the leadership roles of TESOL professionals heavily depend on support from top management, as pointed out by Sarah: *“If I have to implement institutional policies and delegate tasks to my colleagues as their leaders, I must have unconditional support from the management.”* The participants also believe that support is crucial for creating and developing professional learning opportunities in the organization [2]. *“The university needs to arrange workshops based on the learning needs of the teachers and leaders. Teachers should be supported in their further studies and grants should be given to attend courses abroad. This investment will have a long-lasting impact on the institutional outcomes”* (Ahmad).

The findings reveal that while the organization has a responsibility to offer professional learning opportunities, teachers in leadership roles need to have a personal drive for learning and seek opportunities within and beyond their organizations [23]. Teachers lacking a personal inclination for learning may not be as effective as leaders and may struggle to gain the trust of their colleagues. *“There’re loads of learning opportunities one can benefit from. I think there are virtual conferences, webinars, and online lectures almost every week that we can utilise. So, we shouldn’t expect everything from the management, rather make things happen for ourselves”* (Susan). Since a driving passion is key to successful teacher leadership practices [23], its absence can yield no positive results. Therefore, institutional policies need to support teacher leaders in terms of workload. *“I know I should take responsibility for my own learning and make myself a better professional in my current role. I must have intrinsic motivation, but having that motivation is sometimes difficult due to the workload, teaching hours, and student assessment”* (Sarah). Joseph also indicated the impact of evaluation policies on the leadership practices: *“In a context where you have to tread so cautiously due to stringent accountability, it’s never easy to do your best. Teachers and leaders are always on their toes and fear the wrath of top management in case of any self-initiated action. You have no job security whatsoever.”* Therefore, control and accountability can directly affect teachers’ performance and teacher leaders’ practices, leading to compromised organizational outcomes [4].

The lack of intrinsic motivation affects teachers’ efforts to avail themselves of leadership learning opportunities and improve their leadership practices. Consequently, they often fail to keep themselves abreast of new developments in the field and to develop skills and knowledge related to their roles [18]. This failure to meet the expectations of management and colleagues results in a compromised leadership identity. *“A leader is a learner and there is no end to learning. What I have*

seen is that sometimes we are in leadership roles just to secure our jobs. This survival strategy doesn't help us learn and become strong professionals as leaders" (Ahmad). Susan emphasized the significance of knowledge and skills that shape the teacher leader's identity and help them influence colleagues as well as top leadership [15]: "We derive our strength from our pedagogical knowledge and skills. Colleagues can only recognise you as a leader when they see you as a competent teachers and established researcher. Your professionalism shapes your identity as a leader in this profession."

5. Conclusion

This exploratory study has investigated the notion of teacher leadership in the State of Qatar, where TESOL professionals from around the world operate in numerous leadership roles in private and public universities. The key aims of the study were to understand how teacher leaders improve their leadership practices and identify factors that affect the teacher leadership practices of TESOL professionals in their respective organizations. The qualitative data were collected from five TESOL professionals who work at five different universities in Qatar.

The findings have revealed several strategies that teacher leaders employ to improve their leadership practices. These strategies include working in teams, writing reflective diaries, participating in international conferences, attending PD courses, and volunteering as editors and reviewers. These strategies support them in their roles, enable them to learn on the job, and keep them abreast of new developments in the field of ELT as teacher leaders.

On the other hand, several factors can have a negative influence on the teacher leaders' practices. For example, lack of professional autonomy, the absence of teachers' voice in the decision-making process, increased workload and accountability, and a lack of trust and support can be detrimental to TESOL professionals' efforts as leaders. Moreover, due to inadequate PD activities and a lower level of intrinsic motivation, teacher leaders may not be able to develop leadership skills, acquire knowledge, and shape a strong leadership identity.

The study has delved into the novel concept of teacher leadership in Qatar from the perspective of TESOL professionals. It is significant as it offers insights into how teacher leaders might utilize these context-specific strategies to improve their leadership practices. Simultaneously, teachers in their leadership roles can reflect upon the contextual barriers mentioned in this study that can be overcome through individualized and contextualized support.

The study puts forward three recommendations. First, for teachers in leadership roles, it is important to develop collegial relationships and initiate collaborative practices to achieve organizational outcomes. Second, motivation to conduct research studies, a thirst for learning, and availing of formal and informal professional development opportunities will enable teacher leaders to take control of their own professional growth. Finally, higher education institutions need to foster a culture of trust and support and give importance to teachers' voices, contributing to improved teaching, learning, and institutional outcomes.

While the study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its

limitations. The sample size of five participants from specific universities may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the focus on TESOL professionals in Qatar may not fully capture the diversity of teacher leadership experiences in other educational contexts. Future research should consider expanding the sample and exploring teacher leadership in different global settings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this dynamic phenomenon.

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Appendix

Interview protocol

- 1) Can you briefly outline your role as a TESOL professional in a Qatari higher education institution?
- 2) How would you describe the current state of teacher leadership within TESOL in Qatar?
- 3) In what specific ways do you enhance your leadership practices within TESOL in higher education?
- 4) Can you share examples of leadership roles you've undertaken beyond the traditional classroom setting?
- 5) What personal or professional experiences shape your decision to take on leadership roles?
- 6) How do organizational structures and policies impact your ability to engage in teacher leadership activities?
- 7) What challenges do you encounter in promoting teacher leadership in TESOL in Qatar?
- 8) Have you encountered specific opportunities or support mechanisms that facilitate your engagement in leadership activities?
- 9) How do you actively participate in professional development to enhance your leadership capacity?
- 10) Can you provide examples of how professional development has contributed to your effectiveness as a teacher leader?