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Elements, Contexts, and Attributes of Teacher Leadership Identified by College Professors in southeastern Mexico

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Abstract

Teacher leadership has its beginnings in Western countries as a response to fast changes that have taken place in the social, political, and economic environments. Currently in the Latin American context it has become a focus of interest for educational researchers particularly because the incipient research on the topic in these contexts. This study focused on knowing the elements, contexts, and attributes identified by college teachers about teacher leadership southeastern Mexico. All full-time faculty from a college at a public university (50) participated in this study, 20% of whom have formal administrative functions in addition to their teaching. The main findings show that: the main elements that are related to the concept of teacher leadership are behaviors focused on interpersonal relationships and school innovation. Regarding the contexts, the development of teacher leadership is often based on institutional context and collaborative work. Regarding the attributes, special emphasis is placed on interpersonal relationships, change, and individual development and recognition. No significant differences were found in the perceptions of participants who have an administrative appointment and those who do not, regarding the contexts and attributes of teacher leadership, except for the elements of the concept of teacher leadership between men and women.

Keywords

Leadership, teachers, elements, context, attributes

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Elementos, Contextos y Atributos del Liderazgo Docente Identificados por Profesores Universitarios del Sureste de México

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Resumen

El liderazgo docente tiene sus inicios en los países occidentales como respuesta a los rápidos cambios que se produjeron en los entornos sociales, políticos y económicos y actualmente en el contexto latinoamericano se ha convertido en un foco de interés para los investigadores educativos, particularmente por la incipiente investigación sobre el tema. Este trabajo se centró en conocer los elementos, contextos y atributos identificados con el liderazgo docente en el sureste de México. Los participantes fueron todos los profesores de tiempo completo (50) de una facultad de una universidad pública. Los principales hallazgos muestran que: los elementos que se relacionan con el liderazgo docente son conductas centradas en las relaciones interpersonales y la innovación escolar. Con respecto a los contextos, el contexto institucional y el trabajo colaborativo suelen ser los escenarios principales que se conciben para el desarrollo del liderazgo docente. En cuanto a los atributos se pone especial énfasis en: las relaciones interpersonales, cambio, y desarrollo individual y reconocimiento. No se encontraron diferencias significativas en las percepciones de los participantes que tienen un nombramiento administrativo y aquellos que no lo tienen, en cuanto a los contextos y atributos del liderazgo docente, con excepción de los elementos del concepto liderazgo docente entre hombres y mujeres.

Palabras clave

Liderazgo, profesores, elementos, contexto, atributos

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The concept of teacher leadership emerged in the 1970s with the educational reform in the United States of America, when the nation witnessed an almost uninterrupted chain of initiatives and interventions to reform the American education system from preschool to higher levels (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2014; Smyles, Conley & Marks, 2002). These interventions resulted from significant changes in the economic, political, and social landscapes in which the school existed, since in many societies worldwide, teachers are valuable resources that can be utilized to achieve positive changes in people's lives (Qasserras, Qasserras, Elatifi & Qasserras, 2023). These changes were implemented to address various issues in school administration and achieve important objectives, allowing teachers to take on greater leadership roles in their institutions. Since then, numerous lines of inquiry focused on hierarchical conceptions, roles, positional authority, formality, and informality, and their interaction with students in classrooms have emerged. According to Webber and Okoko (2021), educational researchers have shown a growing interest in teacher leadership over the past few decades. This shift has moved from simply acknowledging leadership in schools based on subject matter expertise and successful teacher engagement to the appointment of hierarchical leadership roles. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) highlighted the role of teachers who take the lead in their school communities by working collaboratively with their colleagues to enhance teaching and learning. This educational and social phenomenon offers a broad range of opportunities for further study.

The concept of teacher leadership has significantly evolved from an initial focus on formal roles within the school hierarchy to a broader and more dynamic perspective. In the work by Kenjarski (2015), it is noted that in the 1990s, teacher leadership was primarily defined by specific functions, such as mentoring or curriculum development, that teachers assumed within the school organization. Over time, researchers like Leithwood and Duke (1999) and Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) expanded this definition to include the teacher's influence through support networks, instructional decision-making, and challenging school structures for the benefit of students.

Starting in the 2000s, the focus began to shift more towards the personal qualities and interpersonal skills of teachers, recognizing that leadership did not solely reside in formal roles but also in individual characteristics such as creativity, flexibility, and the capacity for continuous learning. Researchers like York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Reeves (2008) introduced the idea of distributed and strategic leadership, where teachers could influence their school environment from both formal and informal positions. This development reflects a more complex understanding of teacher leadership, encompassing not only direct influence on instruction but also the ability to foster significant changes in the school culture.

The concept of "teacher leadership" has been extensively studied and described from various perspectives in the Western context. However, this is not the case in all regions, as there are still discrepancies regarding its meaning, implementation, and construction. According to the specialized literature on this subject, authors like Wenner & Campbell (2017) and York-Barr and Duke (2004) have identified various attributes of teacher leadership through their studies and publications. These attributes include collaboration, service to the school and the community, and responsibility for achieving the school's vision and objectives. In recent times, researchers such as Nguyen, Harris & Ng (2019) have emphasized the need for expanding the research on teacher leadership across all cultures and contexts.

According to Çetinkaya & Arastaman (2023) and Ghamrawi, Shal & Ghamrawi (2023), teacher leaders are individuals who serve as role models by inspiring and motivating their students, going beyond their teaching duties, and taking on additional leadership responsibilities to enhance student learning and performance. They also impact their colleagues and school principals by influencing them positively. Studies have shown that teacher leadership can have a positive impact on the development of educational institutions and have the potential to improve the quality of teaching and contribute to student learning (Song, Chen, & Cao, 2023; Tortolero & Carreón, 2022; González et al., 2019). Teacher leadership can help teachers see themselves from different angles and develop their abilities and willingness to contribute to the educational system by improving the conditions of teachers in various ways. For instance, they can act as mentors, trainers, curriculum developers, collaborators in data analysis, advocates for educational policies, and promoters of research, Firdaus, Hafezad & Syazwani (2023).

As stated before, teacher leadership is an educational concept that is frequently discussed on international platforms and has gained attention in the Latin American education sector. In these countries Governing documents and official policies often assume that there is a consensus about what teacher leadership is and what attributes are linked with it. However, there is no clear definition of teacher leadership, and there is a lack of shared understanding within educational communities about its impacts and how it can be used to improve outcomes and encourage student learning (Webber et al., 2023).

Research on teacher leadership in Latin America is incipient. The education systems in Latin American countries and the institutions that comprise them are complex social systems. These systems involve various forms of organization, structures, philosophies, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. Unfortunately, in this context, teacher leadership is often associated only with the role of principals in schools. (Pineda et al., 2019; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001; Yarger & Lee, 1994). However, the traditional approach to leadership in schools, where the only person who can exercise it is the one with the highest administrative rank, has lost its validity in terms of school effectiveness. (Cueva et al., 2022). This is evident in Mexico's national policies prioritizing transformation processes towards social demands, with teachers and parents playing a new role in participatory and democratic school management. (Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP], 2019; Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo [CONAFE], 2022; Webber and Okoko, 2021).

A recent literature review has also revealed that there is almost no research available on teacher leadership in Mexico (Achach-Sonda & Cisneros-Cohernour, 2023). More research is needed because as Achach-Sonda and Cisneros (2023), as well as Gülmez (2022) state, teacher leaders are individuals who have achieved public trust in their work, demonstrate respect and concern for members of the school community, develop confidence in students through their work, exercise leadership both inside and outside the teaching environment, and encourage colleagues to adopt advanced educational approaches. They promote participation and learning within the teaching community and have the potential to act as catalysts for improving student and organizational learning.

A study of this kind can aid decision-makers in enhancing learning, teaching practices, and ultimately, educational quality. This study is a preliminary study examining teacher leadership elements, contexts, and attributes from teachers' perspectives. The central research question

guiding this study is: What are the perceptions of university teachers regarding the elements, contexts, and attributes of teacher leadership in southeastern Mexico? The research 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; Webber, 2021; 2023). The cross-cultural research consists of multiple stages and begins in 2018.

Method

As mentioned earlier, this is a preliminary study based on the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL), with a quantitative approach and a correlational, analytical, observational, retrospective, and cross-sectional design. This study is part of a larger project and focuses on the quantitative aspect of the broader study. The process consists of six stages, one of which involves administering questionnaires to educators to evaluate their general perceptions of teacher leadership. The instrument used was validated by colleagues in Colombia and Spain, allowing for its adaptation to the Mexican context¹ This preliminary version was conducted through Google Forms for future large-scale application in Mexico. This quantitative approach will also enable comparability between the various studies that will be conducted internationally as part of the broader study.

Participants

The study involved all full-time faculty from the College of Social Sciences at a university located in southeastern Mexico. The sample comprised 50 faculty members, out of whom 54% were women ($n = 27$). Half of the participants were aged 34 or younger, and three-quarters of them had completed their graduate studies. In terms of experience, nearly 60% of the teachers had 10 or more years of teaching experience. Around 20% of them performed formal administrative functions besides their teaching duties, while the remaining teachers did not perform any administrative functions.

The professors who performed administrative functions were a college Dean, an academic Dean, an administrative head, and seven academic program coordinators. The coordinators have various functions such as supervising the quality of teaching, managing the approval and revalidation process of subjects, ensuring compliance with accreditations, and providing academic support to students and teachers. All other faculty members work mainly on teaching and research.

Instrument

For data collection, 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 Guevera, 2023; Webber, 2018). In this study, the version specifically adapted to Mexican Spanish was used (Gratacós

& Ladrón de Guevera, 2023). The decision to use a questionnaire instead of semi-structured interviews was driven by the broader scope of the sample, which included all full-time faculty members at the institution. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive collection of data across a diverse group of respondents. Within this larger sample, those with administrative tasks were identified based on their roles, ensuring that their perspectives were included in the analysis. The questionnaire comprises 67 items that are divided into 5 sections, as illustrated in Table 1. The first section consists of 8 items that make up the personal data section. It includes questions that aim to gather the demographic variables of the participants. The second section focuses on the elements of teacher leadership and comprises 18 items. The third section is related to the contexts of teacher leadership and has 10 items. The fourth section refers to the qualities of teacher leadership and includes 30 items. The second, third, and fourth sections have Likert-type scales, which are gradually ascending, and classified as agreement and importance. Lastly, there is an open-ended question that asks for additional comments on teacher leadership.

Table 1
Technical Indicators of the Instrument

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Demographics	8	---	---
Elements of teacher leadership	18	.852	.878
Teacher leadership contexts	10	.843	.861
Qualities of teacher leadership	30	.883	.895
Open-ended question	1	---	---
Total items	67		

As shown in the table above, both Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω demonstrate a good level of internal consistency, with scores above .840 for both indicators.

Results

Descriptives

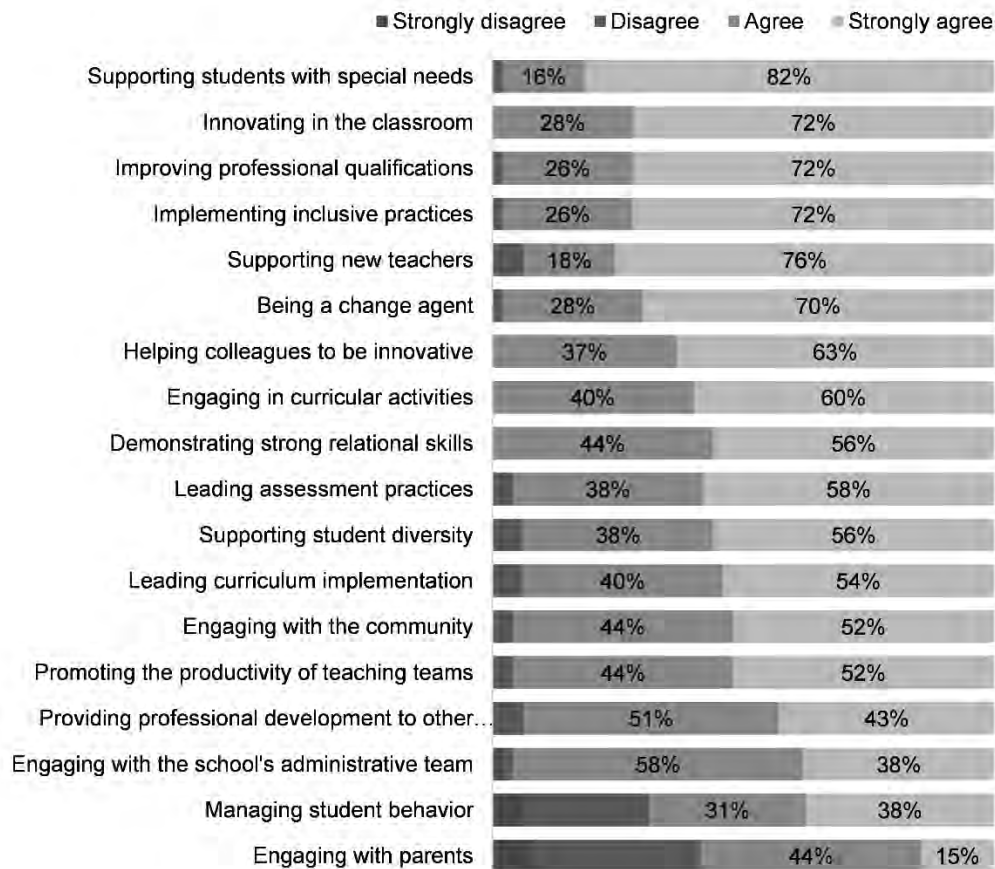
Elements

Figure 1 shows the elements identified in the concept of teacher leadership. To describe how teachers conceptualize teacher leadership, a description of the relevant section of the questionnaire was conducted. As shown in Figure 1, the main attributes identified in the concept of teacher leadership include: supporting students with special needs, innovating in the classroom, improving professional qualifications, promoting inclusive practices, supporting new teachers, being change agents, helping colleagues to be innovative, engaging in curricular activities, and demonstrating strong relational skills. Overall, these attributes relate to behaviors centered on interpersonal relationships and school innovation. An exploratory factor

analysis confirmed that teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of teacher leadership form a unidimensional construct ($\chi^2 = 370$; $df = 153$; $p < .001$).

Figure 1

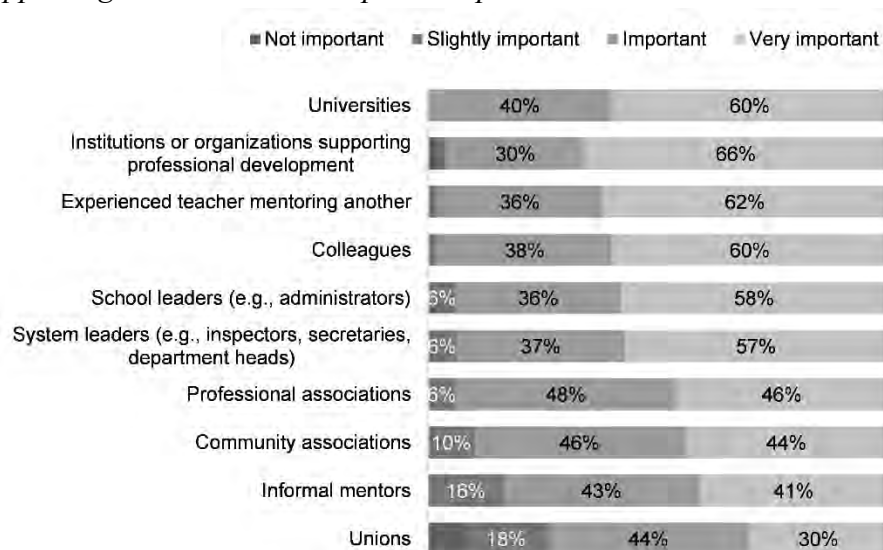
Elements of Teacher Leadership



Contexts

Regarding the contexts or environments that can foster the development of teacher leadership, the results indicate that teachers consider universities and institutions or organizations that support professional development as the main sources of promotion (See Figure 2). They are followed by experienced teachers and colleagues. It is noteworthy that school leaders, whether principals or educational system officials such as inspectors or secretaries, are only considered in fifth and sixth places. Therefore, the institutional context and collaborative work are generally seen as the main settings for the development of teacher leadership. No statistically significant differences were observed when comparing teachers with leadership roles to those without such roles in the various attributes associated with teacher leadership.

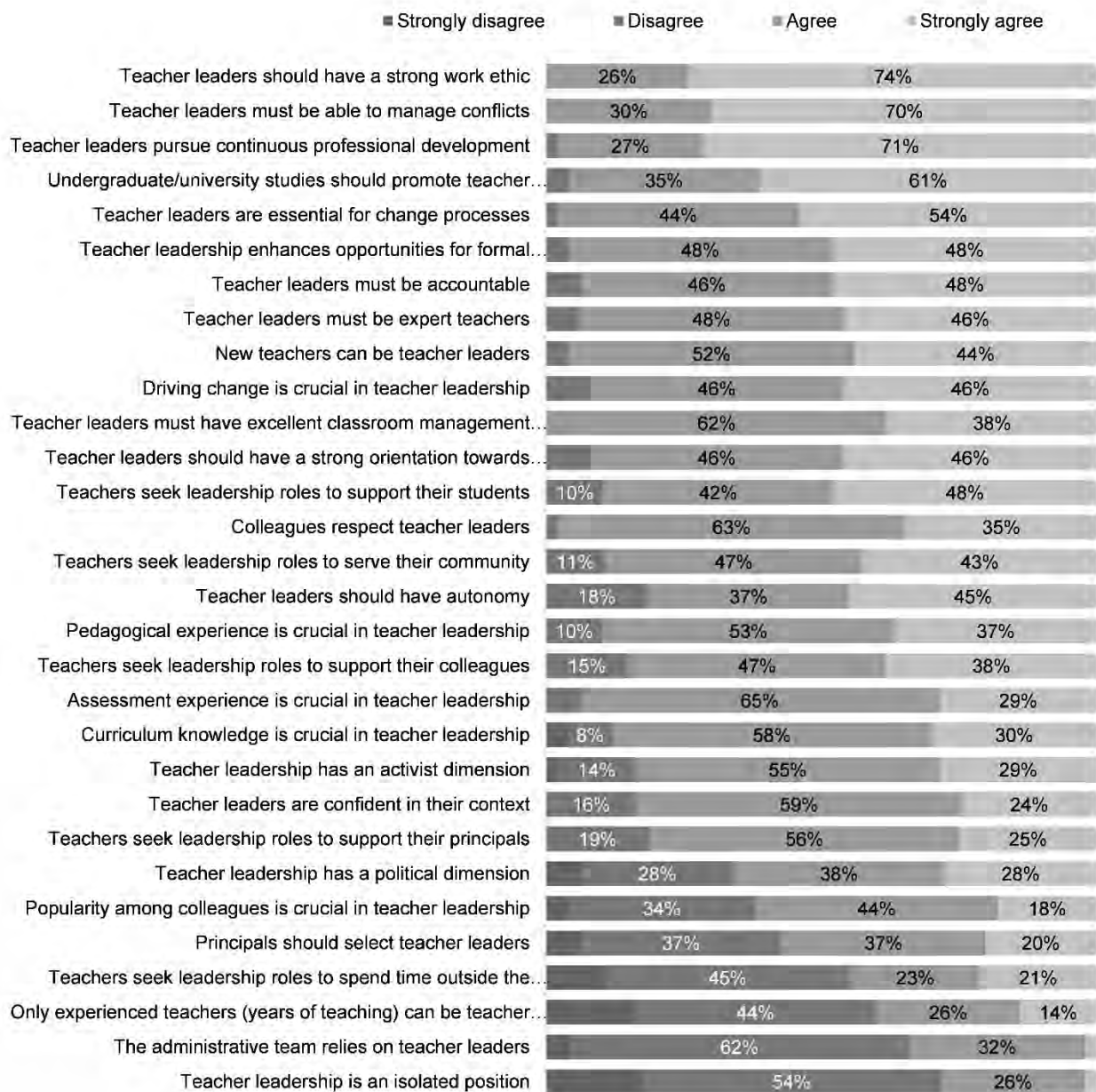
Figure 2
Contexts Supporting Teacher Leadership Development



Attributes

The ten principal attributes identified by participating teachers are as follows: teacher leaders should have a strong work ethic, be capable of managing conflicts, continually pursue their professional development, advocate for undergraduate and university studies to promote teacher leadership, play a fundamental role in change processes, enhance opportunities for formal promotion through teacher leadership, take responsibility for their actions, demonstrate excellence as teachers, recognize that new teachers can also be teacher leaders, and acknowledge the critical importance of driving change in teacher leadership (see Figure 3). These attributes focus on aspects related to change, continuous learning, and recognition.

It is interesting to note that the less associated attributes include the idea that principals should be responsible for selecting teacher leaders, the pursuit of leadership roles to spend less time in the classroom, the belief that only experienced teachers can assume leadership roles, the administrative team's reliance on teacher leaders, and the perception of teacher leadership as an isolated position. These attributes suggest a view of teacher leadership as a phenomenon that is not very collaborative and disconnected from the rest of the educational community.

Figure 3*Key Attributes of Teacher Leaders***Elements**

According to the study, teachers have identified certain elements as part of the concept of teacher leadership (see Table 2). These elements are primarily related to behaviors that focus on interpersonal relationships and innovative practices in schools. The study shows that teacher leadership characteristics are a one-dimensional attribute, as confirmed by an exploratory factor analysis ($\chi^2 = 370$; $g1 = 153$; $p < .001$).

On the whole, teachers who perform administrative functions tend to value almost all elements of teacher leadership more positively than their peers who do not perform such functions. The averages for those performing administrative functions are consistently higher

on most items, indicating that there is greater agreement regarding elements of teacher leadership. This is particularly evident in elements such as “supporting new Teachers,” “supporting students with special needs,” and “being an agent of change”. The differences in the averages between teachers with administrative functions and teachers who do not perform these functions are more pronounced in these areas. Teachers with administrative functions have lower standard deviations, which implies greater agreement on their perceptions. It’s worth noting that the “controlling student behavior” element shows the biggest difference among teacher groups. Other teachers have an average score that is significantly lower than that of their peers. Additionally, it's important to highlight that this category has the highest standard deviation among teachers who don't have administrative responsibilities. This indicates a wide range of responses and opinions among them.

The connection with the community and with the school’s administrative staff is also valued more positively by teachers with administrative functions than by other teachers. This may reflect a perception by those who perform these roles about the importance of these external connections to effective classroom leadership. The highest standard deviations in this group are found in elements that involve interaction with external agents, such as “connecting with parents” and “connecting with the school’s administrative staff.” This might suggest that, although on average teachers performing administrative functions feel that these are important aspects, there is some individual disagreement as to what degree they consider them critical. In contrast, the other teachers show considerable variability in their perception of controlling student behavior and connecting with parents, which could indicate a more heterogeneous perception of these elements of teacher leadership.

Table 2

Elements of Teacher Leadership According to Teachers with or without Administrative Responsibilities

Elements that can be included in teacher leadership	Teachers (n = 40)		Teachers performing administrative functions (n = 10)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Innovate in the classroom	3.73	0.45	3.70	0.48
2. Support colleagues to be innovative	3.64	0.49	3.60	0.52
3. Lead evaluation practices	3.50	0.56	3.70	0.68
4. Lead the implementation of the curriculum	3.48	0.60	3.50	0.71
5. Support new teachers	3.64	0.63	3.90	0.32
6. Support students with special needs	3.77	0.49	3.90	0.32
7. Controlling student behavior	2.95	0.97	3.22	0.83
8. Connecting with the community	3.42	0.55	3.70	0.68
9. Connecting with parents	2.61	0.79	2.80	1.03
10. Liaise with the school’s administrative staff	3.25	0.49	3.60	0.97
11. Provide professional development to other colleagues	3.33	0.58	3.50	0.71
12. Promote the productivity of teaching teams	3.40	0.59	3.80	0.42

Elements that can be included in teacher leadership	Teachers (n = 40)		Teachers performing administrative functions (n = 10)	
	M	SD	M	SD
13. Support student diversity	3.50	0.60	3.50	0.71
14. Get involved in curricular activities	3.55	0.50	3.80	0.42
15. Improve professional qualification	3.65	0.53	3.90	0.32
16. Demonstrate strong relational skills	3.50	0.51	3.80	0.42
17. Be an agent of change	3.63	0.54	3.90	0.32
18. Carry out inclusion practices	3.67	0.53	3.80	0.42

It is worth mention that item 9, "Connecting with parents", received the lowest mean scores in all groups, indicating that it is perceived as less related to teacher leadership.

Contexts

To properly study teacher leadership, it's important to consider the context in which it occurs. This includes the various elements that either help or hinder its development (Webber, 2023; Webber & Nickel, 2022; Lakomski & Evers in 2022). Table 3 shows the results of the survey that asked teachers about their opinions on the different scenarios or contexts that promote teacher leadership.

Table 3

Context that Facilitates Teacher Leadership Among the Two Groups of Teachers

Contexts that facilitate teacher leadership development	Teachers (n = 40)		Teachers with administrative functions (n = 10)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Colleagues	3.58	0.50	3.60	0.70
2. School leaders (e.g.: teachers performing administrative functions)	3.50	0.64	3.60	0.52
3. System Leaders (e.g.: inspectors, secretaries, dept. officers)	3.42	0.84	3.50	0.53
4. Institutions or organizations that support professional development	3.55	0.68	3.80	0.42
5. Experienced teacher mentoring another teacher	3.65	0.53	3.40	0.52
6. Informal mentors	3.15	0.89	3.30	0.68
7. Universities	3.60	0.50	3.60	0.52
8. Trade unions	2.88	0.91	3.30	0.82
9. Professional associations	3.42	0.59	3.30	0.68
10. Community associations	3.38	0.63	3.20	0.79

After comparing the perceptions of teachers who perform administrative functions and other teachers, there was a similarity in the average ratings of both groups. However, there were subtle differences in certain contexts that facilitate teacher leadership. In general, faculty and teachers with administrative roles agree that colleagues and universities are important for

teacher leadership development. As proven by means that show favorable agreement and standard deviation indicating that the perception is moderately uniform.

The study found that teachers who do not hold administrative roles tend to value the influence of “experienced teachers mentoring other teachers” more than those who do. Conversely, teachers in administrative roles perceive that “institutions and organizations that support professional development” play a more significant role in the development of teacher leadership. This is indicated by their higher mean and greater consensus among them, as suggested by their standard deviation. The difference in the perception of “unions” is greater among teachers with administrative functions, which could reflect different expectations or experiences with the role of unions in professional development.

It is interesting to observe that in the case of "Professional Associations", teachers who do not have administrative functions scored higher on average compared to those who do have such functions. This suggests that the former group has a more favorable perception of their contribution to leadership. Among teachers, the highest standard deviations were found in the context of "Informal Mentors" and "Unions", indicating significant variability in their opinions. In contrast, those performing administrative functions have relatively less variability in their perceptions in all evaluated contexts.

Attributes

This section aimed to identify the qualities associated with teacher leadership, based on the perspective of teachers. The statistical analysis, using exploratory factor analysis, revealed that the construct consists of three dimensions that account for 40.5% of the variance ($\chi^2 = 696$; $gl = 435$; $p < .001$). These dimensions are 1) Interpersonal relationships (e.g., teachers seek leadership roles to support their colleagues, students, their principals, and their community); 2) Change and educational leadership (e.g., educational expertise and driving change are crucial in teacher leadership, teacher leaders are critical to change processes, teacher leaders must have excellent classroom management skills, or teacher leaders must have a strong work ethic); and 3) Individual development and recognition (e.g., teacher leaders seek ongoing professional development, only teachers with experience (years of teaching) can be teacher leaders, popularity among colleagues is crucial in teacher leadership, the administrative staff relies on teacher leaders, teacher leadership is an isolating position).

Attributes of Teacher Leadership by Groups

A thorough analysis of the results shows that there is a general tendency towards the positive evaluation of certain attributes such as continuous professional development, the significance of bachelor's degrees in promoting teacher leadership, and the availability of opportunities for new teachers to exercise leadership. This information is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Teacher Leadership Attributes at the Command Level

Teacher Leadership attributes	Teachers (n = 40)		Teachers with administrative functions (n = 10)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Teacher leadership has a political dimension	2.87	0.96	2.89	0.60
2. Teacher leadership has an activist dimension	3.13	0.73	3.00	0.67
3. Teacher leaders should have autonomy	3.33	0.74	3.00	0.82
4. Teacher Leaders Must Be Held Accountable	3.36	0.63	3.67	0.50
5. Bachelor's/ Undergraduate Studies Should Promote Teacher Leadership	3.54	0.60	3.70	0.48
6. Teacher leaders seek ongoing professional development	3.72	0.51	3.60	0.52
7. Teacher leaders must be expert teachers	3.45	0.64	3.20	0.42
8. Teacher leadership increases opportunities for formal promotion	3.52	0.51	3.10	0.74
9. Teachers seek leadership roles to support their colleagues	3.30	0.70	3.00	0.67
10. Teachers seek leadership roles to support students	3.42	0.64	3.20	0.79
11. Teachers seek leadership roles to support their principals	3.11	0.69	2.90	0.57
12. Teachers seek leadership roles to spend time away from the classroom	2.62	0.95	2.30	0.95
13. Teachers seek leadership roles to serve their community	3.35	0.63	3.20	0.79
14. Only experienced teachers (years of teaching) can be teacher leaders	2.33	0.94	2.60	0.84
15. Novel teachers can be teacher leaders	3.38	0.59	3.50	0.53
16. Curricular knowledge is crucial in teacher leadership	3.15	0.77	3.10	0.57
17. Pedagogical expertise is crucial in teacher leadership	3.27	0.68	3.22	0.44
18. Evaluation expertise is crucial in teacher leadership	3.28	0.56	3.00	0.47
19. Popularity among peers is crucial in teacher leadership	2.77	0.77	2.70	0.95
20. Driving change is crucial in teacher leadership	3.35	0.66	3.50	0.53
21. Principals must appoint teacher leaders	2.74	0.82	2.60	1.08
22. Teacher leaders must have excellent classroom management skills.	3.40	0.50	3.30	0.48
23. Colleagues respect teacher leaders	3.28	0.51	3.50	0.53
24. Teacher leaders are critical to promote reform.	3.50	0.56	3.60	0.52
25. Teacher leaders are comfortable in their context	3.08	0.62	3.10	0.74
26. The administrative staff rely on the teacher leaders.	2.38	0.59	2.10	0.57
27. Teacher leaders must have a strong social justice orientation	3.35	0.62	3.50	0.71
28. Teacher leadership is a lonely position	2.16	0.65	2.00	1.00
29. Teacher leaders must have a strong work ethic	3.73	0.45	3.80	0.42
30. Teacher leaders must be able to handle conflict.	3.75	0.44	3.50	0.53

The data indicate that teachers who do not perform administrative functions and those who do, generally agree on the importance of qualities related to teacher leadership. However, there are significant differences in some areas. Teachers who do not have administrative duties tend

to place more importance on their autonomy and their ability to initiate changes. Both groups of teachers view the political and activist aspect of teacher leadership similarly, with an average score of around 3.00. However, teachers with administrative roles exhibit greater agreement in these areas, which is evident from their lower standard deviations.

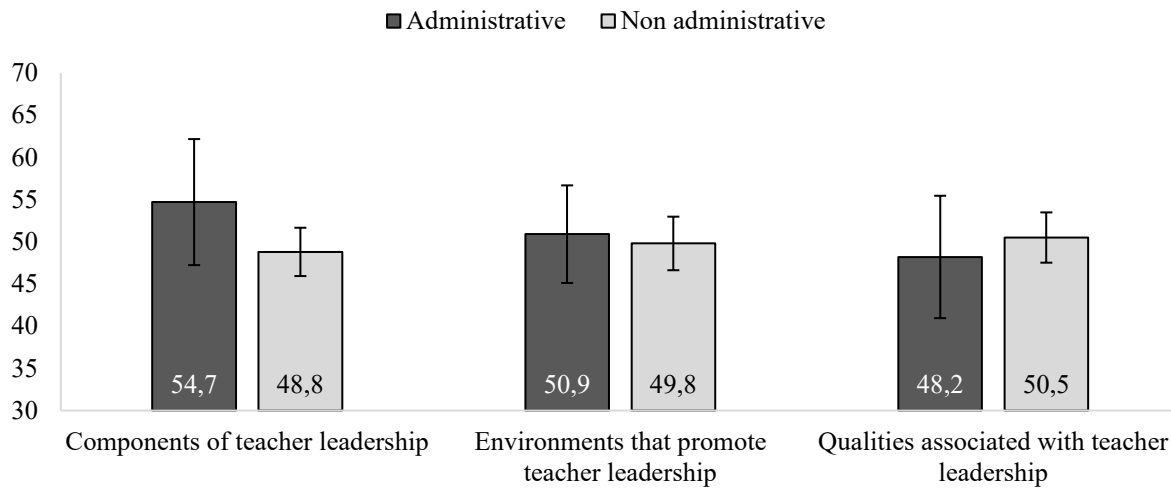
A noteworthy discovery reveals that professors who are not in administrative roles prioritize fostering a supportive environment for their peers and students. Their average rating above 3.30 indicates a recognition of the importance of these practices in their profession. Conversely, those in administrative positions prioritize accountability and classroom management skills for teacher leaders. This emphasis could reflect a perspective focused on responsibility and management of the educational environment. Strong work ethic and conflict resolution skills also rank high on the list of qualities that make a great teacher leader as recognized by both groups. Remarkably, the two groups agree that teacher leadership should not be a lonely position and that leaders should have a strong orientation toward social justice. However, faculty who perform administrative tasks appear to have a slightly stronger consensus on this matter. The administrative staff's dependence on teacher leaders is one of the least appreciated attributes by both groups. This might imply a perception of leadership that is more decentralized and less hierarchical.

Comparison of Dimensions

Finally, it was investigated whether having administrative functions influenced the perceptions and approaches of those teachers with administrative roles than those without. A Student t-test for independent samples was used to explore this relationship. The results, presented in Figure 1, indicate the absence of significant differences in both the components of teacher leadership ($t_{48} = 1.69$; $p = .096$; $d = 0.60$), as well as in environments conducive to teacher leadership ($t_{48} = 0.31$; $p = .761$; $d = 0.11$), and in the qualities associated with teacher leadership ($t_{48} = -0.64$; $p = .526$; $d = -0.23$). In other words, these findings suggest that the concept of teacher leadership among teachers is not affected by having or not those responsibilities.

Figure 1

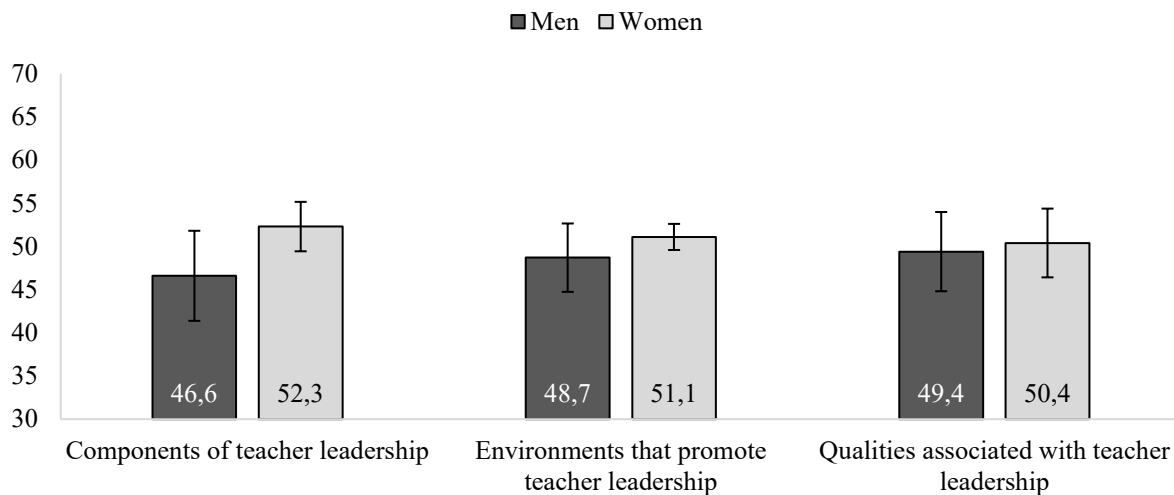
The Difference between Elements, Qualities, and Contexts Associated with Teacher Leadership between Professors with Teaching Positions that Perform Administrative Functions and Those without Administrative Functions



A similar analysis was conducted to examine the potential influence of gender on perceptions of teacher leadership. The study found statistically significant differences only in the components of teacher leadership ($t_{43} = -2.04$; $p = .047$; $d = -0.62$), while no significant differences were observed in the environments that promote teacher leadership ($t_{48} = -0.90$; $p = .374$; $d = -0.25$) or in the qualities associated with teacher leadership ($t_{38} = -0.321$; $p = .750$; $d = -0.10$). According to Figure 2, women tend to identify more components, which is evident by a higher average score. A more in-depth analysis reveals that the difference between the scores of men and women was significant. Women gave a median score of 4 "Strongly agree" on items 3 ($U = 219$; $p = .041$) and 4 ($U = 212$; $p = .030$), which are "Leading evaluation practices" and "Leading the implementation of the curriculum", respectively. On the other hand, men gave a median score of 3, which corresponds to "Agree".

Figure 2

The Difference between Elements, Qualities, and Contexts Associated with Teacher Leadership According to the Gender of the Participants



In the end, it was determined that no notable correlations existed between the three assessed dimensions pertaining to teacher leadership - namely, the components of teacher leadership, environments that foster teacher leadership, and qualities linked to teacher leadership - and variables such as the participant's age, years of experience, or educational level ($p > .05$). Based on these findings, it may be inferred that these three factors stand independently and do not impact the notion of teacher leadership as perceived by professionals in the field of higher education.

Conclusions

This was a preliminary study on teacher leadership in southern Mexico. The research examined the key components of teacher leadership, the environments that foster it, and the attributes necessary to cultivate it within a higher education context. It constitutes a foundational step that lays the groundwork for future comparative studies between faculties at higher education institutions. Additionally, the research analyzed the perspectives of two groups of university professors: one group with formal appointments who also hold administrative positions, and

another group of professors who focus solely on teaching. The study's findings contribute to the limited research on teacher leadership in Latin America, specifically within the context of a college in a higher education institution.

Based on the findings, both groups of teachers demonstrated greater alignment with the aspects of "supporting new teachers and students with special needs, as well as acting as agents for change" in the realm of teacher leadership. These findings are partially consistent with the conclusions of Gratacós and Ladrón de Guevara (2023) whose study conducted in Spain found that teachers placed greater emphasis on the first two elements, but not as much on "being agents of change". In contrast, the same authors discovered that Spanish teachers placed a high value on "improving their professional qualifications and connecting with families". However,

unlike the study by Gratacós and Ladrón de Guevara (2023), the Mexican participants in this study expressed the least degree of agreement with the notion of “connecting with families” as a component of teacher leadership.

Regarding the contextual factors that support teacher leadership, both groups of teachers identified almost all contexts as important or very important for developing knowledge and skills, except for unions, which were not considered important by teachers with administrative roles. The results of the study are partially consistent with the work of Achach-Sonda and Cisneros-Cohernour (2024), who also identified the importance of the support of the principal and inspectors as contextual factors that foster teacher leadership. The study conducted by Achach-Sonda and Cisneros-Cohernour in an elementary school did not examine the significance of other contextual elements in teacher leadership, such as class size, type of employment contract, and administrative responsibilities. Therefore, future studies may consider these aspects to gain a better understanding of their importance. Nor was the aspect of teacher employment contracts examined, despite its identification as a factor affecting teacher leadership in studies by Cisneros-Cohernour (2021) and Vivas and Gratacós (2023).

Regarding the qualities of teacher leadership, both groups of teachers strongly agreed on all the qualities of leadership identified by different authors such as (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Webber, 2021). All of these qualities were included in the design of the questionnaire used for the study conducted in southeastern Mexico. The study found that there was less consensus on the qualities associated with the political aspect of teacher leadership, the importance of popularity of teacher leadership among peers, the role of principals in selecting teacher leaders, the reliance of administrative staff on teacher leaders, and the perception that teacher leadership can be an isolating position. Further research is needed to understand the qualities, as not all teachers who do not engage in administrative activities agree on them.

It is important to mention that, although there were differences in perceptions of teacher leadership between the two groups of teachers (with or without administrative functions), these differences were not found to be statistically significant. There were no significant differences found between teachers in terms of their age, level of education, or years of teaching experience. However, given that this research was carried out with a quantitative approach and the number of teachers that made up the sample size was limited to professors at one university, it is recommended that future studies use quantitative designs with larger and more diverse samples of this profile to obtain results that are more representative. Likewise, it is recommended to conduct a qualitative study to further investigate the differences between different types of teachers in the higher education environment.

The study identified differences in the components of teacher leadership between men and women, indicating that gender-related dynamics and expectations may be at play. Previous research on informal leadership has revealed that women are more likely to engage in this type of leadership than formal leadership (Liu, 2021). This pattern could be influenced by gender roles and expectations learned during teacher training and professional development (Kremen & Kremen, 2020). To gain a deeper understanding of these potential relationships, future studies should investigate the impact of gender expectations on teacher leadership practices.

Finally, this study opens the dialogue for conducting more robust research that allows exploring the roles of middle managers and teaching leaders, particularly in cases where the

latter do not hold formal positions or have administrative functions. Gurr and Nicholas (2023) suggest that such studies could help clarify the definition of teaching leadership and promote the integration of research on various types of leadership within higher educational institutions and in understudied contexts such as Latin America and Mexico.

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Notes

¹ For more information, see the study site: www.mru.ca/istl

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