

# The role of teacher leaders in language classrooms: a case study in National Academy of Education Management, Vietnam

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**Abstract**—In this research, the notion of teacher leadership is introduced to the National Academy of Education Management in Vietnam. The main goals of this study are to examine teacher leadership from the perspective of EFL teachers. They further describe the many leadership positions that EFL teachers fill in this environment. They also examine difficulties with teacher leadership in Vietnam's institutional hierarchies. Twelve EFL instructors were provided with their perspectives on teacher leadership strategies in the National Academy of Education Management environment as study participants. Open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the two data collecting methods used to gather qualitative data. The data were then thematically analyzed, yielding four significant categories and one central theme. The research results indicate that teacher leadership is a novel idea in the Vietnamese EFL environment. Given that EFL educational leaders deal with a number of difficulties, such as a significant administrative workload and a lack of autonomy, the effects of hierarchical structures on teacher leadership practices are obvious. They could overcome these difficulties and enhance organizational performance by utilizing intragroup shared leadership tactics.

**Index Terms**—EFL context; ELT; hierarchical leadership structures; instructional leadership; teacher leadership.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of teacher leadership, which was described as being caused by the increasing professional expectations of schools, is "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the goal of increased student learning and achievement"[9]. However widespread in Western environments, teacher leadership gives teachers the power to alter their schools and perform a range of leadership responsibilities. Teacher leaders consider both the success of their schools and their students' achievement.

The ability of teacher leaders to take on significant tasks, influence changes and innovations, and act as a liaison between administrative leadership and fellow teachers makes teacher leadership positions like curriculum co-ordinator, subject specialist, tutor, and instructor trainer crucial to the growth of educational institutions. Creating and maintaining a professional culture, a sense of social cohesiveness, According to [27], the main objectives of teacher leadership roles are to foster professional trust among teachers. Education organizations all over the world have been encouraged to delegate leadership and provide them the authority to contribute to their organizations' effectiveness because of their crucial role in schools' day-to-day operations.

Although teacher leadership is valued in general education, it is uncommon in the field of teaching English as a second language (ELT). [5] and [26] conducted empirical investigations into this concept in ELT, indicating a paucity of research in this area. According to [23], For teacher leadership in ELT, a conceptual shift is required from hierarchical and conventional leadership models to more vertical and shared leadership models.

Additionally, according to [11], to address universal concerns in the ELT community and attain proficient excellence, every ELT professional should engage in a range of involved responsibilities. They will be able to assist both the expansion of their business and the ELT sector by doing this. The numerous manifestations of teacher leadership and the varied duties that English language instructors carry out as teacher leaders at EFL schools don't seem to be the subject of enough empirical study. As a result, by examining the concept from the viewpoint of EFL instructors, this research adds to the corpus of knowledge on ELT teacher leadership. This comes from the standpoint of teacher leaders in a Vietnamese EFL environment.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the early 1990s, the concept of teacher leadership has gained notoriety. [2]; [3]; [24], and the literature on educational leadership and management has documented its various characteristics and manifestations [6]. John Dewey coined the phrase "teacher leadership" to describe educators' active participation in governing bodies in schools. Teacher leadership techniques had a three-phase development throughout the 1980s educational reform movement.

The first group of instructors served in more formal capacities and with greater top-down control in the early 1980s included department heads, master teachers, and union representatives. Leaders and educators both have influence. Additionally, in order to "increase the efficiency of school operations," tight bureaucratic structures promoted managerialism and reduced oversight of teachers and teacher leaders [30]. ELT specialists had a difficult time finding jobs during this time in education, and numerous ESL instructors had trouble rising to positions of authority.

In order to correct the problems with the first wave of teacher leadership, which "acknowledged the role of teachers as instructional leaders" [19]. Thanks to their scholastic knowledge and skills, teachers were able to take on leadership positions in the classroom as team leaders, curriculum designers, experts in professional development, and men-

tors. Despite the fact that this wave acknowledged teachers' knowledge, their positions were nevertheless seen as the continuation of hierarchical roles [19].

The third wave emerged in the 1990s and is now referred to as an emerging kind of teacher leadership in international educational organizations. In contrast to the preceding two waves, this one places more emphasis on teachers' leadership responsibilities in helping to progress the teaching profession and enhance institutions via teamwork.

#### A. Definitions of teacher leadership

According to [16], experts agree that the development of an operational definition of teacher leadership in the field is still in its infancy. Teacher leadership also includes developing practices, working with associates to bring about modification, gathering and utilizing data in collaborative systems, and assisting in producing and sharing specialized knowledge [4]. Teacher leaders often require knowledge in disciplines like curriculum creation, professional development, and assessment to improve teaching and learning. According to [20], teacher leadership combines with teachers' knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to increase student achievement. The fundamental qualities of teacher leaders are also highlighted and briefly defined in [1].

The concept is most often used to define a teacher's personal agency, usually in relation to classroom management and pedagogy, but it may also be used to indicate a colleague's larger collegial impact, curriculum creation, and policy formulation inside or outside of schools. Organizations or groups of teachers with a mandate to lead in terms of practice and policy might be referred to as teacher leadership.

According to [1]), transformational leaders allow their co-workers to undertake things that they would not typically do on their own to better their professional practice [24]. This is consistent with [14] views of teacher leadership as an enabling element, as demonstrated by teacher leaders' collegial influence on bettering their professional practices.

According to [30], it is the process through which instructors encourage their coworkers, administrators, and other school community members to improve teaching and learning strategies to support student learning and success (p. 287-288). The concept underpinning [30] emphasizes the critical part that context plays in teachers' leadership development and training.

The promotion of teacher leadership in educational institutions can be aided by contextual factors like school management ([15]; [24]; [30]). The ideas presented by [30] are thus appropriate for this study's context since teacher leaders provide leadership inside the classrooms and extracurricular and are not entirely disassociated from classroom instruction.

Moreover, their pedagogical and professional knowledge provides them with leadership responsibilities, allowing them to affect co-workers and collaborate to accomplish institutional results.

#### B. The Teacher leader roles

Most theories in this field come from the United States (e.g., [8]; [30]), where teachers execute diverse management and instructional leadership responsibilities [13]. These

roles, which aim to execute institutional objectives and are comparable to the first and second waves of teacher leadership, include department heads, advisors, trainers, curriculum developers, faculty leader, and topic coordinators([12]; [21];).

In a similar vein, [30] found four positions associated with the first and second waves in their narrative of research on teacher leadership: administrators, curriculum specialists, staff developers, and mentors for aspiring teachers.

Teacher leaders work with their peers to support organizational growth and the professional development of their peers in more unofficial leadership positions such peer mentoring, leading a new team, establishing action-oriented study teams, and contributing to the creation of the curriculum. [8]

Because it seems there is little research in the field of ELT on teachers' perceptions of their leadership positions, these findings will enable close a gap in the literature.

#### C. The lack of teacher leadership due to hierarchy

It might be challenging to achieve teacher leadership under more conventional and top-down management systems because it fosters a cooperative culture. Bureaucratic, top-down, and hierarchical school cultures are obstacles to cooperation, learning, and progress, according to the literature [14].

According to [19], work done by teacher leaders may be negatively impacted by organizational traits and structural elements. For instance, in technocratic processes, administrative overload, a lack of professional autonomy and assistance, and rising obligations typically lead to burnout, hamper instructional leadership, and cause instructors to feel excluded and less committed to their colleagues.[7].

Teachers' discontent and lack of confidence in such positions, which are seen as continuations of top management, add to this isolation.

It is challenging to develop a typical objective and attain the best possible harmony of formalization, centralization, and standardization in schools because bureaucratic institutions usually encourage control and responsibility [22].As a result, companies have trouble developing a supportive, effective workplace.

This report will assist in bridging the research gap that exists in ELT addressing the influence of hierarchical leadership structures on the leadership styles of EFL instructors.

#### D. ELT instructor leadership

Instructor leadership is generally recognized in general education, it has gotten less attention in ELT. The idea of language teachers exercising leadership in educational contexts has been documented. [5] examined how the authentic leadership paradigm affected programs for teacher preparation.

Their findings revealed that instructors were unaware of the concept of classroom leadership; nonetheless, it was ingrained in a variety of educational methods and traits. [5] ascribed the phenomena to teacher leadership curricula being missing from teacher education programs. Therefore, they argued that a distinct leadership model may aid instructors in resolving the particular issues related to teaching English as a foreign language.

[11] investigated EFL instructors' opinions of themselves as educational leaders in Turkish context. They obtained data using a mixed-method methodology, which assisted them in identifying top targets for teaching heads in order to attain English language teaching and learning outcomes. It also emphasized the importance of developing and leading staff to compete with global challenges in this profession.

Research has shown that English language teachers (EFL) must have passion, rapport, purpose, balance, and adaptability to succeed in the Korean school system [26].

Furthermore, Korean EFL learners recognize leadership differently than traditional leaders and its influence beyond classroom activities.

According to the research stated above, the ELT sector is expanding daily, so managing language institutions and programs has become increasingly difficult for ELT experts. The growth of scholastic leadership in ELT, especially in hierarchical leadership systems, has become crucial for addressing the challenges of twenty-first-century education. This study's goal is to add to the field of study, which will address the subsequent research questions.

***(1) How do English language instructors in Vietnam assume their personal leadership duties and the concept of "teacher leadership"?***

***(2) At the National Academy of Education Management in Vietnam, what is meant by "teacher leadership" and what role-related difficulties are connected to teacher leadership positions?***

### III. THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Vietnam's public and private educational systems are under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Training. It is organized into five levels: preschool, elementary school, secondary school, high school, and higher education. Twelve years of basic education make up formal education. Colleges, regional and national institutions and academies (collectively referred to as universities), and research institutes authorized to award doctoral degrees make up Vietnam's national higher education system. The Vietnamese higher education system provides programs at a variety of levels, including bachelor's degrees from universities and academies, master's degrees from universities, academies, and research institutes, and doctorate degrees from the same establishments.

National Academy Of Education Management is a public university established on April 3, 2006. The institution is currently focusing on training 5 majors: Educational Management, Educational Psychology, Educational Economics, Education and Information Technology. This is considered a leading university in educational management science in the university system in Vietnam. Currently, the Academy of Educational Management is training doctorates and masters in Educational Administration, masters in clinical psychology and information technology.

### IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

#### A. Participants

All 14 head teachers employed as full-time teaching staff of the English department from the National Academy of

Education Management were invited; however, the research only included 12 participants. Data was gathered via moderately structured interviews that were recorded on a digital recorder and stored on a personal electrical device that required a password to access them. The audio recordings were given code numbers. All interviewees were sent the transcriptions to double-check and clarify if needed. All 12 teachers answer the questionnaires including eight open-ended questions released online on Google forms to investigate untapped categories more thoroughly and provide the data with more depth.

#### B. Data collections and analysis

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach, which was determined to be the best data collection strategy. The authors' use of a case study approach within a qualitative research framework allowed them to investigate the societal problem of leadership in reality with the possibility that the borders between the environment and the phenomena are not well defined (Yin, 2011). The main method for acquiring qualitative data was semi structured interviews, which were supplemented by an online survey on google forms. The open-ended survey was mostly used to go further into the data and explore unsaturated categories. The questions were developed in light of our observations of the institution's practices and the major themes noted in the body of research on teacher-leader development.

NVivo 10 was employed as the tool to analyze data from interview transcripts and survey results. The process was carried out in the following steps.

To gain an overview of the data, we first read the transcripts. This helped us become ready to code the data. In short, the reading accurately captured the profession-related backgrounds, leadership skills, and historical positions of teacher leaders.

The second step entailed a more in-depth review of the transcripts to code them in accordance with the suggestions. During the first coding phase, which was performed without preconceived notions, there were 181 initial open codes. Using Nvivo nodes, we found recurring patterns and issued initial codes. The same coding was used to contain more recurrent patterns, passages, extracts, and consistencies.

Following the two rounds of open coding, 119 codes were organized into 18 broad categories in the second step of the study, which contained codes with similar principles. This study's only four topics included: the consequences of bureaucracy, organizational hierarchy, instructional leadership responsibilities, and leadership comprehension. Because we returned to the codes and improved and renamed them, Iterative coding was used throughout and changed the way we wrote them to better reflect the conversation of the interviews.

### V. RESULTS

It is remarkable that the majority of the participants do not appear to understand its intention or purpose, considering that the National Academy Of Education Management's main objective is to research the subject of "teacher leadership". When questioned about the precise duties that teacher leaders performed in various divisions, The participants rec-

ommended ten operational and ten instructional tasks. Seven interviewees said that their responsibilities were instructional in character since they were experts in a particular field, while the remaining interviewees believed that their positions were operational and managerial in nature. Silva et al(2000) 's classification of these tasks as part of the first of three teacher leadership waves corresponds well with these operational and instructional qualities.

TABLE 1

<b>Teacher leaders' responsibilities at the National Academy of Education Management</b>	
<b>Managing roles</b>	<b>Academic roles</b>
Checking attendance	Conducting PD courses/workshops
Facilitating classroom issues	Developing curriculum
Evaluating teachers	Mentoring
Scheduling timetable	Supervising
Being in charge of exams	Giving presentations at workshops
Checking quality assurance	Developing teaching materials
Performing learning managing system	Writing test papers
Counselling	Joining academic research group
Organizing webinars and seminars	Publishing papers

The statistics also imply that five operational participants go above and above the call of duty to influence others and complete tasks. The leadership structures and practices of the National Academy of Education Management are significantly disclosed, and the teaching staff's opinions of the top-level leadership model further explain this. The participants mentioned the National Academy of Education Management's top-down management structure, which is managed by a group of people who exercise power and regulate the system. Two people did not think the management structure was entirely top-down, despite the fact that 10 participants said it was rigid. They assumed that the management structure's description included details on regular interactions and viewpoint exchanges between teacher leaders and senior management.

Additionally, the findings show that teacher leaders' lack of support and appreciation leads to tension and frustration. Ten participants express these worries. The findings also demonstrate how teacher leaders lack autonomy as a result of excessive bureaucracy, which limits their jobs to administrative tasks. However, nine of them believe that such power does not assist them gain the trust of teachers or close the gap between teachers and upper management. One believes that teacher leaders at The National Academy of Education Management may have been able to influence other instructors and impose institutional regulations as a result of their hierarchical leadership roles.

Eight respondents proposed that the hierarchical leadership structure had a favorable impact on their leadership positions in spite of the challenges listed in Table 2. For instance, this approach enables a teacher to organize his pro-

TABLE 2

<b>Number</b>	<b>Obstacles conducting job responsibilities</b>
1	Absence of competent assistance
2	Governance and responsibility
3	Bureaucracy
4	Lack of independence
5	Scarcity of gratitude
6	Absence of collaboration
7	Admin workload

fessional work more effectively and give duties to other teachers and group members. There is evidence that the hierarchical leadership model adds stress and bureaucracy, but it also aids teacher leaders at the National Academy of Education Management in their strategic planning.

## VI. DISCUSSIONS

### A. A system of hierarchical leadership at the National Academy of Education Management

It can be seen how teacher leadership functions at the National Academy of Education Management thanks to the participants' assessments of top- and middle-level leadership techniques. The outcomes show that the organization follows a typical top-down management approach, which influences leadership behaviors. Effective teacher leadership is typically hampered by the organization's top-down, bureaucratic processes.

As shown in Table 2, the study has identified a number of administrative issues that participants relate to teacher leadership responsibilities at the National Academy of Education Management. The administrative burden of the teacher leaders appears normal, since much of their time is devoted to paperwork, record-keeping, and ensuring policy conformity. Because administrative tasks are highly standardized and leave a little possibility for leadership within the positions, the variety of administrative responsibilities indicates increased responsibility in higher education.

The participants have benefited from the present hierarchies because it has provided them with a clear framework, a strategy, and a plan to support their management role. Additionally, it has made them more aware of the complexity of both professional and cultural life and explained their tasks, provided them a way to proceed, and clarified their tasks.

Although it may come as a surprise, strict bureaucratic systems can occasionally help individuals be guided and organizational goals to be fulfilled.

### B. Indications for ELT teacher leaders

Although teacher leadership is top-down, qualitative data suggest that teacher leaders in different groups share or divide leadership responsibilities.

Although their places in the system give them influence, teacher leaders want collaboration among group members and subordinates to accomplish organizational objectives. Their willingness to work together also displays their expert understanding of how shared commitments have increased their achievement. Given how bureaucratic rules hinder col-

laboration among faculty heads, teacher leaders seek to create a trustworthy rapport with their group members in order to foster a comfortable working atmosphere.

The research has identified several administrative issues that participants relate to teacher leadership responsibilities at the National Academy of Education Management as they are currently being offered. The teacher leaders' administrative workload seems to be a typical problem, as much of their time is spent on paperwork, keeping records, and assuring policy adherence. The variety of administrative responsibilities shown here is a sign of improved accountability in the higher education sector as a whole since too many administrative duties tend to be standardized and leave little room for leadership within the roles.

To raise understanding of the importance of teacher leadership in ELT among language teachers, teacher leaders in middle level leadership roles, administrative leadership, and policy makers, this study introduces the notion of teacher leadership. Indeed, it advances knowledge of how teacher leadership has acted as a catalyst for change, with those in such roles influencing change, cooperating with colleagues, and influencing organizational outcomes. This study has given EFL teacher leaders a basis to see their leadership duties from a different viewpoint and match their practices with worldwide standards since additional research is needed to identify these characteristics of teacher leadership in EFL/ESL environments.

With the findings of this study, EFL teacher leaders now carry a solid platform on which to build their practices in accordance with international norms and take a new perspective to their role as leaders. Further research is needed on the traits of teacher leadership in EFL/ESL environments. The ELT professionals who currently hold teacher leadership positions and those who may in the future may improve their leadership skills and understand the nature of teacher leadership and the difficulties associated with using it in EFL contexts.

### C. Limitations of the study

A case study technique was decided upon since the current study is context-bound and aims to identify the characteristics that aid EFL teacher leaders in developing their leadership skills. However, a more thorough study using a life history approach, or a narrative research method may compile teacher leaders' varied experiences in ELT which may differ from the existing findings. It can be believed that the case study approach has not been fully utilized because semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire were used, and a variety of qualitative methods could have added more depth to the data. As a result, future research can take into account using a multi-methods case study approach to examine teacher leadership, which may increase the data's rigor and decrease subjectivity.

## VII. CONCLUSION

While a top-down management structure might have detrimental effects on educational institutions, in major institutions like the National Academy of Education Management, it might be regarded as an efficient method of management where more than 25 EFL instructors operate and

adhere to a hierarchical structure that benefits various stakeholders to carry out their given tasks in a straight line. Additionally, under a normal, top-down management style, it is possible to implement middle-level participatory leadership methods, which can help teacher leaders reduce the side effects of top-down regulations. Because hierarchical leadership predominates at the top, it may be advantageous for EFL teacher leaders to develop their leadership skills and, to some extent, be able to successfully carry out their leadership obligations.

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