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Teacher leadership in higher education: A theoretical review

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Abstract

Higher education is an essential context for studying teacher leadership. It is a dynamic field that creates a challenging continuously renewed work environment for teachers with multiple changing roles and targets, including cross-boundary teaching, development work, and leadership assignments. The objective of this theoretical review is to investigate the specific features of teacher leadership discussed in the higher education literature and, in doing so, generate a theoretical model. With reference to previous literature reviews focusing on teacher leadership in other contexts, this study presents a theoretical review of 77 peer-reviewed articles on the topic of teacher leadership solely in the higher education context. A key outcome of the review is the presentation of a new model of teacher leadership that incorporates possible manifestations of teacher leaders' influence and reflects peculiarities of teacher leadership in the higher education context, such as discipline advocacy and quality stewardship as principles of leadership, and identity management as a contingency dimension in facilitating leadership practice. In guiding the future orientation of teacher leadership research in higher education, the study introduces the concept of polarity to discuss controversies within teacher leadership in higher education.

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Practitioner Notes

1. The multiple formal, informal, or semi-formal leadership roles fulfilled by teachers in higher education should be recognised.
2. Higher education teachers' identity management is an important contingency dimension for explaining motivation for teacher leadership practices.
3. Teacher leadership, when enabled, can have positive effects on students, teachers, educational institutions, and educational policy.
4. Teacher leadership in higher education is encouraged by discipline advocacy, quality stewardship, and ethical leadership.
5. Understanding the possible controversies or poles of teacher leadership can create conditions that sustain teacher leadership practice.

Keywords

teacher leaders, teacher leadership, higher education, theoretical review, model

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Introduction

This theoretical literature review explores how teacher leadership (TL) is discussed and manifested in higher education research. The objective is to investigate the specific features of TL in higher education and, in doing so, generate a theoretical model. As a dynamic field that is influenced by ideological changes and political forces such as neoliberal policies (Kenny & Fluck, 2017; Levin Aliyeva, 2015) and new public management approaches (Graham & Donaldson, 2020; McCune, 2021), higher education represents a challenging continuously renewed work environment for teachers – instructors, lecturers, and professors – with multiple changing roles and targets (Corso, 2020; Eflova et al., 2023; Hochrinner, 2019; Tusting & Barton, 2016). Teaching and research activities, traditionally discussed as the main roles of teachers in higher education, are becoming more complex through the alteration of old roles, the formation of new ones, and heated discourses due to a lack of resources and continuously updated responsibilities (Eflova et al., 2023; McCune, 2021). The context of new roles and complex multiple tasks mean leadership roles emerge as regular work assignments for teaching academics, and it is these leadership activities in the higher education context that are the focus of the study.

Literature Review

John Dewey introduced the term TL in the 1940s to suggest “teachers’ active participation in school governance” (Shah, 2019, p. 137) and understanding of the concept has since developed in line with changes and agendas in the education context (Pounder, 2006). In addition to the term TL in the higher education context (Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Salisu & Awang, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021), some scholars employ the terms *faculty leadership* (e.g. Carlson, 2010; Kezar et al., 2007; Norman, 2019), *leadership of academics*, and *leadership of professors* (e.g. Flecknoe et al., 2017; Macfarlane, 2011). Sharp et al. (2020) adopt *literacy leadership* to examine literacy teacher educators, denoting a form of TL action regarding literacy disciplines. In this review, the well-established concept of *teacher leadership* is employed and applied, for example, in the systematic search strategy.

Since 2004, several literature reviews have been undertaken to develop a comprehensive understanding of educational leadership (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; M. Wang & Ho, 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, as shown in Table 1, these reviews do not exclusively focus on higher education. Indeed, Nguyen et al.’s (2020) contextual analysis of TL research concludes that more empirical TL research on postsecondary levels is required. Focusing specifically on higher education as the main context for researching TL is thus an important contribution of this study.

In their comprehensive literature review summarising research findings from 1980 to 2004, York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggest the following definition of TL: “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 aim of increased student learning and achievement” (pp. 287–288). Instead of suggesting their own definition, Wenner and Campbell (2017) extract themes discussed in the definitions of TL in the reviewed sources. These include teacher leaders’ activities beyond the classroom, support of professional learning in schools, involvement in policy and/or decision making, the goal of improving student learning and success, and activity to improve and change schools. Further exemplifying the complexity and ambiguity of TL definition, Wang and Ho (2020) emphasise two dimensions of the concept on

Table 1

Existing literature reviews on teacher leadership

Article	Period	Sources	Context	Findings
York-Bar & Duke (2004)	1980 – 2004	100 research articles, non-peer-reviewed articles, books, conference presentations, scholarly reviews of literature, scholarly book chapters, reports, a national education newspaper	secondary schools	• Development of a conceptual framework for TL, • Definition of TL that recognises teachers' influence without specific formal roles towards effective student learning • Focal areas of development associated with TL at three levels: individual, team and organisation.
Wenner & Campbell (2017)	2004 – 2013	54 research articles, book chapters, and dissertations	secondary schools K-12 teachers	• Research on TL is mostly qualitative and implemented within the USA context. • Lack of clarity in TL concept, but prevalence of distributed leadership as theoretical framework for TL. • TL research should address disciplinary differences • Very little TL research examines issues of social justice and equality
Nguyen et al. (2020)	2003 – 2017	150 research articles	preschools secondary schools post-secondary education	• Research on TL mostly used qualitative method and interviews • Research in TL was mostly focusing on Western contexts • Considerable differences in defining TL • No consistency in outlining theoretical dimensions. • Influence is the central meaning in the concept of TL • Existence of indirect impact of TL on student learning • more research is required at preschool and postsecondary levels
Wang & Ho (2020)	2000 – 2018	790 research articles	secondary schools	• Two dimensions in TL: influence and relationships • multiple perceptions of TL characteristics • importance of collaborative TL and informal roles of TL for team learning. existence of external and internal factors that hinder TL. • Influence of teacher agency on TL is not studied enough
Schott et al. (2020)	2014 – 2018	93 research articles and books	secondary schools	• New conceptual framework based on antecedents and outcomes of TL • Definition by York-Barr and Duke (2004) should be used in the future. • Need to increase quality and diversify research on TL: e.g. designing cross-country studies, researching causal relations between variables, and studying possible negative effects of TL

which definitions are built: influence and relationship. Comparatively, Nguyen et al. (2020) analyse the existing definitions through four categories: (1) process of influence; (2) cooperation; (3) influential behaviour within and beyond the classroom; and (4) targeting improvement. In the most recent systematic review, Schott et al. (2020) conclude TL researchers should use the definition suggested by York-Barr and Duke (in 2004) because it emphasises TL as a process of influence, freedom of TL enactment from formal positions, and student development as a goal.

Since the 2000s, research on leadership in higher education has been enriched by discussions of liberal and lateral representations of leadership practice such as shared leadership (e.g. Holcombe et al., 2021; Vogel, 2022), distributed leadership (Jones et al., 2014; van Ameijde et al., 2009), servant leadership (Abbas et al., 2022; Nawaz et al., n.d.), or "leadership as relationship" (Kouzes, 2019). Juntrasook (2014) also introduces four meanings of leadership in the higher education context: (1) leadership as position, which is when a leader has an officially enshrined leadership or managerial role within organisational structures; (2) leadership as performance, which involves achievement and recognition within the professional community; (3) leadership as practice, which is expressed through everyday activities and the relations of different levels; and (4) leadership as professional role model, which is attributable to personalities and their righteousness. Juntrasook's (2014) concepts of leadership as practice and leadership as professional role model (2014) and Kouzes's (2019) leadership as relationship (2019) shift the higher education leadership discourse from hierarchical structures to actors' individual behaviours, creating a potential space for discussion of, and reflection on, TL. Even though TL is thus an important part of leadership scholarship discussion of influence without formal boundaries (Crawford et al., 2020), the TL phenomenon remains an under-researched area in higher education (Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2020).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) create a conceptual framework that depicts TL as an interwoven path towards student learning. The path begins with leaders' personality and leadership capacities, leadership work, and available conditions. These directly affect the means of leadership influence, which are embedded in teaching, learning, and relationships and are understood as formal or informal influential practices. These aspects concretise targets of leadership influence, resulting in improved teaching and learning processes, and ultimately student learning. The suggested elements of the TL paths – means of TL, practice of TL, and effects of TL – are used as theoretical basis in the data analysis process of this review.

To describe effective leadership, Covey (1989) suggests a model of principle-centred leadership (see also Peak, 1995) that highlights mission statements created at the individual level that then spread throughout the organisation or another entity. These mission statements form a set of values and sense of direction. This view of leadership highlights various actors' individual roles in creating a shared culture based on certain principles (Peak, 1995). This literature review recognises that the principle-based mission statements described by Covey (1989) serve as a starting point for leadership activities and should be explored among other features of TL in the higher education context. Additionally, possible contextual and individual determinants specific to higher education are assumed to exist in this study and are named contingency dimensions (see Villoria, 2022; cf. antecedents by Schott et al., 2020).

Irrespective of the context, given the challenge of finding a universal definition of TL, this study aims to explore features of TL discussed in existing research with reference to higher education teaching staff in order to create a theoretical model. The research questions are:

(1) Which features of TL (principles, means, practice, and effects) are discussed in the higher education literature?

(2) Which contingency dimensions for TL are specific to higher education?

Method

This is a theoretical literature review that aims to assemble explanations and develop conceptual frameworks or models about phenomena that need new theoretical principles and approaches for emerging research questions (Paré et al., 2015). Theoretical literature reviews search systematically for the literature, basing their developments on empirical and conceptual sources (Paré et al., 2015).

Information sources and search strategy

To guarantee the systematic selection of articles (Ghamrawi et al., 2025) for this theoretical review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews & Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021) were followed (Figure 1). The search for literature was completed twice in 2022 and 2025. Due to developments in the search strategies of databases for the last years, it was not possible to receive totally identical results and several articles found in 2022 were missing in 2025. Therefore, the results from both searches were used as the basis of this study.

The 2022 search included only sources published from 2004, the year of the appearance of York-Barr and Duke's (2004) first systematic literature review, which marked the rise of interest in the topic and generated 228 sources. The literature search started from the Education Collection and Education Database (including eight other ProQuest databases) and Education Research Complete in March 2022. Because of the growing interest in TL and extending research in the field, the search was repeated in 2025. The 2025 search extended the period to the end of 2024. It was performed in the same databases and enlarged to Web of Science and Scopus. The search generated 700 results.

For both the 2022 and 2025 data collection periods, a single line search was based on subject-specific terms, and the search strategy was determined using Boolean operators, truncation, phrase searching, field operators, and nesting for precision (Ghamrawi et al., 2025). The search was limited by the filters English language, full text, peer-reviewed sources, and scholarly journals:

("teacher leader*") and ("Higher education*" or Universit*) in abstract

or

("teacher leader*") and ("Higher education*" or Universit*) in subject, topic, or keywords, depending on the database

or

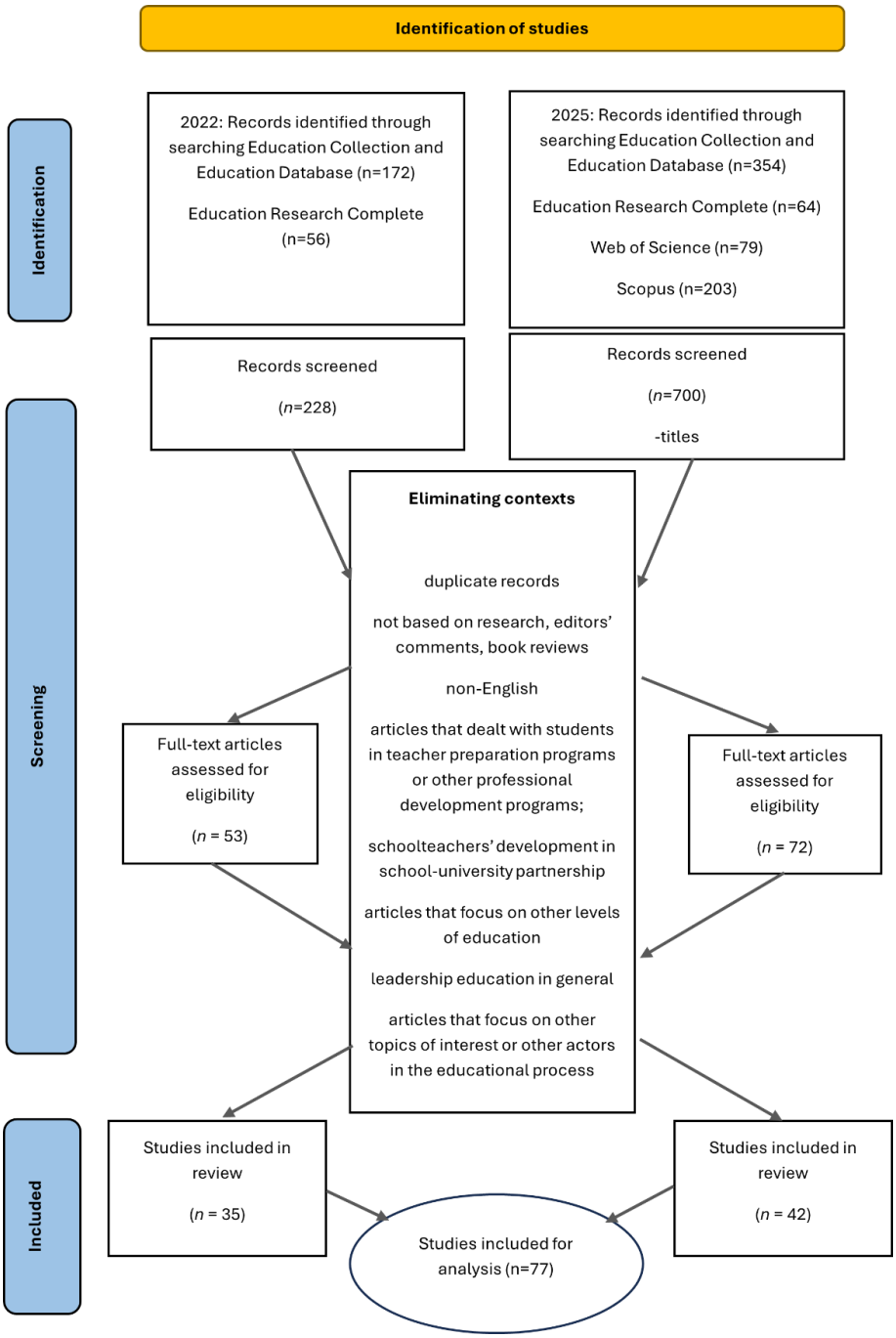
("teacher leader*") and ("Higher education*" or Universit*) in title

In both 2022 and 2025, having analysed the publications' titles and abstracts, the next phase was to identify and select research focusing on higher education teachers in their TL activities. Articles focusing on the following contexts were eliminated: students in teacher preparation programs or

other professional development programs and schoolteachers' development in school–university partnerships. Articles that did not focus on leadership discourse and articles focusing on other actors or other levels of education processes were also eliminated, and duplicate articles were removed. As Pare et al. (2015) suggest, articles based on empirical studies and rigorous methodologies were chosen.

Figure 1

Identification of studies for the review



Essays, editorials, book reviews, and reflections were excluded. With this inclusion and exclusion strategy, articles that explicitly discussed TL in higher education rather than leadership in general or in overly specific contexts were identified. The rationale for this was establishing a theoretical starting point in the TL literature that would assist in developing a theoretical model combining the pre-existing knowledge of, and specific literature on, TL in the higher education context.

In the 2022 data base, 53 articles were included in the first round of reading and, after full-text reading and further elimination based on the above criteria, 35 articles remained for the analysis. For the 2025 database, 94 full-text articles were initially chosen for the first reading. Duplicates with the 2022 database were then removed (n = 22), leaving 72 full-text articles for reading. After further application of exclusion criteria, 42 articles remained for the final analysis. Combining the results of both searches, 77 articles were analysed (Figure 1).

Data analysis

Analysis of the 77 articles was conducted using ATLAS.ti software, and abductive content analysis was used as a synthesis method (cf. Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). The data were extracted from the articles' theoretical background, research findings, discussion, and conclusion sections. During the reading process, codes were manually generated from the articles' contents and were later integrated into the software to answer the research questions. To answer the first research question, the individual codes were first combined into groups and then synthesised into four categories: (1) principles driving TL (based on the conceptualisation by Covey (1989); (2) means of TL (based on the conceptualisation by York-Barr and Duke (2004); (3) practices of TL; and (4) effects of TL (based on the conceptualisations by York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Schott et al. (2020)). To answer the second research question, contingency dimensions were mostly coded from the data, with the exception of leadership work, which was based on the conceptualisation by York-Barr and Duke (2004).

Results

Principles of TL

Becoming a teacher leader is a voluntary altruistic act based on strong commitment to the profession and a sense of responsibility for improvement (Clark et al., 2021; Davison et al., 2014; Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Jenkins, 2019). The analysis of the reviewed articles found that this strong commitment is based on key intertwined principles or aspirations that drive leadership intent, namely quality stewardship, advocacy for discipline, and ethical leadership and inclusivity.

The first principle, quality stewardship of teaching practice, incorporates continuous improvement (Clark et al., 2021). Teacher leaders are those who care for and enhance quality of learning, and advance academic and scholarship standards (Clark et al., 2021; Fawcett et al., 2005; Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Jenkins, 2019; Romanovsky et al., 2019). These principles are tightly connected to issues relating to quality of universities (Zhang et al., 2021), and scholarship of teaching and learning (Flecknoe et al., 2017). Practices that invest in the continuity of knowledge and sustainability of disciplines, such as the protection of scholarship practices and academic values (Macfarlane, 2011), are also highlighted as broad manifestations of quality leadership.

The second principle of TL is advocacy for discipline (Macfarlane, 2011), meaning that teachers in higher education want to promote their discipline and establish its importance within and

beyond educational contexts. Macfarlane (2011) maintains that advocacy for discipline is connected with a significant cause, and being involved in advocacy activities means that teachers in higher education go beyond their responsibilities' traditional domains and champion their broader causes beyond educational institutions' boundaries. Advocacy for the discipline can take various forms: promoting theoretical perspectives; defending the interests of the profession and discipline; participating in public campaigns; developing positive attitudes towards a particular discipline; engaging with external audiences based on one's own disciplinary expertise by serving in professional organisations or organising events (Lunsford & Omae, 2011; Macfarlane, 2011; Sharp et al., 2020; Žydžiūnaitė, 2016).

The third principle is ethical leadership (Butler-Henderson & Crawford, 2020; Mazhair et al., 2023). Ethical leadership behaviour is characterised by high morale, work ethics, and inclusivity (Dominguez-Castillo et al., 2024; Du et al., 2024; Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Norman, 2019; Romanovsky et al., 2019; Salisu & Awang, 2019) and skills in dealing with ethical tensions (Kulp et al., 2024). Hofmeyer et al. (2015) concludes strongly that every academic's moral responsibility is to effectuate respect (for differences) and inclusivity. Regarding students, inclusivity can be understood as leading the learning process in a way that considers different students, supports them, and integrates social equality (Cejas Martínez et al., 2021; Villalobos-Egana et al., 2023). Regarding colleagues, inclusivity can mean helping newly appointed faculty become part of the teaching community, accepting different opinions, and embracing open dialogue (Ghamrawi et al., 2024). Overall, teacher leaders' influence lies in skills of persuasion concerning moral issues and continuous mediating between acceptance and denial (Salisu & Awang 2019). This opinion is supported in Romanovsky's (2019) study, in which students define "moral and ethical qualities" as a distinctive feature of teacher leaders.

Means of TL

Means of TL focus on the tools and roles teachers in higher education use to make a difference. They can be divided into formal and informal roles, cross-level agentic actions, and networks.

Echoing York-Barr and Duke (2004), the literature extensively discusses teacher leaders' formal and informal roles (e.g. Berestova et al., 2020; Dominguez-Castillo et al., 2024; Ghamrawi et al., 2024; M. Harvey & Jones, 2022). Formal roles involve an officially assigned responsibility of a teacher within educational structures – for example, serving on a college-level committee (Johnson et al., 2017), dealing with curriculum development or coordination, mentorship, the training of colleagues, and being heads of units or departments (e.g. Erdel & Takkaç, 2020; Garg, 2020; Shah, 2019). Informal roles appear as everyday activities within practice or routine processes (as opposed to structure) and are based on teachers' personal motivation and passion (Kezar et al., 2007; Sharp et al., 2020), for example, meetings with colleagues (Sharp et al., 2020), proactive approaches to educational practices (Berestova et al., 2020), influencing the direction of universities (Hofmeyer et al., 2015), improving university policies, and developing programs (Norman 2019).

Cross-level agentic actions (Gao & Cui, 2022) refer to the ways in which teacher leaders are characterised as active agents who make choices and take initiatives independently with desired outcomes (Gao & Cui, 2022; Kang & Zhu, 2022b). They reflect teacher leader activities at different levels of education organisations and the education process (Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Kang & Zhu, 2022; Salisu & Awang, 2019; Susman & Temin, 2012) and can be divided into two dominant

topics: TL within the classroom; and TL beyond the classroom. TL in the classroom is mostly understood as leading and managing a course (Marshall et al., 2011) and is associated with learning leadership (Bedgood et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2023). Transformational and transactional leadership styles are popular concepts in this respect, with some studies providing evidence of a strong correlation between elements of transformational leadership (Jiang & Jia, 2018; Noland & Richards, 2014; Pounder, 2009; Wang et al., 2020) or of transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Assefa et al., 2025; DeDeyn, 2021; Erdel & Takkaç, 2020; Lin et al., 2012), and effective classroom leadership and its outcomes (DeDeyn, 2021; Lin et al., 2012; Noland & Richards, 2014; Pounder, 2009). TL beyond the classroom involves other stakeholders in educational practice, including other teachers, or educational institution authorities and larger external communities (Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Kezar et al., 2007; Lunsford & Omae, 2011; Salisu & Awang, 2019). It can involve course coordination in cooperation with colleagues based on shared ideas and teaching materials (Naneh & Rasmussen, 2021), or the creation of conferences or other events to enhance institutional development (Ludwikowska et al., 2025).

Current literature identifies networks that can be built across disciplines (Bedgood et al., 2010; Sharp et al., 2020) as another tool of TL influence. Teacher leaders not only receive access to professional networks (Flecknoe et al., 2017) but create networks of their own (Bedgood et al., 2010; Kezar et al., 2007). Such networks can be either formal or informal. For example, communities of practice are included in some studies as a key type of formal network (e.g. Bedgood et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2021; Jenkins, 2019; Naneh & Rasmussen, 2021) that can take the form of a learning community supported by the institution on campus (e.g. Kezar et al., 2007) or can have a wider outreach and formality emphasised through digital solutions (Bedgood et al., 2010).

Practice of TL

York-Barr and Duke (2004) do not include practice of TL into their conceptual framework. This theme is discussed through examples of various activities TL perform with references to the literature. Similarly, this review identifies practice of TL as tangible activities that enhance teachers' opportunities to have an impact through their everyday tasks, interactions, accomplishments, and competencies. The literature discusses mentoring, research and innovations, decision making, and political behaviour as important TL higher education practices.

Mentoring is identified as typical of teacher leaders (e.g. Ko et al., 2024; Kulp et al., 2024; Mazhair et al., 2023; Žydžiūnaitė, 2016) and is related to terms such as guiding (e.g. Chi ko, 2016), facilitating (Kezar et al., 2007; Macfarlane, 2011; Salisu & Awang, 2019), and nurturing (Macfarlane, 2011). It is largely associated with helping other colleagues, especially those who are less experienced (Creanor, 2014; Kezar et al., 2007; Macfarlane, 2011; Marshall et al., 2011) and its practice (and the interactions it involves) are largely determined by the educational institution's context and the particular assignment's character. For example, some universities establish formal structures with mentoring functions; others keep mentoring informal, underscoring that teacher leaders' followers voluntarily and naturally consider them to be their guides (Kezar et al., 2007; Macfarlane, 2011; Salisu & Awang, 2019).

Research is one of the key activities academics practise in higher education institutions (e.g. Boyd & Smith, 2016; Creanor, 2014; Kumar & Upadhaya, 2018) with teachers' higher education assignments typically blending research and teaching. Supervision of joint research projects and

publication of research papers are considered elements of teacher leaders' activities (Shah, 2019). Special attention is paid to pedagogical research that can be measured by the number of conference presentations (Creanor, 2014; Flecknoe et al., 2017), the number of publications or the amount of funding, which can further be used as a basis for promotion and career movement (Bedgood et al., 2010; Creanor, 2014; Flecknoe et al., 2017). Teaching innovations are closely associated with pedagogical research (e.g. Bedgood et al., 2010; Creanor, 2014; Luo & Wang, 2024). Innovative teachers are described as leaders who develop new educational practices or programs (Davison et al., 2014; Dominguez-Castillo et al., 2024; Hofmeyer et al., 2015) and are ready to be involved in (Berestova et al., 2020) and/or facilitate them at a larger scale. However, the peculiarities of local promotion systems at universities mean involvement in innovative practices can depend on an individual's academic function (Zengin et al., 2018).

Another possible influential leadership practice for academic staff is participation in governance and decision making (e.g. Norman, 2019). The ways in which the literature addresses teachers' participation in decision making is multifaceted and varies according to context (Norman, 2019). Influence on decision making is associated with collective responsibility (Baturay & Yastibas, 2021) and shared/distributed leadership (e.g. Alenezi, 2019; Berestova et al., 2020; Davison et al., 2014), or shared governance (e.g. Boyd & Smith, 2016; Johnson et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017). Shared governance is challenging to implement in academia (Shah, 2019; Smith et al., 2017) and lecturers are often excluded from decision making (Macfarlane, 2011; Smith et al., 2017). Decision making may also be limited to certain areas of influence, for example, instruction (Baturay & Yastibas, 2021), planning and designing professional development programs (Bayram & Canaran, 2018), or influencing decision making at the departmental level (Johnson et al., 2017).

Political behaviour (Salisu & Awang, 2019) is a specific leadership practice and is only included in a few articles that argue that being involved in the wider political environment is essential for teacher leaders (Garg, 2020; Kezar et al., 2007; Salisu & Awang, 2019). It is suggested that discipline can influence teacher leaders' political activity. For example, representatives of the humanities, technological sciences, and natural sciences tend to be involved in policy debates at a larger scale than those in other disciplines (Žydžiūnaitė, 2016). Additionally, those teacher leaders who develop the scholarship of teaching and learning and involve themselves in innovation can become opinion leaders, which is itself a form of political activity (Creanor, 2014).

Effects of TL

The effects of TL can be grouped into four categories that reflect the complex relationship structures in which teacher leaders are involved: (1) effects on students; (2) effects on teachers; (3) effects on educational institutions; and (4) effects on change.

As long as teacher leaders continue to be connected with teaching and classroom practices, their activities for students largely result in student learning improvement (Garg, 2020; Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Noland & Richards, 2014; Zhang et al., 2021). These include developing teacher quality (e.g. Berestova et al., 2020), applying transformational leadership in teaching (e.g. Noland & Richards, 2014), or implementing student-centred teaching methodologies even in the challenging context of large group pedagogy (Bedgood et al., 2010). Teaching practices directly impact on student outcomes (e.g. Bin et al., 2021; Li, 2024; Sereda et al., 2024; Shinde & Bamber, 2023; Tsai & Lin, 2012), particularly in terms of student achievement or performance. Teacher leaders elevate overall student experience (e.g. Creanor, 2014, Flecknoe et al., 2017, Hofmeyer

et al., 2015) by caring for student wellbeing and mental health (Chi Ko, 2016; Noland & Richards, 2014; Peng & Huang, 2024) and increasing student engagement (e.g. DeDeyn, 2021; Noland & Richards, 2014; Trigueros et al., 2020) by exercising spiritual leadership (Xu, 2024) and by experiencing empathy (AlTaher et al., 2024; Fawcett et al., 2005). Broadening student perspectives can be considered another possible result of TL practices that is expressed through supporting students in their goal setting, instilling the desire for lifelong learning, and enhancing students' ability to express opinions with humility and care for others' wellbeing (Chi Ko, 2016; Karthikeyen & Sathish, 2019).

Effects on teachers are palpable when teacher leaders go beyond their classrooms and discuss their trials and errors with other colleagues, enhancing shared teaching expertise: when teacher leaders improve teaching and learning practices, their colleagues also benefit (e.g. Hofmeyer et al., 2015). Professional development thus becomes an important outcome of TL practice (e.g. Cejas Martínez et al., 2021; Karthikeyan & Sathish, 2019; S. Wang & Mhunpiew, 2024). By participating in professional development and involving themselves in action research projects, teacher leaders build their leadership capacity and are recognised as teaching and learning experts, thereby gaining career advancement opportunities (e.g. Creanor, 2014; Flecknoe et al., 2017; Shah, 2019). Career advancement does not necessarily entail moving to administrative and management positions, instead new teacher leader positions can be created to acknowledge scholars' achievement and enable career advancement routes in the sphere of pedagogical innovations and teaching excellence (Creanor, 2014, Flecknoe et al., 2017; Shah, 2019). Participation in TL practices is also positively connected with teachers' motivation as employees of educational organisations. TL allows variation in tasks and increased responsibilities and challenges that make work more interesting and eradicate stagnation (e.g. Garg, 2020). This means teachers' engagement and job satisfaction increase (Baturay & Yastibas, 2021), as does their educational institution citizenship (Kezar et al., 2007; Ludwikowska et al., 2025).

The key effect on educational institutions is improving practices and policies at the level of campuses, departments, or entire universities (e.g. Berestova et al., 2020; Creanor, 2014; Norman, 2019). Shah (2019) states that TL roles are created so that teacher leaders and their colleagues achieve institutional outcomes. Another effect of TL practices is that teacher leaders have increasingly positive attitudes towards their work and are eager to participate in organisational learning (Baturay & Yastibas, 2021), and the educational institution becomes more open and responsive to community needs (Baturay & Yastibas, 2021; Kezar et al., 2007). Open conversation in turn creates opportunities for teachers and administrative staff to learn together (Norman, 2019).

Educational institutions' success as a possible effect of TL is a comprehensive concept (e.g. Baturay & Yastibas, 2021; Shah, 2019) that can be understood in terms of the education quality higher education institutions provide (e.g. Zhang et al., 2021; Norman, 2019) or of new resources for universities and the development of new relationships and academic reputations (e.g. Boyd & Smith, 2016; Macfarlane, 2011; Norman, 2019). Institutional resilience can also be achieved when TL is performed in harmony with other institutional practices, including approaches to governance, and when lecturers can be involved in wider spaces of influence (Norman, 2019).

Discussion of the effects of TL for change should start with adaptive leadership (Potchana et al., 2020). Teacher leaders' adaptive leadership allows the implementation of change (e.g. Bedgood et al., 2010; Bin et al., 2021; DeDeyn, 2021; Kezar et al., 2007) at different levels of TL practice,

including in the classroom (e.g. Bedgood et al., 2010; DeDeyn, 2021), in one's own department, in the university as a whole (e.g. Bedgood et al., 2010; Garg, 2020; Johnson et al., 2016), at other universities (e.g. Bedgood et al., 2010), and at the wider national and societal levels (e.g. Garg, 2020). Change starts in the classroom, where teacher leaders can change students' attitudes, break down stereotypes, and develop positive beliefs (e.g. Bin et al., 2021; DeDeyn, 2021). A specific element of change within institutions is curriculum renewal (Geduld & Sathorar, 2016; Marshall et al., 2011), in which teacher leaders are involved through facilitating roles. Teacher leaders also start to experiment and innovate in their own classrooms, later spreading the results across the educational and other institutions, guiding future nationwide pedagogical higher education change (e.g. Bedgood et al., 2010; Flecknoe et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021). Critically, change should be sustainable (Creanor, 2014; Geduld & Sathorar, 2016; Johnson et el., 2016). Tangible measures that have been introduced to create continuity of change include creating specific TL roles that can become part of nationwide initiatives that foster sustainable transformation (e.g. Creanor, 2014; Bedgood et al., 2010) and ensuring teachers commit to change initiatives in becoming part of university governance, knowing that their voices will be heard (Johnson et al., 2016).

Contingency dimensions for TL

Understanding TL as manifestations that unfold as principles, means of influence, leadership influence practice, and possible effects and outcomes assumes the presence of contingency dimensions as these manifestations' situational background. Such dimensions are related to relationship building, teacher leaders, organisation and culture, the nature of work, and leadership work characteristics.

Relationship building

Dimensions related to relationship building appear in several studies and can be understood at different levels: relationships with students and authentic leadership; relationships with colleagues; relationships with organisational authorities; and relationships with the wider education community. Some studies emphasise the importance for teacher leaders of developing personal relationships (Kezar et al., 2007) while others maintain that TL is based on teacher leaders' personal influence and the interactions in which they involve themselves (e.g. Berestova et al., 2020; Shah, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Relationship building with students is characterised by authentic leadership characteristics of teacher leaders who lead through passion, sincerity, compassion and empathy, and communication and connection (e.g. Fawcett et al., 2005; Butler-Henderson & Crawford, 2020; Whitehead & Greenier, 2019). Echoing the same ideas, Salisu & Awang (2019) claim that teacher leaders typically operate in large spaces where they lack any formal authority and cannot influence the community through hierarchy. The only influential power they have is persuasion, which they exert through involvement in spontaneous interactions with members in unstructured networks like students, colleagues, and other possible members of the education community. The relational character of teacher leader roles is, therefore, directly linked to discussions of formal and informal roles and higher education leadership is not a specific framework of roles but a complex system of institutional relationships (Norman, 2019).

Teacher leaders

The dimensions related to teacher leaders are connected with teacher leaders' professional characteristics and psychological ontology. The complex processes of identity management and expertise, and personal features such as gratitude and hope, are incorporated into these factors. The contingency dimensions related to teacher leaders are connected with teacher leaders' professional characteristics and psychological ontology. The complex processes of identity management and expertise, and personal features such as gratitude and hope, are incorporated into these factors. Research on TL in higher education repeatedly addresses identity management (Kulp et al., 2024) and the multifaceted nature of work. Identity management is discussed mostly in the context of the complexity of multiple roles in academia (e.g. Boyd & Smith, 2016; Creanor, 2014; Flecknoe et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2017), with traditionally strong researcher identities creating room for other identities (Boyd & Smith, 2016; Flecknoe et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2013), which can be explained either by changes in the educational arena (Flecknoe et al., 2017; Gao & Cui, 2022, 2023) or by personal preferences (Salisu & Awang, 2019; Smith et al., 2013). This shift in identity management supports TL intent as undertaking TL activities adds a new element of developing an identity as a teacher leader (Gao & Cui, 2023).

Within the context of shift, feelings of responsibility and ownership are also identified as constituting teacher leaders' identity (Smith et al., 2013). As an expert, a teacher leader leads inclusion of new faculty members in the community (Ghamrawi et al., 2024), works with others to share knowledge (Ko et al., 2024), and showcases achievements in various educational practices (Creanor, 2014) and excellent teaching skills (e.g. Creanor, 2014; Noland & Richards, 2014; Shah, 2019; Susman & Temin, 2012). Salisu & Awang (2019) also consider political skill one of the most important skills of effective teacher leaders, presenting it as a psychological resource and the main tool in performing boundary-spanning roles. Additionally, Garg (2020) focuses on social intelligence as a skill set that includes the ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings, empathise with them, be sensitive to others' needs, and adapt behaviour to the social situation within the relationship. This is an important trait in the process of building relationships with various education community stakeholders by understanding the people involved, evaluating the situation, and choosing the correct strategies for influencing activities (AlTaher et al., 2024; Andrade Navia et al., 2023; Du et al., 2024; Hanshaw & Hanshaw, 2023).

Several writers mention teacher leaders' enthusiasm (e.g. Chi Ko, 2016; DeDeyn, 2021; Sharp et al., 2020), as forming the basis for other typical features of teacher leaders, such as a strong commitment to what they are doing (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020; Susman & Temin, 2012) and resilience (Kezar et al., 2007). Resilience is related to continuity, and for teacher leaders it means persisting even when facing the resistance that occurs during their active engagement (Kezar et al., 2007). Resilience itself is related to individualistic skills (Abu Samra, 2014) that are expressed in a person's strong personality (Salisu & Awang, 2019). These skills resonate with the ability to make decisions and express and put forward ideas (Berestova et al., 2020), which enables teacher leaders to communicate their beliefs and values and showcase their strength for coping with possible resistance, while remaining committed to their own work and objectives.

Gratitude (Garg, 2020; Garg & Gera, 2020; Zheng & Wang, 2024) and hope (Smith et al., 2013) are additional positive psychological traits which have been found to be connected with a readiness to undertake TL assignments. Gratitude is understood as a trait that allows individuals to notice and acknowledge good things in life (Garg, 2020; Garg & Gera, 2020), and it has been

shown to help teachers advance as leaders (Garg, 2020). Hope in turn explains a readiness to collaborate, support, and be connected with the educational institution's success. It supports positive emotions within motivational processes, reinforcing the desire to serve in leadership roles (Smith et al., 2013).

Organisation and culture

At the level of single higher education institutions, organisation and culture can be identified mostly in terms of organisational culture and management models and broader higher education culture and policy. TL is based on, and effective in, conditions of realised distributed leadership (e.g. Alenezi, 2019; Berestova et al., 2020; Cejas Martínez et al., 2021; Davison et al., 2014) or shared governance practices (Johnson et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017; Norman, 2019; Smith et al., 2013). However, a lack of autonomy, trust, cooperation, or empowerment (e.g. Shah, 2019) typifies hierarchical organisations and strict definition of roles within systems (e.g. Baturay & Yastibas, 2021; Shah, 2019) or central steer (e.g. Creanor, 2014) that typifies hierarchical organisation may create clarity (Shah, 2019) but limit TL practices. The culture of higher education's wider context also plays a part in this discussion. For example, general higher education trends that highlight academics' individualism, focus on career development through publication, and numerous non-tenure appointments hinder TL practice (e.g. Kezar et al. 2007, Macfarlane 2011; Jones, 2017).

Nature of work

Manifestations of TL practice are also supported by dimensions related to the nature of work, which can be viewed in terms of *type of* TL assignments; and recognition of teacher leaders' efforts. In terms of TL assignments, TL roles increase administrative workload, may add to paperwork (e.g. Bayram & Canaran 2018; Shah 2019) and a lack of time can prevent teachers undertaking leadership roles (Sharp et al., 2020). It is therefore important to ensure that time and other resources are balanced to enable both leadership assignments and leadership development possibilities (e.g. Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2017). Another aspect that is closely connected with time allocation is a more tangible clarification of the diversity of the roles (e.g. Kezar et al., 2007; Macfarlane, 2011) in which academics are involved (Kulp et al., 2024; Ludwikowska et al., 2025). The clarification of these roles entails manageable and reasonable allocation of teacher leaders' resources in accordance with expectations. At the same time TL assignments should be based on freedom of action (e.g. Baturay & Yastibas 2021; Shah 2019). Unfortunately, teacher leaders often experience a lack of appreciation in their home institution (e.g. Macfarlane, 2011; Shah, 2019; Sharp et al., 2020). Recognition (e.g. Baturay & Yastibas, 2021; Creanor, 2014; Flecknoe et al., 2017) increases teacher leaders' commitment to the practices in which they are active. Recognition can be expressed in various forms: a system of incentives and awards (e.g. Hofmeyer et al., 2015); the creation of special teacher leaders' positions that consolidate TL practice (Creanor, 2014; Davison et al., 2014; Flecknoe et al., 2017); and esteem for teacher leaders' expertise and knowledge (e.g. Macfarlane, 2011).

Leadership work characteristics

How leadership work is performed, its characteristics, and its essence influence the sustainability and enduring outreach of TL in higher education. Humble leadership while raising voices, service leadership, and cooperation and collegiality are characteristics that promote interest in and

excitement about TL endeavours and guarantee resilience of TL practices in higher education systems. On the one hand, the nature of academic work is such that one needs to be open about success: individual performance and research impact is the basis of promotion, e.g. becoming a professor (Macfarlane, 2014). Whatever teacher leaders succeed in should be openly communicated to make leaders' status visible to different education actors (Gao & Cui, 2022, 2023). While it is important to make an impact and to be recognised, it is equally important to promote one's own university (Macfarlane, 2011) and work on behalf of teaching and learning (Clark et al., 2021). On the other hand, teacher leaders remain humble, step back, keep silent, and work behind the scenes (e.g. Kezar et al., 2007; Macfarlane, 2011). They engage in selfless work in nurturing knowledge and do not necessarily receive credit for their unseen work (Davison et al., 2014; Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Kezar et al., 2007). Balancing raising one's voice and a selfless and team-based leadership ethic (e.g. Macfarlane, 2011) is thus one of the challenging characteristics of righteous leadership work that ensures TL paths' continuity.

Another characteristic of TL work is service leadership. Teacher leaders serve the best benefit of students (Dominguez-Castillo et al., 2024; Du et al., 2024; Hanshaw & Hanshaw, 2023), organisations, and societies, with selfless activities forming part of their everyday work (Cejas Martínez et al., 2021; Jonson et al., 2016, Kezar et al., 2007; Shah, 2019). They are sensitive and compassionate towards students and colleagues (Flecknoe et al., 2017; Kumar & Upadhaya, 2018), they promote their university (e.g. serving and representing it nationally and internationally) (Johnson et al., 2017; Macfarlane, 2011; Martínez et al., 2021), and they involve themselves in knowledge exchange with industry representatives (Boyd & Smith, 2016). This characteristic of leadership work creates the conditions for widespread benefits for students, research, and knowledge and generates income practices (Boyd & Smith, 2016; Kumar & Upadhaya, 2018; Macfarlane, 2011) that constitute support for its sustainability. Teacher leaders thus foster collaboration and develop collegiality (e.g. Bayram & Canaran, 2018; Bedgood et al., 2010; Dominguez-Castillo et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2023), which can be developed with different stakeholders (Salisu & Awang, 2019) within and outside universities (Sharp et al., 2020). Cooperation between colleagues can be a first step before influencing the authorities and government (Berestova et al., 2020; Kezar et al., 2007; Salisu & Awang, 2019) and the importance of developing a cooperative approach to relationship building between teachers and university administration should be recognised (Norman, 2019).

Cultures of cooperation can be established through soft approaches (Norman, 2019) or formal and imposed top-down approaches, i.e. through specific programs (Bayram & Canaran, 2018; Kezar et al., 2007; Norman, 2019). The culture of cooperation (Norman, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021) is characterised by collaboration (Hofmeyer et al., 2015), open opportunities (Norman, 2019), mutual help, democracy and encouragement (Zhang, 2021), and questioning and debates (Kezar et al., 2007; Norman, 2019). This culture does not generally allow for the toxic dynamics of personal relationships (Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Kezar et al., 2007), teacher resentment, and mistrust (Shah, 2019). Instead, it promotes civility and inclusivity (Hofmeyer et al., 2015) and develops support from the institution for academics to take on TL positions (Flecknoe et al., 2017; Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Kezar et al., 2007; Norman, 2019) or share experiences (Berestova et al., 2020), creating resilience in TL work.

Discussion

This literature review aimed to answer two research questions: (1) Which of the features of TL are enacted by the teaching staff in higher education?; and (2) What contingency dimensions for TL are specific in the context of higher education? A graphical summary that incorporates the categories generated in the findings (Figure 2) provides a theoretical model of TL in higher education that introduces the prevailing principles in teacher leaders' mission statement and identifies contingency dimensions unique to higher education.

Theoretical model of TL in higher education

The model combines some features of the TL models presented in previous literature reviews by incorporating means, practices, and effects of TL (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Schott et al., 2020). While earlier models of TL are presented linearly, inadvertently suggesting a move from a starting point towards results, the proposed model is circular to represent TL as a continuous process (e.g. Jones et al., 2014; Ko et al., 2024; Norman, 2019; Shinde & Bamber, 2023). This allows for questioning whether teacher leaders stop being active in leadership engagement after a result has been achieved and whether they always manage to achieve the desired outcome.

The model also reflects the contemporary approach to leadership in its pluralised forms (e.g. Gentili, 2021), attending to relationship building as contingency dimensions. Contingency dimensions are comparable with TL's antecedents (Schott et al., 2020), although they are not identical. While antecedents are claimed to have a direct influence on TL manifestations, contingency dimensions create a context or background for them. Although some contingency dimensions do have dependency relationships with features of TL, including hope (Smith et al., 2013), gratitude (Garg, 2020), and distributed leadership (Alenezi, 2019), no claims are made pertaining to correlations between the contingency dimensions and features of TL: the model simply attempts to recognise the existence of background factors that may affect these manifestations. The model therefore has two layers: a central layer representing the main features of TL and a second layer representing contingency dimensions (Figure 2).

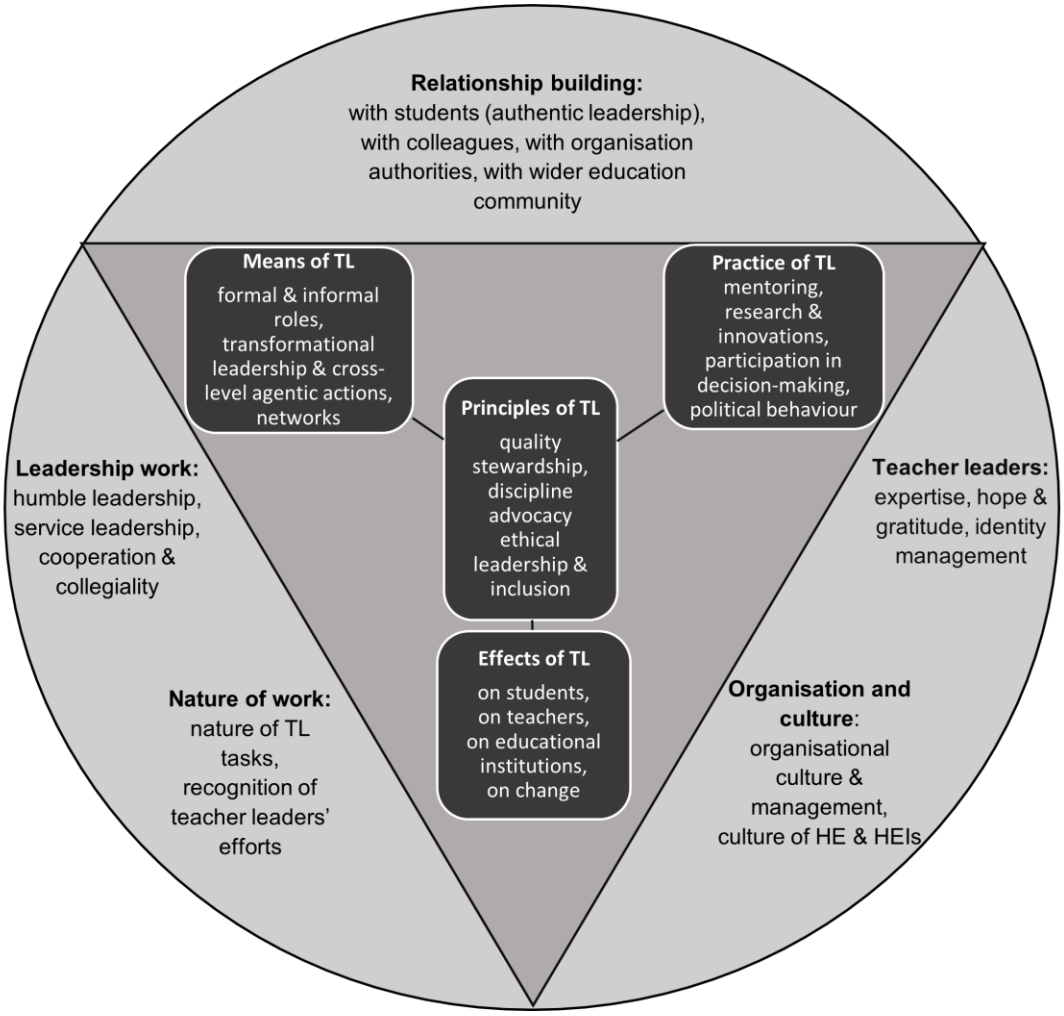
The model's novelty lies in its potential to promote larger causes for leadership action: it transforms the leadership intent in the form of strong beliefs into courageous goals that create a powerful basis for strong influence. This principle-based leadership opens a new perspective in approaching teacher leaders' activities. Earlier reviews conducted by York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Schott et al. (2020) discuss the personal factors of educators that promote the development of TL. Comparatively, this review and its resulting theoretical model provide an understanding of the motivation behind teacher leaders' leadership intent, laying a strong foundation for discovering the paths of influence that York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggest as a possible future research focus.

Certain contingency dimensions that deal with specifics of higher education are unique discoveries of this review. Identity management (Kulp et al., 2024), the traits of positive psychology as hope (Smith et al., 2013), gratitude (Garg, 2020; Garg & Gera, 2020; Zheng & Wang, 2024), and social intelligence (Garg & Gera, 2020) were not mentioned in the earlier reviews and may constitute new approaches to studying TL. Leadership work that is characterised by the poles of humility and raising one's voice, service leadership, and cooperation and

collegiality creates opportunities for increased TL and the results of this study highlight that the connection between leadership work and the principles of TL requires further research.

Figure 2

Theoretical model of TL in higher education



Standing for quality and discipline

The principles of TL highlighted in this literature review reflect the specifics of the higher education context. Academic leaders are continuously involved in activities focusing on protecting disciplines and knowledge, promoting disciplines, and making scientific knowledge and research more open and understandable to the public (Macfarlane, 2011; Sharp et al., 2020). Disciplines constitute shared knowledge resources for those who belong – for example, ways of thinking or writing principles – and disciplinary knowledge is omnipresent in academics' work because it provides the basis for research texts, teaching, funding proposals, and social media postings (Tusting & Barton, 2016). Similar to the higher education field as a whole, disciplinary knowledge is widely influenced by external forces. For example, disciplines with well-established and traditionally fixed practices are therefore strongly placed to defend themselves against external pressures (cf. Tusting & Barton, 2016). These arguments reinforce discipline advocacy as a key

aspect of TL practices in the higher education context. Furthermore, though there are changes in higher education that are precipitated by policy, financial (Gill et al., 2022) and ideological shifts, teacher leaders are the ones who might oppose the changes and stand for the integrity, quality, and standards of research, education, and universities. While quality assurance showcases awareness of higher education's standardised responsibilities, it often fails to answer the expectations of academics, who characterise higher education as overly managerial and focusing on ratings and success instead of students' learning (Harvey, 2022; Locke, 2014). In the midst of the highly administrative process of quality assurance, opportunities to enhance transformative quality that can influence pedagogy, student learning, and skills development also fall short (cf. Harvey, 2022). Quality leadership therefore becomes an act of belief for individual academics.

Poles of TL

This review's findings reveal a number of polarities in TL: (1) formal and informal roles; (2) leadership within and beyond the classroom; (3) individualism (desire for recognition) and cooperation (collegiality); and (4) remaining humble while raising one's voice. These four poles may also intersect with each other. For example, the desire for recognition in academia (e.g. Baturay & Yastibas, 2021; Creanor, 2014; Flecknoe et al., 2017), which is one of the contingency dimensions in the nature of work category, can conflict with collegiality (e.g. Bayram & Canaran, 2018; Bedgood et al., 2010; Berestova et al., 2020), which is one of the contingency dimensions in the leadership work category. While individuals are judged by their individual performance, not their attempts to help others, mentorship opportunities, which constitute one of the manifestations of TL in higher education, increase at the level of professorship (Kemp, 2015). Undertaking TL roles therefore depends on career advancement, and it is possible that the availability of more incentives such as in the form of quasi-formal teacher leader roles (Supovitz, 2018) positively influence TL efforts, commitment to assignments, and progress (Checchi et al., 2021).

The polarity of remaining humble (e.g. Kezar et al., 2007; Macfarlane, 2011) while raising one's voice (Macfarlane, 2014; Gao & Cui, 2023) highlight a key concept in discussions of TL in the higher education context. However, any polarity between the nature of TL roles that, on the one hand, focus on nurturing, humility, and serving others' interests and, on the other hand, emphasise individualism and multiple competitions of higher education (Krücken, 2021) remain under-explored and should be the focus of future research. Current sources discussing humility are mostly philosophical (e.g. Chi Ko, 2016) or describe the life and work of outstanding leaders (Badat, 2013; Susman & Temin, 2012). They describe such leadership in terms of a teacher who does not seek to change anyone or anything in open confrontation and debate; instead, it entails embracing one's values in one's daily work, and demonstrating professional integrity and generosity (Wood, 2016). These studies are in line with the reviewed articles that often highlight generous unconditional involvement in TL activities (e.g. Davison et al., 2014; Ghamrawi et al., 2024; Jenkins, 2019). Such studies to date emphasise teacher leaders' humility; and the results of this review suggest that humble leadership (Liu et al., 2022) is essential in discussions of TL.

Limitations

This review was limited to those studies that were written in English and indicated a focus on TL or teacher leaders in the higher education context in key sections of the publications (i.e. abstracts, keywords, or titles). While this means it was not possible to include all published

research related to TL in the higher education context, the studies here are likely to be of the greatest relevance for capturing the essence of TL. Only one article discusses TL in the context of a university of applied sciences, which indicates a need to research TL at such universities where a slightly different contingency for TL practices may become apparent.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest it is possible to define TL in the higher education context through several specific features. First, TL in higher education is rooted in relationships between teachers and actors in the educational process and is based on quality stewardship, discipline advocacy, and democratic leadership. TL is expressed through formal and informal manifestations of making (and being) a difference within and beyond educational institutions. Second, TL is a result of identity work derived from the complexity of academic assignments. Third, to the extent that shared leadership practices are difficult for university hierarchies, it is important that TL roles are somehow formally fixed and recognised to achieve the possible outcomes, while, at the same time, recognising that humble leadership is a strong feature of leadership work for informal influence.

The practical implications of this research can be discussed from several perspectives. The results indicate it is vital for organisation leadership and educational policies to recognise teachers' roles as leaders (formal, informal, or semi-formal) because, when enabled, TL can positively influence students, teachers, educational institutions, and change at different levels. The theoretical TL model offers education authorities a tool to enable the institutionalisation of TL efforts, which can be implemented by mapping work assignments and allocating necessary resources for possible leadership endeavours. In addition, when higher education institution management understands the existence of controversies (poles) of TL, it can create conditions that sustain TL practice.

For the teacher community, the recognition of teacher leaders is vital for professional development and the achievement of the common goals of quality of education, discipline protection, and ethics. This is connected with students' motivation, performance, and learning outcomes. Awareness of the power of collegial effort as support for teacher leaders (instead of competitive forces) can be beneficial for the whole community. For individual teachers, self-knowledge of one's leadership potential can make a difference in accepting and developing a professional leadership identity. Understanding the possible means of influence and its practices can help teachers to achieve their goals more efficiently, resulting in increased work satisfaction.

For scholarship and research the study offers an agenda to promote further TL research in the higher education context. The reviewed articles largely focus on topics that can be categorised as either means or practice of TL. Therefore, future research could expand this to focus on the principles of TL and its effects, and the discovery of more contingency dimensions unique to specific contexts. The model developed in this study operates with umbrella categories that can be transferred to other TL contexts, and further research based on it could focus on creating possible character profiles (or personas) of teacher leaders.

Furthermore, the theoretical model of TL could be used in empirical inquiry on TL practices, for example, to compare different institutions and countries. Especially the question of how TL roles could be institutionalised and recognised needs more attention in future research. In addition,

further research can use the model to discover additional TL paths by investigating possible connections between the model's different elements using empirical data. The elements of positive psychology highlighted by this study and their strong relation to TL could also constitute a focus for future research in response to contemporary trends in leadership scholarship. The discovery of TL's poles (or controversies) explains the challenges of creating a universally acceptable definition. It suggests a new approach to TL discussions which does not seek to create a universal definition. Accepting and investigating the nature of TL through poles enhances comprehension of TL as a multifaceted phenomenon.

Future research could also focus on manifestations of influence to advocate for discipline and quality and provide insight into how teacher leaders communicate messages to advocate for their positions. Further research that can connect the act of asserting discipline and quality alongside student learning and improvement in teaching should be emphasised. Additionally, future research could elaborate on TL possibilities for academics with different levels of seniority (e.g. Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Professors) and non-tenured academics. In general, the research on features of teacher leadership in higher education can continue utilizing different type of data.

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