

# Teacher Education for Language Teacher Leadership

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**ABSTRACT:** In this editorial, we introduce the rationale for the special issue and discuss how each of the contributions sheds light on the topic of teacher education for teacher leadership.

**KEYWORDS:** language teacher leadership, management, teacher leadership

## Introduction

There have been many changes in recent years about how leadership is viewed. In education, it is now clear that teachers benefit in a multitude of ways from developing leadership skills. In particular, it is widely recognized that “the most successful and sustainable teams are those where responsibilities are distributed among teacher leaders, rather than centralised at the top” (Reinders, 2023a, p. 1; see also, e.g., Harris, 2003). Earlier models frequently emphasized individual leaders and the characteristics of successful leadership. But lately, leadership has come to be seen as a process in which many people have roles to play. Leadership emerges “as a result of what happens among people, the relationships they have, and the contexts where they work” (Reinders, 2023a, p. 2).

There has also been a move away from a focus on technical processes of leadership to one that distinguishes “between the development of the ‘leader’—the person—and the development of ‘leadership’—the process and practice” (Smylie & Eckert, 2018, para. 14). This view emphasizes developing teachers’ leadership: “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” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 288).

In language education, several publications have addressed leadership (see, e.g., Christison & Murray, 2009; Coombe et al., 2008; Curtis, 2022; Knight 2022; Reinders, 2023b). But despite this significant interest in the topic, there has not been as much research carried out as one might expect. Recent meta-analyses (Wenner & Campbell, 2017) and bibliometric analyses (Pan et al., 2023) have shown that very few empirical studies exist that investigate fundamental questions to understand the nature of, contributors to, and impact of teacher leadership. Furthermore, both a generally accepted definition and commonly used theoretical framework for investigating teacher leadership are still lacking (Sebastian et al., 2017). Smylie and Eckert (2018) assert that “currently, very little is known about the scope of efforts being used to develop teacher leadership and little is known about their respective outcomes” (penultimate paragraph). For these reasons, we are pleased to open this special issue of *Second Language Teacher Education* with some of our thoughts about language teacher leadership.

## Literature Review

### *Language Teacher Educators and Teacher Leadership*

The topic of language teacher leadership should be of interest to language teacher educators for at least four main reasons. First, according to Richards (2023), it seems that teacher education programs in our field frequently do not acknowledge “how being a leader is a core dimension of teacher identity and practice” (p. vi). Richards also asserts that such training programs typically do not address “the knowledge, awareness, interpersonal and social skills needed to succeed in leadership responsibilities and decision making” (p. vi). In fact, in a qualitative analysis of ten detailed cases of leaders in TESOL, Curtis (2022) found that feeling ill-prepared for leadership roles was a dominant theme among the experiences of the case contributors.

Second, in a survey of 228 leaders in US language education, Powers and Bailey (2023) found that only 35% “had taken academic courses on leadership,” but 82% “had taken leadership workshops” (p. 70). This contrast may suggest that they engaged in such trainings when they took on or were assigned leadership roles. In addition, 5.7% of these respondents reported being delegated leadership roles without having been asked. Although this percent is small, it indicates that teachers should be prepared for unexpected leadership responsibilities.

A third reason, as we pointed out earlier, is that there is a surprising dearth of research on language teacher leadership. The first scoping review specifically

in the field of *language* teacher leadership (Reinders et al., 2025) showed that despite a relatively large number of publications in leadership, only eight met the inclusion criteria for empirical studies on language teacher leadership. The analysis revealed significant gaps in terms of what has been investigated and how. In this introductory article, we suggest some areas where further research could be undertaken.

Fourth, as noted earlier, the feeling of being ill-prepared for leadership roles is a repeated theme in the self-reports of language teachers who have assumed such roles. The phrase “sink or swim” arises often as teacher leaders talk about how they adjusted to their new work, particularly in relation to official positions, such as department chair or lead teacher. As teacher educators, we should be aware of this situation and offer pre-service and in-service teachers support for their (future) leadership roles, just as we do in terms of their knowledge and skills in teaching methodology, linguistics, language assessment, curriculum design, and so on. It is particularly this final point that motivated us to propose this focus for a special issue of *Second Language Teacher Education*.

Indeed, despite the widely acknowledged importance of teacher leadership, there is only limited empirical research about language teachers engaging (or wishing to engage) in leadership activities (but see Powers & Bailey, 2023) and how they could be better encouraged to do so. The review of the teacher leadership literature in language education (Reinders et al., 2025), showed that a range of different drivers and obstacles exist, but no comprehensive account of these variables is available, and it is not clear how they might interact.

### ***Willingness to Lead***

To better understand these issues, we draw on Reinders’ (2023a) concept of *Willingness to Lead* (WTL)— teachers’ readiness and willingness to assume leadership roles in a particular situation. WTL draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior, first developed by Ajzen in the 1980s, to explain why people do or do not engage in particular behaviours over which they have control (Ajzen, 2011, 2020). As shown in the following model, a range of background factors, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control determines intentions and eventual behaviour. The Theory of Planned Behaviour has been used in fields ranging from health care to consumer attitudes and behaviours. It has only sparingly been used in education. To the best of our knowledge, it has not been used in research on language teacher leadership.

The model includes six components (Reinders, 2023a, pp. 3–4):

*Behaviour beliefs*: The subjective probability that the behaviour will produce a given outcome or experience.

*Attitude towards the behaviour:* the degree to which performance of the behaviour is positively or negatively valued.

*Normative beliefs:* The perceived pressure to engage in a certain behaviour.

*Subjective norms:* The perceived social pressure to engage or not to engage in a behaviour.

*Control beliefs:* The perceived presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of a behaviour.

*Perceived behavioural control:* People's perceptions of their ability to perform a given behaviour.

These six background factors all influence people's intentions for how to behave. Reinders integrated these six components with the three broad situational domains of teacher leadership (personal, organizational, and professional; Reinders, 2023a), to yield a 3-by-6 grid that provides a framework for examining WTL (see the Appendix).

Each cell in the grid represents one or more issues that can be used by individuals, their schools, and the wider community to support a move towards language teacher leadership. For example, our behavioural beliefs at the personal level (cell 1:1) can be altered through guided or self-reflection on prior experiences of leadership. (For examples of such activities, see Reinders, 2023c.) This and each of the other drivers provide opportunities for exploration, for instance, to identify which have the greatest impact or which are most amenable to intervention. We present the framework with illustrative research foci for each of its 18 elements.



be posed about those issues.

The grid shown in the Appendix illustrates the potential for the six categories of Ajzen's (2011) theory, combined with the three situational domains of teacher leadership (personal, organizational, and professional). It illustrates the potential for using the theory as a framework for generating relevant research questions about teacher leadership. The concept of Willingness to Lead is used as an example, but many other topics and research questions could be generated through this framework.

### ***Examining Teacher Education Practices***

However, the framework can also serve as a springboard for language teacher educators to examine their own and others' practices. Reinders (2023a) asserts that "professional programmes can probably do more to incorporate leadership awareness building" (p. 12). As language teacher educators, we can ask ourselves how we help novice teachers prepare for their future leadership roles, even though

those roles may be somewhat unpredictable. We can review our curricula and see if issues in all three columns of the Appendix are addressed. We can ask whether the six categories of Ajzen's (2011) theory are present in the curriculum and/or extracurricular activities.

The sample questions in the grid can be used as discussion starters for group work, trainees' journal entries, or online discussion boards. In working on professional development with in-service teachers, we can consider how best to address with them the factors identified in the Organizational and Professional columns. Pre-service teachers can be encouraged to observe and interview experienced teacher leaders about their contexts.

In addition, the information in the grid suggests steps teacher educators can take to add experiential learning focused on leadership to their programs. For example, in the first cell in the grid (1:1), we find the heading "Understanding personal values and aspirations" followed by the question "What personal values and aspirations influence emerging leaders' efforts to take on leadership roles?" As an activity for addressing this issue, Anderson (2008) explains the benefits of leaders writing a personal mission statement. Doing so "gives us an opportunity for an in-depth view of what we believe we can contribute to the world" (p. 22).

In the cell at the intersection of perceived behavioural control and the organizational component (4:2), we see the topic of "experiential learning opportunities, such as co-teaching or leadership shadowing." As language teacher educators, we can locate or create opportunities for trainees to shadow leaders. Such opportunities could include observing faculty meetings, helping to run local conferences, observing a team doing a SWOT analysis, or—for pre-service teachers in teacher training programs—leading student-run organizations.

## Introduction to This Special Issue

Some of these activities are evident in the contributions to this special issue. At the level of personal leadership, Vo and Christison introduce the concept of intellectual humility. With reference to our grid, this involves (among other issues) "understanding personal values and aspirations" and the use of "guided or self-reflection on prior experiences of leadership." It is interesting to note that, as is the case with several of the other articles included here, the research process itself will have likely encouraged personal reflection and perhaps influenced participants' perceptions of (their and others') leadership. It may do so by "developing a willingness to challenge one's assumptions and take professional risks" and "sharing of experiences of language teacher leadership."

Gardiner-Hyland reviews the impact of participating in a teacher education project on teacher knowledge, confidence, voice, and leadership identity. As the

only contribution to this special issue considering the development of leadership at the organizational level, the main element of the grid in the Appendix is “providing opportunities for networking,” but the teacher leaders also kept journals about their work.

Parker’s contribution analyses the abstracts of 80 dissertations on teacher leadership from education programs and identifies seven major overarching themes that give insight into current research interests in this area. As such, this project involves “evidence from studies on the impact teacher leaders have had, teachers’ experiences, etc.”

The remaining four articles all investigate different aspects of the stages and processes by which teachers develop leadership qualities and experiences. Potts et al. look at this issue from the perspective of early-career teachers, investigating six master’s students’ prior experiences with, beliefs about, and aspirations for leadership. Thus, this article offers an investigation at the personal level into “what do emerging teachers think of leadership?”

Whitehead and Greenier’s article shifts the focus to in-service English teachers’ and English teacher educators’ perceptions of essential features of classroom leadership needed in language teacher education and how these qualities may be nurtured in in pre-service language teacher education programs. Such insights can help inform ongoing professional learning and teacher preparation for future leadership roles.

Powers and Bailey similarly look at teachers’ perceptions and experiences, but these authors focus on those who currently have or have had leadership roles. Their findings, based on interviews with 60 teachers, show that many felt ill-prepared for the responsibilities they had assumed. The authors focused on the challenges encountered by these leaders, primarily in the Professional column of the framework.

The final contribution, by Janssen Sanchez and Davis, also investigated “personal experiences and aspirations.” They examined how world language teacher educators perceive the role of teacher leadership in their programs and what actions they take to cultivate leadership in pre-service teachers within those programs.

Put together, these articles provide a fascinating insight into the many forms leadership takes and the many pathways that contribute to its development. The articles share an interest in the importance of understanding leadership from its protagonists’ point of view, to better understand how teachers can be prepared and supported. They also all problematize the notion of “leadership” as involving conflicting feelings and experiences on the part of teachers as well as a lack of adequate preparation.

It is interesting that the seven articles focus on a relatively small number of topics and questions. Of course, this special issue only offers a snapshot of current activity, but it is worth pointing out that these papers were selected from several dozen submissions, all of which reflected similar concerns. This leaves open many opportunities for researchers to investigate other areas. In particular, it appears that a better understanding of leadership at the organizational level would be beneficial. This raises questions about, for example, the ways in which leadership is localized; how it is encouraged; how it is supported; how it is rewarded; and how less-formal types of teacher leadership interrelate with institutional authority structures. Other areas open for future research involve the role of well-being, both how (emerging) teacher leaders' experiences influence, for instance, job satisfaction, stress, and burnout as well as how teacher leaders themselves contribute to colleagues' levels of well-being. Finally, there are many possible practices suggested in our framework, and it would be beneficial for future studies to investigate their relative impact.

We hope the concepts discussed here along with the articles appearing in this issue of *Second Language Teacher Education* will encourage others to pursue two broad areas of activity. First, we are pleased to share these studies of language teacher leadership and wish to encourage further research on this important topic. Second, we hope language teacher educators will find this framework useful in stimulating their thinking and their actions about including leadership development in their curricula. We firmly believe that “incorporating leadership preparation and opportunities into the career of language education professionals has many benefits and is worthwhile” (Powers & Bailey, 2023, p. 71).



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Appendix: Willingness to Lead



Categories	Personal	Organizational	Professional
Behaviour beliefs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Guided or self-reflection on prior experiences of leadership.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What are the benefits and challenges for emerging learners keeping leadership journals?</li></ol></li><li>Understanding personal values and aspirations.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What personal values and aspirations influence emerging leaders' efforts to take on leadership roles?</li></ol></li><li>Shadowing of (teacher) leaders<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What are the benefits and challenges for emerging learners shadowing established leaders?</li></ol></li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Modelling distributed, instructional, and other forms of teacher-oriented leadership.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What forms of modelling are effective in helping emerging leaders acquire leadership skills?</li></ol></li><li>Sharing and celebrating of teachers' successes.</li><li>Identifying and supporting emerging teacher leaders.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>How can emerging teacher leaders be identified? How can they be supported as they take on leadership responsibilities?</li></ol></li><li>Using assessment tools to review the conditions for teacher leadership.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What assessment tools and procedures can be used to measure the conditions for teacher leadership?</li></ol></li><li>Measuring and sharing the impact of (teacher) leadership.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>How can the impact of teacher leadership be measured?</li><li>What are the results of teacher leadership preparation for the language teachers themselves, their colleagues, and their students?</li></ol></li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Introducing the wide range of ways in which teacher leadership can be manifested.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What activities are helpful in introducing teacher leadership?</li><li>What activities and experiences do emerging teacher leaders perceive as effective?</li></ol></li><li>Evidence from studies on the impact teacher leaders have had, teachers' experiences, etc.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What does the research literature reveal about the impact of teacher leaders (e.g., on their students' learning, on their colleagues, on program development)?</li></ol></li></ol>
Attitudes towards the behaviour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sharing of experiences of language teacher leadership<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What means of sharing leadership experiences are beneficial for emerging teacher leaders?</li></ol></li><li>Identifying role models<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>How can emerging teacher leaders identify appropriate role models?</li></ol></li><li>Developing a willingness to challenge one's assumptions and take professional risks<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What procedures can be used to help emerging teacher leaders challenge their own assumptions about leadership?</li><li>What activities are beneficial in helping emerging teacher leaders become willing to take risks?</li></ol></li><li>Well-being practices<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What well-being practices are effective in helping teacher leaders avoid burnout?</li></ol></li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Providing the necessary resources for leadership responsibilities.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What resources are needed to help emerging teacher leaders take on leadership roles?</li><li>What resources do emerging teacher leaders perceive as being necessary?</li></ol></li><li>Offering leadership pathways and training for teachers.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What sort of support can language teacher educators offer to novice teachers in terms of both knowledge and skills?</li><li>In what ways can language teacher educators take on mentoring roles with novice teachers? How can language teacher educators establish such relationships?</li><li>What sort of leadership training do emerging teacher leaders perceive as being helpful?</li><li>What leadership training activities result in increased skills, knowledge, and confidence for emerging teacher leaders?</li></ol></li><li>Explicitly identifying and acknowledging the wide range of leaders and leadership practices in the organization.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>How can leaders and their leadership practices be identified within an organization?</li><li>Within a particular organization, who are the leaders, and what are their recognizable leadership practices?</li></ol></li><li>Providing spaces for teachers to share concerns about leadership (both their own pathways to leadership and concerns about their current leaders) and potential/perceived lack of power.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What concerns do emerging teacher leaders have about taking on leadership roles? Do they perceive a lack of parity in doing so?</li></ol></li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Challenging ideas about leadership.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What procedures are effective in challenging the ideas about leadership held by emerging teacher leaders?</li><li>What procedures are effective in challenging the ideas about teacher leadership held by those in positions of power over teachers?</li></ol></li><li>Encouraging risk tasking.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>How can leadership trainers encourage risk taking among emerging teacher leaders?</li><li>How can teacher leaders evaluate their own risk-taking behaviours?</li></ol></li><li>Identity work.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What identity work is needed for emerging teacher leaders to prepare for and take on leadership roles? What identity work is effective?</li></ol></li><li>Preparing teachers for self-care and personal well-being<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>What resources and/or learning experiences are effective in helping emerging teacher leaders support their own personal well-being?</li><li>How can burnout be prevented, or at least ameliorated, among teacher leaders?</li></ol></li></ol>

Categories	Personal	Organizational	Professional
Normative beliefs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning about the types of leadership and the ways they can be put into practice.</li> <li>a. What types of leadership are helpful for emerging teacher leaders to learn about?</li> <li>b. How can emerging teacher leaders choose the types of leadership that would be most effective in their contexts and then put those behaviours and attitudes into practice?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offering choice through a range of (optional) leadership opportunities.</li> <li>a. What types of leadership opportunities does the organization offer?</li> <li>2. Recognizing the wide diversity of needs, experiences, and goals among teachers</li> <li>a. What are the diverse needs, experiences, and goals of emerging teacher leaders?</li> <li>b. Do those needs differ by context (i.e., the needs of teacher leaders in elementary schools compared with those in higher education contexts)? If so, how?</li> <li>c. What are the needs of volunteer leaders compared with those of teacher leaders in official positional roles?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inviting teachers to explore how leadership practices can help them achieve their personal aspirations.</li> <li>a. What are the personal aspirations of emerging teacher leaders? How can they explore leadership practices related to those aspirations before taking on leadership roles?</li> </ol>
Subjective norms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aligning external demands with internal aspirations</li> <li>a. How do the aspirations of emerging teacher leaders align with the demands of the leadership positions?</li> <li>2. Employing self-care</li> <li>a. How can emerging teacher leaders determine and then address their own self-care needs?</li> <li>b. What are the external demands faced by emerging teacher leaders?</li> <li>c. What self-care strategies should emerging teacher leaders develop to deal with those demands?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critically investigating existing leadership expectations and practices</li> <li>a. What are the organizational expectations for teachers to take on leadership roles?</li> <li>b. What practices are used in the organization to encourage teachers to become involved in leadership roles?</li> <li>2. Focusing on teacher well-being</li> <li>a. What expectations and practices of leadership must emerging teacher leaders understand and be prepared to deal with?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focusing on teacher well-being.</li> <li>a. What professional issues are central in supporting the well-being of emerging teacher leaders?</li> <li>b. What strategies are effective in supporting the well-being of emerging teacher leaders?</li> </ol>
Control beliefs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifying inhibiting and facilitative factors and reflecting on how they can be overcome and who can be enlisted for support with this.</li> <li>a. What are the inhibiting and facilitative factors that influence emerging teacher leaders' efforts to take on leadership roles?</li> <li>2. Networking</li> <li>a. What networks do emerging teacher leaders have access to in their contexts? How can they utilize those networks to their benefit?</li> <li>3. Connecting with professional communities outside the organization itself</li> <li>a. What professional communities beyond their own work context are available to emerging teacher leaders? What strategies can they use to access and participate in those professional communities?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarity on leadership expectations</li> <li>a. What are the expectations of emerging teacher leaders? Are those expectations realistic and facilitative?</li> <li>2. Provision of resources such as time and recognition for leadership activities</li> <li>a. What resources do emerging teacher leaders need to take on initial leadership responsibilities?</li> <li>b. How can experienced leaders within teachers' work contexts help provide time and recognition for emerging teacher leaders?</li> <li>3. Teacher leadership development courses and support</li> <li>a. What leadership development courses are currently available to language teachers? What goals do those courses typically address?</li> <li>4. Providing opportunities for networking</li> <li>a. What opportunities for networking are provided within/by the work contexts of emerging teacher leaders?</li> <li>5. Teachers' evaluations of their leadership experiences (leading and being led) in order to identify inhibiting and facilitating factors.</li> <li>a. What activities are effective in helping emerging teacher leaders evaluate their own experiences of being led and of leading?</li> <li>b. How can emerging teacher leaders identify the factors that inhibit or promote their own leadership development?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Giving teachers tools to identify the opportunities for and obstacles to leadership.</li> <li>a. What tools can emerging teacher leaders use to identify opportunities for leadership and the obstacles that impede them from taking on such opportunities?</li> <li>2. Setting clear expectations</li> <li>a. What practices are used to set clear expectations for aspiring teacher leaders?</li> <li>3. Developing resources</li> <li>a. What practices are used for developing leadership resources? What resources are available?</li> <li>4. Guidance on ways of dealing with obstacles.</li> <li>a. What guidance is available to help aspiring teacher leaders cope with obstacles to taking on leadership roles?</li> <li>5. Guidance on ways to enlist support</li> <li>a. What type of resources does the profession provide to emerging teacher leaders in terms of</li> <li>i. teachers identifying and accessing helpful resources;</li> <li>ii. teachers deciding how to deal with obstacles; and</li> <li>iii. determining how to enlist needed support?</li> </ol>

Categories	Personal	Organizational	Professional
Perceived behavioural control	<div>1. Personal SWOT analysis (strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats)</div> <div>2. Teacher Leader Self-Assessment</div> <div>    a. What self-assessment tools are available to emerging teacher leaders? How are those tools used? How effective are they?</div> <div>3. Confidence building</div> <div>    a. What strategies and activities are beneficial for emerging teacher leaders to build their own self-confidence?</div> <div>4. Informal mentoring and/or coaching</div> <div>    a. What informal mentoring and/or coaching opportunities are available to emerging teacher leaders in their own contexts?</div> <div>5. Participating in supportive networks</div> <div>    a. What local networks are available for emerging teacher leaders to join?</div> <div>6. Well-being practices</div> <div>    a. What practices can language teachers engage in that will promote their well-being as they prepare for and engage in leadership roles?</div> <div>    b. How can language teacher educators model and promote such practices?</div>	<div>1. Mentoring programs</div> <div>    a. What mentoring programs are available within the organization to assist emerging teacher leaders with their leadership development? If none are available, are such programs needed?</div> <div>2. Coaching programs</div> <div>    a. What coaching programs are available within the organization to assist emerging teacher leaders with their leadership development? If none are available, are such programs needed?</div> <div>3. Experiential learning opportunities, such as co-teaching or leadership shadowing</div> <div>    a. What experiential learning opportunities are available within the organization to assist emerging teacher leaders with their leadership development? If none are available, are such opportunities needed?</div>	<div>1. Constructive feedback</div> <div>    a. What constructive feedback is helpful to emerging teacher leaders? Who provides such feedback and in what form(s)?</div> <div>2. Experiential learning opportunities during pre-service training</div> <div>    a. What experiential learning opportunities directly related to leadership training do emerging teacher leaders encounter during their pre-service training?</div> <div>3. Developing critical reflection</div> <div>    a. How can emerging teacher leaders develop and sustain skills of critical reflection?</div>