Teachers as Leaders: Equipping English Language Teachers with Leadership Knowledge and Skills in TESOL

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Abstract

As part of a larger qualitative case study, this article explores the perceptions of EFL teacher leaders with regards to leadership knowledge and skills they consider important for their leadership roles in the Saudi EFL context. Twelve EFL teacher leaders were interviewed to identity various types of knowledge and skills for teacher leadership practices in the EFL context. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire, and analysed using the Nvivo 10 software. Analysis led to 18 main categories and four overarching themes; however, four major categories and one key theme are part of this article that reflect the participants' perceptions of leadership knowledge and skills. The findings reveal that TESOL background and pedagogical knowledge helped the participants to establish their identity as EFL teacher leaders. Likewise, knowledge about the people and context supported their roles and their acute awareness of the culture, people and the context contributed to their self-efficacy. There is an emphasis on improved pedagogical skills for teacher leadership roles; however, those with operational duties, such as academic coordinators have not considered teaching skills important for their jobs. The findings have highlighted the significance of role-related skills, basic management skills and personality traits for effective EFL teacher leadership.

Keywords: EFL teacher leaders, leadership knowledge, leadership skills, Teacher leadership, TESOL professionals.

Introduction

The increasing professional demands in educational organisations have resulted in the emergence of teacher leadership, a "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" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 288). Mainly in the US school context, teacher leadership empowers teachers to bring change in their schools via performing a wide range of leadership roles. The knowledge of pedagogy, years of service to school community, a deeper understanding of educational practices, and an ability to influence others are the characteristics which have earned teacher leaders recognition as reform agents, policy implementers, subject specialists, guides to knowledge and role models for their colleagues (Tomal, Schilling, & Wilhite, 2014). However, along with teaching load, the added leadership responsibility often challenges the leadership skills of teachers, thus requiring them to work on their leadership capacity building to ensure a successful discharge of their teacher leadership roles. As leadership is a context-specific phenomenon, teachers need to know what different types of knowledge and skills might help them in their leadership roles in a particular context.

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In TESOL, there is an emphasis on leadership knowledge and skills like in any other field. Liu (2008) states that personal success may not be attainable without effective leadership skills which are essential in all fields, but in ELT they directly affect the quality of language education and the soundness of a programme. Graddol (2008) too, emphasises the role of strategic skills for ELT professionals to run a successful language programme. Liu (2008) and Graddol's research show the significance of leadership knowledge and skills for TESOL professional; however, there is a serious dearth of empirical studies on what skills and knowledge teacher leaders require to possess for a successful dispensation of their leadership duties in EFL context. This study aims to fill that void in literature.

Leadership knowledge for educational leaders

Literature on educational leadership highlights the significance of leadership knowledge for educational leaders. Robinson, Loyd and Rowe (2008) note that leadership knowledge is essential and educational leaders must be knowledgeable about professional development and adult learning theories to contribute to the development of their institutions. Literature suggests a variety of knowledge that can facilitate teacher leader roles. For example, Levenson (2014) emphasises that "teacher leaders must be knowledgeable about how to mobilize colleagues who may not share their enthusiasm for yet another change initiative" (p. 100).

On the significance of leadership knowledge, Backor and Gordon (2015) found that instructional leaders needed to develop knowledge about cultural diversity of the workplace. They also considered knowledge about instructional practices and top-notch technology important for the successful operation of leadership roles in educational institutions. Similarly, Le Fevre and Robinson (2014) believe that leaders with inadequate content knowledge about educational theories and practices will be reluctant to observe teachers and give them feedback. Siegmyer (2012) also considered content and contextual knowledge significant for teacher leadership. On this subject, Knight and Trowler (2001) propose seven different types of leadership and management knowledge, which may support academic leaders in their roles. Inman (2007, p.60-62) has succinctly summarised them as:

Control knowledge: Gaining control knowledge means knowing about self, which is learnt through reflection or working with others in leadership teams.

Knowledge of people: To gain knowledge of the people, one needs to possess interpersonal skills that lead to collaboration and collegiality and facilitate consensus over different decisions.

Knowledge of educational practices: This is a key to successful academic leadership which can be acquired through involvement in formal leadership activities. However, relevant courses, reading literature or colleagues' support and advice can also help to "gain, maintain and use educational knowledge appropriately" (Knight & Trowler, 2001, p. 168).

Conceptual knowledge refers to knowing about management and leadership concepts and research. This requires needs analysis of the leaders and leadership roles, practices and context, which address the compatibility of programmes and courses in educational institutions.

Situational knowledge helps in understanding contingencies that have made the faculty what it is and what it might be in future. It helps individuals with understanding of situations in their schools.

Tacit knowledge integrates these six forms of knowledge in the expert practice of educational leaders.

More on leadership knowledge, Lovett, Dempster and Flückiger (2015, p. 131) propose a heuristic tool to guide personal leadership learning, which is a device that helps individuals observe, investigate, experiment and discover new leadership knowledge. They divide this tool into five focal points which are elaborated in Table 1.

Table 1: A heuristic tool to personal leadership learning. Adapted from Lovett et al. (2015, p. 132-138)

Focal Point	Knowledge Required
1: Pedagogy – leaders learning about teaching and learning	Leaders should have a minimum knowledge of: • growth, learning and development across the lifespan, particularly of students and teachers; • effective strategies for teacher professional development; • the rationale for and how to plan, coordinate, implement, monitor and evaluate teaching and learning; • the kind of data to gather and how to conduct evidence-informed professional conversations about teaching and learning.
2: People – learning about those with whom leaders work	Leaders should have knowledge of: • communication, including coaching and mentoring that enhances working relationships; • how to structure schools so that teachers, support personnel and relevant others operate as learning communities; • how and when to distribute tasks to engage others in leadership; • how to identify leadership talent and assist others to develop.
3: Place – leaders learning about the educational context	Leaders should have knowledge of: • international issues and their possible impact on practice; • national reforms, policies and programmes and their effects on schools; • school context and how to undertake a cultural audit; • key conditions for learning and how to optimise them.
4: System – leaders learning about the education system	Leaders should have knowledge of: • the education system's mandated policy, programme and procedural agenda; • the specific curriculum and assessment requirements of the system; • when and where leader discretion can be exercised; • tactics that aid discretionary decision-making; • system and peer networks that facilitate learning relationships.
5: Self-learning about 'me', the leader	Leaders should have knowledge of: • one's own personal professional moral position;

- one's own professional ethics and related personal values;
- tensions between system compliance and personal preference with respect to leadership decisions;
- personal strengths and weaknesses with regard to educational leadership.

The types of educational leadership knowledge reviewed in this section is summarised in Table 2, which indicates a dearth of empirical evidence on the practical role of leadership knowledge for teacher leaders in mainstream education and in the field of TESOL. Thus, it is significant to identify what types of leadership knowledge teacher leaders in ESL/EFL context need to possess. This study will bridge that gap in the literature.

Table 2: Knowledge required for academic leadership roles

1.	Leadership/management knowledge
2.	Knowledge of adult learning theories
3.	Knowledge about mobilising colleagues
4.	Content knowledge
5.	Contextual knowledge
6.	Knowledge of culture & workplace
7.	Control knowledge
8.	Knowledge of people
9.	Knowledge of educational practices
10.	Conceptual knowledge
11.	Situational knowledge
12.	Tacit knowledge
13.	Knowledge of the system
14.	Knowledge of self-learning

Skills required for teacher leadership

As teacher leaders can have a wide range of responsibilities in school operations, it is important to discern what types of skills they need to possess in order to be effective in leadership positions. First and foremost, pedagogical excellence of teachers is

considered a key to effective teacher leadership as "one cannot be an effective teacher leader if one is not first an accomplished teacher" (Odell, 1997, p. 122). Lack of knowledge about classroom practices or lack of credibility as a teacher might negatively influence teacher leader roles. According to Snell and Swanson (2000) and York-Barr and Duke (2004), expertise as a classroom teacher is a critical aspect of teacher leadership, which gives a teacher credibility among peers and colleagues. Hence, teacher leadership is a means by which credible teachers exercise influence over supervisors, colleagues and members of the school community through shared or collaborative relationships that advance pedagogical practices (Poekert, 2012). Besides pedagogical expertise, Tomal et al. (2014) point out that teacher leaders should be skilled in areas, such as "mentoring and coaching teachers, leading and motivating staff, improving curriculum instructions, managing resources, building collaboration, managing school change, communicating to staff, conducting teacher evaluation, and building community relations" (p.26).

Literature gives a useful insight into various other skills that can facilitate teacher leadership roles. For instance, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are important for teacher leaders in school contexts (Angelle & Beaumont, 2008). For ELT professionals in leadership roles, key skills are; time and self-management, ability to collaborate, cooperate and delegate (Murphy & Brogan, 2008), ability to encourage and motivate others (Bailey, 2008; Quirke & Allison, 2008), strategic planning skills (Christison & Murray, 2008), and technical and IT skills (Siskin & Reynolds, 2008).Similarly, Stephenson, Dada and Harold (2012) found effective communication and ability to build relationships as important skills for teacher leaders. For ELT leaders in particular, Coombe, England and Schmidt (2008) recommended public speaking and presentation skills to be effective in their roles. However, for the utilisation of these skills academic leaders should have cultural consciousness skills (Al-Swailem & Elliott, 2013) that inform their actions in line with cultural norms of the organisation.

Scholars also associate personality traits with effective teacher leadership practices in educational contexts. For example, teacher leaders have "creativity, efficacy, flexibility, life-long learning, humor, willingness to take responsibility and risks" (Angelle & Beaumont, 2007, p. 775). They are open-minded and respectful to others showing optimism and enthusiasm, confidence, and decisiveness (Danielson, 2007). Moreover, teacher leaders are honest, competent, forward-looking, and inspiring individuals who derive strength from character and competence; rather than from their middle-level leadership positions (Chapman, 2008). In the TESOL domain, literature has no reference to empirical studies on personality attributes of teacher leaders. Collinson (2012) explains the ethic of care which involves numerous values and attitudes (e.g. honesty, humility, hope) that promote compassionate and respectful relationships with peers or colleagues and foster growth in others.

In the light of the above review, it can be inferred that leadership knowledge and skills are interdependent concepts that complement each other to facilitate teacher leaders in educational leadership roles. Knowledge may only provide an understanding of a leadership role or a task; however, to practically perform it one needs to have leadership skills. As there is no research on what different types of leadership knowledge and skills teacher leaders require in EFL institutes, this study aims to bridge that gap by answer the following question.

Research question: What kind of knowledge and skills do EFL teacher leaders consider important for teacher leadership roles at the English Language Institute?

Context of the Study

This study was carried out in the English Language Institute (ELI) of a Saudi Arabian state university. In the Men's campus of the ELI, more than 8000 EFL learners enroll on the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) each year. The language learning needs of these

learners are met by more than 250 EFL instructors from 27 different countries who offer 18 hours of language instruction per week.

ELI has a traditional top-down management model which is led by the Dean and six Vice-Deans, who oversee the administrative and academic operations in the institute. The leadership positions in table 1 are in the middle of the institutional hierarchy. Individuals in these roles are principally EFL teachers who connect top leadership with teachers at the ELI.

Table 3: Units run by EFL teacher leaders at the ELI

Administrative Units	Academic Units
Academic & Educational Development System Unit	Graduate Studies Unit
Student Affairs Unit	Student Support Unit
Academic Coordination Unit	Research Unit
Quality Application Unit	Testing Unit
External Student Affairs Unit	E-learning Unit
Faculty Affairs Unit	Professional Development Unit
Cooperative and Practical Training Unit	Curriculum Unit

The potential teacher leaders are selected based on their leadership qualities, management experience, interpersonal skills, organizational skills, professional involvement, enthusiasm, knowledge of cultural sensitivity, flexibility, and background of TESOL (Faculty Handbook). Faculty members and EFL students interact with the institute through 21 units that assist with issues pertaining to curriculum, professional development, schedules, examinations and attendance. 14 out of 21 units are led by non-Saudi nationals who are primarily English language teachers and have been assigned administrative and academic roles based on their expertise. Despite leadership responsibilities, teacher leaders at the ELI are not completely removed from classroom teaching as they teach a minimum of three hours per week as per the university policy. Based on the ELI appraisal scheme, these individuals possess excellent classroom teaching skills and enjoy the status of high rank language teachers.

The establishment of the Academic Leadership Centre (ALC)

In Saudi Arabia, academic leadership is supported through leadership development and training programmes offered by Academic Leadership Centre (ACLC) at the universities. To enhance leadership excellence in higher education institutes across the kingdom, ALC offers advice to academic leaders and develops the leadership skills and competence essential for leadership roles in state owned universities. However, there is a serious lack of empirical research on its achievements and contributions to academic leadership development, which could be a researcher's future endeavour. One of the key drawbacks of ALC is that it focuses on top leadership, i.e. presidents, vice presidents, deans, vice deans and non-academic administrators, and it completely disregards the crucial role that teacher leaders play in the success of a higher education institute. Hence, it is important to explore the types of knowledge and skills teachers require to possess in a bid to operate in the middle of the hierarchy.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study methodology to gain insights into how EFL teacher leaders perceive teacher leadership at the ELI. This methodology suits the nature of the current research, as case study is "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context ...where multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Similarly, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) refer to the nature of a case study:

> *A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. ...contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the real life, complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance.* (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 289)

Methods

The researcher considered qualitative methods to be the most appropriate data collection tools for this case study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative approaches help researchers to capture the verbal descriptions, analyses and interpretations of the participants' views. A case study design within the qualitative research framework enabled me to explore the complex social phenomenon of teacher leadership in the real-life context of the ELI, where boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clearly defined (Yin, 2011). Keeping this in mind, I opted for semi-structured interviews as a primary tool for gathering qualitative data which was complemented by an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire was mainly used to further explore unsaturated categories and give more depth to the data. However, I could not use other tools, such as document analysis, archival records, direct observation or physical artefacts (Yin, 2011), mainly due to the practical constraints of the traditional top-down bureaucratic system. The interview questions were generated in the light of my personal observations of leadership practices at the ELI and the key areas identified in the literature on teacher leader development.

Participants

Purposive sampling fitted the nature of this study and allowed me to seek in-depth information from experienced EFL teacher leaders who were in a strong position to give it (Cohen et al., 2011). Twelve EFL teachers who were promoted to the teacher leadership roles based on their professional and pedagogical expertise, participated in the study. Their varied professional and learning experiences gave more depth and richness to the data, which offer useful insights into the nature of EFL teacher leadership at the ELI. With their permission, all 12 interviews were recorded on a Sony digital recorder and saved on a password-protected laptop with audio tracks labelled under their pseudonyms. The pseudonyms used in this study were chosen by the participants. Eight participants responded to open-ended questionnaire which were saved under their pseudonyms' files.

Table 4: Research participants

Pseudonym	Nationality	Leadership Role	Academic Qualification	Previous Profession	Years of Leadership experience outside ELI	Years of EFL Leadership Role at ELI
Gray	British	Head of Graduate Studies Unit	PhD in Applied Linguistics/MA Education/CELTA	Electrical Engineering	4	2

Hamza	Australian	Head of Academic & Educational Development System Unit	B.SC Engineering/CELTA M.Ed.	Mechanical Engineer	8	5
Harrison	British	Head of Research Unit	MA in Educational Management & Leadership	Secondary School Teacher	2	3
Ibrahim	Pakistani Canadian	Head of E-learning Unit	PhD in Educational Leadership	Bureaucrat	20	3
Ismael	Algerian	Head of Student Support Unit	MA in Educational Leadership	State Agent	4	7
Khan	Pakistani	Head of Testing Unit	MA in Educational Leadership	College Level Teaching	0	7
Moh	British	Head of Student Affairs Unit	BS in IT/CELTA	IT specialist	0	9
Natlus	Pakistani	Head of Academic Coordination Unit	MA in Applied Linguistics	Teaching & Research	0	5
Omar	Pakistani	Head of Quality Assurance Unit	MA in English Literature	University Teaching	3	9
Peter	American	Head of Professional Development Unit	MA TESL	University Teaching	0	5
Rahat	British	Head of External Student Affairs Unit	PGCE/CELTA	Secondary School Teaching	0	3
Sachin	Canadian	Head of Curriculum Unit	MBA/TEFL Certificate/CELTA	Hotel Management	6	4

Data collection and analysis

The transcripts of 12 interviews and 8 open-ended questionnaires were analysed using Nvivo 10. For analysis, the researcher adopted an eclectic approach by combining the guidelines given by Creswell (2012) and Saldaña (2009). The process of data analysis was completed in steps as follows:

First, the researcher did an initial reading of the transcripts to obtain a general sense of the data as suggested by Creswell (2012). This prepared me for the coding process of the data. Overall, the initial reading reflected the professional and academic backgrounds of the teacher leaders, leadership knowledge and the leadership roles they had performed over the years.

The second step involved a more thorough reading to code the transcripts, following the recommendations by Creswell (2012) and Saldaña (2009). In the first cycle of coding, the data was openly coded with no preconceived notions and there were 181 initial open codes. Most of the codes were descriptive in type. I did not follow Creswell's (2012) guideline to divide text into segments of information as the data was in Nvivo 10; rather, I identified common patterns and assigned initial codes using Nvivo nodes. Other repetitive patterns, passages, excerpts and consistencies were dragged into the same code which helped in organising the data "not just because they were exactly alike or very much alike, but because they might also have something in common – even if, paradoxically, that commonality consists of differences" (Saldaña, 2009: 6). For example, codes that described the 'top-down management' had both positive and negative opinions of the interviewees, however, they had a similar subject. Consequently, the codes were refined and reduced to 119 open codes.

After the two cycles of open coding, in the second phase of data analysis, 119 codes were subsumed under 18 broad categories which encompassed codes with identical concepts. For the purpose of this study, only four categories were selected: *TESOL Knowledge*, *Personality Traits*, *Pedagogical Skills* and *Leadership Skills*. The entire coding process was iterative as I went back to the codes, refined them, renamed and reworded them to make them more representative of the interviewees' talk. As suggested by Saldaña (2009), the four categories were checked in the light of the research question. The grouping of categories under the research question made it easy to reflect on them and develop four overarching themes. This article includes one major theme '*The repertoire of teacher leadership knowledge andskills'* whereas other themes have been published elsewhere.

Findings

The findings illustrate perceptions of EFL teachers about leadership knowledge and skills they require for leadership roles at the ELI. The theme '*The repertoire of teacher leadership knowledge andskills*' explains the types of leadership knowledge and skills essential forEFL teacher leaders at the ELI.

The repertoire of teacher leadership knowledge and skills

This theme describes the competence of teacher leaders in relation to the range of knowledge and skills they possess that facilitate their leadership roles at the ELI. The data reveal various types of knowledge and skills that influence teacher leadership roles at the ELI. Table 5 summarises the findings pertaining to knowledge that teacher leaders have at the ELI, categorized, as *knowledge of pedagogy, people, place, system* and *self*.

Table 5: Leadership knowledge possessed by EFL teacher leaders

Focal Point	Types of leadership knowledge	Sources	References
Pedagogy	Knowledge of TESOL/ELT	8	9
	Testing	1	1

	Knowledge of the tasks	5	7
	Knowledge of the best practices	7	7
	Knowledge of curriculum	1	3
	Teaching methodologies	8	10
	Research skills & knowledge	1	2
	Knowledge of current developments in ELT	3	4
People	Ability to mentor teachers	2	3
	Persuasive	5	5
	Building rapport	4	4
	Know people potential	4	4
Self	Multi-tasking	3	3
	Setting realistic goals	3	3
	Reflective	8	13
System	Managing curriculum	1	2
	Faculty evaluations	4	6
People & Place	Leading large & diverse teams	1	2
	Knowledge of socio-cultural values	4	5
	Understanding the organisational culture	8	10

The above table suggests that more than half of the participants have knowledge about their organisational culture, pedagogical practices and recent developments in the field of ELT. An emphasis can be noted on leadership knowledge for teacher leadership roles at the ELI.

> *Academically, you should have some kind of background and knowledge when it comes to instructions and management and all the different aspects which cover that, i.e. best practices, latest developments, new implementations, and how they will be done.* (Moh)

The data also indicate that heads of the different units, such as curriculum, testing and research, emphasise knowledge related to their roles and tasks. For example, Harrison states:

In my current role, I need to have experience and expertise in the field of research. Do I know about the paradigms, research methodologies? Do I know how to interpret certain articles and research materials? Can I deliver that to people? (Harrison)

The data reveal that eight participants acknowledge leadership knowledge in the form of pedagogical skills as an important aspect of EFL teacher leadership. For example, Gray believes that all teacher leaders should "*assure that the curriculum delivery was perfect as spelled out in the curriculum guide of the ELI*". Similarly, Peter explains how his vast knowledge of classroom teaching assists his instructional leadership role while observing and giving feedback to teachers.

Due to my ESL teaching experience in the US and other universities and also here, I had a fairly wide sense of what good teaching can look like, which helped me with teachers' professional development. (Peter)

All the participants use the terms 'knowledge' and 'skills' interchangeably when referring to their pedagogical expertise. Ibrahim and Sachin consider teaching skills and knowledge of classroom pedagogies crucial for teacher leadership at the ELI.

To be an effective teacher leader you need to acquire pedagogical skills and knowledge and learn how to design a curriculum for your course, how to control the class setting and what kind of classroom environment you need to have for effective classroom learning and teaching. (Sachin)

There is an agreement among the participants that, whether observer, supervisor, mentor or PD specialist, one needs to have cutting-edge knowledge of classroom teaching and good teaching skills. As Rahat says, *"Pedagogical knowledge and experience helps with the observations part because as a classroom observer you know what to look for".* On the other hand, he does not consider teaching skills important for operational roles and believes that a good teacher might not prove effective as a manager or leader.

There is a perception that if you got a 5 score as a classroom teacher, you can be a good coordinator or a manager, but it's not necessarily true. Someone might be a good manager, but not necessarily a good teacher and vice versa. (Rahat)

When asked about the significance of pedagogical skills for instructional leadership roles, Natlus expresses the same viewpoint and disregarded teaching skills for coordinators and other managerial roles. He states, "*As my role is more of a manager now, it has nothing to do with teaching skills, though I teach those three mandatory hours"* (Natlus).On the other hand, Harrison does not completely deny the importance of teaching skills for teacher leadership roles; however, he prioritizes task achievement ability over teaching skills.

The good teachers might be able to do something better in the leadership positions. However, in my opinion, if you can do certain tasks, whatever it is, you should be in that position. (Harrison)

Speaking in broad terms, Peter suggests that for effective leadership positions at the ELI, teacher leaders should set and achieve very high standards of professionalism which could give them a credible status and identity as leaders. Implying the significance of knowledge and skills, he thinks that his credibility as a teacher leader among his colleagues have a strong impact on the efficiency of his role.

I earned credibility through my academic and professional profile and the current hierarchical position. I'm respected more and enjoy credibility among my colleagues because of my knowledge, expertise, experience, cultural background, trusting relationship that I've with my colleagues and students. These things led to my success in this position. (Peter)

Apart from the various types of leadership knowledge, another aspect of teacher leaders' competence can be viewed in the repertoire of skills they possess, which facilitate their current roles. For example, Khan knows how to be cooperative while calling for compliance and at the same time avoiding resentment. He explained:

You can never expect cooperation from people unless you extend cooperation first. You have to motivate your teachers. When they're motivated, as a by-product, you win their cooperation and they comply. When you start demanding and exercising your power, then there's a lot of resistance, which is not good for healthy professional environment. (Khan)

Khan's quote also exemplifies his knowledge of people and place that supports his teacher leadership role at the ELI. Various other leadership skills which are considered important in their current roles were also mentioned by the teacher leaders. The range of skills in Table 6 suggests that leadership roles at the ELI require them to have a combination of knowledge and skills.

Table 6: Leadership skills for EFL teacher leaders

Skills	Sources	References
Cultural consciousness skills	12	16
Communication skills	12	14
Time management skills	12	12
Interpersonal skills	12	12
People skills	12	12
Conflict resolution skills	9	10
Influencing colleagues	8	9
Making decisions	7	7
Technical skills	5	7
Knowing the task	5	6
Providing & interpreting vision	5	6
Delegating tasks	5	6
Strategic planning skills	6	6
Leading from the front	5	5

Identifying people's potential	4	4
Intrapersonal skills	4	4
Absorbing pressure & stress	2	2

The data show that the teacher leaders value certain skills that simplify their leadership responsibilities at the ELI. As Table 6 illustrates, more than half of the participants consider conflict resolution, decision making, and influencing colleagues as vital skills for their teacher leadership roles at the ELI. The following extract corroborates these claims:

> *Apart from academic know-how of TESOL, the most important skill that I needed was cultural understanding because we work in an environment where teachers come from several different counties and they have their own perceptions and assumptions of educational practices. In addition, I found other skills crucial for my role, such as communication skills, intrapersonal skills, people skills, conflict resolution skills, strategic planning and execution skills.* (Khan)

Moreover, all the participants underscore the significance of *"time management skills", "cultural consciousness skills"* and *"interpersonal skills",* which they describe as the backbone of their leadership roles at the ELI. As Natlus explains:

> *With effective interpersonal and communication skills, coordinators play the role of a bridge between teachers and the top management. A senior coordinator who has people skills and a good rapport with his team is more successful as compared to the one who merely possesses management skills in general.* (Natlus)

In addition, technical skills, ability to **l**ead from the front, identifying people's potential and delegating tasks, assist participants in their leadership positions. Most of these leadership skills are somehow similar to transformational leadership where leaders have to have the ability to provide vision, disseminate work, facilitate, persuade and influence colleagues, inspire team members and lead from the front. For instance, Omar and Sachin have learned how to influence others by setting an example. Sachin would never just say *'take my words for it'*, rather he would sell it *'by showing and walking the walk and talking the talk'*. Similarly, Harrison often questions his skills to further understand his role:

> *Can I delegate work? Can I designate the work of research to certain people under me to carry on them with regards to the master's degree programme? Do I have the vision? These are the key things for such roles.* (Harrison)

To be effective in their roles, the participants pointed out various personality traits which they deemed useful for teacher leadership roles.

Table 7: Personal attributes of EFL teacher leaders

Personal Attributes	Sources	References
Fair	10	14
Empathetic	12	12
Reliable	10	12

Sympathetic	12	12
Honest	10	12
Confident	8	8
Friendly	7	7
Diplomatic	6	7
Trustworthy	5	7
Hardworking	5	5
Professional	4	4

Table 7 shows that 10 out of 12 participants find being *reliable, fair-seeming, honest and sympathetic* to the colleagues are important personality attributes for teacher leaders at the ELI. Emphasising the role of *'confidence'*, Omar points out that EFL teachers are generally very capable but they would avoid taking up leadership roles.

> *You have to be confident for such positions. Most of our colleagues lack self-belief, they are very competent and talented, they can do many things, but they lack confidence. They can teach students but when it comes to dealing with teachers they tend to shy away.* (Omar)

Being empathetic with teachers was an important personality attribute that helps the teacher leaders to understand and resolve teachers' issues and motivate them for effective functioning at the ELI. All of them believe that '*having empathy for colleagues'* and being on good terms with teachers are fundamental to their success as teacher leaders.

> *One word: Empathy. As long as I've empathy for teachers and treat them the way I think I should be treated, I keep getting a very good response from teachers.* (Hamza)

> *My personal attitude, my relationship with instructors and the way I convey my message through coordinators to my team in a friendly way are very important to effectively perform and produce good results.* (Natlus)

The above extracts show that leadership skills and knowledge alone might not facilitate teacher leadership roles and that certain personality traits are important for an effective teacher leader at the ELI.

Discussion

The findings of this study show the kinds of knowledge and skills that teacher leaders deem important for their roles. The findings resonate with literature on the five focal points of knowledge suggested by Lovett et al. (2015). The types of leadership knowledge summarised in Table 5 support the first focal point: *pedagogy – leaders learning about teaching and learning.* This is evident in their professional status as classroom teachers and their possession of knowledge of TESOL practices. Although not all the

participants advocate the importance of pedagogical skills for teacher leadership, they all have refined classroom teaching skills that facilitate the instructional aspects of their leadership roles. Their experience, knowledge and skills have earned them credibility among their colleagues to influence institutional culture, norms, beliefs, and disbeliefs, but only at the level of their groups or units. As the significance of pedagogical skills or knowledge of teaching practices for teacher leadership roles is well established in the literature (e.g. Snell & Swanson, 2000; Odell, 1997; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Stephenson et al., 2012), this concurs with the participants' responses and shows that pedagogical skills play a key role in gaining recognition and credibility as teacher leaders at the ELI. These findings are also consistent with Chapman's (2008) conclusion that colleagues willingly follow competent teacher leaders.

As the second focal point of the heuristic tool, '*knowledge about the people'* (Lovett et al., 2015) has been highlighted by the teacher leaders in this study. Skills such as identifying talent, delegating work, supporting team members, mobilising colleagues and developing working relationships within and beyond the group are key leadership abilities that facilitate teacher leadership roles at the ELI. Similar findings were reported by Levenson (2014), Inman (2007) and Knight and Trowler (2001), who rated knowledge about people a key skill in individuals' leadership development. In the context of this study, knowing about people becomes crucial when teacher leaders interact with teachers from 27 different countries and cultures.

The data have poignantly pointed out the significance of '*contextual knowledge'*, the third focal point of the heuristic tool. Lovett et al. (2015), Backor and Gordon (2015), Siegmyer (2012) and Inman (2007) consider this kind of knowledge important for effective leadership. As the participants have substantial experience of the current context, they appear to be well informed about the internal policies of the Institute. Moreover, their past experiences and collaborative learning at the ELI have given them awareness of the cultural diversity and institutional norms which facilitate their leadership roles. Lovett et al. (2015) discuss various other components of contextual knowledge, such as knowledge of international issues and their possible impact on practice, and how to undertake a cultural audit. However, in the Saudi EFL context, knowledge of these issues is not valued by the teacher leaders for their roles.

The fourth focal point of the heuristic tool is 'knowledge about educational systems, theories and practices', which has helped the EFL teacher leaders with their roles. They seem to have knowledge about curriculum implementation, educational research, and mandated policy and programme procedures that are important aspects of teacher leadership. Studies have indicated the significance of knowledge about the educational system (e.g. Le Fevre & Robinson, 2014; Lovett et al., 2015; Inman, 2007). In the same way, the findings show a relevant importance of the teacher leaders' understanding of educational environment, practices and system at the ELI. The understanding of TESOL practices and educational system has enabled teacher leaders to deal with various matters such as teachers' professional development, curriculum development and teacher evaluation.

The findings also reveal some differences to what Robinson et al. (2008) and Inman's (2007) studies found. Contrary to their findings, most the participants do not consider conceptual knowledge (knowledge of leadership and management concepts and research) important for their teacher leadership roles at the ELI. As four teacher leaders have post-graduate level leadership qualifications, it could be assumed that they have awareness of conceptual knowledge; however, for most of them the five focal points by Lovett et al. (2015) are more important than the conceptual knowledge. Similarly, the findings show the relative importance of process knowledge for EFL teacher leadership.

For EFL teacher leadership, certain leadership skills discussed are considered as important as the leadership knowledge, for example, communication skills, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and cultural consciousness skills. Authors such as Backor and Gordon (2015), Stephenson et al. (2012) and Al-Swailem and Elliott (2013) also emphasise the importance of these skills for

academic leaders in their roles, which shows the relevance of these skills for academic leaders in mainstream education as well as teacher leaders in the EFL contexts.

The wide array of skills listed in Table 6 suggest that EFL teacher leaders can have general as well as role-specific leadership skills. For instance, the head of the research unit should have credibility as a teacher as well as a researcher and he should have improved research skills besides general leadership skills. This shows that the ELI based teacher leadership requires teacher leaders to have a combination of skills in order to work effectively in their respective domains. Apart from the leadership skills, Table 7 suggests that while functioning in the middle-level leadership roles EFL teacher leaders should exhibit various personality attributes. The personality traits emphasised by the participants are similar to what Angelle and Beaumont (2008) deem important for leadership roles. For instance, they are enthusiastic, self-confident, creative, efficient, empathetic and supportive.

Future Research

As this research adopted a case study methodology to explore the notion of teacher leadership knowledge, a different methodology such as narrative research with a life history approach could be used to understand the learning curves that occurred in the individuals' different phases of life and to gain more insight into the process of developing teacher leadership skills and experience. Since, this case study was context-bound, aiming to understand the factors that helped EFL teacher leaders to develop their leadership skills at the ELI, and a case study approach was deemed most appropriate for the current research. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive study in other EFL/ESL contexts would draw up teacher leaders' diverse experiences in TESOL which may be very different from the current findings. As little is known about teacher leadership in ESL/EFL education, particularly in the Middle East and Saudi context, it would be appropriate for future research to further explore this area by employing an inductive approach with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The triangulated data could give a rounded view of how EFL/ESL teacher leaders learn leadership skills. Moreover, a longitudinal study through self-reports could further track the different stages of teacher leadership learning in more depth and offer insights into how teacher leaders in different phases of their professional careers learn and develop a new leadership identity.

Conclusion

As part of a larger qualitative study, this article has considered the perceptions of EFL teacher leaders about various kinds of leadership knowledge and skills they find crucial for teacher leadership roles at the ELI. The participants' accounts show that *pedagogy – leaders learning about teaching and learning* was one of the key reasons for their credibility among teachers since most of them had knowledge of TESOL pedagogies, which they considered important for instructional leadership roles. Similarly, *knowledge about the people and context* are the types of knowledge that assisted the teacher leaders' roles at the ELI. Their acute awareness of the culture, people and the context has led to their effectiveness. There is an emphasis on improved pedagogical skills for teacher leadership roles; however, those with operational duties such as academic coordinators have not considered teaching skills important for their jobs. The findings have also highlighted the importance of role-related skills, basic management skills and personality traits for effective EFL teacher leadership.

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