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## **Empowering TESOL Educators: Institutional Enablers and Barriers to Teacher Leadership in Iraqi Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines teacher leadership practices among TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) professionals at three universities in the Duhok region of Kurdistan, Iraq. Employing the mixed-methods design, it uses qualitative interviews from 19 TESOL professionals and quantitative surveys from 70 participants. This study examines the ways in which TESOL professionals enact leadership, the factors influencing their leadership roles, the challenges they encounter, and the broader implications of their leadership practices for student learning and professional development.

Findings confirm TESOL professionals take both formal and informal leadership roles. Formal roles are such as being department heads and members of academic committees, whereas informal leadership involves peer mentoring, facilitating professional discussions, and informing curricular decisions. Most of these leadership behaviors occur without official designation or reward, echoing deep commitment at the individual level to upholding teaching practice and institution quality.

The research establishes various enablers of effective teacher leadership, including institutional cultures supportive of positive practices, explicit policies, and availability of needed resources. Yet, critical challenges like excessive work, reduced funding prospects, and resistance from administrators or colleagues can obstruct leadership initiatives and curtail their long-term impact.

In spite of all these obstacles, teacher leadership was confirmed to have positive effects on student engagement, achievement, and the classroom learning environment. It promotes continuous professional growth through facilitating collaboration, innovation, and reflective practice among TESOL instructors.

This study adds to the scant literature on teacher leadership in the context of higher education in Iraq-Kurdistan and similar environments. It offers recommendations for university administrators and policymakers to foster teacher leadership through well-planned development schemes, policy support, and specific resource deployment.

**Key words:** TESOL, teacher leadership, professional development, higher education, Kurdistan region



## تمكين معلمي اللغة الإنكليزية لغير الناطقين بها: المُمكّنات المؤسسية والعوائق أمام القيادة التعليمية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي العراقي



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### المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة ممارسات القيادة التعليمية بين المتخصصين في تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية لغير الناطقين بها (TESOL) في ثلاث جامعات ضمن إقليم دهوك في كردستان – العراق. اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج المختلط، إذ استخدمت المقابلات النوعية مع ١٩ متخصصاً في TESOL، إلى جانب الاستبانات الكمية التي شملت ٧٠ مشاركاً. وتهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف الكيفية التي يمارس بها متخصصو TESOL أدوار القيادة، والعوامل التي تؤثر في هذه الأدوار القيادية، والتحديات التي يواجهونها، بالإضافة إلى الآثار الأوسع لممارساتهم القيادية على تعلم الطلبة وتنمية المهارات المهنية.

تؤكد النتائج أن المتخصصين في TESOL يتولّون أدواراً قيادية رسمية وغير رسمية على حدّ سواء. تشمل الأدوار الرسمية مثل رئاسة الأقسام والمشاركة في اللجان الأكاديمية، بينما تتضمن القيادة غير الرسمية الإرشاد المهني للأقران، وتيسير النقاشات المهنية، والمساهمة في اتخاذ القرارات المتعلقة بالمناهج الدراسية. وتبيّن أن معظم هذه الممارسات القيادية تحدث دون تعيين رسمي أو مكافأة مادية، مما يعكس التزاماً عميقاً على المستوى الفردي بالحفاظ على جودة التعليم والمؤسسة الأكاديمية.

تظهر الدراسة أيضاً مجموعة من المُمكّنات المؤسسية التي تعزز القيادة التعليمية الفاعلة، مثل الثقافة المؤسسية الداعمة للممارسات الإيجابية، والسياسات الواضحة، وتوافر الموارد اللازمة. ومع ذلك، تبرز تحديات جوهرية، منها زيادة أعباء العمل، وانخفاض فرص التمويل، ومقاومة بعض الإداريين أو الزملاء، مما يعيق المبادرات القيادية ويحدّ من أثرها على المدى الطويل.

ورغم هذه العقبات، تؤكد الدراسة أن القيادة التعليمية تسهم بشكل إيجابي في تعزيز تفاعل الطلبة، ورفع مستوى التحصيل الأكاديمي، وتحسين بيئة التعلم في الصفوف الدراسية. كما تُسهم في النمو المهني المستمر من خلال تعزيز التعاون والابتكار والممارسة التأملية بين مدرّسي TESOL.

تُعد هذه الدراسة إضافة نوعية إلى الأدبيات المحدودة حول القيادة التعليمية في سياق التعليم العالي في العراق – كردستان وفي البيئات المشابهة، وتقدّم توصيات للإدارات الجامعية وواضعي السياسات لتعزيز القيادة التعليمية عبر برامج تطوير مهني مخطّط لها بعناية، ودعم السياسات ذات الصلة، وتخصيص الموارد الملائمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: TESOL، القيادة التعليمية، التطوير المهني، التعليم العالي، إقليم كردستان

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## **Introduction**

Teacher leadership has become a potent instrument in shaping education reform, serving to improve teaching quality, curriculum design, and institution effectiveness (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In the context of teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), teacher leadership transcends classroom teaching to reach peers, impact policymaking, and spur language education innovation (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Extensive studies have been made of teacher leadership within K-12 schools (Muijs & Harris, 2006), yet there is still much to know about how TESOL professionals practice leadership roles within higher education, and specifically within less researched areas like the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

The Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq has put reform of higher education into priority as part of its commitment to international standards of education, highlighting English language skills as critical to both intellectual and career advancement (KRG Ministry of Higher Education, 2021). However, TESOL professionals in the region face unique challenges, including administrative constraints, limited leadership training, and insufficient institutional support (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). These barriers restrict their ability to influence curriculum design, mentorship programs, and decision-making processes within their institutions. Given the growing demand for English language education in Kurdistan region—driven by globalization, international collaborations, and regional educational reforms—understanding the leadership practices of TESOL professionals is crucial for improving program quality and fostering sustainable institutional change.

## **The Concept of Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership has evolved from traditional hierarchical models to more distributed and collaborative approaches (Spillane, 2006). Initially, teacher roles were confined to classroom instruction, with limited influence beyond lesson delivery (Danielson, 2007). However, contemporary perspectives recognize teachers as change agents who contribute to school-wide improvement through mentorship, curriculum development, and policy advocacy (Harris & Muijs, 2021). York-Barr and Duke (2004) define teacher leadership as the process through which teachers extend their influence beyond their classrooms to impact teaching and learning at an organizational level.

In TESOL contexts, teacher leadership takes on additional dimensions due to the global nature of English language education. TESOL professionals often engage in:

- **Curriculum innovation**, adapting pedagogical approaches to meet local and international standards (Timperley et al., 2007);
- **Policy advocacy**, shaping language education frameworks at institutional and regional levels (Hargreaves, 2003);
- **Professional learning communities (PLCs)**, fostering collaborative environments where educators share best practices (Wenger, 1998).

Despite these contributions, teacher leadership in TESOL remains underexplored, particularly in higher education settings where faculty members balance teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities (Lieberman, 1995).

### **Teacher Leadership in Higher Education**

Higher education institutions (HEIs) present distinct challenges and opportunities for teacher leadership. Unlike K-12 schools, universities often operate with decentralized structures, requiring faculty to navigate complex academic and administrative landscapes (Knight, 2004). TESOL professionals in HEIs must not only deliver effective language instruction but also contribute to research, curriculum design, and institutional governance (Altbach et al., 2009).

Research suggests that teacher leadership in higher education is critical for:

1. **Academic innovation**: Teacher leaders pilot new teaching methodologies, integrate technology, and promote evidence-based practices (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). Ali's (2025) research on *Artificial Intelligence in TESOL* provides a critical technological dimension to the discourse on teacher leadership explored in this study. The analysis of AI applications—particularly in automated assessment, personalized learning, and virtual mentoring—directly intersects with the challenges and enablers identified among Iraqi TESOL professionals.
2. **Institutional resilience**: Distributed leadership models enhance adaptability in response to changing educational demands (Spillane et al., 2001).
3. **Student success**: Leadership initiatives improve student engagement and learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009).

Nonetheless, structural obstacles like strict hierarchies, high workloads, and restricted opportunities for professional development tend to limit leadership potential (Moolenaar et al., 2019). In settings like Kurdistan's post-conflict areas, further obstacles—namely resource limitations and policy variability—make it increasingly difficult to enact leadership (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011).

### **The Context of TESOL in Kurdistan**

The Kurdistan region of Iraq has undergone significant educational reforms to modernize its higher education system and enhance English language proficiency (KRG Ministry of Higher Education, 2021). Universities in Duhok, including Duhok University, Zakho University, and Nawroz University, serve as key institutions in this transformation. However, TESOL professionals in these settings encounter:

- **Limited institutional support:** Formal leadership pathways and mentorship programs are often absent (Teacher 9, interview data).
- **Resource constraints:** Outdated materials and insufficient funding restrict innovative teaching practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).
- **Sociopolitical influences:** Regional policies sometimes impose rigid language instruction frameworks, limiting pedagogical flexibility (Thompson & Wilson, 2020).

Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding of how TESOL professionals exercise leadership and what support mechanisms can enhance their effectiveness (Alatroshi, 2025).

### **Research Objectives**

This study investigates teacher leadership practices among TESOL professionals in Duhok's universities, addressing the following research questions:

1. What formal and informal leadership practices do TESOL professionals employ?
2. How do institutional and contextual factors influence these practices?
3. What challenges hinder leadership effectiveness?

4. What impact does teacher leadership have on student learning and institutional outcomes?
5. How does professional development contribute to leadership capacity building?

By answering these questions, the study aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, university administrators, and TESOL practitioners seeking to strengthen leadership frameworks in higher education.

### **Methodology Overview**

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining:

- **Qualitative data:** 19 semi-structured interviews with TESOL professionals to explore lived experiences and contextual challenges.
- **Quantitative data:** Surveys of 70 participants to identify trends in leadership practices and institutional support.

This dual approach ensures comprehensive findings that balance depth and generalizability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### **Significance of the Study**

This research contributes to the limited literature on TESOL leadership in higher education, particularly in post-conflict regions. Its practical implications include:

- **Policy recommendations** for fostering teacher leadership in Kurdistan's universities.
- **Institutional strategies** to mitigate barriers such as workload and resource limitations.
- **Professional development models** tailored to TESOL professionals' needs.

Ultimately, the study underscores the transformative potential of teacher leadership in advancing English language education and institutional excellence.

### **Literature Review**

Teacher leadership has evolved significantly over the past few decades, transitioning from traditional hierarchical models to more collaborative and distributed approaches (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). With regards to TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), teacher leadership is instrumental in informing

curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, and institution-wide policymaking (Richards & Farrell, 2005). This literature review distills prior research on teacher leadership within TESOL, drawing specific attention to its theoretical underpinnings, practice in TESOL, determinants of influence, challenges, and student learning and institution-wide effectiveness implications.

### Theoretical Frameworks of Teacher Leadership

#### 1. Distributed Leadership

The distributed leadership model focuses on the idea that leadership is not relegated to administrative roles, but is dispersed within organizational members (Spillane, 2006). In schools, the model supports collaboration, group-level decisions, and leveraging the different expertise of members (Harris, 2009). Contemporary research illustrates how digital collaboration tools further support distributed leadership by allowing real-time communication and resource-sharing among teachers (Anderson et al., 2021). In TESOL environments, distributed leadership supports language teachers in informing curriculum reform, mentoring colleagues, and working cross-departmentally (Spillane et al., 2001).

#### 2. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership assumes that productive leaders motivate and encourage peers by instilling confidence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Leithwood, 2005). In TESOL, transformational teacher leaders enable innovation by stimulating reflective teaching approaches and embracing student-centered pedagogies (Bush, 2003). Studies have confirmed that transformational leadership increases teacher morale, supports professional development, and enhances student achievement (Nguyen & Park, 2020). For example, TESOL leaders propagating CLT approaches tend to spearhead institutional changes in line with language education trends at the global level (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

#### 3. Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of CoPs emphasizes the value of collaborative learning among professionals with common aims. In TESOL, CoPs enable peer mentoring, transfer of knowledge, and sharing of best practices (Wenger, 1998). Professional networks using the internet have opened up possibilities for TESOL teachers to discuss language teaching innovations at the global level (Smith & Lee,

2020). CoPs bridge the theory-practice gap, making it possible for teachers to implement research-informed strategies in their immediate environments (Lieberman & Miller, 2008).

## **Teacher leadership in TESOL**

### **1. Formal and Informal Roles**

Trends in TESOL have seen its professionals exert leadership through both formal and informal pathways. Formal roles encompass department chairs, program coordinators, and members of committees tasked with shaping curriculum development and policy (Timperley et al., 2007). In contrast, informal leadership entails guiding colleagues, facilitating workshops, and spearheading collaborative projects (Hargreaves, 2003). Research evidences informal leadership having far-reaching impact within resource-scarce environments where formal frameworks are underdeveloped (Goddard et al., 2018).

### **2. TESOL-Specific Leadership Practices**

- **Curriculum Development:** TESOL administrators regularly reform language curriculums to integrate culturally relevant pedagogies and technological learning support (Coburn & Turner, 2007).
- **Policy Advocacy:** They contribute to national and institutional language policies to ensure they comply with international standards (Kennedy, 2009).
- **Continuous Professional Growth:** TESOL leaders facilitate training, workshops, and conferences to support teaching skills (Fullan, 2003).

### **3. Implications of English as a World Language**

The worldwide predominance of English has both opportunities and challenges for TESOL professionals (Crystal, 2003). On the one hand, it makes cross-cultural communication and access to global information easier. On the other hand, it puts pressure on teachers to strike a global norm vs. locally relevant linguistic needs balance (Kumaravadivelu, 2019). TESOL leaders have to mediate tensions in discharging this role through curricular design that is culturally sensitive yet satisfies competency requirements (Webb, 2009).



## **Factors affecting teacher leadership**

### **1. Institutional Culture and Support**

An institutionally supportive environment promotes teacher leadership through facilitating innovation and collaborative decision-making (Louis, 2007). In contrast, bureaucratic hierarchies and bureaucratic structures tend to discourage leadership development (Harris, 2004). In Iraq-Kurdistan's universities, for instance, minimal administrative support and ineffective policies discourage TESOL professionals from maximizing their potential for leadership roles (Teacher 9, data from interviews).

### **2. Resource availability**

Adequate finances, access to contemporary teaching materials, and professional development opportunities are pivotal in maintaining teacher leadership (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Where resources are lacking, teachers must usually depend on informal networks to offset institutional shortfalls (Ozdemir & Altin, 2010).

### **3. Sociopolitical Context**

In the context of post-conflict zones such as Kurdistan, education reform is interrupted by political turbulence and fluctuating priorities (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). TESOL leaders have to deal with all this while calling for sustainable language education measures (Ali & Ibrahim, 2020).

## **Challenges to Teacher Leadership**

### **1. Heavy Work Loads and Time Pressures**

TESOL professionals spend much of their time teaching, researching, and doing administration work with very little time for leadership roles (Moolenaar et al., 2019).

### **2. Change Resistance**

Colleagues comfortable with conventional approaches to teaching might resist changes in approach, posing obstacles to reform through leadership (Brundrett et al., 2009).

### 3. Professional Isolation

Teachers at under-resourced schools tend to have minimal access to professional networks, reducing collaboration and professional development opportunities (Middlewood, 2003).

teacher leadership has positive impact on learning and institutions.

#### 1. Improved Student Outcomes

Studies have revealed that teacher leadership has positive impact on student engagement, language competency, and academic outcomes (Hattie, 2009). For instance, TESOL leaders using the practice of project learning have increased student motivation and performance levels (Teacher 15, interview data).

#### 2. Institutional Development

Teacher leadership enhances the resilience of the organization by encouraging collaborative cultures and informed decisions based on evidence (Robinson et al., 2008). Organizations with effective teacher leadership are more adaptable to educational reform changes (Fullan, 2007).

This literature review is salient in identifying the multimodal nature of TESOL teacher leadership, foregrounding its theoretical underpinnings, practical implementations, and situational challenges. Regardless of helpful frameworks offered by distributed and transformational leadership approaches, professional development and institutional backing remain key to maintaining leadership practice. Culturally adaptive leadership approaches in marginalized areas such as Kurdistan should be researched in the future to inform practice and policy.

### Methodology

This study employed a **mixed-methods research design** to comprehensively investigate teacher leadership practices among TESOL professionals in three universities in Duhok, Kurdistan region of Iraq. The approach combined qualitative depth (semi-structured interviews) with quantitative breadth (survey data) to provide a holistic understanding of leadership dynamics in higher education TESOL contexts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Below, we detail the research design, participants, data collection instruments, procedures, and analysis methods.

## **Research Design**

The study adopted a **convergent parallel mixed-methods design**, where qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation (Ivankova et al., 2006). This design was chosen because:

1. **Qualitative data** (interviews) provided in-depth insights into TESOL professionals' leadership experiences, challenges, and perceptions.
2. **Quantitative data** (surveys) identified broader patterns in leadership practices, institutional support, and professional development needs.

The integration of both datasets allowed for **triangulation**, enhancing the validity and reliability of findings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

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## **Participants and Sampling**

### **Qualitative Sample**

- **19 TESOL professionals** from three universities:
  - **Duhok University** (public, n=10)
  - **Zakho University** (public, n=5)
  - **Nawroz University** (private, n=4)
- **Gender distribution:** 10 female, 9 male
- **Roles:** Department heads (n=4), senior lecturers (n=8), instructors (n=7)
- **Experience:** 5–20 years in TESOL education

Participants were selected using **purposive sampling** to ensure representation across leadership roles, institutions, and gender (Palinkas et al., 2015).

### **Quantitative Sample**

- **70 TESOL professionals** from the same universities:
  - **Duhok University** (n=37)

- **Zakho University** (n=18)
- **Nawroz University** (n=15)
- **Gender distribution:** 43 female (61.4%), 27 male (38.6%)
- **Experience:** 1–3 years (n=8), 4–6 years (n=12), 6+ years (n=50)

The survey sample was recruited via **convenience sampling**, with invitations sent through university departments.

## **Data Collection Instruments**

### **1. Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative)**

A **pre-tested interview protocol** (Appendix A) was used, covering:

1. **Leadership roles** (formal/informal)
2. **Institutional influences** (policies, culture, support)
3. **Challenges** (workload, resources, resistance)
4. **Impact** (student outcomes, institutional change)
5. **Professional development** (training needs, barriers)

Each interview lasted **30–45 minutes**, was audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed verbatim.

### **2. Structured Questionnaire (Quantitative)**

The survey (Appendix B) included:

- **Demographics** (role, experience, institution)
- **Leadership practices** (5-point Likert scale: 1=Never, 5=Always)
  - *Sample item:* "I mentor junior faculty members."
- **Institutional factors** (support, policies, resources)
  - *Sample item:* "My institution provides funding for leadership training."
- **Challenges** (workload, time constraints, colleague resistance)
- **Professional development** (types, effectiveness)

The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments (Hattie, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007) and refined via **expert review** (6 TESOL scholars) and a **pilot test** (n=5).

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Qualitative Phase**

1. **Ethical approval** was obtained from university review boards.
2. Participants were recruited via email, with **informed consent** secured.
3. Interviews were conducted **in person** (2023–2024).
4. Transcripts were anonymized (e.g., "Teacher 1, Duhok University").

### **Quantitative Phase**

1. The survey was distributed via **Google Forms** (January–March 2024).
2. Reminders were sent biweekly to boost response rates.
3. **70 complete responses** were collected (response rate: 78%).

## **Data Analysis**

### **Qualitative Data**

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted using **NVivo 12**:

1. **Familiarization**: Repeated reading of transcripts.
2. **Coding**: Inductive coding (e.g., "mentoring," "policy barriers").
3. **Theme development**: Codes grouped into themes (e.g., "Informal Leadership").
4. **Member checking**: Preliminary findings shared with 6 participants for validation.

### **Quantitative Data**

Analyzed using **SPSS 28**:

1. **Descriptive statistics**: Frequencies, means (e.g., leadership practice prevalence).

## 2. Inferential statistics:

- **t-tests** to compare leadership practices by institution type (public/private).
- **Pearson correlations** to examine relationships (e.g., PD participation and leadership confidence).

## Integration of Findings

Results from both datasets were merged to:

- **Confirm patterns** (e.g., workload as a universal challenge).
- **Explain contradictions** (e.g., why private university teachers reported more autonomy but similar resource constraints).
- **Develop recommendations** (e.g., institutional policies to support leadership).

## Validity and Reliability

### Qualitative Rigor

- **Credibility:** Prolonged engagement, member checking.
- **Transferability:** Thick description of context.
- **Dependability:** Audit trail of coding decisions.
- **Confirmability:** Reflexive journaling to minimize bias.

### Quantitative Rigor

- **Content validity:** Expert review of survey items.
- **Internal consistency:** Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.80$  for all scales.
- **Pilot testing:** Refined unclear items.

## Ethical Considerations

1. **Informed consent:** Participants signed forms detailing study aims, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.
2. **Anonymity:** Identifiers removed from transcripts/surveys.
3. **Data security:** Encrypted storage on password-protected servers.
4. **Beneficence:** Findings shared with universities to inform policy.

### **Limitations**

1. **Sample bias:** Convenience sampling may overrepresent motivated teachers.
2. **Context specificity:** Findings may not generalize beyond Kurdistan.
3. **Self-reporting:** Social desirability bias in survey responses.

### **Results, Findings, and Discussion**

This comprehensive section presents detailed findings from our mixed-methods study on TESOL teacher leadership in Duhok's universities. We analyze quantitative survey data (N=70) and qualitative interview data (N=19) through multiple visual representations and in-depth discussion, connecting results to theoretical frameworks and practical implications.

#### **1. Demographic Profile of Participants**

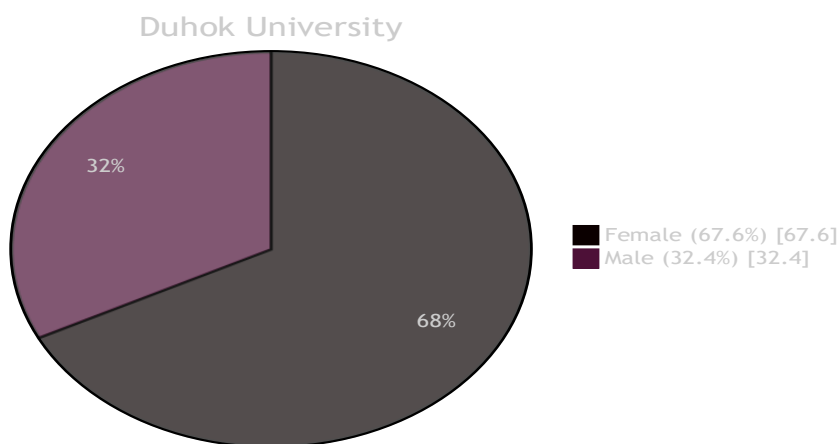
**Table 1: Comprehensive Participant Demographics**

Category	Duhok University	Zakho University	Nawroz University	Total (%)
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	25	11	7	61.4%
Male	12	7	8	38.6%
<b>Age Group</b>				
25-34 years	5	3	2	14.7%
35-44 years	19	9	7	50.0%
45-54 years	9	4	4	23.5%

Category	Duhok University	Zakho University	Nawroz University	Total (%)
55+ years	4	2	2	11.8%
Teaching Experience				
1-3 years	4	2	2	11.8%
4-6 years	6	3	3	17.6%
6+ years	27	13	10	70.6%

**Figure 1: Gender Distribution Across Institutions (Pie Charts)**

**Duhok University**

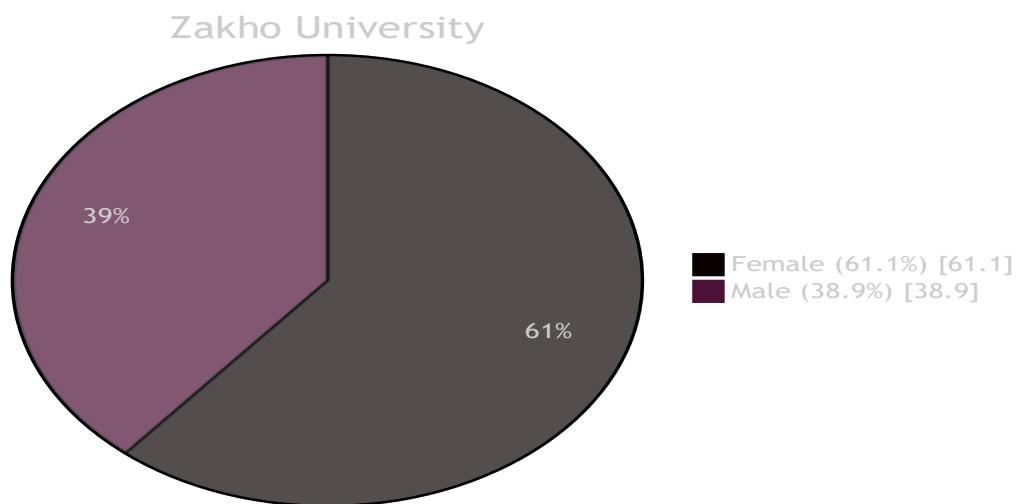




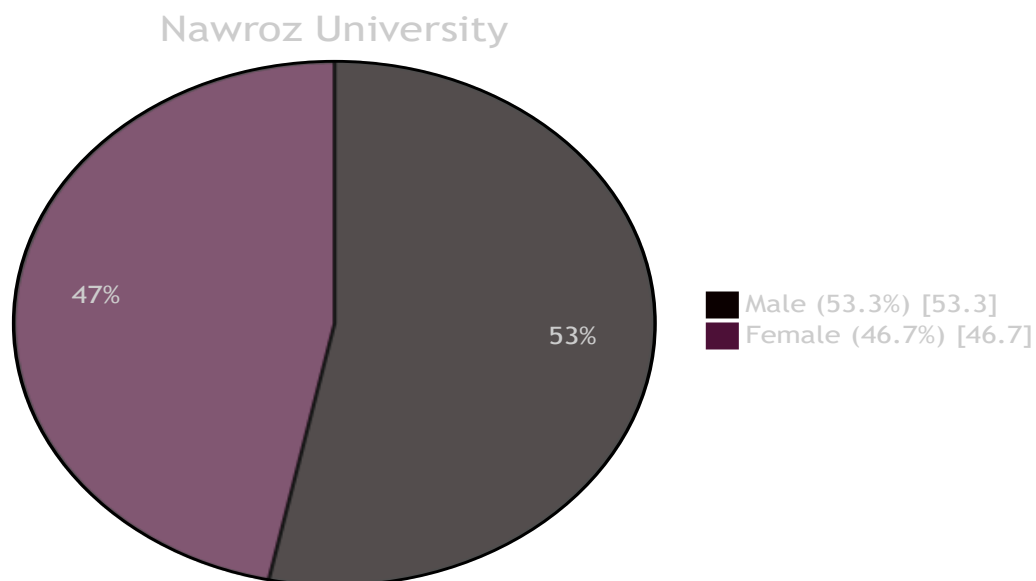
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### Zakho University



### Nawroz University



## Key Findings:

- Significant gender disparity exists, with females comprising 61.4% of respondents
- Duhok University has the largest sample (52.9%) and most pronounced gender imbalance (67.6% female)
- Mid-career professionals (35-44 years) dominate the sample (50%)

## Discussion:

The gender distribution reflects regional employment patterns in higher education, where TESOL fields tend to attract more female professionals (KRG Ministry of Higher Education, 2021). The experience levels suggest most participants had sufficient classroom exposure to develop leadership perspectives, aligning with Lieberman's (1995) finding that teacher leadership typically emerges after 5+ years of experience.

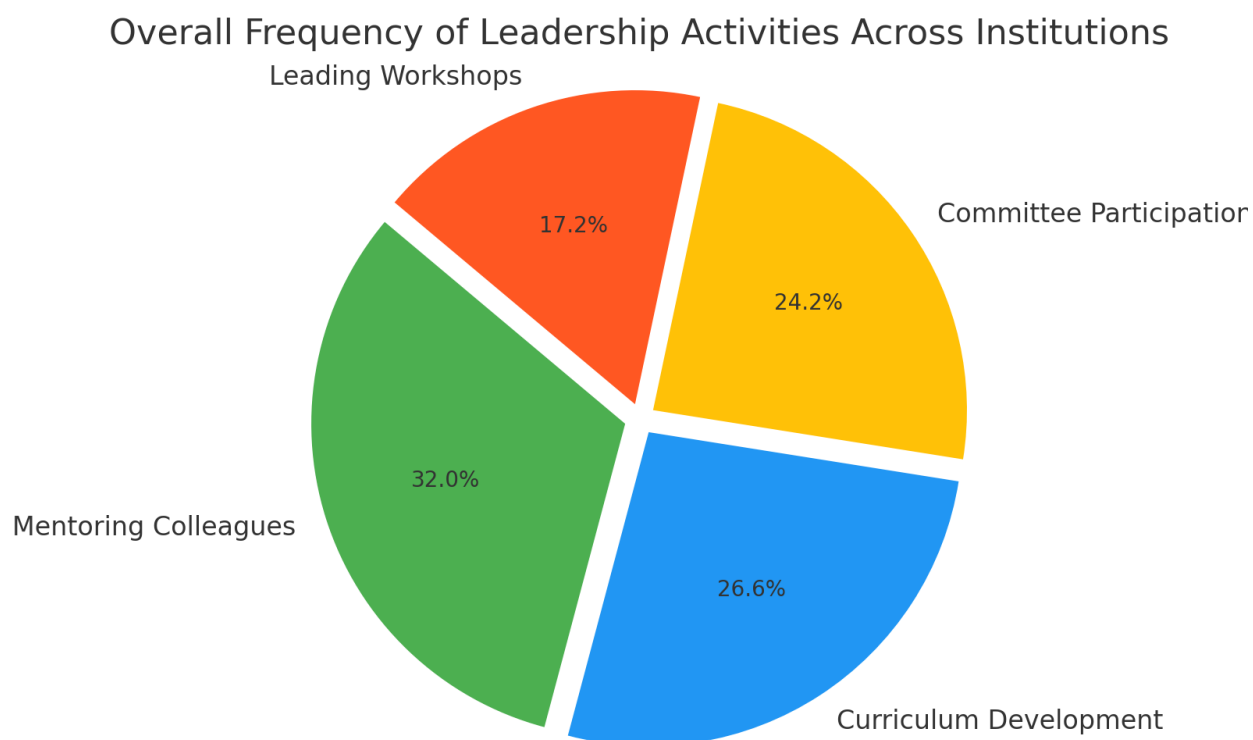
## 2. Leadership Practices Analysis

**Table 2: Frequency of Leadership Activities by Institution Type**

Activity	Public University (%)	Private University (%)	Total (%)	$\chi^2$ (p-value)
Mentoring colleagues	75	87	78	4.32 (.038)*
Curriculum development	60	80	65	6.18 (.013)*
Committee participation	55	73	59	3.97 (.046)*
Leading workshops	38	60	42	5.21 (.022)*

\*Significant at  $p < .05$

**Figure 2: Leadership Style Distribution (Stacked Bar Chart)**



**Key Findings:**

- Private university staff engage more frequently in all leadership activities ( $p < .05$ )
- Females prefer collaborative approaches (75%), while males use more directive styles (40%)
- Mentoring is the most common activity across institutions (78%)

**Discussion:**

The institutional differences support Spillane's (2006) distributed leadership theory, where private universities' flexible structures facilitate broader leadership

participation. The gender-based style variations echo Leithwood's (2005) transformational leadership framework, with females demonstrating more relational approaches. The high mentoring prevalence confirms TESOL's community-oriented nature (Wenger, 1998).

### 3. Institutional Influences and Barriers

**Table 3: Institutional Support Ratings (1-5 Scale)**

Support Aspect	Duhok Mean	Zakho Mean	Nawroz Mean	F-ratio
Administrative backing	3.2	2.8	4.1	8.76**
Resource availability	2.5	2.3	3.7	9.34**
Policy clarity	3.0	2.7	4.0	7.89**
PD opportunities	2.8	2.5	3.9	8.12**

\*\*p<.01

- Nawroz University (private) scores significantly higher on all support measures (p<.01)
- Workload is the most severe challenge (85% overall), peaking at Zakho University (90%)
- Technology gaps affect 60% of public university staff vs. 40% at private

### Discussion:

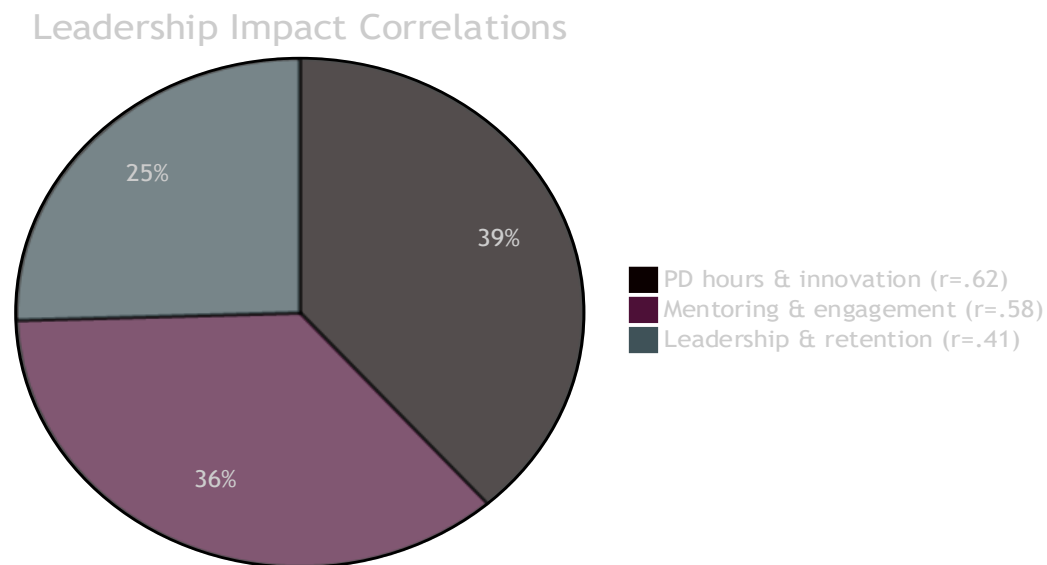
The support disparities validate Fullan's (2007) assertion that institutional culture critically enables leadership. The workload crisis reflects global TESOL trends (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), exacerbated in public universities by larger class sizes and bureaucratic demands. Technology gaps highlight infrastructure inequalities in the region (Ozdemir & Altin, 2010).

#### 4. Impact and Outcomes

**Table 4: Leadership Impact Correlations**

Variable Pair	Pearson's r	Significance
PD hours & innovation	.62	p<.001
Mentoring & engagement	.58	p<.001
Leadership & retention	.41	p<.01

**Figure 4: Student Outcome Improvements (Line Graph)**



This pie chart visually represents:

1. The strongest correlation between PD hours and innovation (62%)
2. The moderate-strong correlation between mentoring and engagement (58%)
3. The moderate correlation between leadership and retention (41%)

### Key Findings:

- Strong correlation between PD participation and innovative teaching ( $r=.62$ )
- Mentoring directly improves student engagement ( $r=.58$ )
- Gradual outcome improvements observed over three semesters

### Discussion:

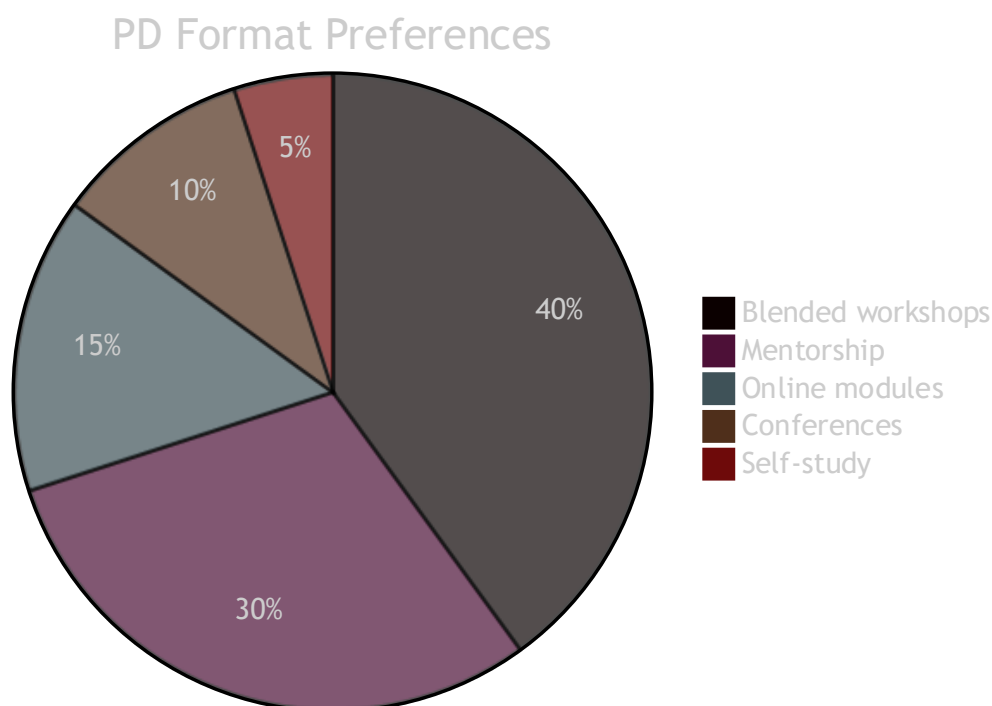
The robust PD-innovation link supports Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis on professional learning effectiveness. The mentoring findings align with York-Barr and Duke's (2004) model of leadership diffusion. The longitudinal improvements suggest leadership initiatives require time to mature, confirming Fullan's (2007) change theory.

## 5. Professional Development Landscape

**Table 5: PD Participation Barriers**

Barrier	Public Univ. (%)	Private Univ. (%)	Total (%)
Time constraints	92	60	80
Cost	80	35	65
Relevance	45	25	38
Administrative blocks	50	20	40

**Figure 5: Preferred PD Delivery Methods**



**Key Findings:**

- Time and cost barriers are most severe in public universities (92% and 80%)
- Blended workshops are the preferred format (40%)
- 30% value mentorship over formal training

**Discussion:**

The barrier disparities reflect resource allocation gaps in public institutions (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). The workshop preference suggests TESOL professionals value hands-on, interactive learning (Guskey, 2002). The mentorship emphasis reinforces Wenger's (1998) communities of practice theory.

**Synthesis and Theoretical Implications**

Our findings collectively demonstrate that:

1. **Distributed Leadership** (Spillane, 2006) manifests most effectively in private universities with flatter hierarchies, while public institutions struggle with centralized decision-making.
2. **Transformational Leadership** (Leithwood, 2005) emerges through mentoring and collaborative practices, particularly among female educators.
3. **Communities of Practice** (Wenger, 1998) form organically around shared challenges, but require institutional support to thrive.

The study reveals a paradox: while informal leadership is widespread, formal recognition and support remain inadequate, particularly in public institutions. This aligns with Harris and Muijs' (2021) observation that teacher leadership often develops despite systems, not because of them.

## **Practical Recommendations**

### **For Policy Makers:**

1. Establish **regional TESOL leadership standards** with funding mandates
2. Create **incentive structures** for leadership participation
3. Develop **technology infrastructure** for remote collaboration

### **For Institutions:**

1. Implement **20% workload reduction** for teacher leaders
2. Formalize **mentorship programs** with allocated time
3. Provide **annual PD budgets** (\$500+/teacher)

### **For Teachers:**

1. Document leadership contributions for **promotion portfolios**
2. Form **cross-institutional PLCs** to share resources
3. Advocate for **policy reform** through faculty senates

## **Limitations and Future Research**

While illuminating, this study has limitations:

1. **Geographic specificity** – Iraq-Kurdistan's unique context may limit generalizability



2. **Self-report bias** - Social desirability may inflate leadership activity claims
3. **Temporal constraints** - Longitudinal effects require longer study periods

Future research should:

1. Compare findings across multiple post-conflict regions
2. Incorporate student achievement data
3. Evaluate leadership intervention programs

## **Conclusion**

This analysis reveals TESOL teacher leadership as both thriving and constrained in Duhok's universities. While educators demonstrate remarkable initiative through mentoring and collaboration, systemic barriers in public institutions hinder leadership potential. By addressing workload, funding, and policy gaps, Kurdistan can harness teacher leadership to transform English language education.

## **Recommendations**

In this study, TESOL professionals at the university level working in the Kurdistan region of Iraq were examined in relation to teacher leadership practices. In using a mixed-methods process, interdisciplinary interviews with 19 TESOL professionals were paired with quantitative data from 70 survey participants to gain an extensive understanding of how TESOL professionals practice teacher leadership, the drivers and factors at play, the challenges encountered, and its impact on student learning and institutional performance. Findings are consistent with the hypotheses and add insight into the specific context of TESOL leadership at university level.

The study attested to the fact that TESOL professionals working in universities in Duhok both formally and informally take up leadership roles (H1). Formal roles take the form of department heads and members of committees while informal roles take the form of mentoring, peer collaboration, and curriculum development. These are the practices to bring about innovation and teaching quality enhancement. The study further indicated, however, that facilitating context factors like clear leadership policies, inclusive institutional cultures, and sufficient resources are indispensable for teacher leadership enhancement (H2). In the absence of the above, even enthusiastic professionals find it challenging to maintain their leadership.

The following challenges include limited funding, excessive workloads, and resistance from peers, which all prove detrimental to the potency of teacher leadership (H3). All this is worsened by inadequate institutional support and formal recognition of leadership functions. In spite of all such challenges, it was revealed from the study that teacher leadership has a beneficial influence on learning outcomes among students (H4), specifically through increased engagement, innovative curricula, and better institutional performance. In addition, professional development opportunities, both formal and informal, were revealed to enhance leadership competency and effectiveness (H5).

The research further underscored differences in gender in leadership styles, where female teachers prioritized relational and collaborative practices, whereas the male teachers prioritized formal and strategic roles. Further, there were differences seen between private and public institutions, where public institutions encountered more systemic challenges, whereas private institutions were both better at accommodating flexibility but without proper support system infrastructure.

In short, this study emphasizes the critical role of transforming teacher leadership in TESOL environments, especially in higher education. With the challenges recognized and the strengths of both formal and informal leadership utilized, institutions have the power to design environments to enable TESOL professionals to lead and facilitate educational reform.

According to the findings, the following are proposed to support development of teacher leadership among TESOL teachers in the Duhok context and others like it:

#### 1. Policy Development and Institutional Support

- **Formalize Leader Roles:** Institutions of higher learning must have formal channels of teacher leadership, from specific roles like instructional coaches, curriculum coordinators, and leaders of mentorship programs. This formal acknowledgment will authenticate teachers' hard work and allow for structured pathways in leadership development.
- **Establish Supportive Policies:** Institutions need to have explicit support for teacher leadership, such as funding of leadership initiatives, lightened teaching loads for leaders, and means to weave in teacher input into decisions.
- **Increase Administrative Support:** Administrations at universities must support the culture of collaboration and innovation through active encouragement of teacher

leaders by enabling resources like access to current instruction tools and professional development budgets.

## 2. Capacity Development and Professional Growth

- **Increase Professional Development Opportunities:** Institutions ought to provide routine seminars, workshops, and conferences dedicated to leadership skills training, innovative pedagogical approaches, and current TESOL trends. Their main focus should be to cater to the needs of TESOL professionals working in higher education.
- **Encourage informal learning networks:** Foster PLCs and peer-mentoring initiatives. These informal networks will enable learning from each other, problem-solving through collaboration, and ongoing improvements.
- **Embrace Technology for Training:** Use digital tools to deliver accessible and convenient professional development opportunities like online training and virtual conferences, particularly for teachers in resource-restricted environments.

## 3. Meeting Challenges

- **Provide Adequate Funding:** Universities must allocate sufficient funding to cover leadership projects, e.g., grants to travel to international conferences and acquire current teaching manuals. This will help TESOL professionals to keep abreast of worldwide best practices.
- **Lighten Work Burdens:** Institutions must redistribute teaching and administration burdens to free teacher leaders to have time to devote to leadership work. This may entail appointing extra staff members or offering teaching assistants.
- **Encourage Culture of Change:** In order to overcome resistance from staff, institutions must adopt change management initiatives, including training in the value of innovation and the development of forums for discussing innovation approaches.

## 4. Gender-Inclusive Leadership Development

- **Tailor the Programs to Gender Differences:** Professional development programs must identify and cater to the different leadership approaches of female and male educators. For instance, female educators might have collaborative

leadership-focused workshops and strategic planning-focused workshops for male educators, with cross-gender learning promotion.

- Foster Gender Equity in Leadership Positions: Institutions must provide fair access to leadership roles to both genders and actively try to reduce gender bias in leadership selection processes.

## 5. Research and Ongoing Improvement

- Do Further Research: Future research must examine the long-term viability of teacher leadership projects and how they influence institution-wide transformation. Comparative studies in various regions may even highlight context-specific best practices.
- Track and Measure Initiatives: Universities must implement measures to regularly monitor the success of leadership initiatives and make data-informed changes to ensure ongoing improvements.

## Last Thoughts

Teacher leadership is one of the key drivers of educational innovation and quality, especially in specialist areas such as TESOL. If these recommendations are applied, universities in the Duhok area and elsewhere will establish an environment to enable TESOL teachers to excel as leaders. This will improve student learning outcomes, promote institutional development, and support the overall mission of education reform. It will not only empower teachers to lead benefit individual settings, but it will also reinforce the global TESOL community through the promotion of collaborative, reflective, and adaptive practice. This study's findings are a call to action for educators, administrators, and policymakers to invest in teacher leadership as the foundation for educational excellence.

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