

# How Do Teacher Leaders Interact with Teachers? A Qualitative Analysis from a Professional Development Program\*

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the processes experienced during the interaction between teacher leaders and their peers. Applying the grounded theory, we present a theoretical model that describes this interactive process in a month-long professional development (PD) program designed for teachers. As a part of the PD program, a total of 150 teachers were tasked with preparing lesson plans in accordance with the principles of Understanding by Design (UbD) and seven teacher leaders, trained and appointed by the researchers, were assigned to guide them. The findings yielded five categories: orientation, improvement, collaboration, communication, and feelings, and a main category, facilitation. It was concluded that the interactions underscore fostering teacher development by promoting professional growth and through structured learning communities, teacher collaboration help promoting educational outcomes as well as student outcomes.

## Keywords:

Teacher Leaders, Teacher Leadership, Understanding By Design (Ubd), Professional Development, Grounded Theory

## Introduction

In the international research, teacher leadership has widely been appealing to both the researchers as well as practitioners (DeDeyn, 2021; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Kahler-Viene et al., 2021; Little, 2003; Webber & Okoko, 2021) and the term, appearing in the USA in the late of 1980's, emphasizes the critical role of teachers in terms of school improvement and their expanded responsibilities beyond in-class activities (Kahila et al., 2020; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Despite the elusiveness and lack of consensus on what forms the teacher leadership (Cosenza, 2015; Gratacos et al., 2021), Kahler-Viene et al.(2021) argue that the concept itself is of crucial importance for teachers who both aspire to be a part of their classrooms and extend their professional growth, which coincides with Grimm's (2020) description of the term: "Teacher leadership can be understood as leading students inside the classroom and as leading teacher peers outside the classroom" (p. 455).

An important aspect of teacher leadership is its connection to peer collaboration. In this regard, the use of learning communities or groups has been recognized as an effective



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strategy for fostering professional growth among teachers (Allen & Blythe, 2018). Nevertheless, despite the global approval of such initiatives, research on their dynamics and effectiveness remains limited. The question whether the dynamics of a group work or a learning community is operative or not for a specific objective under the guidance of a teacher leader seems to be vague despite the abundant research in the related literature (Webber, 2021). In addition, although some theories and researchers have attempted to formulate the concept, the very purpose of this study is to reveal the participants' views in terms of teacher leadership as well as the atmosphere in learning communities independent of existing views. It is seen that, as Webber (2021) points out, the notion of teacher leadership is fluid and it is possible that the literature's multiple definitions serve to highlight the importance of it as a flexible notion that may promote better teaching and learning as well as increased community involvement among school community members. As it is not a purpose of the current study to refute or falsify any prevalent theories, the main emphasis will be placed upon the views of the participants.

In this sense, teacher leaders play important roles to help and direct teachers. They foster a positive atmosphere which paves the way for interactions in groups of teachers. The efficiency of the interaction between teacher leaders and their peers' results in more effective classroom instruction, which increases students' acquisition of academic knowledge and abilities, raises student success, and improves school performance as a whole (Cohron, 2009). Through an effective interaction, teacher leaders can have the chance to collaborate with colleagues on authentic teaching strategies that can be benefitted both individually and collectively. It is mostly agreed that in both formal and informal settings, teacher leaders can have a huge impact on other educators through modelling, working together, coaching, developing collegial connections, and advocating for change (Allen & Blythe, 2018). What this study aims to add to the related literature is to offer a more thorough comprehension of how teacher leadership promotes professional development by analysing the interactions between teacher leadership and their peers and to promote educational practices.

### ***Literature: Teacher Leadership***

Silva et al. (2000) and Shen et al. (2020) contend that there have been three approaches in the evolution of teacher leadership. In the first step, teacher leadership in educational systems was perceived as a tool to make schools more effective and proficient. To Kahila (2020), during this wave, teachers were perceived as the ones who were promoted to perform administrative and management services such as

being the head of a department or the head teacher. In this framework, teacher leaders were viewed as a kind of supervisors with primary responsibility to manage teachers supposedly acting as merely implementers (Pounder, 2006). After this narrow perspective of teacher leadership and "neutering" process of teachers, the second wave, to Silva et al. (2000), put emphasis on the instructional merits and knowledge of teachers. During this wave, teacher leadership embraced unprecedented tasks such as being a leader, curriculum designer, focusing on professional development of teachers. However, this wave, called "remote controlling of teachers" by Darling-Hammond (1998), isolated teacher leaders from their main function of teaching and they somehow were appointed as the ones who designed the curriculum, developed materials for classroom use and maintained their leadership roles out of the classrooms.

The third wave, which is acknowledged as the present-day view of teacher leadership, embraces leadership along with teaching. In this wave, teacher leaders, while performing their main function of teaching, are given the opportunity to unveil their leadership merits (Pounder, 2006). Silva et al. (2000) describe this approach as a means that enables teacher leaders to "slide the doors open to collaborate with other teachers, discuss common problems, share approaches to various learning situations and investigate motivational strategies to bring students to deeper engagement with their learning (p. 721)." This formulation places teacher leadership into a framework where professional development and collegiality come to the forefront and labels teacher leaders as the ones who labour to re-culture schools by improving educational climate in a positive way.

Evaluated and perceived as a process and collaborative phenomenon rather than a managerial or administrative task with the third wave, teacher leadership has become a generic concept, which makes it challenging to have a consensual definition (Pounder, 2006; Harris, 2003; Webber, 2021; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). While Silva et al. (2000) highlight the features of teacher leadership as having skills to develop and foster relationships among colleagues and promoting professional development, York-Barr and Duke's (2004) description puts emphasize on shared impact of teachers on school's stakeholders to enhance teaching and learning process. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2011) argue that teacher leadership is not directly related to managerial or hierarchical position in an organization, rather it focuses on professional and naturally school improvement. Focusing on the idea of change, Wasley (1991, as cited in Harris, 2003) describes the term as a skill to inspire peers to change that could not be performed but for the impact of leaders. Based upon the related literature, Harris and

Jones (2019) put forward the idea that the concept of teacher leadership is something beyond having an official responsibility, on the other hand, it is closely associated with improving pedagogical mastery both in the classroom and outside to guide the peers.

At this point, Harris' (2003) views regarding the concept seem to be noteworthy to review. She suggests that "teacher leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively" (p. 314). In this sense, it includes exchanging ideas, perceptions, information, views as well as creating new ideas collectively through sharing opinions, feedback, and understandings, apart from generating collaborative work. As Can (2009) and Kiliç et al. (2015) assert, teacher leadership nurtures the collaboration as well as motivation among teachers. That the teacher-leaders work collaboratively and collectively is also highlighted by Harris and Muijs' (2003) four roles the teacher leaders are supposed to have. To them, apart from the "brokering role" which secures the opportunities for teachers to improve, teacher leadership requires "participative leadership" in which other teachers are assisted for a specific aim and collaboration. The other dimension is about the "mediating role" in which the leaders are considered as consultants for expert opinions in need of assistance. The last, being probably the most significant dimension for the authors, is "forging close relationships" with teachers so that reciprocal learning can take place.

Developed by a group of researchers in Hong Kong (Pang & Marton, 2017), Learning Study Model (LeaS) along with Educational Design Research (EDR) could be the examples of "forging close relationships" among teachers. These teacher professional development approaches employ cyclic or repetitive procedures, meaning that after gathering and analysing data to create instructional practices, the process is repeated and improved upon until the enhancement as well as improvement is confirmed (Holmqvist, 2017). For instance, in LeaS, teachers, coming together under the guidance of a researcher or a teacher educator, collaboratively design research lessons and apply them in a classroom setting. Although the number of teachers participating in a group varies in the model, there is usually a collaboration of three to six peers (Bümen, & Yedigöz Kara, 2023).

As mostly highlighted in the related literature, teacher leadership is not solely concerned with performing managerial or administrative tasks but working collaboratively with peers and helping or leading them to create new ways or strategies to promote learning in the classrooms. In this sense, collegiality, coaching, working together on a strategy, sharing information, giving feedback, observing, generating new ideas, exchanging opinions on how to implement

a specified strategy as well as modelling and setting learning targets are the qualities seen during the reciprocal interaction between teacher leaders and teacher peers (Allen & Blythe, 2018; Bolat, 2023; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Harris, 2003; Harris & Muijs, 2003; Neupane, 2021; Silva et al., 2000; Xie et al., 2021; Webber, 2021).

No matter how quality the pre-service training is, it would be unrealistic to expect teachers to be equipped for every obstacle or challenge they may encounter in their professional lives. Therefore, to maintain high education standards as well as qualified teaching workforce, education policies should aim to provide teachers with professional development opportunities, one of the aims of which is to share knowledge and experience among teachers (OECD, 2009, Chapter 3). In this sense, the professional development recognises the need for collaboration among teachers and their peers as "there is growing interest in developing schools as learning organisations, and in ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically" (OECD, 2005).

Thus, an issue in this study is to investigate the dynamics of group work under the guidance of teacher leaders. Although we identified the key terms, such as collaboration, exchanging ideas, getting continuous feedback, observing peers, orientation, and communication from the related literature, most of the earlier studies did not explore the concept in depth. It is evaluated that this kind of collaboration may yield to some valuable insights. To begin, successful cooperation among educators would improve the quality of instructional methods and learning by promoting the interchange of new instructional approaches, resources, and practices as it fosters a community of support where educators may share knowledge and enhance their teaching practices, resulting in professional development. In addition, analysing about group dynamics under the supervision of teacher leaders offers valuable perspectives on communication techniques, successful leadership approaches, and the influence of teamwork on academic endeavours. In this way, it would be possible to develop effective models that can be utilised for long-term educational progress by having a thorough understanding of how teacher leaders assist group activities. Further, studying these facets would pave the way for the continuous improvement of teaching methods; foster a supportive and cooperative school climate; and, above all, produce high-quality instruction that promotes students' success. Besides, studying how teacher leaders facilitate group work provides crucial insights into how cooperative efforts may be coordinated to provide a supportive and effective learning environment. Gaining insight into how teacher leaders may facilitate group dynamics would also result in

enhancing teamwork, collaboration and ultimately professional development. These kinds of endeavours essentially help to improve educational leadership practices, foster a collaborative culture, and ensure that the collective experience of educators is utilized and assessed. In this vein, the processes that occur between group members and their teacher leaders have become the subject of the present study. By way of the grounded theory, the present study aims to investigate the interaction between teacher leaders and their peers and to present a theoretical model. In the present study, we intend to provide a thorough and context specific understanding of teacher leadership's unique function in educational practices. This aim does not only align with the related literature but also offers an opportunity to provide concrete evidence to the stakeholders. To this end, answers given by the teacher leaders to the questions below were analysed:

How have teacher leaders developed professionally during the PD program?

## Method

In the current study aiming to examine the processes experienced during the interaction between teacher leaders and their peers in depth and to present a theoretical model describing the process, the grounded theory as a research design was applied. The grounded theory, often regarded as revolutionary among qualitative designs (Walker & Myrick, 2006), came into existence following the release of the book "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" written by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in the 1960's. Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined the term as "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained and analysed in social research" (p. 1) and they developed the theory as a response to the extreme positivism which had dominated the field (Suddaby, 2006). They suggested that a grounded theory which is loyal to the realities of life can be withdrawn from varied data. In this sense, it is possible to develop a new theory through giving close attention to the differences between goings-on in life and the comments of people who experience them, namely the differences between daily realities and the actors (Suddaby, 2006). To Corbin and Strauss (1990), the grounded theory both attempts to unearth the related conditions as well as tries to identify the responses of people in terms of changing conditions and their results. Further, as each context is unique and the experiences of the participants are specific, the grounded theory is not a convenient method to make strong generalisation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thus, the findings of the current study will not serve as a tool for generalisation since the views reflected would be the participants' own realities.

## Participants

A total of 150 teachers were given the task of developing lesson plans in accordance with the guidelines of UbD instructional design. Seven teacher leaders were chosen by the researchers to assist their groups, each of which consisted of 20-25 teachers. The participants were selected on a voluntary basis and they were chosen from a group of teachers who had leadership experiences in their career, such as contributing to professional learning groups and having a role in teaching training. The teacher leaders were also teachers with previous knowledge and experience on developing UbD-based lesson plans and implementing them in their classes. In the current study, convenience sampling technique, which entails the selection of participants based on their accessibility and availability, rather than through randomization, was administered for the recruitment of teacher leaders. This sampling method was employed due to the practicality and easy access to the participants. While acknowledging its potential and possible biases to some extent, we attempted to reduce these restrictions by setting clear inclusion criteria and procedures.

## Study Context

As a part of a professional development program, a total of 150 teachers from various backgrounds were trained about curriculum development and they were assigned to prepare lesson plans in line with their training. In this process, seven teacher leaders were nominated to guide seven different groups. These teacher leaders were trained for a month before the program started and they were appointed to a group of teachers, each consisting of approximately 20-25 participants. In the process, the teachers were requested to prepare lesson plans developed in accordance with an instructional design model, UbD, and the teacher leaders would guide them in developing their designs. With the assistance of teacher leaders to improve the quality variety of their lesson designs, the purpose of this professional development program is to assist teachers in creating lesson plans that are in line with UbD instructional design model. During the program which lasted five months, the teacher leaders and teachers worked together under the supervision of the project team. Starting with a three-day in-person training, the teachers continued the program with online activities including regular live meetings with the project team and the teacher leaders. They also continued their efforts to design unit plans in collaboration with their group members in an asynchronous format. At this point, the process was supported and facilitated by the teacher leaders until they handed the plans designed in line with the principles of UbD to the teacher leaders. Therefore, the teacher leaders

oversaw assisting their groups in developing lesson plans that adhere to the basics of the design. In this way, they helped their peers comprehend the fundamentals of UbD instructional design model and learn how to employ them to develop lesson plans. They also facilitated group discussions and collaborative activities to promote peer learning and exchange of ideas among participants. Once the plans were completed and checked by teacher leaders, the plans were implemented in the classes. After the process was completed, the researchers made interviews with the teacher leaders in terms of their experience with the peer teachers.

### Data Collection

The semi-structured interview was applied as a method of data collection. In this design, it is aimed to acquire individual responses from participants concerning a specific case or experience they have gone through. It is applied when the subjective knowledge is required or lacking under the guidance of scheduled questions administered by the researchers. The design assures the participants of giving responses to the questions freely or however they want (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The questions employed in the interviews were meticulously planned and developed so that they would align with the study's aims. Through expert views, we attempted to ensure the suitability and relevance of the questions. Ethical procedures were conducted meticulously throughout the study. Informed consent forms were obtained from the participants, and they were informed about the details of study.

The interviews were conducted with each of the seven participating teacher leaders individually via Microsoft Teams Online Meeting Software and the lengths of the interviews varied between 30-45 minutes. All the interviews were recorded on the system after the participant gave informed consent to record the interview and participated in the study. Eight semi-structured questions were prepared and directed at all the participants in the same order so that consistency could be ensured in all interviews. In some cases, some follow-up questions, when necessary, were also added to the list in accordance with the flow of the interview to obtain more elaborated responses. All the recorded interviews were decoded through Microsoft Office Word software program. To provide internal validity, the questions were presented to the four experts in the field, and they were revised in accordance with the experts' suggestions.

### Data Analysis

Semi-structured interview questions were asked to the participants and after the interviews with the participants, the data gained were analysed in accordance with the coding process formulated by Corbin and Strauss (1990). Describing the coding

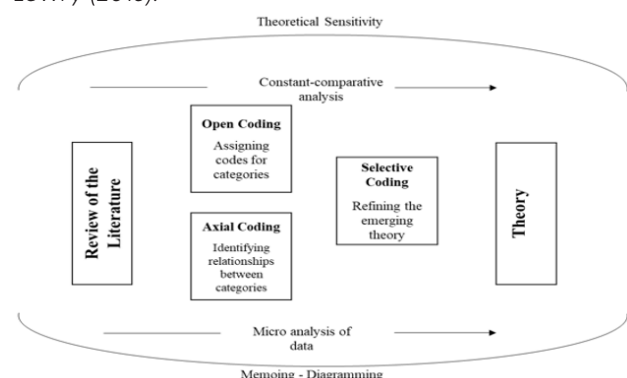
process as one of the most important aspects for the grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (1990) argue that open, axial and selective coding are the three fundamental types while coding. Open coding involves the interpretation of the data analysed line by line even word by word (Urquhart, 2018). By doing this, the analyst gets new insights, and this process paves the way for multiple and generative questions. During the process of axial coding, the categories are connected to subcategories and the interaction among them are analysed. Selective coding is raising the selected codes into categories important to the research problem (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Urquhart, 2018).

In the open coding process, the researcher analysed the decoded texts line by line, sometimes word by word, using the underlining and note-taking methods. During this phase, 213 reference codes were obtained and to make these codes have suitable categories, axial coding phase was put into practice. In other words, in the axial coding process, the features of the codes were arranged in dimensions and in contrast to the first step, relevant connections were drawn among the codes to identify categories.

Throughout the process, specific procedures were implemented to insure both validity and reliability. To improve reliability, consistent and methodical data collecting, and analysis processes were employed, based on the principles of the grounded theory. Document analysis, opinions and interviews were carried out rigorously for data triangulation, which helped to promote data diversity and confirmation of findings. Coding accuracy was assured using explicit coding methods and standards. Furthermore, constant comparison and iterative processing of theoretical notions were carried out to maintain consistency and coherence. Regarding validity issues, peer review was employed, allowing members to verify that they were consistent with their own experiences and peer discussion was also practised to confirm interpretations and to reduce researchers' biases.

**Figure 1**

*Schematic representation of coding process based on Corbin and Strauss (1990). Adopted from Njenga and Lowry (2018).*





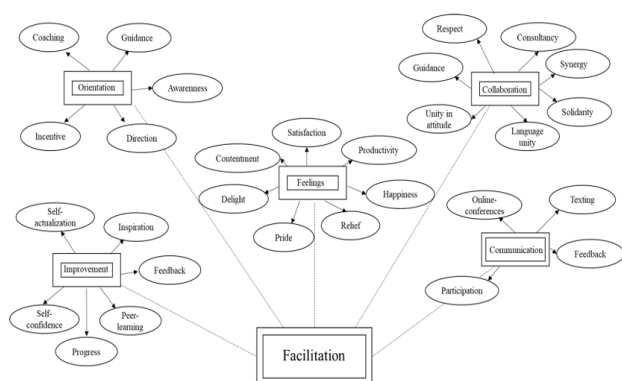
As demonstrated in Figure 1, the data transcribed and transferred to the Word file were analysed based on the coding method of Corbin and Strauss (1990). The codes were obtained from the frequently uttered expressions of the participants, the categories from the common codes, and then the themes were formed. At this stage, when necessary, open coding was reverted to and the generated codes, produced in this process, were reviewed again.

## Results

After the analysis that the grounded theory requires, the current qualitative research yielded five categories, namely orientation, improvement, collaboration, communication, and feelings, and a main category, facilitation.

After open and axial coding, the categories were labelled under a related heading as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
Theoretical Model



As shown in Figure 2, after identifying the codes in the open coding process, five categories were formed in the axial coding process: orientation, improvement, collaboration, communication, and feelings. This phase was followed by the selective coding process in order to clearly understand and associate the five categories that emerged during the axial coding. According to the relationship between the five categories, facilitation which is related to all other categories emerged as the main category.

Below, the findings related to these categories and the main category are presented with direct quotations from the participants.

### Orientation

All the teacher leaders in the current study received the fundamentals of curriculum development and they had necessary qualifications to develop lesson plans in accordance with the principles of the chosen instructional design model, UbD. In this sense, they all had in-service training for a month before they were administered to lead their groups.

Although there were slight differences among their responses, nearly all the teacher leaders were of the opinion that during their leadership, orientation was an important factor in the process. It was perceived as publicising group policies, job tasks, responsibilities, deadlines, procedures and other organisational structures to the members of each group. Under this category, only one teacher stated the phrase "bridge" to describe their roles. Among others, phrases like "awareness", "improvement", "reporter", "tutor", "companion", "mentor", "counsellor", "director", "leader", "advisor" and "instructor" were the ones that were frequently uttered.

The majority of the participants stated that the teacher leadership process helped them acquire and raise a kind of awareness. In this sense, TL5 stated that:

*"During the interactions among teachers I have noticed that awareness is an important gain. Working with 19 teachers in my group, designing with them improved me and helped me raise a kind of awareness. I learned a lot from each teacher. There were things on UbD that I did not know either. Also, guidance. I felt like a guide who transferred, helped in their design, and learned a lot".*

### Improvement

Without any exceptions, all the teachers agreed on the idea that teacher leadership in this process improved their personal and collaborative abilities. It could be concluded from the statements that they improved themselves personally as they were in the positions of consultants, and they were supposed to direct and help the teachers in their groups for the designs. As for the improvement in their collaborative skills, it is apprehended that while negotiating with each other in order to create the best form or design or to reach a consensus among them, they were able to manage the obstacles or difficulties that they encountered as they were acquainted with conferring.

Under this category, the most recurrent phrases were "feedback", "self-confidence", "experience", "progress", "differentiation", "betterment", "gain a different perspective / viewpoint", "inspiration", "self-improvement" and "help". The statements of TL1 were as follows:

*It (the process) developed me a lot, it was important to be the one who taught, and I was able to express myself with ease. It provided me the feeling of self-confidence, and this improved me a lot. Being able to express myself on the topic was important, I'm not afraid anymore. I was able to give feedback on other people's designs. They made changes in accordance with my suggestions. Performance tasks helped them and me be more competent.*

### Collaboration

Nearly all the participants in the study mentioned the presence of collaboration with their leaders as well as

their peers during the process. Some of them focused on the significance of cooperation while the others put emphasis on information exchange, contribution, and direction. In this respect it seems that the unity in groups paved the way for the sense of collaboration as mutual respect among the members and teacher leaders created a kind of positive synergy whereby the work performed by the group could be counted more than that of each member's performance. Under this category, the phrases such as "consultancy", "language unity", "information exchange", "synergy", "solidarity", "respect", "integration", "direction", "natural flow", "calmness", "contribution", "interdisciplinary", and "formal procedure" were the most repeated ones.

Except for one teacher leader who was not that satisfied with the sense of collaboration, all the teacher leaders, while describing the process that they led, mentioned the influence and the value of cooperation. The statements of TL2 in this respect were remarkable:

*It was a very enjoyable process. The team was nice, cooperation was great. We argued amongst ourselves, we went on by consulting each other. It was a naturally occurring process, we tried to answer the questions of the participants immediately. We argued how we can answer the questions of different branches? We cared about unity of language and unity of message. We exchanged information easily. We supported each other. I had an idea regarding my place with other teacher leaders, and the things I learned, I was often consulted. Since I had studied UbD before, I contributed more on the integration side.*

### Communication

Although the phrases under this category were sometimes mentioned under the label of collaboration, the participants particularly put emphasis on it and the majority of them expressed the significance of communication exclusively. As the concept itself includes the acts of sharing information, sending and receiving messages from the members of their groups, they attached particular importance to it. In their attempts to guide and lead the members, the teacher leaders stated that they tried to be good and effective communicators as they listened to the others carefully, talked to them in a clear and respectful way and most importantly they respected their ideas. In addition, the effective and healthy communication among the members were also highlighted by the teacher leaders as this contributed to create positive atmosphere by eliminating likely factors of misunderstandings or confusions.

As the members of the groups were in different cities and provinces, the interviews and meetings were mostly conducted through online facilities. WhatsApp, Zoom conferences and texting were among the means of communication. "Generating ideas", "direction", "sharing ideas", "availability", "efficient

feedback", "excuses", "moderator", "sincerity", "consulting", "barriers in communication with different groups", "cooperation", "unity in attitude", "peer learning", "interaction" and "correspondence" were mostly repeated phrases in this category. While two of the teacher leaders stated that due to the disintegration and quitting from the groups, they had communication problems with the members and could not get what they expected, most of the teacher leaders were of the opinion that the communication with their groups on the whole was effective. In this sense, TL4's expressions were as follows:

*There were those who were more active than the other participants. More information was produced through Zoom, WhatsApp, and phone. Private school teachers were more inclined to work and to be creative than state school teachers. There were groups that I had to direct more. Some groups became more instructive and guiding. Our communication was good. We have been trying to find out how to get better.*

### Feelings

Without any exceptions, all the teacher leaders in the study highlighted the feelings and emotions that they had gone through during the process. All of them expressed positive feelings overall although two of them stated negativity regarding their emotions. However, these teacher leaders though stated their contentment in general, expressed that while conducting or having some specific tasks, they underwent one or two frustrating experiences which mainly, they said, stemmed from technical problems that they faced during online meetings and delays. They highlighted that they often felt positive emotions and feelings, and this had a profound influence especially on attention, productivity, problem solving and efficient communication.

The most common phrases under this category were "pride", "satisfaction", "happiness", self-actualization", "feeling of competency", "sense of achievement", "self-confidence", "excitement", "productivity" and "helpfulness". TL3's expressions regarding feelings were as follows:

*The sense of satisfaction and contribution was very high. It was satisfying for me to guide them as they come from different cities and cultures. I didn't have much difficulty. It would be helpful to have an IT officer in the project, for problems experienced in synchronous meetings. Although we already had basic skills, the IT staff could help with the disruptions in the synchronisation.*

### Facilitation

After the interactions among the identified categories formed during the coding processes were examined, facilitation emerged as the main category. It has been evaluated that the relationship pattern among the categories could give a way to develop a model

whose main point is facilitation. The teacher leaders in the current study mostly emphasised the term since it was recognized as an indispensable condition and tool for both personal and professional improvement. In the current study, teacher leaders guided their groups, and they encouraged them to overcome difficulties, to solve the problems that they encountered during the process, to reach a kind of consensus over diverse opinions and suggestions and also they tried to find out and apply the best strategies to challenges by means of their effective feedback that led to the right way. TL6's statements in this sense are quite compassing:

*Sometimes, we reached mutual and spontaneous common points with the member teachers. While giving feedback, I felt I had to keep them in the process, motivate them, and at the same time, though not often, I had to correct things that weren't in line with our objectives. Kindness and motivation also helped me sustain and enhance the motivation during the process.*

Another participant's, TL5, expressions were also noteworthy to highlight:

*I paid attention to my manner while giving feedback to my peers. There were points where I had to restrain myself. I tried to be helpful for their self-improvement. I felt pride and happiness. I learned to be patient. I grew a kind of self-compassion and empathy. I continuously asked myself the question, 'What would you do if you were in their place?'*

## Discussion

In this study, we delved into the complex and comprehensive processes that took place during the interaction between teacher leaders and their peers in this study. Five distinctive categories have been established via the study of the coding process: orientation, improvement, collaboration, communication, and feelings. Each of these categories contributes uniquely to the overall theme of facilitation. The data were gained from seven teacher leaders appointed to groups of teachers who were requested to design unit plans in accordance with principles of curriculum development along with the other components of the professional development program that they attended. Forming teacher learning groups, as in this study, has become a widespread practice for the professional improvement as well as the transformation of schools seeking for a change (Allen & Blythe, 2018; Kurt, 2016) since these practices have been recognized as vehicles for bringing peers together in order to catch up present-day developments in their ever-changing environments (Dunne et al., 2000; Sargent & Hannum, 2009; Wood 2007).

One of the categories that the teachers highlighted mostly during the interviews is the concept of orientation. The majority of them stated that their involvement in the process helped them acquire and

raise a kind of awareness and a sense of guidance. As Simpson (2021) argues, working with peers and mentors in such groups enhances learning orientation and, in this way, they can learn together and create a kind of common and mutual cognition as well as awareness. Similarly, focusing on promoting and encouraging teacher leadership for school changes, Wang and Ho (2020) highlight that in such practices, teacher leaders inspire others to achieve the common goal. In this sense, teacher leadership is also evaluated as an opportunity, among the members, for their professional development. As Poekert (2012) highlights, there is a significant association between teacher leadership and professional development as "professional development is both a cause and an outcome of teacher leadership" (p. 170).

Through the interviews, the participants also put emphasis on collaboration and communication with their peers. Teacher leaders in such groups often back up the members of their groups by directing, supplying necessary information, demonstrating, monitoring, providing opportunities to exchange different views, providing solidarity and so on (Neupane, 2021). In this context, it has appeared that one of the crucial features of teacher leaders lies in their ability to influence and to direct others through communication in an effective way, which is one of the seven dimensions that Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) have formulated. The teacher leaders reported that by means of good communication skills, except for minor ones, they almost did not have any challenges. As Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) state, when the relationships were set, then teacher leaders can have opportunities to influence their peers for instructional and personal development. The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) which outlines the functions of teacher leaders connotes that communication and facilitation are among the critical skills that teacher leaders can develop. At this point, Ackerman and Mackenzie's (2007) expressions are noteworthy to highlight: Teacher leaders "live for the dream of feeling part of a collective, collaborative enterprise" (p. 237).

From the findings, it was also revealed that teacher leaders' positive mood had a profound impact on their peers as well as on the outcome. As leadership itself is a kind of "emotion-management process" (Fernando & Gamage, 2019, p. 2), the positive moods of teacher leaders improve the members' performance (Humphrey et al., 2008) on the condition that the leaders are effective at influencing their followers' moods in a positive way (Humphrey et al., 2008; Little et al., 2016). As in the words of Goleman et al. (2013), it is the leaders who make emotions "drive in the right direction" (p. 3). In this sense, it is apparent that the concept of emotion is one of the fundamental aspects of teacher leadership as it paves the way for



motivating and inspiring peers, having sustainable relations and associations as well as reaching satisfaction and desired outcomes (Cheng et al., 2021).

Similarly, facilitation which also seems to lie at the core of teacher leadership is a significant aspect to be highlighted. After analysing the associations among the categories, the notion of facilitation emerged as an inclusive concept. In this study, the teacher leaders, in a sense, acted as facilitators who set and directed the procedures, uncovered the energy and stimulated their peers, maintained the lively, sincere atmosphere along with providing convenient strategies and support when required. Thus, facilitation has come to a state which is described as identifying and applying certain strategies or moves, unearthing facts, emphasising the crucial points, analysing and guiding. It has become a concept with a multifaceted nature that includes "cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical dimensions" (Allen & Blythe, 2018). In other words, the emergence of facilitation as the main category emphasizes its critical role in moderating relationships between teacher leaders and their peers. In this context, facilitation refers to the sophisticated procedures by which teacher leaders guide, assist, and improve joint undertakings in the educational setting. It is agreed by several researchers (Lowery-Moore, Latimer, & Villate, 2016; Lieberman & Pointer Mace 2009; Tahir et. al., 2020) that teacher leaders can enhance teaching and learning as well as the professional qualifications, and that teachers benefit from collaborative groups. Thus, it has become more apparent that facilitation serves as a way that leads the stakeholders to access a source of encouragement as well as support, a source of information, where the peers always seek to learn, to do more, to exchange opinions, to internalize improvement and are far more motivated to produce. In other words, it became visible that facilitation emerged as the key category for coordinating and maintaining the intricate interactions in this learning environment. In this context, facilitation goes beyond simple coordination; it encompasses the deliberate and competent coordination of procedures that foster teamwork, encourage progress, provide guidance, encourage effective interpersonal relationships, and realize the emotional aspects that fall under the category of feelings.

In this sense, facilitation goes beyond the conventional notion of leadership, focusing on a flexible and dynamic strategy that successfully negotiates the complex issues present in instructional settings. Establishing a clear direction and a common goal that gives cooperative efforts a meaningful path is part of the facilitative function. This is consistent with the orientation category's findings, showing how teacher leaders act as guides to make sure that group actions have a goal and are focused on shared objectives.

Moreover, facilitation also encompasses a kind of devotion to professional improvement. Teacher leaders become somehow agents of change in the groups, using their facilitation abilities to foster an atmosphere that values experimentation, reflection, and collaboration. Therefore, the category of improvement served in this study as a transformational change that teacher leaders triggered to their peers for better teaching practices and methods.

As for collaboration, it can be argued that facilitation played an important role in fostering synergies between teacher leaders and peers. In this sense, it went beyond a mere coordination and assigning tasks and it acted as a notion that includes establishing a setting that promotes the sharing of knowledge, viewpoints, and ideas, which paved the way for a collective attitude nurtured by individuals' contributions.

In accordance with the findings, facilitation has a connection with efficient communication in that teacher leaders not only allowed suitable and free ways to interact but also made sure that these ways suited to the group's requirements, promoting a culture of trust and confidence. In this way, the facilitative leaders made it possible for flowing of varied ideas, minimizing disagreements and creating a friendly atmosphere for progress and improvement.

Other categories derived from the study were orientation and feelings. As for orientation, it can be argued that the facilitative leaders played important roles for determining a clear and attainable direction and target for collaborative endeavours. Further, these leaders guided their peers towards common objectives to establish successful cooperation. The emotional dimension, meanwhile, emphasized on sentiments which the facilitative leaders observed meticulously and respected. They ensured that the feeling of their peers is comprehended, evaluated and incorporated into collaboration.

In this sense, the practical recommendations would be to organize structured orientation programs to define the roles, responsibilities, purposes of collaboration clearly; organize modules and workshops for continuous professional development that focuses on coaching and sharing teaching practices would be another practice and to establish collaborative teams to develop an environment where teacher leaders and their peers exchange their ideas and suggestions.

In summary, these characteristics helped to construct a theoretical model that reflected the many different aspects of the interactions between teacher leaders and their peers. It is evaluated that the model would offer a helpful basis for analysing and organizing such interactions in educational contexts.

## Conclusion

Five distinctive categories have been identified from the data obtained: orientation, improvement, collaboration, communication, and feelings. It was concluded that each of these categories contributes uniquely to the overall theme of facilitation. The framework offered in the current study examines in depth the processes that occur during interactions between teacher leaders and their peers. The findings provide a basis for a detailed understanding and perception of teacher leadership as well as an opportunity to extract key insights from group works that highlight the dynamic and constant engagement among members. In this sense, the model presented has revealed emotional, psychological, cognitive, social, personal, and interactional aspects of peer work as well as the potential performance of teacher leaders who have acted as facilitators. It can be concluded that teacher leadership requires some skills that go beyond the traditional framework of leadership. With their new roles, teacher leaders are no longer the ones who merely manage their peers, develop materials for classroom use, simply design, supervise or evaluate the curriculum. Instead, their roles require them to be kind of mentors, facilitators, organisers, emotionally resilient figures, continuous learners, instructors, active participants, effective communicators, observers etc. This connotes that teacher leadership entails organisational, superior communication skills, using convenient teaching strategies, ability to motivate when needed and empowerment of peers.

## Suggestions

The current study is naturally subjected to some limitations. To begin, a limited sample size was employed in the study. This may reduce and restrict the possibility of generalization of the findings, since it may not represent the population as it is expected. Further, the teacher leaders assigned to each group have been given the principles of the UbD design which required frequent interactions with the researchers, and this could lead to a kind of bias in their associations. Future studies might be addressed to eliminate any kind of bias and could be designed in such a manner that impartiality would be a major concern. Furthermore, the findings have been gained from the interviews conducted with teacher leaders. In future studies, the opinions of the members of the groups could be taken into account in order to have more thorough and detailed findings in terms of the interaction between teacher leaders and the members. In addition, further studies could be conducted in order to verify the theoretical model developed from this research across a variety of educational contexts. This would allow to increase the generalizability of the findings and give a more detailed views regarding how facilitation works

in different circumstances. To illustrate, comparing the learning environments in urban schools where there are a lot of students with different backgrounds and rural schools having difficulty access to technology and many other facilities, could provide an opportunity to apply the model. Additionally, future studies could expand and focus on the idea that how facilitation influences students' achievement apart from the interactions between teacher leaders and peers. They could examine whether learning designs developed in this way could lead to better teaching strategies and better learning outcomes.

## Declaration of Interest Statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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