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Conceptualizations of and Research on Language Teacher Leadership: A Scoping Review

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen a growing interest in language teacher leadership, or the willingness and ability of teachers to take on responsibilities that benefit the wider community. This scoping review presents the current state-of-play of language education and leadership. Specifically, we aim to answer the questions ‘how has language teacher leadership been defined?’ and ‘how has it been researched?’. To do so, we adopted a framework for conducting qualitative research synthesis. Our findings show that conceptualization of language teacher leadership tends to include both teachers’ actions and roles; specifically, language teacher leadership is considered to encompass both pedagogical and managerial dimensions. Our review highlights that effective language teacher leaders exemplify a number of qualities shared with those of good language teachers. This is unsurprising as much of our data on language teacher leadership come from learners. We highlight several pedagogical implications for developing and sustaining leadership qualities in language teachers, including through initial teacher education, continuous professional development, and mentoring and coaching, as well as their associated benefits and challenges. Although our review includes articles from a number of different countries to ensure international appeal, our findings are limited by the fact that LTL is a nascent topic of research with a dearth of data.

1 | Introduction

Models of leadership have undergone significant changes over time. Particularly in the field of education, it is now acknowledged that all teachers can benefit from developing leadership skills. The most effective and enduring teams are those where responsibilities are shared among teacher-leaders instead of being centralized at the top. Whereas previous models mostly emphasized the importance of a single leader and the specific qualities and behaviors required for successful leadership (Wen et al. 2021), over time leadership has come to be defined as a process to which multiple individuals contribute, and leadership emerges from

their interactions, relationships, and the broader context. There has also been a shift from focusing primarily on technical processes, outcomes, and resources to placing greater importance on individuals (also known as a transition from a ‘things to people’ approach; Wenner and Campbell, 2017). Despite the fact that many teachers engage in leadership (even if they do not always recognize their actions as such; Baecher et al. 2023), the field is relatively under-researched and under-theorized. The meta-analysis by Wenner and Campbell (2017) and a recent bibliometric analysis by Pan et al. (2023) showed that very few empirical studies exist that investigate fundamental questions to understand the nature of, contributors to, and impacts of teacher leadership.

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2 | Language Teacher Leadership

In language education, not only is scholarly activity on leadership very recent, it is also quite limited. Earlier publications (e.g., White et al. 1991) tended to foreground administration and management more than leadership. However, recent work has begun to recognize language teacher leadership (hereafter, LTL) as involving the capacity and initiative of language teachers to take on leadership roles and responsibilities within their educational contexts. The area that seems to have received the most interest is the determination of the potential benefits of LTL. Baecher summarized these in her 2012 article (pp. 317–318), where she writes that engaging in leadership:

1. “improves teacher quality, and hence student learning, as accomplished teachers serve as models of practice for colleagues (York-Barr and Duke 2004);
2. supports reform efforts, by guiding colleagues through implementation of new practices (Childs-Bowen et al. 2000);
3. encourages the retention and recruitment of teachers through providing avenues for motivation and recognition (Hirsch 2006);
4. provides opportunities for teacher leaders’ ongoing professional growth (Barth 2002);
5. creates a more democratic school environment (Harris 2003);
6. increases the sense of professionalism among teachers (Hinchey 1997);
7. extends teachers’ influence beyond the school and into the district (Danielson 2007); and
8. extends principal capacity by reducing principals’ workload (Barth 2001).”

It is important to recognize that the studies Baecher draws on are now rather dated and also that many are not themselves based on primary research. More recent studies in TESOL have reported similar findings, that English teachers who lead support innovative pedagogical practices of other colleagues (e.g., in curriculum materials development in Gao and Cui 2023); cultivate a more racially inclusive school environment (Raza and Eslami 2024); facilitate parent involvement in language learning (Vera et al. 2016); and encourage peer learning among teachers (e.g., through coteaching in Dove and Honigsfeld 2010).

Another area of interest has been the determination of the qualities or behaviors that comprise LTL. One particularly useful example of this is the ‘Teacher Leader Model Standards’, developed in 2011 by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium in the United States (<https://tlstandards.weebly.com/>) It describes seven broad leadership domains and gives examples of teacher activities for each of them (see Table 1).

As practically useful as these domains and the example activities are, they are not based on an empirical investigation. In addition, they do not give us insight into the ways in which teachers develop such leadership qualities and how they can be supported

in doing so. More recent studies such as Powers and Bailey (2023) are starting to provide more insight. In their study, 223 teacher leaders of world languages were surveyed and/or interviewed to identify their leadership journeys, or the sequence, timing, and setting of experiences and influences that culminate in teaching professionals acquiring leadership responsibilities and (usually) gaining awareness of their potential to carry out those roles. Their findings reveal how the activities teacher leaders engage in do not follow a linear path and how for most teachers no leadership training was available. However, such studies are the exception. As Shah summarized in 2017, ‘Teacher leadership has remained underexplored in TESOL’ (p. 240).

It is only when we clearly identify what leadership and its myriad manifestations are, that we can rigorously investigate its development and impacts. For this reason, we now report on a scoping review with the purpose of establishing how LTL has been conceptualized in our field (i.e., how LTL is defined in publications) and how it has been researched, including findings and discussions on issues such as the impact of LTL, sources of influence on LTL development, and challenges to LTL; themes that are prevalent in the extant literature.

3 | Method

For the present study, we conducted a scoping review, which refers to a preliminary and systematic literature review on the topic of LTL (Chong 2025). A scoping review is deemed to be an appropriate type of research synthesis for this study because our aim is to “give clear indication of the volume of literature and studies available as well as an overview... of its focus” (Munn et al. 2018, 2), especially when the topic of investigation is still embryonic. According to Chong and Plonsky (2024), a scoping review is a type of qualitative synthesis of research, which refers to the use of qualitative methodologies to synthesize research evidence. Accordingly, we adopted a methodological framework for implementing such synthesis that was developed for TESOL research (Chong and Plonsky 2021). This framework was selected because, to the best of our knowledge, it is the only one that was developed for synthesizing TESOL research qualitatively.

3.1 | Design Research Questions

Although there is an amount of research on teacher leadership in general education, research on teacher leadership in English language teaching contexts is still in its infancy (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). Moreover, there is little consensus on the conceptualizations of the term teacher leadership (Wenner and Campbell, 2017). To address these gaps, we developed the following review questions:

1. *How is LTL conceptualized?*
2. *How is LTL researched?*

RQ1 focuses on how LTL is defined in selected publications, while RQ2 concerns the findings or discussions of findings of the included articles. The major topics covered in RQ2 include the impact of LTL, sources of LTL development, and challenges faced by language teacher leaders.

TABLE 1 | Leadership domains and example activities.

Leadership domain	Sample activities
(1) Understanding adults as learners to support professional learning communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates group processes to solve problems, make decisions, promote change • Works to create an inclusive cohort of colleagues who share resources and trust each other
(2) Accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists colleagues in accessing research and student learning data
(3) Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates analysis of student data and application of findings to revise instructional strategies • Provides feedback to colleagues to strengthen teaching practice and improve student learning • Identifies and promotes a variety of professional learning based on colleagues' learning needs
(4) Facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports colleagues' growth by serving in roles such as mentor, coach, content facilitator or peer evaluator • Serves as a team leader to harness the skills, expertise, and knowledge of colleagues
(5) Using assessments and data for school and district improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates teams of teachers in scoring and interpreting student performance data • Works with colleagues to use assessment and data findings to recommend potential changes in organizational structure or practice
(6) Improving outreach and collaboration with families and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses knowledge of different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures and languages to promote effective interactions with families
(7) Advocating for student learning and the profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates colleagues' self-examination of their own understandings of community culture and diversity • Advocates for the rights and needs of students, to secure additional resources for student learning • Represents the profession in contexts outside of the classroom

3.2 | Keywords Identified for Conducting the Literature Search

Teacher leadership is usually discussed in conjunction with surrounding and alternative terms, for example, “administration” and “management” (e.g., Bogotch and Shields 2014). Therefore, terms, such as, “language teacher administration” and “management in ELT” were included in our searches. For this research, the following search string was used:

“teacher leadership” OR “language teacher leadership” OR “language teacher management” OR “language teacher administration” OR “management in ELT” OR “language education management” OR “language education leadership” OR “language teaching administration”

3.3 | Literature Search and Evaluation

An exploratory search of literature was implemented using a number of databases. A focused search was performed in journals where recent and relevant publications are published. These publications were screened in two rounds using a set of inclusion criteria (Table 2). As a result a total of eight articles were included in this review (see Figure 1).

3.4 | Extracting Data

An extraction form related to our two research questions was created based on Chong and Reinders (2025), which is a recent TESOL scoping review published in a leading international journal (see Appendix I). To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the extraction form, it was piloted by the second and third authors. We also kept a researcher logbook that documents the meeting notes and our pre- and post-meeting reflections (Liu and Chong 2024).

3.5 | Synthesizing Data

After extracting the eight included articles, we began coding and synthesizing the information in the extraction forms. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to guide our synthesis (Braun and Clarke 2019). To illustrate the cyclical nature of

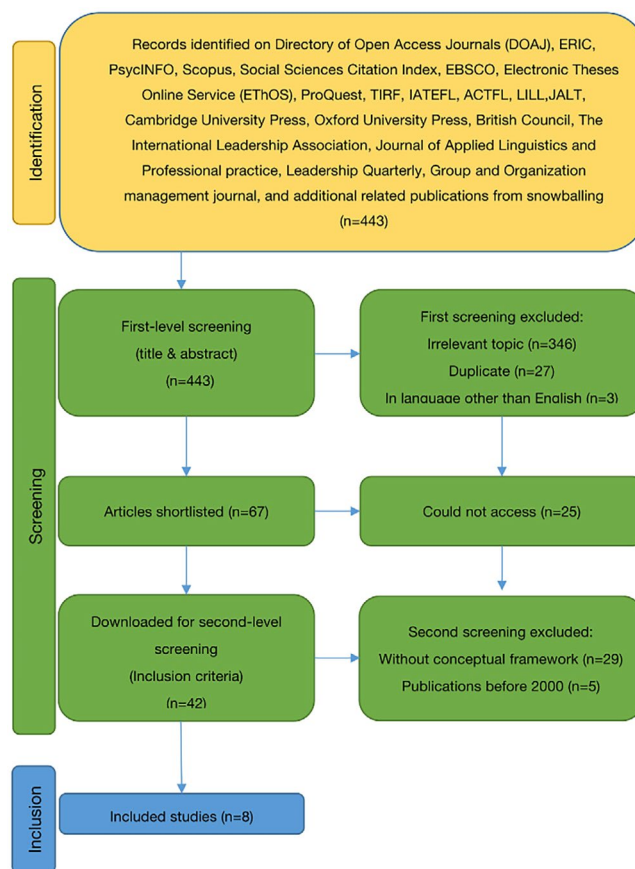


FIGURE 1 | PRISMA diagram of study selection (based on Page et al. 2021).

thematic analysis, the second and third authors independently coded two data extraction forms. It was followed by a virtual meeting where we compared our own coding schemes. Next, the remaining six articles were coded and synthesized. Appendix II shows the coding scheme we developed after synthesizing the eight included publications. Like with data extraction, we kept a research logbook during data collection to record what issues we encountered and how we addressed those issues. Details of the methodology can be found in the published protocol of this scoping review (Reinders et al. 2023).

4 | Findings

4.1 | Background Information

Of the eight included articles, journal articles were the predominant type of publication ($n = 5$) (e.g., Shah 2017; Stephenson 2012), followed by two books (Coombe et al. 2014; Walsh and Mann 2019) and one doctoral dissertation (Sams 2010). Of the five journal articles, four adopted qualitative research methods (Whitehead and Greenier 2019; Kang and Zhu 2022; Stephenson 2012; Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012), with Shah (2017), involving secondary research, being the exception. Sams (2010) used mixed methods. Two books were conceptual pieces (Coombe et al. 2014; Walsh and Mann 2019).

TABLE 2 | Inclusion criteria.

Criteria	Description
Time frame	Publications available since 2000
Language	English
Type of publication	Journal articles (primary studies, research syntheses, commentaries, conceptual pieces), editorials, books, book chapters, doctoral dissertations
Conceptualization	(Language) teacher leadership (or its alternative terms) is explicitly defined

The research questions in these eight articles were multifaceted. Specifically, one of the mutual focuses of the research questions pertained to TESOL leaders; for example, sources of influence shaping TESOL leaders, leadership beliefs (Sams 2010; Stephenson 2012), and leadership practices (Sams 2010; Stephenson 2012; Walsh and Mann 2019). Another focus was on the relationship between leadership development and ongoing professional engagement, the principle of balance (Coombe et al. 2014), L2 reticence among tertiary-level students (Kang and Zhu 2022), and the involvement of teachers in the projects (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012) respectively. Other research questions addressed learners' perceptions of language teacher leaders (Whitehead and Greenier 2019), characteristics of language teacher leaders (Whitehead and Greenier 2019; Stephenson 2012), and challenges and opportunities of professional development from a leadership perspective (Walsh and Mann 2019).

As for participants, only three studies mentioned the location where the research was carried out, being South Korea (Whitehead and Greenier 2019), the United States (Sams 2010), and China (Kang and Zhu 2022). Similarly, three studies mentioned the number of participants, being 20 s-semester graduate students (Kang and Zhu 2022), five TESOL leaders (Stephenson 2012), and 44 teachers (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012). In addition, while both student and leader participants were involved in the above publications, their background information was mentioned in only a few studies. Specifically, student participants in Whitehead and Greenier (2019) were undergraduates with intermediate English proficiency and at least 10 years of English language learning experience. The student participants in Kang and Zhu (2022) were undergraduate students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) with near-advanced English proficiency. On the other hand, Sams (2010) and Stephenson (2012) focused on TESOL leaders, and Kang and Zhu (2022) recruited an L2 international faculty member as a leader-participant, respectively.

4.2 | Findings Based on Research Questions

4.2.1 | RQ1—How Is LTL Conceptualized?

RQ1 focuses on how LTL is defined in the included publications. The eight included articles conceptualized LTL as *actions*, *roles*, and *qualities* of language teacher leaders (Table 3). It is important to note that the included articles focused quite strongly on learners' perspectives, which may explain the predominant emphasis on pedagogical rather than managerial characteristics of LTL. In terms of actions in the classroom, English teachers were said to be able to develop leadership through interpersonal interaction with students, building a good rapport with students, demonstrating high expectations for students (Whitehead and Greenier 2019), teaching effectively (Kang and Zhu 2022), and sharing knowledge and skills to enhance learning (Stephenson 2012). On the other hand, for actions outside the classroom, LTL can be characterized as involving the development of a learning culture by English teachers. This can be achieved by facilitating professional development among colleagues (Sams 2010; Shah 2017;

TABLE 3 | Dimensions of LTL.

Dimensions of LTL	Description
Actions	Inside the classroom, e.g., build a good rapport with students, teach effectively, share knowledge and skills to enhance learning
	Outside the classroom, e.g., foster a learning culture, mentor colleagues, communicate vision to colleagues, engage in ongoing professional development, take strategic actions with colleagues to implement change, facilitate the creation and dissemination of expertise
Roles	Formal leadership roles, e.g., as a mentor, coach, subject coordinator, department chair, principal, lead teacher, central office coordinator
	Informal leadership roles, e.g., peer coaching, leading new teams, establishing research groups, assisting with curricula development, mentoring less experienced colleagues
Qualities	Pedagogical expertise
	Enthusiasm
	Passion
	Commitment
	Willingness to learn
	Patience
	Empathy
	Being a role model

Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012), mentoring (Sams 2010; Shah 2017), solving problems, communicating a vision to others (Sams 2010), ongoing professional engagement (Coombe et al. 2014), proactively improving practice (Shah 2017), taking strategic actions with colleagues to embed change (Shah 2017; Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012), and facilitating the creation and dissemination of expertise (Shah 2017). In addition, involvement in policy making could promote the development of leadership (Whitehead and Greenier 2019; Shah 2017; Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012).

As for leadership roles, Shah (2017) classified leadership roles into formal and informal roles. Formal leadership roles refer to leaders undertaking managerial and pedagogical responsibilities (Shah 2017). For example, being a mentor, coach, subject coordinator (Shah 2017), department chair (Shah 2017; Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012), assistant principal, lead teacher, and central office coordinator (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012). Informal leadership roles imply facilitating organizational improvement and professional learning of colleagues (Shah 2017). Examples include peer coaching, leading new teams, establishing research groups,

assisting with curriculum development (Shah 2017), mentoring less experienced colleagues, presenting in-service teacher development activities, and guiding parental involvement activities (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012). Regarding other leadership roles, Shah (2017) mentioned those of decision-maker, role model, and positional designee. Positional designee refers to the roles designated by peers or administration, such as committee chair and consulting teacher (Angelle and Schmid 2007). Moreover, Sams (2010) mentioned other roles personified by leaders, for instance, instructional and curriculum specialist (Shah 2017), school leader or manager, and catalyst for change, and Whitehead and Greenier (2019) indicated that teachers with leadership are resource providers and learning facilitators.

The essential qualities that language teacher leaders should possess according to the synthesized studies include pedagogical expertise, professionalism, enthusiasm, passion, commitment (Whitehead and Greenier 2019; Kang and Zhu 2022), willingness to learn (Sams 2010), patience, empathy, and acting as a role model (Kang and Zhu 2022).

Concerning the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of LTL, this is rooted in a number of academic disciplines, including psychology, politics, and business management (Sams 2010). In addition, Sams (2010) adopted the evolutionary development approach provided by Van Seters and Field (1990) to show the evolution of leadership theory over the years (see Figure 2). In the early days, referred to as the *personality era* it was widely thought that one's potential to be a good leader can be realized by studying the personalities of great leaders. In this vein, Shah (2017) associated personality traits, such as creativity, sense of humor, and life-long learning with effective teacher leadership. The personality era was superseded by the *influence era*, where the effect of a leader's ability to affect change and influence people was emphasized. This involved an emphasis on identifying and developing behavioral traits beneficial for effective management and leadership. Next, the *situation era* focused on the dynamics of situations and the role of environmental variables affecting the effectiveness of a leader. This overlaps with the *contingency era*, which recognized the appropriateness of leadership styles in specific situations (Tatlah et al. 2010). The focus of the contingency era is to observe the behavior of leaders and those they lead in different situations. The *transactional* era, in turn, placed greater emphasis on the reciprocal quality of the interactions between the various stakeholders in an

educational context. Similar to previous eras, leadership development here is seen as the responsibility of leaders rather than teachers. However, the established hierarchy was questioned by the idea of opening participation to all staff of a group in the anti-leadership era, which is the foundation of shared leadership. Consequently, the *culture era* emerged, which emphasized that leadership occurs throughout an organization rather than in specific individuals and groups only. The most recent era is the *transformational era*, which refers to a leader motivating others by creating a vision of potential opportunity.

The synthesized literature provides various models to conceptualize LTL (see Figure 2). First, *individual* versus *group* leadership. While individual leadership shows that everyone has the capacity for leadership, group leadership emphasizes the dynamics of the group (Sams 2010). *Servant leadership* is one of the current theories of individual leadership. It prioritizes the needs of the community as being paramount in understanding the role of a leader (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). For example, a leader may regularly collect feedback from teachers and students for future planning. Moreover, the leader tries to act on the feedback immediately (Stephenson 2012). For group leadership, *distributed leadership* and *shared leadership* are two relevant concepts. Distributed leadership refers to sharing the same goal among all leaders and subordinates (Whitehead and Greenier 2019) and acknowledges that leadership is dispersed throughout the organization (Coombe et al. 2014). For instance, everyone in a school contributes to the goal of earning the title of 'outstanding school'. Shared leadership focuses on multi-directional interaction and collaboration between leaders and followers (Sams 2010).

Additionally, the synthesized literature mentions other leadership concepts: transformational leadership, generative leadership, situational leadership, and authentic leadership. *Transformational leadership* refers to fundamentally altering the status quo in some way (Sams 2010). For example, when a mentor improves student performance through a new teaching method, the teacher also improves his or her teaching skills. *Generative leaders* address issues in a way that motivates stakeholders to engage in coming up with new ideas (Bushe 2019). *Authentic leadership* is developed on the basis of mutual trust and respect (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). And finally, *situational leadership* is context-oriented and maintains that there is no single 'right' type of leadership style (Stephenson 2012).

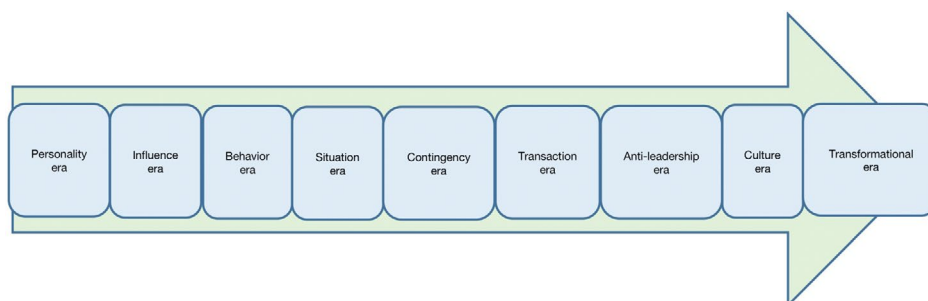


FIGURE 2 | The evolution of leadership theory (based on Sams 2010).

LTL is not equal to authoritative leadership or hierarchical leadership, which means that a good language teacher, despite not being in a formal leadership role in a hierarchical system, can still be a leader (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). At the same time, it does not mean that teachers with the ability to deliver learning goals, good teaching skills, or to lead are necessarily good leaders. The essence of LTL hinges on the interactions between leaders and those around them, rather than their individual characteristics (Whitehead and Greenier 2019).

4.2.2 | RQ2—How Is LTL Researched?

RQ2 synthesizes findings and discussions of findings in the included in the eight publications, focusing mainly on the impact of LTL, sources of influence on LTL development, and challenges to LTL. Five articles adopted perceptual evaluation tools (Sams 2010; Whitehead and Greenier 2019; Kang and Zhu 2022; Stephenson 2012; Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012). Specifically, all five adopted interviews, with two using reflections (Kang and Zhu 2022; Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012). Online surveys (Sams 2010), structured and semi-structured focus groups, and self-evaluation were all adopted by one study (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012). Notably, two of the five articles used not only perceptual tools but also observational tools. Kang and Zhu (2022) adopted video-recorded classroom observations and Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) adopted field observations, respectively. Additionally, Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) collected documents and artifacts (e.g., school improvement plans and team actions/implementation plans) as data. The other three articles did not identify any evaluation tools. Specifically, Shah (2017) is a piece of secondary research, and Walsh and Mann (2019) is a conceptual piece. Coombe et al. (2014) describe perspectives on TESOL leadership using an interview format rather than adopting interviews as a research method.

The impact of effective LTL can be classified into short-term, mid-term, and long-term impact. Regarding *short-term impact*, LTL entails good pedagogy, meeting learners' needs (Whitehead and Greenier 2019), and sharing a commitment to increase learners' knowledge and improve learning skills between teachers and learners (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012; Shah 2017), which could foster students' linguistic development. For *mid-term impact*, relational development can be facilitated by good LTL. Effective LTL is associated with a positive relationship between teachers and students (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). Moreover, learners can develop positive feelings towards language learning under the influence of good LTL (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). It was shown that communication and collaboration skills are essential for effective teacher leadership practices (Sams 2010). Thus, maintaining positive relationships with students and colleagues, and consequently developing a sense of community, is crucial to LTL (Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012). Regarding *long-term impact*, good LTL empowers students to develop themselves interpersonally and intellectually within and beyond language learning (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). Specifically, students will be encouraged to persist in the language learning process and will be positively affected beyond language learning itself, such as observing and internalizing leadership qualities (Whitehead and Greenier 2019). Additionally, having an effective language

teacher leader as a colleague may encourage others to engage in goal setting and long-term planning (Sams 2010). On the other hand, organizational development can be promoted by having a clear vision. Specifically, a leader with vision can signal a clear path and make plans for the future by using available resources wisely (Sams 2010). From the synthesized literature, it appears that LTL is the outcome of the interactions among the above characteristics (Whitehead and Greenier 2019).

With regard to the characteristics of LTL, the synthesized literature suggests that language teacher leaders should have a strong leadership self-identity and be conscious of taking risks (Sams 2010). Leadership self-identity is developed through being attentive to other leaders; leaders with a strong sense of leadership self-identity tend to nurture others, including colleagues and students. In addition, language teacher leaders take on the roles of sharing, empowering, serving, and learning respectively (Sams 2010): (a) *sharing* can be achieved through collaboration and mentoring between the leader and others; (b) *empowering* refers to building relationships and caring for colleagues; (c) *serving* involves service for and influence over others through advocacy; (d) the most important factor to shaping a leader is continuous *learning* (Sams 2010).

As for sources of influence on language teacher leaders, although many teachers have little formal training to be leaders, teacher leaders are influenced by people such as parents, colleagues, mentors, role models, and professors, as well as events or experiences such as early influences, higher education, service and voluntary groups (Whitehead and Greenier 2019; Sams 2010). That is to say, leadership experiences in youth or with college professors have a significant influence on leadership development. People involved in service and volunteer groups have opportunities to help others.

Our review also indicates that there are challenges faced by language teacher leaders. As mentioned, effective LTL relates to a positive interpersonal relationship between learners and teachers. However, Kang and Zhu (2022) mentioned that L2 reticence, which refers to the lack of engagement in interaction using the target language, is detrimental to interaction. Furthermore, leadership roles are ever-changing, making it difficult for teachers to adapt. For example, teachers in Kang and Zhu (2022) perceived leadership as the responsibility of everyone and viewed themselves as informal leaders with the expectation of becoming formal leaders. Similarly, Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) indicated that teacher roles are shifting from formal leadership roles to informal leadership roles. Stress, budgetary constraints and unpleasant leadership experiences are other challenges mentioned by Sams (2010).

Our synthesis suggests that there are eight factors affecting the development of LTL (Shah 2017; Walsh and Mann 2019; Muijs and Harris 2006): (a) the development of LTL requires a supportive culture, which means a minimally hierarchical environment characterized by collaboration, trust and mutual respect (Muijs and Harris 2006; Stephenson 2012) to make schools a safe place (Walsh and Mann 2019). To achieve this, communication and collaboration are key (Coombe et al. 2014); (b) a supportive structure that could provide opportunities for staff to switch roles and move around in school will foster the development of LTL; (c)

middle and senior leaders are willing to delegate authority to teachers (Walsh and Mann 2019; Shah 2017); (d) every school should provide innovative ways to provide professional development for teachers and leaders, and leadership credentials might motivate teachers to develop their leadership capacity (Coombe et al. 2014; Walsh and Mann 2019; Shah 2017; Vernon-Dotson and Floyd 2012); (e) coordination among teachers is important in LTL, for instance, in regular school meetings; (f) a high level of engagement in schoolwork can promote the willingness for teachers to come up with new ideas; (g) teachers need to be encouraged to share ideas and collaborate, which cultivates collective creativity; and (h) teachers' effort should be recognized and rewarded (Muijs and Harris 2006). Additionally, maintaining a balance between life and leadership development is essential (Coombe et al. 2014). Learning to say no to an overwhelming request, having a weekly planning session and using tools to avoid distractions can nurture the development of LTL (Coombe et al. 2014). Moreover, time management is an essential component of effective LTL (Coombe et al. 2014).

5 | Discussion and Conclusion

The first observation from this scoping review is how little research exists in this domain. Even though we initially compiled a long list of potential candidates, the vast majority simply did not meet our inclusion standards. This meant that only a rather disappointing eight articles remained for investigation. Considering the increasingly recognized importance of leadership in general and teacher leadership in particular, this is surprising. It is clear that the results of our selection confirm earlier observations made in the (general education) leadership literature by Muijs and Harris that "much more empirical evidence is required if policy-makers, researchers and practitioners are to be convinced of the merits of teacher leadership in principle and practise" (2006, 445). This observation was later reaffirmed by Wenner and Campbell, whose 2017 meta-analysis lamented the lack of empirical research in the field.

In terms of the foci of the research studies, the three primary areas include the ways in which teachers develop leadership, either as part of their initial teacher training or as part of ongoing professional development; the characteristics of teacher leaders; and the challenges that they face. Since language learners are the participants of the majority of the included studies, it was interesting but not surprising to note that some qualities of successful language teacher leaders resemble those of effective language teachers, such as possessing good interpersonal skills, actively improving teaching practices, especially those who hold a pedagogical leadership position (e.g., a subject coordinator). Referring to the pedagogical and managerial dimensions of LTL, we observe that the included studies focus predominantly on the former, discussing the perceptions of and LTL's impact on students. We identify this as an important limitation of current research on LTL. This affected how we conceptualized LTL in this review, which was informed primarily by learners' perspectives. Future research needs to consider LTL and its impact from the perspectives of different stakeholders, such as its effect on students' learning outcomes and teachers' professional development. Moreover, our review notes actions and roles that are specific to language teacher leaders, with particular importance

of relationship development and community building. The descriptions of leadership across the studies closely conform to the characteristics of distributed leadership (Spillane 2005). This is probably not surprising given that these types of leadership emerged in the second half of the previous century, in predominantly social settings such as in health care and general education. It is also worth noting how closely the reported characteristics align with those mentioned in the synthesis by Baecher (2012) that we presented at the start of this article.

These results have a number of implications for teacher education. Firstly, they reveal a range of professional activities that teacher leaders engage in and that could (and one might argue perhaps should) be included in pre-service courses. It is worth pointing out that the majority of these are not managerial in nature. Without stretching the distinction between management and leadership too far (see Reinders 2023a, for a discussion), it is worth recognizing the still widely-held misconception among many teachers that assuming leadership roles equates to relinquishing pedagogical responsibilities in favor of managerial and administrative ones. This is not born out by our results. Language teacher leaders exercise their leadership *as part of and through their pedagogical roles*. This finding is in line with the perspectives offered in books on language teacher leadership (Christison and Murray 2009; Curtis 2022; Reinders 2023b). This offers a positive starting point for a discussion about leadership and perhaps opens up possibilities for teachers' contributions to be more comprehensively recognized in the workplace.

In terms of research, the primary focus was on identifying the benefits of LTL and was identified as being on learners, either through teachers becoming more capable and therefore able to directly impact language learning outcomes, or in the longer term by improving classroom relationships and through community building. However, no empirical evidence for this was offered, which echoes a recent meta-analysis by Nguyen et al. (2020) which concludes 'On balance, [the reviews] found no studies investigating the direct impacts and effects of teacher leadership on student learning and therefore highlights a need of further empirical attention on the impact of teacher leadership' (p. 72). Another impact that was identified related to learners developing leadership skills themselves. Finally, organizational constraints were also a feature of the studies investigated, with language teacher stress being particularly highlighted. Somewhat surprisingly, however, not much was revealed with regards to the particular affordances and limitations of organizational contexts that impact teachers. This is in contrast with studies in general education leadership; Nyugen et al. (2020), for example, identified five key factors that 'influence the nature, quality and effectiveness of teacher leadership practice [...]: school culture, school structure, principal leadership, peer relationships and person-specific factors' (p. 68). No such conclusions could be drawn from the LTL literature.

All of these results raise a number of important questions. Firstly, they identify areas where more research would clearly be beneficial. For example, despite the fact that several studies mentioned the pressures on teacher leaders there is little known about how these pressures could be identified early on, how they could be mitigated and how teachers could be inoculated

through initial teacher training or ongoing professional development to better deal with such challenges. It is also not entirely clear from the research how the various characteristics that the studies have identified as being reflective of language teacher leaders could best be developed. Nor has it been investigated how teachers could be identified who might have the greatest potential for developing those characteristics. A glaring omission in the research involves any attempt to measure the success of language teacher leaders. For example, there is no investigation into the extent to which language teachers meet the various standards that have been set by professional organizations, what alignment with such standards at the individual level might mean for professional success, or even how that might be operationalized. Clearly as a field, LTL is still in its early stages. We hope that our scoping review will generate increased interest in this particularly important topic.

Author Contributions

Hayo Reinders: conceptualization (lead); writing – original draft (supporting); review and editing (equal). **Sin Wang Chong:** conceptualization (supporting); methodology (lead); formal analysis (supporting); writing – original draft (supporting); review and editing (equal). **Qi Liu:** formal analysis (lead); writing – original draft (lead); review and editing (equal).

Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.