

Women in Teacher Leadership

By

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Abstract

This study examined the impacts of women teacher leaders on shaping instruction and collaboration across K-6 educational contexts in the United States. Utilizing a survey method, I gathered data through Likert-type and open-ended questions to explore how women teacher leaders shape collaboration and instruction. Researcher-developed tools were shared via social media and email to encourage broad outreach, though exact participant location data was not collected. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to identify leadership characteristics, strategies, and their perceived influence on instructional practices. This research aimed to provide insights into the unique contributions of women teacher leaders and inform leadership development practices and policies within diverse educational environments. Quantitative findings suggested that leadership behaviors were generally consistent across demographics, while qualitative analysis revealed key themes of mentorship, modeling, inclusive leadership, and relationship building. These findings highlight the importance of empowering women teacher leaders through professional development that shows value to collaboration and reflective practices. By emphasizing the voices of educators, the study contributed to a deeper

understanding of gender dynamics in teacher leadership, with implications for district-wide student success.

Keywords: women teacher leaders, educational leadership, K-6 education, leadership development, collaboration

Women in Teacher Leadership

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teaching is a dynamic and evolving field, and leadership within schools evolves alongside it. While the teaching profession is predominantly composed of women, there is still a significant presence of male educators. This study seeks to understand how women teacher leaders influence collaboration among teachers and enhance instructional practices using a survey research design conducted via email and Facebook teacher groups.

Teacher leadership has been gaining attention in recent years (Piret & Eisenschmidt, 2022), yet there is a notable lack of research exploring the specific ways women teacher leaders shape collaboration and instructional strategies within district-wide settings (Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Current literature provides limited insights into what characteristics women in leadership roles have in order to foster professional growth and improve instructional outcomes (Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Piret & Eisenschmidt, 2022; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2018), leaving a critical gap in understanding their contributions to educational practices (Piret & Eisenschmidt, 2022). By examining these impacts, this study aims to show how women teacher leaders strive to influence effective collaboration and drive improvements in instructional practices.

This research holds significance because, despite the predominance of women in the teaching profession, there remains insufficient focus on how women leaders specifically influence collaboration and instruction (Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Bridging this research gap would enhance understanding of leadership qualities that contribute to effective teaching and learning environments and support the

development of equitable leadership opportunities within education (Stanley & Crawford, 2022). Furthermore, this study seeks to identify key practices women teacher leaders employ that positively impact collaboration and instructional innovation, offering valuable insights for professional learning and policymaking.

Existing studies on women teacher leaders are often concentrated in international contexts, with limited exploration of their effects on collaboration and instruction in the United States (Stanley & Crawford, 2022). This current study aims to address these deficiencies by focusing on the role of women teacher leaders within diverse educational settings across the country, providing a more comprehensive perspective on their influence.

The primary audience for this research includes educators of all backgrounds, with a focus on understanding how women leaders cultivate and influence learning. Members of Boards of Education at state and county levels may also benefit from these findings, gaining insights into how effective leadership can enhance collaboration and instructional practices. Additionally, this research is directed toward women in education, aiming to understand how women leaders and the factors that they employ help them in leadership.

Teacher leadership is a critical factor in fostering collaboration and shaping effective instructional practices in school. Among those teacher leaders, women teachers often bring distinct approaches that influence the development of these key elements. This study aims to delve deeper into these dynamics. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to measure which actions women teacher leaders take to shape collaboration and instruction. Specifically, it will address the research question: How do women teacher leaders shape collaboration and instructional practice?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Women teacher leaders exhibit characteristics that allow them to profoundly impact schools and educational systems. Drawing from a range of scholarly sources, this literature review explores these characteristics, which include engaging in advocacy, developing resources and curriculum, facilitating professional learning, fostering a positive school culture, implementing school improvement plans, mentoring or coaching colleagues, modeling best practices, promoting inclusivity, supporting community engagement, and encouraging reflective practice and lifelong learning.

Advocacy and Leadership in Challenging Contexts

Women teacher leaders are often at the forefront of advocacy efforts, striving to address inequities in education and promote policies that benefit students and communities. Acquaro and Stokes (2016) highlight how female teacher leaders navigate neoliberal challenges, advocating for student-centered approaches despite systemic pressures. Their advocacy often involves standing against standardized systems that prioritize test scores over holistic education, ensuring that the needs of students, particularly those from marginalized communities, are prioritized. Women teacher leaders are especially skilled in identifying systemic barriers and mobilizing resources to address these challenges effectively. This advocacy extends beyond school walls, as they often collaborate with policymakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders to champion equitable educational practices.

Similarly, Stanley and Crawford (2022) explore how Black women teacher leaders integrate spirituality into their leadership, advocating for culturally relevant pedagogy and student well-being. These leaders use their personal and professional experiences to connect deeply with their school communities and to challenge inequities that persist in educational

systems. Their work exemplifies the powerful role of advocacy in creating equitable and inclusive schools. Women teacher leaders' ability to combine their unique perspectives with actionable strategies underscores their significance as transformative figures in education.

Development of Resources and Curriculum

A critical characteristic of women teacher leaders is their role in developing innovative resources and curriculum that align with the diverse needs of students. Brinia (2012) underscores how women in leadership positions in Greece demonstrate creativity and adaptability in curriculum development, reflecting their commitment to student success and engagement. These leaders are adept at designing curricula that cater to varying learning styles and cultural backgrounds, ensuring that all students have access to meaningful and inclusive educational experiences. Women teacher leaders often integrate culturally responsive practices and innovative instructional techniques to enhance the accessibility and relevance of their curricula.

This aligns with the findings of Carver (2016), who discusses how teacher leaders transform their identities by engaging in curriculum innovation during their transition from teaching to leadership roles. By integrating evidence-based practices and fostering collaboration among educators, women teacher leaders enhance the quality and relevance of the resources they develop. Additionally, they frequently involve stakeholders, including parents and students, in the curriculum design process to ensure that materials are contextually appropriate and reflective of community needs. This collaborative approach not only strengthens curriculum outcomes but also builds trust and ownership among the school community.

Facilitating Professional Learning

Facilitating professional learning is another hallmark of women teacher leaders. Fairman and Mackenzie (2014) emphasize that effective teacher leaders often create collaborative

learning environments, inspiring colleagues to enhance their pedagogical practices. Women teacher leaders excel in fostering professional development by organizing workshops, leading peer learning sessions, and providing constructive feedback. They recognize the importance of creating a supportive atmosphere where educators feel valued and encouraged to grow. Their focus on equity and inclusivity in professional learning ensures that all teachers, regardless of their experience or background, have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge.

Similarly, Piret and Eisenschmidt (2022) illustrate how women teacher leaders in Estonia foster professional learning communities that promote collective growth and development. These leaders leverage their interpersonal skills and subject matter expertise to support their peers' professional journeys, ensuring that professional learning is both impactful and sustainable. Women teacher leaders are also adept at using reflective practices to evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning initiatives, making necessary adjustments to align with evolving educational demands. Their ability to cultivate a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement significantly enhances the capacity of schools to achieve their goals.

Fostering a Positive School Culture

Creating and maintaining a positive school culture is central to the work of women teacher leaders. Coleman (2010) identifies how gendered perceptions of leadership influence women's approaches to fostering inclusive and supportive environments. Women teacher leaders often prioritize relational leadership, building trust and collaboration among stakeholders. They cultivate environments where teachers, students, and parents feel respected and empowered to contribute to the school community. By promoting shared values and open communication, women teacher leaders lay the foundation for a cohesive and inclusive school culture.

Eisenschmidt et al. (2021) further note that women principals in Finland and Estonia implement strategies that encourage teacher involvement in school development, contributing to a thriving school culture. Women teacher leaders often employ restorative practices to address conflicts constructively, fostering stronger relationships among students and staff. Their ability to lead by example and maintain high standards for behavior and academic performance ensures that schools remain environments where everyone can thrive. Through their dedication to fostering positivity, women teacher leaders play a pivotal role in creating sustainable and productive educational ecosystems.

Implementing School Improvement Plans

Women teacher leaders play a pivotal role in implementing school improvement plans, often bridging the gap between policy and practice. Cooper et al. (2016) discuss how teacher leaders navigate embedded systems to drive meaningful change, emphasizing the importance of their leadership in aligning school improvement efforts with community needs. These leaders possess a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by their schools and work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop and execute strategic plans. Their approach is often characterized by inclusivity, as they actively involve teachers, parents, and students in the decision-making process.

Their ability to engage in reflective practice and adapt to changing circumstances ensures that improvement initiatives are effectively tailored to address the specific needs of their schools. By fostering buy-in and building capacity among staff, women teacher leaders drive sustainable improvements that positively impact student outcomes. Additionally, they use data-driven approaches to monitor progress and make informed decisions, ensuring that school improvement

efforts are evidence-based and goal-oriented. This strategic and collaborative approach enables women teacher leaders to create lasting changes that benefit the entire school community.

Mentoring and Coaching Colleagues

Mentoring and coaching are integral aspects of women teacher leadership. Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) describe how women leaders support their colleagues' growth by modeling effective teaching strategies and providing constructive feedback. Women teacher leaders often serve as confidants and advisors, offering both professional and emotional support to their colleagues. Their mentorship extends beyond instructional support to include guidance on navigating career challenges, fostering resilience, and achieving professional goals. This personalized approach enables them to address the unique needs and aspirations of each individual teacher.

Through coaching, they help colleagues identify strengths and areas for improvement, encouraging continuous growth and development. These mentoring relationships contribute to a culture of collaboration and mutual support within schools. Women teacher leaders also promote reflective practices among their mentees, helping them to analyze and improve their teaching methods. By fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect, they empower their colleagues to take risks, innovate, and ultimately achieve greater professional success.

Modeling Best Practices

Women teacher leaders are exemplary role models who consistently demonstrate best practices in teaching and leadership. Wenner and Campbell (2018) note that women teacher leaders' identities are deeply intertwined with their instructional expertise, enabling them to inspire confidence and credibility among their peers. By modeling effective strategies, such as differentiated instruction and data-driven decision-making, they set a standard of excellence that

others aspire to follow. Their commitment to maintaining high standards and adapting to the evolving needs of students ensures that their leadership remains relevant and impactful.

Their ability to integrate innovative practices and adapt to the evolving needs of students ensures that they remain at the forefront of educational leadership. This modeling also fosters a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement within their schools. Women teacher leaders also encourage their peers to adopt these practices, facilitating professional learning and growth within the broader school community. Their dedication to excellence not only enhances student outcomes but also strengthens the overall capacity of schools to achieve their goals.

Promoting Inclusivity and Equity

Inclusivity is a defining characteristic of women teacher leaders. Sharar and Nawab (2020) highlight how women leaders in Pakistan emphasize equitable practices, ensuring that all students have access to quality education. Women teacher leaders often advocate for policies and practices that address systemic inequities, such as implementing inclusive teaching strategies and creating safe spaces for marginalized students. Their leadership is informed by an acute awareness of the barriers that many students face, enabling them to design interventions that promote equity and inclusion.

Similarly, Stanley (2020) explores how Black women teachers advocate for inclusive policies, addressing systemic barriers and fostering equity in their schools. Their leadership is characterized by a commitment to social justice and a determination to create learning environments where every student can thrive. Women teacher leaders also prioritize professional development focused on cultural competence and inclusivity, ensuring that teachers are equipped to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Their unwavering dedication to equity underscores their role as catalysts for systemic change in education.

Supporting Community Engagement

Women teacher leaders often extend their influence beyond the classroom, engaging with families and communities to strengthen educational outcomes. Roofe and Blair (2023) discuss how women leaders in Jamaica and the USA collaborate with community members to address local challenges, demonstrating the power of collective action. These leaders build partnerships with parents, local organizations, and other stakeholders, recognizing that education is a shared responsibility. Their efforts to involve the community in school activities and decision-making processes foster a sense of shared ownership and accountability.

By fostering open communication and mutual respect, women teacher leaders create a strong foundation for community involvement. Their efforts enhance trust and partnership between schools and their stakeholders, contributing to a holistic approach to education. Additionally, they often spearhead initiatives that address broader social issues, such as poverty and health disparities, further strengthening the ties between schools and their communities. This community-oriented approach ensures that educational outcomes are not only improved but also sustained over time.

Encouraging Reflective Practice and Lifelong Learning

Finally, women teacher leaders prioritize reflective practice and lifelong learning, both for themselves and their colleagues. Poekert, Alexandrou, and Shannon (2016) describe how teacher leaders continually refine their practices through reflection, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Women teacher leaders often engage in professional development opportunities, attend conferences, and pursue advanced degrees to stay abreast of the latest research and trends in education. This commitment to growth not only enhances their own leadership capabilities but also inspires others to adopt a mindset of lifelong learning.

By modeling this approach, they ensure that their schools remain dynamic and responsive to evolving educational demands. Women teacher leaders also encourage their colleagues to engage in reflective practices, helping them to identify areas for growth and celebrate their successes. This focus on lifelong learning creates a culture of curiosity and innovation, where educators are motivated to continuously improve and adapt to new challenges. Their leadership ensures that schools remain vibrant learning communities that prioritize both professional and personal growth.

Conclusion

Women teacher leaders embody a diverse set of characteristics that enable them to transform schools and communities. Through advocacy, curriculum development, professional learning facilitation, and fostering inclusivity, these leaders demonstrate the profound impact of their work. Their commitment to reflective practice, community engagement, and equity underscores their critical role in shaping educational systems that are both effective and equitable. The insights drawn from this literature review emphasize the importance of supporting and recognizing the contributions of women teacher leaders in creating positive and lasting change in education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To conduct this research, I employed a survey design with elementary (K-6) teachers that integrated both quantitative and qualitative data to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The quantitative portion included closed-ended questions to examine trends, patterns, and measurable impacts of women teacher leaders on collaboration and instructional improvement. The qualitative portion consisted of open-ended questions to gather detailed insights and reflections from participants. The quantitative component enabled statistical analysis, while the qualitative component allowed for an in-depth exploration of participant experiences and perspectives. This integrated approach allowed for simultaneous data collection, ensuring the findings were robust and meaningful.

Combining quantitative and qualitative data in survey research "strengthens the validity and interpretability of findings by integrating different but complementary types of data" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, pg. 552). By using this methodology, my goal was to balance both numerical trends and the nuanced perspectives of participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This method is well-suited to the study's objectives, which are as follows (1) to measure how women teacher leaders influence collaboration and instructional practices, and (2) to explore which actions were most often taken when shaping educational practices, as it balances statistical analysis with rich descriptive accounts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Context

The specific environment for this study included a diverse range of educational settings within the United States, utilizing social media and email to reach K-6 teachers nationwide. U.S. schools serve diverse populations, with urban and rural districts differing significantly in class

size and resource availability. By targeting teacher-focused Facebook groups and email networks, I captured perspectives from educators across different districts.

Given the national scope, participating schools varied widely in terms of student population, teacher demographics, and resource availability. For example, participants represented schools in both rural and urban areas, which may vary in available resources and structures (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). This broad, inclusive strategy allowed for diverse perspectives that reflect on the different environments.

Participants

The participants for this study included elementary (K-6) educators across the United States, reached through social media platforms and direct outreach to known educators. Social media provided a broad, diverse pool of respondents, allowing the study to capture varied perspectives from teachers in different regions and contexts. This diversity enhanced the generalizability of the findings by reflecting a range of experiences and backgrounds. A total of 33 educators participated in the survey. Of those participants, 17 (51.5%) of them self-identified themselves as teaching in a suburban area, 9 (27.2%) educators taught in a rural area, and 7 (21.2%) educators in an urban area. Based on the survey, the grade level experience showed that 17 (51.5%) out of the 33 taught in the primary grades (kindergarten to second grade), 9 (27.2%) educators taught in upper grades (third grade to sixth grade), and 7 (21.2%) educators stated that they had an equal amount of time spent teaching both bands of grades. On top of the demographics provided, the survey revealed the levels of experience each educator that participated had, such as 12 (36.3%) educators had over 21 years of experience, 3 (9.0%) educators had 16 to 20 years, 6 (18.1%) educators had 11 to 15 years, 4 (12.1%) educators had 6

to 10 years, and 8 (24.2%) educators had 0 to 5 years of experience. The sample size was predominantly female, with 32 participants identifying as female and 1 participant identifying as male. The racial and ethnic identities showed that the participants included White/Caucasian (n=29, 87.9%), Latina (n=1, 3.1%), and African American (n=2, 6.2%), with different variations in phrasing. By combining these recruitment methods, the study balanced breadth and depth, contributing to its validity through a well-rounded representation of the target population (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Instrument

I developed the survey used in this study to explore the ways women teacher leaders shape collaboration and instructional improvement within schools. To support a multimethod approach, the instrument included both quantitative (Likert-type) and qualitative (open-ended) items that were designed to capture the measurable trends and participants perspectives.

I developed the survey in alignment with the literature review, in which I identified key themes across the research in regard to teacher leadership actions and the impact that they have on the school environment. For this review, I condensed the findings into ten core leadership actions that appeared in the research. The ten core leadership actions are: (1) advocacy, (2) mentoring or coaching, (3) facilitating professional learning, (4) modeling best practices, (5) implementing school improvement, (6) promoting inclusive practices, (7) community engagement, (8) encouraging reflective practice, (9) developing curriculum and resources, and (10) fostering positive school culture.

Likert-type Items

Using the leadership actions as constructs, I created survey items for each of the ten teacher leader actions in the form of statements in which participants rank how they relate to the

statement with a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Because the research goal was to investigate these identified leadership actions on women teacher leaders' collaboration and instructional improvement, I created survey items that integrated these two objectives. See Table 1 for examples of construct, research alignment, and example items. The full list of constructs and corresponding items can be found in Appendix C. The directions for these items were:

In this set of questions, please think about how the actions of female teacher leaders shape collaboration and improve instruction in schools. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement with regard to women teacher leaders. For the purpose of this survey, teacher leadership is defined as educators who take on roles beyond their classrooms to influence and guide peers, improve school practices, and enhance student learning. It involves collaboration, advocacy, and initiative, as teachers lead by example, mentor others, and contribute to school-wide decision-making and reform efforts.

The full survey instrument can be found in Appendix D.

Table 1

Item Creation Alignment Examples

Teacher Leadership Action	Research Alignment	Example Survey Items
Advocacy	Acquaro & Stokes, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Roofe & Blair, 2023; Shollen, 2015; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Stanley & Crawford, 2022; Stanley, 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2018	• Working against unfair policies that can be harmful to students is an important teacher leadership practice. • Teacher leaders ensure that all stakeholders are aware of policies and practices that inequitably impact students. • A teacher leader collaborates with stakeholders to ensure that all students are safe, while receiving the highest level of education and care.

Mentoring or Coaching	Acquaro & Stokes, 2016; Msila, 2021; Sharar & Nawab, 2020; Shollen, 2015; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Stokes, 2016; Wenner & Campbell, 2018; Weiner & Woulfin, 2018	• Teacher leaders offer guidance and help other colleagues to refine their skills. • Teacher leaders share their experiences and strategies to promote collaboration and growth.
Facilitating Professional Learning	Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2018	• Teacher leaders provide opportunities for building skills and sharing knowledge to meet challenges. • Teacher leaders collaborate with other stakeholders (e.g., grade level) to find different educational outlets to benefit all students.
Modeling Best Practices	Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2018	• Teacher leaders lead by example to set a standard of excellence, inspiring others. • Teacher leaders support learning communities to promote collaboration in problem solving.

To enhance the construct validity, the item development process was intentional. Each item was mapped to one of the key actions found in the literature and to the one of the objectives (collaboration or instructional improvement), then checked to confirm that the language reflected the concepts in the most accurate way (DeVellis, 2017).

Matrix Items

The items were then groups into matrix style sections that asked the participants to indicate, using a Likert-type scale, the degree they observed female teacher leaders engaging in the actions and to what extent they believe those actions contribute to collaboration and/or instructional improvement in their schools. The matrix format allowed for a more efficient and focused assessment of the viewpoints of relevance and impacts (see Figure 1), which aligns with

best practices for survey design in organizing similar items for ease of response (Dillmon, et al., 2014).

Figure 1

Matrix Item Example

In this set of questions, please think about how the actions of female teacher leaders shape collaboration and improve instruction in schools. For the purpose of this survey, teacher leadership is defined as educators who take on roles beyond their classrooms to influence and guide peers, improve school practices, and enhance student learning. It involves collaboration, advocacy, and initiative, as teachers lead by example, mentor others, and contribute to school-wide decision-making and reform efforts. Example Item: To what extent do you think the following practices, when used by female teacher leaders, shape collaboration in schools?					
Practice	To a Very Large Degree	To a Large Degree	Neutral	To a Small Degree	To a Very Small Degree
Engage in Advocacy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facilitate Professional Learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foster a Positive School Culture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mentor or Coach Colleagues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Promote Inclusivity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Open-Ended Items

The survey included four open-ended questions that were designed to give a deeper insight into the participants' perceptions and experiences. These items allowed for the participants to describe, if possible, specific examples of women teacher leadership actions, reflect on their own leadership identities, and give additional perspectives that they felt were beneficial and something that might not be answered through the quantitative items.

The questions included: (1) In what ways do you feel the leadership practices of women teacher leaders shape collaboration within your school? Please provide examples. (2) In what ways do you feel the leadership practices of women teacher leaders shape instructional improvement within your school? Please provide examples. (3) Is there anything you would like to share about the leadership practices of women teacher leaders and their impact on collaboration and instructional improvement? (4) Do you self-identify or would other teachers identify you as a teacher leader? Please describe.

Demographic Items

In addition to the content items, I included demographic questions to gather more contextual information such as the years of experience, the school setting, and the grade levels taught (see Appendix D). This information provided some important background when interpreting the findings and understanding the representativeness of the sample. Knowing the geographic distribution of the participants is vital for assessing the generalizability of the study's results; for example, if participants were exclusively from one region, the findings will be less applicable to broader, national populations of women teacher leaders.

To further support content validity, the survey instrument was reviewed extensively by the methodologist on my thesis committee, who provided targeted feedback on the clarity, alignment, and structure of the items. After incorporating this feedback, I submitted the final version of the survey to my thesis chair member and East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for ethical approval before distribution as well as one final look over with the methodologist. With the participant sample ($n=31$), the instrument had a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .96. A value of .96 suggests that the survey items were highly correlated and reliably

measured the underlying construct of teacher leadership viewpoints.

Data Collection

To effectively invite participants for my virtual survey, I used a combination of personalized email invitations and targeted outreach through Facebook teacher groups (see Appendix E) which started March 4th, 2025 and ended March 21, 2025. I sent email invitations to 15 known educators (see Appendix B). These emails included important details, such as the purpose of the survey, the types of questions (Likert-type and open-ended), and a direct link for easy access (see Appendix D). A convenience sampling approach was used, as participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate through email and Facebook outreach. This method allowed for efficient recruitment but may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.

Additionally, I engaged with several large Facebook teacher groups, including *Teachers Supporting Teachers*; *First Grade Teachers*, *Teachers: Resources*, *Teaching Tips*, *Teaching Articles*; *Swiftie Teachers*; and *Teachers ask Teachers*. By sharing thoughtfully crafted posts that highlight the survey's purpose and encourage participation (see Appendix E). My posts included concise, engaging messaging along with a clear survey link, making it simple for educators to participate. Participants were invited through email and social media posts that contained the link to the survey, with the consent form (see Appendix) appearing first.

Prior to completing the survey, participants were presented with an informed consent form which outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the participation, and information about confidentiality and anonymity. The consent form made it clear to participants that they could withdraw from the survey at any time without any kind of penalty. The study also did not ask for any identifying information such as names, emails, or phone numbers. All of the

data was stored securely and used only for the purpose of this thesis research. By ensuring voluntary participation, protection of anonymity, and adherence to IRB-approved procedures, the study maintained ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process included both quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine how women teacher leaders shape collaboration and instructional improvement. Each type of response (Likert-type and open-ended items) was analyzed separately using appropriate methods.

Quantitative Data (Likert-type Items)

Quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which includes means, standard deviations, and frequencies, to identify general trends in the participants' perceptions of how frequently women teacher leaders engaged in each of the leadership practices identified in the literature review. The mean (average) provided insight into the overall participant rating, which reflected their perceptions of the frequency, degree, or agreement with women teacher leaders engaged in the leadership practice. The lead-in prompts asked the participants to consider just how strongly they agreed that women teacher leaders demonstrated specific actions and what extent those practices contributed to collaboration and instructional improvement. The standard deviation measured the variability or spread of the responses, which helped to determine whether the participant perspectives were consistent or varied across the sample.

The descriptive statistics were used to establish a baseline understanding of how participants viewed the leadership actions of women teacher leaders. This step was necessary in identifying which leadership actions were most observed and they served as the foundation for further inferential analyses (e.g., ANOVA and t-tests).

To explore the potential differences in the participants' responses across demographic groups (e.g., grade level taught, geographical location of school, years of experience), I conducted both Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test and independent samples *t*-tests. An ANOVA was used to compare the means across independent variables with three or more categories, such as years of teaching experience and grade levels taught, while *t*-test were used for comparisons between two groups, such as racial identity. ANOVA was selected for multi-group comparisons to assess whether observed differences were statistically significant across categories (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). T-tests are appropriate for comparing the means of two independent groups to determine if observed differences are greater than would be expected by chance (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Qualitative Data (Open-Ended Responses)

The analysis of the open-ended survey responses used thematic analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). First, I reviewed the responses for each open-ended response. As I reviewed each response, I identified codes inductively to uncover recurring themes within the qualitative data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The codes were assigned based on the repeated use of certain words, phrases, and ideas that would align with the perceptions of teacher leadership in regards to collaboration and instructional improvement.

Next, I compared the codes across the participants and started to group them into broader categories to provide structured understanding of the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For example, codes that related to mentoring, modeling, and peer feedback were combined into the broader category of “Mentorship and Support”. Finally, I analyzed the organized themes and categories to address the research questions by offering insights into educators’ perspectives, challenges, and suggestions related to the research focus (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I was

able to then connect the responses to the different leadership actions especially in regards to the influence of women teacher leaders with notes of collaboration and instructional improvement.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of this research, I employed strategies to address credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and use of thick rich descriptions (Novak & Jen, 2024). To ensure credibility, I collaborated closely with my supporting faculty members to validate the methodology and maintain clarity and accuracy in handling all information and data collected. This partnership helped verify the alignment of my findings with the research objectives. Dependability was supported by submitting my proposal to the IRB for approval, ensuring that my research adheres to ethical standards and protocols. To address confirmability, I kept a researcher log throughout the data collection process to document and address any potential biases, minimizing their impact on the research outcomes. Together, all the elements strengthened my research's overall integrity and rigor.

Ethical Considerations

The study received exempt approval from the East Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection (see Appendix A). Due to the nature of the study, meaning it was minimal risk and anonymous participation through an online survey, it qualified for exempt status. District level approval was not needed because the study did not involve data collection through any school districts; participants engaged in the survey as individuals.

Participants completed the survey after providing informed consent (see Appendix D). This was provided on the first page of the survey, so as to ensure participants' informed consent was obtained before they proceed (see Appendix D). The consent form clearly stated that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they could stop at any time without any penalty.

The survey did not collect any personal identifiable information unless the participants chose to include them in open-ended responses. While promoting the survey, there was no statement or offer for compensation for their time.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This section presents the results of both quantitative and qualitative analyses that were used to explore how women teacher leaders influence collaboration and instructional improvement. These findings are organized in two main parts. The first part is the descriptive and inferential statistics from the Likert-scale items to show the trends and potential group differences in the perceptions of the participants. The next part is the thematic results from the open-ended responses which are used to provide the contextual support and deeper insight into the leadership practices that were identified by the participants.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative portion of this study examined trends and group differences in the participants' perceptions of women teacher leaders by the use of descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The results are organized by the leadership practices and grouped to reflect the agreements and comparisons between the demographic groups. These findings provide foundational insights into how women teacher leaders are perceived to influence collaboration and instructional improvement.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were first calculated to examine the overall trends in participants' responses across the ten leadership subscales (e.g., advocacy, mentoring, modeling best practices). Means, standard deviations, and frequencies were computed for each subscale to establish how often educators perceived women teacher leaders demonstrating key leadership practices (see Table 2).

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics for Leadership Subscales*

Leadership Subscale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Advocacy	4.04	0.60	2.4	5.0
Developing Curriculum & Resources	4.20	0.54	2.5	5.0
Facilitating Professional Learning	4.37	0.57	2.8	5.0
Fostering Positive Culture	4.43	0.42	3.7	5.0
Implementing School Improvement	4.18	0.65	2.3	5.0
Mentor or Coach Colleagues	4.57	0.42	3.8	5.0
Model Best Practices	4.52	0.41	3.7	5.0
Promote Inclusivity	4.38	0.50	2.8	5.0
Support Community Engagement	4.16	0.55	2.3	5.0
Encourage Reflective Practices	4.45	0.45	3.4	5.0

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *n*= 33 participants.

Means and standard deviations were computed for each subscale to establish overall participant perceptions of how frequently women teacher leaders demonstrated the key leadership practices (see Table 2). The higher means indicated a greater degree of agreement from participants that women teacher leaders engaged in the practices described, while the lower mean suggested less frequent agreements among the participants. Standard deviations indicated the amount of variability in participant responses for each practice.

In addition to the means and standard deviations, frequencies were also calculated to provide a more detailed understanding of the distribution of participant responses across the Likert-type options (see Table 3). Examining the frequencies allows for identification of how many participants strongly agree, agreed, neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with identified teacher leadership actions in the context of women teacher leaders.

Table 3*Frequencies of Participant Responses for Leadership Actions*

Leadership Actions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Engage in Advocacy	53	40	7	2	0
Develop Resources and Curriculum	33	31	3	1	0
Facilitate Professional Learning	40	26	2	0	0
Foster a Positive School Culture	28	36	4	0	0
Implement School Improvement Plans	29	34	4	1	0
Mentor and Coach Colleagues	42	24	1	0	0
Model Best Practices	39	25	2	0	0
Promote Inclusivity	37	29	0	0	0
Support Community Engagement	25	31	10	0	0
Encourage Reflective Practice	36	27	3	0	0

The frequency results in Table 3 suggest that participants view that women leaders were actively engaging in the leadership actions. Across the board, participants selected that they “strongly agree” or “agree” with a few participants selecting that they had a neutral view or a negative response. This pattern was consistent with high agreement that suggests that participants observed women leaders frequently modeling these actions in their schools.

Inferential Statistics

To determine whether there was statistically significant difference in perceptions of leadership practices based on demographic factors, I conducted a series of one-way ANOVA and *t*-tests using SPSS version 29.0.2. T-tests were used when comparing two group variables such as racial and ethnic identity, while the one-way ANOVAs were used for comparisons across independent variables with more than two groups, such as years of experience, grade levels taught, geological location of school, and positions. Each test was used to examine whether participants in different demographic groups reported different mean scores for a given subscale (e.g., advocacy, mentoring, and coaching).

For example, one ANOVA tested whether the mean scores for the advocacy subscale differed significantly across the participants with different years of experience. This ANOVA yielded results of $f(4, 28) = .0316, p = .865$. Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across groups, and effect sizes were minimal.

All other subscales returned similarly non-significant results (see Table 4). These results suggest that women teacher leaders demonstrate consistent leadership behaviors regardless of years in the profession. Although no subscales returned significant results, the tests were still critical for examining the possibility that the different groups of experience might observe leadership actions differently.

Table 4

ANOVA Results for Leadership Practices by Years of Experience

Leadership Practice	0-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		16-2 years		21+ years		$f(4,28)$	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Engage in Advocacy	4.05	0.38	4.0	1.1	4.07	0.55	4.4	0.2	3.95	0.66	0.32	0.87
Develop Resources and Curriculum	4.19	0.32	4.0	1.06	4.42	0.38	4.17	0.8	4.17	0.49	0.37	0.83
Facilitate Professional Learning	4.38	0.46	4.19	0.99	4.67	0.49	4.42	0.63	4.27	0.54	0.57	0.69
Foster a Positive School Culture	4.42	0.46	4.5	0.64	4.56	0.34	4.44	0.19	4.36	0.44	0.22	0.96
Implement School Improvement Plans	4.14	0.66	4.0	1.19	4.58	0.38	4.08	0.38	4.08	0.59	0.73	0.58
Mentor and Coach Colleagues	4.69	0.4	4.69	0.47	4.71	0.29	4.33	1.34	4.44	0.49	0.95	0.45

Model Best Practices	4.42	0.33	4.58	0.42	4.72	0.33	4.33	0.33	4.5	0.46	0.65	0.63
Promote Inclusivity	4.66	0.33	4.38	0.48	4.46	0.4	4.29	0.45	4.15	0.63	1.37	0.27
Support Community Engagement	4.27	0.58	4.25	0.41	4.29	0.43	4.08	1.14	4.0	0.7	0.43	0.79
Encourage Reflective Practice	4.51	0.56	4.4	0.59	4.67	0.39	4.6	0.2	4.27	0.38	0.97	0.44
Scale Total	4.37	0.3	4.32	0.71	4.51	0.34	4.3	0.32	4.22	0.46	0.56	0.69

Note. *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation

Because not all demographic data included three or more categories, independent samples t-test were conducted to examine if there were statistically significant differences in leadership subscale scores between two distinct groups, such as racial/ethnic identity (White and People of Color; see Table 5). Out of the three original identity groups (Black, Latina, and White), Black and Latina were collapsed due to the nature of the amount of participants that identified as Black or Latina, which limited the feasibility of meaningful subgroup analysis.

The results from the t-test showed that there were no statistically significant differences that existed between the two groups on any of the ten subscales (see Table 5). However, there were two results that approached statistical significance. Scores on the *Mentor and Coach Colleagues* subscales were higher for participants who identified as People of Color, $t(31) = 1.17, p = 0.25$. Additionally, *Encouraging Reflective Practice* subscale yielded a similar result, $t(31) = 0.08, p = 0.93$. Though neither met the significance threshold of $p < .05$, there is the potential that, with a larger and more balanced sample, the results could reach statistical significance.

In addition, one-way ANOVAs were conducted for the following demographic characteristics with three or more categories which were: grade level taught (K-2, 3-6, both), school position (teacher, EC/interventionist, other), and school location (urban, suburban, rural).

These analyses revealed no statistically significant differences across any of the ten leadership subscales (see Table 4).

Table 5

Independent Samples T-Test Results for Leadership Practices by Racial/Ethnicity Identity

Leadership Practice	PoC		White		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Engage in Advocacy	4.13	.90	4.03	.58	0.27	31	0.79
Develop Resources and Curriculum	4.00	.66	4.22	.53	-0.66	31	0.51
Facilitate Professional Learning	4.75	.25	4.33	.58	1.22	31	0.23
Foster a Positive School Culture	4.67	.58	4.41	.41	1.00	31	0.32
Implement School Improvement Plans	4.50	.50	4.14	.66	0.91	31	0.37
Mentor and Coach Colleagues	4.83	.29	4.54	.42	1.17	31	0.25
Model Best Practices	4.78	.38	4.49	.41	1.17	31	0.25
Promote Inclusivity	4.50	.43	4.37	.51	0.43	31	0.67
Support Community Engagement	4.42	.52	4.13	.56	0.85	31	0.40
Encourage Reflective Practice	4.47	.46	4.44	.46	0.08	31	0.93
Scale Total	4.50	.36	4.32	.43	0.72	31	0.47

Note. *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. *df* = degrees of freedom. PoC = People of Color.

One person did not self-identify their race/ethnicity (*n*=32).

The quantitative findings suggest that years of experience, grade level taught, and racial identity did not produce significant differences in perceived teacher leadership behaviors in this sample. The descriptive statistics and frequencies indicated that participants held generally high perceptions of the women teacher leaders' practices across all of the groups with a consistent agreement regarding the influence they have on collaboration and instructional improvement. However, the two near-significant results may point to underlying differences worth further investigation.

Qualitative Results

While participation was voluntary for all participants, and they were informed that they could stop at any time, all 32 survey respondents completed the bulk of the Likert-type items. Not all participants completed the four open-ended responses, however. Of the 32 participants who completed the quantitative survey, 25 provided responses to one or more open-ended questions. I collected the open-ended responses to explore the participants' perceptions of how women teacher leaders influence collaboration and instructional improvement. The questions invited participants to describe examples of leadership actions that they had observed, gave an opportunity for reflection on their own identity, and to share any additional insights on women teacher leaders. These qualitative responses were intended to add depth and context to the survey by highlighting specific actions and values that are associated with women teacher leaders.

However, during analysis, not all 25 participants' open-ended responses contained content that could be coded. Through an inductive approach, I developed codes based on patterns and recurring ideas that had emerged from the responses. Many of the participants gave very descriptive and detailed responses that were relevant to the open-ended questions, since they were very detailed that made the responses rich enough to support the code (themes) and subthemes. Some responses did not contain relevant and analyzable content because they were either too brief, off topic, or too vague to have a meaningful connection to the study's focus on collaboration and instructional improvement. For example, one participant gave a vague response of "they were good leaders," but they did not elaborate on any specific actions or outcomes that caused them to feel that way. From this coded group, I selected seven participants whose responses most clearly and richly illustrated the themes. The representative quotations were used to provide a thick description as well as support the trustworthiness. Table 6 shows the

participants whose coded responses I included to provide thick, rich description through explanatory quotations and their corresponding demographics.

Table 6

Demographics for Participants with Representative Quotes

Identifier	Race/ Ethnicity	Grade Band	School Role	Locale	Years of Experience	Identify as a Teacher Leader
J	Latina	3-6	Teacher	Suburban	21+	Yes
K	Black	K-2	Teacher	Suburban	21+	Yes
L	White	Both	EC	Suburban	6-10	Yes
M	White	K-2	Functional Curriculum 2 nd Grade Teacher	Suburban	11-15	Yes
N	White	K-2	1 st Grade Teacher	Rural	6-10	Unanswered
O	White	3-6	ELA Teacher	Suburban	6-10	No
S	White	Both	1 st Grade Teacher	Suburban	16-20	Unanswered

Out of the 25 participants who responded, I asked educators if they were teacher leaders. Sixteen (64%) participants identified themselves as such, responding that they were formal leaders like mentors or lead teachers, or individuals who were frequently guiding peers, sharing instructional strategies, and contributed to school level initiatives. The self-identification as a teacher leader was supported by their open-ended responses where they explained how they mentored new teachers, modeled effective practices, facilitated team collaboration, and/or initiated school improvement efforts. Several participants (about ten participants) made comments in their responses about how they served as a leader in PLCs, or they described how they were supportive of their colleagues during planning periods to better assist them in instruction.

Two (8%) participants indicated that they did not identify as a teacher leader because they were first year teachers, but they did disclose that they hoped to be a teacher leader in the

future. Five (20%) participants responded that they did not identify as a teacher leader in a broad sense; they felt they were a quieter leader, they no longer wished to be a teacher leader, or they were in a position where they did not feel that they were a teacher leader.

For the remaining open-ended survey questions, those questions asked participants to reflect on the influence that women teacher leaders had on collaboration and instruction, and to share any additional insights. Table 7 presents an overview of the themes that emerged from the analysis, the codes that led to those themes, and examples of participant statements. Each of the themes is described in detail following the table.

Table 7

Qualitative Themes, Subthemes, and Participant Examples

Theme	Subthemes	Participant Example
Relationship-Driven Leadership	Emotional intelligence	“Make the school a better place to work because they ensure all voices are heard.” (Participant J)
Mentorship and Support	Inclusion	“She helped me be a better mentor.” (Participant L)
	Listening	
Facilitation of Communities	Mentoring	“Leadership is most visible in PLCs.” (Participant M)
	Guidance	
Modeling Leadership	Professional growth	“My instruction would not have been as strong without her.” (Participant N)
	PLCs (Professional Learning Communities)	
	Team collaboration	
Informal Leadership & Barriers	Instructional planning	“I lead by example while flying under the radar.” (Participant O)
	Instructional modeling	
	Lead by example	
	Shared leadership	
	Self Perception	
	Barriers	
	Informal Pathways	

Theme 1: Relationship-Driven Leadership

One of the themes that emerged from the qualitative responses was the significance of relationship-driven leadership. Participants mentioned and described women teacher leaders as individuals who will prioritize connections, trust, and emotional intelligence in their leadership style.

Emotional Intelligence. Respondents highlighted the emotional intelligence of the women teacher leaders that they observed. Participant J shared that women teacher leaders “make the school a better place to work because they ensure that all voices are heard.” This quote gives a reflection of how the participant viewed how women teacher leaders showed an awareness of others’ emotions and needs while contributing to creating a more positive environment.

Inclusion. Inclusion was another subtheme that was identified. Participants described how women leaders had fostered an inclusive environment where all members of the staff felt valued. One participant even said that women leaders “have a way of engaging all teachers,” (Participant F) which suggests that the leadership style the exhibits collaboration and equity in decision making.

Listening. Listening was another subtheme that emerged from relationship-driven leadership. Several participants described how women leaders would prioritize listening to other teachers as a foundational leadership skill. Participant K shared that women teacher leaders “have a way of engaging all teachers. There’s more of an effort to listen to everyone versus telling people what to do,” which highlighted how listening is a contribution towards the relational aspect of the teacher leadership.

Theme 2: Mentorship and Support

Another theme that emerged was women teacher leaders providing support and mentoring. Participants shared how the women teacher leaders would offer encouragement, guidance through instructional challenges and mentored others to foster growth. The support that the mentorships gave, enhanced individual development as well as contributed to a collaborative school culture.

Mentoring. Women teacher leaders were described as mentors who played a role in supporting their colleagues in different ways. For many, it was supporting their colleagues with modeling, encouragement, and being a sound board for reflection and advice. One participant noted, “She encourages me to step outside of my comfort zone and try new strategies in the classroom” (Participant G), which helps to emphasize the impact that mentorship has on instructional improvement.

Guidance. Participants shared that women teacher leaders consistently provided direction, some encouragement, and a sense of reassurance. This especially is useful when teachers are new, since some of the participants were beginning teachers. One participant even said “Yes, I self identify as a teacher leader, and I believe part of that role is helping others learn through guidance and shared experiences” (Participant A). The guidance is helpful when navigating new experiences and preventing burnout. The supportive presence assisted teachers to navigate challenges, encourage collaboration, and make confident instructional decisions.

Professional Growth. Mentorship is not limited to being a short-term thing; beyond their immediate work, women teacher leaders were seen as the stepping stone for long-term growth. One participant reflected, “She has helped me be a better mentor to my mentee, and assisted in the collaboration between us” (Participant L), which demonstrates the ripple effect of the

professional growth and development that goes on with supported collaboration from other women teacher leaders.

Theme 3: Facilitating Professional Communities

Another theme that emerged was the description of women teacher leaders being key parts in the professional learning communities, specifically in grade-level teams and PLCs. This theme places an emphasis on how the women teacher leaders would help to provide opportunities that offered collaboration, instructional reflections, and shared goal settings.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Women teacher leaders were credited with organizing and sustaining productive PLCs. Participants emphasized that the women teacher leaders not only organized the groups but also would ensure that the focus was clear, the discussion was meaningful and was aligned with instructional goals to ensure improvement. One participant shared, “The time I see the most benefit from teacher leadership in regard to collaboration is within PLCs and teacher teams” (Participant M). Their leadership in PLCs contributes to a shared sense of accountability and even professional growth throughout the different grade levels.

Team Collaboration. Some participants had mentioned that they saw women teacher leaders as a major part in encouraging collaboration among their team and peers. Participants had reflected on collaboration and praised women teacher leaders for promoting an open dialogue and encouraged all members to participate in meaningful conversations. One educator explained, “She brings our team together to plan, reflect and solve problems; we’re stronger because of her leadership” (Participant R). These collaborative spaces were often described as inclusive and respectful, so that each voice was heard, valued, and supported.

Instructional Planning. Another pattern across responses was the impact that women teacher leaders had on strengthening instructional planning. Participant F stated “one of the most important things to me within a PLC is that our leader encourages planning together, not just dividing tasks, but discussing strategies and lessons collaboratively.” Something that many participants mentioned was that the leaders would help facilitate data-informed conversations, would lead curriculum alignment efforts, and would model best practices. The ability to guide planning sessions ensured that all members stayed focused to ensure that collaboration was happening and helping others to become stronger in their teaching.

Theme 4: Modeling Leadership Practices

Effective leadership practices were mentioned by participants, participants mentioned that modeling practices were a meaningful influence. Women teacher leaders were recognized by leading by example, usually by demonstrating collaboration and instructional strategies they had encouraged for others. This theme was a highlight on the impact of visible, action based leadership on the professional growth of peers and the success of team efforts.

Instructional Modeling. Participants described women teacher leaders as powerful instructional models. Instead of telling colleagues what to do, women teacher leaders would model or demonstrate effective strategies in the classroom setting. One participant reflected, “Most collaborative experiences I have engaged in have been led and modeled by women teachers” (Participant N). These modeled experiences offered real time examples of what a strong instruction would look like, which makes the learning experience more impactful.

Leading by Example. Women teacher leaders were also seen as individuals who were leaders through their actions. The willingness to engage in the same work they expected of others made their leadership more credible and inspirational. One educator shared, “Without her

guidance, my instruction would not have been as good as it was and students would have suffered” (Participant S). The reflections displayed the value that authentic, action-oriented leadership that supported peer growth by their presence and their participation.

Shared Leadership. Another aspect of modeling involved how women teacher leaders would facilitate shared leadership and decision-making. One even mentioned “Female leaders seem to be more willing and able to share the leadership. They empower others to take initiative and share their voice during decision making” (Participant W). The participants noted that leaders were intentional about their actions when trying to empower others and promote a collective voice. By demonstrating the value of their peers' input and fostering collaborative decision-making, they would build trust and a sense of shared purpose.

Theme 5: Informal Leadership and Barriers

The final theme that emerged was the participants reflection on informal leadership roles and the different barriers that women faced. Some women led without the need for a formal title or recognition, others encountered some challenges such as administration, school culture, and even personal viewpoints, However, even with challenges, participants did describe how women leaders (themselves or others) would lead through influence, initiatives and everyday actions that shaped their school culture.

Self-Perception. The participants shared the various ways of how they identified themselves as teacher leaders. Some participants viewed their leadership as a connection to a formal title or responsibilities, others had mentioned that they would lead through everyday actions and a quiet influence. One participant noted, “I do my thing. I just lead by example while flying under the radar” (Participant O). The reflections suggest that leadership is not always self declared or even tied to positions of power, it could just be a quiet action.

Barriers to Leadership. Several of the participants shared their experiences of encountering barriers that had limited their ability to lead. This can make it hard for many leaders, the obstacles that popped up were unsupportive school cultures or even an administrative structure. For example, one participant stated, “I want to do more, but my administration doesn’t really listen to ideas unless they come from someone with a title” (Participant Q). This underscores the roles that can have an impact on leadership.

Informal Pathways to Influence. Despite the challenges, women teacher leaders still find ways to showcase leadership in informal ways. Participant O even says “I do my thing...I just lead by example while flying under the radar.” The ways they can do that contribute to the school communities. These are by mentoring peers, offering guidance, or advocating for students needs, the leadership can demonstrate that women teacher leaders can thrive outside of traditional titles and can be personally defined.

The qualitative results addressed the study’s objective by highlighting the leadership actions that women teacher leaders utilize to foster collaboration and instructional improvements. Themes such as mentorship, modeling, relationship building, and advocacy illustrate how these women teacher leaders create inclusive and supportive environments. These findings complement the quantitative results and will be further explored in the discussion to examine their implications for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to explore how women teacher leaders shape collaboration and instructional practices in the elementary educational setting. The quantitative and qualitative methods approach provided breadth and some depth of understanding. Quantitative results did show high perceptions of women teacher leaders' practices across all demographic groups, even though it had little statistical significance. The results suggest that many leadership practices, particularly when it is tied to mentoring, collaboration, modeling and support, may be seen as universally important in the context of elementary schools (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Wenner & Campbell, 2018). These leadership practices appear to stretch across the demographic groups which highlights the widespread value that educators tend to place on inclusive and relational leadership in the school settings.

Interpretation of Quantitative Findings

Quantitatively, the descriptive statistics and frequency data indicate generally high perceptions of women teacher leaders' practices across all participant groups, which suggest that there is a strong and positive valuation of collaboration, instructional improvement, and inclusive leadership actions regardless of demographic backgrounds. The participants rated the practices in relation to collaboration and instructional improvement consistently high. These findings support the idea that leadership actions are valued in elementary contexts from different areas, this aligns with the prior research on the widespread applicability of relational leadership (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Wenner & Campbell, 2018). While leadership is defined in different ways, participants identified the different actions it takes to impact collaboration and instructional improvements in elementary setting.

The absence of statistically significant differences by experience or racial identity suggests that leadership behaviors may be consistent across the demographics in the sample. But the two subscales approaching significant differences (*mentoring and coaching* and *encouraging reflective practice*) suggest potential trends worth further exploration. Specifically, teachers with 16 to 20 years of experience tended to rate women leaders slightly lower on mentoring and reflective encouragement compared to the other demographic groups. Though these trends did not meet the $p < .05$ threshold, the trend may suggest that those in the mid-career educators are perceiving or engaging with leadership differently than the educators that are in the early start of their career or those that are in the late stages of their career. These findings suggest that mid-career educators may experience or view leadership interactions differently, pointing to the importance of a more targeted inquiry and differentiated leadership support.

The absence of significant differences based on racial identity suggests that leadership actions may be viewed similarly across those demographic lines in the sample. While this could be interpreted as a positive sign of equity in leadership perception, it does also raise some questions about the subtlety that may not have been fully captured through the quantitative items alone. Future research might explore whether leadership practices are experienced in substantively different ways across racial and/or cultural viewpoints, even if those differences are not easily translated into significant rating variations. As Stanley and Crawford (2022) emphasized, Black women educators very often experience leadership through a lens shaped by organizational inequalities. Hence, while the ratings may appear very similar on the surface level, the lived experiences behind them may diverge in important ways. Even prior research has noted the importance of cultural competence and identity awareness in the leadership in diverse school settings (Wenner & Campbell, 2018; Stanley & Crawford, 2022).

Interpretation of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings provided insight into how women teacher leaders and their colleagues experience and describe the leadership practices which aligns with the ten constructs that was explored in this study. Participant responses aligned with the ten constructs that were used in the study, especially mentorship, relationship building, modeling, and inclusive leadership. These practices supported professional growth, but also assisted in fostering school wide collaboration and a sense of shared responsibility.

The survey built around the central themes of mentorship, modeling, inclusive leadership, building relationships which had emerged as some key notes on how women shape collaboration and instructional improvements, supported by the prior research (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Wenner & Campbell, 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). For example, mentorship was a consistently mentioned term as it described with the idea of support and guidance which gave many participants a chance to reflect on how this helped them grow in a professional light. On top of that, mentorship also gave some reflection on research that also highlighted how women teacher leaders are often recognized as a person that provides nurturing professional growth in those around them (Sharar & Nawab, 2020; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). This mentorship experience extended beyond the formal agreement, and participants described the informal support that had helped them to build their confidence and resilience.

Similarly, modeling best practices was another frequent key component in participant responses when referencing instructional support from women teacher leaders, this aligns with prior studies that showed that women teacher leaders are often known for leading by example to help influence peer behavior (Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Wenner & Campbell 2018). This is essentially talking about rather than telling a peer or colleague what to

do, Cooper et al. (2015) argued that modeling leadership can have a greater influence on peers, more so than the authority or training from a leader. It was noted that women teacher leaders leaned away from an authoritative approach and chose to lead by example and model for their peers.

Another reference that participants noted was how women teacher leaders were more inclusive and had equity in mind when showcasing their leadership practice, which does give a connection to research that stated that women leaders have a focus of justice and care in the practices (Wenner & Campbell, 2018; Stanley & Crawford, 2022). The findings aligned with the literature emphasizing that women in educational leadership often demonstrate relational and service-oriented leadership styles, which can be characterized by collaboration, support, and influence from peers (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Wenner & Campbell, 2018). This is supported by participants who stated environments fostered by women teacher leaders were “welcoming”, “respectful”, and “safe”.

Participants’ examples of mentorship, trust building, and inclusivity reflect these leadership actions (Shollen, 2015; Acquaro & Stokes, 2016) . The results support the value of these constructs and indicate the importance of continuing to use them as lenses for future research on women teacher leaders. The results also reinforce the importance of the constructs that were used in this study and even support their continue their continued application in future research.

Limitations

Both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative open-ended responses offered meaningful insights into formal and informal ways women enact teacher leadership, but there were several limitations that arose. The first limitation was that the sample size was smaller than

expected, which lead to the data being skewed slightly such as limits on participants of different racial identities and male participants. The lack of balance could have had an impact on the generalizability of the quantitative results and limited the depth of some demographic comparisons. To address this limitation, descriptive statistics were used to summarize patterns, and the subgroups were combined to make only two groups due to the size. Additionally, the open-ended qualitative responses were able to provide a little further context to balance out the limited quantitative comparisons.

The second limitation was that the qualitative data was self-reported, which could reflect more on their perceptions more than the actions that teacher leaders take. On top of that, there could be some bias within the self-identification roles. This is due to the nature that a participant could have felt social desirability bias, which essentially means that the participant could idealize their own roles or those of their peers. To address this limitation and maintain trustworthiness, open-ended responses were analyzed by using an inductive coding process. This is where the codes emerged directly from the participant responses. This allowed the findings to be more grounded in the data rather than shaped by assumptions. Themes were then aligned with the study's constructs, helping to ensure that there was consistency between the research questions and the qualitative analysis.

Finally, because the survey was distributed online, primarily through Facebook teacher groups and professional networks, this has a risk of selection bias. Participants may have been more likely to engage with the study because they were interested in the topic previously or were part of online communities such as Facebook teacher groups, that were supporting such discussions, which could influence the perspectives represented in the findings. While that could have influenced the perspectives represented in the findings, the study used multiple social media

groups and had an emphasis on inviting participants of different natures such as ethnicity, gender, and other demographic groups. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for some degree of triangulation, which gave support to a more comprehensive understanding of women teacher leaders' practices.

Future Research

Future research should continue to examine the nuanced experience of women teacher leaders using both quantitative and qualitative methods. By having a larger and more diverse sample, this would give more of deeper understanding of how identity intersects with leadership actions in women teacher leaders. Exploring the leadership experiences in different roles could benefit as well such as more teachers in the early years, rural areas and special education teachers could provide some new insights of instructional leadership. Future research should focus on deeper explorations of intersectionality in women's leadership experiences, the long-term impacts of targeted professional learning programs, and the systemic conditions that either enable or hinder women teacher leaders' influence on the school culture and the outcomes for students.

Conclusion

This study highlights the contributions of women teacher leaders to collaboration and instructional improvement in elementary settings. The use of quantitative and qualitative approach allowed for exploration on how women teacher leadership is very broad with areas of relationship building, mentorship, modeling, and shared responsibility. Quantitative data revealed the high perceptions of women teacher leaders across all demographic groups, with trends in mentoring and reflective practice that does suggest that further investigation is warranted. The qualitative data was enriching the results from the quantitative data by providing

an insight into how leadership is experienced by others. Together, the findings affirm that leadership that is enacted by women teacher leaders in the elementary setting is relational, service-oriented, and valued by peers.

Despite the few statistically significant differences that emerged in the quantitative analysis, the combination of the data sources did reveal that teacher leadership is broad and more complex than it appears, with differing strengths in relationship building, mentoring, and shared responsibility. Women teacher leaders serve many roles, often creating environments that are highly encouraging of collaboration and lifelong learning. These findings suggest that by recognizing, supporting, and developing women teacher leaders can help to strengthen schools' culture and foster environments that benefit others. The study contributed to the growing research on teacher leadership by placing an emphasis on the relational and service-oriented dimensions that women bring to the leadership practices. Future research should focus on the explorations of intersectionality, the impact of targeted professional development, and systemic supports that can ensure leadership opportunities are available for all women.

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Appendices

Appendix A

IRB Approval



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
Willis Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral **IRB**
To: [Olivia Branton](#)
CC: [Kristen Gregory](#)
Date: 2/5/2025
Re: [UMCIRB 24-002284](#)
Branton: Women Teacher Leaders Impact on Instruction and Collaboration

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 2/3/2025. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2AB.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Branton_Olivia_ELEM 6005_Research Proposal.docx(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Consent Paragraph.doc(0.01)	Consent Forms
Email Survey Invite.docx(0.03)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Social Media Survey Invite.docx(0.02)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Survey on Women Teacher Leaders.pdf(0.03)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the **IRB** states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

Appendix B

Email Invite

Subject Line: Your Voice Matters: Participate in a Research Study

Dear Teacher Leader,

My name is Olivia Branton, and I'm a graduate student at East Carolina University. I'm inviting you to participate in my research study titled **"Women Teacher Leaders and the Change They Bring to Education."**

The purpose of this study is to better understand how women teacher leaders impact collaboration and improve instruction. Your experiences and insights are essential in helping us advance this important research.

What to Expect:

- The survey will take about **15 minutes** of your time.
- Participation is completely **voluntary** and **confidential**.

If you're interested, please click the link below to participate:

<https://forms.gle/z5jDcy5d7WafHZG56>

If you have any questions or need more information, feel free to contact me at brantono23@students.ecu.edu

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to research highlighting the impact of women teacher leaders in education.

Warm regards,
Olivia Branton

Appendix C

Constructs and Corresponding Items

Teacher Leadership Action	Research Alignment	Example Survey Items
Advocacy	(Acquaro & Stokes, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Roofe & Blair, 2023; Shollen, 2015; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Stanley & Crawford, 2022; Stanley, 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2018)	• Working against unfair policies that can be harmful to students is an important teacher leadership practice. • Teacher leaders ensure that all stakeholders are aware of policies and practices that inequitably impact students. • A teacher leader collaborates with stakeholders to ensure that all students are safe, while receiving the highest level of education and care.
Development of Resources	(Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Pham, 2020, Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017)	• Teacher leaders strive to invent new ideas to ensure that all students may benefit. • Teacher leaders review and refine strategies to promote progress and adapt to changing needs.
Encourage Reflective Practice	(Acquaro & Stokes, 2016; Carver, 2016; Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Lambert, 2010; Sharar & Nawab, 2020; Stanley & Crawford, 2022; Wenner & Campbell, 2018)	• Teacher leaders promote communication of experiences to discover insights to drive future decisions and actions. • Teacher leaders encourage a mindset of curiosity and improvement to ensure that personal and professional learning remains continuous.
Facilitating Professional Learning	(Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2018)	• Teacher leaders provide opportunities for building skills and sharing knowledge to meet challenges. • Teacher leaders collaborate with other stakeholders (e.g., grade level) to find different educational outlets to benefit all students.

Fostering Positive School Culture	(Eisenschmidt et al., 2021; Stanley & Crawford, 2022; Trigueros et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2018)	• Teacher leaders encourage open communication and respect to create a sense of purpose. • Teacher leaders ensure that all stakeholders voices are valued and heard.
Implementing School Improvement	(Lambert, 2010; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Pham, 2022; Poekert et al., 2016)	• Teacher leaders consistently apply research-based methods to ensure alignment with goals and values. • Teacher leaders highlight shared goals and values with all stakeholders.
Mentoring or Coaching	(Acquaro & Stokes, 2016; Msila, 2021; Sharar & Nawab, 2020; Shollen, 2015; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Stokes, 2016; Wenner & Campbell, 2018; Weiner & Woulfin, 2018)	• Teacher leaders offer guidance and help other colleagues to refine their skills. • Teacher leaders share their experiences and strategies to promote collaboration and growth.
Modeling Best Practices	(Cooper et al., 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2018)	• Teacher leaders lead by example to set a standard of excellence, inspiring others. • Teacher leaders support learning communities to promote collaboration in problem solving.
Promoting Inclusivity	(Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Stanley & Crawford, 2022; Wenner & Campbell, 2018)	• Teacher leaders build trust and empathy to create an inclusive environment. • Teacher leaders places emphasis on equity in decision making to promote fairness and stronger relationships.
Support Community Engagement	(Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Stanley & Crawford, 2022; Stanley, 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2018)	• Teacher leaders involve stakeholders in planning and building initiatives. • Teacher leaders strive to build strong partnerships with all stakeholders to ensure students receive healthy support from stakeholders.

Appendix D

Survey Instrument

Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled “Women Teacher Leaders and the Change They Bring to Education,” conducted by Olivia Branton, a student at East Carolina University in the Elementary Education and Middle Grades Education department. The goal is to survey at least fifty (50) individuals via Facebook teacher groups and email. The survey will take approximately fifteen (15) minutes to complete. This study aims to better understand how women teacher leaders impact and shape collaboration and instructional improvement. Your responses will be kept confidential, and no data will be released with your identification attached. Participation in the research is voluntary, and you may choose to stop at any time. There is no penalty for not participating in this study, and we will not provide compensation for your time.

For questions related to the research, please contact Olivia Branton at 252-481-5690. For questions about your rights as a participant, contact the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914.

Consent to Participate:

- I agree
- I do not agree (Skip to “Thank you”)

Demographic Information

1. Geographic location of your school:
 - Suburban
 - Rural
 - Urban
2. Please choose the grade level band with which you have the most experience teaching:
 - Primary (Kindergarten to 2nd Grade)
 - Upper Grade (3rd to 6th Grade)
 - Have spent an equal amount teaching in both areas
3. How many years have you been a teacher?
 - 0–5
 - 6–10
 - 11–15
 - 16–20
 - 21+

4. Please provide your position at your school:
(Open-ended response)
5. Please state your gender:
(Open-ended response)
6. Please state your racial/ethnic identity:
(Open-ended response)

Survey Questions

Instructions:

In this set of questions, please think about how the actions of female teacher leaders shape collaboration and improve instruction in schools. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement with regard to women teacher leaders.

(Definition: Teacher leadership is defined as educators who take on roles beyond their classrooms to influence and guide peers, improve school practices, and enhance student learning. It involves collaboration, advocacy, and initiative, as teachers lead by example, mentor others, and contribute to school-wide decision-making and reform efforts.)

Rating Scale:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. Working against unfair policies that can be harmful to students is an important teacher leadership practice.
8. A teacher leader collaborates with all stakeholders to ensure that all students are safe while receiving the highest level of education and care.
9. Teacher leaders provide opportunities for building skills and sharing knowledge to meet challenges.
10. Teacher leaders strive to invent new ideas to ensure that all students may benefit.
11. Teacher leaders build trust and empathy to create an inclusive environment.
12. Teacher leaders support learning communities to promote collaboration in problem-solving.
13. Teacher leaders ensure that all stakeholders are aware of policies and practices that inequitably impact students.
14. Teacher leaders encourage open communication and respect to create a sense of purpose.

15. Teacher leaders involve stakeholders in planning and building commitments for initiatives.
16. Teacher leaders lead by example to set a standard of excellence while inspiring others.
17. Teacher leaders collaborate with stakeholders to find different outlets of education to benefit all students.
18. Teacher leaders review and refine strategies to promote progress and adapt to changing needs.
19. Teacher leaders offer guidance and help colleagues refine their skills.

Instructions:

Please continue thinking about how the actions of female teacher leaders shape collaboration and instructional improvement in schools.

Rating Scale:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. Teacher leaders share their experiences and strategies to promote collaboration and growth.
21. Teacher leaders consistently apply research-based methods to ensure alignment with goals and values.
22. Teacher leaders ensure that all stakeholders' voices are valued and heard.
23. Teacher leaders emphasize equity in decision-making to promote fairness and stronger relationships.
24. Teacher leaders highlight shared goals and values with all stakeholders.
25. Teacher leaders strive to build strong partnerships with stakeholders to ensure students receive healthy support.

Instructions:

For the next set of items, please consider the extent to which specific leadership practices, when used by female teacher leaders, shape collaboration and guide instructional improvement.

Rating Scale:

- To a very large degree
- To a large degree
- Neutral

- To a small degree
- To a very small degree

Practices Rated:

- Engage in Advocacy
- Develop Resources and Curriculum
- Facilitate Professional Learning
- Foster a Positive School Culture
- Implement School Improvement Plans
- Mentor or Coach Colleagues
- Model Best Practices
- Promote Inclusivity
- Support Community Engagement
- Encourage Reflective Practice and Lifelong Learning

Respond to the following:

- To what extent do you think the above practices, when used by female teacher leaders, shape collaboration in schools?
- To what extent do you think the above practices, when used by female teacher leaders, guide instructional improvement in schools?

Open-Ended Questions

(Reminder: Teacher leadership is defined as educators who take on roles beyond their classrooms to influence and guide peers, improve school practices, and enhance student learning. It involves collaboration, advocacy, and initiative.)

26. In what ways do you feel the leadership practices of women teacher leaders shape collaboration within your school? Please provide examples.
27. In what ways do you feel the leadership practices of women teacher leaders shape instructional improvement within your school? Please provide examples.
28. Do you self-identify or would other teachers identify you as a teacher leader? Please describe.
29. Is there anything else you would like to share about the leadership practices of women teacher leaders and their impact on collaboration and instructional improvement?

Thank you for participating in this study!

Appendix E

Social Media Invite

✿ Calling All Elementary Teachers! ✿

Are you an elementary (K-6) teacher? Join us in this research study exploring **“Women Teacher Leaders and the Change They Bring to Education”!**

We’re conducting a research study to understand better how women teacher leaders shape collaboration and improve instruction. Your insights are invaluable in advancing this research.

🕒 **Time Commitment:** Only 15 minutes!

🔒 **Confidential & Voluntary**

Click here to participate: <https://forms.gle/z5jDcy5d7WafHZG56>

✉ Questions? Reach out at brantono23@students.ecu.edu.

Thank you for helping us shed light on the impact of women teacher leaders in education! 💡 ✨