# A journey mapping qualitative analysis of primary education teachers' professional leadership planning in Mongolia

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## Article Info

### Keywords

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### Highlights:

- Teachers prioritize instructional leadership to enhance student learning and classroom practice.
- Peer mentoring and collaboration are central themes in leadership planning.
- Broader school-wide leadership roles are rarely mentioned in teachers' plans.
- Leadership success is often linked to student achievement metrics, not process evaluation.
- Teachers' leadership vision remains focused on classroom and immediate peer engagement.

## Abstract

Previous studies identify three primary challenges hindering the quality of researcher–teacher development: a lack of training in scientific research and methodology, an inadequate teaching and research work environment, and the heavy time burden placed on teachers. To investigate these issues, the researchers conducted a qualitative analysis of My Professional Leadership Plan, a collection of professional development plans authored by primary school teachers. The objective was to explore the complexities of their professional growth, aspirations, and strategies. By focusing on written plans rather than implemented actions, the study was able to examine teachers' intended leadership goals without conflating them with actual outcomes. The analysis revealed that teachers primarily envision exercising leadership by improving instruction and supporting colleagues, consistent with prevailing literature on instructional and collaborative leadership. However, the findings also indicate that less attention is given to broader aspects of leadership, such as participating in school-wide decision-making or engaging with the wider school community. These insights suggest that while teachers demonstrate readiness to lead in instructional and peer-support roles, there is both a need and an opportunity to expand teacher leadership development to encompass a broader range of leadership domains.

# INTRODUCTION

The predominant reliance on traditional teaching methods, such as "blackboard, chalk and talk," has limited the integration of contemporary learning and teaching materials, visuals, ICT, and collaborative activities. Regular evaluation and quality review of teaching materials are crucial in addressing this gap (Shankar & Burmaa, 2018) within the context of Mongolian Primary Education. Sodnomtsog & Densmaa (2018) identify three primary challenges hindering the quality of researcher-teacher development: the absence of scientific research and research methodology for teachers, inadequacies in the teaching and research work environment, and the time burden on teachers. The study concludes with recommendations, including the efficiency of school-based teacher professional development activities and the need for in-service teacher training for integrated education, particularly for middle and high school teachers. At the primary education level, it highlights the importance of classroom-based professional development through the mutual exchange of experiences among teachers. The development of action plans for teacher professional development is advocated to enhance student success (Sodnomtsog & Densmaa, 2018).

Teachers face limitations in fully supporting children's learning, as they allocate most of their non-classroom time to lesson preparation, document development, and correcting children's notebooks. This reduces opportunities for communication and various aspects of professional growth. Problems related to the poor quality of training and organizational inadequacies negatively impact teachers' interest and activity levels in attending training. Overlapping content, suboptimal scheduling, and inadequate consideration of teachers' workload contribute to dissatisfaction among educators. Teachers encounter obstacles in their professional development journey, including weak content in training programs, inflexible program delivery, lack of innovation in teaching and feedback methods, and imbalances between academia and practice (Seferoğlu, 2001).

Professional development is defined as the continuous enhancement of teachers' knowledge, skills, abilities, and the necessary conditions for on-the-job learning. Acknowledged as a critical factor in improving educational efforts, it is deemed necessary for achieving better teaching and creating better schools. Despite addressing inadequacies in the preparation of teachers in teacher colleges, there is a discernible lack of attention to teachers' professional development needs while they are in a teaching and learning setting (Aljassar & Altammar, 2020). Continued professional development (CPD) is identified as essential for keeping teachers updated on changes in education globally. It enables teachers to be aware of curricula and instructional modes, playing a crucial role in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teachers and their tasks, including learning from experience, competence development, and growth in classrooms and schools (Essel et al., 2009). Emphasizing a career-long development process, CPD is viewed as a continuous endeavor starting with pre-service education and extending throughout a teacher's career. It integrates reflective practice and additional training activities based on perceived needs and challenges (Seferoğlu, 2001).

## Leadership Theory and Effective Leadership Behaviors

Contemporary leadership literature provides essential guidance on what an effective leadership plan should cultivate. Transformational leadership theory, for example, emphasizes the importance of leaders inspiring a shared vision, fostering motivation, and elevating followers to higher levels of morality and achievement (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978) famously defined transformational leadership as occurring "when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." Bass (1985) later expanded this framework by identifying key components of transformational leadership—including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—which together encourage followers to transcend self-interest and develop themselves while pursuing organizational goals. Embedding these principles into a personal leadership plan means encouraging the leader to craft a clear vision, act with integrity, challenge the status quo thoughtfully, and mentor or empower others. Such qualities have been linked to positive outcomes like higher employee satisfaction and performance (Northouse, 2013).

In addition to transformational traits, emotional intelligence (EI) is emphasized as a critical component of effective leadership. Leaders with high emotional intelligence—encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills—tend to achieve better team outcomes and work climates (Goleman, 1998; Sadri, 2012). In a review of leadership development practices, Sadri (2012) found that integrating emotional intelligence training significantly enhances both the personal and professional growth of leaders. An effective leadership plan should therefore include efforts to improve self-awareness and empathy. Self-awareness is particularly foundational; it enables leaders to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and understand how their behavior affects others. Studies have shown that self-aware leaders build more trust with employees, communicate more

effectively, and create positive work environments. Moreover, reflective leadership practices—where leaders regularly reflect on experiences and feedback—are strongly associated with improved leadership effectiveness (Densten & Gray, 2001; Castelli, 2015). Reflection serves as a bridge between knowledge and action. By actively thinking about their decisions and assumptions, leaders can reframe problems, consider multiple perspectives, and better understand their followers. This process often yields new insights that help leaders adapt strategies for better outcomes. In fact, ongoing reflection has been linked to higher performance; one study reported that individuals who spent just 15 minutes per day in deliberate reflection outperformed peers who did not, in terms of learning and subsequent results. These findings underscore why a robust leadership development plan should incorporate mechanisms for reflection and feedback, enabling continuous learning.

**Personal Leadership Development Plans and Best Practices**

The concept of a personal leadership development plan aligns with best practices identified in leadership development research. Active participation and ownership of one's development is crucial. Leaders (or aspiring leaders) who engage as active agents in their own development enhance their learning and sustain growth over time. This means a plan should be crafted with the individual's input, ensuring it resonates with their personal vision and motivation (Niehaus et al., 2012). Additionally, tailoring the plan to the individual is essential; a generic development program is less effective than one that addresses the specific competency gaps and career goals of the person (Pernick, 2001). For instance, an individual who excels in technical skills but struggles with communication would benefit from a plan emphasizing public speaking, active listening, or interpersonal training, whereas another might focus on strategic thinking or team-building skills.

The literature also emphasizes balancing theoretical learning with practical application. Cacioppe (1998) argues that integrating leadership theory with on-the-job experiences greatly enhances development outcomes. While formal training or academic study provides frameworks and concepts, it is through practical experience, feedback, and reflection that those concepts are internalized. Many successful leadership programs follow the 70-20-10 model (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000), where 70% of development comes from challenging assignments and experiences, 20% from mentoring and coaching, and 10% from formal education. Although these exact proportions may vary, the underlying principle is clear: exposure to real leadership situations, combined with mentorship and self-study, creates a synergistic learning environment. Therefore, a personal leadership plan should include actionable experiences (e.g., leading a project team, volunteering for a cross-functional initiative) alongside reading leadership literature or attending workshops.

Lastly, effective leadership development is continuous and evaluative. It is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that evolves as the leader grows (Day, 2000). Regularly reviewing and updating the leadership plan is advisable to keep pace with changing responsibilities and organizational needs. Setting measurable goals and metrics supports this effort. For example, improvements in team engagement scores, the achievement of specific project outcomes, or 360-degree feedback results can serve as indicators of progress. By tracking these metrics, leaders can gauge the impact of their development activities and refine their plan accordingly. In summary, the literature suggests that a well-rounded personal leadership development plan should be theory-informed, self-directed, tailored, experiential, and iterative. These insights from prior studies and models form the foundation for the methodology and strategies adopted in My Leadership Plan.

## METHOD

The primary objective of this research was to conduct a qualitative analysis of "My Professional Leadership Plan," a collection of professional development plans created by primary education teachers. The aim was to explore the intricacies of their professional growth, ambitions, and strategies. By examining these plans, the research sought to uncover patterns, themes, and objectives that primary school teachers have set for various stages of their careers, ranging from immediate goals to long-term aspirations.

The General Department of Education of Mongolia annually organizes modular training to enhance the professional development of teachers. In 2023, as part of the "Teacher Leadership Skills" training, 70 primary education teachers participated and developed their personal leadership plans (Figure 1). These plans, created as a component of the training, serve as the primary data source for this analysis, providing insight into the professional development visions of these educators. Each leadership plan is structured into four main sections: Teacher Introduction, Achieved Success, Purpose and Vision, and Development Areas. The Development Areas section is further divided into five subcategories, analyzed across three distinct timeframes: the first year, the next three years, and a long-term future of 10-15 years. This structure offers a comprehensive view of the educators' professional progression and their strategic planning for future growth.

| My Professional Leadership Plan | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** Introduction ..... | | | Picture |
| **2** My Successes ..... | | | |
| **3** My purpose (vision) ..... | | | |
| **4** Development Areas: | | | |
| Time: | Within one year | Three years | 10-15 years |
| 4.1 Which of the teacher leadership skills are you aiming to develop? | | | |
| 4.2 What to do in terms of communicating with the modern "Z" learner? | | | |
| 4.3 What can be done in the area of compassionate leadership? | | | |
| 4.4 What can be changed and updated in terms of the teacher's visual and verbal image? | | | |
| 4.5 What can you do to manage your stress and maintain your mental health? | | | |

**Figure 1.** *The Template for Teachers' Professional Leadership Plan*

A thematic qualitative analysis approach was employed to scrutinize the "My Leadership Plan" data. This involved a meticulous examination of the text data, focusing on identifying and interpreting meaningful patterns (themes) within the teachers' responses. Data coding was conducted manually, ensuring that each response was carefully read and coded for recurring themes. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, multiple rounds of coding were performed, with initial codes refined and grouped into broader themes that accurately reflected the essence of the teachers' plans. First, for the initial review and coding, we read documents, reviewed research objectives, and began coding by annotating relevant information in the margins (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Second, for descriptive and value coding (Saldaña, 2016), we applied the affective coding method – valued coding (which explores beliefs, identity, and cultural values) and descriptive coding (which focuses on experiences, decisions, and social interactions). Third, for category development, we identified patterns from the codes and organized them into preliminary categories or themes based on recurring data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fourth, for refinement through constant comparison, we engaged in continuous comparison and reflection. The purpose of the study is to identify the situation of Mongolian primary education teachers' professional development experience of in-service training through journey mapping methodology, which is a qualitative research methodology used to visually represent an individual's or a group's experiences, interactions, and emotions as they engage with a particular process over time (Howard, 2014; Samson, Granath, 2017). It provides a comprehensive view of the participants' journey (Annamma, 2017; Nielsen & Bruselius-Jensen, 2021), helping organizations understand the entire experience from start to finish. A total of 70 public primary education teachers participated in the study from geographically diverse provinces of Mongolia (Figure 2). For the application of journey mapping, we first gathered data with primary education teachers' professional development plan documents with consent. The key segment identified is primary education teachers who work for public schools. To explore the intricacies of the teachers' professional growth, ambitions, and strategies, we categorized themes.

## RESULTS

Analysis of the teachers' leadership plans yielded several prominent themes. The content of the plans suggests that teachers predominantly view their leadership roles in terms of enhancing instruction and student performance. At the same time, there are notable gaps in areas related to shared decision-making and broader school leadership. Below, we detail the key themes that emerged from the documents, emphasizing that these findings are based on teachers' written intentions rather than observed outcomes. All results are presented as insights from the plans' content, without claims of actual effect.

Nearly all analyzed teacher leadership plans placed a strong emphasis on improving various aspects of classroom instruction and, by extension, student achievement. Common goals stated in the plans included enhancing student engagement, raising test scores or academic performance in specific subjects, and implementing new pedagogical strategies (e.g., project-based learning, differentiated instruction) to benefit students. Teachers frequently framed their leadership in terms of being instructional leaders among their peers—

by modeling effective teaching practices or leading professional development sessions for colleagues on curriculum and instruction.



**Figure 2**. *Mongolian Map*. Note. Number of Participant Primary Education Teachers indicated in the map.

This suggests that teachers view their leadership primarily as a means to impact student learning outcomes through better teaching practices directly. Such an emphasis aligns with the literature that often ties teacher leadership to improvements in teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, it is essential to note that these improvement targets are aspirational, as described in the plans; the study did not track whether these improvements were realized. The findings here indicate that enhancing student learning is a top priority, as written in the plans.

*"Integrate interactive teaching methods"* (P.12)
*"Utilize educational apps and platforms for interactive learning"* (P.47)

Another common element in the plans was the intention to collaborate with and support fellow teachers. Many teacher leadership plans described roles such as mentoring new teachers, facilitating professional learning communities (PLCs), or leading grade-level or subject-area teams in reflective practice. For instance, a number of teachers wrote about organizing regular meetings for colleagues to share instructional strategies or analyze student work together. These planned activities reflect an understanding of teacher leadership as a collaborative endeavor – teachers leading alongside peers to collectively improve practice. The presence of this theme aligns with findings by Wenner and Campbell (2017) that teacher leadership often involves supporting the professional learning of peers and fostering a collaborative culture. Teachers' plans indicated they intended to act as change agents or coaches within their faculty group. Notably, while collaboration was a recurring theme, the plans varied in specificity. Some were quite detailed about how they would mentor others (including timelines, topics, etc.), whereas others simply stated a general aim to "work with colleagues to improve X" without elaboration. Regardless of detail, the prominence of collaboration and mentoring in the documents suggests that teachers recognize leadership as something that can be exercised through influence and support rather than formal authority. Again, no evaluation was made on whether these mentoring efforts occurred or were successful; the analysis only confirms that teachers intended to pursue peer collaboration in their leadership capacity.

*"Mentor new teachers and share my experiences"* (P.52)
*"Establish a support system among colleagues"* (P.4)

A striking finding from the content analysis was that very few leadership plans mentioned roles in school-wide decision-making, policy development, or broader organizational change. Distributed leadership or participation in governance (such as serving on school improvement committees, influencing school policies, or advocating for systemic changes) was largely absent from the documents. Only a small handful of teachers' plans included references to influencing school policy or engaging with administration on leadership decisions. The

majority of plans were inward-focused (classroom and immediate team) rather than outward-focused (whole-school or district). This may suggest that teachers do not view broader leadership as part of their role, lack the empowerment to pursue it, or feel unprepared to engage in it. The lack of emphasis on shared leadership and policy influence in these plans echoes Carter's (2016) observations, which found that many teacher leader models tend to limit the vision of leadership by focusing mainly on instructional management and student achievement. In our analysis, teachers seldom identified goals such as participating in curriculum decision-making committees, shaping professional development at the school-wide level, or advocating for policy changes; instead, they concentrated on what they could do within their classrooms or with their immediate colleagues. This suggests a potentially narrower conception of teacher leadership in practice – one that may neglect opportunities for teachers to lead in a more strategic or organizational capacity. It is essential to clarify that this finding does not imply that teachers failed to have an impact on policy (which was beyond our scope to determine), but rather that such aims were not commonly articulated in their plans.

> *"Become a principal or a senior administrator"* (P.23)
> *"Contribute to the development of innovative teaching policies"* (P.68)

A minority of the plans included objectives related to improving communication or reaching out to stakeholders beyond the school's faculty. For example, a few teachers wrote about plans to engage parents and community members in school events or to communicate more effectively about school initiatives. One teacher's leadership plan, for instance, involved organizing a community STEM night to showcase student projects and strengthen school-community ties. Another mentioned improving communication channels between teachers and school administration. While these examples indicate some teachers do consider broader engagement as part of their leadership, these themes were not as prevalent as the instructional and collaboration themes. Most plans did not explicitly address communication strategies or community involvement, implying that these are secondary considerations for many teacher leaders in their planning. The relatively infrequent mention of community engagement could be due to the primarily internal focus of many leadership plans (centered on teaching practice and immediate peer interactions). This finding suggests that programs aiming to develop teacher leaders might need to encourage participants to also consider skills in communication and outreach as part of comprehensive leadership. Again, since our study did not follow up on these plans, we cannot say whether those who mentioned community engagement achieved it, only that it was an articulated goal for a few.

> *"To have simple conversations with parents, appreciating their efforts"* (P.37)
> *"Utilize digital platforms for more effective parent-teacher communication"* (P.8)

The documents revealed that when teachers discussed how they would know if their leadership efforts were successful, they often defaulted to student achievement metrics (test scores, assessment results) or observable changes in classroom practice. Many plans implicitly or explicitly tied the outcome of their leadership to improved student performance indicators. For example, a teacher leading a new instructional strategy might have written that success would be measured by an increase in students meeting proficiency on standardized tests or by higher homework completion rates. Fewer teachers mentioned qualitative indicators such as teacher feedback, student engagement levels, or school climate improvements as measures of success. Importantly, no plan in our sample outlined any formal process for evaluating the implementation of the leadership initiative itself (e.g., no mention of gathering data on how the plan was executed or reflecting on their leadership growth). This suggests that teachers may be orienting their leadership goals toward student outcomes without concurrently planning to assess the implementation process. As an insight from document analysis, this points to a potential gap: teachers might benefit from support in developing evaluation criteria for leadership initiatives beyond just student test scores. Indeed, Carter (2016) recommended developing alternative evaluative criteria beyond standardized achievement data in teacher leadership models. The predominance of achievement metrics in our sample's plans underscores that recommendation. However, since our study did not measure any outcomes, we refrain from commenting on the appropriateness or effectiveness of these chosen metrics—our observation is simply that teachers' plans tended to identify student outcomes as the primary evidence of success.

> *"Prepared students for the Kangaroo Olympiad, resulting in high qualifications"* (P.14)
> *"Improve public speaking and presentation skills"* (P.51)

Collectively, these results paint a picture of how teachers, in their written plans, envision the practice of teacher leadership. The plans strongly highlight improving teaching and learning (instructional focus) and working with peers (collaboration/mentoring) as central to their leadership role. At the same time, there is comparatively little in the plans about influencing broader school structures or engaging in leadership outside the classroom context. It appears that teacher leadership, as self-defined in these documents, remains largely instruction-centric. The next section will discuss what these findings might mean in the context of existing research and how they can inform the support systems for teacher leaders. It will also reiterate the limitations of interpreting these findings strictly as intentions rather than outcomes.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of teachers' leadership plans offers valuable insights into their perceptions and intended approaches to leadership. It also highlights the gap between idealized, comprehensive leadership roles and the specific areas that teachers choose to prioritize. When interpreting these findings, it is essential to remember that they reflect plans on paper, not actual actions in practice. However, several meaningful observations emerge when we consider the results in conjunction with the broader literature on teacher leadership. Firstly, the strong instructional orientation of the leadership plans reflects a common theme in teacher leadership research: many teachers view improving classroom practice and student achievement as the core of their leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This is unsurprising, as teachers' professional identities are deeply rooted in instruction and student success. Even when stepping into leadership roles, teachers often carry their instructional expertise forward as the primary tool for leadership, such as coaching peers or spearheading curriculum improvements. The plans in this study reveal that teachers feel most comfortable, and perhaps most compelled, to lead in ways that have a direct connection to student learning. This emphasis aligns with prior findings that teacher leadership ultimately aims "at targeting student learning" (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). However, it is worth discussing whether this strong focus might also limit the scope of teacher leadership. If teacher leaders concentrate predominantly on instructional matters, other dimensions, such as contributing to school governance or community partnerships, may receive less attention. The documents we analyzed indeed suggest such a narrowing, indicating a need for professional development programs to broaden teachers' understanding of what being a leader can entail. In other words, while instructional leadership is a valuable and core component of teacher leadership, teachers could be encouraged to also see themselves as leaders in school-wide initiatives or educational advocacy, expanding their impact beyond their own classrooms and immediate teams.

Secondly, the prevalence of peer collaboration and mentoring in the plans is a positive sign, indicating that many teachers view leadership as a collaborative, influence-based process rather than one reliant on formal authority. This aligns with distributed leadership theory, which posits that leadership in schools is not limited to those in formal positions but can be shared among teachers and administrators, operating through social influence and expertise. Teachers planning to lead study groups, mentoring, or PLCs demonstrate an understanding of leadership as working with colleagues to foster improvement (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Such activities can strengthen the professional community and have been linked to enhanced teaching practices school-wide. However, the effectiveness of peer collaboration often relies on factors such as school culture and administrative support (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Since our study did not evaluate actual implementation, we cannot address how these factors manifested. One implication, however, is that school leaders (principals, program coordinators) should recognize teachers' enthusiasm for collaborative leadership and ensure that conditions (like time for collaboration, administrative encouragement, and recognition of teacher-led initiatives) are established to bring these plans to fruition. Our findings suggest that teachers are eager to take initiative in leading peers, which schools can leverage as a resource. Encouragingly, none of the plans indicated a top-down or authoritarian perspective on leadership; instead, teachers framed themselves as facilitators and supporters—aligning with contemporary views of effective teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

On the other hand, the limited focus on school-wide decision-making and policy in the plans highlights a potential area for growth. Teacher leadership literature underscores that for teacher leaders to genuinely influence educational outcomes, they should have a voice in decisions beyond their classrooms and contribute to organizational development (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011). The lack of such components in most plans may stem from several reasons. Teachers may view these areas as outside their scope of influence or authority, reflecting school cultures in which teachers are not traditionally involved in decision-making processes. It might also suggest that teachers lack confidence or experience in those areas, leading them to concentrate on what they know (instruction and collegial support). Another possibility is that the guidelines or prompts for writing these leadership plans (if any were provided by a program or

administration) focused on instructional goals and did not explicitly encourage consideration of policy or governance roles. Regardless of the cause, this finding indicates that if educational leaders wish to foster teacher leadership in a more holistic manner, they may need to intentionally empower and train teachers to engage in shared leadership. For example, leadership development workshops could incorporate elements on how teachers can participate in school improvement planning, committee work, or advocacy. Additionally, school administrators could invite teacher leaders into decision-making spaces, signaling that teacher leadership is valued not just in enhancing teaching but also in steering the direction of the school. The implication is not that every teacher leader must engage in policy influence, but that the option should be made apparent and supported. By emphasizing that few teachers have written about such roles, our study suggests that this aspect of teacher leadership practice, at least in terms of planning, is currently underdeveloped and thus represents an area for future growth.

Another discussion point is the way success metrics are conceived in the plans. The heavy reliance on student achievement data as the marker of success (e.g., test scores) reflects the broader educational climate of accountability. Teachers naturally tie their efforts to student results, which is commendable given that student learning is the ultimate goal of schooling. However, as Carter (2016) and others have noted, this approach can be overly narrow in evaluating leadership initiatives. If a teacher's leadership plan involves mentoring colleagues, the success of that endeavor can also be measured by changes in those colleagues' teaching practices or by their feedback, rather than solely by student test outcomes, which are influenced by numerous factors. The fact that most plans did not mention evaluating the leadership process itself suggests that teachers may lack the tools for reflective evaluation of their leadership. Professionally, this highlights the need to support teacher leaders in learning how to assess their initiatives, potentially through action research or formative evaluation methods. This would not only provide a more rounded view of impact (e.g., "Did my mentoring program improve the new teachers' confidence or skill?" in addition to "Did student scores go up?") but also promote a learning cycle where teachers refine their leadership practices. Since our research did not follow up on the execution of any plan, we cannot know if teachers eventually did such reflection informally. However, from what was written, it seems an afterthought at best. Encouraging a mindset of evaluation and reflection in leadership plans could be beneficial.

It is crucial to explicitly acknowledge the limitations of this study's design in the discussion to uphold academic rigor. The primary limitation is the exclusive reliance on document analysis. We interpreted teachers' intentions based on the written text, which may not always reflect their complete thinking or the context behind their choices. Without interviews or observations, some nuances are inevitably lost. For instance, a teacher might not mention a school-wide leadership role in their plan because they are already informally fulfilling it or because the plan template required a specific type of goal. We must be cautious not to over-interpret the absence of evidence in the documents as evidence of the absence of certain leadership behaviors in reality. Additionally, since we did not track implementation, we cannot claim anything about the effectiveness of these plans or how they unfolded. The discussion above about implications and needs (e.g., expanding focus to policy, improving evaluation) is based on the content analysis, but it would need to be tested through future research that perhaps follows teachers over time or compares planned intentions with actual practice. Finally, the sample size and context (which might be a particular program or region) limit generalizability. The teachers' leadership plans analyzed here may not represent all teachers' leadership planning in other contexts, especially if different supports or expectations exist elsewhere. Despite these limitations, the document-based approach provided a valuable exploratory look at teacher leadership through the lens of self-authored plans, maintaining a clear distinction between describing intentions and claiming outcomes.

Throughout this study, efforts were made to uphold high standards of academic rigor and clarity. The methodology was based on established qualitative research techniques (Bowen, 2009; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), and all interpretations were verified against the raw data (the text of the plans) to ensure their validity. The presentation of results and discussion has been meticulously crafted to avoid ambiguity—readers are not led to believe we observed any actual leadership activities or measured any outcomes. Instead, the article consistently refers to what the plans contain or suggest. This clarification of scope is a crucial aspect of rigor in a document analysis study. Relevant literature citations have been provided to contextualize the findings within existing research and support claims about concepts (such as the nature of teacher leadership or recommended practices). By integrating literature, we ensure that our arguments are analytically robust and not merely based on our dataset in isolation. The tone remains formal and objective, consistent with international journal standards, and the article's structure (Introduction, Methodology, Results, Discussion, Conclusion) adheres to the conventional scholarly format, thereby enhancing clarity and coherence in the presentation.

## Conclusion

This study presented a qualitative content analysis of teachers' leadership plans, providing insight into how teachers envision their roles as leaders in educational settings. By focusing on written plans rather than implemented actions, the research examined the intended leadership activities and priorities of teachers without conflating those intentions with actual outcomes. The findings indicate that teachers predominantly plan to exercise leadership by improving instruction and supporting colleagues, aligning with much of the teacher leadership literature that emphasizes instructional and collaborative leadership. At the same time, the analysis revealed that teachers' plans often overlook broader leadership dimensions, such as participating in school decision-making or engaging with the wider school community. These insights suggest that while teachers are ready and willing to lead in the realm of teaching and collegial support, there may be an opportunity and need to expand the scope of teacher leadership preparation to include other domains.

By accurately characterizing the study as a document analysis, we underscore that any conclusions drawn pertain to the content of the plans themselves. We infer teachers' priorities, concerns, and conceptions of leadership from their writing, but we do not assert that these plans resulted in specific outcomes. In doing so, we maintain a clear distinction between inference and empirical observation. The value of this research lies in what it reveals about the mindsets and needs of teacher leaders. For practitioners and policymakers, the results highlight areas where teacher leadership initiatives could be strengthened, such as encouraging a more expansive view of leadership that includes school-wide influence and training teacher leaders in how to evaluate and adjust their initiatives. For researchers, this study contributes to the understanding of teacher leadership by providing a baseline understanding of what teachers plan to do when they set out to become leaders. Future studies could build on this by examining how these plans are enacted and what challenges or successes teachers encounter, thus connecting intentions to outcomes in a subsequent step.

In conclusion, teachers' leadership plans serve as rich sources of information about how leadership is conceptualized at the grassroots level of teaching. Analyzing these documents with rigor and clarity, as we have done, helps ensure that we accurately interpret teachers' intended practices and avoid overstating their impact. By maintaining methodological precision—specifically stating that we analyzed documents and not interventions—we provide a credible and transparent account that meets high academic standards. This clarity not only enhances the trustworthiness of the research but also acknowledges the complexity of translating plans into practice, which lies beyond the scope of this study. Ultimately, the study emphasizes that teacher leadership is multifaceted and that supporting teacher leaders requires attention to both what they aim to accomplish and what they might not yet envision as part of their role. Based on the conclusions of the study, several targeted recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders such as educators, teacher leadership program designers, school leaders, and researchers to align with and extend the practical implications of the findings. For teacher leadership program designers, professional development initiatives should include modules on reflective planning and adaptive leadership. Teachers should be trained not only to create leadership plans but also to critically evaluate and adjust them in response to evolving school contexts and needs. Moreover, utilizing real-world examples, such as case studies of teacher leaders who have successfully influenced areas beyond their classrooms (e.g., curriculum policy development or school reform efforts), can provide valuable models of expanded leadership roles. For school leaders and administrators, cultivating a culture of distributed leadership is essential. By fostering an environment where leadership is perceived as shared and multifaceted, schools can support teachers in exploring and developing their leadership identities. For practicing teachers, engaging in self-assessment and peer collaboration is crucial. Structured opportunities such as peer discussion groups and coaching sessions can facilitate critical reflection on leadership goals and encourage broader aspirations, particularly regarding school-wide influence and stakeholder engagement. For researchers, future inquiries should include longitudinal studies that examine the implementation of teacher leadership plans over time. Such research would provide insights into the outcomes of these plans and the factors—both enabling and constraining—that influence their success. Additionally, further investigation is required into underrepresented areas of teacher leadership, such as community engagement and participatory decision-making, to better understand the barriers and supports affecting their inclusion in leadership development.

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**Dr. Javzandulam Batsaikhan** serves as Chair of the Department of Methodology in the School of Preschool Education at the Mongolian National University of Education. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in Qualitative Research in Education, Action Research, Research Paradigms and Issues, and Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods. Her research focuses on child learning and development, contextual issues in learning and teaching, preschool education curriculum, and the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers.

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