



Administrative Support for Teacher Leadership in Türkiye and Palestine: A Comparative Perspective¹

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Abstract

This study examines primary school teachers' perspectives on teacher leadership and the role of administrative support in Türkiye and Palestine. It focuses on teachers' expectations of school principals in fostering their leadership capacities and the extent to which these expectations are fulfilled. The study was conducted during the 2022–2023 academic year with 24 teachers working in public and private primary schools in İzmir, Türkiye, and Gaza, Palestine. Adopting a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis with MAXQDA 2020. Findings indicate both similarities and differences in teachers' perceptions, shaped by socio-cultural, organizational, and political contexts. While teachers in both countries emphasize the importance of supportive, participatory, and empowering leadership, the degree of administrative support varies. The study underscores the critical role of school principals in enabling teacher leadership and highlights the need for context-sensitive policies to promote sustainable school improvement.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership, Administrative support, School principals, Primary School, Qualitative research.

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Introduction

Teacher leadership has emerged as a significant theoretical and practical framework in contemporary educational research. It refers to a process through which teachers, individually or collectively, exert professional influence on colleagues and school decision-making processes with the aim of improving teaching practices, enhancing student learning, and contributing to overall school development (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In contemporary perspectives, teacher leadership extends beyond formal positions and is increasingly understood as an integral dimension of teachers' professional agency within schools.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that teacher leadership contributes to improved student learning outcomes by enhancing instructional quality, assessment practices, and collaborative school cultures (Shen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). At the organizational level, it fosters professional collaboration, strengthens learning communities, and increases schools' adaptability to change.

From a theoretical standpoint, teacher leadership is closely associated with distributed leadership theory, which emphasizes the redistribution of leadership practices across organizational members rather than concentrating authority in formal roles (Spillane, 2006). Within this framework, teachers are viewed as active contributors to school improvement through both formal and informal leadership practices, including mentoring colleagues, leading curriculum development, engaging in instructional innovation, and participating in professional learning communities (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Schott et al., 2020).

However, the development of teacher leadership is highly dependent on contextual and organizational conditions, particularly administrative support. School principals play a central enabling role through practices such as providing autonomy, allocating resources, supporting professional development, and fostering a positive school climate (Uddin, 2020; Berry et al., 2021; Alnakhala & Şahin, 2025). In this sense, administrative support can be understood as a multidimensional construct that includes professional autonomy, emotional encouragement, recognition, access to resources, and participation in decision-making processes (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). When such support is present, teachers are more likely to engage in leadership roles beyond their classrooms, whereas restrictive leadership practices may limit teacher agency and initiative.

Among the dimensions of administrative support, professional autonomy plays a critical role in enabling teacher leadership. Studies show that when teachers are empowered to design initiatives and lead instructional projects, leadership practices become more sustainable and visible (Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2006). Similarly, access to continuous professional development strengthens teachers' capacity to assume leadership roles (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010). In addition, recognition and trust from school leaders significantly influence teachers' motivation and willingness to engage in leadership practices (Eyal & Roth, 2011).

Another key dimension is participation in decision-making. Distributed leadership approaches emphasize that involving teachers in school governance enhances organizational effectiveness and strengthens professional commitment (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). However, in many educational systems, teacher participation remains limited, reducing the transformative potential of distributed leadership (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Recent empirical evidence reinforces the view that teacher leadership is not an isolated individual attribute but is fundamentally shaped by the quality of administrative and organizational support provided within schools. In the Turkish context, studies have consistently shown a significant positive relationship between teachers' perceptions of principal support and their engagement in leadership practices, particularly when principals demonstrate trust, encouragement, and provide structured opportunities for participation in decision-making (Dağlı & Kalkan, 2021; Tosun & Bozkurt Bostancı, 2024). More recent findings further indicate that the influence of principal support extends beyond direct effects, contributing indirectly to teacher leadership through enhancing teacher resilience and work engagement, thereby highlighting the motivational and relational dimensions of school leadership (Çilek et al., 2025).

International literature similarly emphasizes that empowering and instructional leadership practices create enabling conditions for teacher leadership by fostering collaboration, professional learning, and initiative-taking within schools (Pan & Chen, 2020). Systematic reviews further confirm that administrative support, professional autonomy, and collaborative school cultures constitute the most consistent predictors of sustainable teacher leadership across contexts (Schott et al., 2020). Moreover, integrative leadership models suggest that principal leadership and teacher leadership operate as interconnected processes that jointly enhance teacher self-efficacy and instructional quality (Li & Liu, 2020). Collectively, these findings underscore that administrative support functions not merely as a contextual background factor but as a central mechanism through which teacher leadership is either enabled or constrained.

In Türkiye, the education system is highly centralized, with the Ministry of National Education maintaining strong control over policy-making, curriculum, and personnel management. While this structure ensures standardization, it also limits school-level autonomy and reduces opportunities for teacher participation in leadership processes (OECD, 2019). In contrast, the Palestinian education system operates under complex socio-political and economic constraints, including occupation, mobility restrictions, and infrastructural limitations, which significantly affect school stability and resource availability (NRC, 2021; Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2025). Despite these challenges, Palestinian schools often demonstrate resilience through strong collegial relationships and informal collaboration practices that support teacher leadership in alternative forms.

Although both contexts differ significantly in governance structure and resources, previous comparative research suggests that similar dynamics emerge in relation to teacher leadership development. Turkish teachers often report sufficient structural resources but limited participation in decision-making, whereas Palestinian teachers operate in resource-constrained environments but demonstrate strong relational and collaborative support systems (Alnakhala, 2025). These differences highlight the importance of examining administrative support not only as a structural condition but also as a culturally and contextually embedded practice.

Despite the growing body of research on teacher leadership, there remains a lack of comparative qualitative studies that systematically explore teachers' expectations of school principals and the extent to which these expectations are fulfilled across different governance contexts. In particular, limited attention has been given to how administrative support operates in centralized versus socio-politically constrained systems and how these conditions shape teacher leadership experiences.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores teachers' perceptions in Türkiye and Palestine regarding administrative support for teacher leadership. Specifically, it investigates teachers' expectations in four domains: support for idea development and initiative-taking, motivation and recognition, professional development opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes. In addition, it examines the extent to which these expectations are met in practice.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are Turkish and Palestinian teachers' expectations regarding school principals in developing their leadership capacities?

RQ2: To what extent are these expectations met in both contexts?

By comparing these two contexts, the study aims to deepen understanding of how administrative support structures influence teacher leadership development under different educational, organizational, and socio-political conditions.

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore teachers' lived experiences regarding teacher leadership in Türkiye and Palestine. Phenomenology is appropriate for capturing how individuals perceive and interpret a specific phenomenon based on their lived experiences within their professional and organizational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this

study, it is used to understand teachers' perceptions of administrative support as experienced in their daily school practices.

Participants

The study included 24 primary school teachers, 12 from Gaza, Palestine, and 12 from İzmir, Türkiye, selected through maximum variation sampling. Participants were chosen based on gender, years of experience, educational background, and school type (public/private) to ensure diverse perspectives.

Turkish participants were recruited from İzmir, while Palestinian participants were selected from Gaza, where the first author has professional experience. Participant anonymity was ensured through coding: Turkish participants were labeled with codes beginning with "T" and Palestinian participants with codes beginning with "F".

Data Collection Tool and Procedure

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview form was developed based on expert opinions from scholars in educational sciences and language education specialists and was revised according to feedback from three academics and two teachers.

The instrument was translated into Arabic with the support of language experts. A pilot study was conducted with six teachers (three from each country). Interviews were conducted face-to-face in Türkiye and online via Zoom in Palestine due to mobility restrictions.

Each interview lasted approximately 25–40 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, meaning no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews. Transcriptions were sent to participants for member checking to enhance accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with MAXQDA 2020. The analysis followed a systematic process including familiarization with the data, initial coding, categorization of codes, and the development of overarching themes. Codes were generated inductively, and similar codes were grouped into meaningful categories and themes used for interpretation and comparison across contexts.

Validity and Reliability

Credibility was ensured through expert review of the interview form, pilot testing, and member checking. In addition, cross-context comparison between Türkiye and Palestine strengthened interpretive depth. Dependability was supported through a clear audit trail documenting all stages of coding and theme development.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. All data were anonymized using participant codes.

Researcher's Role

The researcher played an active role in all stages of the study, particularly in data collection and analysis, while maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process. The study is grounded in both academic and contextual understanding of teacher leadership.

The researcher is originally from Gaza, Palestine, where she completed her education and worked for ten years as a teacher. This background provided contextual insight into teacher leadership in resource-constrained and unstable environments, while also contributing to the development of the research focus. In addition, conducting the doctoral study in Türkiye provided contextual familiarity with the Turkish educational system, which supported a more informed comparative interpretation.

Due to mobility restrictions in Gaza, interviews in Palestine were conducted via Zoom. Although this created technical challenges, it enabled direct access to participants. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained analytical distance by grounding interpretations in the data and following a systematic coding process to reduce potential bias.

Findings

Findings Related to the First Sub-Problem

The findings related to the first sub-problem are presented under four main themes: expectations of support in the idea development process, expectations for motivation, expectations for professional development, and expectations regarding participation in decision-making processes. The results are presented using descriptive analysis, including categories, codes, frequencies (f), and direct quotations from participants in Türkiye and Palestine.

Theme 1: Expectations of Support in the Idea Development Process

This theme examines teachers' expectations regarding the support they receive from school principals during the development and implementation of new ideas. The theme includes three categories: administrative support, effective communication, and resource management.

Across both contexts, teachers reported expectations related to objective evaluation of ideas, communication practices, and access to necessary resources. Palestinian teachers reported higher frequencies in most codes, particularly in flexibility, procedural support, and provision of time and opportunities for implementing ideas.

Table 1.

Expectations of Support in the Idea Development Process

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Administrative Support	Objective evaluation of projects	3	7
	Flexibility and initiative	1	4
	Support with legal procedures	2	4
	Providing time and opportunities	1	4
Effective Communication	Active listening and understanding	2	5
	Fair and impartial treatment	3	3
	Taking teachers' ideas seriously	1	4
Resource Management	Financial/material support	6	8
	Inter-institutional collaboration	1	4

The Palestinian teacher Fayroza stated: *"I expect the principal to create time and space away from the pressure of the school schedule so that I can implement my initiative."* While The Turkish teacher Tutku stated: *"I wish the principal could take some of my classes to give me time to work on project development."*

Theme 2: Expectations for Motivation

This theme explores teachers' expectations regarding motivational factors in their professional roles. It includes recognition and appreciation, emotional support, and material incentives.

Teachers in both groups emphasized recognition and appreciation as important motivational factors. Palestinian teachers reported higher frequencies in verbal, public, and formal recognition. Emotional support was reported in both contexts, while material incentives were mentioned only by Palestinian teachers.

Table 2.

Expectations for Motivation

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Recognition & Appreciation	Verbal appreciation	3	6

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Emotional Support	Public recognition	2	4
	Formal recognition	1	4
	Personal interaction	3	3
	Empathy	2	3
	Psychological encouragement	1	4
Material Incentives	Financial rewards	0	4
	Small gifts	0	3

The Turkish teacher **Tarık** stated: “*The primary condition for increasing teacher motivation is to value the teacher, to sit with them in the teachers’ room, have tea, and talk.*” Similarly, the Palestinian teacher **Fatma** emphasized, “*I expect the principal to encourage and motivate teachers with at least kind words.*”

Theme 3: Expectations for Professional Development

This theme addresses teachers’ expectations regarding training opportunities, institutional support, and professional growth. It includes training and courses, facilitation and support, and lack of motivation for professional development.

Palestinian teachers reported higher expectations for practical workshops, needs-based training, and postgraduate opportunities. Turkish teachers reported lower expectations in several categories and more references to limited engagement in professional development processes.

Table 3.

Expectations for Professional Development

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Training & Courses	Practical workshops	2	7
	Needs-based courses	2	6
	Project opportunities	1	0
Facilitation & Support	Postgraduate flexibility	3	7
	Participation permission	1	4
	Encouragement & guidance	3	0
Lack of Motivation	Reduced expectations	3	0
	Lack of interest	1	0
	Satisfaction with training	3	0

The Turkish teacher **Tuğba** emphasized: “*They should present us with projects and opportunities that help us improve in different areas... We enjoy it more when we do things in a practical way.*”

The Palestinian teacher **Fares** stated: *I expect my school principal to support me by enabling me to participate in courses, seminars, and workshops.*”

Theme 4: Expectation of Participation in Decision-Making Processes

This theme examines teachers’ expectations regarding participation in school decision-making processes. It includes democratic participation, communication and leadership, empowerment and role distribution, and professional respect.

Teachers in Türkiye reported higher frequencies in shared decision-making, while Palestinian teachers emphasized equal participation, autonomy, and leadership sharing. Both groups valued professional respect, particularly in relation to valuing teachers’ opinions and fostering trust.

Table 4.

Expectations for Participation in Decision-Making Processes

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Democratic Participation	Shared decision-making	6	3
	Equal participation	3	5
	Collective decision-making	4	3
Communication & Leadership	Active listening	4	2
	Open dialogue	1	3
	Explaining decisions	1	1
Empowerment & Roles	Autonomy in decisions	0	7
	Leadership sharing	0	4
	Fair distribution of duties	1	2
Professional Respect	Valuing teachers' opinions	5	4
	Encouraging creativity	1	2
	Mutual trust	1	3

Tahir from Türkiye stated: “*Decisions that concern all of us should be taken together... If one person says ‘I made the decision and everyone must follow,’ it will not be productive.*” Faten from Palestine expressed: “*When the school faces a problem, I expect the principal to sit with the teachers, present the issue, and listen to the proposed solutions.*”

Findings Related to the Second Sub-Problem

The findings related to the second sub-problem are presented according to four main themes: fulfillment of expectations regarding teachers’ suggestions, fulfillment of motivational expectations, fulfillment of professional development expectations, and fulfillment of expectations regarding participation in decision-making processes. The results are presented descriptively using categories, codes, frequencies (f), and direct quotations from Turkish and Palestinian teachers.

Theme 1: Fulfillment of Expectations Regarding Suggestions

This theme examines the extent to which teachers’ expectations for support in implementing their suggestions are fulfilled. It includes three categories: level of support, criteria for receiving support, and barriers to support.

Across both contexts, teachers reported varying levels of support ranging from full to no support. Partial support was the most frequently reported category in both groups. Turkish teachers reported a slightly higher frequency of no support compared to Palestinian teachers.

Criteria for receiving support included financial limitations, school priorities, legal regulations, and project feasibility, with Palestinian teachers reporting these criteria more frequently. Barriers such as budget constraints and bureaucratic procedures were reported by both groups, while personal bias was reported only by Palestinian teachers.

Table 5.

Fulfillment of Expectations Regarding Teachers’ Suggestions

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Level of Support	Full support	3	3
	Partial support	5	5
	Minimal support	2	4
	No support	2	0
Criteria for Support	Financial limitations	1	2
	School priorities	0	2
	Legal regulations	0	2

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Barriers	Project potential	0	2
	Budget constraints	1	1
	Bureaucratic procedures	1	1
	Personal bias	0	2

Turkish teacher Tahir summarized the situation as follows: *“This year they have started to provide a small amount of money, but they say you can only use this money to buy cleaning supplies, nothing else.”* Meanwhile, Fatma from Palestine explained how procedural and personal barriers intertwine: *“I try to convince the principal of how beneficial the project or idea can be for students and the school, but he sees this as disrespect toward his authority.”*

Theme 2: Fulfillment of Motivation Expectations

This theme explores the extent to which principals meet teachers’ motivational expectations. It includes level of motivational support and forms of motivation.

Teachers in both contexts reported different levels of motivational support. Partial support was the most frequently reported category among Palestinian teachers, while Turkish teachers reported slightly higher frequencies in limited support.

Verbal appreciation was the most commonly reported form of motivation, particularly among Palestinian teachers. Emotional support and moral/financial recognition were reported at lower frequencies in both groups.

Table 6.

Fulfillment of Motivational Expectations

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Level of Support	High support	4	3
	Partial support	3	5
	Limited support	5	4
Forms of Motivation	Verbal appreciation	2	7
	Emotional support	2	2
	Moral/financial recognition	1	2

Tülin, a Turkish teacher, shared that verbal recognition positively influenced her motivation: *“Our institutional leader meets my expectation in terms of academic guidance and leadership. He verbally acknowledges the work we do in the school.”*

Fatma from Palestine explained how verbal encouragement boosted her energy and engagement: *“When the educational supervisor visits, the principal talks about the teacher’s success and performance. This encouragement makes the teacher go to work with more energy.”*

Theme 3: Fulfillment of Professional Development Expectations

This theme examines the extent to which principals meet teachers’ expectations for professional development.

The most frequently reported category among Turkish teachers was insufficient support, while Palestinian teachers reported a more balanced distribution across insufficient, partial, and full support. Full support was reported only by Palestinian teachers.

Partial support was reported equally in both groups, indicating that principals provide some level of professional development support, although it is not consistently sufficient.

Table 7.

Fulfillment of Professional Development Expectations

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Level of Support	Insufficient support	7	3
	Partial support	5	5
	Full support	0	4

Tuna, the Turkish teacher explained: “*They support us as much as they can. They share in-service training opportunities through WhatsApp and encourage us to apply.*” In contrast, Fadwa, the Palestinian teacher, noted that support was selective: “*The principal does not provide these opportunities to some teachers, because if it does not benefit the school, their expectations are not met.*”

Theme 4: Fulfillment of Expectations Regarding Participation in Decision-Making Processes

This theme examines the extent to which teachers are involved in school decision-making processes. Low participation was the most frequently reported category in both groups. Partial participation was also commonly reported, while full participation was reported by a smaller number of teachers, particularly in Palestine.

Overall, teachers in both contexts indicated limited involvement in decision-making processes, with variation in the degree of participation.

Table 8.

Fulfillment of Expectations for Participation in Decision-Making Processes

Category	Code	Türkiye (f)	Palestine (f)
Level of Support	Low participation	6	6
	Partial participation	3	5
	Full participation	3	1

Tuna described a positive experience: “*If I want to be involved and have ideas, they are valued.*” Likewise, Farah emphasized an inclusive approach: “*The principal listens to everyone... and we try to make the best decision together.*”

Overall, the findings indicate that teachers in Türkiye and Palestine share similar expectations regarding teacher leadership, particularly in relation to participation, motivation, professional development, and administrative support. However, the extent to which these expectations are fulfilled varies across the two contexts, reflecting differences in structural and organizational conditions.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This section discusses the findings in relation to teachers’ expectations of school principals and the extent to which these expectations are met in Türkiye and Palestine, in light of existing literature on teacher leadership, administrative support, and distributed leadership.

Comparative Overview of Findings

Table 6 provides a comparative synthesis of Turkish and Palestinian teachers’ expectations and the extent to which these expectations are fulfilled across four main domains: support for idea development, motivational support, professional development, and participation in decision-making. The table highlights both convergences and contextual variations in how teacher leadership is experienced in the two settings.

Table 9.

Comparative Overview of Fulfillment of Teacher Expectations by School Principals in Turkey and Palestine

Main Theme	Category / Focus	Turkish Teachers’ Perspective	Palestinian Teachers’ Perspective
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Support in Idea and Initiative Development	Administrative Support	Expected scientific and objective evaluation of ideas; limited expectations for flexibility and initiative; some support in legal and bureaucratic procedures; limited provision of time and opportunities	Broader expectations for flexibility and initiative; higher need for support in legal and bureaucratic procedures; stronger emphasis on providing time and opportunities
	Effective Communication	Focus on neutrality and fairness; some attention to active listening and valuing projects	Greater emphasis on active listening, valuing projects, and ensuring equal and fair treatment
	Resource Management	Limited material and logistical support; minimal collaboration with external stakeholders	Greater material and logistical support; stronger collaboration with external institutions and local communities
Fulfillment of Motivation Expectations	Level of Motivational Support	High motivational support reported by some teachers; partial or limited support for others	Often partial or limited support; some cases of full support
	Forms of Motivation	Verbal appreciation, emotional support, empathy; less emphasis on material incentives	Verbal, public, and formal recognition; emotional, spiritual, and material appreciation; stronger emphasis on moral support and material incentives
Fulfillment of Professional Development Expectations	Level of Support	Often insufficient support; partial support for some teachers; concerns about lack of motivation	Partial support common; some teachers report full support including courses, seminars, and personalized development initiatives
	Facilitation and Flexibility	Focus on encouragement and guidance; limited flexibility for pursuing higher education	Focus on flexibility for higher education and leadership development; responsiveness to teachers' needs
	Training and Courses	Limited participation in practical workshops or needs-based training	Greater expectations for practical workshops and needs-based training
Fulfillment of Expectations Regarding Participation in Decision-Making	Low Participation	Limited or no participation; decisions often made individually by the principal	Limited participation for selected teachers; consultation usually occurs on specific issues
	Partial Participation	Selective involvement; sometimes strictly regulated by policies	Selective participation; some teachers' ideas prioritized over others
	Full Participation	Few teachers reported full participation with clear explanation for unimplemented ideas	Rare; some examples of open meetings and collaborative decision-making
	Key Features	Transparency, fairness, explanation of decisions	Inclusiveness, trust, professional respect, shared leadership in decision-making

The table illustrates that while teachers in both Turkey and Palestine share similar expectations regarding support, motivation, professional development, and participation in decision-making, the degree of fulfilment varies between the two contexts. Overall, Palestinian teachers tend to report broader expectations, whereas Turkish teachers more frequently emphasize structured and procedural support. These findings indicate both contextual similarities and differences in the implementation of school leadership practices.

Building on these comparative findings, the following sections provide an analytical discussion of how these expectations are shaped, interpreted, and enacted within the Turkish and Palestinian contexts.

Teachers' Expectations of School Principals in Developing Teacher Leadership

The findings demonstrate a strong convergence in teachers' expectations regarding the role of school principals in fostering teacher leadership in both Türkiye and Palestine. Across both contexts, teachers consistently emphasized four interrelated dimensions of administrative support: fostering initiative and idea development, providing motivational and emotional support, ensuring continuous professional development opportunities, and enabling meaningful participation in decision-making

processes. These expectations reflect a shared understanding of teacher leadership as an organizationally embedded and socially constructed process rather than an individual attribute.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align with teacher leadership scholarship that conceptualizes leadership as a distributed and relational practice enacted across multiple actors within schools rather than concentrated in formal administrative positions (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Schott et al., 2020; Spillane, 2006). Within this framework, principals function as key enablers of teacher agency by creating conditions of trust, participation, and professional autonomy. Accordingly, administrative action becomes a structuring condition for the emergence of teacher leadership rather than merely a managerial function (Birky et al., 2006; Uddin, 2020).

Across both contexts, participation in decision-making emerged as a central expectation, reflecting teachers' desire for professional voice and shared governance. This finding is consistent with empirical studies demonstrating that distributed decision-making strengthens teacher leadership capacity and professional engagement (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Similarly, professional development was viewed not as episodic training but as sustained, practice-based learning embedded within school routines, which aligns with evidence highlighting the importance of continuous and context-sensitive professional learning for leadership development (Carswell, 2021; Fancera & An, 2025; Galdames-Calderón, 2023). Motivational support—particularly through recognition, trust, and constructive feedback—was also identified as a key relational driver of teacher leadership, supporting prior research emphasizing the centrality of relational trust in school improvement processes (Sebullen & Jimenez, 2024; Tosun & Bozkurt Bostancı, 2024).

Although expectations were largely convergent, their emphasis reflects contextualized interpretations of leadership. Turkish teachers tended to associate administrative support with reducing bureaucratic constraints and expanding formal participation in governance structures, consistent with research on centralized systems limiting distributed leadership enactment (Özdemir et al., 2024). In contrast, Palestinian teachers emphasized flexibility, autonomy, and practical facilitation of initiatives, reflecting the adaptive demands of working within resource-constrained and politically unstable environments (Alnakhala & Şahin-Fırat, 2025). These differences suggest that teacher leadership expectations are not fundamentally different but are shaped by opportunity structures embedded in educational systems.

Contextual Realization of Teacher Leadership

Despite shared expectations, the extent to which these expectations are fulfilled differs markedly between the two contexts. In Türkiye, teachers reported that centralized governance structures and bureaucratic accountability mechanisms constrain principals' discretionary power. While institutional stability and resource availability are relatively strong, hierarchical decision-making structures limit meaningful teacher participation. This finding is consistent with literature indicating that centralized systems often create a structural tension between policy-level support for collaboration and the practical limitations of implementation (Özdemir et al., 2024).

In contrast, the Palestinian context is characterized by chronic resource shortages, infrastructural instability, and ongoing socio-political constraints. Under these conditions, administrative support is primarily enacted through relational leadership practices such as emotional support, solidarity, trust-building, and informal flexibility. Teacher leadership therefore emerges as an adaptive response to systemic fragility, where teachers often assume additional responsibilities to sustain educational continuity (Alnakhala & Şahin-Fırat, 2025; UNESCO, 2015). Notably, teachers' accounts indicate that professional commitment frequently compensates for structural deficiencies, highlighting the resilience-based nature of teacher leadership in such contexts.

Taken together, these findings suggest that structural abundance does not automatically generate participatory leadership, nor does structural scarcity eliminate it. Instead, teacher leadership is mediated through the interaction between institutional constraints and relational practices enacted within schools.

Administrative Support as a Mediating Mechanism

The findings underscore administrative support as a central mediating mechanism between institutional structures and teacher leadership practices. Rather than functioning as a direct output of policy or organizational design, administrative support operates through principals' daily relational actions, including communication, recognition, trust-building, and inclusion.

This mediating role is strongly supported by prior empirical evidence indicating that administrative support significantly shapes teacher leadership levels when translated into practice through school leadership behaviors (Tosun & Bozkurt Bostancı, 2024; Dağlı & Kalkan, 2021). In both contexts, teachers emphasized that institutional resources and policies alone are insufficient unless they are activated through supportive leadership practices. When principals acknowledge teacher contributions and enable participation, structural constraints become less restrictive; conversely, when such practices are absent, teacher leadership remains limited regardless of institutional conditions.

Importantly, the meaning of administrative support is context-sensitive. In Türkiye, it is primarily associated with procedural inclusion and formal decision-making authority, whereas in Palestine it is closely linked to emotional solidarity, adaptability, and enabling continuity under constraint. This indicates that administrative support should be understood as a situated construct embedded within broader socio-political and institutional environments rather than a universal leadership mechanism.

Professional Development, Motivation, and Relational Trust

Professional development emerged as a key enabling factor for teacher leadership across both contexts. Consistent with prior research, effective professional development is characterized by continuity, contextual relevance, and integration into school-based practice rather than isolated training interventions (Galdames-Calderón, 2023; Fancera & An, 2025; He et al., 2024). However, systemic constraints shape its accessibility and effectiveness, particularly in centralized or resource-limited systems.

Motivational support, particularly through recognition and emotional validation, also plays a decisive role in shaping teachers' leadership engagement. Teachers consistently emphasized that trust and recognition strengthen professional identity and increase willingness to take initiative. This aligns with research demonstrating that recognition is not only motivational but also constitutive of professional legitimacy and teacher agency (Scallon et al., 2021; Ghamrawi, 2011). Across both contexts, relational trust emerged as a foundational condition for sustaining teacher leadership practices.

Contextual Interpretation of Leadership Constraints

The comparative analysis reveals two distinct yet structurally constraining environments for teacher leadership. In Türkiye, bureaucratic centralization limits distributed decision-making by constraining principals' autonomy. In Palestine, structural instability and resource scarcity restrict institutional capacity and formal leadership development opportunities. Despite these differences, both contexts demonstrate that teacher leadership is partially constrained by structural conditions that cannot be addressed through policy interventions alone.

However, findings also indicate that relational leadership practices can partially mitigate these constraints. Trust, recognition, and inclusive communication enable teachers to exercise leadership agency even in restrictive environments. This supports the argument that teacher leadership is not structurally determined but relationally enacted through everyday school interactions (Spillane, 2006; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

This study demonstrates that teachers in Türkiye and Palestine share highly similar expectations regarding the role of school principals in supporting teacher leadership, particularly in relation to participation, motivation, professional development, and recognition. However, the extent to which these expectations are fulfilled differs significantly due to contextual and systemic conditions.

Overall, the findings indicate that teacher leadership is not solely a function of formal organizational design but is fundamentally shaped by relational leadership practices enacted within schools. Distributed leadership, when operationalized through trust, recognition, and participatory

cultures, constitutes a critical mechanism for enabling teacher leadership across contrasting educational contexts.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to teacher leadership literature by offering comparative qualitative insights from Türkiye and Palestine. It reinforces the understanding of teacher leadership as a relational and context-dependent construct shaped by administrative practices, while also highlighting the mediating role of perceived support.

Practical Implications

The findings highlight the importance of inclusive and supportive leadership practices. School principals should promote participation, recognition, and continuous professional development. Policymakers should reduce bureaucratic constraints that limit school autonomy. In resource-limited contexts, strengthening relational leadership and community collaboration may serve as an effective strategy for enhancing teacher leadership.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations related to its qualitative design and limited sample size, which restrict generalizability. Additionally, data were collected before the escalation of the Gaza conflict in October 2023; therefore, they do not reflect subsequent educational disruptions. Future research could adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to examine changes in administrative support under evolving socio-political conditions.

Disclosure Statements

Contribution rate statement of the researchers:

Both authors contributed equally to this study.

Conflict of interest statement:

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Najlaa J. F. ALNAKHALA & Necla SAHIN FIRAT : Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing – review & editing.

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Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed.