ELT Female Leadership in Latin America: Identity and Support[1]

Araceli Salas Serrano[2], Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the way twelve female leaders in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Latin America have lived their leadership roles in relation to their identity as transformational female leaders. This qualitative multiple-case study used a cross-case analysis to find the similarities and differences among the different leadership cases identified among the participants through a questionnaire during the fall of 2019. The participants were chosen for their active participation and for playing a relevant leadership role, either in their local educational contexts or in their English Language Teaching Associations (ELTAs). The group of participants shared their views on their Latin identity, leadership, female collaboration, role modeling, and female support networks. Among the most relevant findings was that female leadership identity is still a challenge and a matter of perseverance and hard work. The obstacles the participants (or female leaders) still face are gender stereotypes, cultural stereotypes, and gender roles. However, ELT female leaders in Latin America want to use their skills and capacities to lead in their challenging and caring Latin-American ways.

Resumen

El propósito de este estudio fue explorar la forma en que doce mujeres líderes en la Enseñanza de Inglés (ELT) en América Latina han vivido su liderazgo en relación con su identidad como mujeres líderes. El estudio siguió un enfoque cualitativo que, según Marshall y Rossman (2011), se considera el más adecuado para explorar las experiencias de líderes. Este estudio cualitativo de casos múltiples utilizó un análisis de casos cruzados para encontrar las similitudes y diferencias entre los diferentes casos de liderazgo entre las participantes por medio de un cuestionario en otoño de 2019. Las participantes fueron elegidas por su participación y relevancia, ya sea en sus contextos educativos o por sus funciones en sus asociaciones de profesores de inglés (ELTA). Las participantes compartieron sus puntos de vista sobre su identidad latina, liderazgo, colaboración femenina, modelos a seguir y redes de apoyo femenino. Entre los hallazgos más relevantes, se encontró que la identidad del liderazgo femenino sigue siendo un desafío y una cuestión de perseverancia y trabajo. Los obstáculos que aún enfrentan son los estereotipos, la cultura y los roles de género. Sin embargo, las mujeres líderes de ELT en América Latina están dispuestas a usar sus habilidades y capacidades para liderar a su estilo.

Introduction

Leadership, as many other human activities, is a social and cultural practice. Fairclough (2003) affirms that practices are built on social structures shaped by experiences and local events. Additionally, social learning theories propose that people learn from what more experienced peers or leaders do (Johnson, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This way, leadership, as a social practice, takes local and current elements from the environment where it is enacted; that is, leadership becomes culturally and contextually delimited (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Regarding leadership as a cultural practice, Vilas-Boas et al. (2018) affirm that leadership as a cultural practice focuses on the *modus operandi* of leadership, that is how leaders relate context and culture to their leadership performance. This article attempts to see female leadership from both social and cultural perspectives.

Leadership can be defined in different ways. For example, Kouzes and Posner (2012) defined leadership as a set of skills and abilities influenced and shaped by elements such as culture, gender, and ethnicity, among others. Additionally, leadership has been considered a process toward the achievement of goals (Northouse, 2019; Wolinski, 2023). It can also be an identity or a goal for which specific and individual traits and skills, as well as appropriate cultural awareness, need to be developed. However, leadership is exercised by individuals, that is the leaders who also take different roles and dimensions.

Along with the concept of leadership, the figure of the leader has been defined as "anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes and who has the courage to develop that potential" (Brown, 2018, p. 2). A definition within the educational environment was established by Sergiovanni (2000), who said that leaders are the ones who bring different people into a common cause by turning a school into a community. In this way, leaders possess a high status in organizations or institutions and become role models to follow (Brown et al., 2005; Su et al., 2020). Finally, as Leithwood et al. (2004)

conclude, leadership in the educational field may have an impact on the students' learning and their performance in the end. In order to explore the nature of female leadership, it is necessary to know how different leaders can act depending on the sceneries and stances from where they perform their leadership.

Features such as race, context, and profession may also affect leadership (Komives et al., 2006). As a result, the beliefs that a society has about gender roles may influence the way leadership is locally performed by men and women. Consequently, the relationship between gender and culture may present additional challenges for women on their way to leadership (Abalkhail, 2017; Eagly et al., 2003; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012) given the cultural and social expectations that societies bestow on women in different parts the world. Additionally, Stephenson (2018) found that leadership can be learned, and that learning usually occurs according to the context and time in which it happens. Therefore, leadership involves an alignment of becoming, being, and acting appropriately as a leader, according to the culture and time when a leading role is enacted. That is why females may try to adapt their leadership to the practices of the corresponding culture and this may mean an overload of responsibilities for females who opt for leadership roles.

The context in which the present study was conducted was the English language teaching (ELT) field, specifically within a teaching English to speakers of other languages' (TESOL) perspective. The ELT/TESOL field is an especially interesting context in which to explore leadership as an act of becoming, given the diversity of leaders and leadership perspectives and practices in the TESOL field as Raza and Chua (2022) have established. The fact that language teachers may become international leaders in the field gives the ELT profession an additional branch of exploration. Immersed in the TESOL leadership paradigm, this qualitative multiple-case study explores the way twelve ELT female leaders in Latin America have lived their leadership roles in relation to their identity as female leaders within their context and aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Which elements influence the development of the leadership identity of this

group of female leaders?

2. How have these ELT female leaders in Latin America experienced their leadership roles?

Literature Review

Theories of leadership

In the field of education, teachers may take the path of becoming leaders. According to Covey (1989), leadership can be considered as a process of professional development for teachers. However, there are no directions to becoming a leader, at least not in the field of ELT. Leadership may include different areas of knowledge or levels of experience. Educational leaders may contribute to the community's social and economic benefits by empowering individuals to increase their knowledge and well-being as well as the success of education (Azcoitia et al., 2020). Leaders perform their guiding in different ways; therefore, a set of theories on this skill has been developed. The theories developed may help describe the reasons for leadership and the development of individuals in their journey to leadership. Some of the leadership theories in relation to transformational leadership are described below:

Situational leadership. This theory is based on the importance of context. In this theory, the leader sets objectives and acts according to the context. Ghazzawi et al. (2017) claim that situational leadership is a model which integrates directive and supportive dimensions by developing a competence to read situations. An example of this is when groups get together in order to perform a task, the leadership is temporary and appropriate to the situation.

Transactional leadership. This approach emphasizes hierarchy and the exercise of authority to motivate performance, efficiency and goal achievement. This theory bases leadership on creating structures that meet the expectations of organizations. Additionally it focuses on the effectiveness of the leader which should result in the satisfaction of followers according to Avolio and Bass (2002). This kind of leadership is found in organizations or companies where all members want to get benefits from the interactions that take place there.

Instructional leadership. This type of leadership supports the development of teaching and learning. It encourages effective teaching and learning and guides toward instructional improvement through communication skills, pedagogical knowledge, and the ability to solve problems (DeWitt, 2020). School leaders focus on the achievement of goals and success in overcoming educational changes (Hallinger &

Heck, 2010) to improve teaching and learning (Shaked et al., 2019). As its name suggests, this leadership is enacted in educational contexts.

Transformational leadership. According to this theory, effective leaders inspire staff to develop skills and to go beyond their abilities (Dinh et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2013). McGregor (2003) adds that transformational leaders convince their followers and envision the future by helping them develop. This type of leadership develops when a leader inspires followers to make positive changes, for example, in professional development tasks.

The different theories on leadership help leaders identify the purpose of their role according to their contexts and individual traits. However, the perspective that the current study aims to examine is the transformational theory of leadership as it focuses on the leaders' need for meaning and change. McGregor (2003) affirms that a transformational leader identifies the need for change and helps to create it. They focus on and grow new talent and build common values and goals. More specifically, this paper focuses on female transformational leadership, as studies on female transformational leaders are still scarce, especially in the Latin America context.

Female leadership

Female leadership may follow the social and cultural practices where it is enacted. Lagarde (2000) explains that "modern women are convened to be citizens with (limited) rights and with high personal, social and political responsibilities" (p. 33). This paradigm may involve dual perspectives for women, between enacting traditional or modern roles in their communities. Women have traditionally been considered caregivers or educators in some cultures (Shoaib et al., 2012); however, some of them have stepped into leadership roles with their natural or perceived innate female characteristics by society and use them as part of their unique leadership traits. However, recently, women are taking relevant roles where they have to exercise different roles which include traditional roles such as mothers or teachers along with modern roles such as supervisors or even politicians.

The different roles that women take involve the display of different individual characteristics. Eagly and Carli (2007) identify some feminine leadership characteristics; for example, female leaders have been seen as naturally more emotional and able to empathize with others. Additionally, Fiske and Taylor (2013) claim that women´s leadership might encounter ideological challenges, and society may find it hard to think of women as capable leaders due to traditional gender roles. As a result, women have not always seen themselves as leaders; their self-image fluctuates between the society´s expectations and their own self-perception as citizens and professionals.

In particular, Latina American women (Latinas) still face social issues such as racism, stereotypes, inequality in salaries and the cultural responsibilities traditionally given to them. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2023), "Latin America and the Caribbean will take 53 years to attain full gender parity" (p. 6). Therefore, balancing their personal and professional roles has been part of the development of identity of female leadership (Berggren, 2008). This is true for most of the Latin American countries where the participants in this study were born: Mexico, Ecuador, Honduras or Colombia. In Latin America, women tend to prioritize the importance of family, which affects their work-life balance (Ortega-Liston & Rodriguez Soto, 2014). Being a woman, a leader and a Latina may represent a bigger challenge as representatives of a minority in contexts where most leaders are still men. Recently, more women have taken leadership roles in education in Colombia and Mexico. However, women from Latin America, in general, still have a lower representation as leaders in all levels of education (Longman & Anderson, 2016).

Developing a female leadership identity

Leadership can be developed through interaction with peers. Leadership identity is perceived through experiences, practices, roles, social interactions, and feedback from oneself and from others (Ibarra et al., 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Baxter (2010) claims that the way women use language towards themselves, and the way others refer to them as leaders may also impact the way women lead. Language is one of the manifestations of social practices, Lave and Wenger (1991) identified discourse as a relevant dimension of Communities of Practice given that the use of language includes the assumptions and ways of thinking and doing things in the community. Regarding female leadership, Baxter (2010) also affirms that leadership is constructed by the choices speakers make, then, when female leaders use language, they make linguistic decisions on how to perform their leadership individually and supported by peers.

DeRue and Ashford (2010) identify three levels in the process of leadership identity construction: a) individual, b) relational, and c) collective levels. Leadership identity is based on self-concept, including thoughts and beliefs, and contributes to transmitting an image to others until peers validate the identity of a leader. Therefore, for emerging leaders, it is important to consider self-image and the way others perceive them (Day, et al., 2014; Fischbach et al, 2015) as feelings of confidence and self-esteem are relevant for women. In this sense, Hersted and Frimann (2016) have affirmed that leadership and leadership identity emerge from life experiences; however, for women, these life experiences may shape the self-image or the mental image they have of themselves which is essential for their identity development in the education field where many of the leaders are women who are influenced by their sense of self and their emotions.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015), more than half of the teachers in the world are born females. However, leadership positions are usually held by men in most contexts; therefore, women are not well represented in leadership positions in the educational field where they represent a majority of the workforce. McGee et al. (2014) affirmed that there is a need for research into leadership in contexts of ELT, due to the growth of the field, the increasing number leaders in ELT and the impact of teachers´ leadership on teaching practices. Therefore, as a result of the increasing number of female leaders at the moment, research on this field has also increased in order to explore female leadership characteristics and practices in an emerging scenario.

One of these studies is the one done by Komives et al. (2005), who identified a model of six phases in the identity development of female leaders which they called the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model. The first phase refers to the identification of the presence of leaders and it occurs when a leader emerges, and the community recognizes her. Then, the second stage begins when the emerging leader engages with other characters recognized by the community. The third stage in the leadership process occurs when the leader is identified among the hierarchies of the group and the fourth stage develops when the leader shares the same views as the group. The fifth stage refers to the way hierarchies in the groups facilitate the development of new leaders, and the final stage comes when these leaders claim their identity as leaders and take their place within the community.

Along the six stages in the LID model, the leader changes views on herself, develops confidence and acquires new skills while going through a process of reflective learning and meaningful involvement (Komives et al., 2005). Additionally, Gonzales and Lambert (2001) identify recognition and feedback as relevant elements in the development of teacher leadership identity. Regarding women, and following female leader trajectories, DeFrank-Cole and Tan (2017) classify the development of them in four domains: a) Gender societal: how culture defines gender roles, b) Organizational: the type of structure in which women enact their leadership, c) Interpersonal domain: that which oversees all types of relationships in which women get involved, and d) Individual: the unique factors in the development of a woman as a leader. This four-domain framework is a tool to identify the different domains that influence the development of female leaders. Each one presents opportunities and challenges, but also strategies for women to use to succeed in their leadership identity development process by analyzing their initial stance and the domains in which they want to make a change or impact the most. Together, the four areas may cover all aspects that enhance the construction of women's leadership identities (Debebe, 2011; Hersted & Frimann, 2016) based on their individual perspectives, the interactions they hold with peers, and the relationship they have within the communities in which they perform.

When female leaders' skills and talents are recognized, they feel better about themselves, and their confidence increases, since the lack of confidence could reduce their career aspirations (Carlin et al., 2018). Reflection can also impact individual leadership development and self-concept (Komives et al., 2005), as can interaction with colleagues (Howe & Stubbs, 2003; Lewthwaite, 2006). This development may also be influenced by culture, as successful leadership behavior may differ across cultures (House et al., 2004). In Latin America the leadership of women is still challenged by the expectations local societies have on women and their roles.

Other cultural elements that may have an impact on the leadership identity development of female teachers are emotional traits. Society tends to view women as overemotional or lacking education with respect to their capacity for leadership (Ely et al., 2011; Fischbach et al., 2015). Analyzing how women claim that their skills and competencies are challenged more than men at the professional level might help explain the struggle women face due to gender and cultural stereotypes (Fischbach et al., 2015; Kellerman & Rhode, 2017; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Female leadership may also impact the transmission of gender roles across different generations. According to Brue and Brue (2016), female leaders have described leadership as a mindset and not only a role to play. In consequence, women find leadership difficult due to the expectations and the social constructs of their gender in most cultures in the world. Therefore, it is relevant for young women to see other women reaching higher positions so that they will be able to function as role models in the future. Gilliard and Okonjo-Iweala (2020) affirm that when women are exposed to women in leadership, they are encouraged to see it as something feasible for them too.

Female leadership also involves great responsibility since when women become leaders, they also become role models for younger generations. This may explain why female leaders seem to be, for society in general, more dependent on human relationships (as mothers, wives, or caretakers) because they develop their leadership identities through these interactions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). In light of the arguments above, this study aimed to explore how ELT female leaders in Latin America have experienced their leadership roles as well as to identify some of the elements that have influenced their leadership identity development process.

Methodology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), "[q]ualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world" (p. 3). Creswell (2013) explains that this perspective allows researchers to address individuals or groups who might face a social or human problem. Therefore, researchers collect data based on words from a small number of individuals. This way, the participants' views constitute the center of qualitative research which was considered the most appropriate approach for this research to explore the experiences of leaders (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Additionally, the study could give young female leaders the opportunity to compare and contrast their own perspectives and beliefs regarding the ELT field.

This collective (multiple) case study may also lead to some conclusions as Lieberson (2000) explains that would be inaccessible when studying a single case. Regarding the data analysis a cross-case method as Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) recommend was used to compare similarities and differences among the different cases. This type of analysis makes it possible to explore different aspects of a problem from several viewpoints, which can lead to generalizations. The data provided an in-depth understanding of the participants' answers to the questions regarding their individual perspectives on leadership, their interactions with peers and role models, as well as their expectations for female teachers and leaders.

Context

In ELT, two of the organizations where teachers can grow and develop professionally are the educational institutions where they work and English language teacher associations (ELTAs). In most Latin American countries, educational institutions are either private or public. The private institutions are owned and run by a particular person or a group of partners. On the other hand, public institutions are run by the government of the country where it is established. Parents or students choose the institution according to their local context, income, or views on education. The participants of the study worked in both types of institutions.

ELTAs are organizations built by members who meet on a voluntary basis and organize different events. Lamb (2012) defined a language teacher association as an organization which contributes to the personal and professional development of language teachers. Additionally, ELTAs provide a space for networking and growth in the words of Bailey et al. (2009). In Latin America, there are a number of ELTAs in which teachers interact and share professional development activities, such as ECUATESOL in Ecuador, HELTA in Honduras, MEXTESOL in Mexico, PARATESOL in Paraguay and BELTA in Bolivia.

Within these two venues, boards of directors in educational institutions and in ELTAs where most of the members and teachers are women, many of the highest positions are held by men as the 2023 Gender Gap Economic Forum recently published (World Economic Forum, 2023). Normally, directors, coordinators, supervisors and even the leaders of ELTAs, especially in Latin America, are men. The participants of the study were selected and invited due to their gender and the role they play as leaders in the two settings mentioned.

Participants

The participants of the study were twelve female Latin American ELT college teachers who answered an invitation through mail, and once they accepted, they submitted their consent to be part of the study. The

participants were chosen and invited based on two criteria: a) their involvement and participation in their educational contexts or b) their leadership roles in their ELTA in Latin America. Twenty invitations were sent, twelve female leaders answered positively, and they became the participants. Table 1 presents the participants' nationalities, teaching experience (in years), as well as the context in which they perform their leadership. All names are pseudonyms.

Participant (Pseudonym)	Country	Teaching Experience (years)	Context
Ms. Palma	Mexico	20	ELTA
Ms. Vera	Perú	19	ELTA
Ms. Alba	Mexico	26	English Coordinator
Ms. Torres	Bolivia	27	ELTA
Ms. Costa	Brazil	30	English Coordinator
Ms. Morales	Mexico	25	ELTA
Ms. Cano	Colombia	15	English Coordinator
Ms. Herrera	Ecuador	22	ELTA
Ms. García	Uruguay	26	English Coordinator
Ms. Tellez	Colombia	15	English Coordinator
Ms. Rojas	Mexico	22	ELTA
Ms. Escobar	Mexico	20	ELTA & English Coordinator

Table 1: The participants

The instrument

To collect the participants' views on their female leadership roles, a mailed questionnaire was designed. A mailed questionnaire is an appropriate way to reach participants or a sample of a population who are geographically dispersed (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the instrument was an e-mailed questionnaire. In qualitative research, it is important to collect information based on the words, beliefs, and perceptions of a small number of individuals. The questions (See Appendix) were carefully designed to cover three specific fields based on the domains classified by DeFrank-Cole and Tan (2017): individual perspectives (characteristics and goals), support from female peers and role models and future expectations for female leaders in their local contexts

The questions were open-ended "so that the participants [could] best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (Creswell, 2012, p. 218).

Data collection

Two colleagues, both ELT professionals, validated the questionnaire: the coordinator of a BA program in ELT and an ELTA delegate from Central America, representing the participants of the study. These specialists revised the quality and appropriacy of the questions according to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was then e-mailed to the participants. The research was done during the fall of 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic. The participants took on average, a month to send their answers back via electronic mail. When the twelve questionnaires were received, data analysis began.

Data analysis

When the questionnaires were received, the answers from the participants were put together in an Excel spreadsheet according to each of the questions to find the similarities and differences, as suggested by the cross-analysis procedure followed. This process took several rounds of reading and categorizing the participants´ answers. This analysis was done by identifying the main topics and subtopics that the participants mentioned in their answers. Some specific words and phrases were identified, for example, to the question—Do you consider yourself a leader? some words or phrases that indicated doubt were identified: "I think, I don't know, I am not sure". Words or expressions that generalized their answers were also detected: "Every teacher is a leader" or "I am still learning". The same process continued with the participants' answers to each question. By doing this, four main themes emerged: a) individual perspectives, b) characteristics of female leaders, c) the importance of role models and female support, and d) future perspectives of ELT female leaders in Latin America.

Results

Individual perspectives.

Regarding their individual perspectives, the participants expressed whether they considered themselves leaders. Interestingly, even when most of the participants recognized their role as leaders, at the same time, their words lessened the impact of saying "yes" to the question "Do you consider yourself a leader?" as it is presented in Table 2:

Participant	Yes	No	Reasons
Ms. Palma	X		I'm not sure, but I am learning
Ms. Vera	X		Every teacher is a leader
Ms. Alba	X		Every teacher is a leader, especially if they like their job
Ms. Torres	X		I would say yes. But just recently. It took me a while to take that role. At first, I did not value my work that much. But I like helping other teachers, and that, in a way, makes me a kind of leader.
Ms. Costa	X		In my local context
Ms. Morales	X		I think I am,
Ms. Cano	X		I guess some people and colleagues around me consider myself a leader in the ELT field. I think I'm still learning
Ms. Herrera		X	Not really, I don´t have much experience.
Ms. García		X	I consider myself a facilitator. I encourage and help my students to build on their knowledge and skills and learn new ones.
Ms. Tellez			Well, I consider myself as a part of a group of people that are always looking for improving not only the ELT field but Education in general.
Ms. Rojas	X		I think I am a leader in the area I work, I don't know if I am considered a leader in Mexico.
Ms. Escobar		X	Not yet, maybe in the future.

Table 2: Do you consider yourself a leader?

At the individual level, nine out of the twelve participants said that they considered themselves leaders. However, three of the participants said that they were not leaders due to their lack of experience in leadership or they did not want to acknowledge the role they have in the learning process of their students. Although most of the participants in the current study considered themselves leaders in the ELT field, they lessened their claims with words such as: "not yet" or "probably yes," or making a general claim: "all teachers are leaders" and not recognizing their individual worth as leaders following what Baxter (2010) established on the use of language by female leaders.

The characteristics of female leaders

Currently, there is a focus on leadership research regarding the characteristics that leaders must possess (e.g., Dimopoulos, 2020; Salas-Serrano & Schrader, 2019). In their answers, the participants discussed the personal and professional leadership characteristics they believed female leaders should have. These characteristics were organized at the personal and professional level in Table 3, summarizing the words expressed by the participants.

Personal	Professional
-Courageous, empathetic and humble (Ms. Vera)	-Life-long learner (Ms. Vera)
-Be ready to listen and to help if possible (Ms. Alba)	-Willing to improve their teaching techniques (Ms. Alba)
-Be congruent (Ms. Alba & Ms. Torres)	-A solid educational background (Ms. Torres)
-Be sensitive and curious about other cultures (Ms. Costa)	-Open to learning new approaches, techniques and strategies that improve her pedagogical practices (Ms. Costa)
-Organized, creative good communicator, and to have a good sense of humor (Ms. Herrera)	-Teaching experience: We need to have enough practice in teaching in order to compare changes in our teaching over time, as well as learners' changes. (Ms. Morales)
-Flexible and able to motivate and inspire (Ms. García)	
-Passionate and committed (Ms. Tellez)	-Well qualified and professional (Ms. García)
-Help others without the need to feel superior and a capacity to accept criticism and ability to turn it into something beneficial (Ms. Herrera)	-Listening skills and team-work skills. (Ms. Cano)
	-Disciplined, have goals or an action plan, (Ms. Tellez)
-Collaborative (Ms. Costa, Ms. Morales, Ms .Garcia & Ms. Escobar)	-Be responsible, hardworking, leading with example and be able to connect with students and teachers, as well with a general audience (Ms. Escobar)

Table 3: The characteristics of female leaders

The participants' words revealed that leaders should possess unique characteristics at the individual level as a person and as a professional. Interestingly, two of the participants mentioned that there should not be any gender distinction regarding these qualities, as all leaders should possess these characteristics. The participants also expressed how their feminine perspectives provide them with unique characteristics as leaders, for example, as caretakers or being sensitive, curious, or humble, characteristics that are not naturally attributed to men.

The relevance of role models and female support

The participants' answers about who their role models in ELT had been suggests that role models for female leaders may emerge in a variety of contexts and situations. In their responses, some of the participants mentioned names that were not included in Table 4, as part of the ethical treatment of the data obtained. Table 4 summarizes who can become role models in the words of the participants.

Participant	Role Models
Ms. Palma	One of my ex-bosses.
Ms. Vera	My role model is a great leader with a big heart and smile. She was my teacher in my BA.
Ms. Torres	Several. ELT leaders have always inspired and motivated me.me and made me feel I was not alone.
Ms. Costa	There were these two senior teachers that shared their knowledge and experience. with everybody and very generously.
Ms. Cano	One of my professors at the university. I look up to her so much. She is a model for me. It is necessary to have models in several aspects in our life.
Ms. Herrera	Former teachers and current instructors and teacher trainers. I see them as leaders who have taught me something. Not only in the academic area but in other areas too.
Ms. Rojas	My role model is a researcher who has gone beyond the ELT, by enriching this field, and reaching the interdisciplinary boundaries of the area.

Table 4: The participants' role models

From the participants' answers, it was clear that a role model could be anyone around an emerging female leader, a boss, or a peer teacher. Regarding the female support that the participants had received from peers, seven of the participants mentioned the role models they have encountered and followed during the different stages of their trajectories, especially in their beginnings. They explained how these role models impacted or influenced their teaching and leadership trajectories, usually by demanding they go beyond the limitations of their context. The rest of the participants did not mention a role model in their answers.

Apart from the role models they have had during their leadership paths, the participants shared some of their leadership experiences and insights from interactions with colleagues or other female leaders:

Ms Alba: As an English teacher, I felt lonely, so I created a group to contact other teachers and share materials or activities. We presented workshops with new ideas..

Ms Costa: Female teachers must learn to respect other female teachers. Women have this tendency to be competitive or jealous sometimes instead of helping each other, at least in my country.

Ms Cano: I have experienced some discrimination from my peers since I have done different things. Leaders should not be alone, it is necessary to work along with other colleagues, be able to join academic communities to learn, listen, share experiences, and work together.

Ms Herrera: A female ELT leader needs to be perseverant and determined, as there are likely to be more obstacles than there are for men. We, women, can support each other by providing examples, by showing that even small steps are important, and by helping in developing our self-esteem.

Ms. García: By sharing experiences, encouraging each other to give conferences, to write articles, etc., to fight against self-censorship provoked by society.

By reading the participants´ answers, it is evident that women in ELT look for female support and collaboration. They also mentioned that they should work together to achieve academic and personal goals. Although most of their comments were positive, there were also comments on their need for respect, inclusion, and more opportunities for each other as women, teachers, and leaders.

Future perspectives for ELT female leaders in Latin America

Some common views have been selected from the cross-case analysis regarding the leaders´ perspectives for the future and for their peers in Latin America. Their words reflected what they wanted for a better

community of female leaders in their contexts. For example, Ms. Cano affirmed that "women need to combine forces with each other in order to find emerging talents and leaders among us." Ms. Herrera said that "women must become efficient leaders in the classroom and their communities." Ms. Torres explained that "[a]s leaders, women should represent their culture and language, for example, their Latin American culture." Additionally, Ms. Alba said that "female teachers and leaders should have more opportunities of going overseas and more empowerment in the research field." Recognizing the situation of the Latin American countries, Ms. Rojas established that "female leaders should have the recognition they deserve because it is hard to be a female ELT teacher or leader in a country with so much inequality". Summarizing the participants' views, Ms. Palma emphasized that "female leaders should say what they think, with the certainty that their contributions would be considered important, this would make them gain more visibility." As their own claims expressed, this group of Latin American female leaders took the opportunity to speak their minds and express what they wanted for themselves and the emerging female leaders in Latin America, that is, support, empathy, sensitivity, communication, commitment, and collaboration,

Discussion

Leadership as a social and cultural practice can be affected by several factors, one of them is gender as Komives et al. (2006) have expressed. In the participants´ voices some of the obstacles these female leaders still face are gender stereotypes, traditional cultural norms and demands of family care among others. Women become leaders by going into positions which are still commonly held by men by exercising their talents and skills., By doing this, social and cultural practices may impact the self-image and self-conception of the participants. For example, even when recognized as leaders, interestingly, the participants of the study said they did not fully consider themselves as leaders. This could be due cultural practices where women might be reluctant to acknowledge their leadership role with the purpose of not being seen as pretentious or reluctant in their Latin American countries. However, the participants also expressed that leaders' characteristics should be shared across genders and should not be perceived in relation to gender or culture.

The participants commonly recognized those who helped them along their path to leadership. Women supporting women, empowering each other, confirm what Gonzales and Lambert (2001) said about recognition and feedback as relevant elements in female leadership trajectories. They have confirmed that women recognize and assess female leaders' actions by supporting and empowering each other. These interactions direct the leaders' sense of meaning and purpose as female leaders pursue their goals and growth with the example and words from support systems and mentors. Mentorship may offer an opportunity to guide emerging leaders, especially when mentoring occurs in minority group contexts (Buzzanell et al., 2015) such as the Latin American context of the study. Cultural factors are important for female leaders to develop their identity based on the specific and individual characteristics and skills. These characteristics may be shaped according to the social context in which they find themselves.

Additionally, Stout et al. (2011) affirm that role models can be more effective when they exercise their leadership in similar situations to those that the potential leaders face. Therefore, female mentees can identify themselves with leaders who have experience and have reached their goals. This supports the idea that leadership can be enhanced within ELTAs (Bailey et al., 2009) by modeling what other professionals in the field of teaching do.

Additionally, the importance of peer support has been identified as one of the most relevant elements in a female leadership. As the number of female leaders in Latin America is increasing, there is a need for cooperation. In their own words, the female leaders who participated in this study expressed the value that collaboration, peer support and mutual assistance (Haber-Curran, 2013) have for them. The participants´ answers suggested that supporting each other and recognizing that other women´s achievements should be encouraged by sharing experiences and working together.

Among the most relevant findings, the study showed that female leaders in Latin America are proud of their leadership roles and Latina identity. They expressed that female leadership identity is still a challenge and a matter of perseverance and hard work, at least in the Latin American context where the study took place. However, ELT female leaders in Latin America want to use their skills and capacities to lead in their challenging and caring Latin-American ways.

Conclusion

Establishing and enacting female leadership can be challenging. Some of the most common elements mentioned in the study that influence female leadership were self-image and the role that other women play when giving or getting the support of other women as role models, mentors, or companions on their leadership paths. Therefore, support systems should be encouraged in the educational contexts from which female leaders emerge. The study also found that these female leadership practitioners looked for inclusion, recognition, and respect not only from men, but also from other female leaders.

The transformational leadership perspective taken in this article to support the opinions of these female leaders seemed to be the most appropriate as the participants expressed their willingness to make changes in their local circles or in a more global context in spite of the challenges and stereotypes that still prevail. Most of the female leaders in this research expressed their desire to transform the context of ELT into a field of opportunities for women who want to improve and make changes in their surroundings across their personal, professional, institutional, and global settings. This way, female leaders can develop their leadership by following the four domains identified by DeFrank-Cole and Tan (2017); gender societal, organizational, interpersonal, and individual domains. Therefore, it could be concluded that female leadership includes the willingness to use the skills, capacities, knowledge, and values that each woman possesses to induce change and improvement on oneself and on those around oneself in order to create better and safer conditions, In addition, the study provided the participants with an opportunity to share their experiences, concerns, and hopes for the present and the future of female leadership in Latin America.

Female academics and researchers in ELT may encourage women´s leadership awareness and give equal opportunities to those interested in reaching leadership positions. Training programs and the identification of talents, skills, and traits that can enable an ELT professional to become a leader should be enhanced, even from the early stages of a teaching career. More generally, educational authorities might create opportunities for female teachers to develop and exercise their leadership talents so that they can enact their leadership and feel comfortable, safe, and appreciated in their leadership roles. In this way, female leaders will have more possibilities to reach their goals and to improve ELT for everyone in the field.

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Appendix 1: The Instrument

Questionnaire:

I.- How long have you been involved in ELT or Teacher-education?

Do you consider yourself a leader in the ELT field?

What characteristics should female leaders in ELT have? Why?

II.- How could ELT female leaders empower each other?

Do you have a female leader icon in the ELT field? And why?

Do you have a story to tell about supporting peers?

III.- What are your goals as an ELT leader or teacher-educator?

What do you want for the ELT female teachers in your country?

Have you been supported by female peers during your career?