



**Percepción de estudiantes sobre la relación entre el liderazgo docente y el aprendizaje de  
Inglés como lengua extranjera**

**Students' perceptions on the relationship between teachers' leadership and  
EFL learning**

**Percepções dos alunos sobre a relação entre a liderança dos professores e a  
aprendizagem de EFL**

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## Resumen

Esta investigación analiza las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre la influencia del liderazgo de los profesores en el aula y el aprendizaje de EFL. Se determinará el perfil del profesor eficaz en términos de liderazgo para adquirir una nueva perspectiva sobre lo que debe hacerse durante las clases para mejorar el rendimiento de los estudiantes de EFL. Por lo tanto, esta investigación se centra en las características y dimensiones del liderazgo transformacional y transaccional en un profesor de EFL según las percepciones de los estudiantes del Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Católica de Cuenca-Ecuador. En el desarrollo de esta investigación se utilizó una metodología cuantitativa y descriptiva a través de un cuestionario validado que se aplicó tomando en consideración estudios de liderazgo transformacional y transaccional. Los resultados mostraron que el liderazgo de un profesor influye en la motivación y esfuerzo de los estudiantes por aprender inglés como segunda lengua y que los profesores tienen potencial para convertirse en líderes en un aula de EFL.

**Palabras clave:** EFL; liderazgo; aula; rendimiento; profesional; educación

## Abstract

This research analyzes the students' perceptions on the influence of teachers' leadership in the classroom and EFL learning. It will be determined the profile of the effective teacher in terms of leadership to acquire a new perspective on what should be done during classes to enhance EFL students' performance. Therefore, this research focus on characteristics and dimensions of transformational and transactional leadership in an EFL teacher according to perceptions of students from the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca-Ecuador. In the development of this research, a quantitative and descriptive methodology was used through a validated questionnaire that was applied taken into consideration transformational and transactional leadership studies. The results showed that a teacher leadership has influence on students' motivation and effort to learn English as a Second Language and that teachers have potential to become leaders in an EFL classroom.

**Keywords:** EFL; leadership; classroom; performance; professional; education

### Resumo

Esta pesquisa analisa as percepções dos alunos sobre a influência da liderança dos professores na sala de aula e no aprendizado de EFL. Será determinado o perfil do professor eficaz em termos de liderança para adquirir uma nova perspectiva sobre o que deve ser feito durante as aulas para melhorar o desempenho dos alunos de EFL. Portanto, esta pesquisa enfoca as características e dimensões da liderança transformacional e transacional em um professor de EFL segundo as percepções dos alunos do Centro de Línguas da Universidade Católica de Cuenca-Ecuador. No desenvolvimento desta pesquisa, foi utilizada uma metodologia quantitativa e descritiva por meio de um questionário validado que foi aplicado levando em consideração estudos de liderança transformacional e transacional. Os resultados mostraram que a liderança do professor tem influência na motivação e no esforço dos alunos para aprender inglês como segunda língua e que os professores têm potencial para se tornarem líderes em uma sala de aula de EFL.

**Palavras-chave:** ILE; liderança; sala de aula; desempenho; profissional; Educação

### Introduction

EFL teachers are taught that they should master methods, strategies, and techniques so that students are able to learn the language. However, teachers' personal skills like leadership are barely discussed in the Ecuadorian context. Differences in classrooms with teachers-leaders and teachers who have not developed these kinds of abilities have been studied to show that motivation and learning not only come from methods and strategies but elements related to leadership (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016). Moreover, EFL teachers' leadership skills in university contexts is a topic not as studied as in school contexts since in-class leadership influence tends to be undermined because they are pushed to do research or administrative work (Gai, 2005).

Although it is possible to take into account the different characteristics that a leader could have (charismatic, visionary, contingent or situational, moral or ethical, participatory or democratic, etc., etc.), this research does not consider that each teacher demonstrates each of these competencies; but conversely, that they exploit what they have since like any other professional competence they are not acquired through courses taken but through the exercise of good practices with the support of expert tutors (Pounder J. , 2008).

This research defines what the students' expectations are in regard to leadership in the classroom. It is extremely important that teachers know that leadership is important to energize, motivate, and drive any kind of classroom. EFL classrooms are special since students are forced to take classes to get a certificate or to pass a school course (Pounder J. , 2005). Some of these students do not want or like English as a language to learn, therefore teachers' qualifications as leaders can be a good way to ensure that EFL students will be motivated. However, what kind of leadership should teachers develop? This research focus on what is called transformational leadership, a mix of basic transformational leadership skills and transactional leadership skills. Transformational leadership characteristics (Pounder, 2006) are the following:

- Idealized Influence or Charisma
- Inspirational Motivation
- Individual consideration
- Intellectual Stimulation

These characteristics are complemented with transactional leadership dimensions:

- Contingent Reinforcement or Contingent Reward
- Active Management by Exception
- Passive Management by Exception
- Laissez-Faire Leadership

Characteristics and dimensions combined can tell if a teacher is a leader and what kind of leadership he or she has developed. The purpose of this article is to give an insight into the influence of leadership on professional EFL teacher performance according to students' perception, it means to determine the profile of the effective EFL teacher in terms of leadership from the perspective of students.

It is important to take into account that leadership is a controversial issue and it could be defined in different ways, but probably the most useful definition is the one taken under a pedagogical context. In this sense, leadership is a process inherent to all life, and it seeks to transform the potential of students, developing their capacities, motivations, values, and finally, improve their academic performance (Noland & Richard, 2014). Now, its correct development is related to their leadership ability in the classroom and the capacity of leadership is what allows an educational

institution to improve its pedagogical practice. Within the characteristics of leadership, it is easily found that teachers must make students feel security because leadership energizes, motivates, and drives the teaching-learning process. Therefore, with everything stated above there are new aspects that go hand in hand such as the EFL environment that a teacher can find in the classroom that will be important for understanding and analysing the kind of leadership needed. In consequence, the effectiveness of teachers' performance must be taken into consideration to develop new data about what students want from a teacher and include this kind of qualifications in job interviews and EFL teachers' formation.

There are different studies regarding the role of leadership in and EFL classroom. Nowadays, even human resources in a school may hire a teacher or an administrator taken into account their leadership skills and leadership styles (Yazdanmehr, Ramezani, & Aghdassi, 2020). Diverse types of frameworks have been analysed and put into consideration in the last decades like reflective leadership that considers that everyone in the educational system must be leaders (Davut, 2012). Other papers showed that most of teachers, especially in universities, have potential to become leaders in classrooms (Alkhamash, 2019). Moreover, there studies on transformational and transactional leadership in which it was demonstrated that teachers with these qualities are capable of having an impact on students, especially in motivation and extra effort (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020). This researcher framework has been developed in different stages or waves to go from a positional concept to a process in which teachers acquire characteristics to become transformational leaders (Pounder, 2006) and is based on traditional transformational leadership studies and complemented with transactional leadership studies (Bass & Avolio, 2000)

## **Methods**

This research was carried out using a descriptive and analytical approach. Around 329 students from the Catholic University of Cuenca took part of the study. Participants answered a survey with several questions based on Transformational Leadership dimensions (Transformational and Transactional elements). Moreover, it was added questions related to students' perceptions on the influence of teachers' leadership on EFL learning. The questionnaire was applied only to B1 students who had at least 4 teachers in the institute. The SPSS 26 program (Field, 2013) was used to generate descriptive statistics to visualize in summary the level of the three dimensions studied

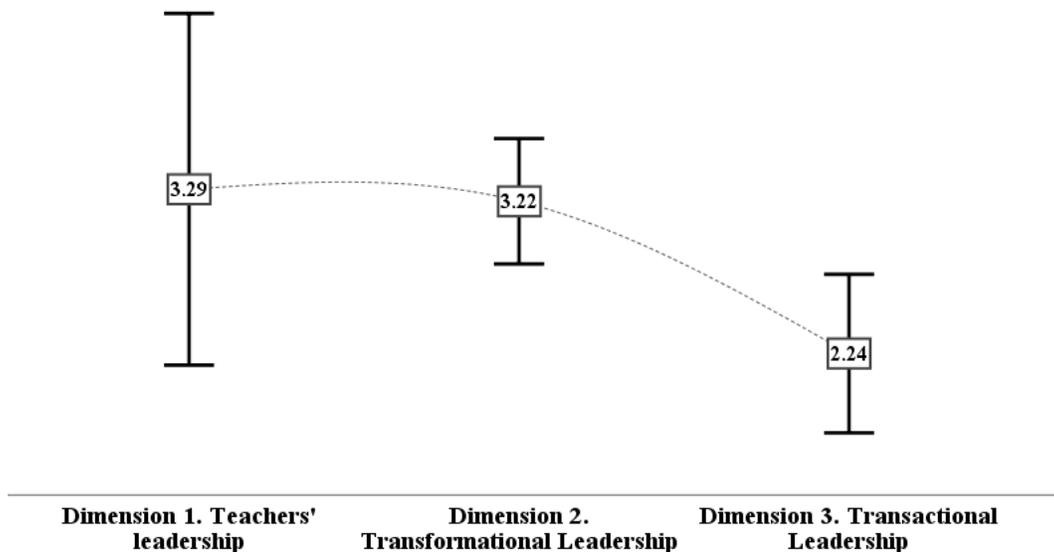
through error bars that visually allow comparisons of the results achieved (Cumming & Finch, 2005). The percentage results of each item were plotted through lines.

## Results

The results of the three dimensions were compared to verify if there are differences among them. The level of variability of Dimension 1 is the highest as can be seen in Figure 1, which shows a large error bar, indicating that students have different criteria on the questions posed (especially on the second and third questions). Dimension 2 obtained an average like Dimension 1, however, in this case students show more agreement due to the small size of the error bar accompanying the average. Both Dimension 1 and Dimension 2 addressing teacher leadership and transformational leadership have similar scores and students show agreement that they noticed leadership characteristics in their teachers. However, regarding Dimension 3, transactional leadership, it was found that students are significantly less in agreement regarding their existence in classroom.

**Figure 1**

Error bar chart of the summary of the three dimensions of leadership.



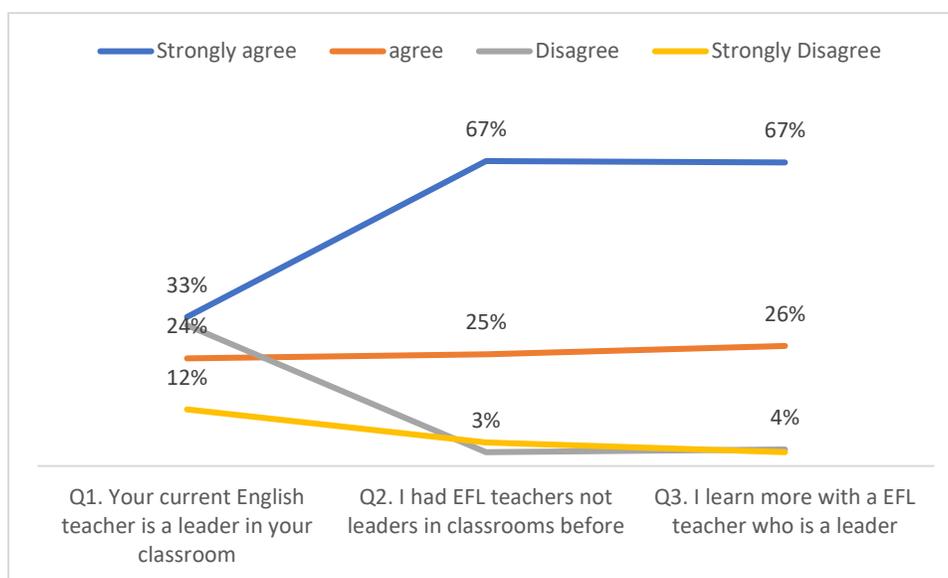
To understand these findings, a breakdown of each of the items of each of the dimensions evaluated is given below

### **Dimension 1. Teachers' leadership**

In the first dimension, three questions are observed, the first one shows that a majority of students do not think their teacher is a leader in their class. The second shows that most of students strongly agree that they had teachers not leaders in an EFL classroom before. This means they can compare teachers' leaders and not leaders. The third item also shows that they strongly agree with the idea that there is an influence of a teacher leader in EFL learning. In short, teacher leadership is questioned by the students.

**Figure 2**

Error bar chart of the Teachers' leadership summary

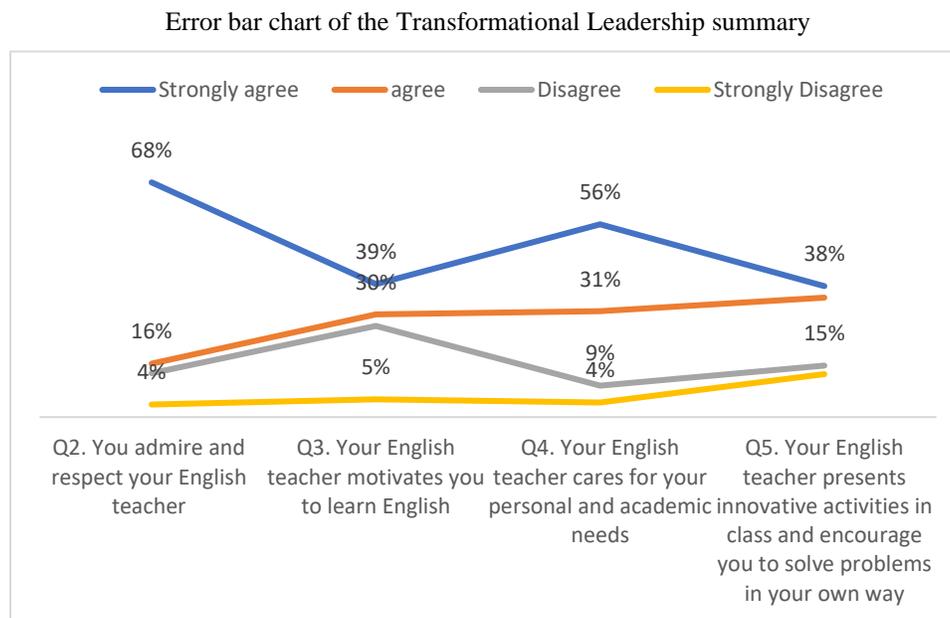


### **Dimension 2. Transformational Leadership**

Within the second dimension, four items are analyzed. The first is idealized influence or Charisma, according to which most students admire and respect their teacher. The second item, Inspirational motivation, shows that one third of the students do not agree that teachers motivate them to learn English. The third question is about English meets academic and personal needs from an Individual Consideration and shows that students mostly agree. The fourth question asks whether innovative problem-solving activities are presented as Intellectual Stimulation and it was found that students

agree and strongly agree. In summary, students agree that there is transformational leadership on the part of the teacher.

Figure 3

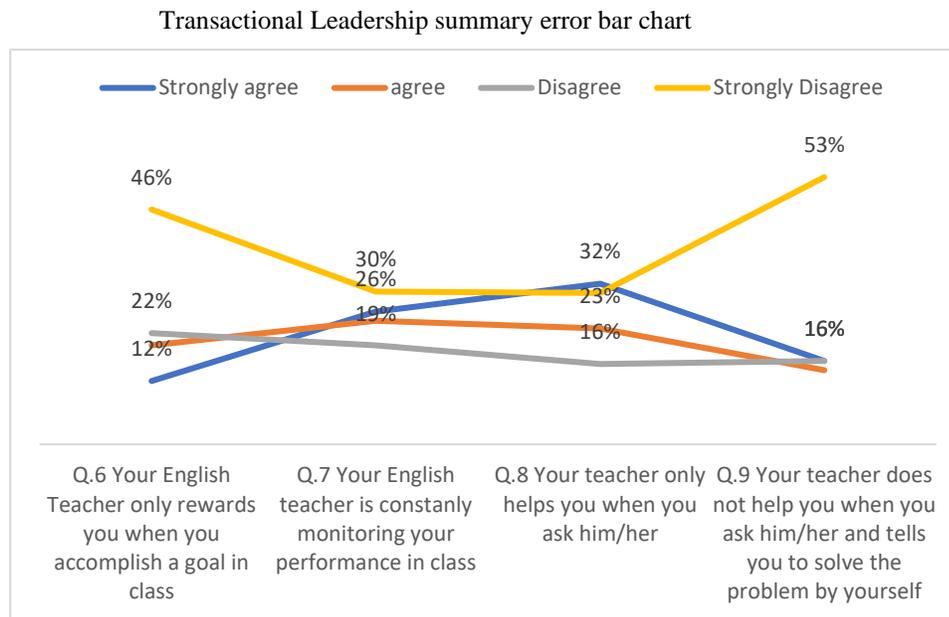


### Dimension 3. Transactional Leadership

The four items that make up transactional leadership show that students mostly do not agree that the teacher only rewards them when they reach certain goals (Contingent Reinforcement or Contingent Reward). In the second question, on the monitoring done in class by the teacher (Active Management by Exception), the students do not agree very much because the criteria are quite divided. The same happens with the third question, which states that the teacher only helps the student when he/she asks him/her to (Passive Management by Exception). However, in the last question, which addresses the lack of involvement of the teacher, leaving only the student to solve problems (Laissez-faire Leadership), most students are less in agreement. Students disagree with two main aspects: that the teacher only rewards them when they achieve a goal, as well as that the

teacher encourages them to find solutions on their own. They maintain different criteria with the teacher's monitoring and with the teacher's help to the student.

**Figure 4**



## Discussion

The results showed that there is a general perception among students that teacher leadership influences their EFL learning in other studies. It is also evident that students have very divided opinions regarding issues of motivation and innovation, i.e., and in consequence, teachers are not trained to assume leadership with respect to these dimensions which affects their overall rating as teacher-leaders (Gai, 2005). Likewise, students' perceptions show that there is a general tendency to think that teachers are passive with respect to learning, taking action only when there is a problem or when students request it (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020).

Moving from passive (traditional or vertical) leadership to active (transformational and transactional) leadership is important for students to improve their motivation in the classroom, which in turn is vital for learning English as a foreign language (Pounder J. , 2006). Similarly, the fact that there are teachers who only intervene when a student asks for help only demonstrates the existence of situations in which the learning environment can be improved. Besides, students clearly understand the difference between teacher-leaders and non-leaders, which determine that they are aware that leadership in the classroom influences their learning (Noland & Richard, 2014).

On the other hand, it is necessary to mention that this research did not establish the types of leadership or whether teachers actually meet the characteristics of transformational leadership. A study of the types of teacher leadership would help to develop more effective and innovative classes that motivate students to meet their learning objectives (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016). However, the perception of the participants showed that there are leadership qualities in their current teachers, but that they did not identify in other teachers. The study revealed that there is a long way to go for teachers to efficiently apply transformational leadership skills that have an effect on their students' learning.

Although leadership in the classroom is an important element that can be considered part of a teacher's personality or character, actually it is a set of skills that can be developed with the right preparation (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016). Transformational leadership dimensions contain important things such as communicational skills, active methodologies, innovation, motivation and other things that are essential for teaching English as a foreign language as seen in other studies.

## Conclusions

When students have the figure of the teacher leadership, they interiorize it as a model to engender confidence. Teachers with these characteristics can motivate their students in better ways to improve everyday and enhance learning and creativity. The different styles (characteristics) that teachers could have in regard to leadership could generate a high degree of satisfaction among students and at the same time these styles may attract educational benefits such as extra effort, more interaction, high participation, high level of confidence and ethical behavior.

Regarding teachers' leadership in the classroom, students do not strongly agree that this is true and prefer to point out that they learn better when the teacher is a leader. However, in transformational leadership, students believe that their teachers have charisma, as well as attend to their personal and academic interests. They do not agree that motivation and intellectual stimulation are sufficient. On the other hand, an aspect that was disruptive was the transactional leadership of the teacher because students believe that teachers do not compensate well the effort of each one,

another aspect that they question is that the teacher employs a laissez-faire leadership, rather they insinuate that teachers prefer a passive management of the class in which the teacher acts in and does not guide the independent search for solutions. The main conclusion of this study established that elemental teachers' abilities such as leadership may have influence in EFL students' skills development.

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