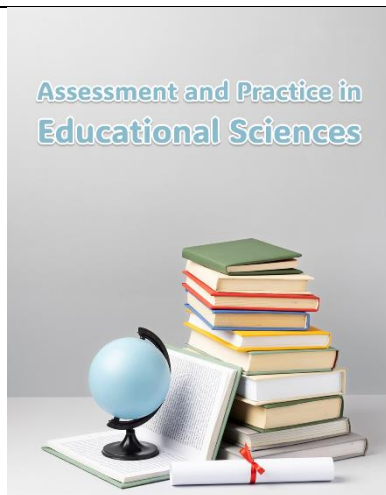




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Perceived School Leadership and EFL Teacher Outcomes in Tehran: An Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study

ABSTRACT

Research on school leadership seldom examines professional agency, collective efficacy-related capacity, academic optimism, and professional learning within one construct-sensitive account. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study addressed that gap in formal EFL schools in District 22 of Tehran. The quantitative phase analyzed an accessible sample of 205 teacher questionnaires through partial least squares structural equation modeling; all constructs were teacher-level self-reports. Persian-language interviews with 12 purposefully selected teachers and three school leaders then explained and qualified the statistical pattern. Perceived school leadership was positively associated with professional-development engagement ($\beta = .63$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .40$), professional agency ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .37$), teacher-perceived academic optimism ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .34$), and perceived collective capacity ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .31$). Interviews associated these relationships with trust, responsible autonomy, consequential teacher voice, organized collaboration, credible expectations, mentoring, and improvement-oriented feedback. Workload, curricular rigidity, bureaucracy, and resource constraints limited the practical use of these supports. The study contributes an integrated account that distinguishes teacher perceptions from school-level properties and collective efficacy beliefs from collective action. Because the design was cross-sectional, single-source, and teacher-level, the results are associative rather than causal and are not evidence of homogeneous school effects.

Keywords: perceived school leadership; teacher professional agency; perceived collective capacity; academic optimism; professional development; EFL teachers; explanatory sequential mixed methods

Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in formal schools is shaped by the interaction of classroom expertise, institutional expectations, curriculum policy, professional relationships, and school leadership. EFL teachers are expected to interpret prescribed curricula, respond to learners with different levels of proficiency, prepare students for examinations,

integrate appropriate instructional innovations, and create meaningful opportunities for language use in settings where exposure to English outside the classroom may be limited. These responsibilities require more than subject-matter knowledge or mastery of teaching techniques. Teachers must also be able to exercise professional judgment, collaborate with colleagues, maintain confidence in students' capacity to learn, and engage continuously in professional learning. In centrally regulated educational systems, however, the extent to which teachers can enact these capacities depends substantially on the organizational conditions they experience in their schools. Curriculum autonomy and flexibility can support responsive teaching, but their benefits emerge only when teachers possess meaningful opportunities, adequate support, and sufficient professional capacity to use them (1). Consequently, understanding EFL teacher effectiveness requires attention not only to what teachers know but also to how school leadership shapes the conditions under which their knowledge, beliefs, and professional commitments are translated into practice.

School leadership is widely recognized as an important indirect influence on teaching and learning. Successful leaders establish instructional priorities, develop organizational capacity, support teachers, and create conditions conducive to sustained school improvement (2). Leadership practices that focus closely on teaching, curriculum, and teacher learning may be particularly consequential because leadership effects on student outcomes are stronger when leaders participate in and promote teachers' professional learning rather than concentrating primarily on administrative coordination (3). Nevertheless, leadership should not be understood merely as a collection of formal actions performed by principals. Its practical significance depends on how teachers experience everyday interactions, expectations, feedback, decision-making procedures, and opportunities for participation. A policy that formally authorizes innovation may remain ineffective if school-level leadership discourages risk-taking, while a restrictive policy environment may still permit limited but meaningful professional action when leaders establish trust, encourage dialogue, and mobilize available resources.

This distinction is consistent with the concept of policy enactment. Educational policies are not simply implemented in identical ways across schools; rather, they are interpreted, translated, negotiated, and reconstructed by actors working within particular material, professional, and organizational contexts (4). Principals and teachers therefore participate in converting formal requirements into situated practices. The influence of leadership on EFL teaching may become visible in decisions about lesson planning, assessment, classroom interaction, technology use, curriculum pacing, and responses to learner diversity. Evidence from elementary-school EFL education indicates that instructional leadership can shape how teachers plan and implement curriculum innovations by clarifying priorities, supporting instructional preparation, and influencing the practical interpretation of reform expectations (5). Leadership is thus relevant not because principals directly control every classroom decision, but because they influence whether teachers perceive professional judgment, experimentation, collaboration, and learning as legitimate and feasible.

One of the most important teacher outcomes associated with these conditions is professional agency. Agency refers to teachers' capacity to make purposeful choices, exercise informed judgment, and act in ways directed toward valued educational goals. From an ecological perspective, agency is not a fixed personality trait or an unrestricted form of individual autonomy. Instead, it is achieved through the interaction of teachers' professional histories, beliefs, aspirations, competencies, relationships, resources, and the affordances and constraints of their present environments (6). A teacher may possess considerable pedagogical knowledge but remain unable to use it when curricular rigidity, examination pressure, workload, limited resources, or punitive supervision restrict the available possibilities for action. Conversely, supportive relationships and credible opportunities for participation can enable teachers to mobilize existing knowledge and develop new ways of responding to instructional problems.

The ecological conception further emphasizes that teacher agency has temporal, relational, and contextual dimensions. Teachers draw on prior experiences, orient their action toward imagined professional and educational futures, and make practical judgments within the possibilities of the present situation (7). Their beliefs are especially important because beliefs influence how they interpret contextual conditions, recognize possible courses of action, and determine whether a given opportunity is educationally worthwhile (8). Leadership may therefore support agency by communicating trust, legitimizing responsible adaptation, giving teachers a consequential voice, facilitating access to resources, and providing improvement-oriented feedback. It may constrain agency when consultation is symbolic, observation is experienced as surveillance, or compliance is valued more highly than professional reasoning. Accordingly, school leadership does not simply “grant” agency; it contributes to the environment in which agency may or may not be achieved.

Empirical studies of teacher agency during curriculum reform reinforce the importance of these contextual relationships. In Iran, curriculum reform has created expectations for changes in language teaching while teachers continue to work within centralized structures and examination-oriented conditions. Iranian teachers’ agency is consequently expressed through negotiation between reform objectives, established instructional traditions, school expectations, and available resources (9). Broader analyses of English instruction in Iranian mainstream schools similarly identify the interconnected influence of pedagogical conditions, societal expectations, and government policy on teachers’ classroom practices (10). These conditions make formal-school EFL teaching a particularly valuable setting for examining perceived leadership, because the principal may function as an intermediary between centralized requirements and teachers’ situated instructional needs.

Assessment provides a prominent illustration of this negotiation. In high-stakes EFL environments, teachers must reconcile pedagogically meaningful assessment with external examinations, administrative expectations, and accountability demands. Research in Iran shows that the Konkur, principals, and parents can jointly shape novice EFL teachers’ classroom assessment decisions, sometimes limiting the practical scope of their professional assessment judgment (11). At the same time, teachers may use blended learning and ecological language-assessment literacy to negotiate high-stakes requirements and construct context-sensitive assessment practices (12). Assessment agency consequently depends on both teacher capacity and contextual support. The development of instruments addressing EFL teachers’ assessment agency has also demonstrated that agency encompasses personal, professional, and environmental dimensions rather than functioning as an isolated individual characteristic (13). Likewise, a validated inventory of EFL teachers’ potential ecological agency underscores the importance of available resources, contextual affordances, professional competence, and teachers’ interpretations of their working environments (14).

Professional education may strengthen teachers’ capacity to exercise agency, but whether new learning is enacted remains dependent on workplace conditions. Language-assessment teacher education, for example, can enhance EFL teachers’ assessment agency and influence their longer-term professional-development trajectories by expanding knowledge, confidence, critical reflection, and the ability to make principled decisions (15). However, professional learning does not automatically overcome systemic constraints. Diagnostic work on teacher agency during curriculum reform in Vietnam illustrates the need to identify contradictions among policy demands, institutional arrangements, professional tools, and teachers’ actual possibilities for action (16). This suggests that interventions intended to increase teacher agency should address the organization of teachers’ work rather than focusing exclusively on individual motivation or competence.

Leadership may also support agency through teacher leadership. Teacher leadership extends professional influence beyond an individual classroom and may include mentoring, curriculum development, collaborative inquiry, peer support, and participation in organizational decisions. Yet conceptualizations of language teacher leadership remain diverse, and research has employed varying definitions of teachers’ formal and informal influence (17). Evidence indicates that teacher leadership

can enable pedagogical innovation even under contextual constraints when teachers mobilize professional relationships, negotiate institutional expectations, and receive sufficient organizational recognition (18). School leaders can facilitate this process by converting teachers' existing capabilities into meaningful opportunities for responsive education, particularly in diverse schools where standardized approaches may fail to address learners' needs (19). Thus, leadership is most enabling when it does not merely encourage teachers rhetorically but establishes structures through which their expertise can influence practice.

Teachers' identities and micropolitical relationships also affect whether leadership support is experienced as credible. EFL teachers construct professional identities through negotiations with colleagues, leaders, institutional norms, and competing expectations concerning good teaching (20). In such environments, decision-making and collaboration are never entirely neutral: they involve status, recognition, access to resources, and the legitimacy of particular professional perspectives. Leadership that invites teacher participation without allowing teachers' contributions to affect decisions may weaken trust and reinforce compliance. In contrast, responsible autonomy, transparent communication, and consequential participation can strengthen teachers' identification with school improvement. Principal leadership has likewise been associated with professional development when leaders align learning opportunities with teachers' needs, encourage professional exchange, and connect new learning to school priorities (21).

Professional-development engagement is therefore another central outcome of perceived school leadership. Engagement entails more than attending workshops or completing required training. It includes behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social investment in learning activities that teachers perceive as relevant to their practice. The Teacher Engagement Scale for Professional Development highlights active participation, commitment, reflection, and meaningful involvement in sustained learning experiences (22). Leaders may influence these qualities by protecting time for learning, providing relevant opportunities, organizing mentoring and peer observation, offering constructive feedback, and establishing psychological safety for discussing instructional difficulties. Where professional development is disconnected from classroom needs or treated as an administrative requirement, attendance may produce little change. Where it is sustained, collaborative, and connected to real instructional problems, teachers are more likely to examine their practices and apply new knowledge.

The effects of leadership may further extend to collective professional capacity. Teachers rarely address complex educational problems entirely alone. They depend on colleagues for shared planning, interpretation of curriculum requirements, assessment design, exchange of materials, and responses to learners' needs. Perceived collective capacity refers to teachers' beliefs that their faculty possesses the competence and coordinated ability needed to influence learning. Such beliefs are conceptually related to collective efficacy, but they should not be equated automatically with observed collective action. Confidence in colleagues may exist without adequate routines for collaboration, just as scheduled meetings may occur without meaningful joint problem-solving. Leadership can connect belief with action by creating protected collaborative time, clarifying shared purposes, distributing responsibility, and ensuring that collective conclusions influence school decisions.

Academic optimism offers a related but broader account of a school's positive professional orientation. It integrates academic emphasis, relational trust, and collective confidence in the ability to promote student learning (23). Academic optimism is not uncritical positivity. Rather, it represents a grounded belief that students can succeed when teachers maintain appropriate expectations, develop trustworthy relationships, and coordinate effective action. In EFL settings, this orientation may be especially important because limited language exposure, heterogeneous proficiency, examination pressure, and low learner confidence can encourage deficit interpretations. Leaders who combine credible academic expectations with resources, encouragement, and professional support may help teachers view learning difficulties as improvable. Expectations unsupported by trust or practical assistance, however, may be experienced merely as pressure.

Professional agency, perceived collective capacity, academic optimism, and professional-development engagement are distinct but complementary dimensions of teachers' professional functioning. Agency concerns purposeful judgment and action; collective capacity concerns confidence in the faculty's shared capability; academic optimism combines trust, academic emphasis, and collective confidence; and professional-development engagement concerns teachers' sustained investment in learning. Recent measurement research confirms that teacher agency itself is multidimensional and can be assessed across several dimensions among both preservice and in-service teachers (24). At the same time, measurement claims must remain sensitive to context and level. When constructs are compared across groups or settings, evidence of measurement invariance is necessary before observed differences can confidently be attributed to substantive rather than measurement-related factors (25). Similarly, when teachers are nested within schools, individual perceptions should not be interpreted automatically as objective school-level properties.

These distinctions have methodological implications for leadership research. Teachers' reports of leadership, academic optimism, collective capacity, and professional engagement provide meaningful information about the environment on which teachers base their actions, but they remain teacher-level perceptions unless supported by aggregation evidence and school identifiers. Multilevel analytical approaches can examine relationships operating simultaneously at teacher and school levels and can test whether leadership influences individual outcomes through collective organizational processes (26). Congruence between teachers' and leaders' perceptions may also matter, but evaluating such correspondence requires analytical methods capable of representing agreement and discrepancy without reducing them to simple difference scores; response surface analysis offers one such approach, including in multilevel settings (27). When the available data are teacher-level and cross-sectional, conclusions should therefore emphasize associations rather than causal or homogeneous school effects.

Despite growing scholarship, several gaps remain. Leadership, agency, collective efficacy-related beliefs, academic optimism, and professional development have frequently been examined in separate lines of research. This fragmentation makes it difficult to determine whether teachers perceive school leadership as simultaneously related to their individual professional judgment, collective confidence, achievement-oriented beliefs, and participation in learning. It also obscures the practices through which such relationships are experienced. Quantitative associations alone cannot establish whether teachers connect leadership with trust, autonomy, feedback, collaboration, mentoring, teacher voice, or resource provision. Conversely, qualitative accounts alone cannot indicate the consistency or relative magnitude of associations across a larger teacher sample. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design is therefore suitable because it can first estimate the teacher-level pattern and then use teachers' and school leaders' accounts to explain the practices and constraints underlying that pattern.

The need for such integration is particularly strong in Tehran's formal-school EFL context, where centralized policy, high-stakes assessment, curricular requirements, variable resources, parental expectations, and school-level leadership intersect. Teachers may be encouraged to innovate while remaining accountable to prescribed content and examination outcomes. They may possess professional knowledge but lack time or authority to enact it, or they may receive formal autonomy without the collegial structures needed to use it effectively. Examining perceived leadership alongside four complementary outcomes can provide a more comprehensive account of how organizational support is associated with teachers' professional work while avoiding the assumption that individual perceptions constitute independently verified school characteristics.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine the associations of perceived school leadership with Iranian EFL teachers' professional agency, perceived collective capacity, teacher-perceived academic optimism, and professional-development engagement in formal schools in District 22 of Tehran and to explain and qualify these associations through the accounts of teachers and school leaders.

Methods and Materials

Design and context

An explanatory sequential design gave priority to the quantitative phase (QUAN → qual; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A direct model related perceived leadership separately to the four outcomes; follow-up interviews explored how teachers and leaders interpreted the pattern. Integration informed interview selection and questions and the final joint display.

The study involved public and private formal schools in District 22 of Tehran; private language institutes were excluded. The teacher was the unit of analysis. Because no school identifier was retained, aggregation and multilevel estimation were impossible. The model estimated cross-sectional associations and explained variance; the design established neither temporal order nor causality.

This contextual boundary was intentional. Formal schools operate within curricular requirements, administrative procedures, examination schedules, and leadership structures that differ from stand-alone language institutes. Including only school-based teachers therefore aligned the sampling frame with the study’s leadership construct, although it narrows the settings to which the findings may be transferred.

Quantitative participants and sampling

Schools served as access clusters in an accessible sampling procedure. Of 250 distributed surveys, 224 were returned; 19 were excluded for substantial incompleteness, straight-line responding, or influential multivariate outliers, including six identified through Mahalanobis distance. The final sample was 205 (82% usable response).

Participants were 62% women and 38% men. Ages were under 30 (26.3%), 30–39 (42.0%), 40–49 (22.9%), or at least 50 (8.8%). Teaching experience was 1–5 years (22.4%), 6–10 (35.1%), 11–15 (24.9%), or over 15 (17.6%). Most held bachelor’s (57.6%) or master’s degrees (36.1%); 6.3% held doctorates. Accessible sampling precludes population-representative inference.

The demographic spread supplied variation in career stage and education, but schools participated where access could be secured. The response rate therefore indicates usable participation within the approached network rather than representativeness of all Iranian EFL teachers.

A sensitivity calculation for a two-sided zero-order association showed that a sample of 205 provides approximately 80% power at $\alpha = .05$ to detect a correlation of about .19. The observed associations were larger than this value, but statistical sensitivity does not correct the selection limitations of accessible sampling or the nesting of teachers within unidentified schools.

Measures and instrument adaptation

The Persian questionnaire used five-point agreement scales. Wording was reviewed for clarity, conceptual equivalence, and contextual fit; ELT and leadership experts reviewed construct relevance. A 30-teacher pilot outside the main sample refined wording and instructions. These procedures provided initial evidence of linguistic and content adequacy, but they were not equivalent to an independent psychometric validation of every adapted item.

Table 1. Quantitative Measures and Composite Representation

Construct	Source / items	Composite representation	Interpretation in this study
Perceived school leadership	MLQ 5X rater form	Five MLQ-based transformational/supportive leadership composites	Teacher-perceived leadership behavior; not a direct measure of distributed leadership

Professional agency	15 adapted items	Five three-item composites	Instructional judgment, adaptation, reflection, initiative, and school-level participation
Perceived collective capacity	Goddard (2002), 12 items	Four three-item composites	Collective efficacy/capacity; action-oriented agency examined qualitatively
Academic optimism	Academic Optimism Profile	Four conceptual composites	Teacher-perceived academic emphasis, trust, and collective confidence
Professional-development engagement	Kelly et al. (2022), 8 adapted items	Four two-item composites	Relevant, reflective, sustained, and collaborative professional learning

Note. All indicators entered in SmartPLS were theory-guided composite scores. Full copyrighted MLQ item wording is not reproduced.

Perceived school leadership. Five theory-guided composites from the MLQ 5X rater form represented transformational and supportive behavior, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The score was not interpreted as distributed leadership.

The analysis did not compare transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles as separate predictors. Instead, the composites represented an overall teacher-perceived leadership construct suited to the direct model. Shared leadership and teacher participation remained qualitative topics because attributing them to the MLQ would overstate its content.

Professional agency. Fifteen adapted items formed five three-item composites: responsible instructional judgment; pedagogical adaptation; reflective practice and feedback use; professional initiative and learning; and participation in school processes (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). As a study-developed measure, it requires independent validation.

Higher scores represented stronger self-reported capacity to make and enact purposeful decisions within formal-school conditions. Expert review and pilot testing provided initial content evidence, whereas the main-sample measurement model assessed only the composite structure used in this study.

Perceived collective capacity. Goddard's (2002) 12-item Short Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale formed four three-item composites. It assesses shared efficacy beliefs, not collective action; the latter was examined in interviews.

The composites covered faculty competence and task-demand judgments. Accordingly, interpretation remained anchored in the scale's efficacy content rather than being extended to observed collective action.

Teacher-perceived academic optimism. Four adapted Academic Optimism Profile composites assessed academic emphasis, trust in students, trust in parents, and collective confidence (Hoy et al., 2006). Scores remained teacher-level perceptions.

No attempt was made to aggregate these reports into a school score because anonymous school identifiers and within-school agreement estimates were unavailable.

Professional-development engagement. Eight adapted items formed four two-item composites covering classroom relevance, reflection and improvement, sustained activity, and collaboration (Kelly et al., 2022). In the original validation, coaches rated teachers' engagement during a sustained professional-development intervention. The present adaptation changed both the respondent and the referent: teachers rated their own general engagement in school-based EFL professional learning. It therefore measured perceived qualities of participation rather than verified hours, attendance, program completion, or coach-observed engagement. Reliability from the original validation was not assumed to transfer unchanged to this adaptation.

Theory-specified composite indicators were averaged before PLS-SEM analysis. Parceling reduced complexity and preserved domain coverage but concealed item-level performance and may mask localized misfit.

Composites were specified before structural analysis rather than selected to improve path estimates. The five professional-agency parcels combined items 1/2/8, 3/5/11, 4/12/14, 6/7/13, and 9/10/15; the four professional-development parcels combined items 1/5, 2/6, 3/7, and 4/8. Consequently, satisfactory composite loadings support only the representation analyzed here and do not demonstrate that every original item would perform equally well in an item-level model.

Quantitative data collection and analysis

After consent, questionnaires were completed in person or online with reference to participants' current schools. SPSS screening removed the cases described above; limited item-level missingness in retained cases was replaced by the relevant mean. The exact distribution of missing cells and the administration-mode counts were not retained in the analysis record, so no mode comparison or multiple-imputation analysis was possible. Skewness and kurtosis fell within ± 2 . The first factor in Harman's diagnostic explained 38.4% of variance, although this insensitive diagnostic cannot eliminate common-method concerns.

Anonymity, research-only use, and the absence of correct answers were emphasized to reduce evaluation apprehension. Cases were screened for incompleteness, patterned responding, and influential multivariate outliers before composites were calculated. Mode of administration was used only to accommodate school access and was not modeled as a substantive condition.

SmartPLS 4 estimated a reflective construct model in which theory-guided parcel scores served as Mode A indicators (Hair et al., 2022). Reliability and validity were assessed with loadings, alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, AVE, Fornell–Larcker, and HTMT (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). Structural assessment used standardized paths, 5,000-resample bootstrapped *t* statistics and confidence intervals, R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 . The model contained one predictor and four separate outcomes, without mediation or moderation; β , R^2 , and f^2 are consequently related rather than independent evidence.

Because each outcome had one predictor, structural VIF values were 1.00 and added no meaningful common-method diagnostic. The simultaneous PLS-SEM framework was useful for assessing the common composite-level measurement model and estimating four direct paths, but the specification should not be read as a complex causal or out-of-sample predictive system. Positive Q^2 values were interpreted as in-sample predictive relevance because neither a holdout sample nor PLSpredict was used.

Qualitative participants and data generation

Twelve survey respondents were purposefully selected to vary in outcome profile, gender, experience, and education; seven were women, five were men, and experience ranged from four to 18 years. Three principals or instructional leaders supplied contextual accounts, while teacher testimony remained primary.

The 15 Persian interviews lasted 45–60 minutes and elicited examples of decision-making, trust, participation, collaboration, expectations, feedback, mentoring, and learning. Recordings were transcribed and checked in Persian, de-identified as T1–T12 and SL1–SL3, and coded before translation. Only reported excerpts were translated and checked against the Persian source.

Selection sought relatively high, moderate, and low survey profiles so that interviews could explore convergence and discrepant experience. Follow-up probes requested specific incidents and counterexamples rather than general evaluations. Field notes documented contextual details and immediate analytic reflections.

Qualitative analysis, trustworthiness, and integration

Thematic analysis followed familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Quantitative outcomes served as sensitizing domains, while inductive coding identified additional processes and systemic barriers. Repeated reading, cross-participant comparison, an audit trail, reflexive memos, peer review of a coding subset, consensus discussion, and translation checks supported credibility and dependability.

Coding and theme development remained in Persian to reduce premature translation loss. Peer review was used to challenge interpretations rather than to imply that qualitative meaning is mechanically reproducible. Quotations in the Results section make the relationship between participant accounts and analytic claims visible.

Integration occurred through interview selection, questions shaped by quantitative results, and a joint display. Themes were interpreted as confirming, explaining, or extending the statistical pattern; they were not treated as proof of the paths.

This sequence preserved the explanatory purpose of the design: interviews examined the practices participants associated with each quantitative relationship and how unmeasured conditions qualified its practical expression. The qualitative material was not used to establish temporal mediation or to rank the four associations.

Findings and Results

Descriptive and measurement-model results

All means exceeded the scale midpoint: perceived leadership ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.64$), academic optimism ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.57$), professional-development engagement ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.61$), professional agency ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.59$), and perceived collective capacity ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.62$). Their compressed range limits the substantive importance of this ordering.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Composite-Level Measurement Quality

Construct	M	SD	α	ρ_A	CR	AVE
Perceived school leadership	3.87	.64	.88	.89	.91	.67
Professional agency	3.74	.59	.86	.87	.90	.65
Perceived collective capacity	3.68	.62	.84	.85	.89	.68
Academic optimism	3.81	.57	.85	.86	.90	.69
Professional-development engagement	3.76	.61	.83	.84	.88	.67

Note. $N = 205$. α = Cronbach's alpha; ρ_A = Dijkstra–Henseler's rho; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. Values apply to the parcel-indicator model, not to every original item.

Table 3. Outer Loadings of the Composite Indicators

Leadership	Agency	Collective capacity	Academic optimism	Professional learning
SL1 .81	PA1 .78	CA1 .83	AO1 .84	PD1 .81
SL2 .84	PA2 .82	CA2 .79	AO2 .87	PD2 .85
SL3 .79	PA3 .85	CA3 .86	AO3 .82	PD3 .83
SL4 .86	PA4 .80	CA4 .81	AO4 .79	PD4 .78
SL5 .83	PA5 .77	—	—	—

Note. Indicator labels identify theory-guided parcel scores entered into SmartPLS, not individual questionnaire items. No parcel was removed after measurement-model assessment.

Loadings (.77–.87), alpha (.83–.88), ρ_A (.84–.89), composite reliability (.88–.91), and AVE (.65–.69) met conventional criteria at the parcel-indicator level. Table 4 provides the complete information used to assess discriminant validity rather than only the largest value.

Table 4. Correlations, Square Roots of AVE, and HTMT Ratios

Construct	SL	PA	PCC	AO	PD
SL	.82	.70	.65	.67	.72
PA	.61	.81	.61	.64	.68
PCC	.56	.52	.82	.66	.63
AO	.58	.55	.57	.83	.65
PD	.63	.59	.54	.56	.82

Note. Bold diagonal entries are square roots of AVE; values below the diagonal are latent-variable correlations; values above the diagonal are HTMT ratios. SL = perceived school leadership; PA = professional agency; PCC = perceived collective capacity; AO = academic optimism; PD = professional-development engagement.

Each square root of AVE exceeded the associated correlations, and every HTMT ratio was below .85. Perceived collective capacity and academic optimism remained conceptually related because collective efficacy informs both, although their HTMT of .66 supported empirical distinction within the analyzed parcel model. These results do not validate every source item independently, and statistical distinction does not erase theoretical overlap.

Structural-model results

All four paths were positive and significant (Table 5), supporting H1–H4. Professional-development engagement had the largest point estimate ($\beta = .63$, $R^2 = .40$), followed by professional agency ($\beta = .61$, $R^2 = .37$), academic optimism ($\beta = .58$, $R^2 = .34$), and perceived collective capacity ($\beta = .56$, $R^2 = .31$). Because differences between coefficients were not tested, this ordering is descriptive.

Table 5. Direct Teacher-Level Associations

Outcome	Estimate and bootstrap inference	Model statistics
Professional agency	$\beta = .61$; Boot SD = .052; $t = 11.73$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [.51, .71]	$R^2 = .37$; adj. $R^2 = .36$; $f^2 = .59$; $Q^2 = .24$
Perceived collective capacity	$\beta = .56$; Boot SD = .058; $t = 9.66$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [.45, .67]	$R^2 = .31$; adj. $R^2 = .30$; $f^2 = .45$; $Q^2 = .19$
Academic optimism	$\beta = .58$; Boot SD = .055; $t = 10.55$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [.47, .68]	$R^2 = .34$; adj. $R^2 = .33$; $f^2 = .52$; $Q^2 = .22$
Professional-development engagement	$\beta = .63$; Boot SD = .050; $t = 12.60$; $p < .001$; 95% CI [.53, .72]	$R^2 = .40$; adj. $R^2 = .39$; $f^2 = .67$; $Q^2 = .27$

Note. Perceived school leadership was the sole predictor in each equation; 5,000 bootstrap resamples were used. β , R^2 , and f^2 are mathematically related in a single-predictor model. Q^2 denotes in-sample predictive relevance, not holdout performance.

Effect sizes were .45–.67, and Q^2 values were positive (.19–.27), indicating in-sample predictive relevance. These indices are descriptive because no holdout prediction was conducted and the single-predictor design makes several statistics transformations of the same association. The pattern informed interview prompts about where participants encountered leadership most directly and where peer or institutional conditions also mattered.

The confidence intervals excluded zero and showed the same ordering as the point estimates. Differences between coefficients were not tested directly, so the rank order should not be interpreted as proof that one relationship is statistically stronger than another. The point estimates nevertheless provided an analytically useful basis for follow-up questions, without supporting inferential comparison.

Qualitative themes

The thematic analysis generated 16 subthemes organized under five themes. Four explained the corresponding quantitative relationship, while the fifth identified constraints omitted from the survey model.

Table 6. Qualitative Themes, Subthemes, and Explanatory Mechanisms

Theme	Subthemes	Explanatory mechanism
Leadership and professional agency	Encouragement; trust and autonomy; participation; constructive feedback	Recognition and professional voice made responsible instructional initiative safer and more feasible.
Leadership and collective agency	Collaborative structures; shared responsibility; professional dialogue	Participants associated enacted collaboration with protected time, purposeful routines, and psychological safety.
Leadership and academic optimism	Trust-based climate; academic emphasis; positive achievement-oriented morale	Credible expectations and constructive sense-making framed student difficulty as improvable.
Leadership and professional development	Continuous learning; mentoring and support; reflection and innovation	Access, encouragement, feedback, and follow-up connected professional learning to EFL classroom problems.

Systemic barriers	Workload; curriculum/bureaucracy; limited resources	Institutional demands bounded teachers' opportunity to use supportive leadership.
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Note. Themes were derived from 12 teacher and three supplementary school-leader interviews conducted and coded in Persian.

Theme 1: Leadership and professional agency. Teachers linked agency with trust, responsible autonomy, participation, and constructive feedback. Autonomy meant room to adapt pedagogy with professional accountability: “If the principal trusts me, I feel free to choose the best method for my students. I know the level of my class better than anyone else” (T2). Consultation signaled professional membership, while observation supported agency only when it produced respectful, usable feedback rather than fault-finding.

Recognition and participation supplied complementary evidence. T4 explained, “When the principal appreciates our efforts, even small things, I feel that my work matters. It gives me more energy to improve my teaching and try new activities with my students.” T1 similarly contrasted consequential consultation with top-down communication: “When our opinions are asked before decisions are made, we feel that we are part of the school, not just employees who receive orders.”

Recognition was also consequential because it made initiative visible. Teachers contrasted consultation before decisions with being informed after choices were fixed. They did not reject evaluation; they rejected observation experienced primarily as detection of noncompliance. Agency was therefore related to the purpose and quality of interaction, not simply the presence of autonomy or feedback.

Theme 2: Leadership and collective agency. Collective agency was organized professional work rather than collegial friendliness. Joint planning, assessment discussion, materials sharing, and group responses to learning problems required time, clear meeting purposes, safety, and shared ownership. As SL1 observed, “If collaboration is not planned and supported by leadership, teachers usually become busy with their own classes.” The interviews thus explained how perceived capacity could become action without assuming that shared belief automatically produces collaboration.

The teacher accounts also tied collaboration to a concrete instructional object. T8 stated, “When students have difficulties in English, we discuss the issue as a group and try to find solutions together. It is not only the responsibility of one teacher.” This example supports an interpretation of collective agency as coordinated problem-solving, not simply favorable attitudes toward colleagues.

Teachers described shared responsibility most clearly when recurring student difficulties were treated as a department problem rather than one teacher’s failure. Yet timetabled meetings sometimes remained administrative. This contrast showed that structural provision was necessary but insufficient: collaboration also needed decision relevance and an instructional object.

Theme 3: Leadership and academic optimism. Leaders’ messages helped frame difficulty as fixed or improvable. One teacher noted, “Our principal always says that even weak students can improve if we support them properly” (T7). Optimism did not deny low motivation, limited exposure, or examination pressure; it combined academic emphasis with trust, recognition, and the expectation that coordinated effort could produce progress.

Participants also described the discouraging effect of communication focused repeatedly on deficits and blame. Positive expectations became credible when leaders recognized incremental progress and supported teachers’ responses to difficulty. Optimism was thus an achievement-oriented interpretation of evidence, not generalized morale.

The supplementary leader perspective converged with this account. SL3 noted, “If the leadership always focuses on problems, teachers become discouraged. But when we emphasize progress and possibilities, teachers develop a more positive outlook.” The quotation is treated as contextual corroboration rather than a substitute for teachers’ perceptions.

Theme 4: Leadership and professional development. Leaders influenced information, permission, scheduling, mentoring, and follow-up, helping interpret the largest point estimate. Teachers valued EFL-relevant opportunities and learning embedded

in observation, mentoring, peer dialogue, and reflection. “When feedback is supportive, not critical, it helps us improve. We feel that observation is for learning, not for blaming” (T6). Meaningful engagement required classroom relevance and opportunities to apply new ideas, not mandated attendance alone.

Access to formal learning was also visible in T4’s account: “Our principal informs us about new training opportunities and encourages us to attend workshops related to English teaching.” Read together, the two excerpts distinguish access to professional development from the relational quality of feedback that supports engagement after access is provided.

External workshops were valued when their content addressed current teaching problems and when school routines allowed experimentation afterward. Participants otherwise experienced training as certification or attendance. The leadership contribution therefore concerned both the supply of opportunities and the local conditions under which learning could influence practice.

Theme 5: Systemic barriers to agency and development. Workload, rigid curricula, bureaucracy, and limited resources constrained every domain. “Even if the school leader supports innovation, the centralized curriculum does not always allow us to change our teaching methods” (T10). Leaders could protect time, interpret requirements flexibly, or seek resources, but could not remove national curricula, fixed examinations, staffing constraints, or scarcity. This theme extended the direct model by locating leadership within institutional conditions.

Workload imposed a second boundary. T12 explained, “We want to attend more training sessions and try new teaching ideas, but our workload is very heavy. Sometimes there is no time or energy left.” This negative case qualifies any leader-centered interpretation: perceived support may coexist with limited opportunity to participate or experiment.

Workload was described as a constraint on both attendance and the energy required to test unfamiliar practice. Curriculum and examination expectations narrowed the acceptable range of adaptation, while resource scarcity limited technology, materials, and mentoring access. The same supportive behavior could therefore have different consequences depending on the surrounding conditions.

Mixed-methods integration

The datasets converged on positive leadership relationships. Interviews explained professional agency through trust, voice, and feedback; collective capacity through organized collaboration; academic optimism through credible expectations and trust; and professional learning through access, mentoring, reflection, and follow-up. Systemic barriers expanded the survey model.

Table 7. Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative pattern	Qualitative explanation	Integrated inference
Leadership → professional agency: $\beta = .61$; $R^2 = .37$	Trust, responsible autonomy, teacher voice, and improvement-oriented feedback	Leadership was associated with agency when teachers experienced credible professional discretion and support.
Leadership → collective capacity: $\beta = .56$; $R^2 = .31$	Time, team structures, shared responsibility, and professional dialogue	Participants associated movement from shared efficacy beliefs toward coordinated action with organized, purposeful collaboration.
Leadership → academic optimism: $\beta = .58$; $R^2 = .34$	Trust, high expectations, recognition of progress, and constructive communication	Leadership helped shape teachers’ interpretation of academic possibility, but the study measured teacher perceptions rather than school-level culture.
Leadership → professional-development engagement: $\beta = .63$; $R^2 = .40$	Relevant opportunities, mentoring, supportive observation, reflection, and follow-up	The largest point estimate was consistent with participants’ accounts that leaders influenced access and local learning routines; coefficient differences were not tested.
Unmeasured contextual conditions	Workload, centralized curriculum, bureaucracy, and scarce resources	Leadership associations were embedded in systemic conditions that could enable, dilute, or block practical enactment.

Note. The joint display distinguishes statistical convergence, qualitative explanation, and qualitative expansion of the survey model.

Across outcomes, leadership had relational and structural dimensions. Trust and respect reduced interpersonal risk; schedules, mentoring, resources, and decision procedures made action feasible. Together they made experimentation, help-seeking, and discussion of difficulty safer. This integrated inference explains the shared pattern but was not an additional tested path.

Table 7 also distinguishes convergence from expansion. The first four themes made the positive paths intelligible, whereas systemic barriers introduced conditions outside the quantitative model. Integration therefore yielded a qualified account rather than simple confirmation.

Discussion and Conclusion

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study examined the associations of perceived school leadership with professional agency, perceived collective capacity, teacher-perceived academic optimism, and professional-development engagement among EFL teachers in formal schools in District 22 of Tehran. The quantitative findings supported all four hypotheses. Perceived school leadership was positively associated with professional-development engagement ($\beta = .63$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .40$), professional agency ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .37$), teacher-perceived academic optimism ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .34$), and perceived collective capacity ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .31$). The qualitative findings explained these relationships through teachers' and school leaders' accounts of relational trust, responsible autonomy, consequential teacher voice, organized collaboration, credible academic expectations, mentoring, and improvement-oriented feedback. Participants nevertheless indicated that workload, curricular rigidity, bureaucratic requirements, and resource limitations restricted their ability to convert leadership support into sustained professional action. Collectively, these findings suggest that teachers who experienced their school leadership more positively also reported stronger individual and collective professional capacities, greater academic optimism, and deeper engagement in professional learning. Because the quantitative phase was cross-sectional and based on teacher-level self-reports, however, these findings indicate associations rather than causal leadership effects.

The strongest point estimate was observed for professional-development engagement, for which perceived school leadership explained 40% of the variance. Although the differences among the four coefficients were not tested statistically, the descriptive prominence of this relationship is theoretically plausible because school leaders can influence teachers' access to professional learning relatively directly. Principals and instructional leaders can allocate time, identify relevant learning opportunities, facilitate mentoring, encourage peer observation, organize collaborative meetings, and provide follow-up feedback. The interview findings supported this interpretation: teachers described professional learning as more meaningful when leaders connected it to classroom problems, encouraged the exchange of experience, and treated feedback as a resource for improvement rather than as an instrument of evaluation. This result accords with research showing that principal leadership can connect professional-development priorities with teachers' actual needs and promote the translation of professional learning into practice (21). It is also consistent with the understanding of professional-development engagement as active, reflective, sustained, and collaborative participation rather than mere attendance at training activities (22).

The professional-development finding can also be interpreted through emerging work on teacher leadership. Sustained learning becomes more likely when teachers are not positioned merely as recipients of externally designed programs but are enabled to contribute knowledge, mentor colleagues, initiate inquiry, and participate in instructional improvement. Research on language teacher leadership has identified professional learning, peer influence, and organizational participation as important but inconsistently conceptualized components of teachers' leadership roles (17). The present qualitative evidence suggests that supportive school leaders can make such roles practicable by recognizing expertise and organizing opportunities for teachers to learn with and from one another. This aligns with evidence that teacher leadership can help teachers implement

pedagogical innovation despite contextual constraints (18). It also supports the view that leadership enables responsive education by converting existing teacher capabilities into opportunities for meaningful action (19). Thus, the relationship between leadership and professional-development engagement appears to involve both the provision of learning opportunities and the creation of a professional culture in which teacher learning carries practical value.

Perceived school leadership was also strongly associated with professional agency, explaining 37% of its variance. This finding is consistent with an ecological understanding of agency as an achievement arising from the interaction of teachers' capacities and contextual affordances, rather than as a stable personal attribute (6). Teachers in the qualitative phase associated agency with being trusted to adapt instruction, being consulted about decisions, receiving constructive feedback, and having their professional voice produce recognizable consequences. Such accounts demonstrate that autonomy alone is insufficient. Teachers may formally be permitted to make decisions, but their agency remains limited when workload, fixed curricula, examination demands, or scarce resources prevent them from enacting those decisions. The results therefore support the ecological proposition that agency depends on how professional histories, aspirations, beliefs, resources, and current conditions come together in specific situations (7).

The interview evidence also clarifies why leadership should not be understood as "giving" agency to teachers. Agency remained dependent on teachers' professional judgment and willingness to act, but leadership shaped whether such action appeared legitimate, safe, and feasible. Teachers' beliefs influence how they recognize and evaluate possibilities for action; consequently, the same formal opportunity may be interpreted as genuine professional discretion by one teacher and as symbolic participation by another (8). The importance participants assigned to consequential voice is especially notable. Consultation that does not affect school decisions may generate frustration rather than agency, whereas transparent decision-making and visible use of teacher input can strengthen professional responsibility. The findings also fit the multidimensional representation of teacher agency, which includes instructional decision-making, professional development, collaboration, and participation in school processes (24).

The agency result is particularly relevant to Iranian EFL education. Previous research has shown that teacher agency during curriculum reform in Iran emerges through negotiation between reform expectations and centralized institutional conditions (9). Iranian mainstream-school English teaching is simultaneously influenced by pedagogical realities, societal expectations, and governmental policy environments (10). The present findings extend this literature by identifying perceived school leadership as an important correlate of teachers' capacity to navigate these intersecting demands. Leadership may help teachers interpret policy, adapt prescribed materials, and respond to learners' needs, but it cannot eliminate structural constraints originating beyond the school. This distinction reflects the policy-enactment perspective, according to which educational policies are interpreted and translated by school actors within specific material and organizational circumstances rather than implemented uniformly (4).

Assessment-related studies provide further support for this interpretation. Iranian novice EFL teachers' assessment practices may be shaped simultaneously by the Konkur, principals, and parents, illustrating how professional decisions are embedded in overlapping systems of pressure and accountability (11). Nevertheless, teachers can negotiate high-stakes demands through context-sensitive assessment literacy and the strategic use of blended learning (12). The present study similarly indicates that leadership can either expand or narrow the practical space within which teachers exercise professional judgment. Its findings also align with ecological measures of EFL teacher agency that emphasize interactions among individual competence, professional relationships, resources, and school-community conditions (14). Assessment agency specifically has likewise been conceptualized as involving teacher-related and contextual dimensions (13). Therefore, the relationship found here should not

be reduced to a simple effect of principal encouragement; it reflects the role of leadership within a wider ecology of professional action.

Perceived school leadership was positively associated with teacher-perceived academic optimism and explained 34% of its variance. Academic optimism integrates academic emphasis, trust in students and parents, and collective confidence in the faculty's ability to promote learning (23). The qualitative findings indicated that leaders supported this orientation when they communicated credible expectations, recognized progress, maintained respectful relationships, and coupled demands for achievement with instructional assistance. In an EFL context, such practices may be particularly important because limited exposure to English, heterogeneous proficiency, and examination pressures can encourage teachers to adopt deficit-oriented explanations of student performance. Leaders who frame difficulties as improvable and provide practical support may strengthen teachers' confidence in students and colleagues. Conversely, expectations that are not accompanied by trust, resources, or professional support may be experienced as administrative pressure rather than academic optimism.

This finding complements established leadership research. Successful school leadership contributes to instructional focus and organizational capacity by establishing direction, developing people, and redesigning organizational conditions (2). Leadership approaches that directly promote and participate in teacher learning are particularly strongly connected with educational outcomes (3). The present evidence suggests that one route through which such leadership may matter is the cultivation of an achievement-oriented yet relationally supportive professional environment. Nevertheless, the study measured individual teachers' perceptions of academic optimism rather than an aggregated school property. The findings therefore show that teachers who perceived stronger leadership also tended to perceive greater academic emphasis, trust, and collective confidence; they do not demonstrate that all teachers within a school shared a homogeneous optimistic culture.

The positive association with perceived collective capacity, accounting for 31% of the variance, further indicates that leadership is related to teachers' confidence in their faculty's shared ability to address instructional challenges. Interview participants connected this confidence with organized collaboration, shared planning, mutual assistance, and opportunities to discuss classroom problems. Leadership appeared to strengthen perceived collective capacity by establishing structures for interaction and signaling that collaboration was a legitimate part of professional work. However, the interviews also showed that confidence and collective action were not interchangeable. Teachers could believe that their colleagues were capable while lacking the time or authority necessary for sustained joint work. Similarly, formal meetings did not necessarily produce collective problem-solving when they were dominated by administrative matters or when teacher contributions had little influence on decisions.

This distinction is important because the quantitative measure represented efficacy-related perceptions rather than directly observed collective agency. Leadership may create the relational and organizational preconditions for collective action, but actual coordination requires usable time, shared goals, access to evidence, and decision-making procedures. Curriculum flexibility and professional autonomy are most productive when teachers and schools possess the capacity to use them effectively (1). The participants' accounts of workload and bureaucratic demands illustrate how nominal opportunities for collaboration can be weakened by practical constraints. Accordingly, the lower point estimate for perceived collective capacity—although not statistically compared with the other coefficients—may reflect the fact that collective functioning depends not only on the principal–teacher relationship but also on peer relationships, faculty composition, scheduling, and institutional resources.

The findings also illustrate the value of separating related constructs. Professional agency concerned the teacher's purposeful judgment and action, whereas perceived collective capacity concerned beliefs about what the faculty could accomplish together. Academic optimism overlapped with collective capacity through collective confidence but additionally incorporated trust and

academic emphasis. Professional-development engagement referred to the quality of teachers' participation in learning. The acceptable discriminant-validity results supported their empirical distinction in the analyzed composite-level model, but their conceptual relationships remain important. Leadership practices such as trust, feedback, collaboration, and teacher voice may influence several outcomes simultaneously. For example, mentoring may increase professional learning, strengthen individual agency, and contribute to confidence in colleagues. The integrated model therefore reveals complementary associations rather than four entirely independent leadership effects.

The qualitative findings further qualified the uniformly positive quantitative pattern. Teachers did not describe leadership support as sufficient to overcome all constraints. Curricular rigidity limited instructional adaptation; examination requirements narrowed assessment decisions; workload reduced time for collaboration and professional learning; bureaucracy redirected attention toward compliance; and resource shortages restricted the implementation of new ideas. Diagnostic research on teacher agency during curriculum reform similarly shows that contradictions among policy, institutional arrangements, available tools, and teachers' objectives can inhibit meaningful change (16). EFL teacher identity is also negotiated within micropolitical relationships involving authority, recognition, institutional expectations, and access to resources (20). These perspectives help explain why teachers who perceived leadership positively could still encounter substantial barriers to action.

Professional education may strengthen teachers' capacity to respond to such constraints. Language-assessment teacher education, for instance, can enhance agency by developing knowledge, reflection, and confidence in professional decision-making (15). Yet the current findings suggest that individual learning is most likely to affect practice when leadership creates conditions for application. Similarly, instructional leadership can influence teachers' planning and implementation of curriculum innovation by connecting reform goals with classroom-level support (5). Leadership should therefore be understood as a contextual organizer rather than an isolated cause: it can align expectations, relationships, resources, and learning opportunities, but its influence remains conditioned by the broader educational system.

Methodologically, the findings require careful level-specific interpretation. All constructs were reported by individual teachers, and no school identifier was retained. Consequently, perceived leadership, academic optimism, and collective capacity cannot be interpreted as independently verified school-level properties. Multilevel mediation frameworks would be needed to distinguish teacher-level associations from school-level processes and to examine whether organizational conditions transmit leadership relationships across levels (26). Measurement invariance would also need to be demonstrated before comparing these constructs across groups such as public and private schools, career stages, or demographic categories (25). If future work examines agreement between teachers' and leaders' perceptions, response surface analysis could represent congruence and discrepancy more accurately than simple difference scores (27). The present results thus provide an integrated, construct-sensitive account but should not be treated as evidence of causality, multilevel effects, or perceptual agreement.

This study had several limitations. Its cross-sectional design did not establish temporal order or causality, and reciprocal relationships are possible because agentic, optimistic, collaborative, and professionally engaged teachers may also evaluate leadership more positively. Accessible sampling from formal schools in one district of Tehran limits generalizability to other districts, provinces, educational levels, and language institutes. All quantitative variables were collected from teachers through self-report questionnaires, increasing the possibility of common-method variance, social-desirability effects, and perceptual overlap. No school identifier was retained; therefore, teacher responses could not be nested, aggregated, or used to estimate school-level leadership and climate effects. The adapted measures and theory-guided parcels reduced model complexity but concealed item-level performance, and some instruments—particularly professional agency and professional-development engagement—require further independent validation in Iranian EFL settings. The qualitative sample provided contextual depth but was relatively small, and the accounts may not represent the full diversity of formal-school EFL teachers. Finally,

administration-mode details and the exact distribution of item-level missingness were unavailable, preventing mode comparisons and more advanced missing-data analyses.

Future studies should use longitudinal, experimental, or repeated-measures designs to clarify the temporal and potentially reciprocal relationships among leadership perceptions and teacher outcomes. Researchers should recruit probability-based samples across multiple districts, provinces, school levels, and public and private sectors and retain anonymous school identifiers so that multilevel models can distinguish teacher-level perceptions from school-level properties. Data should be collected from teachers, principals, students, observations, and administrative records to reduce dependence on a single source. Independent validation of the adapted instruments should include item-level confirmatory analyses, measurement invariance across relevant groups, and tests of convergent and predictive validity. Future models could examine trust, psychological safety, teacher voice, mentoring, professional learning communities, and resource availability as mediators, while workload, curricular rigidity, examination pressure, school type, and career stage could be examined as moderators. Comparative case studies and classroom observations could also determine how leadership support is translated into actual instructional adaptation, assessment practices, collaboration, and professional learning over time.

School leaders should establish regular, protected opportunities for EFL teachers to plan together, examine learner evidence, design assessments, share materials, observe colleagues, and address problems of practice. Teacher participation should be consequential, with leaders communicating how teachers' recommendations influenced decisions and explaining transparently when proposals cannot be adopted. Classroom observation and feedback should emphasize growth, reflection, and problem-solving rather than surveillance. Leaders should combine responsible instructional autonomy with clear expectations, mentoring, accessible resources, and follow-up support so that teachers can implement professionally justified adaptations. Professional-development activities should address authentic EFL challenges, including mixed proficiency, communicative teaching, assessment, motivation, technology, and high-stakes examinations. Educational authorities should also reduce unnecessary administrative workload, provide greater flexibility in curriculum implementation, and ensure equitable access to instructional and technological resources. These practices can create conditions in which professional agency, collective confidence, academic optimism, and sustained teacher learning reinforce one another.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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