

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Work Motivation in the Digital Era: The Mediating Role of Teacher Readiness for Change

Original Article

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Received: 12 May 2026

Accepted: 26 May 2026

Published online : 09 June 2026

Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of principals' transformational leadership on teachers' work motivation in the digital era, with readiness for change as an intervening variable. Amidst the increasingly massive demands of digital transformation in education, it is crucial for schools to understand the factors that influence teachers' work motivation to maintain the quality of learning. Data were collected through a survey involving 75 teachers in Enrekang Regency who are facing the dynamics of technology adaptation. The analysis method used was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS), which allows researchers to test the relationship between variables simultaneously. The results show that transformational leadership has a positive and significant influence on teachers' work motivation, and readiness for change acts as a mediator that mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and teachers' work motivation in the digital era. These findings emphasize the importance of enhancing transformational leadership capacity to not only encourage technology adoption but also improve teachers' mental readiness and work motivation.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Teacher Work Motivation, Readiness for Change, Digital Era, Educational Management.

1. Introduction

The education sector in Indonesia plays a significant role in supporting human resource (HR) capacity building and national growth in the era of disruption. Based on global demands and the policy direction of the Ministry of Education, school digitalization is a key instrument in accelerating the quality of learning. The implementation of various platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), digital administration applications, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) requires educators to be fully prepared. The dynamics of digital transformation are a phenomenon that will never fade with time but rather continue to evolve with the times. These changes force schools to remain adaptive and agile in responding to technological developments to ensure the quality of graduates remains relevant to the needs of the modern job market (Fentyrina & Mardi, 2025).

One area facing real challenges in aligning teacher competencies in this digital era is Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi. As a region with unique geographic characteristics and varied digital infrastructure, the process of technology adaptation among teachers in Enrekang Regency has given rise to fluctuations in work motivation. Teachers are burdened not only by conventional teaching duties but also by technological anxiety (technostress) due to the demands of digital-based performance reporting. The combination of limited access to



training, new administrative workloads, and teacher age diversity contribute to unstable levels of work motivation. If left unchecked without appropriate leadership support, this can lead to a decline in teaching effectiveness and overall school performance (Ningtyas & Sugiarto, 2022).

Leadership competence in schools is an integral part of the institutional work climate. Facing increasingly fierce competition for quality between schools, school management must stand out with unique and innovative management. The principal's leadership style is a key determinant of success in this quality competition. Many educational institutions experience stagnation or decline in performance because their leaders fail to provide appropriate guidance and moral support to teachers during the transition period. The quality of the principal's managerial services is a key psychological consideration for teachers in determining their professional commitment, as the leader's actions influence how teachers view the shift from analog to digital work systems (Fentyrina & Mardi, 2025).

Transformational leadership is considered the most effective internal marketing approach for building human resource engagement and motivation in the digital era. Transformational leadership focuses on four main pillars: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Gougou, 2023). Through this approach, leaders act not only as guides but also as agents of change, inspiring employees to adapt quickly to technological transformation and new work dynamics.

Transformational principals do not act in an authoritarian manner, but rather serve as role models in digital literacy, optimistically communicating a vision for the school's future, stimulating teachers' teaching creativity, and paying special attention to teachers with slower technological learning curves. The emotional connection built through this leadership style has been shown to foster deep teacher trust and job satisfaction, while human-centered problem-solving approaches such as design thinking have also been shown to be effective in fostering critical and innovative thinking in a structured manner within the organization (Daengneam et al., 2025).

In addition to directly influencing motivation, transformational leadership also influences teachers' readiness for change (Aditianto & Amir, 2022). Readiness for change is a crucial psychological step in developing, maintaining, and protecting the adaptive capacity of human resources before they fully internalize digital work systems. Teachers tend to have high levels of readiness and confidence when their leaders consistently provide satisfactory responses and facilities. In the context of school management in the digital era, readiness for change encompasses aspects of mental openness, acceptance of new regulations, and active participation in IT training.

Teacher work motivation itself is a process that emerges when teachers recognize their professional responsibilities, seek the best teaching formulations, and assess the extent to which digital innovations can facilitate student learning outcomes. When teachers feel emotionally engaged and mentally prepared for change, they will be encouraged to implement teaching innovations more quickly and consistently. Readiness for change here serves as a crucial intervening variable connecting the influence of transformational leadership with optimal teacher work motivation (Novitasari & Asbari, 2020).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on transformational leadership and teacher work motivation (e.g., by Novitasari & Asbari, 2020), research specifically examining readiness for change as a mediating variable in the context of school digitalization in areas with specific geographic and infrastructure challenges, such as Enrekang Regency, remains very limited. Most previous research has focused on urban areas with established digital penetration. However, psychological dynamics such as technostress and motivational

fluctuations are most likely to occur in supporting or rural areas that are being forced to make the digital technological leap.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of a human-centered approach into transformational leadership to address teachers' digital resistance in a region with unique infrastructure variations. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the direct influence of principals' transformational leadership on teachers' work motivation in the digital era and to examine the extent to which teachers' readiness for change mediates this relationship in Enrekang Regency. The results of this study are expected to provide a practical contribution to the Enrekang Regency Education Office in formulating an adaptive principal development model in the era of disruption.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one of the most adaptive leadership paradigms in managing organizational change (Wulansari & Pratama, 2025). According to modern concepts, transformational leadership is defined as a leadership style capable of motivating and inspiring followers to achieve results beyond their own expectations for the advancement of the organization (Yukl, 2024). Within the educational ecosystem, principals who implement a transformational style do not simply rely on bureaucratic authority or a rigid transactional reward system, but rather strive to transform teachers' awareness, values, and professional commitment (Sabariah et al., 2024).

According to the main theory of Bass & Avolio, the effectiveness of transformational leadership is measured through four main dimensions known as The 4 Is: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration.

2.2. Readiness for Change

In facing technological disruption in education, educators' readiness for change plays a crucial role (Aledhean et al., 2021). Readiness for change is a psychological state encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects, where organizational members accept, support, and believe that a planned change or the adoption of a new system within the organization is a key element that determines successful adaptation (Zaman, 2025).

When a school transitions to a digital ecosystem, teachers are vulnerable to technostress if they are not equipped with adequate mental readiness (Wicaksana et al., 2026). Human resources with a high level of readiness for change will demonstrate greater openness to new regulations, actively participate in IT training, and demonstrate an affective commitment to the success of the school's digitalization program (Nurista & Yusra, 2025).

2.3. Teacher Work Motivation in the Digital Era

Work motivation is an internal and external driving force that actively encourages individuals to carry out their work tasks with commitment and enthusiasm to achieve established organizational goals (Hasibuan, 2021). In the current era of digital transformation, the dynamics and fluctuations of work motivation (particularly among teachers) are highly dependent on the adaptive work climate and digital culture created by their organization (Wahit et al., 2025). A work environment that is responsive to technological change has been shown to maintain the stability of educators' work enthusiasm and performance on an ongoing basis.

Work motivation is crucial in encouraging loyalty, creativity, and maximum performance of educators (Mangkunegara, 2017). Based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, this dimension is divided into motivator factors (intrinsic) related to internal psychological satisfaction such as recognition, responsibility, and self-development, and hygiene factors (extrinsic) which include work environment conditions such as school policies, supervision, and compensation (Mangkunegara, 2017). When these two factors are well accommodated by the institution's management, teachers' passion for teaching will increase significantly, which in turn has a direct impact on improving the quality of learning and the school's effectiveness on an ongoing basis.

2.4. Hypothesis Development

The relationship between the principal's transformational leadership variable and teacher work motivation shows that supportive, visionary, and innovative leadership behaviors have a statistically significant positive relationship with the work motivation of educators (Bass & Avolio, 1997). The more effective the transformational leadership style implemented by the principal in the digital era, the higher the motivation and work passion of teachers in carrying out their academic duties. In the era of technological disruption, principals who are able to provide intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation make teachers feel appreciated and supported, thus triggering an increase in their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to continue to perform optimally (Mangkunegara, 2017).

Transformational leadership is considered a key determinant in building adaptability and capacity for change at the school organizational level (Ferdinand, 2014). When principals demonstrate transformational characteristics through communicating a clear digital vision and leading by strong role models, teachers' perceptions of the urgency of technological change shift positively. The sense of security and trust fostered by transformational leadership minimizes the psychological resistance of educators, making them cognitively and affectively more prepared to face and adopt various digital learning system transformations (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Teachers' psychological well-being, characterized by a high level of readiness to embrace technological innovation, is closely correlated with their level of engagement and work motivation at school (Mangkunegara, 2017). Teachers with a mature level of readiness for change tend to view digitalization not as an additional workload, but as an opportunity for professional development. This proactive and optimistic attitude in facing changes in the digital era fosters a sense of responsibility and high internal job satisfaction, which in turn significantly strengthens the foundation of their work motivation within the school environment.

The influence of a principal's transformational leadership on teacher work motivation is not only direct but also significantly mediated by the teachers' level of readiness for change (Hair & Alamer, 2022). A transformative principal acts as a catalyst, initially fostering awareness, confidence, and readiness for digital adaptation among educators. By creating a conducive climate of readiness for change, the positive impact of the principal's leadership will be more strongly internalized within teachers, ultimately manifesting in a massive and sustainable increase in work motivation in the digital era.

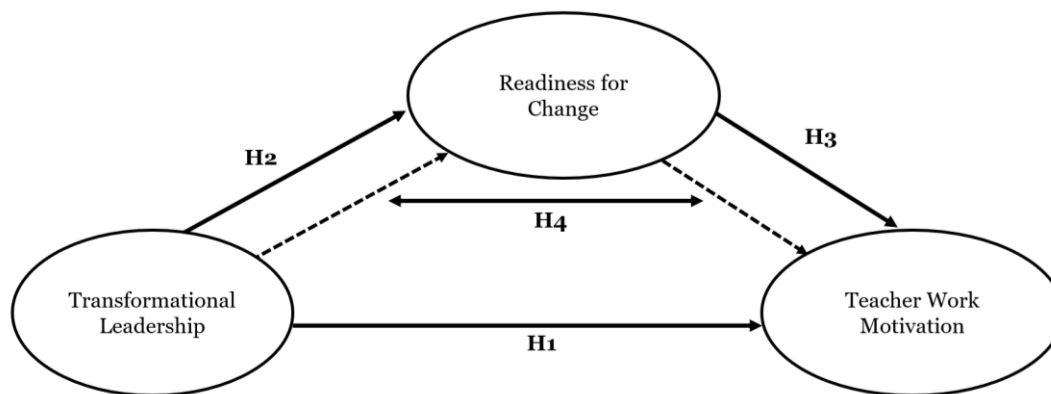


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

- H1 : The principal's transformational leadership has a positive and significant influence on teacher work motivation.
- H2 : The principal's transformational leadership has a positive and significant influence on teachers' readiness for change.
- H3 : Teachers' readiness for change has a positive and significant influence on teachers' work motivation.
- H4 : Teachers' readiness for change significantly mediates the influence of the principal's transformational leadership on teachers' work motivation.

3. Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the influence of principals' transformational leadership on teachers' work motivation in the digital era through teachers' readiness for change as an intervening variable. The population in this study is all teachers who are actively teaching in Enrekang Regency. Considering that the population is large and not all members of the population can be reached, this study uses a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling approach, namely selecting respondents who meet the following criteria: (1) have the status of an active teacher in Enrekang Regency, and (2) have utilized digital technology in the learning process for at least the past 1 year in order to have adequate experience related to the digital transformation of schools (Ferdinand, 2014).

The sample size for PLS-SEM analysis is determined by a minimum sample size of 5 times the number of indicators in the measurement model (Hair & Alamer, 2022). This study used a total of 15 indicators, so the minimum sample size required is $15 \times 5 = 75$ respondents. Therefore, this study selected 75 teachers as the research sample.

Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire survey as primary data distributed to teachers who met the sample criteria, both online and offline, with a Likert scale of 1–5 (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure the variables of principal transformational leadership, teacher readiness for change, and teacher work motivation before being analyzed, the data were selected to ensure completeness and consistency of answers and to handle invalid responses. Data analysis used the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach with SmartPLS through evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) including reliability and validity tests (outer loading, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, and discriminant validity/HTMT) (Hair & Alamer, 2022), followed by evaluation of the structural model (inner model) including R^2 , f^2 ,

and hypothesis testing was carried out using bootstrapping to obtain t-statistic and p-value values at a significance level of 5%.

4. Results and Discussion

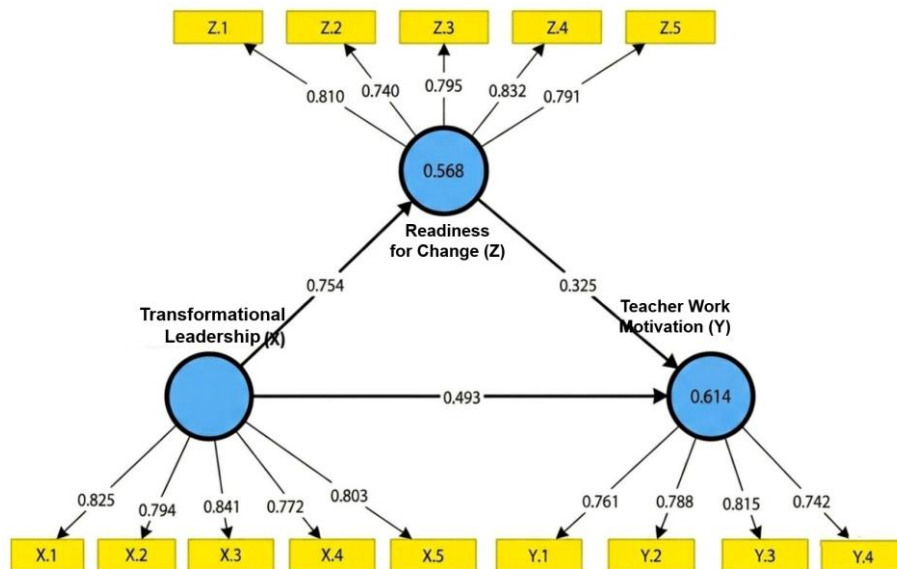


Figure 2. PLS-SEM Result

4.1. Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Sub-Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Woman	42	56.0%
	Man	33	44.0%
Total		75	100%
Age Group	< 35 Years (Late Millennials & Gen Z)	22	29.3%
	35 – 50 Years	38	50.7%
	> 50 Years (Senior)	15	20.0%
Total		75	100%

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of 75 teachers in Enrekang Regency who participated as respondents. Based on gender, the composition of respondents consisted of 42 female teachers (56.0%) and 33 male teachers (44.0%). Viewed from the age aspect, the distribution of data shows that the majority of teachers are in the middle productive age range, namely 35–50 years old, as many as 38 people (50.7%), followed by the group of young teachers aged under 35 years old as many as 22 people (29.3%), and the group of senior teachers aged over 50 years old as many as 15 people (20.0%).

4.2. Construct Validity & Reliability

Outer model evaluation is carried out to test the extent to which empirical indicators are validly and reliably able to represent the latent variables.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	rho_C	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Teacher Work Motivation	0.794	0.802	0.851	0.589
Readiness for Change	0.831	0.840	0.876	0.602
Transformational Leadership	0.865	0.871	0.903	0.651

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Based on the data processing results in Table 2, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values (both rho_A and rho_C) for all constructs have exceeded the critical threshold of 0.70. This indicates that all latent variables have reliable instrument internal consistency. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables are above the threshold of 0.50, which proves that the convergent validity requirements have been convincingly met.

4.3. AVE Root Value (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

The discriminant validity test aims to ensure that each latent construct measures a different dimension and does not correlate too strongly with other constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Based on AVE Root

Variables	Readiness for Change	Teacher Work Motivation	Transformational Leadership
Readiness for Change	0.776		
Teacher Work Motivation	0.712	0.767	
Transformational Leadership	0.754	0.738	0.807

Source: Processed Data, 2026

The analysis results in Table 3 show that the square root of the AVE for each construct (listed in bold diagonal) is consistently greater than the correlation coefficient between that construct and other constructs in the economic model. Thus, the discriminant validity criteria based on the Fornell-Larcker method have been met.

4.4. R-Square

The R-square value criteria are used to determine the percentage of the ability of the independent variable's variability to define changes in the dependent variable.

Table 4. R-Square

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Readiness for Change (Z)	0.568	0.563
Teacher Work Motivation (Y)	0.614	0.604

Source: Processed Data, 2026

Based on Table 4, the constant R-square value for the Readiness for Change (Z) variable was obtained at 0.568 (56.8%), which means its variability is influenced by transformational leadership. Meanwhile, the R-square value for the Teacher Work Motivation (Y) variable reached 0.614 (61.4%), which proves that variations in teacher work motivation can be explained simultaneously by the principal's transformational leadership and readiness for change in the moderate-strong effect strength category.

4.5. F-Square

F-square analysis is used to estimate the relative impact size of an exogenous driver on an endogenous objective.

Table 5. F-Square

Variables	Readiness for Change	Teacher Work Motivation	Transformational Leadership
Readiness for Change		0.118	
Teacher Work Motivation			
Transformational Leadership	1,316	0.184	

Source: Processed Data, 2026

F-square table value confirms that the principal's Transformational Leadership variable has a very large effect contribution (large effect) on teacher Readiness for Change with a value of 1.316. Meanwhile, the contribution of the effect of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Work Motivation (0.184) and the effect of Readiness for Change on Teacher Work Motivation (0.118) fall into the criteria of a medium effect level .

4.6. Hypothesis Test Results

Table 6. Path Analysis

Relationship	β	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H1 Leadership→ Readiness for Change	0.754	14,500	0,000	Confirmed
H2 Leadership→ Motivation	0.493	5,245	0,000	Confirmed
H3 Readiness for Change→ Motivation	0.325	3,009	0.003	Confirmed
H4 Leadership→ Readiness for Change → Motivation	0.245			Confirmed

Source: Processed Data, 2026

The results of the hypothesis test show that Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Readiness for Change ($\beta = 0.754$; $t = 14.500$; $p < 0.001$). Similarly, Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Motivation ($\beta = 0.493$; $t = 5.245$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, Readiness for Change is proven to have a positive and significant effect on Motivation ($\beta = 0.325$; $t = 3.009$; $p = 0.003$). Path analysis confirms that Leadership influences Motivation indirectly through Readiness for Change as a mediating variable with a path coefficient of 0.245.

4.7. Discussion

4.7.1. Leadership as a Driver of Readiness for Change

The results of the study indicate that leadership has a positive and significant influence on shaping employee readiness for change. Theoretically, transformational leaders play a crucial role in articulating a clear vision during the transformation process, which directly reduces employee resistance. Through a participatory and inclusive approach, leaders create a sense of involvement in decision-making, ultimately increasing employee ownership of the change. This confirms that readiness for change is not a natural process, but rather the result of adaptive leadership interactions in managing employee psychological perceptions.

In line with these findings, Siswadhi et al. (2025) research confirms that leaders who are able to integrate transparent communication strategies will accelerate technology adoption in the organizational environment, because employees who feel well informed tend to be more open to change than those under closed, authoritarian leadership.

4.7.2. The Influence of Leadership Style on Work Motivation

This research confirms that leadership directly influences employee motivation. The role of leadership remains a fundamental element in creating a conducive work environment, particularly in the complex dynamics of the public sector. Leaders who provide emotional support and tangible work appreciation create a work climate that motivates employees to achieve established performance targets. This support serves to fulfill crucial psychological needs, directly increasing employees' internal drive to perform optimally.

This view is supported by the study of Palit & Wahyuningtyas (2025), which states that leaders who apply a supportive leadership style are able to minimize the impact of work stress and increase intrinsic satisfaction, thereby creating an environment where employee motivation grows sustainably even when faced with the pressure of strict organizational targets.

4.7.3. The Role of Readiness for Change in Stimulating Motivation

These findings strengthen the evidence that change readiness has a positive and significant influence on achievement motivation. Change readiness serves as a mental framework that encourages employees to view change not as a threat, but as an opportunity for self-development. When employees feel ready for change, their self-confidence increases, which directly contributes to their drive to contribute more actively to achieving organizational goals. Thus, readiness becomes a psychological determinant that transforms a passive attitude into a proactive initiative at work.

Falita et al. (2024) research strengthens this argument by explaining that high readiness for change acts as a proximator for achievement motivation; employees with mature mental readiness tend to have higher resilience when facing organizational dynamics, which in turn strengthens their commitment to the company's strategic goals.

4.7.4. The Mediating Effect of Readiness for Change on Motivation

Path analysis confirmed that leadership influences motivation through readiness for change as a mediating variable. This suggests that readiness for change is the psychological foundation that bridges the relationship between leadership style and work effectiveness. Effective leadership will have a more optimal and sustainable impact on employee motivation when leaders are able to first build their mental readiness. Therefore, readiness for change is not simply an independent variable, but rather a crucial "bridge" that ensures leadership influence can translate into consistent and long-term work motivation.

As found by Manuk et al. (2024), the mediating role of readiness for change is crucial because it is a psychological mechanism that changes the influence of leadership style from mere external direction to internal commitment, so that the resulting work effectiveness becomes more stable than if motivation is only driven by direct instructions without adequate mental readiness.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that transformational leadership of principals plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher work motivation in Enrekang Regency in the digital era, both directly and through readiness for change as a mediating variable. The findings indicate that principals who are able to effectively articulate a digital vision, provide emotional support, and stimulate intellectual development significantly reduce teacher psychological resistance. Thus, readiness for change serves as a psychological "bridge" that transforms leadership directives

into a strong professional commitment, so that teachers no longer view digitalization as a burden but rather as an opportunity for self-development.

Practically, the results of this study confirm that strategies for developing educational quality in areas with infrastructure challenges must prioritize enhancing the transformational leadership capacity of school principals. The Enrekang Regency Education Office is advised to design a development program that focuses on a human-centered approach to strengthen teachers' mental readiness to adopt technology. By building a supportive and adaptive work ecosystem, schools can ensure that teacher motivation remains stable amidst the ongoing flow of technological disruption, thus ensuring the quality of learning remains relevant and competitive.

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