

ASSESSING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION READINESS: DIGITAL LEADERSHIP AND HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY AS INFLUENCING FACTORS AT SMP 72 MALUKU TENGAH

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Abstrak: Transformasi digital di lembaga pendidikan sering kali terjebak pada kesiapan struktural tanpa menjamin eksekusi operasional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai (assess) kesiapan transformasi digital dan menguji pengaruh kepemimpinan digital serta kapasitas sumber daya manusia terhadap kesiapan implementasi. Metode yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif deskriptif-korelasional dengan desain survei. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan kuesioner berskala Likert yang terdiri dari 30 butir pernyataan. Sampel penelitian melibatkan sensus populasi yang terdiri dari 21 guru dan tenaga kependidikan di Sekolah Menengah Pertama 72 Maluku Tengah. Hipotesis penelitian mengajukan bahwa kepemimpinan digital dan kapasitas sumber daya manusia berpengaruh positif terhadap kesiapan implementasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa secara agregat kesiapan berada pada kategori sangat tinggi. Namun, terdapat paradoks statistik di mana kepemimpinan digital tidak berpengaruh signifikan, sedangkan kapasitas sumber daya manusia menjadi prediktor dominan yang sangat signifikan. Temuan mengindikasikan bahwa asumsi linear pada literatur terdahulu yang berpusat pada kepemimpinan perlu ditinjau kembali, dan menunjukkan kemungkinan perspektif baru yang berpusat pada agensi manusia, di mana kapasitas sumber daya manusia bertindak sebagai mekanisme institusionalisasi teknologi. Berdasarkan hasil tersebut, dapat disarankan bahwa kebijakan transformasi digital sebaiknya menggeser fokus dari sekadar dukungan manajerial menuju pelembagaan kompetensi operasional, sehingga intervensi sumber daya manusia menjadi prioritas utama demi keberlanjutan ekosistem digital sekolah. Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan Digital; Kapasitas Sumber Daya Manusia; Kesiapan Organisasi; Manajemen Pendidikan; Transformasi Digital.

Abstract: Digital transformation in educational institutions often falls into structural readiness without guaranteeing operational execution. This study aims to assess digital transformation readiness and test the influence of digital leadership and human resource capacity on implementation readiness. The method used is descriptive-correlational quantitative with a survey design. Data collection was conducted using a Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 30 items. The research sample involved a census population of 21 teachers and educational staff at Junior High School 72 Central Maluku. The research hypotheses proposed that digital leadership and human resource capacity positively affect implementation readiness. Findings show that overall readiness is in the very high category. However, a statistical paradox exists where digital leadership has no significant effect, while human resource capacity becomes a highly significant dominant predictor. The findings indicate that linear assumptions in previous leadership-centric literature may need to be reconsidered, and show the possibility of a novel human-agency-centric perspective, positioning human resource capacity as the actual mechanism for technology institutionalization. Consequently, it is suggested that educational digital transformation policies should shift focus from mere managerial support to the institutionalization of operational competencies, making human resource interventions the primary priority for the sustainability of the school's digital ecosystem.

Keywords: Digital Leadership; Human Resource Capacity; Organizational Readiness; Educational Management; Digital Transformation.

Introduction

The digitization of educational institutions has evolved from merely digitizing administrative activities to a systemic transformation encompassing various aspects (Deogaonkar, 2025). Beyond the mere availability of infrastructure, digital leadership and human resource (HR) capacity have emerged as critical components of an institution's overall digital capacity (Fan & Yang, 2026). Specifically, digital leadership drives the strategic vision and facilitates technology integration (X. Zhang et al., 2025), while HR capacity determines whether technology can be adopted and implemented sustainably at the operational level (AIDhaheeri et al., 2026).

Over the past decade, the focus of literature reviews has shifted from individual technology adoption to organizational readiness. Contemporary studies have begun to consider digital literacy and systemic challenges as determining factors, whereas early research placed greater emphasis on the influence of leadership on teacher acceptance (Alkandari et al., 2026). Consequently, there is insufficient data on how the relationship between digital leadership and human resource capabilities jointly predicts implementation readiness within the context of schools with limited resources. The primary data collected from a survey of 21 participants at SMP 72 in Central Maluku reveals a paradoxical phenomenon. While perceptions of readiness regarding digital leadership elements and HR capacity are very high ($M = 4.81$), indicators of the gap between targets and actual conditions, along with competency limitations, are still considered moderate barriers ($M = 2.67$). Without a mature human resource capacity mechanism, positive beliefs regarding the leadership vision do not necessarily translate into operational capabilities. There is a discrepancy between this normative readiness and the reality of implementation..

To address this discrepancy, this study proposes that educational institutions must shift from merely ensuring structural readiness to developing digital capabilities. The focus of this study is to find empirical evidence that digital leadership serves as an enabling condition, while human resource capacity serves as a direct mechanism linking the digital vision to task execution. Compared to previous studies (Correia & Frank, 2025; Nguyen, 2026; van Roekel et al., 2025), this study uses regression modeling to examine the relative predictive influence of HR capacity and digital leadership on implementation readiness. Additionally, to capture a more comprehensive and objective profile, this study incorporates gap assessments and barriers as reverse-scored items. This methodological choice is justified as it offsets potential halo effects or socially desirable responding in self-reported data, thereby providing a more balanced measurement of multidimensional readiness by integrating both enabling factors and actual operational impediments. This method yields a more objective, data-driven framework for evaluating the maturity of the school's digital ecosystem (Gastaldi et al., 2026).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the multidimensional profile of digital transformation readiness and to assess how digital leadership and human resource capacity influence implementation readiness at SMP 72 in Central Maluku. Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed: (1) Digital leadership positively influences digital transformation implementation readiness; and (2) human resource capacity significantly and positively influences digital transformation implementation readiness. Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on organizational readiness models in the context of educational digital transformation. Practically, the results of this study will provide an empirical foundation for stakeholders to create a digital transformation roadmap that focuses on strengthening digital literacy, human resource development, and data governance rather than merely concentrating on infrastructure procurement.

Method

To evaluate the digital ecosystem in educational institutions, this study employed a quantitative method and utilized a descriptive-correlational survey design. SMP 72 in Central Maluku served as the subject and location of the study. The target population comprised all teachers and educational staff at the institution. Given the limited and homogeneous population within a single work unit, a total sampling (census) method was used. Twenty-one respondents actively participated in completing the instrument, consisting of teachers and educational staff, representing various teaching tenures and administrative roles.

The primary tool for data collection was a web-based closed-ended questionnaire consisting of thirty statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, where one point indicated "strongly disagree" and five points indicated "strongly agree." A multidimensional digital transformation readiness framework, encompassing human, organizational, and technological elements, was adapted and contextualized for this questionnaire from Afrianty et al. (2026). The adaptation process involved contextualizing the items to fit the specific educational setting, followed by content validation by three experts in educational management and digital technology to

ensure face and content validity. Construct validity was assessed through expert judgment, as the small sample size precluded formal factor analysis. The operational definitions of the research variables are as follows: (1) Digital Leadership, measured through four statements assessing leaders' ability to formulate a vision, establish policies, and facilitate technology; (2) Human Resource Capacity, measured through four statements assessing the basic competencies, adaptability, and willingness of teachers and staff to learn new technologies; and (3) Implementation Readiness, measured through 19 positive statements covering cultural and social aspects, alongside 3 items measuring gaps and barriers.

Data analysis was conducted in several systematic steps. First, to ensure that each construct was internally consistent, the reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicated good to excellent internal consistency for all major variables: Digital Leadership ($\alpha = 0.856$), Human Resource Capacity ($\alpha = 0.760$), and Implementation Readiness ($\alpha = 0.889$). Second, descriptive analysis was used to draw up readiness profiles based on mean values and standard deviations. The categorization criteria are 1.00 to 1.80 (very low); 1.81–2.60 (low); 2.61 to 3.40 (moderate); 3.41 to 4.20 (high); and 4.21 to 5.00 (very high). To calculate the Integrated Readiness Index, the three dimensions of Gaps and Barriers were used as reverse-scored items. Their scores were converted using formula 6 and subtracted from the original scores. While mathematically clear, this reverse-scoring approach requires conceptual caution, as it assumes a direct linear inversion of readiness, which may not fully capture the nuanced, non-linear nature of organizational friction.

Third, the strength and direction of relationships between variables were measured through correlational analysis using Pearson's and Spearman's rho tests. Fourth, to test for partial and simultaneous significance, multiple linear regression was used for inferential analysis. Prior to running the regression, classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure the validity of the model. Normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, linearity was assessed through scatterplots and the linearity test, multicollinearity was evaluated using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values (ensuring $VIF < 10$ and tolerance > 0.10), and homoscedasticity was checked via the Glejser test. All assumptions were met, confirming the data's suitability for parametric testing. This also predicts the relative influence of human resource capacity and digital leadership on readiness for digital transformation implementation. However, given the small sample size ($N=21$), the use of multiple linear regression has the potential to limit statistical power and the stability of coefficient estimates. Therefore, this study is conceptualized as an exploratory single-case analysis rather than a generalizable population study. The implications of these statistical limitations for the generalizability of the results are further elaborated in the Limitations section.

Findings and Discussion

Findings 1

Digital Transformation Readiness Profile

Data were collected from 21 participants who completed a questionnaire using a 1–5 Likert scale. According to the descriptive statistics, respondents' perceptions of digital transformation readiness were generally very positive. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients above 0.70 for nearly all major constructs indicate that the instrument has good internal consistency.

Table 1. Digital Transformation Readiness Profile by Key Construct

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	Alpha	Category
Digital Leadership	4	4.810	0.325	0.856	Very high / Very ready
HR Capacity	4	4.607	0.415	0.760	Very high / Very ready
Implementation Readiness (Positive)	19	4.734	0.262	0.889	Very high / Very ready
Gaps and Barriers	3	2.667	1.342	0.930	Moderate barriers
Integrated Readiness*	22	4.543	0.343	0.862	Very high / Very ready
Total Readiness Index**	30	4.587	0.306	0.889	Very high / Very ready

Source: Processed primary data, 2026.

*Note: Integrated Readiness is a combination of 19 positive items and 3 barrier items that have been reverse-scored (6 minus the original score).

**Total Readiness Index includes all 30 statement items.

A detailed analysis identified specific areas requiring strategic attention, although the aggregate score remained in the "very good" category. Table 2 shows that the dimensions of inter-unit collaboration and the external environment received the lowest relative scores compared to the other dimensions.

Table 2. Areas Requiring Attention Based on the Lowest Average Score

Item	Dimension	Statement	Mean	SD
25	External	Government policies encourage this institution to carry out digital	4.286	0.717

12	Environment	transformation.		
5	Organizational Culture	Inter-unit collaboration in the implementation of digitalization is running well.	4.476	0.680
6	Human Resources	Teachers/lecturers/staff have adequate basic skills in using digital technology.	4.524	0.680
6	Human Resources	HR in this institution is able to adapt to changes in digital-based work systems.	4.571	0.507

Source: Processed primary data, 2026.

Furthermore, the mapping of barriers (Table 3) shows that, despite a high level of regulatory readiness, there is a moderate perception of a gap between targets and actual conditions, as well as limitations in human resource competencies. This indicates a discrepancy between strategic expectations and operational capabilities at the field level.

Table 3. Gap Profile and Barriers to Implementation

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
28	There is a gap between the institution's digital transformation targets and the actual conditions in the field.	2.762	1.338	Moderate barrier
29	Limited HR competence remains a barrier to digital transformation.	2.952	1.465	Moderate barrier
30	Limited infrastructure and technical support remain a major barrier to digital transformation.	2.286	1.488	Low barrier

Source: Processed primary data, 2026.

Findings 2

Relationships and Interactions Among Variables

Prior to conducting inferential analysis, the classical assumptions for multiple linear regression were explicitly tested and verified. The Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed the normality of the residuals ($p > 0.05$), scatterplots and the linearity test indicated a linear relationship between the variables, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were well below the threshold of 10 (confirming the absence of multicollinearity), and the Glejser test confirmed homoscedasticity. With these statistical prerequisites satisfied, correlation analysis and multiple linear regression were applied to test the relationships and effects among the variables. The results of the Pearson and Spearman correlation tests revealed a variety of relationship patterns.

Tabel 4 Matriks Korelasi Antarvariabel Utama

Relationship	Pearson r	p	Spearman rho	p	Interpretation
Digital Leadership ↔ Implementation Readiness	0.272	0.233	0.170	0.462	Not significant ($\alpha=0,05$)
HR Capacity ↔ Implementation Readiness	0.824	<0.001	0.760	<0.001	Significant, very strong
Digital Leadership ↔ HR Capacity	0.437	0.048	0.145	0.530	Significant (Pearson)
Gaps/Barriers ↔ Integrated Readiness	-0.796	<0.001	-0.817	<0.001	Significant, strong negative

Source: Processed primary data, 2026.

Table 4 shows a significant and strong positive correlation between human resource capacity and implementation readiness ($r = 0.824$; $p < 0.001$). In contrast, the relationship between implementation readiness and digital leadership is not statistically significant ($p = 0.233$).

With implementation readiness as the dependent variable and human resource capacity and digital leadership as predictor variables, multiple linear regression was used to determine the dominant influence. With an R^2 value of 0.689, the regression model was found to be significant overall ($F = 19.920$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates

that the two predictor variables can account for 68.9% of the variation in implementation readiness when used together.

Table 5. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Predictor	B (Unstandardized)	SE	p	β (Standardized)
Constant	2,619	0,542	<0,001	-
Digital Leadership	-0,088	0,118	0,466	-0,109
Human Resources Capacity	0,551	0,092	<0,001	0,872

*Notes: $R^2 = 0,689$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0,654$.

Source: Processed primary data, 2026.

When the human resource capacity variable was controlled for in the model, the effect of digital leadership became insignificant ($p = 0.466$). Conversely, only HR capacity has a positive and significant impact on implementation readiness in a partial sense ($\beta = 0.872$; $p < 0.001$). The results indicate that in this sample, HR operational capabilities are more important than leadership vision or policies as direct mechanisms determining implementation success.

Discussion

An Interpretation of Multidimensional Readiness and the Paradox of Digital Leadership

The research findings indicate that the overall level of digital transformation readiness at SMP 72 in Central Maluku is very high. This confirms the modern view that digital readiness is a multidimensional construct comprising human, process, technological, and leadership elements (Imandeka et al., 2026; Pandita et al., 2026; Tiron-Tudo & Deliu, 2025). Interestingly, the inferential analysis reveals a nuanced statistical phenomenon regarding the role of digital leadership. In the multiple linear regression model, the partial effect of digital leadership on implementation readiness did not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.466 > 0.05$), despite a positive correlation observed in the bivariate test. While this shift presents a sharp analytical observation, it must be interpreted with caution rather than declared as a definitive theoretical paradox. Statistically, this non-significance is highly likely driven by the shared variance between digital leadership and human resource capacity, compounded by range restriction in the leadership variable ($M = 4.81$; $SD = 0.325$) and the small sample size ($N = 21$), which collectively limit statistical power.

Nevertheless, from a conceptual standpoint, this suggests that digital leadership appears to have reached its peak as an enabling condition or hygiene factor. In other words, the minimum expected from the organization is support for the vision, policies, and backing from leadership. Once the foundation of leadership is established, changes in implementation readiness are determined by other operational variables that focus more on on-the-ground execution than on shifts in perceptions of leadership (Kampoowale et al., 2025; Nnaji et al., 2026; Phonthanukitithaworn & Ketkaew, 2026).

In terms of statistical limitations, these results may be influenced by range restriction in the digital leadership variable ($M = 4.81$; $SD = 0.325$) and the small sample size ($N = 21$). Consequently, these factors resulted in low statistical power for identifying partial significance. These findings, however, actually provide significant theoretical progress from a scientific and analytical perspective. Many previous studies (Aldhaheeri et al., 2026; Gong & Ribiere, 2025; Stock et al., 2026) indicate that leadership is a primary predictor of technology integration. In the context of this study, digital leadership appears to have reached its peak as an enabling condition or hygiene factor. In other words, the minimum expected from the organization is support for the vision, policies, and backing from leadership. Once the foundation of leadership is established, changes in implementation readiness are determined by other operational variables that focus more on on-the-ground execution than on shifts in perceptions of leadership (Kampoowale et al., 2025; Nnaji et al., 2026; Phonthanukitithaworn & Ketkaew, 2026).

The Dominance of Human Capital as a Mechanism for the Institutionalization of Technology

The second hypothesis, which states that human resource capacity has a positive and significant effect on implementation readiness, was widely accepted ($\beta = 0.872$; $p < 0.001$). This contrasts with digital leadership. These results align with the arguments (Ly, 2025; Zhu et al., 2026) that position digital literacy, self-efficacy, and adaptability as keys to the success of transformation. Socio-technical systems offer the most coherent explanatory framework for exploring these findings from a scientific perspective. This theory posits that if the social system (human resource capacity and culture) is not optimized alongside the technical system (infrastructure, applications), the results will be poor.

Human resource capacity serves as a bridge or transducer to convert structural inputs into implementation outputs within the SMP 72 Central Maluku ecosystem. The neglect of human agency is a weakness of digital

transformation approaches that focus solely on technology procurement or top-down directives from leadership. These findings indicate that HR adaptability and the desire to learn can significantly mitigate classic barriers such as resistance to change or technical limitations (Chale et al., 2026; Odai et al., 2025; Tsakalerou et al., 2025). Therefore, an organization's digital readiness is driven by competencies at the operational agent level, not by leadership decisions or technological determinism.

A Critical Analysis of Gaps and False Readiness

There is a possibility of halo bias or "apparent readiness," according to a critical analysis of the gap and barrier dimensions as well as the items with the lowest scores. External policy drivers ($M = 4.286$) and inter-unit collaboration ($M = 4.476$) received the lowest scores, even though the total readiness index fell into the very high category. Conversely, perceptions of the gap between targets and actual conditions ($M = 2.762$) and competency limitations ($M = 2.952$) consistently fell into the moderate barrier category.

This discrepancy highlights a critical methodological reality that must be acknowledged: all data in this study are perception-based, relying entirely on self-reported surveys. As noted by Zhang et al. (2025), using subjective perceptions as the sole measure of digital readiness carries inherent risks, which are highly relevant to interpreting our specific findings. Since the organization has recently provided new basic facilities, respondents may report uniformly high levels of readiness across the board due to the halo effect or social desirability bias (the tendency to rate the organization's general efforts positively). This reliance on perceptual data likely explains the extreme mean scores and range restriction observed in the digital leadership variable ($M = 4.81$; $SD = 0.325$). However, the fact that respondents still identified moderate barriers regarding actual competency limitations ($M = 2.952$) and target gaps ($M = 2.762$) suggests that when faced with specific operational pain points, their perceptual filters become more critical and grounded in reality. One weakness of this entirely perception-based approach is the potential for common method bias; however, its strength lies in its ability to map the psychological and cultural blind spots of the institution. This indicates that digital transformation in these schools still tends to be siloed (centered on specific individuals or units) and has not yet fully evolved into a culture of cross-unit collaboration (Abdelwahed et al., 2025; Awodiji & Naicker, 2026; Mikkonen et al., 2026).

Limitations of the Study

One of the primary methodological limitations of this study is its cross-sectional design and small sample size ($N=21$) drawn from a single educational institution. Consequently, the findings are context-specific and cannot be broadly generalized to school contexts with different resource levels, demographics, or cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, as a perception-based survey, the data is susceptible to social desirability bias and the halo effect, which may have influenced respondents' self-reported readiness levels. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples across multiple educational levels, and mixed-methods approaches (e.g., incorporating objective performance metrics alongside self-reported surveys) to further validate these findings.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Despite these limitations, the findings pave the way for important theoretical and practical shifts. Theoretically, this study challenges traditional, leadership-centric assumptions of digital transformation models. It suggests a paradigm shift toward a human-agency- and competency-centered framework, where human resource capacity acts as the primary mechanism converting structural inputs into operational outputs. Practically, the results indicate that educational institutions that have already secured basic structural and leadership support should pivot their focus. Future interventions should prioritize the institutionalization of operational competencies through clinical mentoring, communities of practice, and targeted data literacy training for all educational staff, rather than merely concentrating on infrastructure procurement or high-level managerial training.

Conclusion

This study indicates the presence of a contextual "digital leadership paradox," in which high leadership scores, while descriptively positive, do not demonstrate a significant partial impact on implementation readiness when human resource capacity is controlled for in the regression model. Rather than broadly challenging the leadership-centered assumptions of previous studies, these findings suggest that digital leadership may function primarily as a foundational condition, while pointing toward a human-agency-centric perspective that views operational human resource capacity as the critical mechanism for technology institutionalization. However, due to the small sample size ($N=21$), the single-case location (SMP 72 Maluku Tengah), and the perception-based cross-sectional design, these conclusions cannot be broadly generalized and may imply context-specific dynamics rather

than universal rules. Therefore, further research utilizing diverse methodological designs, larger and more varied samples, and objective performance metrics is needed to validate these indications and develop more robust digital transformation policies.

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