

The Effect of Transformational Leadership, Change Communication, and Digital Transformation on Student Readiness

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Abstract-This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of transformational leadership, change communication, and the digital transformation process in shaping students' readiness to face a technology-based academic system at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Tadulako University. The research used a quantitative approach by distributing a Likert-scale questionnaire developed based on relevant theoretical foundations so that each variable could be measured accurately. A total of 41 active students from the 2023–2025 cohorts were selected as respondents using purposive sampling, considering that they were currently experiencing the implementation of a digital academic system. Each variable transformational leadership, change communication, digital transformation, and student readiness was elaborated into operational indicators designed to capture student perceptions precisely. Linear regression analysis was used to identify the extent to which each independent variable explained variations in student readiness. The results show that students' readiness to face academic digitalization is significantly strengthened by transformational leadership and the ongoing digital transformation process. These two factors provide students with a considerable advantage in adapting to technological changes. Meanwhile, communication related to change has not demonstrated a meaningful influence on student readiness. This indicates that the process of delivering information about ongoing changes is not yet effective enough to shape students' readiness, as change communication does not contribute significantly within the tested research model. meaning that 68.6% of the variation in student readiness can be explained by the three independent variables (transformational leadership, change communication and digital transformation), while the remaining 31.4% is influenced by other factors outside the scope of this study.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Change Communication; Digital Transformation; Student Readiness; Academic

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become a significant phenomenon that has affected every aspect of life, including higher education. The integration of learning management systems (LMS), virtual classrooms, digital administration applications, and online-based academic communication platforms are examples of how the learning process has moved from a face-to-face model to a technologically advanced system (Pratomo & Wahanisa, 2021). Higher education institutions in Indonesia, such as the Faculty of Economics and Business at Tadulako University, continue to transform through the development of digital innovations to improve the effectiveness of the learning process, enhance academic services, and create an educational environment that is more responsive to technological advances (Andi Kambau, 2024). However, in its implementation, there are certainly challenges related to infrastructure readiness, teaching staff capacity, and the readiness of students themselves to adapt (Akbari & Pratomo, 2022; Ndaba & Naidoo, 2024). This shift requires students to master digital skills, learn independently, and adapt to changes in the academic system (Putri Anzari & Pratiwi, 2021).

The demands of an increasingly digitized education system require students to possess flexibility, adaptability, and adequate technological literacy. Universities play a vital role in equipping students with these competencies so that they are prepared to face changes in the era of Industry 4.0 (Poszytek, 2024). Students' readiness to face digital transformation reflects their mental and emotional state in accepting and implementing changes occurring on campus (Abadiyah & Yulianto, 2022). This is important because readiness to change is a key factor for educational institutions in responding quickly to dynamics and implementing changes effectively (Erlyani & Suhariadi, 2022). Despite still facing challenges related to discomfort in using technology, a study analyzing Indian students' readiness to use technology for digital learning shows that they are generally optimistic and creative (Kaushik & Agrawal, 2021). This readiness can be enhanced in the context of campus digital transformation if adequate supporting infrastructure is available to facilitate students' adaptation and enable them to keep up with technological developments in the best possible way (Setiaji & Dinata, 2020).

Students' readiness to face digital transformation is believed to be greatly influenced by various external factors in addition to internal factors. According to Sarmiento et al. (2023) and Hardianto et al. (2024), one of these factors is transformational leadership, which is very important in encouraging motivation, creativity, and adaptability among members of educational organizations, which can increase students' readiness to face change. A leader's ability to convince and guide people to make positive changes or achieve unmet goals is known as transformational leadership (Roni Harsoyo, 2022). This type of leadership is very important in the context of higher education because it helps ensure that the institution's vision is realized and supports sustainable progress, especially when facing the demands of digital transformation (Khairuddin, 2020; Armiyanti et al., 2023). Karakose et al. (2023) emphasize that leadership effectiveness is not only determined by the ability to influence, but also by the mastery of appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In line with this, transformational leaders are required to be able to combine various approaches according to the needs of the organization and the dynamics of change that occur (Hilmi et al., 2025).

Another equally important external factor is changes in communication. A clear and sustainable change communication strategy determines the extent to which information, support, and expectations related to academic transformation can be understood and responded to by students (Sataøen & Lövgren, 2024; Keskin & Tat, 2025). The use of digital technology, which has replaced face-to-face communication with online platform-based interactions, is increasingly influencing changes in communication within organizations and higher education institutions. These institutions must adjust their communication strategies to remain efficient as a result of these changes, which have made information delivery faster, more flexible, and more accessible (Romadona & Setiawan, 2020). According to Wiryaning et al. (2022), the use of technology has also created new coordination patterns that require a high level of individual adaptation to complete tasks and receive information. Changes and communication strategies will be more effective if they are designed flexibly and involve stakeholders. This approach helps ensure that the messages conveyed are understood, accepted, and responded to appropriately by the target audience (Servaes, 2020). According to research, these modifications affect how messages are conveyed, as well as the reactions of organizations and the readiness of individuals to face the process of change (Hamid, 2025; Memon et al., 2020). Communication systems in general are undergoing changes to become more digital, dynamic, and adaptive to the demands of the modern world.

In addition, the digital transformation efforts undertaken by institutions are also an important factor in shaping students' readiness levels. The maturity of digital transformation, including the readiness of infrastructure, policies, and training programmers, is a prerequisite for the implementation of digital learning to have a positive impact on students' learning experiences and readiness (Yolanda & Rifani, 2025; Antonopoulou et al., 2021). Digital transformation is a major change process within an organization that utilizes technology to update work methods, services, and internal systems. The success of digital transformation is highly dependent on leadership that is capable of setting direction, formulating strategies, and encouraging consistent use of technology (Tulungen et al., 2022). This transformation is not only related to the use of digital devices, but also includes human resource readiness, structured planning, and adjustments to the work culture to make it more adaptive (Gholamzadeh et al., 2025). In the context of education, digitization makes the learning process, administration, and academic services more efficient and integrated, while helping students improve their readiness to face the demands of the Industry 4.0 era (Andi Kambau, 2024). However, various obstacles such as technological limitations, uneven digital capabilities, and resistance to change remain challenges that need to be managed in order for digital transformation to deliver optimal results (Ahyani & Dhuhani, 2024).

Although many studies have discussed student readiness, transformational leadership, change communication, and digital transformation, most of them have been conducted separately. Studies that integrate these three factors into a single research model are still limited, especially in the context of faculties in Indonesia. Based on this research gap, this study aims to examine the influence of transformational leadership, change communication, and digital transformation on the readiness of students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Tadulako University. This study is expected to enrich the theoretical study of various factors that influence student readiness in the context of digital education (Fadhilah & Husin, 2023). In addition, the findings of this study can also be used as practical recommendations for faculties in formulating leadership strategies, communication patterns, and strengthening digital transformation more optimally, so that students can develop into individuals who are more adaptive, competent, and ready to face the ever-changing dynamics of technology.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Basic Research Framework

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach because the researcher wanted to see how much influence certain factors had on students' readiness to face change in the digital age. A quantitative approach was chosen not only because of its objective and measurable nature, but also because this study required data that could be analyzed statistically to see the relationship between variables more clearly. To collect data, the researcher used a questionnaire distributed to students. The respondent selection technique used was purposive sampling, which involves selecting samples based on specific criteria determined in advance (Farell & Pranata, 2024). In this case, the researchers stipulated that respondents must be from the Faculty of Economics and Business at Tadulako University, specifically students from the 2023 to 2025 cohorts. They were considered relevant because they were actively enrolled in lectures and already had experience in digital-based learning. From the data collection process, 41 respondents met the criteria and were willing to complete the questionnaire.

This research was conducted at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Tadulako University. The choice of location was not without reason. Academic activities at this faculty are quite intense and involve the extensive use of digital technology, so that students in this environment can provide a more realistic picture of how they respond to change. Furthermore, this faculty is also considered sufficiently representative for observing various forms of communication dynamics, leadership, and technological adaptation that occur in the teaching and learning process.

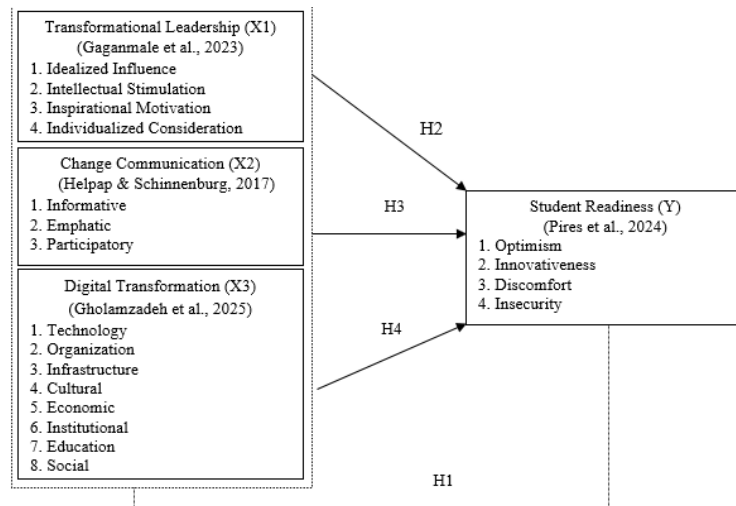


Figure 1. Research Model

This study involves three independent variables and one dependent variable, each of which has specific dimensions. The first variable is transformational leadership (X1), which includes four main dimensions, namely idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration (Gaganmale et al., 2023). The second variable is communication change (X2), which is measured through the dimensions of informative, emphatic, and participatory (Helpap & Schinnenburg, 2017). The third variable is digital transformation (X3), which includes the dimensions of technology, organization, infrastructure, culture, economics, institutions, education, and society (Gholamzadeh et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the dependent variable of student readiness (Y) is viewed through several dimensions, namely optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, and insecurity (Pires et al., 2024).

These three independent variables are thought to play a role in shaping students' readiness to face change, whether it be changes to the system, learning processes, or adaptation to new technologies. Based on the relationship between these variables, the researchers formulated several hypotheses. Broadly speaking, the research hypothesis states that each independent variable has an influence on student readiness, and that all three are also thought to have a simultaneous influence.

The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS software. To process the data obtained, the researchers used two types of analysis. The first was descriptive statistical analysis. This analysis was used to obtain an overview of the collected data, such as the range of values, averages, and variations in respondents' answers (Hanida et al., 2024). This analysis is important so that researchers can understand whether the data is sufficient and whether the response patterns show certain trends. After that, the researchers performed multiple linear regression analysis. This analysis was used to test whether the three independent variables really had an influence on student readiness, both individually and collectively (Dewi et al., 2020).

The research framework is based on the view that student readiness does not develop suddenly, but is influenced by various factors. Transformational leadership is considered capable of providing direction and encouragement that makes students better prepared to face change. On the other hand, changes in communication also play an important role because the way information is conveyed greatly influences how students interpret new situations. Meanwhile, digital transformation has become the main context that is changing many aspects of academic life. These three factors are then described in the research framework as interrelated elements that influence student readiness.

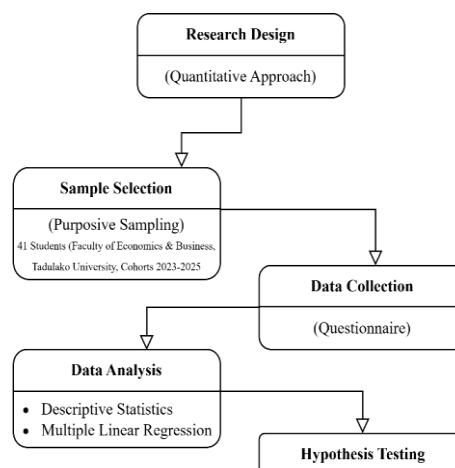


Figure 2. Research Methodology Flowchart

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result of Descriptive Statistics

Based on Table 1, the results of the analysis of the Transformational Leadership variable (X1) show that indicator X1.1 (exemplary behaviour) has the highest mean value of 4.44. This finding indicates that students feel that leaders, both lecturers and faculty members, are able to set a good example in dealing with digital change. Meanwhile, the lowest mean value was found in indicator X1.4 (attention to individual difficulties), which was 3.71, suggesting that although leaders are considered capable of providing inspiration and role models, attention to students' personal needs or obstacles is not yet optimal. Thus, although transformational leadership has had a strong influence on student readiness, improvements in the aspect of individual mentoring can further strengthen student readiness in facing the process of academic digitalisation.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Transformational Leadership (X1)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Role modelling (X1.1)	41	4.44	.896
Encouraging critical thinking (X1.3)	41	4.37	.915
Motivating students (X1.3)	41	4.15	.937
Paying attention to individual difficulties (X1.4)	41	3.71	.901
Valid N (listwise)	41		

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Communication Change (X2)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Providing clear information (X2.1)	41	3.71	.873
Showing concern (X2.2)	41	3.66	.762
Providing opportunities (X2.3)	41	3.61	.919
Valid N (listwise)	41		

The results of descriptive data processing in Table 2 for the Communication Change (X2) variable show that indicator X2.1 (providing clear information) obtained the highest mean value of 3.71, indicating that students feel that the faculty or lecturers are quite good at conveying information related to changes in policies, new systems, and the digitization process. Conversely, indicator X2.3 (providing opportunities) had the lowest mean value of 3.61, which means that students feel that the space to express opinions, provide input, or participate in the change process is still not optimal. Overall, although some aspects of communication are already running well, the lack of student participation and involvement is a factor that makes the communication change variable need to be improved so that it can have an influence on student readiness.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Transformation Digital (X3)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Use of digital applications/platforms (X3.1)	41	3.73	.837
Policies and training (X3.2)	41	3.59	.805
Internet devices (X3.3)	41	3.56	.896
Integration of values in digital content (X3.4)	41	3.71	.844
Budget/infrastructure support (X3.5)	41	3.34	.911
Regulation and support (X3.6)	41	3.63	.733
Learning models (X3.7)	41	3.44	.923
Digital accessibility and interaction (X3.8)	41	4.07	.848
Valid N (listwise)	41		

Based on the data processing results in Table 3, the Digital Transformation variable (X3) shows that indicator X3.8 (digital accessibility and interaction) has the highest mean value of 4.07. This indicates that students find it easy to access digital platforms, online academic services, and various forms of technology-based interaction. However, indicator X3.5 (budget/infrastructure support) has the lowest mean value of 3.34. This means that although students can functionally access digital services well, they still feel limitations in supporting aspects such as the completeness of facilities, network quality, technological devices, or institutional budget allocation to support comprehensive digitalization. Overall, these findings illustrate that digital transformation has been quite effective and has had a direct impact on student readiness. However, improvements in infrastructure support and budget allocation are still needed so that the digitisation process can be more equitable and sustainable.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics Student Readiness (Y)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Simplifying academic activities (Y.1)	41	4.17	.834
Enthusiasm for trying out new technology systems (Y.2)	41	3.85	.823
Difficulty understanding how new systems work (Y.3)	41	3.71	.901

Indicator	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Doubts about the reliability of the campus digital system (Y.4)	41	3.90	.800
Valid N (listwise)	41		

In Table 4, which describes the Student Readiness (Y) variable, indicator Y.1 (facilitating academic activities) shows the highest mean value of 4.17, indicating that students feel that the use of digital technology really helps in various academic activities, such as collecting assignments, accessing lecture materials, administrative processes, and communicating with lecturers. On the other hand, indicator Y.3 (difficulty understanding how the new system works) obtained the lowest mean value of 3.71. This finding indicates that although students feel helped by technology, their level of enthusiasm for trying, exploring, or adapting to the latest digital systems is still relatively low. Overall, although student readiness is in the good category, improving motivation and enthusiasm for trying new technologies needs attention. If this enthusiasm can be increased, then student readiness in facing the academic digitalization process will be more optimal.

3.2 Result of Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Simultaneous Test Results (F)

		ANOVA				
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1 Regression	204.105	3	68.035	26.95	<.001 ^b	
Residual	93.408	37	2.525			
Total	297.512	40				

a. Dependent Variable: Student Readiness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Transformation Digital, Transformational Leadership, Change Communication

Based on Table 5 of the ANOVA test results, a calculated F value of 26.950 with a significance value of < 0.001 was obtained. Since the significance value is much smaller than the $\alpha = 0.05$ limit, it can be concluded that the regression model constructed is simultaneously significant. This means that the three independent variables studied, namely Transformational Leadership (X1), Communication Change (X2), and Digital Transformation (X3), together have a significant effect on Student Readiness (Y). This finding indicates that student readiness is not only influenced by one factor, but is the result of the overall process of leadership, patterns of change communication, and the implementation of digital transformation that occurs in the faculty environment. In general, the results of this test reinforce that the three X variables have a significant role in shaping the level of student readiness, so that all three should be taken into consideration in efforts to improve readiness for digital-based academic change.

Table 6. Partial Test Results (T)

Model	Coefficients			t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.425	1.562		1.552	0.129
Transformational Leadership	0.263	0.125	0.298	2.113	0.041
Change Communication	-0.379	0.221	-0.297	-1.712	0.095
Transformation Digital Academic	0.446	0.075	0.849	5.921	<.001

Table 6 shows that the partial test results indicate that the variables of Transformational Leadership (X1) and Digital Transformation (X3) have a significant effect on Student Readiness (Y), with significance values of 0.041 and <0.001, respectively. This indicates that leadership that provides inspiration and exemplary behavior, as well as a well-executed digital transformation process, can increase student readiness in facing academic digitalization. Meanwhile, the Communication Change variable (X2) does not have a significant effect with a significance value of 0.095, meaning that the communication of change that has been carried out is not yet strong enough to increase student readiness.

Table 7. Coefficient of Determination Test Results

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjust R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.828 ^a	0.686	0.661	1.589

The table above shows the relationship between variables X and Y. The coefficient of determination test results has an R value of 0.828, while the effect is indicated by an R Square value of 0.686, meaning that 68.6% of the variation in student readiness can be explained by the three independent variables (transformational leadership, change communication and digital transformation), while the remaining 31.4% is influenced by other factors outside the scope of this study.

3.3 Discussion

3.3.1 Simultaneous Influence of Variables

The first hypothesis in this study states that transformational leadership, change communication, and digital transformation simultaneously influence student readiness. The F test results show a value of 26.950 with a significance of < 0.001 , which means that the regression model used is statistically significant. Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted. These findings are consistent with previous studies which state that an individual's readiness to face change is influenced by a combination of leadership, communication, and supportive digital infrastructure factors. Several previous studies, such as research on readiness in the implementation of e-learning systems and digital transformation in higher education, concluded that students are more prepared to adapt to technology when the organizational environment demonstrates active leadership in encouraging change and providing clear information (Aisha Alsobhi, 2021). The results of this study are consistent with these findings, reinforcing the conclusion that student readiness cannot stand alone without the support of a conducive academic ecosystem.

This simultaneous meaning also indicates that the three variables do not work in separate spaces. Transformational leadership creates a vision and motivation for change, communication of change provides clarity of direction and minimizes confusion, while digital transformation provides the means for students to actually implement these changes. The three are a series of complementary factors that form a more stable and comprehensive readiness to learn.

3.3.2 Partial Influence of Variables

The second hypothesis states that transformational leadership has a significant effect on student readiness. The t-test results show a significance value of 0.041, meaning that transformational leadership has a significant effect on student readiness. Thus, the second hypothesis is accepted. This finding reinforces the argument that a visionary, inspirational, and motivational leadership style is highly relevant in the context of digital-based change. Many previous studies have concluded similarly, one of which is in line with the results of the study by (Adda & Buntuang, 2022). They emphasize that leaders who are able to present a clear vision, demonstrate an optimistic attitude, and encourage the creativity of their subordinates tend to create an environment that supports performance improvement. The exemplary behavior and positive stimulation from these leaders make individuals feel more confident in facing change and new work demands. When applied to the academic context, these characteristics are relevant because students will be better prepared to face digital transformation when leaders in the campus environment are able to provide clear direction, create a supportive atmosphere, and encourage innovation in the learning process.

The third hypothesis states that communication of change has a significant effect on student readiness. However, the partial test results show a significance value of 0.095, which means that communication of change does not have a significant effect on student readiness. Thus, the third hypothesis is rejected. These results indicate that even though information about the change has been communicated, students do not fully rely on formal communication in building their readiness. This finding contradicts Sataøen & Lövgren, (2024) and Keskin & Tat, (2025), who state that clear and continuous change communication can improve individuals' understanding and readiness for transformation. Furthermore, Wiryaningrum et al. (2022) also emphasize that shifts in communication patterns due to digitalization require individuals to be more adaptive, making message clarity increasingly crucial.

The fourth hypothesis states that digital transformation has a significant effect on student readiness. The t-test results show a significance value of < 0.001 with the highest t-value among the other variables. These findings show that digital transformation is the most dominant variable in explaining student readiness. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is accepted. These results are consistent with previous studies by Yolanda & Rifani, (2025) and Antonopoulou et al. (2021), which explain that learning readiness in a digital context is greatly influenced by the availability of technology, the quality of digital platforms, and the support of academic information systems. Students will be more mentally, technically, and motivationally prepared when the technology they use is stable, easily accessible, and supports the learning process. Many previous studies also emphasize that digital transformation is not only about technology adoption but also about how technology creates a more flexible, interactive, and efficient learning experience.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that students' readiness for digital-based learning does not stand alone but is shaped by a number of interrelated factors. The degree to which digital transformation is truly incorporated into the educational process and transformational leadership in the campus setting are the two most important factors. In general, students view the three aspects of leadership, communication, and digital facilities quite positively, so it is natural that their level of readiness is also in the high category. These three factors were found to significantly affect student preparedness when tested simultaneously. These results demonstrate that a single factor cannot be the sole driver of readiness to adapt to digital learning systems. Conversely, preparedness necessitates a combination of leaders who can inspire and guide others, communication channels that facilitate change, and sufficient technology support for everyday learning activities. Partially, transformational leadership and digital transformation have been proven to have a significant influence, with digital transformation being the most dominant variable. Meanwhile, communication of change does not show a significant influence, indicating that students rely more on personal adaptation skills or informal sources of information

in understanding academic changes. In order to prepare students for the increasingly dynamic developments in digital learning, educational institutions must continue to strengthen both leadership and technology factors. Overall, this study confirms that student readiness is the outcome of the interaction between these factors.

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