

# The Role of the Principal's Transformational Leadership Style and the Teacher's Motivation in Professional Development Readiness



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## Abstract

The transformational leadership style is considered very effective in preschool institutions because it contributes to creating a stimulating environment for teachers. Principals who adopt this leadership style prioritize teacher motivation, engagement, and professional development, understanding the significant impact of their competencies on work quality. Therefore, this research examines the relationship between transformational leadership style, teacher motivation, and professional development readiness.

The study involved 260 teachers whose attitudes were examined with the Transformational Leadership Style Questionnaire (Podsakoff et al., 1990), the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (Gagné et al., 2014) and the Professional Development Readiness Scale (Beara & Okanović, 2009).

The results show a statistically significant positive correlation between the transformational leadership style and teachers' autonomous motivation ( $r = 0.216$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and autonomous motivation of teachers and their professional development readiness ( $r = 0.465$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Teachers' autonomous motivation ( $F = 37.081$ ,  $df = 2;245$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) is a significant predictor, while transformational style does not contribute to professional development readiness ( $F = 1.838$ ,  $df = 1;247$ ,  $p = 0.176$ ). The variance analysis revealed that teachers' self-initiative for professional development increases with age ( $F = 6.619$ ,  $df = 3/250$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The findings can guide principals in enhancing the management process in early and preschool education institutions, boosting overall efficiency and work quality.

## Key words:

efficiency; leadership; motivation; work quality

## Introduction

Leadership is a key factor in an educational institution's effectiveness, and the principal's leadership style influences employees' work motivation and effectiveness (Bass, 1990; Fullan, 2007).

Constant changes in the early and preschool education system create an increasing need for a modern way of leadership. In addition to principals, educators also play a key role in developing the quality of educational practice in preschool institutions. Their actions are influenced by professional knowledge and experience, understanding of their educational practice, and motivation for further improvement. Many contemporary scholars (Bennet & Anderson, 2003; Aubrey, 2007; Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Peko et al., 2009) emphasize the encouragement of professional development as an indispensable factor of successful leadership that, along with many others, contributes to the achievement of educational goals. Educators make numerous important decisions for children's well-being daily and are responsible for being critical of educational practice (Gotal & Tot, 2022). The motivation of educators and an environment that encourages professional learning contribute to the quality of their work. The extent to which educators are motivated to engage in various professional learning activities depends on their own responsibility and the support of the principal.

Leadership aimed at developing a professional environment that encourages educator autonomy, and the joint construction of knowledge leads to the development of a culture of continuous learning, which in the long term improves the quality of the preschool institution's educational work.

## **Transformational leadership style**

The principal, as the most important factor in the effectiveness of an educational institution, is a key link between the development of educators and the quality of the institution itself (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Smith & Hoy, 2007). His leadership role is observed through determinants such as the ability to motivate people, develop communication skills, build a shared vision, introduce changes and innovations, and create conditions for employees' personal and professional development (Blažević, 2014). Transformational leadership is characterized by inspiring and motivating employees through a vision and shared goals, encouraging personal development and creativity, and creating positive organizational changes. Compared to other styles, transformational leadership contributes the most to employee motivation (Avolio et al., 2009). Transformational leaders build trust, encourage the development of leadership skills in others, and raise the level of commitment (Dumdum et al., 2013). The effectiveness of preschool institutions can also be observed through the perspective of the professional development of educators and the implementation of modern knowledge in educational work with children. Numerous studies confirm the contribution of some aspects of leadership practice to strengthening the overall achievement of institutions (Staničić, 2006). Transformational leadership increases the additional effort of teachers (Geijsel et al., 2003) and their motivation (Lee & Kuo, 2019). Teachers whose principals practice a transformational leadership style are more motivated to perform their tasks (Layton, 2003), and such leadership also positively impacts their professional development (Sathiaseelan, 2015). Transformational leadership by principals affects the perception of conditions in the institution, their readiness for change, and continuous professional development (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass, 2000; Bogler, 2001; Hallinger, 2003).

## **Work motivation**

According to self-determination theory, employee performance and well-being are strongly influenced by employees' motivation towards their work (Deci et al., 2017). The type of motivation that drives people to act and the reasons for engaging in certain behaviours play a vital role in professional terms (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation drives activities for the pleasure of performing them, while extrinsic motivation comes from external goals such as praise or rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000). External motivators, such as material rewards, supervision, strict deadlines, and threats, hurt intrinsic motivation because they undermine the primary psychological need for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 2001). On the other hand, the possibility of choice and opportunities for self-initiative (Zuckerman et al., 1978; according to Deci & Ryan, 2000) encourage intrinsic motivation because they allow for a greater sense of autonomy.

The study results by Mlinarević et al. (2022) show a significant association between principal characteristics, such as extroversion, agreeableness, and using a transformational leadership style in preschool institutions. According to Hapsari (2021), transformational leadership of principals, job satisfaction, and work enthusiasm positively affect educators' effectiveness. Empirical studies in various settings, including education, show that autonomous motivation is positively associated with favourable and negatively with unfavourable outcomes (Deci et al., 2001). Autonomous motivation leads to less burnout and is positively associated with work engagement and negatively with job exhaustion, while controlled motivation is positively associated with exhaustion (Fernet et al., 2010). Active participation in professional development activities is a significant predictor of teaching practice, and transformational leadership stimulates teachers' professional development and motivation and improves the organizational conditions of the school (Thoonen et al., 2011).

## **Professional development**

Professional development is understood as a long-term process through which knowledge, skills, and abilities are developed and improved through learning, practical work, and research (Mušanović, 2001; Tot & Maras, 2023). The professional development of educators as a process with a high level of intrinsic motivation and clearly defined personal goals (Kirkwood & Christie, 2006) is aimed at educators who are prone to critical thinking and can provide the prerequisites for the development of each child (Vujičić et al., 2015). Therefore, educators are expected to be open and ready for change, motivated for lifelong learning, researching personal practice, and developing a culture of dialogue and cooperation for more effective professional development (Vujičić et al., 2015). The ability to manage knowledge, or the dissemination and use of knowledge to improve learning and teaching, are key characteristics of effective leadership (Fullan 2007; 2011a; Andrews, 2009; Heikka, 2014). Analysing the role of motivation, organizational conditions, and leadership styles in professional learning, active participation in professional learning activities tends to be a significant predictor of teaching practice, and transformational leadership stimulates the professional development and motivation of employees and improves the organizational conditions of the educational institution (Hallinger, 2003; Thoonen et al., 2011). Accordingly, the role of the principal is to support educators in professional development to achieve independence and professional autonomy (Bredeson, 2000).

The principal of a preschool institution is in a unique position to create conditions for the professional development of educators by creating a shared vision, encouraging cooperation, providing support, and maintaining positive relationships. Research shows that teachers with higher levels of identified regulation and intrinsic motivation are more involved in professional

development activities (Jansen in de Wal et al., 2014). Functional aspects of the work environment, such as a positive organizational climate, play a key role in increasing engagement and the effectiveness of professional development (Tot & Maras, 2023). In this sense, Wagner and French (2010) state that educators who assess a more positive climate in their workplace are more likely to use available professional development opportunities.

Research goal and problems

This research examines the relationship between principals' transformational leadership style, work motivation, and educators' readiness for professional development. Following the goal, the following research problems were set:

- P1: To examine the connection between the transformational leadership style and autonomous and controlled motivation.
- P2: To examine the connection between readiness for professional development and autonomous and controlled motivation.
- P3: To examine the predictive relationship between the transformational leadership style and autonomous and controlled motivation in relation to readiness for professional development.
- P4: To examine educators' differences in self-initiative and extrinsic motivation for professional development.

Method

Participants

The questionnaire was completed by 260 participants, but the analyses were conducted on a sample of 254, as six responded that they were not currently employed as educators. All respondents were female and were divided into four age groups: up to 30 years (24%), from 31 to 40 years (54.3%), from 41 to 50 years (13%) and older than 50 years (8.7%). In terms of education, 1.6% of respondents had a secondary education, 32.7% had a higher education (two-year study), 37.8% had a higher education (three-year study), and 26.4% had a university degree (five-year study). Only 1.6% had completed postgraduate studies. Most participants are in the younger age groups (78% had up to 15 years of work experience). Regarding professional status, 20 teachers have one, of which 14 are mentor, and 6 are advisors. Descriptive data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
Descriptive data

	N	M	SD
Gender	254	1.000	0.0000
Age	254	2.063	0.8458
Education level	254	2.937	0.8458
Length of service	254	2.736	1.6045
Professional status	254	2.866	0.4765

Instruments

## **Transformational Leadership Style Questionnaire**

Perception of leadership style was examined using the Transformational Leadership Style Questionnaire - TLI (Podsakoff et al., 1990), which consists of 28 items. Statements assessing individual components of leadership style are grouped into seven categories (articulating a vision, providing an appropriate role model, encouraging acceptance of group goals, high expectations of work performance, individualized support, intellectual stimulation, and potential rewards) and were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument was translated into Croatian and was used as such by Pomper & Malbašić (2015). The questionnaire has an acceptable level of reliability ( $\alpha = .968$ ).

## **Multidimensional work motivation scale**

Work motivation was examined using the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale - MWMS (Gagné et al., 2015). The scale was developed for the purpose of applying the theory of self-determination in the field of organizational behavior (Gagné et al., 2015; Smokrović et al., 2018) and consists of 19 items grouped into six subscales, which measure amotivation and five types of motivation regulation. All items were formed as answers to the question, "Why do you invest, or would you invest effort in your current job?". The subscales Extrinsic Social Regulation, Extrinsic Material Regulation, and Introjected Regulation describe behaviours characteristic of controlled motivation, and the subscales Identified Regulation and Intrinsic Regulation describe behaviours characteristic of autonomous motivation. The statements were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale has an acceptable level of reliability ( $\alpha = .743$ ), which is consistent with the validity indicators according to Gagné et al., (2015).

## **Professional Development Readiness Scale**

Teachers' professional development readiness was assessed using the Professional Development Readiness Scale (Beara & Okanović, 2010). The original 17-item scale was translated into Croatian and adapted to the participants of this study. The item "I manage to keep up with the development of the subject I teach" was omitted because it strictly applies to teachers. The reliability of the scale is high ( $\alpha = .821$ ). Five subscales (external motivation for training, awareness of the importance of training for the teaching profession, awareness of the importance of training for the quality of practice, monitoring of contemporary achievements, and self-initiative for training) also meet the reliability criterion (Beara & Okanović, 2010).

## **Results**

The relationship between the principals' transformational leadership style, work motivation, and the teachers' professional development readiness was examined using the Pearson correlation coefficient (Table 2). The results indicate a statistically significant positive correlation among the aforementioned variables. There is no statistically significant correlation between the principals' transformational leadership style and teachers' controlled motivation and between the controlled motivation and the teachers' professional development readiness.

Table 2 Pearson correlation coefficient				
	Autonomous mot.	Leadership style	Controlled mot.	Professional development readiness
Autonomous mot.	1.00			
Leadership style	.216**	1.00		
Controlled mot.	1.00	.044	1.00	
Professional development readiness	.465**	-	-.091	1.00
*p<.05; **p<.01				

The predictive role of the transformational leadership style and the autonomous and controlled motivation was examined by hierarchical regression analysis. The first step is statistically significant, and sociodemographic variables explain 9.4% of the total variance of educators' professional development readiness. Of all the sociodemographic variables, only the level of education has a significant contribution. The second step of the regression analysis does not explain a significantly higher percentage of the variance than the first. The perceived leadership style of the principal proved to be a non-significant predictor of educators' professional development readiness. The third step of the analysis is statistically significant, indicating that autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of the readiness of educators for professional development, even above the control sociodemographic variables and the transformational leadership style of the principal, and independently explains 20.9% of the total variance of the readiness of educators for professional development. All variables in blocks 1-3 explain 31% of the total variance of educators' readiness for professional development. The model is significant for predicting the readiness of educators for professional development. The results indicate that greater autonomous motivation and a higher level of education predict greater readiness of preschool teachers for professional development (Table 3).

Table 3  
Hierarchical regression analysis

Model	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β
MODEL 1	<b>,094***</b>	,094	
Age			,118
Education level			<b>,248***</b>
Length of service			,149
Professional status			,004

MODEL 2	,101	,007	
Age			,119
Education level			<b>,253***</b>
Length of service			,156
Professional status			,008
Leadership style			,082
MODEL 3	<b>,310***</b>	,209	
Age			,082
			<b>,229***</b>
			,192
			,017
Education level			-,019
Length of service			-,022
Professional status			<b>,468***</b>
Leadership style			
Controlled mot.			
Autonomous mot.			

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

Differences in self-initiative and external motivation for the professional development of preschool teachers concerning sociodemographic factors were determined by one-way ANOVA. Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variance. ANOVA shows a statistically significant difference in self-initiative for professional development concerning age and length of service. The Post hoc Scheffe test shows no differences between the younger groups (up to 30 years and 31 to 40 years). However, they are statistically significantly different from the two older groups (41 to 50 years, and more than 50 years), but there are also no differences. The post hoc test did not determine statistically significant differences between groups with different lengths of service. Arithmetic means show a slight trend towards preschool teachers with more extended service expressing greater self-initiative for development. This aligns with the age difference found, but these differences are minimal. There is no statistically significant difference in the external motivation of preschool teachers concerning age, length of service, and level of education. Levene's test showed that the variances of different groups by education in external motivation for improvement are too different (Table 4), which is why the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was applied (Table 5).

Table 4 ANOVA												
		Self-initiative for training					External motivation					
		SS	df	MS	F	p	SS	df	MS	F	p	
Age	Between groups	9,505	3	3,168	6,619	,000	4,239	3	1,413	<b>1,914</b>	<b>,128</b>	

	Within group s	119,657	250	,479			184,564	250	,738			
	Total	129,161	253				188,802	253				
Lengh t of servic e	Betwe en group s	11,362	6	1,894	3,971	,001	6,410	6	1,068	<b>1,45</b>	<b>,197</b>	
	Within group s	117,799	247	,477			182,392	247	,738			
	Total	129,161	253				188,802	253				
Educa tion level	Betwe en group s	4,350	4	1,088	2,170	,073						
	Within group s	124,811	249	,501								
	Total	129,161	253									

Table 5  
Kruskal - Wallis test

External motivation for professional development		
Chi-square	df	Sig.
8,364	4	,079

## Discussion

Correlation analysis shows that educators attributing transformational leadership characteristics to principals have greater autonomous motivation. These findings are in line with research results showing that transformational leadership promotes autonomous work motivation (Graves et al., 2013) and professional development of employees and improves the organizational conditions of the educational institution (Thoonen et al., 2011). The research also shows that autonomously motivated educators are more willing to engage in various forms of professional development. In previous research, autonomous motivation has been associated with outcomes such as commitment to the organization, psychological well-being, trust, job satisfaction (Deci et al., 2000; Deci et al., 2001), work engagement (Fernet et al., 2012), and has a significant contribution to knowledge exchange, as an informal form of professional development (Foss et al., 2009). Educators who feel safe in their job are certainly more relaxed and cultivate a positive



attitude in their work with children, parents, and colleagues. By ensuring conditions that encourage autonomy in the work environment, principals support educators in shaping their professional roles through continuous professional development. Such an approach is an indispensable factor in successful and efficient leadership, which contributes to the achievement of educational goals (Peko et al., 2009; Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Aubrey, 2007; Bennet & Anderson, 2003). The level of education and autonomous motivation are significant predictors of educators' professional development readiness. Educators with a higher level of education are more motivated and, therefore, more willing to participate in various forms of professional development. Accordingly, it is assumed that these educators will more often implement modern knowledge in their educational work. Similar findings were also made by Vansteenkiste et al. (2009), who associated autonomous motivation with positive effects such as thorough learning and perseverance. The assumption about the predictive relationship between the principal's transformational leadership style and the educators' readiness for professional development was not confirmed in this case, although many recent studies (Bogler, 2001; Fullan, 2002; according to Hallinger, 2003) show otherwise.

Furthermore, the assumption about a statistically significant difference in educators' self-initiative and external motivation for professional development regarding age, length of service, and education level was partially accepted. The results show that educators of older chronological age and those with more extended service have greater self-initiative for professional development. Older educators have more work experience, recognize weaknesses, and plan professional development accordingly. Younger educators do not yet have a clear perception of their competencies, so they may consider additional training unnecessary. These results are in line with the findings of the study by Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2017), according to which middle-aged and older educators have greater motivation for professional development compared to younger ones. The results show that preschool teachers of different ages, years of experience, and education levels are equally motivated to improve their skills when it comes to external motivation factors (principal expectations, mandatory training, number of hours received for attending training). The results contradict the findings of Hildebrandt and Eom (2011), which state that younger teachers, compared to older ones, value praise more and are more motivated when it comes to financial rewards.

The relationships between the transformational leadership style of principals and the autonomous and controlled motivation of educators, presented in the research, can expand the understanding of the role of principals and the characteristics of their leadership style. Also, the results of this research can serve as guidelines for principals in their professional development of those competencies that will help them create an atmosphere of safety and mutual trust to encourage the autonomous motivation of educators. It is important to note that this research has some limitations. For example, due to commercialization, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio and Bass, 2010), which is more appropriate for examining transformational leadership style, was not used. Also, by conducting an online survey, respondents who were not Internet users were excluded. Although this research reveals relationships between transformational leadership style, work motivation, and educators' readiness for professional development, it does not provide sufficient information about the impact of individual behaviours of a transformational leader. Therefore, future research should focus on studying the relationship between different components of transformational leadership style and autonomous motivation. It would also be useful to examine, in addition to transformational leadership, transactional leadership style, and the mediating role of autonomous and controlled motivation of educators in relation to professional development.

## Conclusion

The research confirms the expected connection between the principal's transformational leadership style and the educators' autonomous motivation and autonomous motivation and readiness for professional development. Predictive variables explain 31% of the variance in professional development readiness, with the level of education and autonomous motivation standing out as the most significant predictors. Educators' professional development is a complex area in which all stakeholders (principals, professional associates, colleagues, parents, etc.) contribute in different ways to the engagement of educators and their active participation in the process. Organizational factors, such as the principal's leadership style, play a significant role in creating conditions and an environment that encourages educators engage in professional learning activities, leading to higher productivity and quality of educational work.

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**Stvoreno 20 svibnja 2025 18:10:50 od Martina Gajšek**

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