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Bridging the Gap: Organizational Climate as a Mediator between Transformational Leadership, Religiosity, and Teacher Engagement

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the influence of transformational leadership and religiosity on teacher engagement, with organizational climate as an intervening variable, among 153 teachers at A-accredited private lower secondary schools in Tangerang City. The writer used a quantitative survey method and multiple regression analysis with the Sobel mediation test. The results indicate that transformational leadership does not directly affect teacher engagement, but strongly influences organizational climate, which fully mediates this effect. Religiosity, on the other hand, had a significant direct effect on teacher engagement, whilst being partially mediated by organizational climate. These findings confirm that organizational climate acts as a crucial bridge linking leadership to engagement; therefore, the efforts to strengthen leadership must be accompanied by the development of a conducive organizational climate.

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of Indonesian education remains unresolved. The 2022 PISA results showed Indonesian students' reading literacy scores were only 359, mathematics 366, and science 383, all of which declined compared to the 2018 PISA results and were far below the OECD average (OECD, 2023). Data from the Teacher Competency Test from 2021 to 2023 even showed that approximately 81 percent of teachers in Indonesia had not achieved the minimum competency score set by the government (Roesminingsih & Windasari, 2025). This shows that the issue of teacher quality is not merely a matter of technical competence, but also concerns the extent to which teachers are emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engaged in their work, known as teacher engagement.

In private schools, the challenge of maintaining engagement is even greater because limited resources often force schools to rely on non-material factors, such as leadership quality and teachers' personal values. Recent literature frequently links two factors to teacher engagement: the principal's transformational leadership and teacher religiosity. However, the relationship between these two factors and engagement is not always direct. Several recent studies show that the influence of transformational leadership often affects work engagement through the organizational climate created in the workplace (Zhang et al., 2025).

The novelty of this research lies in empirically testing the role of organizational climate as an intervening variable that simultaneously bridges the influence of transformational leadership and religiosity on teacher engagement within a single model, particularly in the context of private junior high school teachers in Indonesia, which has rarely been specifically researched. This study examines the direct and indirect effects of these two independent variables on teacher engagement among 153 A-accredited private junior high school teachers in Tangerang City.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Teacher Engagement

Work engagement is understood as a positive psychological state characterized by passion, dedication, and immersion in one's work. In the context of teachers, engagement reflects the extent to which an educator is emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engaged in their teaching duties (Meditamar, 2024; Roesminingsih & Windasari, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Schaufeli (in (Rachmawati, Damayanti, & Zulfiandi, 2026)) defines employee engagement as a positive and satisfying mental state related to work, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. From this perspective, strengthening teacher engagement is crucial. Teachers with high engagement will devote their best efforts to educating and developing students' potential, thereby improving the quality of education in line with the rapid development of technology. Engaged teachers also tend to be more motivated to develop their competencies to educate students effectively and continuously. This study measured teacher engagement through seven indicators: career development, loyalty, enthusiasm, dedication, immersion, passion, and a sense of workplace belonging.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that encourages subordinates to transcend personal interests for shared goals, through a clear vision, intellectual stimulation, role modeling, and individual attention(Roesminingsih & Windasari, 2025). Ghadi, Fernando, and Caputi (2013) showed that transformational leadership influences work engagement primarily by strengthening the meaning of work, while (Zhang et al., 2025) found that organizational climate mediates this influence. This study measured transformational leadership through four indicators: role model influence, inspiring motivation, encouragement of creative thinking, and personal approach.

Religiosity

Religiosity refers to the extent to which individuals internalize and practice religious values in their daily lives (Abualigah et al., 2021). Apriasari and Susetyo (2022) showed that religiosity significantly predicts teacher engagement, while Nwachukwu et al.(2021) emphasized the multidimensional nature of religiosity in influencing work engagement. This study measured religiosity through six indicators: Appreciation of faith, Commitment to Religious Practices, spiritual experience, religious knowledge, social ethics, and religious integration in daily life.

Organizational Climate

Organizational climate reflects organizational members' shared perceptions of working conditions and interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Abun, Menor, Catabagan, Magallanes, T., & Ranay, 2021). Several studies have shown that organizational climate acts as an intervening variable between leadership and work engagement(Meditamar, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). This study measures organizational climate through five indicators: emotional harmony, social harmony, innovation dynamics, structural openness, and organizational sustainability. Based on this review, organizational climate is positioned as an intervening variable that bridges the influence of transformational leadership and religiosity on teacher engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach with a survey method and a causal explanatory design. The research model positioned transformational leadership (X1) and religiosity (X2) as independent variables, organizational climate (X3) as an intervening variable, and teacher engagement (Y) as the dependent variable. The study population was teachers at A-accredited private junior high schools in Tangerang City, with a sample of 153 teachers from 10 schools.

Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Table 1 presents the number of items and Cronbach's alpha reliability of each instrument after validity testing with 30 teachers outside the sample, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of items and Instrument Reliability

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Transformational Leadership (X1)	39	0.967
Religiositys (X2)	36	0.939
Organisational Climate (X3)	39	0.941
Teacher Engagement (Y)	34	0.921

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 32, including classical assumption tests, three-stage multiple regression analysis, and Sobel mediation tests following the procedures of Baron and Kenny (1986). Organizational climate is declared a full mediator if the direct effect of the independent variable on Y becomes insignificant after X3 is entered into the model, and a partial mediator if the direct effect remains significant but decreases. The significance level is set at 5 percent.

RESULTS

The classical assumption tests indicated that the regression model was suitable for use, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Classical Assumption Tests

Test	Result	Conclusion
Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)	0.066; p = 0.503	Normal
Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)	0.984; p = 0.082	Normal
Linearity (Ramsey RESET)	F = 2,117; p = 0.148	Linear
Multicollinearity (VIF/Tol.)	X1: 1.838/0.544; X2: 1.455/0.687; X3: 1.741/0.574	No Multicollinearity
Autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson)	1.769	No autocorrelation
Heteroscedasticitys (Glejser)	X1: p=0.020; X2: p=0.787; X3: p=0.080	Mild Indication for X1

Table 3. Model 1 – Total Effect X^1 dan X^2 on Y

Variables	B	SE	t	Sig.
Constant	66.080	11.120	5.942	0.000
X1 (Transformational Leadership)	0.064	0.052	1.240	0.217
X2 (Religiosity)	0.391	0.082	4.768	0.000

R^2 = 0.218; Adj R^2 = 0.208; F = 20.942; Sig. F = 0.000

Table 4. Model 2 – The effect of X^1 and X^2 on X^3

Variable	B	SE	t	Sig.
Constant	40,786	14,280	2,856	0,005
X1	0,474	0,067	7,097	0,000
X2	0,309	0,105	2,937	0,004

R^2 = 0,426; Adj R^2 = 0,418; F = 55,558; Sig. F = 0,000

Table 5. Model 3 – The effect of X1, X2, dan X3 on Y

Variable	B	SE	t	Sig.
Constant	58,810	11,153	5,273	0,000
X1	-0,020	0,059	-0,341	0,734
X2	0,336	0,082	4,078	0,000
X3 (Organisational Climate)	0,178	0,062	2,870	0,005

R^2 = 0,259; Adj R^2 = 0,244; F = 17,382; Sig. F = 0,000

Table 6. Results of the Sobel Test

Path	Indirect Effect	Z - Value	Sig.	Conclusion
X1 -> X3 -> Y	0,0845	2,661	0,0078	Significant (full mediation)
X2 -> X3 -> Y	0,0551	2,053	0,0401	Significant (partial mediation)

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

No.	Hypothesis	Results
1	X1 has direct effect on Y	Rejected
2	X2 has direct effect on Y	Accepted
3	X1 has an effect on X3	Accepted
4	X2 has an effect on X3	Accepted

No.	Hypothesis	Results
5	X3 influences Y	Accepted
6	X3 mediates the relationship between X1 and Y	Accepted (full mediation)
7	X3 mediates the relationship between X3 and Y	Accepted (partial mediation)

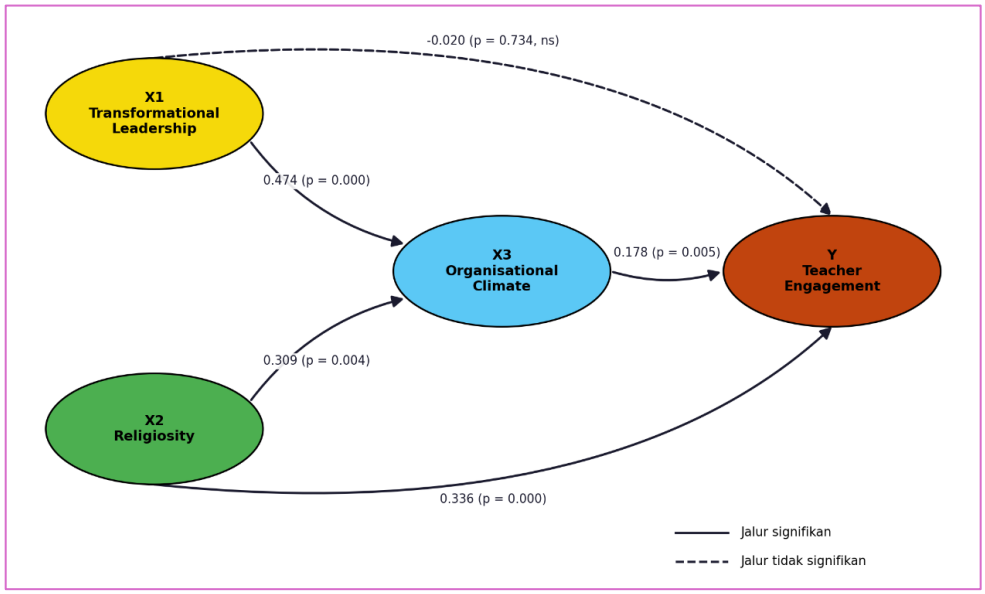


Figure 1. Research Path Model

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that transformational leadership does not directly affect teacher engagement, which may seem counterintuitive at first glance but aligns with a pattern increasingly reported in recent studies. Ayep, Nurhayati, and Utomo (2024) found a similar pattern among teachers in Batam, where transformational leadership had no direct effect on engagement, while a mediating variable fully mediated the relationship. Zhang et al.(2025) reported consistent findings across healthcare professions, showing that organizational climate mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. The similarity of these patterns across professional contexts suggests that the phenomenon reflects fundamental mechanisms of how leadership operates, rather than simply a unique feature of the data in this study.

The most plausible explanation draws on the idea of Ghadi, Fernando, and Caputi(2013) , who argued that transformational leadership influences work engagement primarily by strengthening the meaning of individual work rather than directly shaping work attitudes. An inspiring and exemplary principal does not necessarily make teachers feel more engaged in their work unless that leadership is first translated into concrete work conditions, such as a conducive organizational climate. Chen and Cuervo (2022) support this argument by

showing that the influence of transformational leadership on work engagement depends heavily on the motivation successfully cultivated in employees.

Conversely, transformational leadership emerged as a key shaper of organizational climate, far surpassing the contribution of religiosity to the same variable. This pattern is consistent with Romi, Efendi, Chandra, Candra, and Sudirman (2023), who identified transformational leadership and organizational climate as two interrelated primary predictors of work engagement, and Munte, Siagian, Sihombing, and Susanti (2022), who emphasized the central role of principal leadership in shaping the organizational climate in educational settings. Transformational leadership is essentially a climate-shaping force, not a direct force shaping engagement.

Religiosity shows a different pattern, with a strong direct effect on teacher engagement remaining even after accounting for organizational climate. This finding confirms that religiosity has its own pathway of influence that is relatively independent of work environment conditions, aligning with the view of Abualigah, Davies, and Harrington(2021) that religiosity functions as a personal resource capable of sustaining work engagement even when organizational conditions are less than ideal. Bernie and Suhana(2025) reported similar findings in the Indonesian context, reinforcing the notion that religiosity is more personal and inherent to the individual, distinct from leadership, which is contextual and dependent on the organizational situation.

Nevertheless, religiosity has also been shown to contribute to organizational climate, albeit to a lesser extent than transformational leadership. Religious teachers are likely to contribute to organizational climate through how they interact with colleagues, particularly by embracing social ethics and integrating religious values into daily life. Organizational climate has consistently been shown to significantly influence teacher engagement. Both independent variables significantly influence it, confirming its role as an intervening variable rather than simply an additional independent variable. This consistency with Ramadan, Sari, and Tentama(2021) and Jalaludin, Setyaningsih, and Herfina (2024), who examined the context of private junior high school teachers, whose characteristics are nearly identical to the focus of this study, further confirms that the patterns found reflect common mechanisms in small- to medium-sized educational institutions with limited resources.

Theoretically, this study deepens our understanding that transformational leadership and religiosity do not influence teacher engagement through of uniform mechanism. Transformational leadership relies almost entirely on organizational climate as a conduit for its influence, while religiosity has a much more dominant direct pathway. Practically, these findings confirm that investing in principals' transformational leadership will have little impact on teacher engagement unless paired with concrete efforts to build a conducive organizational climate, while strengthening teacher religiosity can provide an additional, more direct pathway.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that transformational leadership does not directly influence teacher engagement; instead, it operates entirely through organizational climate as an intervening variable. Religiosity, on the other hand, has a dual pathway of influence, both directly and through organizational climate. Organizational climate has consistently been shown to act as a strategic bridge between both independent variables in increasing teacher engagement.

Based on these findings, schools are advised to focus not only on developing the principal's transformational leadership but also to actively build a conducive organizational climate, particularly in terms of policy sustainability and emotional harmony in the workplace. Strengthening teacher religiosity, for example, through joint religious activities or providing spaces for spiritual reflection, is recommended as an additional, more direct pathway to increasing teacher engagement**.**

FURTHER STUDY

This study was limited to the context of A-accredited private junior high school teachers in one city, so generalization of the findings should be done with caution. Future research should test this model in the context of public schools or other educational levels and consider additional mediator variables, such as work motivation, to broaden our understanding of the mechanisms that increase teacher engagement. Indications of mild heteroscedasticity in one of the independent variables also warrant further investigation in future research with a larger sample size.

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