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## The Role of Transformational Leadership in Fostering Teacher Knowledge Sharing: The Mediating Effects of Teachers' Epistemic Curiosity and Commitment

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how principals' transformational leadership practices influence teachers' knowledge-sharing behaviors through the mediating roles of teacher epistemic curiosity and commitment. Although transformational leadership has been extensively studied, limited empirical research has examined the psychological mechanisms linking transformational leadership to knowledge-sharing practices in the Turkish educational context. To address this gap, survey data were collected from 502 teachers across primary, secondary, and upper-secondary schools in Türkiye and analyzed using structural equation modeling. Results reveal that transformational leadership promotes knowledge sharing both directly and indirectly by fostering curiosity and commitment among teachers. These findings underscore the importance of leadership in shaping teacher capacities that facilitate professional knowledge exchange. Implications include the need to institutionalize structured opportunities for knowledge sharing, recognize teachers' collaborative contributions, and support principals in fostering inquiry-oriented school cultures. Limitations of the study, including the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, suggest directions for future longitudinal and multi-source research.

**Keywords:** Transformational leadership, teacher epistemic curiosity, teacher commitment, teacher knowledge sharing, mediated-effects model

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## Introduction

In recent years, teacher knowledge sharing (TKS) has attracted growing scholarly interest as a crucial mechanism for advancing teaching quality and, by extension, promoting school effectiveness (Shi et al., 2023; Zeinabadi & Abbasian, 2024). As schools increasingly aim to foster collaborative and inquiry-driven professional cultures, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, instructional experiences, and teaching resources among teachers has become an indispensable priority (Wang et al., 2021). More than a conduit for spreading effective practices, TKS serves as a driver of instructional innovation and collaborative problem-solving, enabling schools to develop collective instructional capacity (Chen & Pongtornkulpanich, 2024). Yet, despite its importance, stimulating knowledge-sharing among teachers remains a multifaceted challenge, shaped by a complex interplay of organizational conditions and psychological dispositions. This complexity has led educational leadership scholars to zoom in on how leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership (TL), can influence and sustain TKS behaviors in schools (Zeinabadi, 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

Despite prior evidence in the literature linking school leadership to TKS, critical gaps remain unresolved. First, despite the heightened policy emphasis on strengthening school leadership to improve instructional quality, there is still a notable lack of empirical inquiry into how leadership practices influence TKS in the Turkish educational context, which yields a centralized structure with recently intensified policy efforts to leverage school principals' leadership practices to improve teaching and learning (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018, 2024). Therefore, examining the empirical link between TL and TKS has become a timely and pressing concern in the Turkish education system.

Second, although prior studies have proposed several mediating variables, such as perceived organizational support, organizational culture (Hoang & Le, 2025), and psychological empowerment (Zhang et al., 2024), the evidence base is still underdeveloped concerning whether and how teacher epistemic curiosity (TEC) and teacher commitment (TC) operate as psychological conduits in this relationship. To address this, the current study conceptualizes TEC and TC as novel mediators potentially linking TL and TKS. While earlier studies have largely emphasized organizational and structural factors, the current model introduces psychological and motivational mechanisms that remain underexplored in the context of leadership and knowledge sharing in schools. TEC denotes teachers' intrinsic motivation to acquire new knowledge about student learning, question assumptions, and remain engaged in continuous professional learning, all of which are foundational to effective knowledge sharing (Adams et al., 2025). Likewise, TC captures teachers' affective and normative attachment to their school (Thien & Razak, 2014). The literature suggests that committed teachers are more inclined to invest discretionary effort in collaborative practices such as knowledge sharing (Fayda-Kinik, 2022). Conceptually, TL has the potential to enhance both TEC and TC by inspiring teachers to rise above individual interests and align with shared educational goals (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). By placing TEC and TC as mediating constructs, this study aims to uncover the internal motivational pathways by which TL impacts knowledge sharing.

To address these gaps in the existing literature, this study develops and tests a mediated-effects model that investigates whether TL fosters TKS through the mediation of TEC and TC. The findings seek to contribute to the literature through two key ways: (1) it offers contextually grounded evidence into how TL shapes TKS in a context where leadership development has emerged as a strategic priority to improve teaching and learning in schools, and (2) it introduces

TEC and TC as theoretically coherent yet empirically underexplored psychological mechanisms that could mediate this relationship. By integrating these constructs into a unified theoretical framework, the study advances current perspectives on the role of school leadership practices in empowering teachers to share pedagogical knowledge. This study is guided by the following key research questions:

1. What is the direct link between TL and TKS?
2. Do teacher TEC and TC mediate the link between TL and TKS?

## **Context of the Study**

Türkiye's educational landscape functions under a centralized governance model, with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) overseeing key aspects such as teacher assignment, curriculum planning, and administrative appointments (Kılınç et al., 2021). This model provides uniformity across schools, ensuring alignment with national priorities and facilitating the large-scale implementation of educational reforms. At the same time, it offers limited space for teachers to exercise professional agency or to participate meaningfully in collaborative decision-making processes. In this system, teachers are primarily responsible for delivering the nationally prescribed curriculum, with limited autonomy to modify content or instructional strategies based on local needs. Principals, likewise, are mainly accountable for administrative compliance and school operations, with their roles and authority broadly defined by MoNE regulations. This structure may limit opportunities for teachers to exercise professional agency or to engage fully in collaborative decision-making processes. Similarly, principals are frequently appointed without formal leadership training, which may reduce their preparedness to foster professional dialogue and support the development of learning-centered school environments (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

Recent policy reforms increasingly acknowledge that meaningful and sustainable instructional improvement relies not only on individual teacher capacity but also on continuous professional collaboration and the intentional sharing of pedagogical knowledge. Key national policy documents, including the Teacher Strategy Paper (MoNE, 2017), the 2023 Education Vision (MoNE, 2018), and the Century of Türkiye Education Model (MoNE, 2024), have recently underscored the importance of fostering teacher collaboration, advancing technology integration in teaching, and allowing greater flexibility at the school level. Therefore, school principals are increasingly expected to execute TL practices by motivating teachers, nurturing their curiosity, and creating conditions conducive to sharing instructional practices and professional expertise.

Within this evolving policy landscape, this study investigates whether and how TL contributes to knowledge-sharing practices among teachers. Investigating the intermediary functions of epistemic curiosity and teacher commitment might illuminate the underlying psychological mechanisms that enable knowledge-sharing behaviors to flourish. It is also worth noting that although grounded in the specific dynamics of Türkiye's education system, the findings generated by this study might hold broader applicability for other centralized education systems striving to foster collaborative school cultures through school leadership.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Rooted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this study provides a robust framework for understanding how school leadership practices can influence teacher motivation and behavior. As outlined in SDT, the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is considered essential for fostering individual motivation. Meeting these fundamental needs creates the conditions for intrinsic motivation to develop, which, in turn, fosters stronger engagement, sustained effort, and increased voluntary investment in their work (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). TL serves as an organizational factor that helps meet teachers' core psychological needs (Messmann et al., 2022). By articulating a shared vision, offering individualized consideration, and stimulating intellectual growth, transformational school leaders could create environments where teachers feel empowered, capable, and connected (Eyal & Roth, 2011). In doing so, TL promotes the internalization of professional goals and fosters a sense of ownership over instructional practices (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

This motivational process is particularly relevant to TEC, which reflects a teacher's intrinsic drive to explore new knowledge about student learning and engage in sustained professional inquiry (Adams et al., 2025). When school principals provide autonomy-supportive conditions, teachers are more likely to pursue learning out of genuine interest rather than external obligation. This intrinsic motivation could not only fuel TEC but also encourage reflective dialogue and the sharing of pedagogical expertise with peers (Mercer & Pawlak, 2024). Similarly, TC can also be nurtured through leadership practices that fulfill psychological needs (Ford et al., 2019). Teachers experiencing a school atmosphere characterized by support and empowerment tend to align more closely with school objectives and contribute actively to their achievement (Geijsel et al., 2009). This emotional investment is a critical foundation for collaborative behaviors such as sharing knowledge (Van Den Hooff et al., 2012). Guided by SDT, this study proposes a conceptual model where TL directly influences TKS and indirectly through TEC and TC. The model assumes that TL enhances both teachers' intellectual engagement and emotional affiliation, which, in turn, fosters a professional climate conducive to open exchange among teachers.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### ***Teacher knowledge sharing***

Knowledge sharing refers to the process by which individuals exchange information, expertise, and experiences that contribute to learning, innovation, and improved organizational outcomes (Wang & Noe, 2010). It is pivotal in building collective capacity, enhancing collaboration, and sustaining knowledge-based practices across professional domains (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Although knowledge may be codified in systems or formal resources, it often resides in individuals and remains inaccessible unless they voluntarily choose to share it. Thus, the effectiveness of knowledge sharing depends not on enforcement mechanisms but on individuals' willingness to contribute their knowledge within a supportive and trust-based organizational environment (Bock et al., 2005).

Within the educational context, TKS involves the mutual exchange of instructional strategies, classroom practices, and pedagogical expertise among teachers to enhance professional development and, thereby, teaching quality. It facilitates not only the dissemination of established techniques but also the co-construction of innovative practices through collaborative reflection and professional dialogue (Agyemang et al., 2016; Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011; Zeinabadi & Abbasian,

2024). TKS extends beyond the mere transmission of information. It represents a dynamic, reciprocal process of engagement that nurtures professional dialogue, reflective inquiry, and collective problem-solving (Cheng et al., 2009; Tan, 2015). Through structured interactions such as team teaching, collaborative lesson planning, and teacher learning communities, teachers exchange creative ideas and draw on one another's classroom experiences to enrich their teaching practices. This collaborative knowledge base enables the refinement of existing strategies and promotes the implementation of instructional innovations. Such practices are instrumental in shaping a collaborative school culture, where teachers actively support one another's professional growth and work collectively toward improving students' learning outcomes (Akosile & Olatokun, 2020; Shi et al., 2023).

### ***Teacher epistemic curiosity***

Epistemic curiosity is conceptualized as an internally regulated motivation to seek knowledge, explore, and resolve cognitive uncertainty through learning. It is characterized by a desire to acquire new information and to make sense of unfamiliar or complex phenomena (Berlyne, 1954; Litman, 2005). As a relatively stable motivational disposition, epistemic curiosity promotes cognitive engagement, encouraging individuals to expand their understanding over time (Chang & Shih, 2019). In professional learning contexts, it serves as a key factor in driving reflective practice, innovation, and intellectual growth (Li et al., 2023).

Within the teaching profession, TEC reflects the degree to which teachers are internally driven to investigate students' cognitive processes, learning behaviors, and engagement with instructional content (Adams et al., 2025). Teachers marked by a higher sense of TEC typically engage in investigating the processes underlying student engagement and academic learning. This drive compels them to pose challenging pedagogical questions, critically reflect on student responses, and modify instructional strategies to meet diverse learning needs. In this regard, TEC functions as a psychological resource that contributes to continuous instructional refinement.

TEC is rooted in teachers' satisfaction in pursuing knowledge and resolving instructional challenges. Scholars have framed this type of curiosity as an "interest-driven" state, where intrinsic pleasure is derived from learning outcomes and the inquiry process itself (Litman et al., 2010). Teachers demonstrating strong epistemic curiosity tend to experiment with new methodologies, seek feedback from colleagues, and view teaching as an evolving practice marked by exploration and reflection (Mercer & Pawlak, 2024; Whitehouse et al., 2018). Therefore, in this study, TEC is defined as teachers' internal drive to enhance their instructional practices by actively probing how students learn and continuously engaging with novel pedagogical insights. It encompasses a sustained orientation toward asking meaningful questions, pursuing conceptual understanding, and exploring student learning in diverse classroom contexts.

Although previous evidence suggests a potential link between higher levels of epistemic curiosity and collaborative learning behaviors (Litman et al., 2010), the role of TEC in fostering TKS remains insufficiently studied. Curiosity fosters openness to alternative viewpoints and receptivity to creative ideas, which are among the conditions conducive to professional exchange (Li et al., 2023). Watson (2022) contends that curiosity is advantageous and essential for meaningful collaboration, particularly when professional knowledge is jointly constructed. Evidence from the organizational behavior literature supports these findings. For instance, Chen et al. (2024) identified a significant association between curiosity and knowledge-sharing practices. Gino (2018) emphasized that curiosity enhances communication and teamwork, both of which are central to sustained knowledge exchange. However, empirical evidence that directly



links TEC to knowledge-sharing behaviors in educational settings remains sparse. This gap is particularly salient in contexts like Türkiye, where professional learning increasingly depends on peer-based exchange. Therefore, it is hypothesized that TEC is positively and directly associated with TKS (Hypothesis 1).

### ***Teacher commitment***

TC refers to the emotional attachment and psychological bond that teachers form with their schools. It reflects a voluntary and affirmative connection that shapes how teachers perceive their work environment, the extent of effort they are willing to contribute toward the school's success, and their intentions to remain within the organization (Bogler & Berkovich, 2022; Hulpia et al., 2009). Mowday et al. (1982) identified three aspects that form the basis of organizational commitment: identification with the values and goals of the organization, involvement as reflected in a willingness to exert effort on the organization's behalf, and loyalty in the form of a desire to sustain membership. These elements suggest that commitment is both attitudinal and behavioral, influencing how individuals relate to their institutions and how actively they contribute to organizational development. Prior studies have consistently linked teacher commitment to several positive outcomes, including enhanced job satisfaction, improved collaboration, and reduced turnover intentions (Devos et al., 2014; Imran et al., 2017; Mokhtar et al., 2023).

In educational settings, TC is commonly viewed as the extent to which teachers align with school goals, contribute actively to their realization, and demonstrate a sustained intention to be part of the school community (Thien & Razak, 2014). This view captures both the motivational drivers and the practical enactments of commitment in day-to-day professional life. In this study, teacher commitment is conceptualized as a psychological bond encompassing loyalty to the school, alignment with institutional values, and a sense of satisfaction derived from being part of the school environment.

Empirical research highlights organizational commitment as a key driver of knowledge-sharing behavior in professional contexts. For instance, Costa and Monteiro (2016), in a study of university faculty in Portugal, found that organizational commitment was a robust antecedent of educators' willingness to share knowledge. Similarly, in a Turkish university setting, Fayda-Kinik (2022) found that individuals with greater affective commitment were more inclined to participate in knowledge-sharing activities. Supporting this, Mohd Rasdi and Tangaraja (2022) identified affective commitment as a crucial enabler that channels intrinsically motivated professionals toward knowledge-sharing behavior. Drawing on the existing literature, this study proposes that TC is positively and directly related to TKS (Hypothesis 2).

### ***Transformational leadership***

TL refers to a leadership model that motivates teachers to transcend routine expectations by cultivating a shared sense of purpose and actively supporting their personal and professional growth (Bass & Avolio, 1994). It is fundamentally oriented toward shaping school culture in ways that foster collaboration, innovation, and sustained improvement. Since TL emerged as a dominant leadership paradigm in the 1990s, it has been widely acknowledged for its capacity to reshape organizational culture by aligning values, beliefs, and behaviors with broader institutional goals (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Although TL was initially conceptualized through four core components (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) (e.g., Bass, 1985), school leadership research has distilled these into three practices: vision

building, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation (e.g., Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). These practices illustrate how transformational leaders foster motivation by articulating collective goals, encouraging reflective thinking, and providing personal and professional support. In doing so, they could help construct school environments where trust, professional learning, and shared responsibility are integral to daily practice. By strategically aligning school objectives with teachers' intrinsic motivations, transformational leaders contribute to a culture supporting individual growth and collective development (Ninković et al., 2024; Vermeulen et al., 2022). Therefore, this study conceptualizes TL as a coherent school leadership model that unifies these practices into a singular construct. In this study, the conceptualization of TL developed by Carless et al. (2000) was used as it encapsulates the essential qualities of TL within a concise and theoretically robust structure.

There is increasing empirical attention on how TL shapes teachers' engagement in collaborative and knowledge-sharing behaviors. For instance, Hoang and Le (2025) demonstrated that TL positively and directly influences TKS. Similarly, Al-Husseini et al. (2021), working on academic staff in Iraqi public universities, found a strong positive link between TL and knowledge-sharing behaviors. Echoing these findings, in a study conducted by Chen and Chang (2023), university faculty in China showed a greater tendency to participate in knowledge-sharing practices when they perceived their leaders as transformational. Therefore, it is theorized that TL is positively and directly associated with TKS (Hypothesis 3).

More recently, research has also investigated how TL may foster deeper forms of professional motivation, particularly epistemic curiosity. For instance, Adams et al. (2025) found that leadership characterized by transparent communication, reflective discourse, and attentive listening was significantly linked to elevated levels of teacher epistemic curiosity. In another study, Jaleel and Sarmad (2024) reported that empowering leadership practices positively predicted curiosity in work settings. These findings align with SDT, which suggests that the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters curiosity-driven behaviors and self-initiated learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Informed by this theoretical lens, this study hypothesizes that TL is positively and directly related to TEC (Hypothesis 4).

A growing body of evidence has also examined the role of TL in fostering teachers' commitment to their schools. Kılınç et al. (2024) revealed that TL exerted a significant positive impact on TC, reinforcing that visionary and supportive leadership deepens teachers' attachment to their schools. Supporting this, Ibrahim et al. (2014) demonstrated a strong association between TL and teachers' organizational commitment, while Berkovich and Hassan (2023) highlighted the capacity of TL to enhance affective bonds even in virtual settings. Therefore, it is expected that TL is positively and directly associated with teacher commitment (Hypothesis 5). Building on the preceding hypotheses, the study further proposes that TL indirectly influences TKS through the parallel mediating roles of TEC and TC.

## Method

### Research Design

This study was designed as a quantitative, cross-sectional survey to examine the relationships between principals' TL practices and teachers' knowledge-sharing behaviors, with TEC and TC as mediators. This design enabled the collection of data at a single point in time and the analysis of both direct and indirect relationships among the variables using structural equation modeling (SEM). A visual representation of the conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.

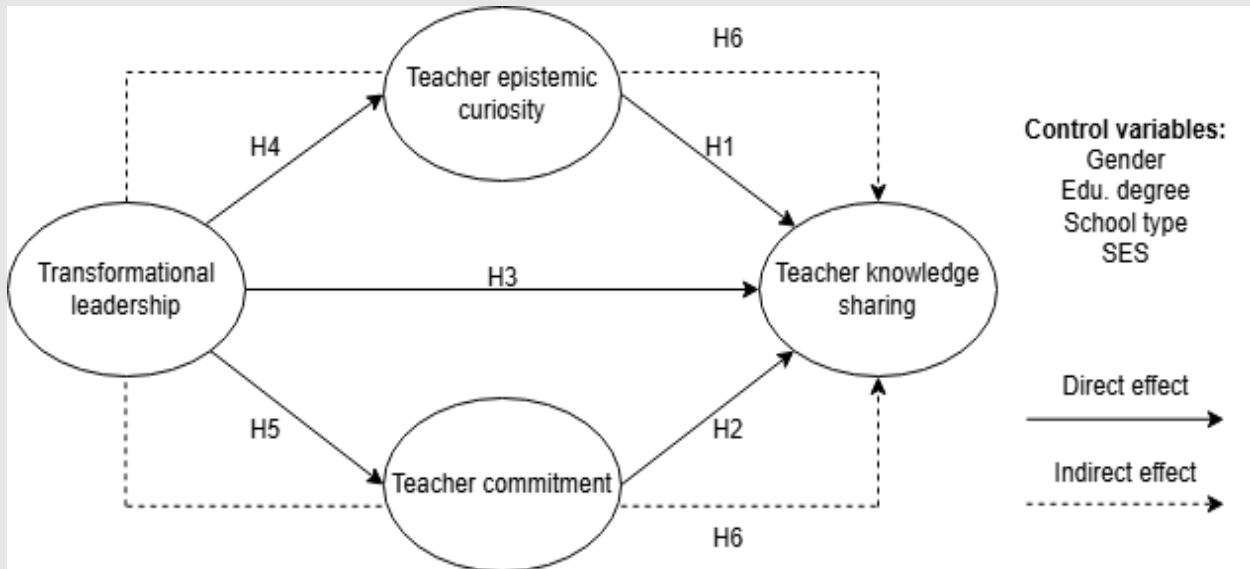


Figure 1. Conceptual model

### Sample

The participants in this study were teachers employed in public primary, secondary, and upper-secondary schools across Türkiye. A stratified sampling strategy was used to ensure geographic and institutional diversity. First, Türkiye was categorized into three broad regions: eastern, central, and western, based on general geographic and sociocultural distinctions. From each region, four metropolitan provinces were purposively selected, resulting in a total of twelve provinces. To account for socioeconomic variation, the national Socioeconomic Development Index (SEGE) published by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Industry and Technology (2017) was used, which ranks provinces based on indicators such as education, income, employment, and access to services. Within each selected province, a representative number of teachers was included from each school level (primary, secondary, and upper-secondary) in line with the official teacher distribution data from the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2023).

The final sample consisted of 502 teachers drawn from public schools across Türkiye. Among the participants, 248 (49.4%) were female and 254 (50.6%) were male. Regarding educational attainment, 69.1% held a bachelor's degree ( $n = 347$ ), while the remaining 30.9% ( $n = 155$ ) had completed postgraduate studies. The average length of teaching experience was 18.70



years ( $SD = 8.80$ ). Approximately 22.7 % of the teachers worked in primary schools, and the rest were employed in secondary and upper secondary schools. Additionally, 7.4 % of the schools were identified as serving communities with lower socioeconomic status.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected during the second term of the 2024-2025 academic year using an online survey, selected for its practical benefits in educational research, such as cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, broad accessibility, and ease of data handling (Lefever et al., 2007). The instrument was designed using Google Forms, emphasizing clarity, accessibility, and ease of navigation. The survey opened with a short description outlining the purpose of the study, followed by a consent form confirming voluntary participation and the protection of participant confidentiality. The data collection phase commenced with contacting school principals via phone and email to outline the study and clarify participation details. Those who agreed to participate received Google Forms links, which they subsequently shared with teachers via WhatsApp. The survey settings were configured to prevent duplicate submissions from the same IP address, thereby maintaining the accuracy and reliability of the data.

As cross-sectional research designs are prone to common method bias, which can affect the credibility of findings, both procedural and statistical strategies were implemented to mitigate this risk. First, participant anonymity was ensured by avoiding the collection of any personally identifiable data, including names and email addresses. Second, the title of the questionnaire was withheld to reduce framing effects, and the sequence of variables was arranged to present dependent variables first, followed by mediators and independent variables. This design aimed to minimize response bias caused by priming or expectancy effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, a pilot phase was implemented with a small number of teachers to review the instrument's wording, structure, and digital functionality for potential improvements. Pilot feedback was used to improve the instrument and ensure relevance across different educational settings. In addition to these procedural remedies, Harman's single-factor test was conducted as a statistical check for common method bias. The analysis indicated that a single factor explained 40.08% of the total variance, which falls below the commonly accepted 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias is not a major concern in this study.

### **Instruments**

**TKS.** TKS was assessed with a six-item instrument developed by Agyemang et al. (2016) and contextually adapted for use in Turkish schools as part of this study. The scale assesses the frequency with which teachers engage in sharing both explicit and tacit knowledge. A sample item is: "I share a lot of professional knowledge and expertise with other colleagues." Participants responded on a five-point Likert-type scale, with options spanning from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

**TEC.** TEC was assessed using a six-item unidimensional scale, developed by Litman and Spielberger (2003) and subsequently adapted for educational contexts by Adams et al. (2025). It was further adapted to the Turkish context by Savaş et al. (2025). The scale captures teachers' curiosity about student learning processes and their intrinsic motivation to explore pedagogical knowledge. Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). An example item includes: "I am curious about why some students struggle to learn."

**TC.** TC was assessed using a four-item scale based on the OECD's (2019) school commitment measure, adapted for the Turkish context by Kaya et al. (2024). The scale evaluates

teachers' emotional attachment to their school and willingness to remain in the institution. A five-point response scale, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), was used to capture participant input. A representative statement included: "I usually look forward to each working day at this school."

**TL.** TL was measured using a seven-item scale developed by Carless et al. (2000) and adapted into Turkish by Özdemir et al. (2024). The scale assesses teachers' perceptions of their principals' transformational leadership behaviors, including the extent to which they foster trust, provide encouragement, and articulate a shared vision. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A sample item is: "My principal gives encouragement and recognition to staff."

**Control variables:** The model controlled for potential background influences by including gender, level of education, type of school, and the socioeconomic status (SES) of the school.

### Validity and Reliability Analyses

CFA was applied to each construct individually to check the reliability and validity of the measurement tools. All models demonstrated adequate fit, confirming the robustness of the scale structure (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with all coefficients falling between .83 and .95, surpassing the conventional .70 criterion. Furthermore, CR values were consistently above .80 for all constructs. AVE values also exceeded the .50 threshold, providing evidence for convergent validity. The fact that CR values consistently exceeded AVE values further confirms the internal reliability and construct validity of the measures (Hair et al., 2019; Hatcher, 1994). These findings confirm that the instruments used in the study possess strong psychometric properties and are suitable for inclusion in the structural model. Details of the CFA outcomes, including reliability and validity indices, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability, validity, and fit indices of the scales

Scales	$\alpha$	AVE	CR	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
TKS	0.92	0.71	0.92	2.23	0.05	0.01	0.99	0.99
TEC	0.88	0.57	0.86	2.48	0.05	0.02	0.99	0.99
TC	0.83	0.58	0.84	1.49	0.03	0.01	0.99	0.99
TL	0.95	0.77	0.96	2.07	0.04	0.01	0.99	0.99

*Notes.* TKS: Teacher knowledge sharing; TEC: Teacher epistemic curiosity; TC: Teacher commitment; TL: Transformational leadership

### Data Analysis

The data were first imported into IBM SPSS 27 for preliminary screening, which involved identifying missing values, data entry errors, and statistical outliers. To examine normality, skewness and kurtosis statistics were calculated, and all values were found to lie within the acceptable threshold of  $-2$  to  $+2$  (George & Mallery, 2016). Variance inflation factors (VIF) were also examined, and all values were below 10, indicating no concerns regarding multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations were computed for all variables included in the study. Using AMOS 23, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to determine the adequacy of item representation for each theoretical construct. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess the internal consistency of the scales, whereas construct validity was examined using average variance extracted (AVE) values (Hair et al., 2009).

Model fit was assessed using a range of indices: chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df \leq 5$ ), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) ( $\geq .90$ ), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) ( $\leq .08$ ), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ( $\leq .08$ ) (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Finally, SEM was used to analyze the direct and indirect links between variables. Mediation was tested using bootstrapping (5,000 samples, 95% CI), with indirect effects deemed significant if zero was not within the confidence interval (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

## Findings

### Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive findings indicate that teachers reported generally high scores across all study constructs. The mean score for TKS was 4.45 (SD = 0.52), suggesting a strong tendency among participants to exchange pedagogical knowledge and practices with colleagues. Similarly, TEC yielded a high mean of 4.43 (SD = 0.47). This reflects teachers' intrinsic motivation to explore and understand student learning processes. TC was moderately high (M = 3.70, SD = 0.79), which indicates a meaningful level of emotional and psychological attachment to their schools. Perceptions of TL were also favorable, with a mean of 4.01 (SD = 0.79), suggesting that teachers generally recognized and valued leadership behaviors such as vision-building, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation.

Bivariate correlations indicated significant positive associations among all principal constructs ( $p < .01$ ), supporting the hypothesized interconnections. As presented in Table 2, TKS was significantly correlated with TEC ( $r = .555$ ,  $p < .01$ ), TC ( $r = .391$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and TL ( $r = .372$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, TL was positively associated with both TEC ( $r = .254$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and TC ( $r = .535$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These findings provide preliminary empirical support for the proposed structural model, suggesting that leadership practices may influence knowledge-sharing behaviors through TEC and TC. Table 2 displays the descriptive results and intercorrelations of the study variables.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. TKS	1	0.555**	0.391**	0.372**	0.139**	-0.032	-0.110*	-0.032
2. TEC		1	0.295**	0.254**	0.177**	0.011	-0.094*	-0.002
3. TC			1	0.535**	0.023	-0.056	-0.107*	0.118**
4. TL				1	0.070	-0.016	-0.060	-0.004
5. Gender					1	0.074	0.111*	0.057
6. Educational degree						1	0.023	-0.076
7. School type							1	-0.044
8. SES								1
Mean or %	4.45	4.43	3.70	4.01	49.4%	69.1%	22.7%	7.4%
SD	0.52	0.47	0.79	0.79	0.50	0.46	0.42	0.26
Skewness	0.51	-0.30	-0.50	-0.74	-0.24	0.83	-1.31	-3.27
Kurtosis	0.36	-0.79	0.43	-0.59	-2.00	-1.32	-0.29	8.75

Notes. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ ; TKS: Teacher knowledge sharing; TEC: Teacher epistemic curiosity; TC: Teacher commitment; TL: Transformational leadership; SD: Standard deviation; Gender: Reference group is female; Educational degree: Reference group is bachelor's degree; School type: Reference group is primary school; SES: Socioeconomic status of the school-reference group is low socioeconomic status

## Hypothesis testing

SEM was employed to evaluate the hypothesized model, with all relevant control variables included to minimize the influence of potential confounding factors. The analysis yielded a good model fit, with all indices meeting recommended standards ( $\chi^2/df = 1.92$ ; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.04; TLI = 0.96; CFI = 0.97), indicating that the model closely reflects the observed data.

As shown in Table 3, the results supported all hypothesized direct relationships. Consistent with H1, TEC was a significant positive predictor of TKS ( $\beta = 0.491$ ,  $SE = 0.049$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that higher curiosity levels among teachers are associated with increased involvement in knowledge-sharing activities. H2 was also confirmed, with TC demonstrating a significant direct effect on TKS ( $\beta = 0.208$ ,  $SE = 0.066$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that committed teachers are more inclined to share knowledge.

In line with H3, TL showed a significant direct effect on TKS ( $\beta = 0.136$ ,  $SE = 0.051$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Although this effect is relatively small, it still reinforces the notion that TL contributes to fostering TKS. Furthermore, H4 was supported, as TL was positively associated with TEC ( $\beta = 0.267$ ,  $SE = 0.046$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that transformational leaders help stimulate teachers' intellectual curiosity. H5 was also confirmed, with TL significantly predicting TC ( $\beta = 0.596$ ,  $SE = 0.040$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This means that leadership practices enhance teachers' commitment to their schools.

To test H6, mediation analysis was conducted using a bias-corrected bootstrapping method with 5,000 samples and 95% confidence intervals. TL had significant indirect effects on TKS via both TEC ( $\beta = 0.131$ ,  $SE = 0.017$ , 95% CI [0.049, 0.136]) and TC ( $\beta = 0.124$ ,  $SE = 0.025$ , 95% CI [0.030, 0.127]). Since zero was not included in either interval, both mediation pathways were statistically significant, supporting H6. The direct, indirect, and total effects are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects

Effect	Predictor	Mediator	Outcome	$\beta$	SE	95% Bias-corrected confidence interval
Direct effect	-	TEC	TKS	0.491***	0.049	[0.391, 0.584]
	-	TC	TKS	0.208**	0.066	[0.082, 0.335]
	TL	TEC	-	0.267***	0.046	[0.176, 0.353]
	TL	TC	-	0.596***	0.040	[0.513, 0.670]
	TL	-	TKS	0.136**	0.051	[0.036, 0.235]
	Gender	-	TKS	-0.061	0.038	[-0.131, 0.016]
	Educational degree	-	TKS	-0.018	0.039	[-0.094, 0.057]
	School type	-	TKS	-0.044	0.036	[-0.113, 0.026]
	SES	-	TKS	-0.059	0.044	[-0.139, 0.031]
Indirect effect	TL	TEC	TKS	0.131***	0.017	[0.049, 0.136]
	TL	TC	TKS	0.124***	0.025	[0.030, 0.127]
Total effect	TL		TKS	0.391***	0.043	[0.305, 0.474]

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ; TKS: Teacher knowledge sharing; TEC: Teacher epistemic curiosity; TC: Teacher commitment; TL: Transformational leadership;  $\beta$ : Standardized path coefficient; SE: Standard error.

Finally, the total effect of TL on TKS was also statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.391$ ,  $SE = 0.043$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.305, 0.474]). This finding highlights the combined importance of both direct and mediated mechanisms through which TL promotes TKS. The model explained .45 of the variance in TKS ( $R^2 = .45$ ). Figure 2 shows the final model used to test the study's hypotheses.

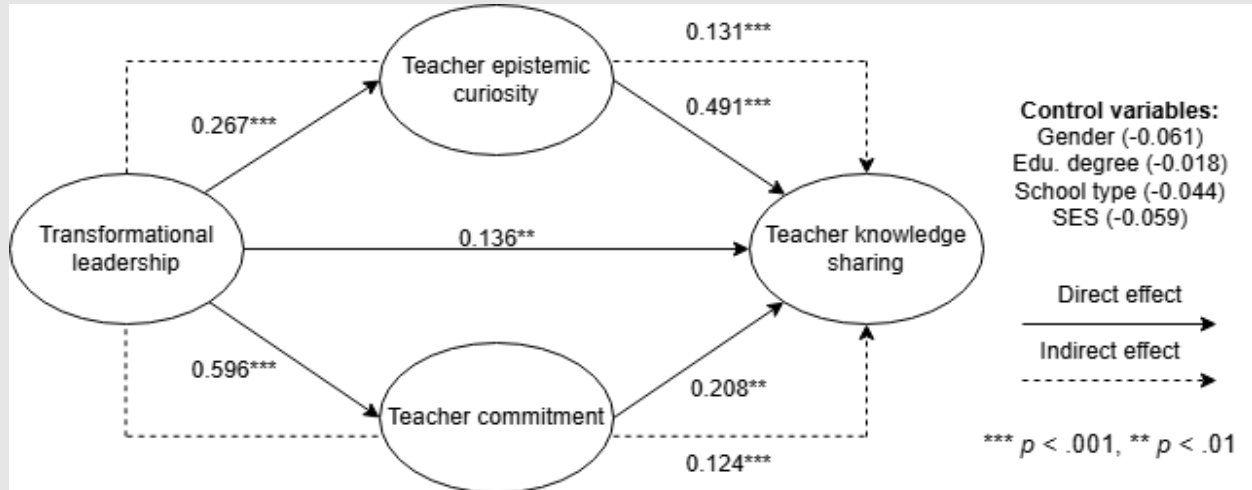


Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients

## Discussion

The analysis revealed a significant and strong relationship between TEC and TKS. This suggests that teachers who are curious about teaching and learning often contribute more to the exchange of ideas among peers. This finding supports the conceptualization of TEC as a key internal driver of professional exchange and aligns with prior research indicating that curiosity enhances openness to alternative viewpoints and collaborative learning (Chen et al., 2024; Mercer & Pawlak, 2024). One possible explanation is the unique role that curiosity plays in environments with limited autonomy, such as Türkiye's centralized education system. In such contexts, where external incentives for collaboration may be weak or absent, internally driven traits like curiosity become more influential. Teachers who are naturally inquisitive may seek out and engage in professional exchanges to satisfy their desire for growth and innovation (Li et al., 2023; Mercer & Pawlak, 2024).

TC also showed a significant and positive relationship with TKS. Teachers who reported stronger emotional and psychological commitment to their schools were more inclined to contribute to the collective exchange of professional knowledge. This result aligns with earlier studies demonstrating that commitment fosters knowledge sharing (Costa & Monteiro, 2012; Fayda-Kinik, 2022). It further highlights that in a highly regulated policy context like Türkiye's, emotional commitment can serve as a key internal driver for professional exchange. When teachers feel committed to their schools, they are more willing to share knowledge, not because they are required to, but because they care about their professional community and its development.

In addition, TL directly and significantly impacted TKS. Although the effect size was smaller than those of TEC and TC, this result affirms the direct role of leadership in teachers' knowledge-sharing behaviors. It supports earlier studies that show TL is associated with teacher sharing practices when principals provide vision, encouragement, and recognition (Chen & Chang,



2023; Hoang & Le, 2025). The results indicate that teachers are more inclined to share instructional knowledge under leadership, which they perceive as supportive and developmentally oriented.

Stronger direct associations were observed between TL and both TEC and TC. Teachers who perceived their principals as transformational tended to show greater epistemic curiosity and commitment. This relation may be explained by the limited autonomy in Türkiye's centralized education system, where teachers often have little control over instructional decisions, curriculum, or school-level planning (Kılınç et al., 2021). In such environments, transformational leadership can help compensate for this lack of autonomy by creating supportive school climates. Through behaviors such as offering individual support, encouraging new ideas, and building a shared vision, transformational principals can help teachers feel respected and professionally valued (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Eyal & Roth, 2011). These conditions support teachers' basic psychological needs, which are closely linked to motivation and curiosity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As a result, even when autonomy is limited, teachers may still feel internally motivated to explore and learn, especially when they are supported by strong leadership (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

Findings further demonstrated that TL indirectly influenced TKS through both TEC and TC. These results indicate that transformational principals contribute to knowledge sharing not only through direct leadership practices but also by enhancing teachers' motivation and emotional connection to their work. This dual pathway aligns with the principles of SDT, emphasizing that sustainable behavioral outcomes are more likely when internal motivational mechanisms are activated (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the context of Türkiye's centralized education system, such leadership appears most effective when it nurtures internal motivation and commitment. By strengthening curiosity and emotional bonds, school principals indirectly promote knowledge sharing among teachers.

The study adds to existing knowledge by demonstrating that TL promotes knowledge sharing among teachers via direct and indirect routes. By identifying TEC and TC as key psychological mechanisms, the findings offer a more complete understanding of how leadership fosters collaborative professional practices. These results support the application of Self-Determination Theory to the study of school leadership and highlight the importance of promoting both supportive leadership and teacher motivation to enhance instructional exchange in centralized education contexts. Although the study focuses on Türkiye, the findings may also be relevant to other education systems in regions such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, where decision-making is centralized and teacher autonomy is limited. In these contexts, transformational leadership practices that foster teachers' curiosity and commitment may serve as an effective strategy to promote knowledge sharing and strengthen professional learning communities.

## **Implications for Policy and Practice**

This study offers important insights for both policymakers and school leaders aiming to strengthen teachers' knowledge-sharing behaviors and support teacher curiosity and commitment. First, at the policy level, policymakers should fund and institutionalize structured knowledge exchange practices both within and across schools. This could include enhancing school-based branch teacher meetings so that they go beyond administrative updates and become regular forums for sharing classroom strategies and student learning experiences. In addition, provincial directorates can support the creation of teacher clusters composed of educators from different schools who specialize in similar subject areas, such as mathematics or literacy. These clusters can engage in targeted collaboration on lesson planning, student assessment, and problem-solving. Policymakers can also support inter-school networking facilities for both teachers and principals, where good practices and instructional innovations are shared through scheduled meetings, online platforms, or regional conferences. By creating formal opportunities for teachers to engage with colleagues beyond their immediate school contexts, such platforms can enhance the reach of knowledge sharing and amplify its positive impact on instructional practices. Second, recognition systems should be established at the school and district levels to acknowledge and celebrate teachers who actively contribute to professional knowledge sharing. Such incentives can strengthen teacher commitment and reinforce the behaviors that underpin collaborative improvement. Finally, principals should be equipped to lead data-informed reflection practices. By helping teachers analyze classroom-level evidence and collaboratively interpret student learning data, school leaders can nurture a climate of inquiry that stimulates curiosity.

In addition, school principals should create structured, ongoing opportunities for peer dialogue and reflective teaching. Setting aside regular time for teachers to discuss instructional challenges and exchange insights can activate both epistemic curiosity and professional commitment, while embedding knowledge sharing into the daily fabric of school life. Principals should also model curiosity-driven leadership by openly seeking feedback, sharing their own learning experiences, and demonstrating a willingness to learn alongside teachers. This approach helps build a psychologically safe environment where inquiry and collaboration are normalized. Lastly, aligning school-level goals with individual teachers' professional interests can deepen commitment and sustain motivation. Offering flexibility in professional learning choices and recognizing teacher agency reinforces both professional engagement and shared responsibility for improving instruction.

## **Limitations and Further Research**

This study has several limitations that should be considered in future research. First, using a cross-sectional design restricts conclusions about causality. Although the results align with the proposed relationships, the temporal order of these associations cannot be determined. Future studies should consider longitudinal or experimental designs to clarify the causal pathways connecting leadership practices with psychological processes and teacher behaviors. Second, using only self-reported data from teachers could lead to biased responses. Although efforts were made to minimize such effects, incorporating multi-source data, including peer evaluations, principal perspectives, or classroom observations, could strengthen the credibility and reliability of the results. Third, because the research took place in Türkiye's centralized education system, where school management is tightly controlled, the results may have limited applicability beyond this setting. Future studies should examine how these relationships play out in more decentralized systems or settings with varying degrees of school-level autonomy and leadership flexibility.

Finally, while TEC and TC were examined as mediators, future studies could explore additional psychological and contextual variables that may influence or moderate the effects of TL on TKS. These might include teacher self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, school climate, or digital collaboration infrastructure. Adding such variables could enhance understanding of how knowledge sharing is facilitated in school settings.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest for the study. The author conducted the study alone.

### **Ethics**

The ethics application for the study was made on 27/03/2025, and the research was carried out with the approval of Bartın University Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences dated 16/04/2025 and numbered 2025-SBB-0264.

### **Notes**

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