

Servant Leadership and Employee Advocacy: Mediating Roles of Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Commitment

Alice Leonardi Liong*, Andreas Heryjanto

Universitas Bunda Mulia, Indonesia

Email: benecila@gmail.com*

Keywords:

servant leadership; employee advocacy; psychological empowerment; organizational commitment; private education.

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between servant leadership and employee advocacy in a private educational institution, with psychological empowerment and organizational commitment tested as parallel mediators. A cross-sectional survey of 305 teachers and operational staff across six Indonesian cities was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. All seven hypothesized paths were supported. Servant leadership was positively associated with employee advocacy ($\beta = 0.187$), psychological empowerment, and organizational commitment. Both mediators showed significant indirect effects on employee advocacy: $\beta = 0.075$ through psychological empowerment and $\beta = 0.260$ through organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was also the strongest direct predictor of employee advocacy ($\beta = 0.529$), and the model explained 60.10% of the variance in employee advocacy. The larger coefficient for the organizational commitment pathway indicated a descriptively stronger indirect association; however, the difference between the two specific indirect effects was not statistically tested. Measurement quality was generally acceptable, although the estimated-model standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = 0.120) and normed fit index (NFI = 0.820) indicated limitations in model fit that warrant caution in interpreting the results. The findings extend research on employee advocacy to the context of private education and suggest that servant leadership is associated with employee advocacy both directly and indirectly through employees' psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. Longitudinal and multi-institutional studies are needed to examine temporal ordering and assess the robustness of the two mediation pathways.

INTRODUCTION

Private education depends heavily on the people who deliver its services. Parents and students may compare curricula, facilities, academic outcomes, and tuition fees, but they also evaluate an institution through direct interactions with teachers and staff. Employees therefore influence not only service quality but also how the institution is perceived by the public. This role becomes increasingly important as schools compete for both students and qualified employees while the education sector faces a broader shortage of teachers. (UNESCO & 2030, 2024) reported that millions of additional teachers will be needed worldwide by 2030. For private educational institutions, attracting and retaining capable employees is therefore closely linked to institutional reputation and long-term service quality.

Employee advocacy is one potential outcome of a positive employment relationship. It refers to voluntary behaviors through which employees recommend, support, promote, or defend their organization to internal or external audiences (Thelen, 2021; Thelen & Formanchuk, 2022). Employee advocacy is distinct from job satisfaction because employees may be satisfied with their jobs yet remain unwilling to speak positively about the organization. Advocacy requires a stronger level of personal involvement because employees use their own credibility when recommending the institution, correcting inaccurate or unfair information, expressing pride while representing it, or participating in voluntary activities that support its public image. (Walden & Westerman, 2018) described this type of behavior as closely related to organizational citizenship behavior because it extends beyond formal job responsibilities and may contribute to organizational effectiveness.

The practical issue underlying this study emerged from internal employee monitoring at a private educational institution in Indonesia. The institution found that employees were more willing to recommend its educational services than to recommend it as a place to work. This difference suggests that employees may have confidence in the quality of the institution's services while maintaining a weaker employment-related attachment. It also demonstrates why employee advocacy should not be reduced to a single recommendation score. Advocacy may involve support for the institution as a service provider, an employer, and a social organization. Understanding the factors that encourage this broader form of support is important for management because teachers and operational staff interact with parents, students, applicants, alumni, and community members in both formal and informal settings.

Servant leadership provides a useful theoretical basis for explaining this behavior. (Greenleaf, 1977) described servant leadership as an approach to leadership that begins with a desire to serve others. Subsequent studies have characterized it through behaviors such as ethical conduct, employee development, empowerment, prioritization of followers' needs, support, and concern for the wider community (Blau, 1964; Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Liden et al., 2008). These behaviors are particularly relevant in educational settings because school leaders are expected not only to direct work but also to support teachers and staff engaged in activities with strong service and social purposes. When employees perceive leadership as fair, supportive, and ethical, they may become more willing to reciprocate through voluntary support for the institution.

However, the direct relationship between servant leadership and employee advocacy remains inconclusive. (Thelen, 2021), (Prabawa & Andrias, 2024), and (Wahyono & Riani, 2024) reported positive relationships between servant leadership and employee advocacy, whereas Thelen and Yue (2021) did not identify a significant direct effect in their model. These inconsistent findings suggest that leadership may not always influence advocacy directly. Instead, leadership may first shape how employees perceive their capabilities at work or the extent to which they feel psychologically connected to the organization. A model that focuses exclusively on the direct relationship may therefore overlook the mechanisms through which leadership influences advocacy.

This study focuses on two such mechanisms. The first is psychological empowerment, which reflects the extent to which employees perceive their work as meaningful, feel competent in performing it, experience autonomy in how they carry out their tasks, and believe that they can influence organizational outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995). Servant leaders may strengthen these

perceptions by providing trust, support, and discretion. The second mechanism is organizational commitment, which reflects the psychological bond between employees and their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Leaders who support employee development, act consistently with ethical values, and provide meaningful support may strengthen employees' sense of belonging and willingness to remain connected to the institution.

The distinction between these two mediators is important. Psychological empowerment represents a capability pathway in which employees feel able to act, contribute, and make decisions. Organizational commitment represents an attachment pathway in which employees feel connected to the institution and care about its future. Both states may promote employee advocacy, but they may not do so with equal strength. Employees may feel competent and autonomous without experiencing a strong motivation to publicly defend or promote the organization. In contrast, employees who feel strongly attached to the institution may be more willing to associate their own reputation with the organization in public settings. Examining both pathways within the same model can therefore provide a clearer explanation of how servant leadership is associated with employee advocacy.

This study addresses three related research gaps. First, much of the existing research on employee advocacy has been developed in the contexts of internal communication, social media, employer branding, and general service industries (Jaffari et al., 2024; Lee, 2019; Thelen & Men, 2023; Wahyono & Riani, 2024). Private education has received comparatively less attention, even though teachers and staff are highly visible representatives of institutional quality and values. Second, prior studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the direct effect of servant leadership on employee advocacy, indicating a need for further examination in a different service context. Third, previous research has examined psychological empowerment, employee-organization relationships, perceived relationship investment, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment in separate models; however, the relative roles of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment as parallel mediators between servant leadership and employee advocacy remain unclear.

Accordingly, this study examines employee advocacy in the context of private education in Indonesia, reassesses a direct relationship that has yielded mixed findings in previous research, and compares two distinct mediation pathways within a single structural model. This comparison is particularly important because it can clarify whether employee advocacy is more strongly associated with employees' sense of capability or with their psychological attachment to the institution. Specifically, the study examines whether servant leadership is positively associated with employee advocacy, psychological empowerment, and organizational commitment; whether psychological empowerment and organizational commitment are positively associated with employee advocacy; and whether each mediator carries a significant indirect effect between servant leadership and employee advocacy. The findings are expected to contribute to research on servant leadership and employee advocacy while providing practical implications for the management of private educational institutions.

METHOD

Research design and sample

The study employed a quantitative explanatory design with a cross-sectional time horizon to examine relationships among variables measured at a single point in time (Saunders et al., 2023). Because the variables were measured concurrently, the structural paths were interpreted as associations consistent with the proposed theoretical model rather than as definitive evidence of causality.

The target population consisted of 1,288 teachers and operational staff who had worked at the private educational institution for at least one year across six Indonesian cities. Employees with less than one year of tenure were excluded to ensure that respondents had sufficient experience with the institution, its work practices, and their immediate leaders. Because a complete employee sampling frame was not available, probability sampling was not feasible.

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents with at least one year of service, while proportional quota sampling was applied to approximate the employee distribution across the six cities. A target sample of 305 respondents was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, and 305 usable responses were obtained. The sample size also exceeded commonly recommended heuristic thresholds for models of comparable complexity (Hair, 2019; Pardede et al., 2025). However, no formal statistical power analysis based on expected effect sizes and model complexity was reported.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire, and respondent anonymity was maintained by excluding names and other direct identifiers. Because the study relied on self-reported, single-source, cross-sectional data, the possibility of common method bias remained and should be considered when interpreting the findings. The manuscript should also report the participant consent procedure and the applicable ethics committee approval or exemption status.

Table 2. Respondent profile (n = 305)

Aspect	Description	Frequency	Ratio (%)
Gender	Male	86	28.20
	Female	219	71.80
Role	Teacher	184	60.33
	Operational employee	121	39.67
Age	20-29	58	19.02
	30-45	171	56.07
	46-60	76	24.92
Tenure	>1-10 years	190	62.30
	11-20 years	79	25.90
	>=21 years	36	11.80
Location	City A	187	61.31
	City B	33	10.82
	City C	21	6.89
	City D	20	6.56

Aspect	Description	Frequency	Ratio (%)
	City E	21	6.89
	City F	23	7.54

The sample was dominated by female respondents (71.80%) and teachers (60.33%). Most respondents were 30-45 years old (56.07%) and had worked for more than one year up to ten years (62.30%). At the same time, the sample included employees with longer tenure and employees from all six locations. This spread provides a useful range of work experience, although the non-probability sampling method limits statistical generalization beyond the studied institution.

Measures

All constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument was adapted from scales used in earlier research and the original English items were translated into Indonesian and adjusted to the private-education context. [DATA PENULIS DIPERLUKAN: describe the translation/back-translation or adaptation procedure, expert evaluation, and pilot testing that were actually conducted before data collection; do not infer procedures that were not performed.]

Table 3. Measurement of the study constructs

Construct	No. of items	Main content / dimensions	Main source
Servant leadership	7	Awareness of employee problems; career development; personal support; community contribution; putting employees first; work discretion; ethical conduct	Thelen & Yue (2021)
Psychological empowerment	12	Meaning; competence; self-determination; impact	Thelen & Yue (2021)
Organizational commitment	5	Decision to work in the institution; intention to continue; positive comments about the workplace; concern for the institution's future; willingness to give extra effort	Jaffari et al. (2024)
Employee advocacy	6	Recommendation as an education provider and employer; correcting unfair opinions; public support on relevant issues; pride; voluntary community/PR participation	Thelen & Yue (2021); Thelen & Formanchuk (2022)

Servant leadership was measured with seven items covering the main behaviors used in the adapted scale. Psychological empowerment was measured with 12 items reflecting meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Organizational commitment was measured with five items that capture employees' overall attachment and willingness to continue supporting the institution. Employee advocacy was measured with six items covering recommendation, defense, pride, and voluntary public support. The study treated each construct as a single latent variable in the structural model.

Data analysis

The model was analyzed with PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM was selected because the study tests several direct and indirect relationships at the same time and focuses on

explaining employee advocacy. The analysis was completed in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated to make sure that the indicators measured their intended constructs. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test explanatory power, predictive relevance, effect sizes, collinearity, and the seven hypotheses (Pardede et al., 2025; Sarstedt et al., 2021).

Table 4. Main PLS-SEM evaluation criteria used in the study

Stage	Indicator	Criterion used
Measurement model	Outer loading	> 0.70
Measurement model	Average variance extracted (AVE)	> 0.50
Measurement model	Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability	> 0.70
Measurement model	HTMT	< 0.90
Structural model	R-square	0.25 weak; 0.50 moderate; 0.75 strong
Structural model	Q-square	> 0 indicates predictive relevance
Structural model	f-square	0.02 small; 0.15 medium; 0.35 large
Structural model	Inner VIF	< 3 preferred
Hypothesis test	Bootstrapped path	Positive coefficient, $t \geq 1.96$, $p \leq 0.05$

One psychological empowerment item (PE11), concerning control over what happened in the work unit, had an initial outer loading of 0.444 and was removed before estimation of the final model. Removing the item improves indicator reliability but narrows empirical coverage of the control/impact aspect of psychological empowerment. The retained indicators should therefore be checked to ensure that meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact remain substantively represented; the deletion should not be interpreted as evidence that employees lack control over their work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive results

Respondents gave positive ratings to all four constructs. Organizational commitment had the highest overall mean, followed by employee advocacy, psychological empowerment, and servant leadership. This pattern is important because employees rated their attachment to and support for the institution more strongly than their evaluations of leadership. At a descriptive level, the institution therefore had a strong base of commitment and advocacy, but there was still room to improve how consistently servant leadership was experienced across employees.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the study constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Servant leadership	3.790	0.983	High
Psychological empowerment	4.138	0.766	High
Organizational commitment	4.276	0.764	Very high

Construct	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Employee advocacy	4.205	0.744	Very high

Indicator-level results give a more detailed picture. Ethical conduct was the highest-rated servant leadership behavior, while putting employee interests before the leader's own interests had the lowest mean. In psychological empowerment, the meaning of work was especially strong, while perceived control over events in the work unit was lower. Organizational commitment was strongest on concern for the institution's future, and employee advocacy was strongest on recommending the institution as a provider of quality education. These results suggest that respondents felt strong meaning, pride, and institutional concern, while perceptions of influence and leader self-sacrifice were less uniform.

Table 6. Selected indicator-level descriptive results

Code	Indicator focus	Mean	SD	Interpretive point
SL07	Leader maintains ethical principles	4.102	0.968	Strongest servant leadership item
SL05	Leader puts employee interests first	3.390	1.035	Lowest servant leadership item; wider response variation
PE01	Work is very important to the employee	4.452	0.728	Strong meaning component
PE11	Employee has strong control over events in the work unit	3.561	0.900	Lower impact/control perception; later removed from measurement model
OC04	Employee cares about the institution's future	4.416	0.678	Strongest commitment item
OC05	Employee is willing to give extra effort	4.325	0.735	Shows active commitment, not only intention to stay
EA01	Employee recommends the institution as a quality education provider	4.338	0.747	Strongest advocacy item
EA04	Employee supports the institution on relevant public education issues	4.134	0.714	Lowest advocacy mean, although still high

Measurement model

After PE11 was removed, all final indicator loadings were above 0.70. AVE values ranged from 0.598 to 0.753, which means that each construct explained more than half of the variance in its indicators. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were also above 0.70 for all constructs. These results support convergent validity and internal consistency. The highest reliability was found for psychological empowerment, while employee advocacy had the lowest values among the four constructs but still remained above the accepted threshold.

Table 7. Measurement model quality

Construct	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	Final loading range
Employee advocacy	0.869	0.902	0.607	0.708-0.879
Organizational commitment	0.918	0.939	0.753	0.845-0.888

Construct	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	Final loading range
Psychological empowerment	0.933	0.942	0.598	0.726-0.838
Servant leadership	0.894	0.917	0.612	0.734-0.810

Discriminant validity was mainly assessed with HTMT. All HTMT values were below 0.90. The highest value was 0.817 between organizational commitment and employee advocacy. This relatively high value is understandable because committed employees are also expected to support the organization. However, the value remained below the criterion, so the two constructs can still be treated as empirically distinct. The Fornell-Larcker check reported in the thesis showed the same conclusion: the square root of AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with the other constructs.

Table 8. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Construct	EA	OC	PE	SL
Employee advocacy (EA)	-			
Organizational commitment (OC)	0.817	-		
Psychological empowerment (PE)	0.627	0.619	-	
Servant leadership (SL)	0.588	0.536	0.403	-

The removal of PE11 should be interpreted as a measurement-model decision rather than as a substantive finding about employees' actual control. Its low loading indicates weak consistency with the latent construct in this sample; it does not establish that respondents lack influence or autonomy. Any interpretation of control or impact should therefore rely on the retained empowerment indicators and on the construct-level results, while acknowledging that deletion of PE11 may reduce coverage of that aspect of the construct.

Structural model

The structural model explained 60.10% of the variance in employee advocacy, 24.10% of organizational commitment, and 14.20% of psychological empowerment. These values show that servant leadership accounts for a substantial share of advocacy but more limited shares of the two mediators. Other influences may exist, but variables such as work design, career opportunities, coworker relationships, or local unit conditions were not tested in this model and should be framed only as theoretical possibilities rather than empirical explanations of the remaining variance.

Table 9. Explanatory and predictive power of dependent constructs

Dependent construct	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Q-square
Employee advocacy	0.601	0.597	0.259
Organizational commitment	0.241	0.239	0.229
Psychological empowerment	0.142	0.139	0.128

All Q-square values were above zero, which indicates predictive relevance for the three dependent constructs. Employee advocacy had the highest Q-square value (0.259), followed by organizational commitment (0.229) and psychological empowerment (0.128). This pattern is consistent with the purpose of the model: the model is most useful for explaining the main outcome, employee advocacy, while the two mediators still depend on many factors outside servant leadership.

Effect sizes show where the strongest relationships are located. Organizational commitment had a large effect on employee advocacy (f-square = 0.405). Psychological empowerment and servant leadership each had small direct effects on advocacy (f-square = 0.065). Servant leadership had medium effects on organizational commitment (f-square = 0.318) and psychological empowerment (f-square = 0.165). This pattern suggests that servant leadership works more strongly by shaping employees' internal states than by directly producing advocacy. The leadership effect becomes more important when it is carried through commitment and empowerment.

Table 10. Effect sizes and inner VIF values

Structural path	f-square	Effect size	VIF
Organizational commitment -> Employee advocacy	0.405	Large	1.730
Psychological empowerment -> Employee advocacy	0.065	Small	1.530
Servant leadership -> Employee advocacy	0.065	Small	1.340
Servant leadership -> Organizational commitment	0.318	Medium	1.000
Servant leadership -> Psychological empowerment	0.165	Medium	1.000

Inner VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.730, indicating no problematic structural collinearity under the criterion used. Model-fit indicators, however, require a more cautious interpretation. The saturated-model SRMR was 0.060, but the estimated-model SRMR was 0.120, exceeding the <0.10 criterion reported in Table 10; NFI values of 0.829 and 0.820 were also below the strict >0.90 benchmark. These results do not invalidate the PLS-SEM analysis, but they indicate that the specified model does not reproduce all observed relationships well and should be reported as a limitation rather than offset by favorable R², Q², or path-significance results.

Table 11. Model fit and Goodness of Fit indicators

Indicator	Saturated model	Estimated model	Criterion / interpretation
SRMR	0.060	0.120	Saturated model meets <0.08; estimated model does not meet <0.10
NFI	0.829	0.820	Both below the strict >0.90 criterion
GoF	0.457	0.457	Above 0.36; classified as large in the thesis

Hypothesis testing and path model

Bootstrapping results supported all seven hypotheses. All five direct effects were positive and significant, and both indirect effects were also positive and significant. Organizational commitment had the largest direct effect on employee advocacy, while the indirect path through organizational commitment was much stronger than the indirect path through psychological empowerment.

Table 12. Direct and indirect hypothesis tests

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	t	p	Decision
H1	SL → EA	0.187	3.591	<0.001	Supported
H2	SL → PE	0.376	6.646	<0.001	Supported
H3	SL → OC	0.491	9.425	<0.001	Supported
H4	PE → EA	0.199	2.828	0.005	Supported
H5	OC → EA	0.529	7.343	<0.001	Supported
H6	SL → PE → EA	0.075	2.702	0.007	Supported; Partial mediation
H7	SL → OC → EA	0.260	5.559	<0.001	Supported; Partial mediation

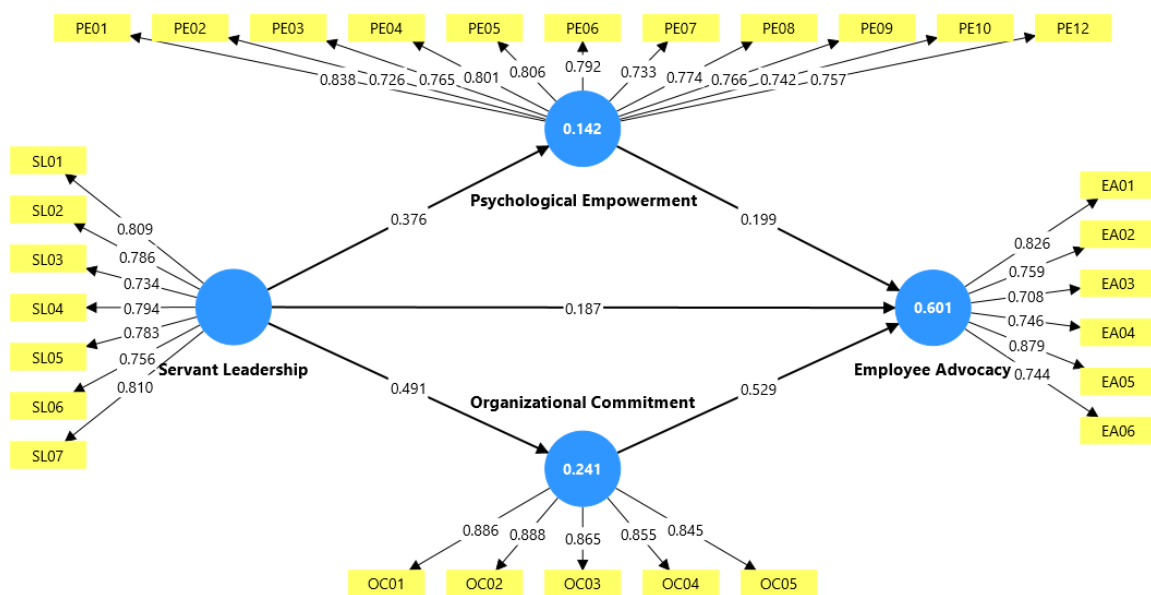


Figure 2. Final PLS-SEM path model

Servant leadership and employee advocacy

H1 was supported. Servant leadership had a positive direct effect on employee advocacy (beta = 0.187, $p < 0.001$). Employees who experienced more support, ethical behavior, development, and freedom in their work were more willing to recommend, represent, and defend the institution. This finding supports Social Exchange Theory. When employees receive positive treatment from leaders, they may return that treatment through voluntary behavior that helps the organization. Employee advocacy is a meaningful form of return because employees use their own voice and credibility, not only their formal job performance.

The result also adds to earlier findings that are not fully consistent. It agrees with (Prabawa & Andrias, 2024; Thelen, 2021; Wahyono & Riani, 2024), which found positive links between servant leadership and advocacy-related outcomes. However, it differs from Thelen and Yue (2021), where the direct effect was not significant. The present result suggests that context may matter. In private education, employees and leaders work in an environment where service quality, values, and public trust are closely connected. Employees may therefore link the behavior of their immediate leader with the identity of the institution more directly than in some other settings.

At the same time, the small *f*-square value of 0.065 shows that the direct effect should not be overstated. Servant leadership matters, but it is not the main immediate predictor of advocacy. This finding is important for theory and practice because it shows that asking leaders to "be more servant-like" is not enough. The stronger effects appear when leadership changes employees' sense of empowerment and, especially, their commitment to the institution. The direct path is therefore only one part of the larger process.

Servant leadership and psychological empowerment

H2 was supported. Servant leadership had a positive effect on psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.376$, $p < 0.001$) with a medium effect size (*f*-square = 0.165). This result is consistent with the idea that empowerment is not created only by formal delegation. Employees become psychologically empowered when they believe their work is meaningful, feel competent, have room to make decisions, and believe their actions matter. A servant leader can support these experiences by giving trust, encouraging growth, listening to employees, and allowing suitable professional judgment. The result is consistent with Thelen and Yue (2021) and Raub et al. (2024).

The descriptive results make this relationship more specific. Meaning and competence were already high among respondents, but control and influence were less consistent. This suggests that private educational employees can feel strongly connected to the purpose of their work while still having limited influence over some unit-level decisions. The low loading of PE11 supports the same interpretation.

For management, the result suggests that empowerment needs more than positive messages about meaningful work. Teachers may need clear professional space to make decisions about teaching methods, problem solving, and improvement within agreed standards. Operational staff may need suitable authority to solve service problems without unnecessary approval steps. The goal is not unlimited freedom, but clear decision rights and confidence that employee judgment is trusted within reasonable boundaries.

Servant leadership and organizational commitment

H3 received strong support. Servant leadership had a positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.491$, $p < 0.001$), and the effect size was medium and close to the large-effect threshold used in the study (*f*-squared = 0.318). This path was clearly stronger than the servant leadership-psychological empowerment path. The result suggests that employees may respond to servant leadership as a signal about the quality of their relationship with the organization, not only as a source of personal work autonomy.

This result is consistent with the idea that leaders represent the organization in daily work. Ethical conduct, support for employee growth, and personal concern can become evidence that the institution takes its responsibilities toward employees seriously. In this way,

servant leadership can help fulfill the psychological expectations employees hold about fair and supportive treatment. The result is consistent with (Blaique & Mir, 2026; Uktutias et al., 2022), which also connect servant leadership with stronger organizational commitment.

The descriptive results strengthen this interpretation. Employees rated concern for the institution's future and willingness to give extra effort very highly. These items suggest that commitment in this sample was not only about staying because leaving would be difficult. It also included active concern for institutional success. This type of commitment is especially relevant to advocacy because employees who care about the future of the organization have a stronger reason to protect its reputation and support it in interactions with others.

Psychological empowerment and employee advocacy

H4 was supported. Psychological empowerment had a positive effect on employee advocacy ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.005$). Employees who feel capable and trusted to use their judgment are more prepared to take the initiative required for advocacy. They may be more confident when recommending the institution, correcting inaccurate statements, or representing the organization in community settings. This result supports the empowerment pathway proposed in the model and is consistent with Thelen and Yue (2021) and the broader communication-empowerment findings reported by Lee and Dong (2023).

However, the effect size was small ($f\text{-square} = 0.065$). This is an important result because it shows that empowerment alone may not create strong advocacy. Employees can feel skilled, autonomous, and effective while still keeping an emotional distance from the institution. In other words, the ability to act does not automatically create a reason to act on behalf of the organization. This helps explain why psychological empowerment was a significant mediator but not the strongest one.

The result also suggests that organizations should avoid treating empowerment as a direct promotional strategy. Giving employees more freedom is valuable for work quality and initiative, but management should not assume that more autonomy will automatically produce positive public statements. Advocacy is voluntary and involves personal reputation. Employees need to feel both able to speak and sufficiently connected to the institution to want to speak in its support.

Organizational commitment and employee advocacy

H5 was supported, and organizational commitment was the strongest direct predictor of employee advocacy ($\beta = 0.529$, $p < 0.001$). Its effect size was large ($f\text{-square} = 0.405$), which makes this the most important structural result in the model. Employees who care about the institution, want to continue working there, speak positively about the work environment, and are willing to give extra effort are also much more likely to recommend and defend the organization.

This result is consistent with Walden and Westerman (2018), who found that organizational commitment helps explain advocacy intentions, and with Jaffari et al. (2024), who found a positive relationship between organizational commitment and employer brand advocacy. The present study extends this pattern to a private education setting. The result is especially reasonable in education because teachers and staff are visible members of the institution. Their professional identity and their organizational identity can be difficult to separate when they speak with parents, students, colleagues, or community members.

The strong commitment effect also helps explain the practical issue that motivated the study. Employees may be willing to recommend the institution's educational service because they believe that students receive good quality. Recommending the institution as a workplace or defending it publicly requires something more personal: employees must feel that the organization is also worthy of their own attachment and support. This difference explains why management should not use service reputation as a substitute for the employee experience. Strong education quality may support one form of recommendation, while employee advocacy also depends on the quality of the employment relationship.

Parallel mediation: capability versus attachment

Both mediation hypotheses were supported. Psychological empowerment carried a positive indirect effect from servant leadership to employee advocacy ($\beta = 0.075, p = 0.007$), while organizational commitment carried a larger positive indirect effect ($\beta = 0.260, p < 0.001$). Because the direct servant leadership-employee advocacy path remained positive and significant, both mediators represent complementary partial mediation. Servant leadership therefore influences advocacy directly and through both employee states at the same time.

Both specific indirect effects were statistically significant, with coefficients of 0.075 through psychological empowerment and 0.260 through organizational commitment. The organizational-commitment coefficient is descriptively larger, but the study did not report a statistical test of the difference between the two indirect effects. Accordingly, the findings support two mediation pathways and a larger estimated coefficient for the commitment pathway, not a statistically proven superiority of one mediator over the other.

This result develops the work of Thelen and Yue (2021). Their study showed that psychological empowerment can mediate the effect of servant leadership on employee advocacy. The present study confirms that pathway but shows that it may not be the strongest pathway when organizational commitment is tested at the same time. It also connects with Trinuryana et al. (2024), who found that organizational commitment can mediate servant leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. The present study applies this relationship to employee advocacy, which is a more specific extra-role behavior expressed through recommendation, public support, and defense of the organization.

The parallel mediation result is consistent with Social Exchange Theory in that supportive leader behavior can be associated with both employees' sense of capability and their attachment to the institution. Both states were related to advocacy. Because the difference between the two specific indirect effects was not formally tested, the stronger coefficient for organizational commitment should be interpreted descriptively rather than as definitive evidence that the attachment pathway is statistically stronger.

The pattern across all effect sizes supports the same conclusion. Servant leadership had medium effects on the two mediators but only a small direct effect on advocacy. Organizational commitment then had the largest effect on advocacy. This sequence suggests an upstream role for servant leadership: leadership creates conditions that shape how employees experience their work and their organization, and those internal states are closer to the decision to advocate. The model therefore gives a more complete explanation than a simple direct leadership-advocacy relationship.

CONCLUSION

This study found that servant leadership was positively associated with employee advocacy, psychological empowerment, and organizational commitment among 305 teachers and operational staff. Both mediators demonstrated significant indirect effects, with the organizational commitment pathway showing a larger estimated coefficient than the psychological empowerment pathway ($\beta = 0.260$ vs. $\beta = 0.075$). However, because the difference between the two specific indirect effects was not statistically tested, the findings do not establish that one mediation pathway was statistically stronger than the other. Organizational commitment was the strongest direct predictor of employee advocacy, and the model explained 60.10% of the variance in employee advocacy. Overall, these findings support the relevance of both capability- and attachment-based mechanisms in explaining the relationship between servant leadership and employee advocacy.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that leadership development, employee voice initiatives, and efforts to strengthen organizational commitment may support voluntary employee advocacy. However, these implications should be interpreted cautiously because the study employed a cross-sectional design, used nonprobability sampling within a single institution, and relied on single-source self-reported questionnaire data. In addition, the estimated-model standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI) indicated limitations in model fit. Potential common method bias and the absence of fully documented information regarding ethics and consent procedures, instrument adaptation, and formal statistical power analysis should also be acknowledged where applicable. Future research should employ longitudinal or time-separated designs, include multiple institutions, use probability-based sampling where feasible, formally compare specific indirect effects, and incorporate additional theoretically relevant predictors to assess the robustness and generalizability of the observed mediation pathways.

Theoretical implications and novelty

The study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it places employee advocacy within an organizational behavior process instead of treating it only as a communication, social-media, or employer-branding outcome. The findings show that leadership and employee attitudes can explain a substantial part of advocacy behavior. This supports the view that advocacy is an extra-role response that develops from the employment relationship.

Second, the study provides additional evidence for a direct servant leadership-employee advocacy relationship that has produced mixed results in earlier research. The positive direct effect supports studies such as Thelen (2021), Prabawa and Andrias (2024), and Wahyono and Riani (2024), while differing from Thelen and Yue (2021). The result suggests that service context may shape how directly employees connect leader behavior with support for the organization. Private education is a useful setting for this test because employees have regular contact with external stakeholders and often represent institutional values in public interactions.

Third, the study distinguishes two mechanisms that are often discussed separately. Psychological empowerment represents a capability pathway, while organizational commitment represents an attachment pathway. Both specific indirect effects were significant, and the commitment pathway had the larger estimated coefficient. Because the difference

between the indirect effects was not formally tested, the contribution is the simultaneous estimation and descriptive comparison of the two mechanisms rather than a claim of statistically established superiority.

Managerial implications

For management, the findings suggest that employee advocacy should not be treated as a simple communication campaign. Asking employees to share positive messages before they have a positive work relationship may create weak or short-term support. A better approach is to build the internal conditions that make voluntary advocacy more likely. Servant leadership can be one starting point because employees who experience ethical, supportive, and development-focused leaders are more likely to feel empowered and committed.

Leadership development should focus on the behaviors that employees did not experience as strongly or consistently. In the descriptive results, putting employee interests first had the lowest servant leadership mean, while support for career development was also lower than ethical conduct. Management can therefore strengthen coaching, career discussions, active listening, fair delegation, and regular feedback about whether leaders actually support employee needs. Ethical consistency should be maintained because it was the strongest leadership item and can provide a base for trust.

Organizational commitment should be a central management priority because it was the strongest predictor of advocacy. Commitment can be supported by linking daily work with the institution's mission, recognizing employee contributions, offering fair development opportunities, involving employees in decisions that affect their work, and making sure that leadership behavior matches organizational values. The goal is not to demand loyalty. It is to create a work relationship that gives employees good reasons to care about the institution's future and to feel proud of being part of it.

Psychological empowerment also remains relevant to advocacy. However, the removal of PE11 means that the final measurement model provides reduced coverage of the control/impact content represented by that item. Management implications should therefore be based on the retained empowerment construct as a whole rather than on the claim that employees specifically lack control or influence.

Employee advocacy itself should remain voluntary. Management can make advocacy easier by providing clear internal information, responsible social-media guidance, and opportunities for employees to join community or public-relations activities. However, employees should not be pressured to post positive messages or defend the institution. Advocacy is credible because it is voluntary. The findings suggest that genuine support is more likely to develop from commitment and positive leadership than from direct requests to promote the organization.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design measures all variables at one point in time. The results are consistent with the proposed causal direction, but they cannot prove how the relationships develop over time. Longitudinal studies could test whether changes in servant leadership are followed by later changes in empowerment, commitment, and advocacy. Experimental or time-separated designs could also reduce the risk that same-time measurement affects the observed relationships.

Second, the study was conducted in one private educational institution. Its culture, values, management system, and service model may influence the strength of the relationships. The use of purposive and quota sampling also means that each employee did not have a known probability of selection. Future studies should include several private educational institutions, public schools, universities, health-care organizations, or other service organizations to test whether the stronger commitment pathway appears in different settings.

Third, the model explained 60.10% of employee advocacy, leaving 39.90% related to other factors not included in this study. Future research can examine internal communication, perceived organizational support, trust, organizational identification, job satisfaction, employee engagement, person-organization fit, and organizational culture. A useful extension would also connect employee advocacy with outcomes such as employer attractiveness, employee referral, retention, applicant interest, reputation, Net Promoter Score (NPS), and employee Net Promoter Score (e-NPS). These extensions can help explain not only why employees advocate, but also what organizational value follows from their advocacy.

REFERENCES

- Blaique, L., & Mir, F. A. (2026). Servant leadership and organisational commitment in UAE-based work environments: Do employee burnout and resilience play a role? *International Journal of Management and Enterprise Development*, 25(1), 61–81. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMED.2026.150477>
- Blau, P. M. (1964). Justice in social exchange. *Sociological Inquiry*, 34(2), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1964.tb00583.x>
- Canavesi, A., & Minelli, E. (2022). Servant leadership: A systematic literature review and network analysis. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 34(3), 267–289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-021-09381-3>
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.
- Hair, J. (2019). *Multivariate Data Analysis*.
- Jaffari, A. A., Foroudi, P., Palazzo, M., & Akbari, M. (2024). Enriching the concept of employer branding: Investigating its impact in the service sector. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 46(7), 1446–1482. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-02-2024-0076>
- Lee, Y. K. (2019). The effect of active material, conductive additives, and binder in a cathode composite electrode on battery performance. *Energies*, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/en12040658>
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161–177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.01.006>
- Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, 1(1), 61–89. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822\(91\)90011-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822(91)90011-Z)
- Pardede, R., Thaib, D., Christian, M., & Hinsu, D. P. (2025). *Metode penelitian manajemen dan bisnis: Analisis structural equation modelling dengan aplikasi SmartPLS 4*. IPB Press.
- Prabawa, M. A. A., & Andrias, M. S. (2024). Pengaruh servant leadership dan symmetrical communication terhadap employee advocacy yang dimediasi oleh employee empowerment dan organizational citizenship behavior. *Syntax Literate: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia*, 9(7), 3866–3882. <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literate.v9i7.15699>

- Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Hair, J. F. (2021). Partial least squares structural equation modeling. In C. Homburg, M. Klarmann, & A. Vomberg (Eds.), *Handbook of market research* (pp. 587–632). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57413-4_15
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research Methods for Business Students* (9, Ed.). Pearson.
- Spreitzer, G. M. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442–1465. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256865>
- Thelen, P. D. (2021). Leadership and internal communication: Linking servant leadership, communication satisfaction, and employee advocacy. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 15(5), 440–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2021.1984919>
- Thelen, P. D., & Formanchuk, A. (2022). Culture and internal communication in Chile: Linking ethical organizational culture, transparent communication, and employee advocacy. *Public Relations Review*, 48(1), 102137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102137>
- Thelen, P. D., & Men, L. R. (2023). Commentary: The role of internal communication in fostering employee advocacy: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 60(4), 1441–1454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488420975832>
- Uktutias, S. A. M., Iswati, S., Hadi, C., & Suhariadi, F. (2022). Servant leadership and job satisfaction and organizational commitment: Empirical evidence from Surabaya health care sector. *Open Access Macedonian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 10(E), 1082–1093. <https://doi.org/10.3889/oamjms.2022.9237>
- UNESCO, & 2030, I. T. F. on T. for E. (2024). *Global report on teachers: Addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession*. UNESCO.
- Wahyono, & Riani, A. L. (2024). The role of servant leadership on employee advocacy on social media: The mediating role of employee-organization relationship. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Research*, 8(9), 397–409. <https://doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2024.8923>
- Walden, J. A., & Westerman, C. Y. K. (2018). Strengthening the tie: Creating exchange relationships that encourage employee advocacy as an organizational citizenship behavior. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 32(4), 593–611. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318918783612>