

PATTERNS OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVANT LEADERSHIP, DECISION-MAKING, AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT IN EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE

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Abstract: Teachers' professional commitment plays a crucial role in strengthening educational governance and improving the quality of educational services. However, efforts to enhance teachers' professional commitment require an understanding of the organizational factors that contribute to its development. This study aims to analyze the relationship between servant leadership, decision-making, and teachers' professional commitment in the context of educational governance. This study employed a correlational survey method with a quantitative approach. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to 178 full-time teachers from private vocational high schools in Depok City, selected using a proportional random sampling technique. The instrument measured servant leadership, decision-making, and teachers' professional commitment. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and path analysis. The results showed that servant leadership had a positive and significant influence on teachers' professional commitment ($\beta = 0.154$; $p = 0.043$) and decision-making ($\beta = 0.188$; $p = 0.014$). Decision-making also showed a positive and significant influence on teachers' professional commitment ($\beta = 0.236$; $p = 0.001$). Furthermore, decision-making significantly mediated the relationship between servant leadership and teachers' professional commitment (indirect effect = 0.068; $Z = 2.492$; $p = 0.013$). This finding suggests that servant leadership contributes to strengthening teachers' professional commitment, both directly and indirectly, through improved decision-making. This study highlights the importance of encouraging servant-oriented leadership practices and participatory decision-making processes as strategic approaches to enhancing teacher professionalism and promoting effective educational governance.

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INTRODUCTION

Effective educational governance is largely determined by the quality of the human resources involved, particularly teachers as the primary implementers of the learning process. In the context of 21st-century education, teachers are not only required to possess strong pedagogical and professional competencies but also to possess a strong professional commitment to their profession. Teacher professional commitment is a combination of the teacher and their profession, reflecting loyalty, dedication, and responsibility in carrying out their duties in accordance with ethical standards and professional values. Teachers with a high level of



professional commitment tend to demonstrate dedication, loyalty, and a willingness to continuously develop themselves to improve the quality of education (Ma, 2022). Professional commitment is also a crucial determinant in maintaining the quality of educational services and the sustainability of educational reform in schools. Teacher commitment contributes to improving the quality of learning, school effectiveness, and student success (Paulus et al., 2021).

However, various challenges in educational governance are causing teachers' professional commitment to face increasingly complex pressures. Increasing administrative demands, rapid changes in educational policy, and teacher involvement in various non-teaching activities have the potential to impact the quality of teachers' professional sustainability. This situation is a significant concern, given that teachers' professional commitment contributes to school effectiveness, job satisfaction, learning quality, and student success. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the factors related to strengthening teachers' professional commitment within the context of educational organizations is needed.

One factor thought to be related to teacher professional commitment is servant leadership. Servant leadership is a leader's actions that focus on serving others, with the primary goal of empowering and prioritizing their needs and well-being. This is prioritized through **empathy, compassion, caring, empowerment, vision (foresight), humility, and trust**. In a school environment, principals who implement servant leadership strive to create a work climate that supports teacher professional growth, builds relationships based on trust, and provides space for participation in school management. Research shows that servant leadership practices are associated with increased individual commitment to the organization and their profession (Godbersen et al., 2024). In the educational context, service-oriented leadership is believed to strengthen teachers' positions in carrying out their duties and carrying out their profession. Research (Zhang et al., 2025) shows that servant leadership is related to teacher emotional well-being, both directly and through psychological mechanisms such as recognizing and managing emotions. Similar findings are also seen in research (Doğan, 2025) which shows that servant leadership is related to teacher well-being and enthusiasm, especially when supported by distributed leadership practices within the school organization.

Besides serving as a leadership role, teacher decision-making is also a crucial aspect of modern educational governance. Decision-making is a complex process that involves selecting the best alternative based on an analysis of the situation, objectives, and existing conditions. Decision-making is no longer viewed solely as an activity solely for the satisfaction of school leaders, but rather involves active teacher participation in various managerial and instructional aspects. Teacher involvement in the decision-making process provides them with the opportunity to contribute to the direction of school development while strengthening their sense of ownership of the organization and their profession. Teacher decision-making is crucial because school decisions concerning learning, classroom management, professional development, and school policy direction are directly related to teachers' work experiences. Specifically, teacher involvement in decision-making related to learning is strongly linked to professional commitment. This demonstrates that decision-making is not merely an administrative procedure but also a participatory space that can strengthen teachers' sense of ownership and professional responsibility.



Based on this study, there is a need to view servant leadership, decision-making, and teacher professional commitment as three interrelated aspects of educational governance. Some previous studies have discussed principal leadership, decision-making, and professional commitment separately. Other studies have demonstrated the importance of teacher decision-making within school organizations. However, studies that specifically describe the patterns of relationships between servant leadership, decision-making, and teacher professional commitment in the context of educational governance, particularly in private vocational schools, still need to be strengthened. This gap is significant because private schools have unique governance dynamics, including the relationships between the foundation, principal, teachers, and internal school policies.

This study aims to describe the relationship patterns between servant leadership, decision-making, and teachers' professional commitment in educational governance. The term "pattern of relationship" is used to emphasize that this study is not directed at proving causal relationships experimentally, but rather to understand the statistical relationships between variables and deepen their meaning through qualitative explanations. Thus, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of educational leadership as well as practical contributions to strengthening school governance that is more participatory, serving, and supports teachers' professional commitment.

METHOD

The research was conducted at an A-accredited private vocational high school in Depok City, West Java. The subjects were permanent teachers from the private vocational high school foundation. The sample size was determined using *proportional random sampling* using the Slovin formula (Setyaningsih, 2020), resulting in 178 teachers as respondents.

This study used a correlational survey method with a quantitative approach. According to Karimuddin et al. (2021), quantitative research is a scientific approach carried out systematically to study various phenomena and their cause-and-effect relationships. Quantitative research was conducted using a survey method. The survey method is used to collect data from a specific location in natural conditions, where researchers do not provide special treatment to respondents. Data collection was carried out using questionnaires, tests, structured interviews, and so on, where the treatment here is not like an experiment (Sugiyono, 2022). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. Prior to the main survey, the instrument was tested on teachers outside the research sample. Instrument validity was examined using the Product Moment correlation technique, while reliability was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Only valid and reliable items were used in the final data collection.

Quantitative data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics, prerequisite tests, including normality, homogeneity, significance, and linearity, and path analysis. Path analysis was used to examine direct and indirect relationships between variables. In this study, decision-making was positioned as a mediating variable linking servant leadership and teacher professional commitment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results



Respondent Characteristics

A total of 178 teachers from private vocational high schools (SMK) in Depok City participated in this study. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Respondent Demographic Results

Demographic	Amount	Percentage
Age		
25-35 years	81 teachers	46%
36-45 years old	28 teachers	16%
46-55 years	53 teachers	30%
56-65 years	16 teachers	9%
Gender		
Man	57 teachers	32%
Woman	121 teachers	68%
Years of service		
< 2 years	16 teachers	9%
2-5 years	35 teachers	20%
6-10 years	40 teachers	22%
>10 years	87 teachers	49%
Level of education		
Senior High School	6 teachers	3%
D3	3 teachers	2%
S1	145 teachers	81%
S2	23 teachers	13%
S3	1 teacher	1%

The results showed that the majority of respondents were female teachers (68%), aged between 25 and 35 years (46%), had more than ten years of teaching experience (49%), and had a bachelor's degree (81%). These characteristics indicate that respondents had adequate educational qualifications and professional experience to provide reliable information regarding servant leadership practices, decision-making processes, and professional commitment in educational settings.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the distribution of the research variables. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Data Results

	Teacher Professional Commitment	Servant Leadership	Decision-making
N	178	178	178
Means	151.66	153.44	130.47
Standard Deviation	15.469	18.58	17.15
Minimum	114	100	86
Maximum	185	185	160

Descriptive statistics show that teachers' professional commitment had a mean score of 151.66 (SD = 15.47), servant leadership had a mean score of 153.44 (SD = 18.58), and decision-making had a mean score of 130.47 (SD = 17.15). These findings indicate that respondents rated the



level of servant leadership, decision-making practices, and professional commitment relatively high. The standard deviation values also indicate an acceptable level of variability in the data, supporting further inferential analysis.

Assumption Testing

Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption testing is performed to ensure that the data meets the requirements for path analysis.

Normality Test

The results of the normality test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Results of normality test

NO	Variables	Significant Value	α	Conclusion
1	Teacher Professional Commitment	0.200	0.05	Normally distributed data
2	Servant Leadership	0.088	0.05	Normally distributed data
3	Decision-making	0.200	0.05	Normally distributed data

The results of the study showed that all significance values exceeded 0.05. Therefore, the data for all research variables were normally distributed and suitable for further analysis.

Linearity Test

The results of the linearity test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Linearity Test Results

NO	Model Relationship between variables	F count	Table F	Signature	α	Test Results Linearity
1	Servant Leadership → professional teacher commitment	0.680	1.44	0.950	0.05	Linear
2	Decision Making → professional teacher commitment	1,046	1.44	0.411	0.05	Linear
3	Servant Leadership → Decision Making	1,098	1.44	0.333	0.05	Linear

The results of the study indicate that all relationships between variables meet the linearity assumption. The significance value is greater than 0.05, and the calculated F-value is lower than the critical F-value (1.44). Therefore, all regression models are considered linear and suitable for path analysis.

Path analysis was used to examine the direct relationship between servant leadership, decision-making, and teacher professional commitment. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 Hypothesis Test Results

Path of Influence	B	SE	β	T	Signature.	Conclusion
Servant Leadership → professional teacher commitment	0.145	0.071	0.154	2,043	0.043	Important
Servant Leadership → Decision Making	0.194	0.078	0.188	2,493	0.014	Important
Decision Making → professional teacher commitment	0.216	0.064	0.236	3,344	0.001	Important

The results showed that servant leadership had a positive and significant influence on teachers' professional commitment ($\beta = 0.154$; $t = 2.043$; $p = 0.043$). This result indicates that increased servant leadership practices among school leaders are associated with higher levels of teachers' professional commitment. Servant leadership was also found to have a positive influence on



decision-making ($\beta = 0.188$; $t = 2.493$; $p = 0.014$). This indicates that leadership characterized by empathy, empowerment, and trust contributes to improving teachers' decision-making abilities in educational organizations. In addition, decision-making demonstrated a positive and significant influence on teachers' professional commitment ($\beta = 0.236$; $t = 3.344$; $p = 0.001$). These findings imply that teachers who demonstrate stronger decision-making competencies tend to demonstrate greater commitment to their profession.

Indirect Effect Analysis

The Sobel test was conducted to determine whether decision-making mediated the relationship between servant leadership and teacher professional commitment. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Results of the Indirect Effect Test Using the Sobel Test

Indirect Path	Indirect Effects	Z Sobel	Signature.	Criteria	Conclusion
Servant Leadership → Decision Making → Professional Teacher Commitment	0.068	2,492	0.013	$Z > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$	Significant

The Sobel test results show a significant indirect effect of servant leadership on teachers' professional commitment through decision-making (indirect effect = 0.068; $Z = 2.492$; $p = 0.013$). Since the Z value exceeds 1.96 and the significance value is below 0.05, decision-making is confirmed as a significant mediating variable. These findings indicate that servant leadership not only contributes directly to strengthening teachers' professional commitment but also indirectly through improving teachers' decision-making capacity. Therefore, decision-making serves as an important mechanism through which servant leadership fosters stronger professional commitment among teachers in the context of educational governance.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that servant leadership has a direct positive effect on teachers' professional commitment. This finding indicates a linear coefficient of leadership on teachers' professional commitment of 0.145 with a significance value of 0.043. Statistically, these results indicate that the stronger the servant leadership practices perceived by teachers, the higher the tendency for teachers' professional commitment. In the context of educational governance, servant leadership creates a supportive organizational climate and encourages teachers to develop stronger emotional attachments, professional responsibility, and dedication to their profession. However, the magnitude of the coefficient needs to be read carefully. The effect is significant, but not dominant. This means that servant leadership does contribute to teachers' professional commitment, but it is not the sole determining factor.

Theoretically, these findings align with the concept of leadership, which encompasses service emphasis, empathy, empowerment, trust, and concern for the development of organizational members. In the school context, principals or leaders who demonstrate servant leadership not only act as instructors but also as facilitators who address the needs of professional teachers. Teachers who feel heard, admired, and empowered tend to have a stronger sense of responsibility toward their profession. This aligns with a study (Eva et al., 2019) that explains that servant leadership is associated with positive work attitudes because leaders place the growth and needs of subordinates at the center of leadership actions. In educational



organizations, this orientation can strengthen teachers' sense of appreciation, belonging, and willingness to continue carrying out their professional responsibilities. Servant leadership positively influences teacher well-being, work engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, and professional attitudes (Doğan, 2025). Servant leadership contributes significantly to positive educational outcomes by fostering a supportive work environment and strengthening teachers' professional growth (Ouyang et al., 2024). Similarly, servant leadership increases psychological empowerment among teachers, which in turn increases positive organizational behavior and commitment (Van Der Hoven et al., 2021).

Other research findings, both directly and through psychological mechanisms such as social recognition and emotional management (Zhang et al., 2025), suggest that the relationship between servant leadership and teacher professional commitment can be explained through similar mechanisms. When teachers receive emotional support, trust in the classroom, and recognition from school leaders, they are more likely to view their profession as a meaningful contribution to the classroom. Thus, professional commitment stems not only from formal obligations as teachers but also from work experiences that strengthen professional identity and commitment to the school. Effective decision-making reflects an individual's level of cognition, responsibility, and autonomy in carrying out their professional role (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Teachers who are actively involved in the decision-making process tend to feel valued and in control of their work, thus fostering a stronger affective commitment to the profession and the institution where they work.

Contextually, decision-making in educational governance encompasses the processes of problem identification, goal setting, information gathering, alternative development, and evaluation of alternative decisions. If teachers are involved in this process, they not only implement decisions but also become part of the school policy-making process. This can strengthen their sense of ownership of organizational decisions. Park et al. (2023) in their research revealed that teacher influence in school decision-making is related to job satisfaction and professional commitment, particularly when those decisions relate to the learning domain. The findings of this study support this view because decision-making is proven to be a variable that directly influences teachers' professional commitment.

Teachers who actively participate in decision-making processes are more likely to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for organizational goals. Participation in decision-making enables teachers to view themselves as valuable contributors to school development, thereby strengthening their identification with professional values and institutional goals. This involvement increases intrinsic motivation and fosters a greater commitment to professional responsibilities. Consistent with research by Mansor et al. (2021), involvement in decision-making makes teachers feel trusted and valued. This results in increased work motivation and commitment to the profession.

In the context of private vocational schools, these findings are particularly significant. Private schools often have governance structures that involve relationships between the foundation, the principal, and the teachers. In such structures, teacher participation and space can be limited if decisions are made primarily from a top-down perspective. The results of this study suggest that strengthening teacher professional commitment requires more participatory governance. Teachers who are involved in decisions regarding learning, school development, academic policies, and professional development are more likely to understand the rationale behind



school policies and are more willing to implement those decisions responsibly. Conversely, decisions presented solely as administrative instructions can diminish teachers' sense of ownership of the school.

From a governance perspective, decision-making serves not only as an administrative activity but also as a mechanism for strengthening professional relationships within schools. Educational institutions that promote participatory decision-making tend to foster higher levels of professional commitment among teachers because the decision-making process increases transparency, trust, and shared accountability.

The following findings indicate that servant leadership has a direct positive effect on decision-making. The path coefficient between servant leadership and decision-making is 0.194, with a significance value of 0.014. These results indicate that the stronger the servant leadership practices, the better the decision-making process is perceived by teachers. Theoretically, this is understandable because servant leadership tends to open up communication, encourage participation, build trust, and reduce the hierarchical distance between leaders and teachers. When the relationship between leaders and teachers is more open, the decision-making process becomes more inclusive.

Teachers who feel empowered through collaborative decision-making demonstrate greater loyalty to their profession. Research by Medina et al. (2023) found that granting direct decision-making authority to 41.2% of teachers increased their independence and loyalty to their institution and profession. Xu & Pang (2024) found that leadership involving collaborative decision-making fosters a sense of ownership *that* enhances teacher commitment and loyalty, crucial for reducing teacher *turnover* globally.

Waruwu's (2021) research explains that *servant leadership* has a positive impact on school organization because principals who implement *servant leadership* are able to build open communication, increase collaboration, and improve the quality of school management. This research confirms that *servant leadership* helps principals make more effective decisions that align with the needs of the school.

Research by Pujiastutianingsih & Ricky (2023) explains that *servant leadership* helps leaders understand the needs of teachers and students through intensive communication, consultation, and collaboration. Leaders who implement *servant leadership* obtain more comprehensive information before making decisions, resulting in more informed organizational decisions and increased acceptance by members.

In their study, Effendi & Erb (2024) found that principals who implement *servant leadership* tend to use open communication, accept feedback from teachers, and involve the school community in organizational processes. This makes the decision-making process more democratic and humane because it considers the diverse perspectives of school members.

Other findings highlight contemporary servant leadership, emphasizing that servant leaders foster shared decision-making and a participatory organizational culture (Adams et al., 2025). By encouraging collaboration and shared responsibility, servant leadership strengthens teachers' ability to engage in meaningful decision-making processes. In schools, this



participatory environment contributes to more effective problem-solving and increased organizational adaptability. These findings also support the organizational behavior perspective, which suggests that leadership influences employee behavior through structural and psychological mechanisms. When teachers are trusted and empowered by their leaders, they are more likely to use professional judgment and engage constructively in school decision-making processes.

Thus, it can be concluded that *servant leadership has a direct positive influence on decision-making because* it encourages open communication, collaboration, participation, and involvement of organizational members in the policy-making process. Servant leaders tend to consider various aspects and perspectives holistically, resulting in more effective, democratic, and acceptable decisions for all members of the organization.

The results also show an indirect effect of servant leadership on teachers' professional commitment through decision-making. The indirect effect coefficient is 0.068 with a calculated Z-value of 2.492, which is greater than the Z-table value of 1.96. These findings indicate that decision-making functions effectively as an intervening variable in the relationship between servant leadership and teachers' professional commitment. Thus, servant leadership not only directly influences teachers' professional commitment but also through improving the quality of decision-making.

This mediation finding is the most important part of the research. Substantively, this finding indicates that servant leadership will be more meaningful for teachers' professional commitment when translated into participatory decision-making practices. In other words, servant leadership is not simply about empathy, caring, or interpersonal support. This leadership needs to be realized in a work system that provides teachers with the space to express opinions, consider alternatives, make decisions, and share responsibility for implementing school policies. Without such mechanisms, servant leadership risks becoming merely a pleasant communication style, but it may not necessarily have a strong impact on school governance.

The influence of servant leadership on teachers' professional commitment often does not occur instantly, but rather through specific structural mechanisms within the organization. One of the most crucial mechanisms is teacher involvement in decision-making. Leaders who practice *servant leadership* tend to provide trust and space for participation to teachers through delegation of tasks and involvement in school policies, thereby enhancing their sense of ownership of the school organization (Darmansah et al., 2024). In this study, decision-making can be understood as an organizational pathway that bridges servant leadership with teachers' professional commitment. When principals practice servant leadership, teachers feel more trusted and motivated. These feelings then become more concrete when teachers are involved in the decision-making process. This involvement strengthens professional commitment because teachers not only feel cared for but also feel a vital part of school governance.

Decision-making plays a role as a mediating variable linking leaders' good intentions with teachers' actual actions. Brezicha et al. (2020) found that when teachers are involved in the decision-making process, they develop a higher level of commitment to the institution and their profession. The greater their involvement in decision-making, the higher the teachers' job satisfaction.



Furthermore, research by Liu & Yin (2023) explains that ethical leadership by principals positively influences professional *learning communities* through teacher participation in decision-making. This research shows that the greater the teacher involvement in school decision-making, the stronger the positive impact of leadership on teacher professional behavior.

However, the results of this study also have limitations in their interpretation. The R Square value of 0.273 in the model predicting teacher professional commitment indicates that the variables in the model explain 27.3% of the variation in teacher professional commitment, while 72.7% is explained by other variables outside the research model. This means that servant leadership and decision-making are indeed important, but not enough to explain the entire dynamics of teacher professional commitment. Other factors such as well-being, workload, school culture, job satisfaction, career development opportunities, foundations, job security, and professional climate may also influence teacher commitment. This section needs to be clearly stated so that the article does not appear to be demanding too large causal claims based on survey data.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that servant leadership, decision-making, and teacher professional commitment have a significant relationship pattern in educational governance at private vocational schools in Depok City. Servant leadership has been shown to have a direct positive relationship with teacher professional commitment. This indicates that leadership practices that emphasize empathy, empowerment, trust, and attention to teacher needs can strengthen teachers' commitment to their profession. However, this relationship needs to be understood proportionally because servant leadership is not the sole factor explaining teacher professional commitment.

Decision-making has also been shown to have a direct positive relationship with teacher professional commitment. These findings confirm that teacher professional commitment is shaped not only by the quality of the relationship between leaders and teachers, but also by the space for participation provided to teachers in school governance processes. Teachers who are involved in identifying problems, setting research objectives, developing alternatives, and evaluating decisions tend to have a stronger sense of ownership, responsibility, and professionalism toward their school and profession.

The research also shows that servant leadership has a positive relationship with decision-making. Thus, servant leadership can be understood as a relational foundation that creates dialogue, builds trust, and encourages teacher participation in the decision-making process. Furthermore, decision-making has been shown to act as a connecting variable between servant leadership and teacher professional commitment. This means that servant leadership will be more meaningful when translated into participatory governance mechanisms, rather than simply remaining as a personal attitude of the principal.

Theoretically, this research strengthens the understanding that teacher professional commitment is formed through a combination of leadership qualities and school governance. Servant leadership provides a psychological foundation of trust and empowerment, while decision-making provides organizational space for teachers to engage effectively in school life. Practically, principals and foundations need to develop more open decision-making



mechanisms, such as teacher deliberation forums, teacher involvement in policy evaluations, and feedback systems before implementing decision-making strategies.

This study has limitations because the data were obtained through a survey and analyzed using statistical models. Therefore, the results are best understood as patterns of relationships, rather than as absolute causal evidence. Future research could expand the context to different levels or regions, add other variables such as teacher welfare, school culture, workload, job satisfaction, or foundation support, and deepen the qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of education governance.

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