

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK LIFE BALANCE IN SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON WORK ENGAGEMENT OF TEACHERS AT SMK NEGERI 1 GIANYAR

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze and explain the mediating role of work life balance in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement. Using a quantitative approach with Structural Equation Modeling through Partial Least Square (PLS-SEM) the study was conducted among teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Gianyar with a total sample of 73 teachers excluding school leaders obtained through a saturated sampling method. Data were collected via interviews and questionnaire distribution. The results show that (1) servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement (2) servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work life balance (3) work life balance has a positive and significant effect on work engagement and (4) work life balance mediates the effect of servant leadership on work engagement through complementary partial mediation. The theoretical implications of this study support previous research findings from the perspective of Social Exchange Theory. Practically this research provides a policy reference for organizational leaders and management to improve teacher work engagement through servant leadership and work life balance.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Servant Leadership, Work Life Balance

INTRODUCTION

Human resources occupy a central position in determining the quality of organizational performance particularly within the public education sector where dedication competence and sustained commitment are daily demands. Work engagement matters not only in private organizations but in public institutions as well where the quality of employee involvement directly shapes service outcomes. Teachers as professional educators carry the core responsibility of guiding instructing evaluating and nurturing students across formal educational pathways (Retnodiani & Hartono, 2023). To carry that responsibility meaningfully teachers need work engagement. It is the psychological fuel that lets them pour energy and dedication into their roles.

SMK Negeri 1 Gianyar is a vocational high school in Gianyar Regency Bali offering programs across several specializations and supported by professional teaching staff operating under the school's organizational structure. Preliminary interviews with ten teachers from productive adaptive and normative groups revealed patterns worth examining. Several teachers reported fluctuating work enthusiasm and the occasional sense of burnout arising from monotonous routines. Some struggled to stay focused when

personal matters spilled over into school hours. Others found their engagement contingent on student responsiveness or their own emotional state on a given day. These observations point to a genuine ongoing challenge with work engagement at the school.

Work engagement is a mindset where employees feel positive about their work and express themselves cognitively physically and emotionally in carrying out their duties. It shows up in how seriously people take their tasks how much they invest in their roles and whether they see their job as meaningful. Organizations use it as a gauge for enthusiasm and genuine involvement since employees who are truly engaged tend to be more productive and more aligned with institutional goals. High work engagement keeps people from looking elsewhere for fulfillment channeling their energy instead into sustained performance (Walfaidihin, 2024).

What drives that level of engagement? Among the most examined factors is leadership style. Social Exchange Theory explains this relationship well. When leaders provide fair treatment care and meaningful support employees respond with commitment and effort. The theory holds that the reciprocal quality of the leader-follower relationship shapes what employees invest in their work. In the context of education when a school principal creates conditions of trust and growth teachers tend to return that investment with higher engagement (Lestari et al., 2025).

Servant leadership is one such style. It describes leaders who place the needs of their followers first empowering them developing their capacities and leading with an ethical orientation toward the wellbeing of the organization and the people within it (Ariyanti et al., 2021). Leaders in this mode attend to individual needs and support employees without expectation of personal gain (Yang et al., 2017). Their sincerity in serving creates the conditions for genuine loyalty and contribution (Sari et al., 2024). Research consistently shows that servant leadership positively influences work engagement across different organizational contexts (Eva et al., 2019 Hidayat et al., 2020 Putra et al., 2023 Majid & Puspita, 2024).

Leadership does not act on work engagement in isolation. Work life balance is an equally important thread in this picture. When employees manage to balance their professional obligations with their personal lives effectively they bring greater energy and focus to work and their engagement follows (Nugraha, 2024). The balance prevents the kind of spillover whether from work into personal life or the reverse that erodes motivation and concentration (Nanuru et al., 2023). Teachers especially feel this tension. Classroom demands and administrative responsibilities do not always stop at the school gate and when personal life pressures compound the load the result can be declining enthusiasm and disengagement (Astuti et al., 2025).

The connection between servant leadership and work life balance is also meaningful. A leader who prioritizes follower wellbeing supports emotional recovery and remains aware of what individuals are experiencing creates an environment where work life balance is more achievable (Haar et al., 2017 Lamprinou et al., 2021 Sari et al., 2025). When balance is achieved work engagement rises in response (Marseno & Muafi, 2021 Humaini

et al., 2024). This suggests that work life balance may carry the influence of servant leadership forward into engagement outcomes.

Yet empirical findings are not uniform. Some research confirms that servant leadership directly raises work engagement (Zhou et al., 2022 Aristo et al., 2024 Malićanin et al., 2025). Others show negative or negligible direct effects with Ramadhan et al. (2025) reporting a significant negative relationship. On the work life balance side while many studies confirm its positive role in engagement (Salsabilla & Izzati, 2023 Humaini et al., 2024) others find no significant relationship (Aprilia & Santosa, 2024 Arifin et al., 2025). These inconsistencies suggest that the full picture requires attention to intervening variables.

This study therefore examines work life balance as a mediator in the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement among teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Gianyar. The school operates in a competitive educational environment where teacher quality and commitment directly affect student outcomes making work engagement a strategic priority. Applying Social Exchange Theory as the theoretical lens the research aims to contribute empirical support to existing scholarship while offering practical direction for leadership and human resource policy within the school.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative causal associative design to test and explain relationships between the variables of interest. The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Gianyar located on Jalan Mulawarman Abianbase Gianyar Bali. The research objects are servant leadership, work life balance and work engagement among the school's teaching staff. The population consists of 73 teachers excluding school leaders distributed across three teaching categories 36 productive teachers who handle vocational and practical subjects 22 adaptive teachers who cover general work-relevant subjects and 15 normative teachers who focus on moral and character education. Because servant leadership is one of the study variables school leaders were appropriately excluded from the sample. A saturated sampling method was used meaning all 73 teachers served as respondents.

Data were gathered through preliminary interviews and structured questionnaires distributed online via Google Forms. Each questionnaire item was measured using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Servant leadership was operationalized using five dimensions from (Yue et al., 2024) altruistic calling emotional healing wisdom persuasive mapping and organizational stewardship covering 22 indicators. Work engagement was measured across three dimensions drawn from (Tan et al., 2022) and (Rahmi et al., 2025) vigor dedication and absorption with 9 indicators. Work life balance was assessed through four dimensions from (Maimunah et al., 2024) Work Interference With Personal Life (WIPL) Personal Life Interference With Work (PLIW) Personal Life Enhancement of Work (PLEW) and Work Enhancement of Personal Life (WEPL) comprising 15 indicators.

The analysis technique used is Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) implemented via SmartPLS software. The analysis proceeds in two stages. The first stage evaluates the outer model through convergent validity (outer loadings and AVE) and discriminant validity (cross loadings and square root of AVE) as well as composite reliability. The second stage evaluates the inner model using R-square and Q-square values. Hypothesis testing draws on bootstrapping with 5000 sub-samples to generate t-statistics and p-values for both direct and indirect effects. Mediation type is determined by examining the significance of paths p1 (servant leadership to work life balance) p2 (work life balance to work engagement) and p3 (servant leadership to work engagement directly) following the classification framework from (Hair et al., 2017).

Descriptive statistics were used to profile respondents and interpret variable mean scores against category intervals. The interval of 0.80 was applied with scores from 1.00 to 1.80 classified as very low 1.81 to 2.60 as low 2.61 to 3.40 as moderately high 3.41 to 4.20 as high and 4.21 to 5.00 as very high.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of SMK Negeri 1 Gianyar

SMK Negeri 1 Gianyar was established in 1976 evolving from its original form as SMEA Negeri Gianyar a school focused on economic and commercial education. Following national policy changes that converted SMEA and STM institutions into Vocational High Schools (SMK) the school took its current name and expanded its program offerings. Today it provides training in fields including Visual Communication Design Computer and Network Engineering Software Engineering Accounting and Financial Institutions Business Marketing Office Management and Hospitality. The school holds an A accreditation making it one of the recognized vocational institutions in Bali.

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 73 teacher respondents female teachers comprise the majority at 65.8 percent compared to 34.2 percent male. The dominant age group is 31 to 40 years representing 46.7 percent of respondents indicating a workforce that is largely in its most productive working years. Most teachers hold a bachelor's degree (93.2 percent) while 6.8 percent hold a master's degree. By teacher status productive teachers form the largest group at 49.3 percent followed by adaptive teachers at 30.1 percent and normative teachers at 20.5 percent. In terms of tenure 41.1 percent of teachers have worked for 1 to 5 years indicating that a substantial portion of the staff is relatively new still in the phase of professional adaptation and development.

Description of Research Variables

Servant leadership receives an overall mean score of 4.12 placing it in the high category. Among its five dimensions wisdom earns the highest mean (4.17) while altruistic calling produces the lowest (4.10) though both remain in the high category. At the item level the statement "My leader sacrifices personal interests to meet the needs of followers" records the lowest score at 4.04 suggesting that teachers perceive their

principal's personal sacrifice for followers as present but not entirely optimized. The high overall score indicates that servant leadership is generally well practiced though the altruistic calling dimension warrants continued attention.

Work engagement produces an overall mean of 3.77 in the high category. Among the three dimensions dedication yields the lowest mean at 3.71 with the item "I am enthusiastic about my work" recording the lowest individual score of 3.70. This is consistent with the interview findings from the pre-survey where teachers described fluctuating enthusiasm particularly during dense or repetitive teaching schedules. Vigor and absorption dimensions also fall in the high category showing that energy and focused involvement are present but that dedication the more emotionally invested dimension needs strengthening.

Work life balance has an overall mean of 3.45 high category. The PLIW dimension (Personal Life Interference With Work) produces the lowest mean at 3.39 classified as moderately high. The item "I have difficulty completing work because I am thinking about personal problems" records the lowest score of 3.28. This finding indicates that for some teachers personal concerns do spill over into the work environment affecting concentration and task completion. The other three dimensions (WIPL PLEW WEPL) all fall in the high category suggesting that while work-to-life interference is manageable life-to-work interference remains an area where improvement is needed.

Outer Model Evaluation

All 46 indicators across the three constructs returned outer loading values above 0.70 satisfying the threshold for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). The AVE values for servant leadership (0.687) work engagement (0.824) and work life balance (0.860) all exceed the 0.50 cutoff confirming that each construct captures sufficient shared variance from its indicators.

For discriminant validity cross-loading inspection shows that each indicator loads more strongly on its own construct than on any other construct. The square root of AVE for servant leadership (0.829) work engagement (0.908) and work life balance (0.927) each exceed the inter-construct correlations confirming that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another.

Composite reliability values are 0.980 for servant leadership 0.977 for work engagement and 0.989 for work life balance all well above the 0.70 threshold. Cronbach's alpha values are similarly strong 0.978 0.973 and 0.988 respectively. The measurement model is reliable.

Inner Model Evaluation

The R-square for work engagement is 0.631 meaning 63.1 percent of its variance is explained by the variables in the model. The R-square for work life balance is 0.638 indicating that 63.8 percent of its variance is accounted for by servant leadership. The Q-square value is calculated as follows

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.631)(1 - 0.638) = 1 - (0.369)(0.362) = 1 - 0.133 = 0.867$$

A Q-square of 0.867 confirms strong predictive relevance. The model explains 86.7 percent of the variation in work engagement through servant leadership and work life balance with the remaining 13.3 percent attributable to factors outside the model.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 1. Direct Effect Results

Direct Effect	Path Coefficient	STDEV	T-statistic	P-value	Result
Servant Leadership → Work Engagement	0.444	0.102	4.335	0.000	Significant
Servant Leadership → Work Life Balance	0.799	0.031	25.916	0.000	Significant
Work Life Balance → Work Engagement	0.394	0.111	3.556	0.000	Significant

Table 2. Indirect Effect Results

Indirect Effect	Path Coefficient	STDEV	T-statistic	P-value	Result
Servant Leadership → Work Life Balance → Work Engagement	0.315	0.093	3.386	0.001	Significant

All three direct paths (p1, p2, p3) and the indirect path were statistically significant, establishing work life balance as a complementary partial mediator in the servant leadership–work engagement relationship.

Direct effects were tested using bootstrapping. Servant leadership to work engagement produced a path coefficient of 0.444 with a t-statistic of 4.335 and p-value of 0.000 confirming H1. Servant leadership to work life balance yielded a path coefficient of 0.799 t-statistic of 25.916 and p-value of 0.000 confirming H2. Work life balance to work engagement showed a path coefficient of 0.394 t-statistic of 3.556 and p-value of 0.000 confirming H3.

For the mediation test (H4) the indirect effect of servant leadership on work engagement through work life balance returned a path coefficient of 0.315 t-statistic of 3.386 and p-value of 0.001 all satisfying the significance threshold. All three paths (p1 p2 p3) are statistically significant identifying the mediation type as complementary partial mediation. This means that work life balance strengthens and clarifies the effect of servant leadership on work engagement and that servant leadership still exerts a direct effect on work engagement even after the mediating path is accounted for.

The Effect of Servant Leadership on Work Engagement

Servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. This means that as teachers perceive stronger servant leadership from their school principal their levels of vigor dedication and absorption in teaching work rise accordingly. The finding is consistent with previous research (Malićanin et al., 2025 Majid & Puspita, 2024) that reports similar positive and significant relationships across different organizational settings.

From the Social Exchange Theory perspective fair treatment and genuine support from a leader generate a sense of moral obligation in employees who then reciprocate by investing more of themselves into their work (Lestari et al., 2025). In a school context when a principal prioritizes the needs of teachers attends to their emotional wellbeing and makes decisions with the broader community in mind teachers respond with stronger commitment to teaching and to the school's mission. Servant leadership builds trust and interpersonal closeness that strengthens the social exchange bond making employees more willing to engage fully in their roles (Nurmalitasari & Puspitarini, 2024). A leader whose organizational stewardship inspires teachers to see the school as contributing positively to the community also raises the sense of pride that feeds dedication the engagement dimension that scored lowest in this study.

The Effect of Servant Leadership on Work Life Balance

Servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work life balance. The stronger the servant leadership behaviors exhibited by the principal the better teachers manage the boundary between professional demands and personal life.

Social Exchange Theory helps explain this pathway. When leaders demonstrate genuine care for what teachers need including the capacity to recover from difficult personal experiences teachers gain the psychological resources to manage work and personal life without feeling that one persistently undermines the other (Setiawati & Dewi, 2023). A principal who places the follower's interests above their own in the altruistic calling dimension reduces the pressure that might otherwise force teachers to sacrifice personal wellbeing for work demands. When the principal understands the current situation and can anticipate consequences teachers feel supported in managing their workload proactively (Sari et al., 2025). Servant leadership operates with a long-term holistic orientation that gradually produces changes across both the professional and personal dimensions of employees' lives (Junita et al., 2022).

The Effect of Work Life Balance on Work Engagement

Work life balance has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. Teachers who manage their personal and professional lives with greater balance show higher levels of enthusiasm focus and emotional involvement in teaching. The finding supports (Salsabilla & Izzati, 2023) who document a positive relationship between work life balance and work engagement among teachers and (Humaini et al., 2024) who argue that balance between personal and professional roles removes the interference that would otherwise pull people away from engagement.

Social Exchange Theory provides a frame here too. When the organizational environment helps workers achieve balance employees perceive the exchange as fair and they respond by giving more of themselves to the organization (Wulandari, 2024). Teachers who feel that their personal lives create better moods and renewed energy for teaching rather than becoming a source of distraction naturally find themselves more absorbed in the classroom (Alisa & Sugiarti, 2024). Management support and open communication are central to creating the conditions where work life balance can support

engagement (Anaya & Desiana, 2023). The PLEW dimension where personal life energizes and prepares a person for work becomes a positive resource rather than a burden.

Work Life Balance as a Mediator

Work life balance mediates the effect of servant leadership on work engagement through complementary partial mediation. The positive direction of both the direct and indirect pathways means that work life balance does not simply carry the leadership influence forward it amplifies and clarifies it. Teachers who experience servant leadership from their principal develop better work life balance and that balance in turn raises their work engagement. This is the chain of influence at the heart of the model.

The finding supports (Haar et al., 2017) who describe servant leadership as improving work life balance and through that balance increasing work engagement and (Vanesa et al., 2022) who document the same mediated pathway. In the Social Exchange Theory framework servant leadership creates conditions of trust and reciprocity strengthening the personal resources that allow employees to navigate the competing demands of work and personal life (Zhou et al., 2022). Teachers whose personal lives are in better balance feel ready to invest more in their teaching approaching their work with more enthusiasm and dedication as a form of positive reciprocity toward the institution and the leadership that supported them (Udin et al., 2025). The partial nature of the mediation confirms that servant leadership also maintains an independent pathway to work engagement which means that while work life balance is a meaningful mediating mechanism it does not capture the entire effect of leadership on engagement.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings the following conclusions can be drawn

1. Servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. Higher levels of servant leadership perceived by teachers produce higher levels of work engagement at SMK Negeri 1 Gianyar.
2. Servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on work life balance. As servant leadership practices become more consistent teachers experience better balance between professional responsibilities and personal life.
3. Work life balance has a positive and significant effect on work engagement. Teachers who achieve a better balance between work and personal life demonstrate higher levels of enthusiasm focus and emotional commitment to their teaching roles.
4. Work life balance mediates the effect of servant leadership on work engagement through complementary partial mediation. As servant leadership strengthens work life balance improves and that improvement raises work engagement. The direct effect of servant leadership on engagement also remains significant confirming that the mediation is partial and complementary.

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