



Servant Leadership on the Path to Organizational Innovation: A Psychological Analysis of Transformative Mediating Mechanisms

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Abstract

Background and Purpose: Grounded in social cognitive theory and organizational behavior literature, this study examines the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior, with an emphasis on the mediating roles of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment. While prior research has established links between leadership styles and innovation, limited attention has been paid to the psychological mechanisms through which servant leadership fosters innovation in educational settings. This study addresses this gap by proposing a model that integrates both intrapersonal and organizational factors. **Methodology:** A descriptive-correlational design was employed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population comprised all primary school teachers in Javanrood City during the 2024–2025 academic year, with 219 participants selected via convenience sampling. Data were collected using four standardized instruments: Allen and Meyer's Affective Commitment Scale, Karwowski et al.'s Creative Self-Efficacy Scale, the Servant Leadership Questionnaire by Gholipour and Hazrati, and Janssen's Innovative Work Behavior Questionnaire. Analyses were conducted using SPSS and AMOS software. **Findings:** The findings showed that the research model, which aimed to predict innovative work behavior based on servant leadership, with creative self-efficacy and affective commitment as mediators, was a good fit. Additionally, servant leadership significantly influenced innovative work behavior through both mediators ($p < .01$). **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that innovative behaviors are shaped not only by elements of servant leadership but also by intrapersonal factors such as creative self-efficacy and emotional commitment. Enhancing these behaviors, therefore, requires a dual focus on both organizational dynamics and individual psychological capacities.

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Introduction

The educational system in contemporary societies serves as one of the foundational pillars of character development and functions as a complement to the process of socialization initiated within the family. It plays a vital role in preparing individuals for effective participation in societal life (Fossum, Handegård & Drogli, 2017). The realization of developmental goals within this crucial institution relies on the employment of committed educators and staff who not only demonstrate professional loyalty but also exhibit sustainability and high performance (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024). Teachers, as the primary agents of instruction, require capabilities that enable them to adapt to environmental changes and everyday challenges (Schowalter & Volmer, 2025; Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024). According to the prevailing philosophy in education, professional engagement, organizational commitment, and psychological–emotional resilience among teachers are considered essential prerequisites for the success of educational institutions (Weihua, 2025).

In recent years, the concept of innovative work behavior (IWB) has gained prominence as a key factor in enhancing educational quality and institutional effectiveness. IWB refers to the generation, promotion, and realization of new ideas that improve processes, solve problems, and contribute to organizational development (Janssen, 2000; Su et al., 2020). In today's rapidly evolving landscape—where organizational quality indicators increasingly emphasize innovation and creativity—the education sector must align with this transformation (Cheng et al., 2025; RamazanNiya et al., 2022). Numerous studies underscore that cultivating a culture of innovation and strengthening innovative behavior are vital components in improving the quality of educational systems (Saravi Moghadam & Ali Ahmadi, 2022). However, much of the existing literature focuses on describing innovation's importance rather than identifying the psychological and organizational mechanisms that enable it. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how leadership style and internal motivational factors jointly influence IWB among educators.

Servant leadership, introduced by Greenleaf (1977), emphasizes ethical stewardship, empowerment, and personal growth. Unlike transactional or authoritarian models, servant leadership fosters trust (Athanasios, 2024), autonomy, and emotional support—conditions conducive to innovation (Spears, 2025; Bufalino, 2025). With a focus on employee development and reciprocal relationships, it provides psychological and ethical

support to members of the organization (Wu et al., 2025; Makirimani & Naicker, 2024), thereby fostering extra-role behaviors such as innovation (Turner, 2022). Despite its conceptual appeal, empirical studies on servant leadership in educational contexts—especially in non-Western settings—remain limited. Moreover, foundational works such as Laub (1999), Liden et al. (2008), and van Dierendonck (2011) on servant leadership measurement have not been sufficiently incorporated into regional studies, limiting cross-cultural comparability. This study draws on these validated frameworks to enhance methodological rigor and global relevance.

To explain how servant leadership may foster IWB, this study integrates two psychological constructs as mediators: creative self-efficacy and affective commitment. Creative self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to solve problems creatively and generate novel solutions (Abbott, 2010; Bawuro et al., 2019). According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997), self-efficacy beliefs influence motivation, perseverance, and behavioral outcomes. Employees with higher creative self-efficacy are more successful in confronting new challenges and generating innovative solutions (Kumar et al., 2022; Abdi & Rostami, 2021). However, cross-cultural validations of creative self-efficacy scales (e.g., Tierney & Farmer, 2002; Karwowski et al., 2012; Widmann & Mulder, 2018) suggest that contextual factors significantly influence its expression. This study contributes by examining the construct within the Iranian educational system, thereby expanding its applicability and offering comparative insights.

Affective commitment, as defined by Allen & Meyer (1990), reflects the emotional attachment of employees to their organization and its values. It enhances motivation, perseverance, job performance, and psychological well-being (Chigeda, Ndofirepi & Steyn, 2022; Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021). In a servant leadership context, this type of commitment strengthens creativity and participation (Zhang et al., 2025). Yet, its mediating role in the relationship between servant leadership and innovation has not been sufficiently theorized, and its interaction with creative self-efficacy remains unexplored.

This study posits that creative self-efficacy and affective commitment may operate as complementary mediators. While self-efficacy empowers individuals cognitively to generate ideas, affective commitment provides emotional grounding that sustains engagement and risk-taking. Drawing on dual-process models of

motivation (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kanfer, 1990), the framework suggests that both pathways are necessary for translating leadership influence into sustained innovative behavior. This theoretical integration strengthens the conceptual model and offers a more nuanced understanding of innovation in educational settings.

In contrast to prior studies that examine these variables in isolation, this research proposes a unified model that simultaneously considers servant leadership, creative self-efficacy, and affective commitment. By doing so, it addresses a clear theoretical and empirical gap and contributes to both local practice and international scholarship.

In conclusion, given the central importance of innovative behavior among teachers and the need to clarify its influencing factors, this study seeks to explore the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior, with an emphasis on the mediating roles of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment among primary school teachers. The study's novelty lies in its integrated theoretical framework, its use of validated international instruments, and its contextual focus on Iranian educators—an underrepresented population in global leadership and innovation research.

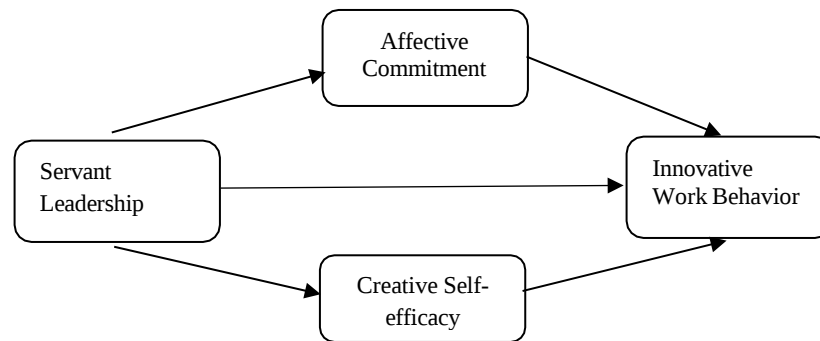


Figure 1. Research conceptual model

Based on the conceptual framework of the present study, the following hypotheses are proposed and will be empirically tested using structural equation modeling (SEM):

- Servant leadership has a direct effect on innovative work behavior.
- Servant leadership has a direct effect on creative self-efficacy.
- Servant leadership has a direct effect on affective commitment.
- Creative self-efficacy has a direct effect on innovative work behavior.
- Affective commitment has a direct effect on innovative work behavior.
- Servant leadership indirectly affects innovative work behavior through creative self-efficacy.

- Servant leadership indirectly affects innovative work behavior through affective commitment.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach with a fundamental research objective. The data were collected using a descriptive (non-experimental) method and analyzed through a correlational research design, applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the maximum likelihood estimation technique. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS software.

The statistical population consisted of primary school teachers in Javanrood City. Based on data provided by the Kermanshah Department of Education, the population size was 440 individuals. According to Krejcie and Morgan's sample size table, a total of 219 teachers were selected through convenience sampling. Although this sample size meets the statistical

requirements for SEM (Meyers, Gamst & Guarino, 2006), it is important to acknowledge that convenience sampling is a non-probability method that may introduce selection bias. The sample may not fully represent the broader population of primary school teachers, which limits the generalizability of the findings.

To assess the research variables and gather data, the following standardized questionnaires were utilized:

- The Affective Commitment Questionnaire, originally developed by Allen and Meyer (1997) as a subcomponent of their Organizational Commitment Scale, was utilized in this study to assess emotional attachment to the organization. Specifically, only the affective commitment subscale was employed, which includes 8 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The psychometric properties of this instrument have been well-established, with a reported validity coefficient of 0.86 (Meyer & Allen, 1997, as cited in Jafari et al., 2012), and a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.81 according to Ebrahimi (2008). In the current study, internal consistency was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating a high level of reliability. To establish the construct validity of the Affective Commitment Questionnaire developed by Allen and Meyer, the present study referenced the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results reported by Nadi, Molavi, and Toghræi (2012), conducted within the Iranian cultural context. Their findings demonstrated acceptable model fit indices, including a Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) of 0.90 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.08, with statistical significance at $p < 0.05$. These indicators suggest a reasonably good alignment between the proposed model and the observed data. Accordingly, the structural integrity of the instrument is supported, validating its application in subsequent structural equation modeling within similar cultural and organizational settings.

- The Creative Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, designed by Karwowski, Lebudá, and Wiśniewska (2012), comprises 11 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and is intended to evaluate individuals' belief in their own creative potential and problem-solving ability. This instrument has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, with a reported validity coefficient of 0.756 (Zahed-Babolan &

Seyyedkalan, 2015), and exhibited excellent internal consistency in the current study, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. To evaluate the construct validity of the Creative Self-Efficacy Questionnaire developed by Karwowski, Lebudá, and Wiśniewska, the present study relied on the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results reported by Aghvami Panah, Rastgar, and Bagheri Ghareh Bolagh (2024). Their research, conducted within the Iranian public sector, provided strong evidence for the psychometric robustness of the instrument. The factor loadings for the creative self-efficacy items were generally satisfactory, with item 22 loading at 0.850 ($t = 20.026$), item 25 at 0.851 ($t = 24.841$), and item 29 at 0.846 ($t = 21.881$). Additional items demonstrated loadings ranging from 0.645 to 0.824, indicating an acceptable model fit across most indicators. Only item 32 exhibited a relatively low loading of 0.403, which was acknowledged in the final analysis. Overall, these results affirm the structural validity of the questionnaire and support its application in the current study's structural equation modeling framework.

- The Servant Leadership Questionnaire used in this study is grounded in Patterson's conceptual framework and was culturally adapted to the Iranian organizational context by Gholipour and Hazrati (2009). The instrument consists of 28 items distributed across four dimensions: service orientation (items 1–6), humility (items 7–13), trustworthiness (items 14–23), and Compassion (items 24–28). Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior research has demonstrated strong psychometric properties for this tool, with an overall Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.90 (Gholipour & Hazrati, 2009), and complementary findings by Rezaei-Manesh and Sedighi (2016) indicating a reliability coefficient of 0.84, with subscale alphas ranging from 0.74 to 0.78. In the current study, internal consistency was confirmed with high reliability scores across subscales—0.88 for service orientation, 0.83 for humility, 0.89 for trustworthiness, and 0.86 for compassion—resulting in an overall scale reliability of 0.95, which reflects excellent internal consistency.

- The Innovative Work Behavior Questionnaire, originally developed by Janssen (2000), consists of 9 items distributed across three dimensions: idea generation (items 1–3), idea

promotion (items 4–6), and idea implementation (items 7–9). Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale, capturing the extent to which individuals engage in creative processes within the workplace. The instrument has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties, with the original study reporting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.819, and a local validation by Ahmadi, Nouri, and Ganjeh (2016) confirming reliability at 0.825. In the current study, internal consistency for the subscales was 0.80 for idea generation, 0.75 for idea promotion, and 0.72 for idea implementation, with an overall scale reliability of 0.84, indicating good measurement reliability across dimensions of innovative behavior. To assess the construct validity of Janssen's Innovative Work Behavior Questionnaire, the confirmatory factor analysis results reported by Shakeri et al., (2011) were utilized. Their study, conducted within the Iranian organizational context using structural equation modeling, demonstrated strong psychometric properties for the instrument. Specifically, the model fit indices indicated an excellent fit: RMSEA was reported at 0.05, suggesting a good approximation of the data; GFI reached 0.99, reflecting an outstanding overall

model fit; and AGFI was 0.96, confirming an acceptable adjusted fit. These results affirm the structural validity of the questionnaire and support its application in the present research.

Findings

The descriptive findings related to sample demographics indicate a reasonably balanced distribution across gender and educational levels. Specifically, the sample included 119 female teachers (54.3%) and 100 male teachers (45.7%). In terms of educational attainment, 2.3% of participants held doctoral degrees ($n = 5$), 32.9% held master's degrees ($n = 72$), and 64.8% held bachelor's degrees ($n = 142$). The mean work experience among participants was 14 years and 3 months, suggesting a well-established professional cohort with substantial classroom exposure and career maturity. These characteristics provide a robust empirical foundation for investigating the research hypotheses within a qualified and contextually relevant population.

Table 1. Descriptive Indicators of Main Research Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Affective Commitment	26.4384	5.4174	-0.329	-0.189
Creative Self-Efficacy	35.6256	7.6738	0.028	0.122
Idea Generation	9.3516	2.2564	-0.220	-0.565
Idea Promotion	9.3288	2.4461	0.016	-0.104
Idea Implementation	9.9361	2.2187	-0.239	0.170
Innovative Work Behavior	28.6164	5.6340	-0.022	-0.312
Service Orientation	19.9680	4.5397	-0.398	0.539
Humility	22.7763	4.6728	-0.251	0.268
Trustworthiness	32.4201	6.9108	-0.060	-0.006
Compassion	15.6164	4.0771	-0.256	-0.245
Servant Leadership	90.7808	17.6645	-0.203	-0.028

As illustrated in Table 1, the variable Servant Leadership demonstrated the highest mean score, recorded at 90.7808, indicating a strong prevalence of servant leadership traits within the studied population or organizational context. The corresponding standard deviation of 17.6645 suggests a moderate level of dispersion in responses, reflecting variability in how participants perceived or experienced servant leadership. These statistical indicators highlight the prominence of servant leadership as a central construct in the research

framework and underscore its relevance for further theoretical and practical investigation. To ensure the validity of subsequent analyses, the normality of data distribution was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, both of which fell within the commonly accepted range of ± 1 . Additionally, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was performed for each of the primary variables, with results presented below.

Table 2. Normality Test Results for Main Research Variables

Tests of Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnova		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Affective Commitment	.089	219	.058
Creative Self-Efficacy	.085	219	.105
Innovative Behavior	.066	219	.307
Servant Leadership	.058	219	.427

As shown in Table 2, all variables yielded non-significant results ($p > .05$), indicating no significant deviation from normality. These findings, combined with skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable range, support the assumption of approximate normality for the dataset. The results confirm acceptable normality

across all variables, supporting their suitability for structural equation modeling. Therefore, to test the study's hypotheses and examine relationships among the key variables, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated as part of the preliminary analysis.

Table 3. Pearson Correlations Between Study Variables

	AC	CSE	IG	IP	II	IWB	SO	HU	TR	CL	SL
Affective Commitment (AC)	1										
Creative Self-Efficacy (CSE)	.666	1									
Idea Generation (IG)	.569	.517	1								
Idea Promotion (IP)	.618	.574	.553	1							
Idea Implementation (II)	.624	.662	.480	.445	1						
Innovative Behavior (IWB)	.742	.717	.830	.831	.779	1					
Service Orientation (SO)	.599	.717	.472	.502	.535	.618	1				
Humility (HU)	.620	.763	.557	.531	.589	.685	.755	1			
Trustworthiness (TR)	.635	.772	.485	.527	.622	.668	.695	.786	1		
Compassion (CL)	.556	.634	.432	.354	.493	.521	.502	.628	.645	1	
Servant Leadership	.694	.835	.558	.557	.651	.722	.844	.911	.926	.778	1

All correlations significant at $p < .01$

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients, indicating significant and direct relationships between key research variables. Specifically, the correlation coefficients between servant leadership and affective commitment ($r = .694$), creative self-efficacy ($r = .835$), and innovative work behavior ($r = .722$) suggest strong associations. Additionally, affective commitment and creative self-efficacy were significantly correlated with

innovative work behavior at $r = .742$ and $r = .717$, respectively.

Given the high correlations observed between certain variables, a multicollinearity diagnostic was conducted using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance statistics for the predictor variables. The results of this analysis are presented in the table below:

Table 4. Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for Key Research Variables

Coefficients							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	4.088	1.258		3.251	.001		
Affective Commitment	.439	.060	.422	7.369	.000	.493	2.027
Creative Self-Efficacy	.189	.055	.258	3.445	.001	.289	3.461
Servant Leadership	.068	.025	.213	2.749	.006	.269	3.722
t. Dependent Variable: Innovative Behavior (IWB)							

Dependent Variable: Innovative Behavior (IWB)

As presented in Table 4, none of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values exceed the widely accepted threshold of 5, indicating an absence of problematic multicollinearity among the study variables. According to established statistical guidelines, a VIF value of 1 denotes no correlation between a predictor and other variables in the model, values between 1 and 5 suggest moderate correlation that is generally acceptable, while values above 5 may signal serious multicollinearity concerns that could compromise the reliability of coefficient estimates and significance levels. In the current model, the highest VIF was observed for the variable Servant Leadership (VIF = 3.722), which remains well within the acceptable range. These results

confirm that multicollinearity is not a significant issue in this regression analysis and is unlikely to distort the interpretation of path coefficients or overall model validity.

These results confirm that all main variables are positively and significantly correlated. Given the strength and significance of these associations, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the study's conceptual framework and examine the direct and indirect relationships among the variables. The results—including both standardized and unstandardized path coefficients—are illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.

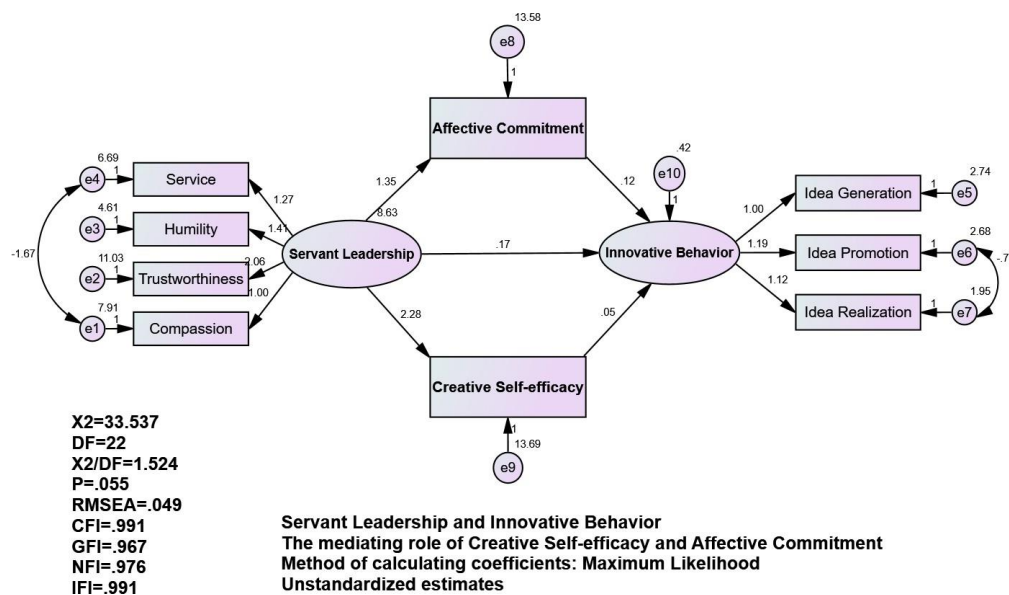


Figure 2. Modeling the structural relationships between servant leadership and innovative behavior with emphasis on the mediating role of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment in the case of unstandardized coefficients.

Figure 2 illustrates the structural equation model examining the direct and indirect effects of servant leadership on employees' innovative behavior. The model highlights the mediating roles of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment, providing insight

into the psychological mechanisms that link leadership style to innovation outcomes. All path coefficients are presented in their unstandardized form, reflecting the raw relationships among variables within the proposed framework.

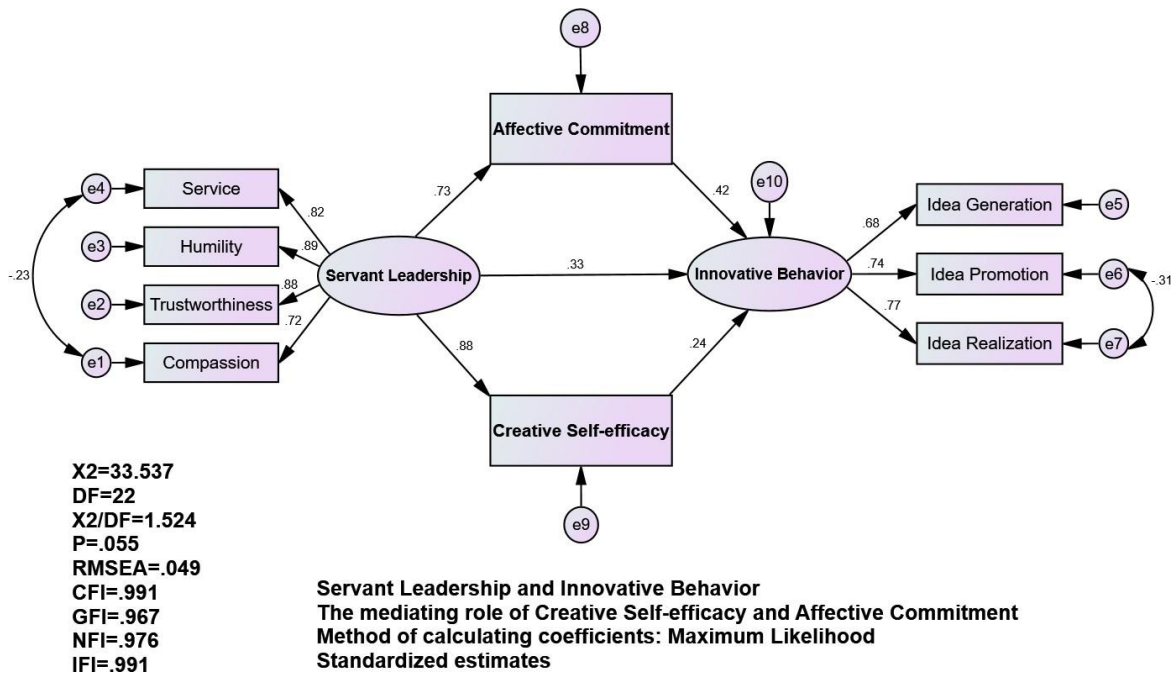


Figure 3. Modeling the structural relationships between servant leadership and innovative behavior with emphasis on the mediating role of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment in the standard coefficients case.

Figure 3 presents the structural equation model depicting the standardized path coefficients between servant leadership and innovative behavior. It emphasizes the mediating roles of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment, offering a clearer understanding of the relative strength and significance of each relationship within the proposed framework.

To assess the adequacy of the structural equation model, a comprehensive set of fit indices was employed, including Chi-square (χ^2), Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), Root Mean Square Error of

Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI), and Parsimonious Comparative Fit Index (PCFI). Empirical evidence indicates that RMSEA values less than or equal to 0.08 are acceptable, and relative indices (e.g., GFI, NFI, CFI) with values equal to or greater than 0.90 reflect adequate model fit (Hulpia, Devos & Rosseel, 2009; Mask, 2007).

Table 5. Overall Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Acceptable Range	Present Study	Fit Evaluation
Chi-square (χ^2)	—	33.537	—
Degrees of Freedom (df)	—	22	—
P-value	> 0.05	0.055	Adequate Fit
χ^2/df (CMIN/DF)	< 3	1.524	Adequate Fit
RMSEA ¹	< 0.08	0.049	Adequate Fit
GFI ²	≥ 0.90	0.967	Adequate Fit
NFI ³	≥ 0.90	0.976	Adequate Fit
IFI ⁴	≥ 0.90	0.976	Adequate Fit
TLI ⁵	≥ 0.90	0.986	Adequate Fit
CFI ⁶	≥ 0.90	0.991	Adequate Fit
PNFI ⁷	> 0.50	0.596	Adequate Fit
PCFI ⁸	> 0.50	0.606	Adequate Fit

The results summarized in Table 5 confirm that the proposed conceptual model exhibits strong and acceptable fit with the observed data. These findings support the robustness and parsimony of the hypothesized model, verifying its suitability for structural equation analysis. In support of the structural

equation model, standardized beta coefficients, path coefficients, and critical ratios (t-values) were also examined for each hypothesized causal relationship. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Standardized Path Coefficients and Significance of Direct Effects

Path Relationship (direct effect)	β Coefficient	S.E.	C.R.	Significance
Servant Leadership → Affective Commitment	0.732	0.127	10.601	0.000
Servant Leadership → Creative Self-Efficacy	0.875	0.179	12.732	0.000
Servant Leadership → Innovative Behavior	0.330	0.066	2.599	0.009
Affective Commitment → Innovative Behavior	0.424	0.021	5.788	0.000
Creative Self-Efficacy → Innovative Behavior	0.238	0.021	2.312	0.021
Servant Leadership → Compassion	0.722	—	—	—
Servant Leadership → Trust	0.876	0.161	12.751	0.000
Servant Leadership → Humility	0.888	0.109	12.912	0.000
Servant Leadership → Altruism	0.821	0.117	10.849	0.000
Innovative Behavior → Idea Generation	0.677	—	—	—
Innovative Behavior → Idea Promotion	0.740	0.126	9.425	0.000
Innovative Behavior → Idea Implementation	0.774	0.115	9.808	0.000

As shown in Table 6, servant leadership demonstrates statistically significant direct effects on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.732$), creative self-efficacy

($\beta = 0.875$), and innovative behavior ($\beta = 0.330$), with corresponding critical ratios meeting the thresholds for significance ($t \geq 1.96$; $P \leq 0.05$ and $t \geq 2.576$; $P \leq 0.01$).

¹ Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

² Goodness of Fit Index

³ Normed Fit Index

⁴ Incremental Fit Index

⁵ Tucker-Lewis Index

⁶ Comparative Fit Index

⁷ Parsimony Normed Fit Index

⁸ Parsimony Comparative Fit Index

Moreover, affective commitment and creative self-efficacy also exert direct and significant influences on innovative behavior, with path coefficients of $\beta = 0.424$ and $\beta = 0.238$, respectively.

To examine the mediating roles of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment in the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior, bootstrapping was conducted with 5,000

resamples. Table 7 reports the unstandardized indirect effects, their standard errors, and bias-corrected 99% confidence intervals for each mediation path. This method allowed for the calculation of standard errors and confidence intervals, contributing to the assessment of the precision and stability of the model estimates.

Table 7. Indirect Effects and Significance of Mediating Variables (Bias-Corrected 99% Confidence Intervals)

Predictor Variable	Mediator Variable	Criterion Variable	Indirect Effect	Standard Error	99% CI Lower	99% CI Upper	P-value	Mediation Status
Servant Leadership	Affective Commitment	Innovative Behavior	0.269	0.060	0.155	0.391	0.000	Confirmed
Servant Leadership	Creative Self-Efficacy	Innovative Behavior	0.210	0.038	0.137	0.285	0.000	Confirmed

The results presented in Table 7 indicate that affective commitment significantly mediates the relationship between servant leadership and innovative behavior, with an indirect effect of 0.269. Similarly, creative self-efficacy also mediates this relationship significantly, with an indirect effect of 0.210. The 99% confidence intervals for both mediating paths do not

include zero, confirming statistical significance at the 0.01 level. These findings support the hypothesized indirect mechanisms through which servant leadership influences innovative behavior.

Table 8. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Research Hypothesis	t-value	P-value	Supported
H1. Servant leadership has a direct effect on innovative behavior.	2.599	$P \leq 0.01$	Yes
H2. Servant leadership has a direct effect on creative self-efficacy.	12.732	$P \leq 0.01$	Yes
H3. Servant leadership has a direct effect on affective commitment.	10.601	$P \leq 0.01$	Yes
H4. Creative self-efficacy has a direct effect on innovative behavior.	2.312	$P \leq 0.05$	Yes
H5. Affective commitment has a direct effect on innovative behavior.	5.788	$P \leq 0.01$	Yes
H6. Servant leadership has an indirect effect on innovative behavior through creative self-efficacy.	$LB \& UB \geq 0$	$P \leq 0.01$	Yes
H7. Servant leadership has an indirect effect on innovative behavior through affective commitment.	$LB \& UB \geq 0$	$P \leq 0.01$	Yes

As demonstrated in Table 8, all research hypotheses were supported. These findings are further examined and interpreted in detail in the discussion and conclusion sections of the study.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between servant leadership and innovative behavior among elementary school teachers, with a focus on the

mediating roles of creative self-efficacy and affective commitment. The findings indicate that the proposed conceptual model demonstrates a good fit with the data and theoretical foundations. The path structure confirms the appropriateness of modeling innovative behavior as an outcome of servant leadership mediated by affective commitment and creative self-efficacy. The hypotheses are discussed below in alignment with the existing literature to contextualize the findings within a broader theoretical framework.

The empirical evidence of this study confirms a statistically significant and positive association between servant leadership and innovative work behavior among educators. The path coefficient and its corresponding *t*-value substantiate **Hypothesis 1**, aligning with prior empirical findings (Jalalian, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023; Dadashpour et al., 2023; Saravi Moghadam & Ali Ahmadi, 2022; Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024). These converging results reinforce the conceptual stance that people-centered leadership exerts a pivotal influence on teacher innovation in institutional settings.

Servant leadership is undergirded by principles of emotional attunement, ethical stewardship, and developmental support (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). Rather than employing directive or transactional mechanisms, servant leaders cultivate psychologically safe and empowering climates where creativity and professional growth are nurtured (Dami, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2021). Turner (2022) and Cheng et al. (2025) suggest that this leadership style operates as a mechanism for removing organizational and psychological impediments to performance, thereby unlocking latent creative potential.

A defining feature of servant leadership is strategic delegation—leaders entrust staff with autonomy and decision-making authority, fostering a culture of experimentation and accountability (Schowalter & Volmer, 2025; Bufalino, 2025; Wu et al., 2024). This autonomy enables individuals to initiate novel instructional approaches and engage in reflective pedagogical inquiry. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings are consonant with self-determination theory, which posits that environments supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitate intrinsic motivation and innovation. The data thus validate the proposition that servant leadership serves not only as a managerial philosophy but also as a catalyst for institutional learning, creativity, and adaptive transformation.

The current findings yield important implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, the results highlight the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the leadership–innovation nexus. By fostering emotional safety and trust, servant leaders activate internal motivational resources conducive to creative action. Practically, school systems confronting rapid curricular shifts and pedagogical reform may benefit from adopting servant leadership models that prioritize relational engagement and transformative autonomy. Servant leadership appears uniquely suited to

mobilizing teacher agency and sustaining innovation in complex educational ecosystems.

The study also reveals a significant and positive relationship between servant leadership and creative self-efficacy, thereby affirming **Hypothesis 2**. These findings echo prior scholarship which identifies servant leadership as a predictor of self-belief, psychological resilience, and creative agency in professional settings (Nguyen et al., 2023; Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024; Ozkan & Ardic, 2022; Askaripour, MottaghiPisheh & Sheikhi, 2020; Sadeghi Dehcheshmeh et al., 2021; Ghanbari et al., 2022; Jalalian, 2022).

Servant leadership foregrounds attentiveness to individual needs, participatory problem-solving, and the cultivation of professional identity (Wu et al., 2024; Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). Leaders in this paradigm relinquish personal ambition in favor of empowering others through psychological support and inclusive engagement (Wu et al., 2025; Weihua, 2025; Makirimani & Naicker, 2024). As noted by Daft (2023), authentic delegation and responsive leadership behaviors enhance employee strength, efficacy, and adaptive capacity. Krumrei-Mancuso and Rowatt (2023) similarly underscore that servant leadership fosters the emergence of individual capabilities by creating space for exploratory and self-affirming experiences.

Creative self-efficacy—defined as one’s belief in their capacity to generate and apply innovative solutions (Wytsma, 2023)—is therefore amplified through the nurturing climate promoted by servant leaders. This corroborates Bandura’s social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of modeling, encouragement, and mastery experiences in shaping self-efficacy beliefs.

The strengthened sense of creative self-efficacy observed among educators operating under servant leadership frameworks holds conceptual and applied significance. Conceptually, the results reflect the psychological empowerment that emerges from relational leadership practices that affirm staff value, encourage initiative, and sustain developmental growth. Applied to educational contexts, increased creative self-efficacy among teachers can translate into enhanced problem-solving capacities, pedagogical innovation, and proactive classroom management—essential competencies in an era of educational reform and unpredictability. These findings thus position servant leadership as a viable strategy for both cultivating individual creative belief and reinforcing systemic resilience.

The results of the present study provide empirical validation for **Hypothesis 3**, confirming a statistically

significant and positive relationship between servant leadership and affective commitment. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that relational and people-focused leadership styles foster emotional attachment and organizational identification among employees (Afrianty et al., 2025; Jalalian, 2022; Sadeghi Dehcheshmeh et al., 2021; Ahmadi & Zardoshtian, 2019; Kustiawan et al., 2022; Hendriks et al., 2020).

Affective commitment—defined as the emotional bond and psychological alignment between individuals and their organizations—is primarily nurtured through experiences of trust, respect, and interpersonal inclusion. Servant leaders enhance this commitment by demonstrating empathy, facilitating shared decision-making, and prioritizing the holistic development of their team members (Makirimani & Naicker, 2024). When teachers perceive authentic investment in their personal and professional growth, their sense of organizational loyalty and moral responsibility intensifies (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2023).

Theoretically, this relationship resonates with social exchange theory, whereby reciprocal interactions based on care and support lead to stronger employee dedication and prosocial behavior. In educational contexts, such affective ties serve as precursors to behavioral outcomes such as sustained engagement, discretionary effort, and creative instructional practices (Weihua, 2025). Importantly, servant leadership extends its influence beyond performance metrics, fostering deeper psychological connectivity that reinforces teachers' long-term commitment to institutional success (Cheng et al., 2025).

Hypothesis 4 was also statistically supported, revealing a positive and significant association between creative self-efficacy and innovative work behavior. This result reinforces previous studies that underscore the foundational role of internal cognitive beliefs in enabling creative action (Jalalian, 2022; Abdi & Rostami, 2021; Karimi et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2025).

Creative self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to generate, apply, and adapt innovative solutions within professional settings (Wytsma, 2023). According to Abbott (2010), this construct encompasses two interrelated components—creative ideation and creative execution—both of which are essential for translating novel ideas into impactful outcomes. Teachers with elevated creative self-efficacy tend to approach instructional challenges with greater flexibility, resourcefulness, and resilience, often

succeeding in divergent thinking and adaptive pedagogical strategies (Kumar et al., 2022).

Notably, organizational climate and leadership style play a crucial role in shaping creative self-efficacy. Environments that emphasize autonomy, competence, and mutual respect—hallmarks of servant leadership—facilitate the development of positive self-perceptions regarding creative potential (Baharuddin et al., 2019; Barrow et al., 2019). As such, creative self-efficacy functions both as a direct antecedent to innovation and a mediating mechanism through which supportive leadership translates into meaningful behavioral outcomes.

The **hypothesis 5** was also affirmed, demonstrating a statistically significant and positive link between affective commitment and innovative behavior. This finding is congruent with previous research that highlights the motivational power of emotional engagement in promoting creativity and proactive performance (Botella-Crabbé et al., 2021; Dziuron & Halaszowicz, 2025; Kustiawan et al., 2022).

Affective commitment reflects a psychological bond rooted in value congruence, organizational identification, and emotional investment in institutional goals (Tang & Vandenberg, 2020). Teachers with strong affective commitment exhibit heightened levels of initiative, experimentation, and resilience in the face of pedagogical challenges. Their intrinsic motivation fosters a proactive disposition toward instructional improvement and curricular innovation (Dziuron & Halaszowicz, 2025).

Furthermore, this form of commitment has been shown to buffer against professional burnout, enhance well-being, and promote adaptive coping mechanisms (Murray & Holmes, 2021; Estigoy, Sulasula & Guodu, 2020). In this regard, affective commitment does not merely support compliance or retention—it propels educators beyond formal role expectations, enabling creative engagement and boundary-spanning behavior critical for educational transformation.

Bootstrapped path analysis provided robust empirical evidence supporting the mediating role of creative self-efficacy in the relationship between servant leadership and innovative behavior (**Hypothesis 6**). These findings affirm previous research indicating that internal cognitive constructs such as self-belief mediate the translation of leadership practices into behavioral outcomes (Dadashpour et al., 2023; Jalalian, 2022; Ahmadi & Zardoshtian, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2023; Ozkan & Ardic, 2022).

Creative self-efficacy refers to an individual's perceived capacity to engage in creative ideation, evaluation, and implementation within complex problem contexts (Wytmsa, 2023). Teachers with elevated creative self-efficacy not only generate novel instructional ideas but also demonstrate persistence, adaptability, and confidence in pursuing those ideas through application. Servant leaders play a critical role in cultivating such efficacy by offering autonomy-enhancing experiences, emotional encouragement, and competence-affirming feedback (Bufalino, 2025). Delegation and participative support enhance teachers' belief in their own creative capacities—an essential ingredient for innovation in dynamic educational environments.

Theoretically, the mediation effect aligns with the tenets of social cognitive theory and the broaden-and-build model of positive psychology, which emphasize the influence of supportive environments on self-perceptions and proactive engagement. Given the multifactorial nature of educational innovation—encompassing psychological readiness, organizational structures, and socio-cultural expectations—creative self-efficacy functions as an indispensable intermediary that connects enabling leadership with transformative teacher behavior (Abdi & Rostami, 2021; Baharuddin et al., 2019; Widmann & Mulder, 2018). These results suggest that the most effective route to organizational innovation may be indirect—anchored not just in leadership practices but in their power to shape foundational beliefs and self-concept among educators.

The statistical analysis also confirmed **Hypothesis 7**, illustrating that affective commitment serves as a significant mediating variable linking servant leadership to innovative work behavior. This finding is aligned with empirical studies that underscore emotional and psychological attachment as a conduit for translating relational leadership into creative engagement (Afrianty et al., 2025; Dadashpour et al., 2023; Ghanbari et al., 2022; Jalalian, 2022; Kustiawan et al., 2022).

Affective commitment encompasses the emotional investment, organizational identification, and internalized sense of belonging that educators develop in response to inclusive and affirming leadership practices. Servant leadership strengthens this commitment by embodying values of compassion, transparency, and purposeful collaboration—leading to enhanced motivation, participatory behavior, and sustained creative effort (Botella-Crabbé et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2025). Teachers operating within such climates exhibit a heightened sense of institutional loyalty, which in turn

manifests in discretionary behaviors, such as initiating reforms, developing new pedagogical techniques, and engaging in organizational problem-solving.

The mediating role of affective commitment further highlights the emotional dimension of innovation—a facet often overlooked in mechanistic models of organizational change. When leaders authentically connect with their staff, they stimulate a depth of commitment that transcends formal obligation, empowering educators to pursue innovation out of personal conviction and relational accountability. These findings not only expand the explanatory reach of leadership theory but also reinforce the centrality of emotional labor and psychological safety in achieving sustainable educational transformation.

Therefore, the conceptual framework tested in this study demonstrates robust empirical fit and theoretical integrity in explaining how servant leadership contributes to innovative behavior among educators. The dual-mediation model reveals that servant leadership significantly predicts both creative self-efficacy and affective commitment, which in turn collectively account for a substantial proportion of the variance in innovative behavior.

Notably, creative self-efficacy emerged as the stronger mediator, emphasizing the primacy of internal belief systems in enabling innovation. Affective commitment complemented this pathway by ensuring emotional investment and motivational continuity. Together, these mediators exemplify a dual-process model in which cognitive agency and emotional alignment jointly translate servant leadership into creative organizational action.

From a practical standpoint, these insights offer valuable guidance for educational policymakers and school leaders: fostering innovation requires more than structural incentives—it demands relational leadership capable of cultivating psychological safety and personal empowerment. Servant leadership, by emphasizing empathy, autonomy, and holistic development, provides a fertile platform for both belief formation and emotional engagement. When these psychological conditions converge, educators move beyond compliance into realms of visionary practice and transformative impact.

Limitations

Despite the theoretical contributions and statistical rigor of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and guide future research. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data restricts the ability to draw definitive causal inferences. While the structural model illustrates

directional pathways among variables, longitudinal or experimental designs are recommended in future studies to validate the temporal and causal relationships proposed.

Second, the use of convenience sampling, although statistically adequate for structural equation modeling, limits the generalizability of the results beyond the specific population studied. The sample may not fully represent the broader demographic and professional diversity of educators in other regions or educational systems. Employing probability-based sampling methods in future research would enhance external validity and reduce selection bias.

Third, all constructs were measured using self-report instruments administered at a single time point, which introduces the possibility of common method variance and social desirability bias. Given the subjective nature of variables such as leadership perception, creative self-efficacy, and innovative behavior, shared method effects may have inflated observed associations. Although validated scales and respondent anonymity were employed to mitigate these risks, procedural remedies—such as temporal separation of measures or the use of marker variables—were not implemented. Future studies should consider multi-source data collection and staggered measurement designs to improve construct validity and reduce method bias. Finally, cultural response tendencies may have influenced how participants interpreted and responded to survey items, particularly in relation to leadership and innovation constructs.

The sociocultural context of Iranian educators may shape perceptions and behaviors in ways that differ from other educational environments. Researchers are encouraged to adapt measurement tools to local cultural norms and to replicate the study across diverse settings to assess cross-cultural applicability.

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Implications and Recommendations

Drawing on the findings and acknowledging the methodological boundaries of the present study, a set of recommendations is proposed at both practical and research-oriented levels. On the practical front, educational policymakers and university administrators are encouraged to foster servant leadership practices among school leaders, while simultaneously investing in the development of teachers' creative self-efficacy and affective commitment. These efforts should move beyond general advocacy and be operationalized through structured professional development programs, targeted psychological support, and context-sensitive leadership training. Moreover, institutionalizing innovative behavior within educational systems requires more than aspirational language—it demands concrete mechanisms such as performance-based innovation indicators, pilot initiatives in selected schools, and the integration of creativity-focused modules into teacher evaluation frameworks.

At the research level, future studies should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to validate the causal pathways suggested by the current structural model. Investigating the multifaceted nature of teachers' innovative behavior through the lens of psychological, social, and organizational variables—while accounting for cultural context and leadership diversity—would yield a more nuanced and generalizable understanding of instructional innovation. Additionally, employing multi-source data collection and culturally adaptive instruments will help mitigate common method bias and enhance the robustness of future findings. Such inquiries are essential for building comprehensive, evidence-based models that inform both theory and practice in educational leadership and innovation.

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Servant Leadership, Innovative Work
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