

## **The Impact of Headmaster's Servant-Leadership Practices towards Teachers' Commitment in Betong, District of Sarawak**

**Linggoh Untan, Abd Latif bin Kasim, Ishak Sin, Arumugam Raman**  
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah Malaysia

### **\*Corresponding Author:**

Linggoh Untan

Email: linggohuntan@yahoo.com

---

**Abstract:** This study is aimed to investigate the effects of servant-leadership practices towards teachers' commitment to the school. The population comprised of teachers who serve in primary schools, Betong Division, Sarawak. The data obtained through survey method using a questionnaire comprising Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA), and TCM Employee Commitment Survey that was answered by a total of 310 teachers. The quantitative data obtained from questionnaires is analyzed using descriptive statistical method and inferential analysis such as *t* tests, ANOVA and regression. The findings show that the headmasters' servant-leadership has a positive and significant relationship of teacher commitment to the school. In addition, the headmasters' servant-leadership found to be predictor to the commitment of teachers to the school.

**Keywords:** Servant-leadership, Leadership, commitment, Headmaster, Teachers, Primary school

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Based on some research conducted on primary schools in Malaysia, it was found that the level of commitment of the teachers is only at a moderate level Nurharani Selamat et al. [1]; Fauziah Nordin et al.[2]; Mohammed Sani Ibrahim, et al. [3]; Ashraf Sharif et al. [4]; Jamalullail Abdul Wahab et al. [5]. Jamalullail Abdul Wahab et al. [6] was conducted a study towards primary school teachers and found their level of motivation is also at a moderate level. Another study conducted by Sii Ling et al. [7] of Secondary school teachers in Sarawak found the level of teacher commitment towards learning is low. This scenario is very worrying because it could jeopardize the Government's efforts to make this country as a centre of excellence in the Asian region. The decline in the level of commitment of the teachers feared effect school performance.

Many ways have been proposed to overcome this problem. Among the most important is to improve headmasters' leadership style. The leadership style practiced will affect the relationship between the teachers' teacher commitment and servant-leadership of the headmaster. According to Mareena Mohammad et al. [8] leadership style is the dominant factor that influences employee commitment to the organization. In addition Brashear, and Boles Bellenger [9] claimed a leader who managed to instill harmony relationship between the leader with his followers and help develop their career will be able to increase the commitment and loyalty to the organization.

Based on the literature review, the servant-leadership was introduced by Robert Greenleaf [10] is said to have an impression on teachers' commitment [11]. In Malaysia, the empirical study of servant-leadership is less conducted [12-14] and mostly not in the context of education, e.g. study Aznarahayu Ramli [12], Goh et al. [15] and Yong [13] involving other organizations.

Based on the above premises, research should be carried out to identify the relationship of both these elements, namely the practice servant-leadership and teachers commitment in primary schools. A detailed study should be carried out to identify whether the decline in the commitment and quality of teacher professionalism stems from the leadership style adopted or otherwise. This question should be studied to find out if the teachers are less trust in the leadership of headmasters or headmaster' leadership now a days fail to captivate the teachers so that they serve more committed to the school.

### **Literature review**

Several studies have been conducted involving servant-leadership practices, trust and commitment either abroad or in the country.

### **Servant-leadership**

Zhang *et al.* [30] found servant-leadership well accepted compared to autocratic leadership style in

---

Singapore. Servant-leadership becomes the primary choice because its leadership is not abusing power as a leader. This comparative study was carried out in the public sector involving the school leaders of some cluster school. In Indonesia, Sendjaya et al. [16] conducted a study and found that servant-leadership style contributed to trust of the leaders. In Malaysia, Ibrahim et al. (2014) found that servant leadership has positive influence toward changes in school management style.

### **Commitment**

A study conducted by Othman Md Johan et al. [18] towards 432 secondary school teachers in Johor Baharu found that principals' leadership behaviors affect job satisfaction and commitment of teachers of the school. Asri Marsidi et al. [19] found that the level of education has a positive relationship with employees' commitment towards their organizations.

### **The study of servant-Leadership and commitment towards Organizations**

Drury [20] conducted a study on the servant-leadership and commitment. The results of the study showed no significant relationship between servant-leadership with employees' commitment. Cerit Yusuf [11] also conducted a study to determine. The impact of servant leadership towards teachers' commitment to the school. The study was based on the Laub's servant-leadership model. OLA instrument was used to measure leadership styles based on six characteristics found on the servant-leadership model consisting of values people, develops people, provides leadership, builds community, displays authenticity and shares leadership. The samples were comprised of 563 teachers who teach at primary schools district of Duzce. The findings showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between servant-leadership styles and teachers' commitment towards school. Overall, the mean score for each dimension of principals' servant-leadership styles namely values people (3.57), develops people (3.53), builds community (3.53), displays authenticity (3.55), provides leadership (3.61) and shares leadership (3.57). The mean score for aspects of teacher commitment was 3.51. The study also found that servant-leadership act as predictor of teachers' commitment of the school. This means that servant-leadership style able to increase the teachers' commitment of school teachers.

Mahembe and Engelbrecht [21] conducted a study on the relationship between the servant-leadership, commitment, and the effectiveness of the teamwork. 202 secondary and primary school teachers selected from 32 schools in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. In the study they use survey method to distribute questionnaires 'Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ)' [22] to measure the servant-leadership. Five servant-leadership factors containing

23 item has been tested and the factors comprising Altruistic calling, wisdom, persuasive mapping, organizational stewardship. Meanwhile, affective commitment was measured using the works team Team Commitment Subscale (TCS) which was built by Bennet and Durkin [31] while the team's effectiveness in turn is measured using the Team in best Questionnaire (TEQ) by Larson and LaFasto [32]. The data collected is analyzed using Structural Equation Models (SEM). The findings show there is a positive relationship between servant-leadership with affective commitment teamwork ( $t = 3.75, p < 0.05$ ) and between servant-leadership with effectiveness of teamwork ( $t = 7.73, p < 0.05$ ). This means servant-leadership able to enhance affective commitment as well as effective teachers' teamwork.

Ebrahim et al. [23] carried out a study of servant-leadership style and commitment to the organization. This study involved 205 teachers of physical education in Bushehr province, Iran. They used survey comprising Gholipour and Hazrati Questionnaire which contained 28 questions based on the four factors of the servant-leadership style of including humble service, and simplicity, of reliable and benevolence. To measure the commitment of teachers, three components of Allen and Meyer [24] which contained 24 items consisted of a continual commitment; the commitment of the normative and affective commitment has been used. The data collected has been analyzed using descriptive statistics and reference statistics, SPSS version 18. This study shows there is a positive and significant relationship between servant-leadership style with a commitment of teachers of physical education. Components of servant-leadership style such as trustworthiness, benevolence and humanity plays an important role in determining the commitment to the organization. Based on the findings, servant leadership found to be a predictor of teachers' commitment and is very effective in enhancing their commitment level to the organization. The study of the Ding Donghong, Yi Lu, Haiyan Song and Qing Lu [25] on M.B.A. students at a University in China also shows servant-leadership has a positive relationship with the loyalty of the workers.

In Malaysia a study was conducted by Goh and Low [15] on employees of an organization. They found there is a strong relationship between servant-leadership practices with commitment. The workers have a higher trust on their leaders and have a higher level of commitment to the organization when they observe their leaders adopt a servant-leadership style in the management.

In addition to the above studies, Madavana [26] also conducted a study on 432 teachers in India to identify the relationship between servant leadership and transformational leadership, organizational citizenship

behavior and trust, job satisfaction and organizational commitment as a mediator. The results showed servant leadership and transformational leadership has a poor relationship with organizational commitment.

The findings of the above studies imply that the servant leadership style of the headmaster or principal has the same impact to the teachers' commitment. Overall, previous studies reported that there were no significant differences between servant leadership style of the headmaster or principal is not related with any significant commitment. The questionnaire with teachers' commitment to the organization.

## METHODOLOGY

This research used survey method by using a questionnaire to obtain data from respondents. The population of the study was comprised of teachers who serve in primary school in Betong Division, Sarawak. A total of 310 teachers were selected as samples through cluster sampling (sampling clusters). Determination of the number of sample size is based on formula of Krejcie and Morgan [27]. The instrument used is divided into four parts, namely, part A contains the respondent's demographic information such as gender, age, educational status, experience and tenure at the present school.

In Part B Organizational Leadership Assessment instrument (OLA) Laub [28] was used. The instrument used to measure servant-leadership practice based on the perceptions of teachers contains 59 items. Part C is an instrument of TCM Employee Commitment Survey [24]. The instrument contains 18 items used to measure the commitment of teachers towards school. These two instruments have been translated from the original version to Malay Language via back translation for quality and accuracy and adapted according to the context of the purposes of the review.

The pilot study was carried out to determine the validity and reliability of research instruments. This study involves 30 teachers who serve in 5 primary

schools in Saratok District. The results showed that the OLA instrument has alpha's value of .98 and TCM Employee Commitment Survey. 87. Therefore both of these instruments suitable for use in real study.

## RESULTS

The respondents of this study consist of 310 teachers who serve in 93 primary schools in Betong Division, Sarawak.

A total of 165 (53.2%) respondents of this study are male whereas 145 (46.8%) respondents are female teachers. This means that more male teachers involved in this study compared to female teachers.

A total of 205 people (66.1%) are graduate teachers and the remaining 105 respondents (33.9%) are non-graduate teachers. The number of graduate teachers doubled compared to non-graduate teachers. This situation occurs due to Malaysia Education Policy which is targeting at least 50% the number of teachers who teach at primary schools must be a graduate by the year 2020.

There are 81 respondents (26.1%) involved in this study are teachers aged below 30 years, 107 people (34.5%) aged 31 to 40 years old, 86 people (27.7%) between the ages of 41 years to 50 years and a total of 36 people (11.6%) aged 51 years and above. Majority of the teachers are from the age group between 31 years to 40 in the study. While respondents aged over 50 years only 36 and it is the smallest group compared to other age groups.

### Research question 1

What is the servant-leadership practice level adopted by the headmasters of primary school in Betong Division, Sarawak?

To determine the level of headmasters' servant-leadership practices and teacher commitment, following score range in Table 1 used as guide.

**Table-1: Range Headmaster servant-leadership and commitment Teachers**

score	level
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Moderate Low
3.01 – 4.00	Moderate High
4.01 – 5.00	High

Source : Numally et al. (1994)

To answer this question, researchers used descriptive statistics to describe the mean for the Headmasters' servant leadership practice level and the dimensions based on teachers observations. The overall mean values of the variables are as shown in Table 2 below. The mean score for servant leadership style of the headmaster is 4:37. While the mean scores for each

dimension in comparison, has a building community dimension build the highest mean score (4.44) and also provide leadership dimension mean score is lower (3.91) compared to other dimensions. This shows the headmaster practice servant-leadership style with high emphasizes on aspects of building community in the practice of his leadership.

**Table-2: Mean and Standard Deviation headmasters' servant leadership Practice**

Headmasters' servant leadership Practice	Mean	SD
Values people	4.36	.41
Develops people	4.32	.40
shares Leadership	4.37	.46
Provides leadership	3.91	.35
Displays authenticity	4.32	.39
Builds community	4.44	.40

**Research question 2**

What is the commitment level of Betong Division Primary school teachers towards school?

Based on the analysis carried out in Table 3 below, the results showed an overall mean score for the commitment variable is 3.6. While the ratio of the

dimensions, the dimensions of normative commitment has the highest mean score of 3.65, followed by continuance commitment dimensions (3.61) and the last one is the affective commitment (3.54). Under such circumstances, it can be concluded overall Betong primary school teachers has a moderately high level of commitment to the school.

**Table-3: Mean and standard deviation of teachers' Commitment Level**

Commitment	Mean	SD
Affective	3.54	.53
Continuance	3.61	.59
Normative	3.65	.49

**Testing hypotheses**

To examine the relationship between the practices of servant leadership with the c teachers commitment towards schools; researcher used Pearson

Correlation test was used to determine the linear relationship between the variables. The correlation value is interpreted based on Table 4 below.

**Table-4: Interpretation of correlation in this study**

Correlation value	Strength of Relationship
0.90 – 1.00	Very strong
0.70 – 0.90	Strong
0.50 – 0.70	Moderate Strong
0.30 – 0.50	Weak
0.01 – 0.30	Very weak
0	No relationship

Source : Hinkle, Wiersma dan Jurs (1988)

*H<sub>01</sub>: There was no significant correlation between the headmaster's practice of servant leadership and teaches' commitment*

From Table 5 reveals headmaster's servant leadership practice has a very weak positive relationship with teachers' commitment to school ( $r = .21, p < 0.01$ ).

Based on these results, the hypothesis is rejected. Given the positive relationship between the two variables involved showed headmasters servant-leadership practice affects teachers' commitment to school even at the minimum level.

**Table-5: Pearson Correlation between Headmasters servant-Leadership practice and Teachers commitment towards school**

Variable	Teachers commitment( <i>r</i> )	Sig.
Servant-leadership	.21	.00

\*\* Sig at 0.01

Correlation test between all dimensions i.e. servant-leadership dimension of values people, develops people, shares leadership, provides leadership, displays authenticity and develops community with teacher commitment to the school. Analysis results are as in table 6 below.

Based on the analysis of correlation on the table, the relationship between teachers' commitment and the servant leadership's dimension of the headmasters is between from  $r = .13$  to  $.24$ . is not related significantly to commitment. As a whole all servant-leadership dimensions have very weak relationships with teachers' commitment to the

school. The dimensions of the displays authenticity is the best of  $r = .24$  compared to the dimensions of values people  $= .22$ , builds community ( $r = .20$ ); dimensions of provide leadership( $r = .19$ ); dimension of develops people ( $r = .17$  and shares leadership dimensions ( $r = .14$ ).

The study also shows the six dimensions of servant-leadership has a significant relationship with

normative and continuance commitment except the affective commitment. In addition, all of the dimensions of servant-leadership have a very weak correlation with the affective dimension. Whereas for the continuance and the normative dimension also has only a weak positive relationship with all the dimensions of servant-leadership.

**Table-6: Pearson correlation Analysis of servant-leadership dimensions**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Commitment						
Values people	<b>.224**</b>					
Develops people	<b>.176**</b>	<b>.816**</b>				
shares Leadership	<b>.137**</b>	<b>.713**</b>	<b>.768**</b>			
Provides leadership	<b>.194**</b>	<b>.821**</b>	<b>.842**</b>	<b>.739**</b>		
Displays authenticity	<b>.237**</b>	<b>.871**</b>	<b>.867**</b>	<b>.766**</b>	<b>.877**</b>	
buildscommunity	<b>.201**</b>	<b>.839**</b>	<b>.760**</b>	<b>.690**</b>	<b>.796**</b>	<b>.837**</b>

\* $p = .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$

*Ho2: Headmaster's servant-leadership is not a predictor of teacher commitment towards school*

SPSS data analysis results in Figure 7 below shows that predictor variable i.e. headmasters servant-leadership ( $R = .213$ ,  $t = 8.57$ ,  $p < 0.5$ ) significant factor towards teachers commitment in schools. Therefore,

null hypothesis was rejected and reported that the predictor variable accounted for 4.5 percent ( $r = .21$ ) change of variance in the level of commitment of the teachers of the school [ $F(1, 296) = 14.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Based on the findings researchers conclude that headmaster's servant-leadership effects the teachers commitment towards school.

**Table-7: Regression analysis servant-leadership as predictor towards teachers commitment**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE	R <sup>2</sup> change	F	P
1	.213 <sup>a</sup>	.045	.042	.43351	.045	14.074	.00

\* $p = .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$

## DISCUSSION

As a conclusion, the study has found that the headmasters of Betong Division Primary schools, Sarawak practicing high servant-leadership styles based on the teachers perception involved in this study. This finding supports the findings of Ibrahim et al. [17]. In addition, the level of teachers commitment involved in the study was found to be at the level of medium high. The findings are consistent with the findings Arumugam et al. [29].

The results of this study also found headmasters servant-leadership practices affecting teachers' commitment to the school even though the relationship is weak. These results contradict with the findings of Drury [20] indicating the servant-leadership is not related with any significant commitment. In addition, this study also showed that the servant-leadership become predictor to teachers' commitment.

Based on some of the findings above, it is recommended school leaders practice servant-

leadership style to improve teachers' commitment towards the school. The school leaders should practice servant leadership which always emphasized on human capital development to replace the traditional leadership practices of bureaucracies that has patterned not suitable and relevant to the challenges and current developments. Since there were only few studies had been carried out involving the practice of servant leadership in educational contexts in Malaysia, therefore it is recommended more studies involving other variables can be tested to add empirical evidence on this field.

## CONCLUSION

Headmasters' servant-leadership practices have been found to successfully to improve the commitment of teachers to the school. This study also showed no significant difference in the level of commitment of teachers to school teachers based on demographic factors such as level of education, experience, and length of service with the exception of age. Since there are no such studies ever conducted involving primary schools in the State, the findings of this study will

---

contribute to the understanding of servant leadership and increase the level of commitment among teachers.

## REFERENCE

1. Selamat N, Nordin N, Adnan AA; Rekindle Teacher's Organizational Commitment: The Effect of Transformational Leadership Behavior. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2013; 90: 566-574.
2. Noordin F, Rashid RM, Ghani R, Aripin R, Darus Z; Teacher professionalisation and organisational commitment: Evidence from Malaysia. *International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER)*, 2010; 9(2).
3. Ibrahim MS, Ghavifekr S, Ling S, Siraj S, Azeez MIK; Can transformational leadership influence on teachers' commitment towards organization, teaching profession, and students learning? A quantitative analysis. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 2014; 15(2): 177-190.
4. Sabariah S; Hubungan pengajaran guru besar dengan komitmen kerja guru di sekolah rendah luar Bandar. *International Journal of Learning*, 2010.
5. Wahab JA, Fuad CFM, Ismail H, Majid S; Headmasters' Transformational Leadership and Their Relationship with Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Teachers' Commitments. *International Education Studies*, 2014; 7(13):40.
6. Wahab JA, Hamid AHA, Zainal S, Rafik MFM; The Relationship between Headteachers' Distributed Leadership Practices and Teachers' Motivation in National Primary Schools. *Asian Social Science*, 2013; 9(16):161.
7. Ling SLM, Ibrahim MS; Transformational Leadership and Teacher Commitment in Secondary Schools of Sarawak. *International Journal of Independent Research and Studies*, 2013; 2(2): 51-65.
8. Mohamad M, Ismail Nzaia, Asmuni A; Tinjauan Hubungan Gaya Kepimpinan Dengan Komitmen Organisasi. *Eksplanasi*, 2012; 6(1).
9. Brashear TG, Bellenger DN, Boles JS, Barksdale Jr. HC; An exploratory study of the relative effectiveness of different types of sales force mentors. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 2006; 26(1): 7-18.
10. Greenleaf, Robert K; *Servant leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness/essays by Robert, K Greenleaf; edited by Larry C. Spears; foreword by Stephen R. Covey; afterword by Peter M. Senge – 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed.* Robert K. Greenleaf Center, Inc, 2002.
11. Cerit Y; The effects of servant leadership on teachers'organizational commitment in primary schools in Turkey. *International Journal of Leadership inEducation*, 2010; 13(3): 301-317.
12. Rimes WD; The relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment (Doctoral dissertation, Temple University), 2011.
13. Yong B; Relationship between emotional intelligence, motivation, integrity, spirituality, mentoring and servant leadership practices. *Arts and Social Sciences Journal*, 2013.
14. Al Haj BK, Sarimin R, Nasir NHM, Yusof MZ; Servant Leadership Style: A Case Study of Government Agency in Malaysia. In *UMT 11th International Annual Symposium on Sustainability Science and Management 09th–11th July, 2012*.
15. Goh KS, Low JZB; The influence of servant leadership toward organizational commitment: The mediating role of trust in leaders. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 2014; 9(1): 17-25.
16. Sendjaya S; Servant leadership as antecedent of trust in organizations. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 2010; 31(7): 613-663.
17. Izani I, Yahya D; Servant leadership and effective changes management in schools. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2014; 4(1): 1-9.
18. Othman MJ, Ishak MS; Impak tingkah laku kepimpinan transaksi dan transformasi pengetua terhadap kepuasan kerja dan komitmen guru terhadap sekolah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*, 2008; 13: 31-43.
19. Marsidi A, Hamrila AL; Faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi komitmen pekerja di organisasi awam. *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, 2007;10: 56-64.
20. Drury SL; Servant leadership and organizational commitment: Empirical findings and workplace implications. *Servant Leadership Research Roundtable Proceedings*, Regent University, School of Leadership Studies, Virginia Beach, VA, 2-3 August, 2004; 1-17.
21. Mahambe B, Engelbrecht SA; The relationship between servant leadership, affective team commitment and team effectiveness. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2013; 11(1): 1-10.
22. Barbuto JE, Wheeler JE; Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. *Group & Organization Management*, 2006;13(3): 300-326.
23. Ebrahim M, Hoshyar M, Parivash N; The relationships between servant leadership style and organizational commitment. *Archives of Applied Research*, 2013; 5(1): 312-317.

- 
24. Meyer JP, Allen NJ; TCM Employee Commitment Survey Academic Users Guide, 2004.
  25. Donghong D, Haiyan L, Song Y, Qing L; Relationship of servant leadership and employee loyalty: The mediating role of employee satisfaction. *iBusiness*, 2012; 4 208-215.
  26. Madavana J; Servant and transformational leadership: A study on teachers in Montfort Schools in India. *Au Journal of Management*, 2012.
  27. Krejcie R, Morgan D; Determine sampling size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological measurement*, 1970; 30(3): 607-610.
  28. Laub AJ; Assessing the servant organization: Development of the organizational leadership assessment (OLA) instrument. Dissertation of Doctor Education. Florida Atlantic University, 1999.
  29. Arumugam R, Chang CL, Rozalina K; Relationship between school climate and teachers' commitment in an excellent school of Kubang Pasu District, Kedah, Malaysia. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*6(3), MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy, 2014.
  30. Zhang Y, Lin TB, Fong Foo S; Servant leadership: a preferred style of school leadership in Singapore. *Chinese Management Studies*, 2012; 6(2):369-383.
  31. Bennet H, Durkin M; The effects of organisational change on employee psychological attachment. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 2000; 15(2):126–148.
  32. Larson CE, LaFasto FMJ; The team effectiveness questionnaire. In P.G. Northouse (Ed.), *Leadership: Theory and practice*. (2nd edn.). (p. 184). Thousand Oaks: SAGE. 2001.