

**Influence of Perceived Servant Leadership on Organizational Commitment among Chinese Childcare Teachers: The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital**Tao Yu¹, Peng-Fei Chen^{2*}, Ke Zhang³**ARTICLE INFO****ABSTRACT****Article History:**

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KeywordsPerceived Servant Leadership;
Organizational Commitment; Psychological
Capital; Childcare Teachers**Purpose:** This study explores the influence of perceived servant leadership on organizational commitment among childcare teachers in China and examines the mediating effect of psychological capital.**Methodology:** A quantitative research design was employed, with structured questionnaires administered to 956 childcare teachers from 16 provinces in China. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine relationships among servant leadership, psychological capital, and organizational commitment. **Findings:** Perceived servant leadership significantly predicted organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.41, p < .001$) and psychological capital ($\beta = 0.48, p < .001$). Psychological capital partially mediated the relationship between perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment, with the indirect effectaccounting for 24.10% of the total effect (95% CI [0.07, 0.13]). Public institution teachers ($M = 3.92, SD = 0.67$) demonstrated higher organizational commitment than those in private institutions ($M = 3.44, SD = 0.81$); higher-salaried teachers ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.74$) exhibited significantly higher organizational commitment than lower-salaried counterparts ($M = 3.32, SD = 0.86, F = 21.43, p < .001$). **Implications for Research and Practice:** Perceived servant leadership not only directly enhances childcare teachers' organizational commitment but also indirectly influences it by improving their psychological capital. Childcare institutions should integrate servant leadership training and psychological capital interventions into their management systems. Policy makers should strengthen leadership and psychological health support requirements in the evaluation standards for childcare institutions.

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Introduction

The implementation of China's "Healthy China 2030" strategy, coupled with the growing challenges of population aging, has positioned early childhood care services for

¹ Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok 10210, ThailandORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0615-8330>, Email: muaisenlin@gmail.com² Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok 10210, ThailandORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6449-9865>, Email: blissfulalice@gmail.com³ Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok 10210, ThailandORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2080-7660>, Email: zhangkedpu@gmail.com*Correspondence: blissfulalice@gmail.com

children under three years of age as a cornerstone of the national population development strategy. These services fulfill multiple critical functions: promoting optimal child development, alleviating family caregiving burdens, and enhancing overall population quality. Following the 2019 publication of the "Guiding Opinions of the State Council on Promoting the Development of Care Services for Infants and Young Children Under 3 Years Old," China's early childhood care system has entered a phase of accelerated expansion. According to the [National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China \(2024\)](#), by the end of 2023, the nationwide ratio of childcare positions per thousand population reached 3.38, with 36,000 registered childcare institutions, including 20,900 affiliated with kindergartens. The sector employed 1.124 million individuals, with childcare teachers comprising 566,000 of this work force, demonstrating substantial sectoral growth.

Despite this quantitative expansion, the early childhood care sector faces significant qualitative challenges. Current research reveals persistent issues within the industry, including elevated teacher turnover rates, diminished organizational loyalty, and weak professional identity ([Li et al., 2025](#); [Yang et al., 2022](#)). Research from the United States indicates that 25-40% of childcare teachers leave their positions annually--a turnover rate exceedingly twice that of K-12 teachers ([Bryant et al., 2023](#); [Caven et al., 2021](#); [Doromal et al., 2022](#)). This instability not only disrupts the continuity of care relationships but also significantly impairs infant attachment development ([Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, high turnover compels administrators and remaining staff to redirect their focus from quality enhancement to recruitment and vacancy management ([Doromal et al., 2022](#); [Totenhagen et al., 2016](#)). Consequently, stabilizing the childcare teaching workforce, strengthening professional identity, and fostering organizational loyalty have emerged as critical imperatives for promoting high-quality sector development.

Research demonstrates that organizational commitment serves as a significant predictor of employee turnover intention and work engagement ([Alifuddin & Widodo, 2021](#)). Therefore, enhancing teachers' organizational commitment represents an effective strategy for workforce stabilization. Within organizational management frameworks, leadership style is recognized as a pivotal factor influencing employee organizational commitment. Servant leadership, as an emerging leadership paradigm, emphasizes leaders' service orientation toward subordinates, prioritizing their development and well-being ([Greenleaf, 1977](#)). Existing literature indicates that servant leadership positively influences employee work attitudes and behaviors ([Liden et al., 2008](#)). However, contemporary research has predominantly focused on corporate environments and preschool education settings, often overlooking childcare institutions as "small but specialized" organizations that encounter unique operational challenges. Childcare teachers differ from traditional preschool staff in that they assume dual caregiving and educational responsibilities, bear heightened safety obligations for infants, and frequently experience limited social recognition and professional development opportunities. These distinctive characteristics may influence the mechanisms through which leadership behaviors impact organizational commitment.

The Affective Events Theory posits that leadership behaviors, functioning as significant contextual emotional events, influence employees' psychological states and emotional responses, subsequently affecting their attitudes and behaviors ([Weiss & Cropanzano,](#)

1996). Psychological capital, conceptualized as an individual's positive psychological state encompassing self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007), may serve as a crucial mediating mechanism between leadership behavior and employee attitudes. Within early childhood care contexts, servant leadership practices may enhance teachers' organizational belonging and loyalty by fostering their psychological capital.

Given the backdrop of rapid national expansion in early childhood care services and concurrent workforce instability, this study examines Chinese childcare teachers as the primary research population. Employing questionnaire methodology, the study explores the influence of perceived servant leadership on organizational commitment and the mediating role of psychological capital. This research holds substantial theoretical and practical significance for the field. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) investigate the direct impact of perceived servant leadership on organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers; (2) examine the direct impact of perceived servant leadership on psychological capital among Chinese childcare teachers; (3) analyze the direct impact of psychological capital on organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers; and (4) explore the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a critical lens for understanding interactions between employees and organizations, suggesting that workplace relationships are based on reciprocal exchanges of resources (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Within this framework, leaders and employees engage in mutual transactions: leaders provide career advancement, financial incentives, and recognition, while employees reciprocate with diligence, loyalty, and organizational citizenship. This reciprocity fosters a sense of obligation, motivating employees to repay organizations with sustained commitment when provided with socioemotional or material support (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Servant leadership, which emphasizes prioritizing the welfare and development of subordinates, aligns with the principles of SET. By investing in relational equity (such as mentoring or empowerment), servant leaders nurture subordinates' willingness to reciprocate with increased engagement and long-term loyalty (Liden et al., 2008). This study utilizes SET to clarify how servant leadership behaviors enhance teachers' organizational commitment.

The Affective Events Theory (AET), introduced by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), outlines how workplace environments influence employee attitudes via emotional experiences. AET proposes two pathways: (1) a cognitive route, where employees assess job characteristics in relation to their personal values, and (2) an affective route, where situational triggers (such as leadership styles) elicit emotional responses that affect behaviors (Weiss & Beal, 2005). In childcare settings, servant leadership, characterized by empathy, support, and ethical stewardship, acts as a positive affective event. This form of leadership promotes psychological safety and trust, which in turn, enhances employees' emotional resilience and job satisfaction (Neubert et al., 2008). These emotional states

mediate the translation of leadership practices into organizational commitment (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). By incorporating AET, this study investigates how psychological capital connects perceived servant leadership with commitment, shedding light on the 'black box' of leadership's emotional mechanisms.

Perceived Servant Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Servant leadership theory was proposed by Greenleaf (1977), emphasizing that leaders place subordinates' needs and development first, building trust relationships through service behaviors to achieve organizational goals. Ehrhart (2004) defined servant leadership as a leadership style focused on others' needs and interests, adhering to "service first," reflecting employees' emotional attachment and loyalty to the organization, including affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In the Chinese cultural context, servant leadership highly aligns with traditional "people-oriented thinking" and "serve the people" concepts (Liu et al., 2018).

Organizational commitment is an attitudinal variable representing the psychological bond connecting employees with the organization, including affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees with higher organizational commitment possess stronger beliefs in accepting organizational goals and values, willingness to exert maximum effort for organizational interests, and strong desire to remain organizational members. Accordingly, teacher organizational commitment is teachers' psychological set reflecting identification and acceptance of school values, belief in school goals, dedication to school development, and desire to continue working at the school. Teacher organizational commitment is an important indicator of schools' internal attractiveness, concerning the stability of teaching staff, achievement of organizational goals, and improvement of educational quality. While organizational commitment reflects the psychological connection between teachers and school organizations, principals' leadership approaches play an irreplaceable role in establishing this connection (Zhang & Mao, 2022). Research has found that when principals exhibit transformational leadership characteristics, teachers' organizational commitment increases (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

According to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 2017), servant leadership can enhance employees' organizational commitment by establishing high-quality leader-member exchange relationships. Recent empirical studies have consistently demonstrated servant leadership's positive influence on organizational commitment across various contexts. Erdurmazli (2019) found that servant leadership's characteristics of humility, selflessness, care, and support help establish and strengthen emotional connections between employees and leaders, thereby enhancing employees' organizational commitment. Liden et al. (2008) empirically demonstrated that servant leadership directly positively influences organizational commitment. Carter and Baghurst (2013) empirically surveyed 100 employees at a service-oriented restaurant, finding that servant leadership positively affects employee engagement, loyalty, organizational commitment, and satisfaction. In the Chinese context, Wang et al. (2023) also verified this relationship in research with kindergarten teachers. Based on this, the current study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: *Perceived servant leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers.*

Mediation of Psychological Capital

Psychological capital refers to a positive psychological state individuals exhibit during growth and development, including self-confidence (self-efficacy), hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). Psychological capital serves as a cognitive resource (Fredrickson, 2001), psychological resource (Hobfoll, 2011), and key psychological state, functioning as a variable for evaluating employees' psychological capabilities. It can be cultivated and shaped through organizational management mechanisms and leadership approaches, and can be applied in work to transform into positive attitudes and behaviors needed by organizations or managers. Therefore, psychological capital may have mediating effects between theoretical relationships (Luthans et al., 2007). According to Fredrickson (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, positive leadership behaviors can promote employees' accumulation and development of psychological resources. Research indicates that servant leadership can enhance employees' psychological capital through support and empowerment (Chughtai, 2021). Empirical research shows that servant leadership has a significant positive correlation with employees' positive psychological capital (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) and organizational commitment (van Dierendonck, 2010).

Additionally, employees with higher psychological capital levels have stronger organizational identification and belonging, exhibiting higher organizational commitment (Avey et al., 2011). Empirical evidence shows a significant positive association between psychological capital and organizational commitment, with activities enhancing psychological capital promoting organizational commitment (Sharifi & Shahtalebi, 2015). Idris and Manganaro (2017) investigated the relationship between psychological capital and organizational commitment among Saudi petroleum and petrochemical industry managers, finding that psychological capital enhances organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job satisfaction. Recent empirical work by Owais et al. (2023) and Geremias et al. (2024) also supports the role of psychological capital as a predictor of organizational commitment. Recent empirical studies have provided evidence for psychological capital's mediating role. Clarence et al. (2020) found that servant leadership influenced teachers' affective commitment through psychological capital's mediating effect. Zhou et al. (2024) demonstrated that psychological capital mediated the relationship between servant leadership and newcomer commitment in hospitality settings.

Based on Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), servant leadership as a positive work environment characteristic may influence teachers' organizational commitment (attitudinal outcome) by affecting their psychological capital (emotional response). Therefore, the current study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: *Perceived servant leadership has a significant positive effect on psychological capital among Chinese childcare teachers.*

H3: *Psychological capital has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers.*

H4: Psychological capital mediates the relationship between perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationships among perceived servant leadership, psychological capital, and organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers. This design was chosen to enable statistical testing of the hypothesized relationships and mediation effects, while providing generalizable findings across a large sample.

Participants and Sampling

This study targeted frontline teachers in Chinese childcare institutions based on theoretical and practical considerations. Childcare teachers represent the primary recipients of leadership behaviors and implementers of organizational policies, making them appropriate respondents for assessing perceived servant leadership and organizational commitment (Liden et al., 2008). Given the unique characteristics of childcare work (intensive emotional labor, high infant safety responsibility and limited career advancement), childcare teachers constitute a distinct occupational group whose experiences may differ from traditional educational settings (Moon et al., 2023).

This study employed a multi-stage sampling approach combining convenience and purposive sampling to balance methodological rigor with practical feasibility. The sampling design included: (1) Geographic diversity: 16 provinces representing different economic development levels and regions to ensure external validity; (2) Institutional heterogeneity: both public and private institutions of varying scales to capture sector diversity; (3) Position representation: multiple professional categories (lead teachers, assistants, caregivers, healthcare staff) to ensure comprehensive organizational coverage; (4) Methodological triangulation: combined offline and online data collection to address potential sampling biases.

Data collection occurred from March to August 2024 using dual channels. Offline surveys ($n = 287$, 95.70% recovery rate) were conducted in registered childcare institutions in Zhengzhou, selected for institutional diversity. Online surveys utilized professional platforms Credamo and Wenjuanxing to test the hypotheses with strict screening criteria including institution type verification and informed consent. In total, 1,160 questionnaires were collected. Rigorous quality control procedures were implemented to ensure data integrity, including elimination of responses with: (1) abnormal completion times (below 50% or above three standard deviations of estimated completion time), (2) consistently identical responses exceeding 80% of items, and (3) missing key demographic or substantive information. These procedures resulted in 956 valid samples from 16 provinces (82.40% effective recovery rate), exceeding the minimum sample size requirements determined by power analysis ($n = 784$ for medium effect sizes with 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$).

The final sample demonstrated substantial heterogeneity across key demographic and organizational variables. Public childcare institution teachers accounted for 22.80%, while private institution teachers comprised 77.20%, reflecting the current composition of China's childcare sector. Regarding institutional scale, small-scale 0-3 years childcare centers predominated (62.34%), with integrated 0-6 years care-education centers accounting for 37.66%. Position distribution included lead teachers (40.48%), assistant teachers (25.73%), caregivers (20.29%), and other teaching staff (13.49%). Salary distribution showed: above 5,000 yuan (31.28%), below 3,000 yuan (25.21%), 3,000-4,000 yuan (22.91%), and 4,000-5,000 yuan (20.61%). This heterogeneity enhances the generalizability of findings across diverse organizational contexts within China's childcare sector.

Measurement scales

All measurement variables in this study adopted mature scales with high frequency use and reliable validity from domestic and international sources. Scale selection strictly followed a four-stage process: "literature support – translation-back-translation – cultural adaptation – pre-testing" to ensure measurement tools' applicability and cultural equivalence. All scales used a 5-point Likert scoring method, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores representing higher variable levels.

Servant Leadership: Ehrhart (2004) servant leadership scale was adopted for applicability in Chinese educational contexts. The scale contains 14 items. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.44$, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .98, TLI = .98). In this study, the scale's Cronbach's α coefficient was .98, composite reliability (CR) was .98, and average variance extracted (AVE) was .75, indicating good reliability and validity.

Organizational Commitment: Liu and Huang (2019)'s localized scale based on Meyer et al. (1993)'s revised organizational commitment scale was adopted, including affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment dimensions, with 18 items total. CFA results showed good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.03$, RMSEA = .01, CFI = .99). In this study, the scale's Cronbach's α coefficient was .96, CR was .96, and AVE was .56, indicating good reliability and validity.

Psychological Capital: Luthans et al. (2007)'s simplified psychological capital questionnaire (PCQ-12) was adopted, which has been widely used and validated in various cultural contexts. The scale consists of 12 items, measuring self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. CFA results indicated good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 4.61$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .98). In this study, the scale's Cronbach's α coefficient was .97, CR was .98, and AVE was .73, demonstrating strong reliability and validity.

Control Variables: Based on literature review and preliminary interviews, this study controlled for key variables potentially affecting childcare teachers' organizational commitment, including institution nature (public=1, private=2), institution scale type (0-3 years childcare center=1, 0-6 years integrated care-education center=2), teacher position (lead teacher=1, assistant teacher=2, caregiver=3, other=4), and monthly salary level (below 3,000 yuan=1, 3,000-4,000 yuan=2, 4,000-5,000 yuan=3, above 5,000 yuan=4).

Data Analysis

Data analysis used SPSS and AMOS software, assessing measurement model reliability and validity through Cronbach's α coefficients and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), including convergent validity (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and structural validity evaluated using multiple model fit indices ($\chi^2/df < 5$, RMSEA < 0.08 , CFI > 0.90). First, common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test; Second, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis provided preliminary understanding of relationships between research variables; Third, independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined differences in organizational commitment across different background variables; Finally, hierarchical regression analysis tested main effects and mediating effects, with Bootstrap method (5,000 resamples) verifying mediating effect stability and significance.

Results

Common Method Bias Test

Since this study's data were collected through self-report questionnaires from the same source, Harman's single-factor test was employed to assess potential common method bias. All measurement items underwent exploratory factor analysis, revealing four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, with the first common factor explaining 30.44% of total variance, below the common 40% threshold, preliminarily indicating no serious common method bias issues. Further confirmatory factor analysis comparing single-factor and multi-factor models showed that the three-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 1.51$, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .02) was significantly superior to the single-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 19.91$, CFI = .55, TLI = .53, RMSEA = .14) ($\Delta\chi^2 = 18,204.84$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .001$), further confirming that common method bias would not seriously affect study results.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Mean values (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlation matrix for childcare teachers' perceived servant leadership, psychological capital, and organizational commitment are shown in Table 1. Chinese childcare teachers' perceived servant leadership mean score was 3.65 ($SD = 1.01$), psychological capital mean score was 3.63 ($SD = 1.01$), and organizational commitment mean was 3.55 ($SD = 0.81$), all at moderate to high levels.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of Core Variables (n=956)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Organizational Commitment	3.550	0.807	1		
2. Perceived Servant Leadership	3.651	1.009	.481**	1	
3. Psychological Capital	3.634	1.014	.414**	.525**	1

Note: ** $p < .01$

Pearson correlation analysis showed that childcare teachers' perceived servant leadership was significantly positively correlated with psychological capital ($r = .53$, $p < .01$)

and organizational commitment ($r = .48, p < .01$), while psychological capital was significantly positively correlated with organizational commitment ($r = .41, p < .01$). These preliminary results support the study's hypotheses and meet basic conditions for mediating variable analysis.

Demographic Analysis

This study examined differences in organizational commitment across institution nature and scale type using independent samples t-tests, with results shown in Table 2. Significant differences in organizational commitment were found across different institution types ($t = 8.01, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.61$), representing a medium effect size, with public childcare institution teachers ($M = 3.92, SD = 0.67$) showing significantly higher organizational commitment than private institution teachers ($M = 3.44, SD = 0.81$). Significant differences in organizational commitment were also found across different institution scale types ($t = -7.40, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.49$), approaching medium effect size, with teachers in 0-6 years integrated care-education centers ($M = 3.79, SD = 0.77$) showing significantly higher organizational commitment than those in 0-3 years childcare centers ($M = 3.41, SD = 0.80$).

Table 2

Demographic Analysis in Organizational Commitment (n = 956)

Variable	Category	n	M	SD	t	Effect size
Institution nature	Public childcare institution (a)	218	3.92	0.67	8.01***	d = 0.61
	Private childcare institution (b)	738	3.44	0.81		
Institution scale	Small-scale childcare center (0-3 years) (a)	596	3.41	0.80	-7.40***	d = 0.49
	Integrated care-education center (0-6 years) (b)	360	3.79	0.77		

Note: nature: a= Public childcare institution, b= Private childcare institution; scale: a= Small-scale childcare center, b= Integrated care-education center; Effect sizes are Cohen's d (t-test). *** p < .001

This study examined differences in organizational commitment across position and monthly salary using one-way independent samples ANOVA, with results shown in Table 3. Significant differences in organizational commitment were found across different positions ($F = 26.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.08$). Scheffe post-hoc comparisons showed that lead teachers ($M = 3.71, SD = 0.74$) and assistant teachers ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.69$) had significantly higher organizational commitment than caregivers ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.80$) and other teaching staff ($M = 3.15, SD = 0.99$). Significant differences in organizational commitment were also found across different monthly salary levels ($F = 21.43, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.06$). Scheffe post-hoc comparisons showed that teachers with monthly salaries above 5,000 yuan had significantly higher organizational commitment ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.74$) than other salary groups, while the 4,000-5,000-yuan group ($M = 3.52, SD = 0.79$) had significantly higher organizational commitment than the 3,000-4,000-yuan group ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.86$) and below 3,000-yuan group ($M = 3.32, SD = 0.86$).

Table 3

Demographic Analysis in Organizational Commitment (n = 956)

Variable	Category	n	M	SD	F	Effect size
Teacher position	Lead teacher (a)	387	3.71	0.74	26.15***	$\eta^2 = 0.08$
	Assistant teacher (b)	246	3.69	0.69		
	Caregiver (c)	194	3.31	0.80		
	Other teacher (d)	129	3.15	0.99		
Monthly salary level (CNY)	Below 3,000 (a)	241	3.32	0.86	21.43***	$\eta^2 = 0.06$
	3,000-4,000 (b)	219	3.36	0.86		
	4,000-5,000 (c)	197	3.52	0.79		
	Above 5,000 (d)	299	3.75	0.74		

Note: Post-hoc comparisons showed that for the teacher position variable, a>c, d; b>c, d; for the monthly salary variable, d>a, b; c>a, b. Effect sizes are Cohen's η^2 (ANOVA). *** p < .001

Hypothesis Testing

To test research hypotheses, hierarchical regression analysis was employed, with results shown in Table 4. During analysis, control variables (institution nature, institution scale type, teacher position, monthly salary level) were entered first, followed by the independent variable (servant leadership) and mediating variable (psychological capital). Multicollinearity diagnostics showed all variables' variance inflation factors (VIF) were below 3, indicating no serious multicollinearity issues.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results (n=956)

Variable	Organizational Commitment		Psychological Capital	Organizational Commitment	
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Control Variables					
Institution Nature	-.185***	-.159***	-.058	-.028	-.154***
Institution scale type	.175***	.184***	.036	.047	.175***
Teacher position	-.197***	-.134***	-.160***	-.085**	-.118***
Monthly Salary level	.139***	.057*	.124***	-.028	.052
Independent Variable					
Servant Leadership		.422***		.498***	.333***
Mediating Variable					
Psychological Capital					.180***
ΔR^2	.170	.163	.062	.227	.023
R^2	.170	.333	.062	.289	.357
F	48.713***	95.070***	15.739	77.343***	87.661***

Note: *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

Hierarchical regression results showed: (1) control variables explained 17% of organizational commitment variance (Model 1); (2) after controlling relevant variables, servant leadership significantly positively predicted organizational commitment ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .16$) (Model 2), supporting hypothesis H1; (3) servant leadership significantly

positively predicted psychological capital ($\beta = .50, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .23$) (Model 4), supporting hypothesis H2; (4) when servant leadership and psychological capital were simultaneously entered into the equation (Model 5), psychological capital significantly positively predicted organizational commitment ($\beta = .18, p < .001$), supporting hypothesis H3; simultaneously, servant leadership's effect on organizational commitment remained significant ($\beta = .33, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .23$), but its regression coefficient decreased from .42 to .33, indicating psychological capital's partial mediating role between servant leadership and organizational commitment.

To further verify psychological capital's mediating effect magnitude, bias-corrected percentile Bootstrap method was employed for mediating effect testing (Fang et al., 2012). Bootstrap was set to 5,000 resamples with 95% confidence interval. Bootstrap test results in Table 5 show that servant leadership's indirect effect on teachers' organizational commitment through psychological capital was significant (Estimate = 0.10, 95% CI [0.07, 0.13]). Servant leadership's direct effect on teachers' organizational commitment was significant (Estimate = 0.099, 95% CI [0.26, 0.37]), and servant leadership's total effect on teachers' organizational commitment was significant (Estimate = 0.10, 95% CI [.36, .46]), with the indirect effect accounting for 24.10% of the total effect, further verifying psychological capital's partial mediating effect and supporting hypothesis 4.

Table 5

Bootstrap Mediating Effect Test (n=956)

Path	Estimate	95% CI	
		Lower	Upper
Total Effect	.409***	.362	.460
Direct Effect	.311***	.257	.369
Indirect Effect	.099***	.068	.133
Indirect Effect Proportion	.241***	.164	.329

Note: Bootstrap resampling = 5,000; CI = Confidence Interval, *** $p < .001$.

In summary, all hypotheses were supported, indicating that in the Chinese childcare institution context, perceived servant leadership not only directly enhances teachers' organizational commitment but also indirectly affects organizational commitment by improving teachers' psychological capital.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the influence mechanism of perceived servant leadership on organizational commitment among Chinese childcare teachers, further examining psychological capital's mediating role. The research focused on the current reality of China's childcare service system rapidly expanding under policy promotion but facing high teacher turnover and profession instability issues. Combining Affective Events Theory and Social Exchange Theory to construct an analytical framework, the study sought to reveal organizational loyalty enhancement pathways from leadership style and teachers' internal psychological resource interaction perspectives, providing theoretical support and practical implications for stabilizing childcare talent teams and improving service quality. Methodologically, this study employed questionnaire survey methods, collecting 956 valid samples through convenience sampling from Chinese mainland childcare teachers,

covering public and private institutions, different scales and positions, with samples showing good representativeness and heterogeneity. Measurement tools included Ehrhart (2004)'s servant leadership scale, localized organizational commitment scale, and (Luthans et al., 2007)'s psychological capital scale, all undergoing CFA verification showing excellent fit and reliability/composite reliability exceeding 0.95. Data analysis employed SPSS and AMOS for descriptive statistics, difference analysis, stepwise regression, and Bootstrap mediation testing, ensuring logical rigor and statistical robustness.

Demographic Differences

This study found that multiple organizational background factors significantly influence childcare teachers' organizational commitment. First, public childcare institution teachers ($M = 3.92$) showed significantly higher organizational commitment than private institution teachers ($M = 3.44$) ($p < .001$, $d = 0.61$). This may relate to stability, welfare guarantees, and professional prestige provided by Chinese public institutions. Public childcare institutions, typically government-sponsored, offer stable positions, high social recognition, and relatively clear career development prospects (Chen et al., 2023), naturally attracting higher organizational loyalty. Second, integrated care-education center teachers ($M = 3.79$) demonstrated significantly higher organizational commitment than single childcare center teachers ($M = 3.41$) ($p < .001$, $d = 0.49$). This may relate to organizational scale, resource allocation, and development space. Integrated care-education centers typically have larger scales, richer resources, more diverse teacher career development paths, and more comprehensive professional support systems, thus better meeting teachers' development needs and enhancing organizational commitment (Yang et al., 2022). Third, significant differences emerged across teaching positions ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$), with lead teachers ($M = 3.71$) and assistant teachers ($M = 3.69$) showing significantly higher organizational commitment than caregivers ($M = 3.31$) and other staff ($M = 3.15$). This may relate to professional identity and autonomy. Lead and assistant teachers carry more educational guidance responsibilities with stronger professional value sense, while caregivers focus on basic care work with relatively lower social recognition and career development space. Finally, higher-salaried teachers (monthly salary above 5,000yuan, $M = 3.75$) showed significantly higher organizational commitment than lower-salaried teachers (below 3,000yuan, $M = 3.32$) ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$), aligning with economic exchange perspectives: higher material rewards satisfy teachers' survival and development needs, enhancing retention intention and loyalty (Alifuddin & Widodo, 2021).

Influence of Perceived Servant Leadership on Organizational Commitment

Research results indicated that childcare teachers' perceived servant leadership significantly positively predicts their organizational commitment ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$), consistent with existing research findings (Liden et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2022). This result can be explained through social exchange theory: when childcare institution directors exhibit "teacher-first" servant leadership traits like empowerment support, emotional care, and growth promotion, teachers perceive high-quality social exchange relationships, generating obligation feelings and responding by enhancing organizational identification and commitment (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Notably, this study found servant leadership's influence coefficient on childcare teachers'

organizational commitment ($\beta = .41$) higher than previous preschool education research ($\beta = .25 - .36$) (Wang et al., 2023), possibly reflecting childcare teachers' special sensitivity to supportive leadership behaviors. Compared to traditional kindergarten teachers, childcare teachers face higher occupational pressure, lower social recognition, and greater infant safety responsibilities (Moon et al., 2023), thus particularly valuing directors' emotional support, professional guidance, and development opportunities. These supportive behaviors effectively alleviate childcare work's high-intensity pressure, enhancing organizational belonging and loyalty.

Influence of Perceived Servant Leadership on Psychological Capital

Servant leadership significantly positively predicted childcare teachers' psychological capital ($\beta = .48, p < .001$). This can be explained through Affective Events Theory (AET): servant leadership as a positive organizational contextual event provides respect, trust, and support, evoking teachers' positive emotional experiences and enhancing positive psychological resources like self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). For example, when directors recognize teacher achievements, attend to their needs, and provide professional guidance, they enhance teachers' confidence and sense of achievement; when directors empower and promote decision participation, they cultivate teachers' hope and optimistic expectations; when directors provide support and understanding during challenges, they help teachers build resilience and coping abilities (Chughtai, 2021; Sun et al., 2022).

Influence of Psychological Capital on Organizational Commitment

Psychological capital significantly positively predicted organizational commitment ($\beta = .18, p < .001$). This can be understood from Conservation of Resources (COR) theory perspective: psychological capital as important personal psychological resources helps childcare teachers more effectively address work challenges, reduce emotional exhaustion, enhance job satisfaction and wellbeing, thus strengthening emotional attachment and loyalty to organizations (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Specifically, teachers with high self-efficacy feel more confident completing childcare tasks, gaining sense of achievement; teachers with high hope levels set clear goals and plan implementation paths; optimistic teachers positively interpret infant behaviors and work environments; teachers with resilience recover from setbacks and persist in professional growth (Avey et al., 2011; Clarence et al., 2020). These positive psychological resources' accumulation ultimately transforms into organizational commitment and loyalty.

Mediating Role of Psychological Capital

This study found psychological capital partially mediates between servant leadership and organizational commitment, with indirect effects accounting for 24.10% of total effects. This result aligns with positive organizational behavior core propositions (Luthans et al., 2007; Newman et al., 2014) and provides new perspectives for understanding childcare teachers' organizational commitment formation mechanisms. This finding supports Affective Events Theory, suggesting work environment characteristics (servant leadership) influence individual affective responses (psychological capital), subsequently affecting

work attitudes (organizational commitment). Servant leadership's support and empowerment may enhance teachers' self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, which further promote teachers' organizational commitment. Teachers with high psychological capital more likely face work challenges with positive attitudes, experiencing and perceiving more positive emotional events at work, which can evoke positive emotions and organizational commitment (G. Miner et al., 2005). Notably, psychological capital's partial mediating role (24.10%) indicates servant leadership can influence organizational commitment through other pathways. These potential mechanisms include job satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2022), perceived organizational support (Sun et al., 2022), leader-member exchange (LMX) quality (Eva et al., 2019), awaiting future research exploration.

Conclusion

This study systematically explored servant leadership's influence mechanism on teachers' organizational commitment and psychological capital's mediating role through surveying 956 Chinese childcare institution teachers. Findings showed: (1) servant leadership significantly positively predicted childcare teachers' organizational commitment and psychological capital; (2) psychological capital partially mediated between servant leadership and organizational commitment, accounting for 24.10% of total effects; (3) institution nature, scale, teacher position, and salary level significantly influenced organizational commitment, with public institutions, integrated care-education centers, teaching positions, and higher-paid groups showing higher organizational commitment.

These findings indicate servant leadership influences childcare teachers' organizational commitment through dual direct and indirect pathways: directors' servant leadership behaviors directly enhance teachers' organizational identification and loyalty; meanwhile, servant leadership indirectly enhances organizational commitment by improving teachers' psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience). Research results provide important implications for childcare institution managers and policy makers. Promoting servant leadership concept practice and psychological capital development will lay foundations for building professional, stable, vibrant childcare teaching teams, promoting high-quality Chinese childcare service development.

Theoretical contributions include extending servant leadership and organizational commitment research to infant childcare domain, enriching organizational behavior research in this field. Compared to traditional school organizations, childcare institutions feature small scale, strong professionalism, and intensive emotional exchange. This study integrates Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Affective Events Theory (AET) dual perspectives, constructing "servant leadership → psychological capital → organizational commitment" mediation model, deepening understanding of childcare teachers' organizational commitment formation mechanisms, revealing leadership behaviors' influence on individual internal psychological changes and organizational attitude transformation's dual pathways.

This study yields significant practical implications for childcare institution management and policymakers. Childcare centers should prioritize: (1) fostering servant leadership through professional development that enhances directors' capacity for teacher-

centered support and empathetic engagement; (2) systematically integrating psychological capital interventions through structured workshops and peer support networks while creating environments that nurture efficacy and optimism; and (3) implementing differentiated management approaches based on institutional characteristics. Policy recommendations include: incorporating leadership quality and psychological wellbeing metrics into evaluation frameworks; establishing comprehensive director training programs; developing teacher retention strategies through improved compensation and career advancement opportunities; and formulating industry-wide professional standards that define clear developmental pathways. These targeted approaches would collectively strengthen organizational stability while advancing childcare system quality.

Despite its contributions, this investigation has methodological constraints requiring acknowledgment. The cross-sectional approach impedes robust causal inferences, suggesting future longitudinal or experimental designs would strengthen validity. Data collection relied exclusively on self-reporting, introducing potential common method variance; subsequent studies should triangulate information through multi-source assessment including supervisor evaluations and objective metrics. While sampling encompassed 16 provinces, geographical concentration limits representativeness, necessitating broader regional distribution in follow-up research. Conceptually, treating organizational commitment as a unidimensional construct overlooked potentially differentiated effects across its distinct components, while the analytical framework would benefit from examining dimensional interactions between servant leadership and specific psychological capital elements. Future investigations should incorporate potential moderators (institutional culture, teacher attributes), develop moderated mediation models, incorporate qualitative methodologies to capture lived experiences, and design intervention studies that validate practical applications within childcare settings.

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