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The Influence of Psychological Empowerment and Psychological Safety on Lecturer Performance with Servant Leadership as a Mediating Variable

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the influence of psychological empowerment and psychological safety on lecturer performance, with servant leadership serving as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through purposive sampling from a group of university lecturers. The analysis employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to evaluate measurement and structural models. Findings indicate that both psychological empowerment and psychological safety significantly enhance lecturer performance, while servant leadership plays a pivotal mediating role in strengthening these effects. The results highlight that fostering a supportive work environment and empowering academic staff are crucial for improving performance in higher education. Theoretically, this research extends the understanding of human resource management in academic contexts, particularly the interplay between empowerment, safety, and leadership. Practically, the study offers recommendations for educational institutions to cultivate servant leadership and ensure psychological well-being to optimize lecturer contributions.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions face increasing demands to produce graduates who are not only competent but also adaptable to the rapidly changing demands of the global workforce. This expectation places significant pressure on lecturers, whose performance becomes a key determinant of institutional success. As noted by Robbins and Judge (2019), employee performance in any organization is strongly influenced by the psychological and social environment in which they operate. In academia, fostering an environment that promotes psychological empowerment and safety has emerged as an essential strategy for sustaining high performance.

Psychological empowerment reflects the intrinsic motivation and perceived self-determination of employees in their roles (Spreitzer, 1995). In the context of lecturers, this involves the belief that their work is meaningful, that they have the autonomy to make

decisions, and that their contributions are valued. When lecturers feel empowered, they are more likely to display initiative, engage in innovative teaching, and contribute to research productivity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Equally important is psychological safety, defined as the shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). Within higher education, psychological safety enables lecturers to express ideas, raise concerns, and engage in academic discourse without fear of negative consequences. Research by Newman et al. (2017) indicates that psychologically safe environments foster collaboration and enhance overall organizational learning, both of which are crucial in academic institutions.

Servant leadership has been recognized as a leadership style that can foster both psychological empowerment and psychological safety (Liden et al., 2008). This leadership approach emphasizes serving others, prioritizing follower development, and promoting a supportive environment. In the academic context, servant leaders can inspire lecturers to excel by placing their professional growth and well-being at the forefront of institutional priorities (Eva et al., 2019).

Several studies have established the direct effects of psychological empowerment and psychological safety on employee performance (Tuckey et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2017). However, the role of leadership style, particularly servant leadership, as a mediator in this relationship has been relatively underexplored in higher education settings. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how leadership practices can amplify the benefits of a positive psychological climate.

Furthermore, higher education in Indonesia operates within a dynamic and competitive landscape, where lecturer performance is often linked to accreditation ratings, research outputs, and student satisfaction (Kemenristekdikti, 2020). In such an environment, understanding the psychological and leadership factors that drive performance is not only academically relevant but also practically vital for institutional development.

The integration of servant leadership into this framework provides a promising avenue for enhancing lecturer performance. As argued by Hunter et al. (2013), servant leaders create a culture of trust and mutual respect, which strengthens both empowerment and safety perceptions. This, in turn, motivates employees to engage fully with their roles and contribute more effectively to organizational objectives.

From a theoretical perspective, the relationships among psychological empowerment, psychological safety, and performance can be explained through the lens of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). When lecturers perceive empowerment and safety, they feel an obligation to reciprocate through higher levels of performance. Servant leadership can reinforce this exchange by demonstrating genuine concern for lecturers' needs and aspirations.

Empirical evidence from various sectors suggests that servant leadership not only influences individual attitudes and behaviors but also enhances organizational outcomes (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Applying these insights to the academic setting could reveal practical strategies for university administrators seeking to elevate lecturer performance through leadership and psychological interventions.

Given these considerations, this study aims to examine the influence of psychological empowerment and psychological safety on lecturer performance, with servant leadership serving as a mediating variable. By focusing on the higher education context in Indonesia, the research seeks to contribute to both the theoretical understanding and practical application of these constructs in academic institutions.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design with an explanatory approach to examine the influence of psychological empowerment and psychological safety on lecturer performance, mediated by servant leadership. The choice of this design was based on the objective of testing hypotheses and determining causal relationships between variables, in line with the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018) for studies aiming to validate theoretical models in organizational behavior.

The population in this research comprised lecturers from a private higher education institution in Indonesia. To ensure the sample accurately represented the population, purposive sampling was applied with specific inclusion criteria, such as having at least two years of teaching experience and being actively involved in academic and administrative duties. This criterion was chosen to ensure that participants possessed sufficient exposure to the institutional environment, leadership practices, and performance expectations relevant to the study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was distributed both physically and through online platforms. The questionnaire consisted of four sections, each measuring one of the study variables: psychological empowerment, psychological safety, servant leadership, and lecturer performance. All items were adapted from validated measurement scales in prior studies, with minor modifications to fit the Indonesian higher education context. A five-point Likert scale was used to capture responses, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to measure participants' perceptions consistently.

Psychological empowerment was measured using the scale developed by Spreitzer (1995), covering dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Psychological safety was assessed using the instrument by Edmondson (1999), which evaluates the extent to which individuals feel safe to take interpersonal risks. Servant leadership was measured using Liden et al.'s (2008) multidimensional scale, which includes aspects such as emotional healing, creating value for the community, and empowering others. Lecturer performance was assessed through an adaptation of the performance measurement framework by Campbell (1990), focusing on teaching effectiveness, research contributions, and service to the institution.

Before data analysis, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of lecturers to assess clarity, cultural relevance, and reliability. Feedback from the pre-test resulted in minor adjustments to wording and formatting to ensure ease of understanding and cultural alignment. Reliability and validity testing were conducted through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE), following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019).

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The primary data analysis technique employed was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. This method was selected due to its ability to handle complex models with multiple constructs, its suitability for predictive research, and its tolerance for non-normal data distributions. The analysis was conducted in two stages: the measurement model assessment, to ensure the reliability and validity of constructs, and the structural model assessment, to evaluate the hypothesized relationships between variables.

Bootstrapping with a large number of resamples was used to assess the significance of path coefficients. This approach allowed for a more robust estimation of standard errors and confidence intervals, which is particularly beneficial for studies with moderate sample sizes. Model fit and predictive relevance were evaluated using R-squared values, effect sizes (f-squared), and the Stone-Geisser Q-squared statistic, ensuring the overall adequacy of the model in explaining the dependent variable.

Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring informed consent from all participants, maintaining the confidentiality of their responses, and securing data in a password-protected system. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their input would be used solely for academic purposes. This adherence to ethical standards was in line with institutional research policies and internationally accepted norms for human subjects research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outer model evaluation ensures that the instruments used are valid and reliable

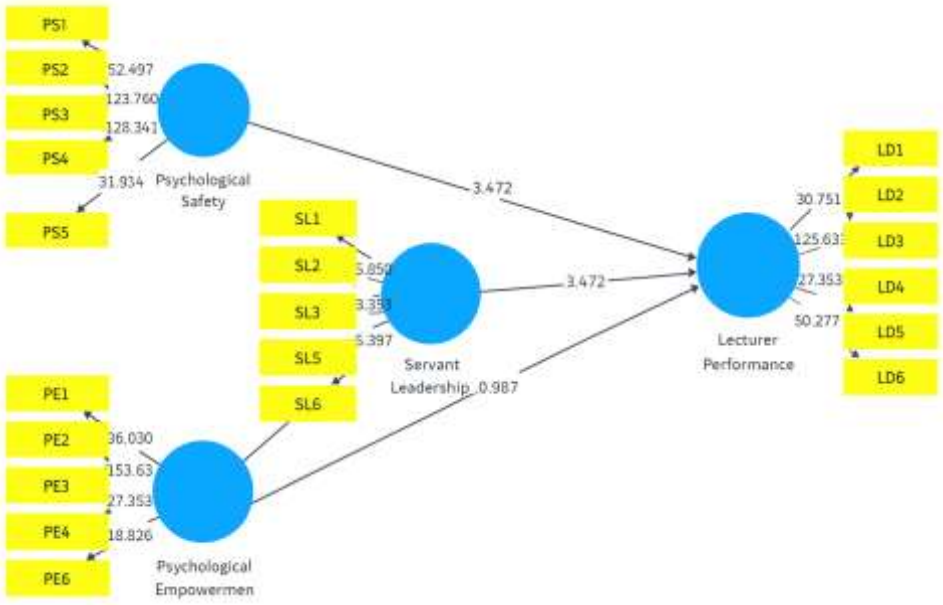

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model

Convergent validity was assessed using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The analysis showed that all indicators had outer loading values above the 0.70

threshold, indicating that each indicator strongly represents its measured latent construct (Frimayasa & Suprayitno, 2025).

Tabel 1. Outer Loadings of Indicators for Each Construct

Indicator	Lecturer Performance	Psychological Empowerment	Psychological Safety	Servant Leadership
KD1	0.928			
KD2	0.955			
KD3	0.849			
KD4	0.967			
KD5	0.967			
KD6	0.954			
PE1		0.931		
PE2		0.93		
PE3		0.907		
PE4		0.943		
PE5		0.834		
PE6		0.853		
PS1			0.971	
PS2			0.98	
PS3			0.931	
PS4			0.947	
PS6			0.92	
SL1				0.948
SL2				0.925
SL3				0.912
SL4				0.922
SL5				0.9
SL6				0.908

All indicators for the constructs of Lecturer Performance (Y), Psychological Safety (X2), and Servant Leadership (X1) have loading values above 0.70, indicating that all items are highly valid and effectively measure their respective constructs. Furthermore, the AVE values for each construct were examined, with convergent validity considered satisfactory if the AVE exceeds 0.50.

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for Each Construct

Construct	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Lecturer Performance	0.879
Psychological Empowerment	0.811
Psychological Safety	0.903
Servant Leadership	0.845

All construct variables, Lecturer Performance (Y), Psychological Empowerment (Z), Psychological Safety (X2), and Servant Leadership (X1), have AVE values above 0.50.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with both required to exceed 0.70.

Table 3. Composite Reliability for Each Construct

Construct	Composite Reliability
Lecturer Performance	0.978
Psychological Empowerment	0.963
Psychological Safety	0.979
Servant Leadership	0.97

Reliability testing was conducted using Composite Reliability (CR) to ensure the internal consistency of indicators for each latent construct. The results showed very high CR values for all variables—Lecturer Performance (0.978), Psychological Empowerment (0.963), Psychological Safety (0.979), and Servant Leadership (0.970). All values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 recommended by Hair et al. (2019), indicating excellent internal consistency. With CR values above 0.90, the constructs demonstrate excellent reliability, meaning the research instruments consistently and stably measure their respective constructs. These findings confirm that all constructs meet the composite reliability requirements, strengthen the validity of the outer model, and ensure the data are suitable for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha for Each Construct

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Lecturer Performance	0.972
Psychological Empowerment	0.953
Psychological Safety	0.973
Servant Leadership	0.963

Reliability testing was conducted to ensure the internal consistency of the research instruments in measuring the intended constructs. The results showed very high Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables—Lecturer Performance (0.972), Psychological Empowerment (0.953), Psychological Safety (0.973), and Servant Leadership (0.963). All values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 recommended by Hair et al. (2019), indicating excellent reliability. Values above 0.90 signify that the indicators produce consistent and stable data across repeated measurements. These findings confirm that all indicators used in each variable demonstrate strong reliability, making the instruments suitable for subsequent analysis, particularly for testing relationships among variables in the structural model (inner model).

Table 5. R-Square and Adjusted R-Square for Each Endogenous Construct

Construct	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square
Lecturer Performance	0.928	0.926
Servant Leadership	0.96	0.959

The results show that Lecturer Performance has an R-Square of 0.928 and an Adjusted R-Square of 0.926, indicating that 92.8% of its variation is explained by the model's predictors, with the remaining 7.2% influenced by other factors. Servant Leadership has an R-Square of 0.960 and an Adjusted R-Square of 0.959, meaning 96.0% of its variation is

explained by its predictors, with only 4.0% attributed to external factors. According to Hair et al. (2019), R-Square values above 0.75 are considered substantial, suggesting that this model has excellent predictive power and that the relationships among variables in the structural model provide strong explanatory contributions, making it suitable for further hypothesis testing.

Table 6. Correlation Coefficients between Constructs

Construct	Lecturer Performance	Psychological Empowerment	Psychological Safety	Servant Leadership
Lecturer Performance	—			
Psychological Empowerment	0.049	—		3.12
Psychological Safety	0.257		—	2.722
Servant Leadership	0.719			—

These results indicate that Servant Leadership contributes the most to Lecturer Performance, followed by Psychological Safety with a moderate contribution, while Psychological Empowerment has a minor impact. This confirms the importance of service-oriented leadership in enhancing lecturer performance, supported by a psychologically safe work environment.

Table 7. Q^2 Predictive Relevance for Each Construct

Construct	Q^2 (= 1 - SSE / SSO)
Lecturer Performance	0.795
Psychological Empowerment	—
Psychological Safety	—
Servant Leadership	0.794

Predictive relevance testing was conducted to assess the model's ability to predict indicators of endogenous constructs. Using the Blindfolding method, Q^2 values were 0.795 for Lecturer Performance and 0.794 for Servant Leadership. Based on Hair et al. (2019), $Q^2 > 0$ indicates predictive relevance, with 0.02 (small), 0.15 (medium), and 0.35 (large). These results, far exceeding 0.35, show that the model has high predictive relevance for the studied constructs. This indicates that the model not only has strong measurement quality but also accurately predicts the research variables, reinforcing its suitability for hypothesis testing and theoretical conclusions. Hypothesis testing used SmartPLS, where p-values below 0.05 provided empirical support for acceptance.

Table 8. Path Coefficients, T-Statistics, and P-Values

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Psychological Empowerment → Lecturer Performance	0.799	0.802	0.093	8.6	0

Psychological Empowerment → Servant Leadership	0.541	0.546	0.071	7.663	0
Psychological Safety → Lecturer Performance	0.173	0.174	0.1	7.6	0
Psychological Safety → Servant Leadership	0.505	0.503	0.069	7.362	0
Servant Leadership → Lecturer Performance	1.136	1.16	0.362	3.141	0.002

Based on the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis, all direct relationships between variables in the model are positive and significant. Psychological Empowerment positively and significantly affects Lecturer Performance (O = 0.799, p < 0.05) and Servant Leadership (O = 0.541, p < 0.05). Psychological Safety also has a positive and significant effect on Lecturer Performance (O = 0.173, p < 0.05) and Servant Leadership (O = 0.505, p < 0.05). Servant Leadership, in turn, positively and significantly influences Lecturer Performance (O = 1.136, p < 0.05). Overall, these findings confirm that Psychological Empowerment, Psychological Safety, and Servant Leadership play crucial roles in enhancing Lecturer Performance, both directly and through their interrelationships. The significance of all effects further supports the validity of the structural model used in this study.

Table 9. Indirect Effects through Servant Leadership

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Psychological Empowerment → Servant Leadership → Lecturer Performance	0.614	0.618	0.153	4.02	0
Psychological Safety → Servant Leadership → Lecturer Performance	0.573	0.596	0.246	2.327	0.02

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis shows that the indirect relationships through Servant Leadership are positive and significant. Psychological Empowerment positively and significantly affects Lecturer Performance through Servant Leadership (O = 0.614, p < 0.05), indicating that empowerment enhances performance more effectively when mediated by service-oriented leadership. Psychological Safety also has a positive and significant indirect effect on Lecturer Performance via Servant Leadership (O = 0.573, p < 0.05), suggesting that a psychologically safe environment boosts performance when coupled with servant leadership. Overall, these results highlight Servant Leadership as an effective mediator linking Psychological Empowerment and Psychological Safety to Lecturer Performance, implying that performance improvement efforts should address both empowerment and safety while fostering service-oriented leadership.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that psychological empowerment, psychological safety, and servant leadership are critical determinants of lecturer performance in higher education. The findings demonstrate that both psychological empowerment and psychological safety exert significant direct effects on lecturer performance, while also influencing performance indirectly through servant leadership. Servant leadership emerges as a pivotal factor, amplifying the positive effects of empowerment and safety by fostering a supportive, service-oriented environment that motivates lecturers to perform at their best. The results further affirm that psychological empowerment enhances lecturers' sense of meaning, autonomy, and competence, which in turn strengthens their willingness to contribute effectively. Similarly, psychological safety creates an environment where lecturers feel secure to share ideas, take risks, and engage in open communication without fear of negative consequences. When combined with servant leadership, these conditions create a powerful synergy that drives sustainable performance improvements. From a practical perspective, higher education institutions should prioritize leadership development programs that cultivate servant leadership qualities, alongside initiatives that promote empowerment and psychological safety. Such integrated efforts not only improve individual performance but also contribute to institutional excellence. Theoretically, the study reinforces the importance of leadership as a mediating mechanism in organizational behavior, offering valuable insights for future research in academic and other professional contexts.

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