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The Influence of Principal Servant Leadership and Subjective Well-Being on Junior High School Students' Self-Regulated Learning through Emotional Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how principal servant leadership and students' subjective well-being influence junior high school students' self-regulated learning, both directly and indirectly through students' emotional intelligence as a mediating variable. Servant leadership is assumed to create a supportive, empathetic, and student-centered school environment. At the same time, subjective well-being is viewed as a personal resource that strengthens students' emotional and learning competencies. This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey design. The sample consisted of 250 junior high school students (125 male and 125 female) selected through probability sampling. Data were collected using adapted standardized questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The results show that servant leadership was positively associated with self-regulated learning ($\beta = 0.228$) and, to a lesser extent, with emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.111$). Subjective well-being was the strongest predictor of emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.415$; $f^2 = 0.211$), whereas its direct path to self-regulated learning was negative and negligible ($\beta = -0.054$). Emotional intelligence was positively associated with self-regulated learning ($\beta = 0.181$), but the indirect effects through emotional intelligence were small (0.020 for servant leadership and 0.075 for subjective well-being). The model's explanatory power was weak ($R^2 = 0.183$ for emotional intelligence and 0.089 for self-regulated learning), and convergent validity was not fully met. These findings suggest that principal leadership influences students' learning indirectly and modestly, while students' internal psychological resources play a more prominent role.

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INTRODUCTION

Students' subjective well-being (SWB) is a key indicator of educational success, as it is linked to life satisfaction, positive emotions, and academic achievement. However, research indicates that students' SWB levels, particularly at the junior high school level, remain in the lower-middle range. Factors such as family environment, family structure, and academic achievement have a significant influence on students' SWB, with healthy family functioning able to enhance students' overall life satisfaction (Hu et al., 2010; Ma`arif et al., 2025; Munir et al., 2026; Syamsuni et al., 2025).

In the context of education, school principal leadership plays a crucial role in creating an environment that supports student well-being. Servant leadership emphasizes meeting the needs of others, fostering ethical behavior, and creating a supportive environment (Amenu et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025). In schools, principals who demonstrate qualities of servant leadership, such as putting others first, empowering staff, and behaving ethically can foster a positive school culture that benefits both teachers and students (Amenu et al., 2025). Servant leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on teachers' emotional well-being and to foster an inclusive and supportive school culture (An-Nasa'i et al., 2026; Kyambade et al., 2024; Najah et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025). However, the direct influence of a principal's servant leadership on students' SWB has not yet been extensively studied.

Research on emotional intelligence (EI) in leadership has developed in parallel with, and increasingly converged on, research on servant leadership (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022; Fauzi et al., 2025; Hadisi et al., 2025; Yuliana et al., 2025). Both lines of inquiry emphasize the leader's capacity to manage emotions, build relationships, and foster trust among teachers and students. This convergence is confirmed by the meta-analysis of Miao et al. (2021), which found a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and servant leadership and concluded that emotionally intelligent leaders are better prepared to implement servant leadership practices. This quantitative evidence supports earlier conceptual reviews arguing that genuine care, humility, and empathy, which are essentially emotional competencies, are the defining dispositions of servant leaders (Robinson et al., 2018), and it extends the foundational synthesis that first positioned servant leadership as a distinct field of leadership research centered on follower growth (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Taken together, these studies indicate that the emotional and service dimensions of leadership reinforce rather than compete with each other. Studies in educational settings take this argument further: principals' emotional intelligence strengthens organizational trust and teacher performance, and leaders' emotional intelligence is associated with their own subjective well-being and lower emotional exhaustion, both of which contribute to a positive school culture (Karmina et al., 2024; Kouhsari et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2020; Maqfirah et al., 2026).

However, similar to most servant leadership research, these studies measure outcomes at the teacher or leader level, so the benefits for students are inferred rather than directly tested. In parallel, research on self-regulation shows that servant-oriented leadership can foster readiness for self-directed learning, and that self-regulated learning helps students manage their emotions, achieve academic goals independently, and thereby enhance their well-being (Athanasios, 2025; Cahyono et al., 2025; Daulay et al., 2024; Hariyani et al., 2025; Suud et al., 2024; Uula & Ali, 2025). Comparing these bodies of literature reveals a clear gap: leadership studies rarely reach student-level psychological outcomes, whereas student-level studies of emotional intelligence and self-regulated learning rarely consider the role of school leadership. Accordingly, the present study examines emotional intelligence at the student level, that is, students' own ability to perceive, understand, and regulate their emotions, rather than as a characteristic of the principal.

During adolescence, development and well-being are influenced by changes in social, biological, and personal domains (e.g., family, education, or culture). The educational context is one of the most influential, as adolescents spend a significant amount of time learning new skills and building social relationships (Chamizo-nieto, 2021). Studies on subjective well-being (SWB) constitute a key area of research regarding positive mental health outcomes in adolescents (Vera et al., 2012). Adolescence is a critical period for the development of a sense of well-being, which facilitates an individual's potential

to achieve a positive quality of life in adulthood (Hafshoh & Airin Yustikarini Saleh, 2021). Interest in Subjective Well-being (SWB) is growing, with a growing number of studies reporting findings relevant to social workers, psychologists, pediatricians, educators, policymakers, and many others, as well as to the general public. Furthermore, according to Kaye-Tzadok et al. (2017), SWB is defined as an individual's perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations regarding their own life.

According to Zimmerman (2002), researchers in the field of self-regulation have sought to understand how to assist students in developing key processes they lack, such as goal setting, time management, learning strategies, self-evaluation, self-attribution, seeking help or information, and important motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy and intrinsic interest in tasks. Self-regulation in learning has been suggested to refer to self-directed processes that help individuals learn more effectively (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Toering et al., 2012) Thus, this study aims to examine the influence of principal servant leadership and students' subjective well-being on junior high school students' self-regulated learning, both directly and indirectly through students' emotional intelligence. In this model, principal servant leadership (a contextual factor) and subjective well-being (a personal psychological resource) are positioned as exogenous variables, students' emotional intelligence as the mediating variable, and self-regulated learning as the dependent variable. This study is expected to provide new insights into the mechanisms through which school leadership and students' well-being jointly support students' regulation of their own learning.

Theoretically, this approach aligns with the developmental needs of adolescents, who require emotional support, a sense of being valued, and a psychologically safe environment. However, most previous studies have primarily examined the effects of servant leadership on teacher performance, organizational commitment, or school effectiveness. Studies that directly link principal servant leadership to students' subjective well-being remain relatively limited (Abdillah et al., 2022). Furthermore, research examining the psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship has also been scarce.

Based on this review, at least three aspects remain underexplored. First, servant leadership research in schools has measured outcomes almost exclusively at the teacher or organizational level, so it is still unclear whether, and how strongly, principals' servant leadership is related to students' own psychological and learning outcomes. Second, the mechanism that may transmit the influence of a principal, who rarely interacts with students directly, to students' learning behavior has not been tested. Students' emotional intelligence is a plausible mechanism, because it enables students to recognize, understand, and manage emotions adaptively, allowing them to cope with academic and social pressures more effectively (Salma & Alsa, 2023). Third, subjective well-being has mostly been studied as an outcome of school factors, whereas its role as a personal resource that may strengthen emotional competencies and, in turn, self-regulated learning, as proposed by the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), has rarely been examined together with school leadership. Self-regulated learning itself reflects students' ability to independently set goals, select strategies, and evaluate the learning process (Asy'Ari et al., 2025; Fernando & Zumratun, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2026; M. Suud & Na'imah, 2023; Prisuna et al., 2026). A school environment led by a principal with a servant leadership style has the potential to foster a culture of emotional support and learning autonomy that strengthens both of these variables. Addressing these three gaps in the context of Indonesian junior high schools is the main rationale for the present study.

Thus, the relationship between principal servant leadership, emotional intelligence, self-regulated learning, and students' subjective well-being needs to be empirically tested within a comprehensive structural model. The novelty of this study lies not merely in combining several variables, but in what the integration makes it possible to test. By placing a contextual pathway (the principal's servant leadership) and a personal-resource pathway (students' subjective well-being) in one model, this study can compare their relative contribution to students' self-regulated learning and examine whether students' emotional intelligence channels the influence of a distal school leader. Such insights cannot be obtained when leadership and student characteristics are studied separately, and they extend servant leadership theory from the teacher level to the student level. In addition to filling

a gap in the literature, this study also offers practical contributions to the development of school leadership policies and strategies focused on students' psychological well-being. This focus distinguishes this study from previous research by emphasizing the integration of contextual and intrapersonal factors into a single empirical model. In line with these objectives, this study tests the following hypotheses: H1: Principal servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on students' emotional intelligence; H2: Subjective well-being has a positive and significant effect on students' emotional intelligence; H3: Principal servant leadership has a positive and significant effect on students' self-regulated learning; H4: Subjective well-being has a positive and significant effect on students' self-regulated learning; H5: Emotional intelligence has a positive and significant effect on students' self-regulated learning; H6: Emotional intelligence mediates the effect of principal servant leadership on students' self-regulated learning; and H7: Emotional intelligence mediates the effect of subjective well-being on students' self-regulated learning. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS), which allows for simultaneous analysis of direct and indirect relationships between variables. All hypotheses are tested in the Findings section. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1, in which the arrows represent the direct effects (H1–H5) and the paths through emotional intelligence represent the mediating effects (H6–H7).

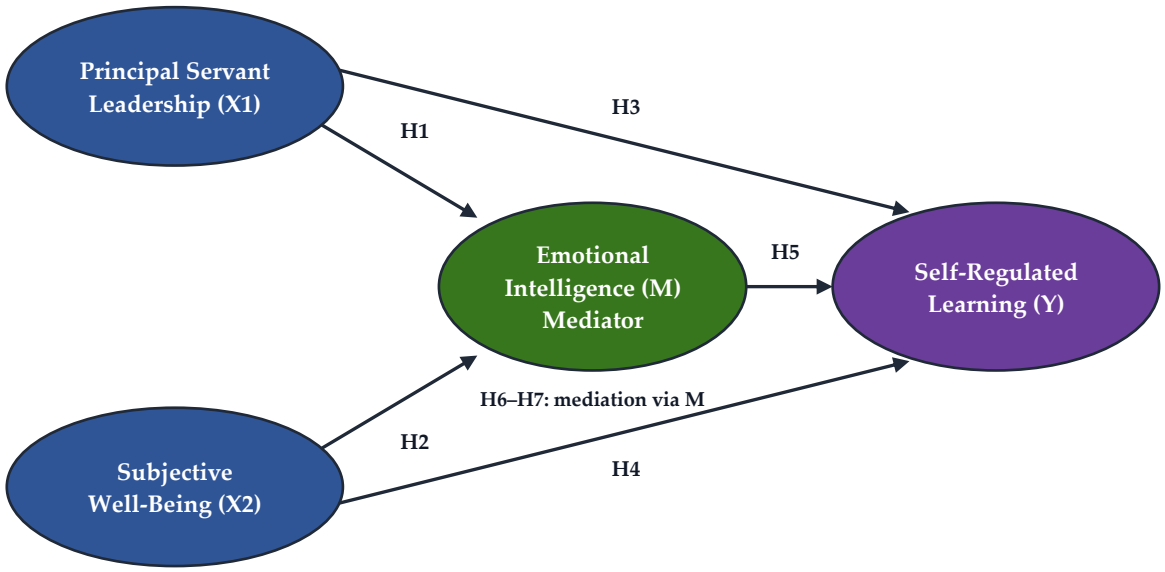


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design. Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, and predict phenomena (Teo, 2013). The study population comprised 436 students in grades VII–IX (226 male and 210 female students). The adequacy of the sample size was checked using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, which yields a minimum of 209 respondents from a population of 436; the sample of 250 students exceeds this minimum and also satisfies the PLS-SEM ten-times rule, which requires at least 30 cases because the maximum number of structural paths pointing at a construct in this model is three. The sample consisted of 125 male and 125 female students selected through probability sampling, with an equal number of male and female students included so that both groups were equally represented. This study employs a quantitative research design with an explanatory approach, as outlined by Creswell, to examine the structural relationships between principal servant leadership, subjective well-being, emotional intelligence, and students' subjective well-being. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS)-based Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach. PLS-SEM can handle both formative and reflective measurement models, making it suitable for various types of

constructs (Kono & Sato, 2022). PLS-SEM is particularly useful for predictive modelling, especially when the focus is on out-of-sample prediction to support external validity (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

A quantitative approach was chosen to test the hypothesised causal relationships and to evaluate the mediating role of emotional intelligence in a comprehensive structural model. This research was conducted from February–March 2026 among junior high school students (grades VII–IX) in boarding schools in Lampung Province, Indonesia, with individual students serving as the unit of analysis. The study population consisted of junior high school students, from whom a sample of 250 respondents was selected using probability sampling. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires that were distributed directly to students. This instrument measures principal servant leadership, subjective well-being, emotional intelligence, and self-regulated learning using Likert scale items adapted from established and validated instruments. Before data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed for content validity and pilot tested to ensure clarity and reliability. All responses were collected anonymously to maintain ethical standards and reduce response bias. Therefore, the quantitative research method, using a questionnaire, was considered as the most suitable for this study. The questionnaire survey usually helps in collecting a large amount of data in a short period of time and provides a quantitative or numeric description of a population's attitude (Creswell, 2009).

The research instruments are summarized in Table 1. a) Principal servant leadership was measured with items adapted from the short form of the Servant Leadership Scale (SL-7) (Liden et al., 2015), in which students rated the servant leadership behaviors of their own principal ; b) subjective well-being was measured with items adapted from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to assess students' life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985); c) students' emotional intelligence was measured with items adapted from the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Adolescent Short Form (TEIQue-ASF) (Sci et al., 2020), which measures students' ability to recognize and manage their own emotions; and d) self-regulated learning was measured with items adapted from the short Self-Regulation of Learning Self-Report Scale (SRL-SRS-C) (Pitkethly & Lau, 2016). Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. PLS-SEM was selected because the study aims to explain and predict variance in the endogenous constructs and to test direct and mediating effects simultaneously in a model with several latent variables, and because it does not require multivariate normality (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The analysis followed three stages. First, the measurement (outer) model was assessed through indicator loadings (≥ 0.70; loadings of 0.40–0.70 retained only if their removal does not improve AVE and composite reliability), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ≥ 0.70), convergent validity (AVE ≥ 0.50), and discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85) (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). Second, the structural (inner) model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Third, the hypotheses were examined through the path coefficients of the direct effects (H1–H5) and the indirect effects through emotional intelligence (H6–H7).

Table 1. Research Instruments

Variable	Respondent	Indicators	Items	Scale	Source
Principal Servant Leadership (X1)	Students (rating their principal)	X1.1–X1.9	9	Likert	Adapted from SL-7 (Liden et al., 2015)
Subjective Well-Being (X2)	Students	X2.1–X2.8	8	Likert	Adapted from SWLS (Diener et al., 1985)
Emotional Intelligence (M)	Students	M1.1–M1.6	6	Likert	Adapted from TEIQue-ASF (Sci et al., 2020)
Self-Regulated Learning (Y)	Students	Y1.1–Y1.8	8	Likert	Adapted from SRL-SRS-C (Pitkethly & Lau, 2016)

Note: the number of items follows the indicators retained in the SmartPLS model (Figure 2).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents important original data obtained from questionnaire-based surveys administered to adolescent students. In line with the research objectives, the results are presented in three stages: descriptive statistics, measurement model assessment, and structural model evaluation, including the direct and indirect effects. A total of 250 valid responses from junior high school students were analyzed. The questionnaire measured four latent constructs, namely principal servant leadership, subjective well-being, students' emotional intelligence, and self-regulated learning, using Likert-scale items adapted from validated instruments.

Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine respondents' overall perceptions of each construct. The results indicate that students reported relatively high levels of principal servant leadership, subjective well-being, emotional intelligence, and self-regulated learning.

Measurement Model Assessment

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	ϱ_a	ϱ_c	AVE
Emotional Intelligence	0.664	0.656	0.779	0.373
Self-Regulated Learning	0.612	0.625	0.741	0.271
Servant Leadership	0.541	0.338	0.626	0.190
Subjective Well-Being	0.474	0.519	0.544	0.224

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Based on the results of the construct reliability and validity analysis, it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha values for all tested constructs were below the recommended threshold of 0.70. The Emotional Intelligence construct obtained an alpha value of 0.664, Self-Regulated Learning 0.612, Servant Leadership 0.541, and Subjective Well-Being 0.474. This indicates that the internal consistency among indicators within each construct is still relatively weak and requires further attention regarding the selection and development of measurement instruments.

When examined in terms of composite reliability (ϱ_c), the Emotional Intelligence construct obtained a value of 0.779 and Self-Regulated Learning of 0.741, which are still within acceptable limits (> 0.70). Meanwhile, the Servant Leadership construct (0.626) and the Subjective Well-Being construct (0.544) fall below the required minimum value, so the reliability of these two constructs is questionable. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are below the minimum threshold of 0.50, specifically: Emotional Intelligence (0.373), Self-Regulated Learning (0.271), Servant Leadership (0.190), and Subjective Well-Being (0.224). This indicates that the model's convergent validity has not been met, meaning that the indicators used are not yet capable of adequately representing their respective latent constructs. This situation may be caused by low indicator loadings or the presence of indicators that are irrelevant to the constructs being measured; therefore, it is recommended to re-evaluate the items in the instrument used. A closer inspection of the outer loadings in Figure 2 helps explain these results. Several indicators have loadings far below the minimum of 0.40, namely X1.1 (0.224), X1.7 (0.193), X1.9 (0.021), and Y1.8 (0.280), while X1.4 (0.398) is borderline, and three subjective well-being indicators have negative loadings (X2.1 = −0.028, X2.2 = −0.084, X2.3 = −0.129). Negative loadings usually indicate reverse-worded items that were not recoded, or items that do not reflect the same construct. Following Hair et al. (2019), indicators with loadings below 0.40 should be removed, and indicators between 0.40 and 0.70 should be removed when doing so raises AVE and composite reliability above their thresholds. AVE values below 0.50 may still be tolerated only when composite reliability exceeds 0.60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Because these indicators were retained in the present

estimation, the measurement weaknesses are acknowledged as a limitation, and the structural results are interpreted with caution.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	EI	SRL	SL	SWB
Emotional Intelligence	—			
Self-Regulated Learning	0.307	—		
Servant Leadership	0.302	0.402	—	
Subjective Well-Being	0.550	0.386	0.514	—

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

Discriminant validity testing in this study was conducted using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach, which is currently considered a more accurate method than the Fornell-Larcker criteria or cross-loadings analysis (Henseler et al., 2015). Based on the analysis results, all HTMT values between constructs were below the 0.85 threshold recommended by experts. The highest HTMT value was found in the relationship between Subjective Well-Being and Emotional Intelligence, at 0.550, followed by the relationship between Subjective Well-Being and Servant Leadership at 0.514, and Servant Leadership and Self-Regulated Learning at 0.402.

The fact that all HTMT values are well below the critical threshold of 0.85 indicates that each construct in the model possesses sufficient conceptual distinctiveness and does not overlap excessively with others. These results provide preliminary support for discriminant validity. However, given the weaknesses in reliability and convergent validity, the HTMT values alone cannot be taken as evidence of overall measurement quality, because low HTMT values can also occur when indicators share little common variance. Therefore, the discriminant validity results should be interpreted with caution.

Structural Model Evaluation

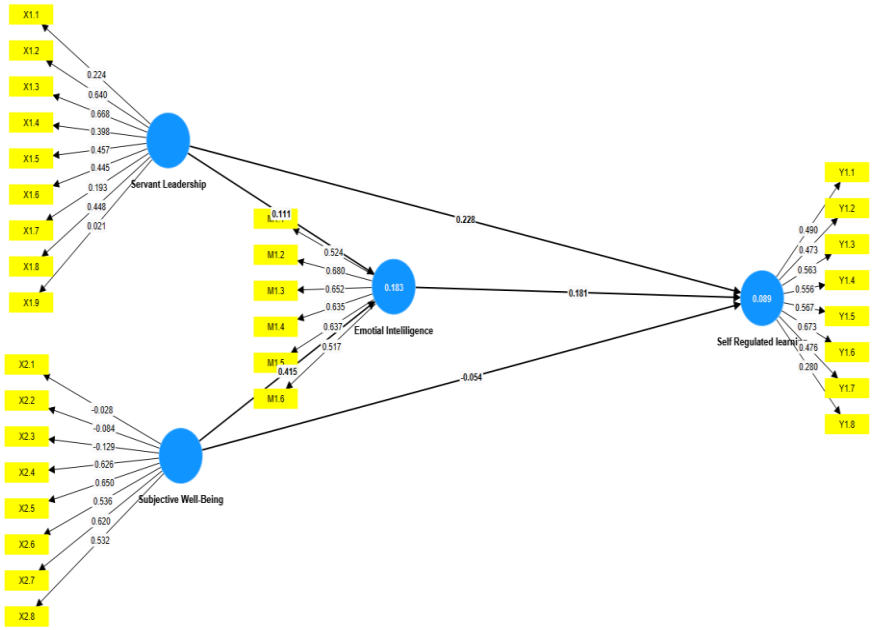


Figure 2. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Model with Mediating Variables

Figure 2 presents the estimated structural model. Principal servant leadership (X1) had a positive path to students' emotional intelligence (M; β = 0.111) and a stronger positive path to self-regulated learning (Y; β = 0.228). Subjective well-being (X2) had the strongest path to emotional intelligence (β = 0.415), but its direct path to self-regulated learning was negative and close to zero (β = −0.054). Emotional intelligence had a positive path to self-regulated learning (β = 0.181). The model explained 18.3% of the variance in emotional intelligence and 8.9% of the variance in self-regulated learning. The

point estimates of the indirect effects through emotional intelligence were 0.020 for servant leadership (0.111 × 0.181) and 0.075 for subjective well-being (0.415 × 0.181). Because bootstrapping significance tests are not reported, these direct and indirect effects are interpreted in terms of their direction and magnitude.

Table 4. R-Square (Coefficient of Determination)

Construct	R^2	R^2 Adjusted
Emotional Intelligence	0.183	0.177
Self-Regulated Learning	0.089	0.077

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

The results of the coefficient of determination (R^2) analysis indicate that the exogenous variables in this model have relatively weak predictive power regarding the endogenous variable. The Emotional Intelligence construct obtained an R^2 value of 0.183, meaning that Servant Leadership and Subjective Well-Being together can only explain 18.3% of the variance in Emotional Intelligence, while the remaining 81.7% is explained by other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.177 reinforces this finding by accounting for the number of predictors in the model. The Self-Regulated Learning construct yielded a lower R^2 value of 0.089, indicating that the exogenous variables as a whole account for only 8.9% of the variance in Self-Regulated Learning. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.077 further confirms the model's limited predictive power regarding this construct. Referring to the categories proposed by Hair et al. (2019), an R^2 value below 0.25 is classified as weak, meaning this model has very limited predictive power overall. This suggests the need to add more relevant predictor variables to enhance the model's explanatory capacity.

Table 5. F-Square (Effect Size)

Path	F^2	Category
Emotional Intelligence → Self-Regulated Learning	0.029	Small
Servant Leadership → Emotional Intelligence	0.015	Very Small
Servant Leadership → Self-Regulated Learning	0.056	Small
Subjective Well-Being → Emotional Intelligence	0.211	Medium
Subjective Well-Being → Self-Regulated Learning	0.003	Very Small

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

An individual with emotional intelligence can better understand a situation and, therefore, express their judgment more accurately. Consequently, students with emotional intelligence demonstrate better emotional understanding and expression **(Jan et al., 2020)**. Effect size analysis (f^2) is used to assess the relative contribution of each predictor variable to the endogenous construct in the model. Based on the criteria established by Cohen (1988), an f^2 value is categorized as small if it falls within the range of 0.02–0.15, moderate within the range of 0.15–0.35, and large if it exceeds 0.35. Based on the analysis results, the path from Subjective Well-Being to Emotional Intelligence yielded an f^2 value of 0.211, which falls into the moderate category. This finding indicates that Subjective Well-Being makes a fairly significant contribution to influencing Emotional Intelligence compared to other predictor variables in the model.

In contrast, the other paths showed very small or negligible effect sizes. The path from Emotional Intelligence to Self-Regulated Learning yielded an f^2 value of 0.029, the path from Servant Leadership to Emotional Intelligence yielded 0.015, the path from Servant Leadership to Self-Regulated Learning yielded 0.056, and the path from Subjective Well-Being to Self-Regulated Learning yielded only 0.003. These values indicate that the practical influence of these paths is very weak, even though they may still be statistically significant.

Discussion

The structural model provides a more nuanced picture than initially hypothesized. Servant leadership was positively associated with students' emotional intelligence (β = 0.111) and with self-regulated learning (β = 0.228); subjective well-being was positively associated with emotional intelligence (β = 0.415); and emotional intelligence was positively associated with self-regulated learning (β = 0.181), whereas the path from subjective well-being to self-regulated learning was negative and negligible (β = −0.054). The strongest relationship in the model was therefore not the leadership path but the link between students' subjective well-being and their emotional intelligence, which was also the only path with a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.211$). Together, the predictors explained 18.3% of the variance in emotional intelligence and 8.9% of the variance in self-regulated learning, both of which are categorized as weak. These figures should be interpreted in light of the measurement results: AVE values below 0.50 for all constructs and composite reliability below 0.70 for servant leadership and subjective well-being indicate that part of the weak explanatory power may stem from measurement error rather than from a genuine absence of relationships. Accordingly, the following discussion treats the path coefficients primarily as indicators of the direction and relative strength of the relationships.

Within the school context, servant leadership emerges as a relevant and transformative leadership approach. Unlike power- or control-oriented leadership models, servant leadership positions the leader as a servant focused on the growth, well-being, and empowerment of organizational members. School principals with these characteristics demonstrate empathy, a commitment to individual development, and the ability to build a supportive school community. Servant leadership has been shown to positively influence well-being in educational contexts. For instance, a principal's servant leadership enhances teachers' professional well-being and psychological empowerment, which can indirectly foster a positive and conducive school climate for student well-being (Yu et al., 2025). Servant leadership also reduces emotional exhaustion among teachers, fostering a supportive environment that can benefit students' subjective well-being (Wu et al., 2024). Thus, these findings indicate that servant leadership fosters a supportive environment, which can indirectly benefit student well-being.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a key factor in leadership effectiveness. School principals with high EI positively influence organizational trust and teacher performance, which can indirectly impact the student experience (Kouhsari et al., 2023). Emotional intelligence is also linked to subjective well-being, as demonstrated in a study involving athletic directors and teachers, showing that emotionally intelligent leadership can foster a supportive and emotionally healthy school environment (Lee et al., 2020). It should be emphasized, however, that the present study examines students' emotional intelligence, measured with an adolescent instrument, rather than the principal's. The literature on principals' emotional intelligence is relevant only because it suggests that emotionally attuned leadership helps create a supportive school climate in which students' own emotional competencies can develop. In the present study, the path from servant leadership to students' emotional intelligence was positive but weak (β = 0.111; $f^2 = 0.015$), suggesting that students' emotional competencies are shaped only marginally by their perception of the principal's leadership. One plausible explanation is that principals interact with students less directly than teachers do, so their influence on students' emotional functioning is more likely to be transmitted through teachers, classroom practices, and the broader school climate than through direct contact.

Servant leadership has been linked to fostering a readiness for self-directed learning among educators, which can extend to students through the trickle-down effect of leadership practices. Emotional intelligence and empowering leadership styles are known to enhance self-regulated learning, which is crucial for students' academic and personal development. Thus, this implies that servant leadership may indirectly support students' self-regulated learning by fostering a culture of autonomy and self-awareness. The findings of this study are consistent with this argument: servant leadership showed its largest direct path to self-regulated learning (β = 0.228; $f^2 = 0.056$), which was stronger than its path to emotional intelligence. Two mechanisms may explain this relationship. From the perspective of self-determination theory, servant leaders support students' needs for autonomy,

competence, and relatedness, which are the motivational foundations of self-directed learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). From a social cognitive perspective, principals who set goals, monitor progress, and reflect openly on their own work model the very processes that constitute self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002). Emotional intelligence also contributed positively to self-regulated learning (β = 0.181), supporting the view that the ability to recognize and manage emotions helps students sustain effort and cope with academic difficulties (Salma & Alsa, 2023).

Subjective well-being among students which encompasses life satisfaction, positive emotions, and low levels of negative emotions has been shown to influence students' academic engagement and achievement. For example, life satisfaction among students positively predicts academic engagement, while negative emotions have the opposite effect (Datu & King, 2018). Furthermore, SWB has a reciprocal relationship with academic achievement, such that students with high SWB tend to have better grades, and vice versa (Tian et al., 2015). Relationships with peers, teachers, and family play a crucial role in students' SWB. Social support from various sources, such as parents and teachers, directly and indirectly enhances SWB through better school adaptation (Tomás et al., 2020). These studies are relevant to the present model because they show that well-being functions not only as an outcome but also as a resource. Consistent with this view, subjective well-being was the strongest predictor of emotional intelligence in this study (β = 0.415; f^2 = 0.211), indicating that students who are more satisfied with their lives and experience more positive emotions also report better emotional competencies, as proposed by the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001). Interestingly, the direct path from subjective well-being to self-regulated learning was negative and negligible (β = −0.054; f^2 = 0.003), suggesting that feeling well does not automatically translate into stronger regulation of learning unless it is accompanied by adequate emotional skills.

Female students tend to have higher subjective well-being than male students, particularly in the aspect of social relationships (Li & Wang, 2019; Mirawati et al., 2024). Academic achievement has a positive relationship with subjective well-being. Students with good academic grades tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction (Zhang & Chen, 2025). The subjective well-being of middle school students is influenced by factors such as family functioning, academic satisfaction, and emotional support. Although this study does not link well-being to leadership, it underscores the importance of a supportive environment, which can be facilitated by servant leadership. These factors are discussed here because they may partly account for the 91.1% of unexplained variance in self-regulated learning. Because the sample was balanced between male (n = 125) and female (n = 125) students, gender differences could in principle be examined; however, no multigroup analysis was conducted, so whether the relationships in this model differ between male and female students remains an open question for future research.

CONCLUSION

The most significant and unexpected finding of this study is that principal servant leadership was not the dominant driver of students' learning outcomes. Its direct paths were relatively weak, with a positive association with self-regulated learning (β = 0.228) and only a small association with emotional intelligence (β = 0.111). Instead, students' subjective well-being emerged as the strongest predictor of emotional intelligence (β = 0.415; f^2 = 0.211), while its direct path to self-regulated learning was negative and negligible (β = −0.054). Emotional intelligence, in turn, contributed positively to self-regulated learning (β = 0.181), although the indirect effects through emotional intelligence were small. These results indicate that students' internal psychological resources play a more prominent role in shaping their emotional and learning competencies than principal leadership alone, and that the principal's influence on students is likely to be indirect and modest.

In terms of scientific contribution, this study partly confirms previous findings that servant leadership creates supportive conditions for learning (Athanasios, 2025; Yu et al., 2025), but it also questions the assumption that the benefits of servant leadership observed among teachers transfer directly to students. By integrating a contextual factor (principal servant leadership) and personal resources (subjective well-being and emotional intelligence) in a single PLS-SEM model of junior high

school students' self-regulated learning, this study offers a new perspective: the effect of school leadership on students appears to be distal and filtered through students' own emotional resources. This extends the servant leadership literature, which has mostly focused on teachers and organizational outcomes, to student-level psychological variables.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 250 students from schools in a single region (Lampung), so the findings cannot be generalized to other regions, educational levels, or types of schools. Second, the cross-sectional, self-report design does not allow causal conclusions and is vulnerable to common method bias. Third, the measurement model showed weaknesses, with AVE values below 0.50 for all constructs and composite reliability below 0.70 for servant leadership and subjective well-being, while the R^2 values (0.183 and 0.089) indicate weak explanatory power. Fourth, differences by gender, age, grade level, and school context were not analyzed. Future research should refine and re-validate the instruments, use larger and more diverse samples across regions, school levels, and genders, and apply longitudinal or multilevel designs that include teacher and school-climate variables. Such studies would produce a deeper and more comprehensive understanding and support the formulation of more effective school leadership policies focused on students' well-being and learning.

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