

An Exploratory Study on Servant Leadership Traits among selected Principals and Senior Teachers in Model Schools, Telangana, India



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The study investigates how servant leadership traits are perceived and demonstrated by principals and senior teachers in selected model schools. Using the Servant Leadership Questionnaire originally developed by Robert K. Greenleaf, information was gathered from eight principals and forty-six senior teachers. The responses revealed a generally positive attitude toward servant leadership, with conceptualisation and healing emerging as the most evident traits. The findings imply that while the philosophy of servant leadership is appreciated, its practice varies in consistency. Continued emphasis on reflective leadership and professional learning could further enhance these qualities in educational contexts.

Keywords: Educational Management, Greenleaf Questionnaire, Leadership Behavior, Model Schools, Servant Leadership

1. Introduction

Educational institutions increasingly recognize the need for leadership models that emphasize empathy, trust, and community. The concept of *servant leadership*, first articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, proposes that the most effective leaders are those who view themselves primarily as servants to their communities. In the school environment, this approach nurtures a culture of care, shared responsibility, and personal growth. Model schools were established to serve as examples of quality governance and teaching practice. Exploring servant leadership within these schools provides insight into how leadership behavior influences institutional culture and effectiveness. This research seeks to understand the extent to which principals and senior teachers in such institutions exhibit servant leadership traits in their daily professional lives.

2. Literature Review

1. Introduction to Servant Leadership in Education

Servant leadership, first introduced by Greenleaf (1977), emphasizes the leader's role as a servant to others, focusing on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. In educational settings, this leadership style is characterized by attributes such as empathy, listening, stewardship, and commitment to the growth of others. Recent studies have highlighted the positive impact of servant leadership on various educational outcomes, including teacher performance, school climate, and student achievement.

2. Servant Leadership and Teacher Performance

A study conducted at SMAN 1 Gerung in Indonesia explored how principals' servant leadership behaviours influence teacher performance. The research found that teachers perceived principals who exhibited servant leadership traits—such as empathy, openness, and community building—as more effective, leading to enhanced teacher performance.

3. Systematic Reviews on Servant Leadership in Education

A comprehensive systematic review by Kainde and Mandagi (2024) analysed 30 empirical studies to assess the outcomes of servant leadership in educational contexts. The review concluded that servant leadership positively affects teacher morale, job satisfaction, and engagement. On an organizational level, it fosters improved communication and a collaborative culture, thereby enhancing overall school performance.

4. Servant Leadership and School Climate

Research by Kilag et al. (2024) examined the role of servant leadership in creating a positive school climate. The study found that principals who practiced servant leadership contributed to a supportive and inclusive school environment, which in turn improved teacher job satisfaction and student academic achievement.

5. Servant Leadership in South Asian Educational Settings

In a study focusing on Bangladeshi educational institutions, it was found that principals' religious values, when aligned with

servant leadership principles, positively influenced teacher job satisfaction. The research highlighted the mediating role of servant leadership in this relationship, emphasizing its cultural relevance in South Asian contexts.

6. Servant Leadership Practices in South African Rural Schools

Shula (2024) explored the relationship between principals' servant leadership practices and teacher motivation in rural South African schools. The study revealed that principals who adopted servant leadership behaviors, such as active listening and empathy, significantly enhanced teacher motivation, even in challenging contexts.

7. Implementation Challenges and Recommendations

While the benefits of servant leadership are evident, its implementation in educational settings faces challenges. A study by Subekti et al. (2024) identified that limited understanding and insufficient training among educational leaders hinder the effective application of servant leadership. The authors recommend the development of targeted training programs and mentorship initiatives to promote servant leadership practices.

Conclusion from Reviews

The reviewed literature underscores the positive impact of servant leadership on various aspects of education, including teacher performance, school climate, and student achievement. However, challenges in implementation highlight the need for comprehensive training and development programs for educational leaders. Future research should focus on exploring context-specific applications of servant leadership and developing strategies to overcome implementation barriers

3. Methodology

Objectives of the Study: *Primary objective:* Measure the level of servant leadership traits among principals and senior teachers in model schools. *Secondary Objective:* Determine which servant leadership traits are more prominently displayed. Further, Analyze overall perceptions of servant leadership within the school environment. *Final objective of the study:* Recommend strategies for strengthening servant leadership practices in education.

Table I Aspects and Description of the Research

Aspect	Description
Research Design	Descriptive and exploratory
Population	Principals and senior teachers working in model schools
Sample Size	8 Principals and 46 Senior Teachers
Sampling Technique	Purposive sampling
Instrument Used	Standardized <i>Servant Leadership Questionnaire</i> (Greenleaf)
Data Collection	Structured interviews and questionnaire responses
Data Analysis	Descriptive statistics—mean and frequency values on a five-point Likert scale

The instrument measured ten dimensions of servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

4. Data Specification

Our study is based on opinions of selected respondents of model schools. The Average scores for the ten traits ranged from **3.0 to 3.8**, showing an overall slightly positive perception of servant leadership among respondents.

Table II Mean score and Interpretation

Trait	Mean Score	Interpretation
Listening	3.2	Neutral
Empathy	3.5	Slightly positive
Healing	3.7	Positive
Awareness	3.4	Slightly positive
Persuasion	3.2	Neutral
Conceptualization	3.8	Positive
Foresight	3.4	Slightly positive
Stewardship	3.4	Slightly positive
Commitment to Growth of People	3.2	Neutral
Building Community	3.1	Neutral

The analysis indicates a developing inclination toward servant leadership among the school leaders surveyed. Higher scores in **conceptualization** and **healing** suggest that respondents value vision, creativity, and concern for others’ well-being.

Slightly positive responses for **empathy**, **awareness**, **foresight**, and **stewardship** show an emerging sensitivity to interpersonal relationships and collective responsibility.

Neutral ratings in **listening**, **building community**, and **commitment to growth of people** point to areas where further improvement is possible. This pattern implies that servant leadership is gradually being internalized but has not yet become a fully embedded institutional norm. Administrative constraints, time limitations, and top-down decision-making may restrict broader application of servant leadership principles in daily school management.

5. Results and Discussions

This section presents the results and findings obtained from the empirical study. Based on the data collected and analysis, the following observations have been drawn regarding the leadership traits.

1. Most respondents demonstrated a **slightly positive orientation** toward servant leadership.
2. **Conceptualization** and **healing** received the strongest ratings, highlighting leaders' strategic thinking and supportive attitudes.
3. **Empathy**, **awareness**, and **foresight** also showed positive trends, reflecting a growing appreciation for reflective and inclusive leadership.
4. Some dimensions—especially listening and building community—remain neutral, signaling potential for targeted development.
5. The overall findings confirm a **positive but evolving presence** of servant leadership in model school environments.

5.1 Discussion

The results correspond with earlier research emphasizing the relevance of servant leadership in nurturing ethical and collaborative work cultures (Spears, 1995; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The data reveals that principals and senior teachers are moving from traditional authoritative roles toward more supportive and participative models.

However, the transition requires institutional backing. Leadership development programs, peer reflection sessions, and shared decision-making structures can help translate these attitudes into consistent behavior. When leaders act with empathy and stewardship, they foster environments that promote motivation, mutual respect, and improved learning outcomes.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that servant leadership traits are becoming visible among principals and senior teachers in model schools. The most evident traits—conceptualization and healing—indicate progress toward visionary and compassionate leadership. Overall, the results portray a **moderately positive climate**, suggesting that servant leadership is gaining recognition as a desirable leadership model in education. Sustained encouragement through training, reflection, and recognition will be essential to make these values a lasting feature of institutional culture.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen and enhance servant leadership practices.

- **Professional Development:** Conduct regular workshops focusing on empathy, communication, and ethical leadership.
- **Mentorship:** Establish mentorship networks where experienced leaders guide others in practicing servant leadership.
- **Collaborative Governance:** Promote participatory decision-making and shared leadership among staff members.
- **Recognition Systems:** Publicly appreciate leaders who demonstrate servant leadership behaviors.
- **Future Research:** Extend the study to a larger population or compare results across different school categories.

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