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The Servant Leadership Approaches of Principals at Schools –How Successful Do The Principals View Themselves?[1]

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ABSTRACT

For ensuring sustainable development and maintaining the competitive advantages of the organizations, lots of leadership approaches have been emerged in the management literature. And, at schools, the leadership roles of school principals is seen as the number one issue in order to achieve effectiveness in education. Servant leadership, as one of the leadership approaches, draws considerable attention in recent years in terms of accomplishing professional development and realizing educational goals through serving the others for the common good. The main goal of that research is, based on the views of the primary school principals, to determine the levels of their servant leadership behaviours they fulfil at schools. The universe of the research constituted the principals working at the primary schools in Elazig, a small city in the Eastern part of Anatolia in Turkey. The research was run in the universe. The total number of the school principals who responded the questionnaire items was 129. To obtain the views of principals about the levels of their own servant leadership behaviours, a questionnaire, developed by the researchers themselves was used. In order to maintain the reliability and validity, a principal component analysis was performed distributing the questionnaires to a large group of people consisting of teachers. And so, the low-loaded questionnaire items were excluded. And the factor analysis gave way to gather the items under three factors named as "caring and integration", "sensitivity", and "individual orientation". For the analysis of the data, frequency, mean, and ANOVA were computed. The results revealed that principals' views about their own servant leadership fulfilment at schools were highest levels. However, significant difference was found considering the independent variable of educational degree level. Based on the results, some interpretations were produced, and some recommendation were made.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Principals, Primary Schools

Introduction

Various theories and models have been developed in terms of leadership in the management of the organizations. Although the purposed leadership styles varied according to their functionalities, today's unstable and vague organizational environment requires the leadership

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[1] This study is based on a thesis entitled "The Level of Servant Leadership Actualized by Supervisors and School Principals (Sample of Elazig City)" run by Fatih Polat, under the consultancy of Prof. Dr. Fatma Ozmen

styles which endure a supportive and caring nature. Servant leadership is such a kind of leadership that is needed to achieve sustainable development of staff and organization.

The term of servant leadership originated by Greenleaf (1970) in an essay entitled *The Servant as Leader,* (Spears, 2002, p.3). This concept of servant leadership emphasizes the idea that a leader must serve first. The primary aim of a servant leader is to serve the followers for the sake of their growth and wellbeing so as to achieve common goods. Collective human development is emphasized than self interests (Page and Wong, 2000).

Educational organizations, have unique features since the main input and output of them is human. These institutions serve for the growth and development of people by means of people as well. Therefore, more consideration and supports should take place in every aspect of the management and leadership manifestation. To accomplish the organizational goals so as to promote learning and development, a servant leadership embracing all stakeholders is necessary.

Problem of the Research

For promoting the effectiveness of schools, principals are seen in the number one position since they have lots of vehicles for influencing, motivating, directing and supervising the people. Principals can collaboratively create a suitable and fruitful environment for the school staff and for the students to accomplish instructional and organizational improvement. Wilmore (2002) draws attention to the changing roles of school principals that pursue a transition from head teacher to school manager and then to school leadership that is seen necessary for the success of all stakeholders and for building a learning community (p. 5). Citing several researchers, Black (2010) states that "..improved academic achievement goals can be attained by effective school leaders attending to the needs of school organizations" (p. 437).

Schools, due to their value weighted nature as organizations, may be deemed as the best places for servant leadership practices. Demarest, Edmonds, and Glaser (2010) state that for achieving high performing organization, a strong and distinct culture should be established. And, they insist again that the most successful culture change for achieving high level performances is top managers' servant leadership. It is claimed that there is a positive correlation between servant leadership implementations and a positive organizational climate (Black, 2010, p. 437-438). Clark (2011), in his study find that there is a positive correlation between servant leadership and school climate.

Likewise, Kahveci's (2012) findings indicate a significantly positive relationship between the servant leadership and school culture, and servant leadership is found as a prediction of school culture (p. 70).

On the other hand, Blanchard, Blanchad and Zigarmi (2010), see the plight of ego as a barrier to effective leadership. They state that ego creates a false pride making someone think leadership is about him or her rather than about those who are led. And, self-doubt or fear accompanies to false pride, and the person begins to spend a great deal of time for protecting yourself. However, the issues such as seeing the future, engaging and developing people, reinventing continuously, valuing results and relationships, and embodying the values, as in servant leadership, are seen as the ego antidotes by them (p. 287).

The results of various researches demonstrate that school principals do not have adequate level of knowledge and skills in performing effective leadership practices (Babil, 2009; Kazancı, 2010). Abdollahi et al (2013), share the results of some other studies done by various researchers. For instance, in Hanigan's (2008) study conducted in five California colleges, no

servant leadership behaviours were detected. Likewise, the research results obtained by Frani (2007) in Teacher training university in Iran, revealed less level servant leadership. In the study of Zahn (2011), it may be seen that principals' servant leadership is perceived at moderate level considering persuasion and emotional healing; but at high level in learning as a team, organizational management, and altruism. Balay, Kaya, and Gençdoğan-Yılmaz's (2014, p. 243) study comprising elementary, middle and secondary schools; and Gençdogan-Yılmaz's (2013, p,84) study comprising education, health, and security institutions, indicate moderate level of servant leadership competences. And, again, related to the servant leadership behaviours of school principals, the findings of Cerit (2005), reveal that the principals fulfil all the servant leadership dimensions at generally level.

Another remarkable point is that regarding the level of principals' servant leadership competences, principals perceptions indicate higher levels than of teachers' (Herbst, 2003, Cerit, 2007, p. 93; Balay, Kaya, and Gençdoğan-Yılmaz, 2014, p. 242; Gençdoğan-Yılmaz, 2013, p. 132).

Goal of The Research

The definition of the concept and the characteristics of a servant leader have been argued largely in the literature. Servant leadership encompasses leadership behaviours and a management philosophy as well. This philosophy emphasizes the needs of the followers first than of leaders', making them grow professionally as autonomous individuals.

Schools can create fruitful environments for the growth of the individuals. This research, taking into account the opinions of the principals, tries to find out if servant leadership qualities have been disseminating at the school settings.

The main aim of that research is, based on the views of the school principals, to determine the level of their servant leadership approaches. In that frame, the objectives of the research are to determine if there are significant differences among the views of the principals:
1. According to their ages?
2. Education levels?

Literature Review Related to Servant Leadership

The term servant leadership was popularised by Robert K. Greenleaf in his book entitled *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, in 1977. The idea of servant leadership, as Greenleaf (2002) states, comes out of reading Hermann Hesse's book entitled *Journey to The East* where the main character Leo serving the people in the journey creates an extraordinary pleasant environment until his disappearance. This situation makes Greenleaf think that Leo is not only a servant but at the same time a leader since after his disappearance the journey is abandoned. And, he comes a conclusion that great leaders are servant first (p. 19).

Based on the thoughts of Greenleaf, Spears (2010) described ten servant leadership traits as, listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and building community (p. 27). Page and Wong (2000), referencing to Adjibolosoo (1994), point out servant leadership as the one that best represent the ideals embodied in the human factor among many leadership styles. According to Adjibolosoo, human factor refers to a spectrum of personality characteristics, and other dimensions of human performance.

In practicing servant leadership and sharing the burden of leadership in school settings, three points are emphasized by Sergiovanni (2000, p. 277). These are mentioned as *purposing*, *empowerment*, and *leadership by outrage*. The aim of purposing is explained as ".. to build within the school a center of shared values that transforms it from a mere organization into a covenantal community". Empowerment can be practiced successfully if support is provided to remove the obstacles. And, when the covenants of shared values become the driving force for the school's norm system, it seems natural to react with outrage to shortcomings.

Since Greenleaf's presentation of servant leadership to the management literature, various researches on the effectiveness of servant leadership were conducted, and the functionalities of servant leadership were tested. Patterson (2003), developed a servant leadership model which based on seven virtuous constructs each of which nurturing the other, reaches to the virtue of service at the end. These constructs or dimensions are described as follows:

Agapao love : Love is the cornerstone of servant leadership, and means social or moral sense. It considers each individual as a total person with needs and desires. Servant leaders love unconditionally and genuinely.

Humility : Non-overestimating of one's merits, respect is paid to receive criticism.

Altruism : Helping the people for their welfare rather than the leader himself.

Vision : Emphasizing organizational members' future state.

Trust : Believing in the success of the followers, it ties the member together.

Empowerment: Entrusting power to others so as to make them grow.

Service : Giving of time, energy, compassion, and the like for the welfare and success of others.

Beside developing models, several servant leadership instruments were developed as well. Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) in order to measure the construct of servant leadership, developed a servant leadership assessment instrument building upon Patterson's theory. Their instrument comprised five factors such as empowerment, love, humility, trust and vision. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) tested servant leadership construct developing a scale which mainly sought the congruence to leadership characteristics stated by Spears (1995). They obtained five factors for the scale named as altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom, and organizational stewardship. Similarly, Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008), claiming that the servant leadership literature offers an inconsistent set of dimensions, developed a nine dimensional measure of servant leadership. These dimensions were explained as *emotional healing, creating value for community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, relationships,* and *servanthood.*

Page and Wong (2000) state that "Servant leadership incorporates the ideals of empowerment, total quality, team building, participatory management, and the service ethic into a leadership philosophy". This model of leadership, according to Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (1997), emphasized, increased service to others; a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community; and a sharing of power in decision making (Page and Wong, 2000; Smith, 2005, p, 4).

It is stated that 21. Century scholars presented the servant leadership as one moving beyond the transformational leadership (Black, 2010, p. 438). Liden, et al (2008) consider servant leadership as a socially oriented transformational leadership.

Research Methodology

A survey method was used in that research. The space of the research constituted 150 principals working in the primary schools in Elazig, a city in the Eastern part of Anatolia, in Turkey. The research was run in the space and as total 129 subjects, all of whom were males, replied the questionnaire items.

The questionnaire items have been developed by the researchers themselves in the light of literature review and views of experts in the field. The five scale Likert type questionnaire which consisted of 45 items, ranking from always, to never, was used to gather the views of the subjects.

To determine if the items of the data gathering instrument are adequate for sampling and for doing factor analysis, 52 items had been tested distributing to a large group, beforehand. The KMO value was detected as .98. The accepted index towards KMO value is over .6; and, to find out the correlation level among the variables, the result of Barlett's test was found as 16874.49, indicating .00 level of significance. The principal component analysis created opportunity to exclude the low loaded items under .40; and at the end, through exploratory factor analysis, 45 items were gathered under three factors with Eigenvalues above 1. According to the connotation of the items, the factors were named as *caring and integration* (33 items), *sensitivity* (7 items), and *individual orientation* (5 items).

The item loads in the first factor was between .76 and .49; in the second factor was between.73 and .54; and in the third factor was between .79 and .53. Towards the internal consistency of the factors, the Cronbach-Alpha values were obtained. And, it was understood that the Cronbach-Alpha value for the the dimension of "caring and integration" was α= .98; for "sensitivity" was .88; and for "individual orientation" it was .86. All of these values indicate that the measuring tool is adequate and reliable at high level.

Another remarkable issue to mention here is that all the core features of servant leadership could be reflected inclusively through the dimensions of *caring and integration*, *sensitivity*, and *individual orientation.*

Analysis of the Data

The data were analysed considering frequency, mean, and ANOVA. The replies to five scale questionnaire items were ranged as 1,00-1,80 very low (never); 1,81-2,60 low (rarely); 2,61-3,40 moderate (sometimes); 3,41-4,20 high (generally); and 4,21-5,00 very high (always).

Findings and Discussion

Findings at The Item Base

Without taken into consideration the independent variables, it is understood that the mean values of the items in each dimension, has indicated highest scores. For instance, in *Caring and Integration* dimension, the items, "I encourage people to work collaboratively" ($\overline{X}$=4.74); "I appreciate the success and efforts of my subordinates" ($\overline{X}$=4.79); "I share my knowledge and experiences with my staff" ($\overline{X}$=4.70), and the like, all show highest scores.

In the dimension of *Sensitivity* the items such as "I do not run in pursuit of small accounts to save the day" ($\overline{X}$=4.79); "I am not insensitive towards the requirements of the staff about finding the ways of doing some work" ($\overline{X}$=4.75); "I create opportunities for professional development of the organizational members" ($\overline{X}$=4.81); "I encourage the teachers for taking initiative" ($\overline{X}$=4.84); "I value the development of social affairs" ($\overline{X}$=4.78) indicate highest scores.

The items which take place in the dimension of *individual orientation* such as "I do not exhibit a domineering characteristic style" ($\overline{X}$=4.81); "As a principal, my behaviours are not rough and tough" ($\overline{X}$=4.66); "I'm not consistently grim-faced" ($\overline{X}$=4.56) indicate very high scores again.

On the other hand, the items such as "I remember the special and important days (birthday, teachers' day, etc.) of my teachers" ($\overline{X}$=3.41); "I encourage teachers to be accountable related to the works they do" ($\overline{X}$=3.99); "I often get students' views to determine their level of satisfaction about the school" ($\overline{X}$=4.09) deserve relatively low mean scores and indicate 'generally' level which is interpreted as high level as well.

The distribution of the highest scores for favourable behaviours in each dimension, can be thought as an indication of being servant leaders on the part of the school principals. It can be seen that only four items have proven generally levels, and all the other items which indicate the affirmative statements are all marked at 'always' level. This can be interpreted that, school principals perceive themselves as fully as servant leaders.

Findings Related to The Independent Variables at The Bases of Dimensions

Considering the independent variables of age and education level, the distribution of the sub groups according to variables are given below in tables.

Findings related to Age variable

Related to age variable, it can be seen that 9 principals are 30 years old or less than it. 45 principals' age varies between 31-40; 42 principals are between 41-50 years old; and 33 of them are 51 years old or more than it (Table 1).

Table 1
Distribution o The Age Range of The Subjects

Age level	N	%
30 and less	9	6.9
31-40	45	34.9
41-50	42	32.6
51 and more	33	25.6
Total	129	100

In the research, related to the views of the principals considering their own servant leadership practices, the findings according to age variable, indicate no significant differences at the base of the dimensions. Principals put forth their views at highest levels marking "always" option (Table 2).

The researches done in the context of servant leadership, reveal different results regarding the variable of age. In a research, conducted by Mook (2012), which aims to assess the perceived servant leadership levels in five business-model companies, no significant differences is attained related to age variable. Melchar and Bosco (2010), in their study to assess the mid-level service managers' servant leadership characteristics in three high-performing automobile dealerships, reach no significant differences related to employees' age (p. 84). And, in Chow's (2008) study

again, no significant differences are found related with age variable towards servant leadership practices.

On the other hand, there have been some other studies in which significant differences have been obtained. Horsman (2001), in his study conducted in multiple types of organizations, finds significant differences in perceptions of servant leadership within the ranges of age (Rennaker, 2008, p. 25). Gençdoğan-Yılmaz (2013), finds significant differences among the age groups, as well, towards actualization of servant leadership in the public institutions, including educational ones (p. 112-113). She concludes that the age range and perception levels of servant leadership are mutually increased.

Table 2
The Distribution of Data According to The Age Variable at the item bases

Dimensions	Groups	N	X	SS	SH	F	P
Caring and Integration	1) 30 and less	9	4.58	.25	.09		
	2) 31-40	45	4.42	.29	.04		
	3) 41-50	42	4.44	.30	.05	.75	.52
	4) 51 and more	33	4.47	.35	.06		
	Total	129	4.45	.31	.03		
Sensitivity	1) 30 and less	9	4.60	.60	.20		
	2) 31-40	45	4.69	.43	.06		
	3) 41-50	42	4.53	.50	.08	1.44	.23
	4) 51 and more	33	4.48	.46	.08		
	Total	129	4.58	.48	.04		
Individual Orientation	1) 30 and less	9	4.51	.44	.15		
	2) 31-40	45	4.47	.43	.07		
	3) 41-50	42	4.46	.33	.05	.75	.53
	4) 51and more	33	4.59	.44	.08		
	Total	129	4.50	.40	.04		

Findings Related to The Variable of Educational Level

Considering the educational level of the principals, as AA/AS (Associate of Arts/Associate of Sciences), BA/BS (Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science), and MA/MS (Masters of Arts/Masters of Science), the distribution of the data shows that 29 of the principals have AA or AS degree; 84 have BA or BS degree; and 16 principals have MA or MS degree (Table 3).

Table 3
The Distribution of The Educational Level of The Subjects

Degree level	N	%
AA/AS	29	22.5
BA /BS	84	65.1
MA /MS	16	12.4
Total	129	100

The analysis of the data according to the education level as AA/AS, BA/BS, and MA/MS of the principals towards holding the views of principals related to their own servant leadership approach, reveal no significant difference regarding the dimensions of *caring and integrating* and *individual orientation*.   The replies of the subjects confirm highest level of servant leadership (Table 4).

On the other hand, regarding the dimension of *sensitivity*, a significant difference can be noticed among the education degree groups. Even if high level of confirmation exists, MA /MS group see their servant leadership level ($\overline{X}$=4.86) more than the AA/AS group's ($\overline{X}$=4.37). This difference may stem from academic peculiarities gaining through the MA-MS training process.

Table 4
Distribution of The Data According to The Variable of Educational Level at The Base of Dimensions

Dimensions		N	X	SS	SH	F	P	
Caring and Integration	1) AA/AS	29	4.45	. 36	.07			
	2) BA /BS	84	4.43	. 30	.03			
	3) MA /MS	16	4.53	. 29	.07	. 60	. 55	
	Total	129	4.45	. 31	.03			
Sensitivity	1) AA/AS	29	4.37	. 49	.09			
	2) BA /BS	84	4.59	. 48	.05			
	3) MA /MS	16	4.86	. 20	.05	6.03	.00**	A (C)
	Total	129	4.58	. 48	.04			
Individual Orientation	1) AA/AS	29	4.60	. 44	.08			
	2) BA /BS	84	4.45	. 38	.04			
	3) MA /MS	16	4.55	. 44	. 11	1.55	.22	
	Total	129	4.50	. 40	.04			

*P<.05,**P<.01

In some of the studies regarding the level of servant leadership competences of school principals, it has been seen that no significant differences have been detected related to the education level variable (Cerit, 2005; Sagır, 2011; Kahveci (2012); Balay, Kaya, and Gençdoğan-Yılmaz, 2014, p. 115), Melchar and Bosco (2010), in their study to assess the mid-level service manager servant leadership competences in three high-performing automobile dealerships, no significant differences are stated related to employees' level of education (84). However, in Horsman's (2001), study considering multiple types of organizations, significant differences are indicated among the perceptions of the subjects, considering education level (Rennaker, 2008, p. 25).

The findings obtained in that research have some similarities in the researches mentioned above. However, in that research, almost all the items and dimensions have been replied at highest levels.

Results and Recommendations

That research has been considered important in terms of understanding the school settings in the frame of implemented servant leadership approach. The results reveal that all of the principals view themselves as servant leaders replying almost all of the items of the questionnaires at high or very high scores.

On the other hand, regarding the age variable, related to all the dimensions as *caring and integration*, *sensitivity*, and *individual orientation* no significant differences have been found among age range groups of respondents.

Regarding the independent variable of educational degree level, it can be seen that the views of the principals who hold MA and MS degree, indicate significantly higher scores than the other degree groups'. This situation may be attributed to their knowledge and skills gained during graduate trainings related to the importance of soft skills in leadership approaches.

Schools are value based organizations. And the main goal of the schools is to ensure effective education through facilitating and supporting learning and teaching environment. Especially for achieving sustainable development and renovation, mutual understanding, collaboration and cooperation should be practiced at every educational setting. And, principal here is the number one person to construct a positive work environment through disseminating caring, supportive, and facilitative leadership behaviours which are seen as the crucial characteristics of servant leaders. Servant leadership is needed in all interpersonal affairs and in all work processes at schools.

In that research, although the principals find themselves as servant leaders, the views of all stakeholders can create differences. The results in many researches indicate that especially subordinates do not find principals so effective as principals think themselves. For instance, Karip (1998) finds that school principals evaluate themselves more successful than deputy principals. And, similarly in a research done by Herbst (2003), it has been seen that the views of principals are higher that the teachers' in terms of achieving servant leadership qualities. Therefore, to increase the skills and knowledge level of the principals, ongoing in-service training programs towards leadership should be realized. They should be encouraged to disseminate servant leadership behaviours and attitudes, in all day to day educational processes.

Since the findings in that research indicate significant difference between MA/MS holders and the other degree groups, the principals should encourage to hold graduate and post graduate degrees, and the opportunities to attend such programs should be created.

The training programs should have interdisciplinary and multi faced features so as to make principals well equipped to meet the expectations of the school members.

Principals should be motivated to become members of various well known web based international principal associations for improving their knowledge capacity.

This research is limited with the views of the primary school principals related to their own servant leadership approaches at schools. Some other empirical researches can be conducted based on the observation of the implementations of servant leadership behaviours at educational institutions.

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