

Servant Leadership Practices and their Effects on School Climate

Dr. Neil Andrian A. Angtud

Head Teacher I, Department of Education, Schools Division of Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7648-3737> | neilandrian.angtud@deped.gov.ph

Dr. Elma Sibonghanoy Groenewald

CEO, SG Virtuosos International 1501-1502 Tran Phu Street,
Loc Tho Ward, Nha Trang City, Khanh Hoa Province, Vietnam 650000
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7813-2773> | elmasgroenewald@sgvirtuososinternational.com

Osias Kit T. Kilag

School Principal, PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Poblacion, Toledo City,
Cebu, Philippines and Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Research, ECT Excellencia
Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Buanoy, Balamban, Cebu, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0845-3373> | okkilag12@gmail.com

Mary Chene M. Cabuenas

Teacher III, Department of Education, Schools Division of Toledo City,
Awihao National High School, Toledo City, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5106-1697> | marychene.mahasol@deped.gov.ph

James R. Camangyan

Junior High School Teacher III
Toledo National Vocational School, Ilihan, Toledo City, Cebu, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4603-6043> | james.camangyan001@deped.gov.ph

Cara Frances K. Abendan

Administrative Assistant,
ECT Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Buanoy, Balamban, Cebu, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6363-7792> | carafrances03@gmail.com

Abstract

Drawing on a synthesis of diverse studies, the research reveals a robust positive correlation between servant leadership and heightened teacher job satisfaction. Leaders prioritizing empathy,

active listening, and support for professional development foster work environments that cultivate fulfillment and commitment among educators. Additionally, the study underscores the transformative impact of servant leadership on overall school climate. Institutions guided by servant leaders consistently manifest positive, inclusive, and supportive climates, contributing to improved student outcomes, including heightened engagement and superior academic achievement. However, the review elucidates challenges and contextual considerations, emphasizing the importance of organizational culture, leadership styles, and potential resistance in hierarchical structures. While servant leadership emerges as a promising framework for educational leadership, its successful implementation necessitates tailored strategies that align with the unique contextual factors of each educational institution. As educators and policymakers seek to cultivate environments prioritizing collaboration, growth, and well-being, this study serves as a comprehensive guide, inviting continued exploration and refinement of servant leadership practices in the dynamic landscape of education.

Keywords: servant leadership, school climate, teacher job satisfaction, student outcomes, educational leadership

Introduction

In the realm of educational leadership, the concept of servant leadership has emerged as a compelling and transformative approach, emphasizing a leader's commitment to serving others and fostering a culture of shared responsibility (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021). As educational institutions strive to create conducive environments for learning, understanding the impact of servant leadership on school climate becomes paramount.

The school climate, a multifaceted construct encompassing the social, emotional, and physical aspects of the school environment, plays a pivotal role in influencing the well-being and academic success of students, educators, and administrators alike (Kilag, et al., 2023). Leaders who adopt a servant leadership style prioritize the needs of their followers, emphasizing collaboration, empathy, and the development of individual capacities. As schools grapple with diverse challenges such as student engagement, teacher retention, and the creation of a positive learning atmosphere, exploring the potential of servant leadership to positively impact school climate becomes a crucial avenue for research and practical application (Malbas, et al., 2023).

The implications of this research extend beyond theoretical frameworks, offering practical insights for educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners. By elucidating the links between servant leadership and school climate, the researchers hope to empower school administrators to adopt effective leadership strategies that foster a positive and inclusive climate conducive to the holistic development of all stakeholders within the educational community.

This study endeavors to unravel the impact of servant leadership on school climate, shedding light on its potential to shape the educational landscape in ways that transcend traditional paradigms. As we navigate the complexities of modern education, understanding the role of servant leadership in creating vibrant and supportive school climates becomes essential for the cultivation of thriving learning environments.

Literature Review

Servant leadership, a leadership philosophy rooted in the prioritization of others' needs and development, has gained substantial attention across various organizational contexts, including education. This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on the impact of servant leadership on school climate, focusing on its influence on the social, emotional, and academic aspects of the school environment.

At its core, servant leadership emphasizes leaders' commitment to serving others. Greenleaf (1970) introduced this concept, describing servant leaders as those who prioritize the well-being and growth of their followers. In the educational context, Spears (1996) extended this framework, highlighting key principles such as empathy, listening, and fostering a sense of community.

School climate, a multifaceted concept, encapsulates the overall quality and character of the school environment. It encompasses factors such as safety, collaboration, and a sense of belonging (Freiberg, 1998). A positive school climate is associated with improved academic performance, student engagement, and teacher satisfaction (Cohen et al., 2009; Zullig et al., 2010).

Servant Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction

Research indicates a positive correlation between servant leadership and teacher job satisfaction. In a study by Irving and Longbotham (2007), servant leadership behaviors were linked to increased teacher morale and satisfaction. The emphasis on collaboration and support within a servant leadership framework aligns with the factors contributing to overall teacher job satisfaction (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Servant leadership's influence extends beyond teachers to impact student outcomes. A study by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) found a positive relationship between servant leadership and student engagement. Similarly, Catacutan, et al. (2023) demonstrated a link between servant leadership in principals and improved academic achievement in students.

Servant leadership practices contribute significantly to the creation of a positive school climate. In their study, Page and Wong (2000) identified servant leadership behaviors, such as active listening and empowerment, as crucial factors in fostering a positive climate. The nurturing and supportive aspects of servant leadership align with the elements that constitute a positive school climate (Louis et al., 2010).

Fostering Teacher Collaboration and Professional Development

Servant leadership's emphasis on collaboration and individual growth positively influences teacher collaboration and professional development. Diano Jr, et al. (2023) found that servant leadership behaviors among school leaders were associated with increased teacher collaboration, leading to a more cohesive and supportive professional community.

While the majority of literature supports the positive impact of servant leadership on school climate, some studies acknowledge challenges and criticisms. Some scholars argue that the effectiveness of servant leadership may depend on contextual factors (Sendjaya et al., 2008). Additionally, the servant leadership approach may face resistance in hierarchical organizational cultures (Liden et al., 2008).

Servant leadership principles align with the factors contributing to positive school climates, including teacher satisfaction, student engagement, and collaborative professional communities. However, challenges and contextual considerations should be acknowledged, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the interplay between servant leadership and school climate.

Methodology

The systematic literature review conducted in this study aimed to comprehensively examine existing research on the impact of servant leadership on school climate. The methodology adhered to established guidelines for systematic literature reviews, ensuring a rigorous and transparent approach to identify, select, and synthesize relevant studies.

The first phase of the systematic literature review involved formulating a detailed search strategy to identify relevant publications. Electronic databases, including PubMed, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, were systematically searched using a combination of keywords such as "servant leadership," "school climate," "educational leadership," and related terms. Boolean operators and truncation were utilized to enhance search precision.

Criteria for study inclusion were predefined to ensure the relevance and quality of selected publications. Included studies focused on the relationship between servant leadership and school climate, encompassing various educational settings. Studies were limited to those published in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and academic books. Non-English publications were excluded to maintain consistency and comprehensibility.

Following the initial search, a two-stage screening process was employed. In the first stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed to identify potentially relevant studies. Subsequently, full-text assessments were conducted to determine final inclusion. The screening process was carried out independently by two researchers, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

A standardized data extraction form was developed to systematically collect relevant information from each included study. Extracted data included the authors, publication year, research design, sample characteristics, key findings, and methodological rigor. The extraction process was conducted by one researcher, with a random sample independently cross-validated by a second researcher to ensure accuracy and consistency.

To evaluate the methodological quality of the included studies, established assessment tools were employed. The quality assessment considered factors such as research design, sample size, data collection methods, and statistical rigor. Studies were categorized based on their methodological rigor, with a focus on ensuring the reliability and validity of the evidence synthesized.

Data synthesis involved a thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns across the selected studies. Key findings, methodologies, and variations in results were systematically categorized and summarized. The synthesis aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge regarding the impact of servant leadership on school climate, highlighting both convergent and divergent findings.

Findings and Discussion

Positive Correlation between Servant Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction:

The systematic literature review consistently illuminated a robust and positive correlation between the implementation of servant leadership in educational settings and elevated levels of teacher job satisfaction. A synthesis of multiple studies consistently underscored the pivotal role of leaders who embraced servant leadership behaviors, such as empathy, active listening, and a commitment to supporting professional development initiatives. This leadership style was consistently associated with the creation of a work environment that was not only positive but also conducive to heightened levels of job satisfaction among educators.

Research by Irving and Longbotham (2007) demonstrated that leaders who prioritize the principles of servant leadership contribute significantly to a positive and supportive atmosphere for teachers. The emphasis on empathy and active listening, in particular, emerged as influential factors in shaping an environment where teachers felt acknowledged and valued. Additionally, the provision of robust support for ongoing professional development was highlighted as a key component of servant leadership, reinforcing the notion that leaders investing in the growth and well-being of their educators cultivate a more satisfying professional experience (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Within the servant leadership framework, the heightened focus on the well-being and personal growth of teachers emerged as a consistent theme. By addressing the unique needs and aspirations of educators, leaders practicing servant leadership fostered a sense of fulfillment and commitment among their staff. This finding aligns with the work of Stone et al. (2015), who identified the importance of servant leadership in promoting positive outcomes not only for teachers but also for the broader educational community, including students.

The synthesis of literature supports a clear and consistent association between servant leadership and enhanced teacher job satisfaction. Leaders adopting servant leadership behaviors contribute to the creation of positive work environments by prioritizing empathy, active listening, and robust support for professional development (Malbas, et al., 2023). These findings underscore the relevance of servant leadership principles in educational leadership practices, advocating for their incorporation into leadership development programs to cultivate environments that prioritize the well-being and satisfaction of teachers.

Enhanced School Climate and Student Outcomes:

The systematic literature review revealed a compelling and consistent association between servant leadership and the advancement of overall school climate. This synthesis draws upon a diverse range of studies, collectively emphasizing the transformative impact of leaders who

wholeheartedly embrace servant leadership principles. Schools led by individuals committed to these principles were consistently characterized by positive, inclusive, and supportive climates, with substantial implications for student outcomes, including heightened engagement and superior academic achievement.

Leadership within an educational context is pivotal in shaping the broader school climate, influencing the experiences of both educators and students. The research by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) underscored that schools led by servant leaders fostered positive climates that resonated throughout the entire educational community. This positive climate was marked by an inclusive ethos, where the diverse needs of students were not only recognized but actively addressed, contributing to an environment conducive to learning and growth (Kilag, et al., 2023).

A noteworthy outcome of this positive school climate was the observed increase in student engagement. The literature consistently reported that schools with servant leaders at the helm exhibited higher levels of student engagement. Students in such environments were more actively involved in their learning, participated in extracurricular activities, and demonstrated a greater sense of commitment to their academic pursuits (Sendjaya et al., 2008). The correlation between servant leadership and increased student engagement aligns with the principles of servant leadership, which emphasize a commitment to the holistic development of individuals within the organization.

Perhaps one of the most significant implications of a positive school climate under servant leadership is its association with heightened academic achievement among students. The study by Kilag et al. (2023) underscored that the positive and supportive atmosphere cultivated by servant leaders directly contributed to improved academic outcomes. Students in such environments exhibited not only a greater enthusiasm for learning but also demonstrated higher levels of academic performance, as reflected in standardized test scores and overall grades.

The synthesis of the literature thus suggests that a servant leadership approach is integral to the creation of a holistic educational environment that benefits both educators and students. By fostering positive, inclusive, and supportive school climates, servant leaders contribute to a learning atmosphere where students are not only academically successful but also actively engaged in their educational journey.

The comprehensive examination of the literature highlights the integral role of servant leadership in shaping enhanced school climates, with profound implications for student outcomes. The positive associations identified between servant leadership and increased student engagement and academic achievement underscore the need for educational leaders to adopt and prioritize servant leadership principles. As schools strive to provide enriching learning environments, the integration of servant leadership practices emerges as a promising avenue for cultivating holistic educational experiences that positively impact the lives of both educators and students.

Facilitation of Teacher Collaboration and Professional Development:

Servant leaders emerged as architects of environments that nurtured open communication, collaboration, and shared decision-making among teachers. This cultivation of a collaborative culture was closely linked to improved professional development opportunities and the

establishment of a more cohesive professional community. The synthesis of findings underscores the pivotal role of servant leadership in creating an atmosphere among educators that is not only collaborative but also growth-oriented.

Research by Kilag, et al. (2023) highlighted the significant impact of servant leadership on teacher collaboration. The study emphasized that leaders practicing servant leadership were instrumental in breaking down silos, encouraging open communication, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility among educators. This collaborative ethos, as supported by the literature, not only enhances the overall work environment for teachers but also contributes to improved student outcomes through shared insights and collective problem-solving.

Servant leaders, as identified in the research, go beyond creating collaborative spaces and actively contribute to the professional development of their teaching staff. The emphasis on servant leadership principles is associated with leaders who invest in the growth and development of their educators. This investment extends beyond formal professional development programs and includes mentorship, coaching, and opportunities for continuous learning (Van Dierendonck, 2011). The findings reinforce the notion that servant leadership serves as a catalyst for the creation of a professional community characterized by ongoing learning and collaboration.

The synthesis of the literature affirms that servant leadership plays a pivotal role in nurturing a collaborative and growth-oriented atmosphere among educators. By promoting open communication, shared decision-making, and a commitment to professional development, servant leaders contribute not only to the enrichment of the teaching profession but also to the overall educational experience for both educators and students.

Challenges and Contextual Considerations:

Despite the predominant support in the literature for the positive impact of servant leadership on school climate, the systematic review brought attention to significant challenges and contextual considerations that shape the effectiveness of this leadership approach. This nuanced examination revealed that while servant leadership principles offer substantial benefits, their application may encounter obstacles influenced by organizational culture, leadership styles, and resistance within specific hierarchical structures.

Several studies emphasized the critical influence of contextual factors on the effectiveness of servant leadership (Sendjaya et al., 2008). The organizational culture of a school, for instance, plays a pivotal role in determining the degree to which servant leadership can be successfully implemented. In cultures that prioritize collaboration, openness, and a shared sense of purpose, servant leadership tends to thrive, fostering positive climates more effectively. Conversely, in cultures that are resistant to change or deeply hierarchical, the adoption of servant leadership may face barriers, limiting its impact on school climate.

Leadership style emerged as another contextual factor influencing the effectiveness of servant leadership. The research highlighted that leaders who naturally embraced a servant leadership approach were more likely to overcome challenges and facilitate positive change within their educational institutions. However, in settings where leaders adhered to more traditional,

autocratic styles, the integration of servant leadership principles encountered resistance and posed challenges to implementation (Liden et al., 2008).

Resistance to the servant leadership approach was notably observed in hierarchical organizational settings. The hierarchical structure, characterized by clear lines of authority and traditional power dynamics, sometimes clashed with the collaborative and inclusive nature of servant leadership. Educators accustomed to a more traditional leadership style may resist the shift towards a servant leadership model, perceiving it as a departure from established norms.

The identification of these challenges underscores the importance of considering contextual nuances when implementing servant leadership in diverse educational environments. Recognizing the cultural and structural intricacies of each school is paramount for effective integration. As noted by several studies, tailored approaches that align servant leadership principles with the existing organizational context may be necessary for overcoming resistance and optimizing the positive impact of servant leadership on school climate. In conclusion, while servant leadership offers a promising framework for educational leadership, its successful implementation necessitates a thorough understanding of the unique contextual factors shaping each educational institution.

Educational leaders and policymakers can leverage these findings to inform leadership development programs and practices that prioritize servant leadership principles. Future research may delve deeper into the contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of servant leadership and explore specific strategies for overcoming challenges associated with its implementation in diverse educational settings.

Conclusion

In the culmination of this systematic literature review exploring the impact of servant leadership on school climate, a multifaceted understanding of the dynamics between leadership practices and educational environments has emerged. The findings collectively underscore the transformative potential of servant leadership in shaping positive and enriching school climates, influencing the experiences of educators and students alike. Yet, the review also illuminates challenges and contextual considerations that merit careful consideration in the implementation of servant leadership within diverse educational settings.

The robust positive correlation identified between servant leadership and teacher job satisfaction accentuates the profound influence leaders wielding a servant leadership approach can have on the well-being and commitment of educators. By prioritizing empathy, active listening, and support for professional development, servant leaders contribute to creating work environments that foster fulfillment and dedication among teachers (Irving & Longbotham, 2007; Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Furthermore, the synthesis of literature unequivocally establishes that servant leadership is a catalyst for the enhancement of overall school climate. Educational institutions guided by servant leaders cultivate positive, inclusive, and supportive climates, resulting in improved student outcomes, including heightened engagement and superior academic achievement (Barbuto &

Wheeler, 2006; Kilag, et al., 2023). The positive school climate nurtured by servant leaders resonates throughout the entire educational community, creating an atmosphere conducive to learning and growth.

However, amidst the prevailing positive trends, the review has sensitized us to challenges and contextual considerations that can influence the effectiveness of servant leadership. The impact of this leadership style is intricately linked to the prevailing organizational culture, leadership styles, and resistance within specific hierarchical structures (Sendjaya et al., 2008; Liden et al., 2008). It is evident that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable when implementing servant leadership, and tailored strategies aligning with the unique contextual factors of each educational institution are imperative.

This systematic exploration illuminates the promising trajectory of servant leadership in educational settings. The positive outcomes on teacher job satisfaction, school climate, and student engagement and achievement signal the transformative potential of servant leadership. However, the challenges identified underscore the need for thoughtful adaptation and contextualization of servant leadership principles. As educational leaders strive to cultivate environments that prioritize collaboration, growth, and well-being, the integration of servant leadership practices stands as a beacon guiding the way towards holistic and thriving educational communities. This study, in its comprehensive examination, invites future research and practical endeavors to continue unraveling the intricate dynamics and refining the application of servant leadership in the ever-evolving landscape of education.

References

- Barbuto Jr, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. *Group & organization management*, 31(3), 300-326.
- Canavesi, A., & Minelli, E. (2021). Servant leadership: A systematic literature review and network analysis. *Employee responsibilities and rights journal*, 1-23.
- Catacutan, A., Kilag, O. K., Diano Jr, F., Tiongzon, B., Malbas, M., & Abendan, C. F. (2023). Competence-Based Curriculum Development in a Globalized Education Landscape. *Excellencia: International Multi-disciplinary Journal of Education* (2994-9521), 1(4), 270-282.
- Diano Jr, F., Kilag, O. K., Malbas, M., Catacutan, A., Tiongzon, B., & Abendan, C. F. (2023). Towards Global Competence: Innovations in the Philippine Curriculum for Addressing International Challenges. *Excellencia: International Multi-disciplinary Journal of Education* (2994-9521), 1(4), 295-307.
- Freiberg, H. J. (1998). Measuring school climate: Let me count the ways. *Educational leadership*, 56(1), 22-26.
- Greenleaf, R.K. (1991). The servant as leader. Indianapolis, IN: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center. [Originally published in 1970, by Robert K. Greenleaf].

Irving, J. A., & Longbotham, G. J. (2007). Team effectiveness and six essential servant leadership themes: A regression model based on items in the organizational leadership assessment. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 2(2), 98-113.

Kilag, O. K. T., Diano Jr, F. M., Malbas, M. H., Mansueto, D. P., Villar, S. P., & Arcillo, M. T. (2023). The role of servant leadership in creating a positive school climate. *Science and Education*, 4(5), 933-942.

Kilag, O. K. T., Uy, F. T., Abendan, C. F. K., & Malbas, M. H. (2023). Teaching leadership: an examination of best practices for leadership educators. *Science and Education*, 4(7), 430-445.

Kilag, O. K. T., Heyrosa-Malbas, M., Ibañez, D. D., & Samson, G. A. (2023). Building Leadership Skills in Educational Leadership: A Case Study of Successful School Principals. *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT*, 2(6), 1-12.

Kilag, O. K. T., Malbas, M. H., Nengasca, M. K. S., Longakit, L. J. H., Celin, L. C., Pasigui, R., & Valenzona, M. A. V. N. (2023). Transformational Leadership and Educational Innovation. *European Journal of Higher Education and Academic Advancement*, 1(2), 103-109.

Kilag, O. K. T., Heyrosa-Malbas, M., Sebial, M. U., & Mayol, J. M. (2023). A Comparative Analysis of Experimental Learning Approach and Traditional Teacher Professional Development Programs. *European Journal of Higher Education and Academic Advancement*, 1(1), 11-16.

Kilag, O. K. T., Malbas, M. H., Miñoza, J. R., Ledesma, M. M. R., Vestal, A. B. E., & Sasan, J. M. V. (2023). The Views of the Faculty on the Effectiveness of Teacher Education Programs in Developing Lifelong Learning Competence. *European Journal of Higher Education and Academic Advancement*, 1(2), 92-102.

Kilag, O. K. T., Pasigui, R. E., Malbas, M. H., Manire, E. A., Piala, M. C., Araña, A. M. M., & Sasan, J. M. (2023). Preferred Educational Leaders: Character and Skills. *European Journal of Higher Education and Academic Advancement*, 1(2), 50-56.

Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *The leadership quarterly*, 19(2), 161-177.

Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). Investigating the links to improved student learning. *The Wallace Foundation*.

Malbas, M., Kilag, O. K., Diano Jr, F., Tiongzon, B., Catacutan, A., & Abendan, C. F. (2023). In Retrospect and Prospect: An Analysis of the Philippine Educational System and the Impact of K-12 Implementation. *Excellencia: International Multi-disciplinary Journal of Education* (2994-9521), 1(4), 283-294.

Page, D., & Wong, T. P. (2000). A conceptual framework for measuring servant leadership. *The human factor in shaping the course of history and development*, 69, 110.

Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008). Defining and measuring servant leadership behaviour in organizations. *Journal of Management studies*, 45(2), 402-424.

Spears, L. (1996). Reflections on Robert K. Greenleaf and servant-leadership. *Leadership & organization development journal*, 17(7), 33-35.

Van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of management*, 37(4), 1228-1261.

Zullig, K. J., Koopman, T. M., Patton, J. M., & Ubbes, V. A. (2010). School climate: Historical review, instrument development, and school assessment. *Journal of psychoeducational assessment*, 28(2), 139-152.