

INNOVATIONS

Servant Leadership Practices: A Comparative Study between Government and Private Secondary Schools of Addis Ababa

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Abstract

This study compared servant leadership practices between government and private secondary schools of Addis Ababa. A descriptive survey design was used to carry out the research. The data for the study was gathered using a survey questionnaire. Thus, using a stratified random sampling technique, the questionnaires were distributed to respondents selected from the twelve secondary schools (four from the government and eight from the private). Again, a total of 320 respondents were chosen using a stratified random sampling technique, with 108 from four government secondary schools and 212 from eight private secondary schools. Respondents were selected using strata based on gender and position in the schools. A quantitative approach was used to analyze the data. Besides, the data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test). As a result, the findings revealed that servant leadership practices were deficient in both government and private secondary schools; servant leadership practices were inadequate in the sampled secondary schools. However, in comparison, the servant leadership practices in Addis Ababa's private secondary schools were superior to those in the government schools. It was also discovered that there was a statistically significant difference in servant leadership practices between government and private secondary schools, implying that the servant leadership practices of private secondary schools were better than those of their government counterparts. Hence, it was concluded that servant leadership practices were superior in private secondary schools of Addis Ababa than government secondary schools. It was recommended that secondary school leaders use servant leadership vigorously in Addis Ababa's secondary schools, particularly in government secondary schools, to improve schools' performances at least one step ahead.

Keywords: 1. Leadership 2. Servant Leadership 3. Comparative Study 4. Secondary Schools 5. Addis Ababa

Introduction

Leadership entails more than just asserting one's authority and recognizing the power of others. It is about overcoming the challenges and assisting followers in seeing the future. It helps and directs others to develop the proper attitude to maximize their goals and personal aspirations (Bakare & Oredein, 2021). Chadwick, Patel, and Lindblom (2018) defined leadership in education as "doing everything possible to support students and teachers, ensuring teachers have everything they need to do their jobs well." Learning, developing, and adapting skills and practices are all part of effective leadership. Northouse (2013) stated that a conscientious effort is required to transmit knowledge to followers in order for the leader's goals and objectives to be actively executed. In other words, the leader inspires and motivates others to work by demonstrating the necessary leadership skills and charisma that attract followers. Leadership can also be linked to performance, which can be profit-driven or not.

As a result, different styles of leadership and leadership theories have been developed and implemented with varying degrees of success to achieve organizational goals and make leadership desirable to followers. Here comes the concept of servant leadership, which can be traced back to the fourth century, most notably passages documented by Lao-Tzu, who lived in China around 570 B.C. (Brewer, 2010). As a result, servant leadership appears to have a more extensive historical foundation than other types of leadership styles. However, the modern study of servant leadership can be traced back to Greenleaf's revolutionary work (1977). Among all the various leadership theories, the theory of servant leadership is becoming more widely accepted (Anderson, 2005). Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership model is appropriate for providing employees with empowerment and participatory job features related to both employee and customer satisfaction.

Servant leadership represents a model of leadership in which the leader assumes a supportive, service-orientated role among stakeholders and followers. The fundamental concept of servant leadership is placing others before the self. Accordingly, servant leaders care about the people who work for them; other people's agendas come before their own, and commitment to service comes first (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership concerns the emotional healing of others, increased service to others, empowering others, developing a clear vision of the organization, the practice of humility, authenticity, active listening, and trust (Laub, 1999; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2005). These variables of servant leadership practices were the focus of this study.

In today's competitive and challenging environment, organizations cry out for ethical and practical leadership, such as servant leadership that serves others, invests in their development, and fulfills a shared vision. While leadership is essential everywhere in the world, the way people actually lead can differ by region. Many researchers have examined what good leadership looks like in Western cultures, but leadership in most of Africa has not been explored in much depth (Eckert & Rweyongoza, 2015). Similarly, people, particularly in less developed countries, are also craving efficient and supportive services from their leaders, be it in governmental or private organizations. In line with this, Professor Patrick Utomi, a political economist and former 2011 Nigerian Presidential Candidate, noted that while the twentieth century promoted an egocentric notion of African leadership, African leaders in the twenty-first century must be self-sacrificing people that give up their own good for the sake of others: The big challenge in Africa has been the challenge of leadership, especially servant leadership. Leadership is unselfish behavior. If you are obsessed with yourself, then you are not a

leader. Knowledge and a sense of service- a sense of sacrificially giving up yourself for the sake of others is leadership (Gumede,2017).

Moreover, leadership could influence the job performance of employees, and ultimately, productivity in any organization. In line with this, servant leadership is supposed to suit the most essential concept to play a significant role in formulating organizational values that enhance performance (Donghong, Lu & Lu, 2012; Greenleaf, 1977). There are considerable efforts exerted to study the leadership styles in the Ethiopian context, but only limited to transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, autocratic, and democratic (Markos, 2015; Mekdelawit, 2016; Tadele, 2016).

Over the years, it has been generally observed that the success of any school system, be it public or private, depends largely on the leadership. Many schools have gone into extinction due to the operation of poor leadership styles in place. The reality now is that schools not led by a servant leader likely be ineffective, while those that are servant leadership oriented gain more grounds and be more effective. The need to explore servant leadership phenomena becomes more vital when considering organizational culture differences between government and private secondary schools (Hofstede, 2019).

Despite the availability of a considerable number of conceptual and empirical studies globally, the researcher could not find any published or unpublished research report in servant leadership practices, especially comparative research on the context of government and private secondary schools in Ethiopia. This leadership style has not been researched in both government and private secondary schools in Ethiopia, particularly Addis Ababa. To this end, this comparative study was conducted to fill the gaps observed in the servant leadership practices in government and private secondary schools of Addis Ababa by achieving the following research objectives:

- To compare the level of servant leadership practices between government and private secondary schools of Addis Ababa.
- To assess whether there were significant statistical differences in servant leadership practices between the government and private secondary schools of Addis Ababa.

Significance of the Study

It is believed that the current findings of this research potentially will contribute empirical data that assist the practical application and theoretical discussions regarding servant leadership practices. Moreover, the information obtained from this study can contribute to resolving the concerns created by a lack of research in servant leadership within government and private secondary schools or even in other service-giving organizations in the Ethiopian context. In addition, the present study's data can help provide areas of emphasis for individuals or organizations interested in developing leadership training programs, at least for the Ethiopian context.

Review of Related Literature

The Concept of Servant Leadership

Achua and Lussier (2013) define servant leadership as leadership that transcends self-interest to serve the needs of others. Placing the leader in a non-focal position within a group in such a way that the organizational resources and support are provided to followers without the expectation of acknowledgment, thereby helping them grow, both professionally and personally. According to Northouse (2013), servant leadership is a style of leadership that focuses on leadership from the point of view of the leader and their behaviors, emphasizing the need of the leaders to pay attention to their

followers' concerns and empathize with them and nurture them. According to Sendjaya et al. (2008), servant leaders put their followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities, and lead in ways that serve the greater good of the organization and community and society at large. Greenleaf (1977) explains that servant leaders are primarily motivated by aspirations to lead, unlike traditional leaders who are primarily motivated by a desire to serve than to lead. As a result, the motivation of servant leaders arises from an underlying attitude of egalitarianism.

Dimensions of Servant Leadership

Servant leadership first theorized four decades ago (Greenleaf, 1970), was initially described as a leadership philosophy that values service to others over self-interest. This work carried intuitive appeal, and subsequent popular press publications glorified the construct (Spears, 2005). Different theoreticians identified several dimensions of servant leadership. The first was identified by (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf identified ten dimensions of servant leadership, although no empirical tests of these dimensions were conducted. Consequently, servant leadership was viewed primarily as a conceptual, albeit a rather elusive construct, lacking any consensual framework or empirical rigor (Bass, 2008). According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), the construct was rejuvenated by a clarification that operationalized a testable servant leadership theory. Searle and Barbuto (2010) explained that this clarification stimulated subsequent empirical works on servant leadership. In addition to Greenleaf (1970), Sendjaya et al. (2008) identified five dimensions of servant leadership.

Moreover, other theoreticians such as (Spears, 2010; Laub, 1999; Page & Wong, 2000; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002) identified various dimensions of servant leadership. Here, one thing should be noticed: even though all these scholars came up with their own constructs or dimensions of servant leadership, the dimensions identified by them share more or less similar characteristics, and many of the dimensions specified by the scholars overlap. Hence, based on this scenario, only eight dimensions of servant leadership, which were commonly identified by all of them, were used as variables of this research. These dimensions are discussed below.

Emotional Healing: This involves being sensitive to the personal concerns and well-being of others and includes recognizing others' problems and being willing to take the time to address them (Sendjaya et al. (2008). According to Northouse (2013), servant leaders exhibit emotional healing, avail themselves to others, stand by them, and support them.

Increased Service to Others: The desire to positively influence others through service is deemed central to servant leadership ideology (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Servant leaders embrace service to followers and sacrifice self-interest for their followers' development (Bass, 2008; Graham, 1991). Servant leaders desire positive effects in individuals, organizations, communities, and societies (Liden et al., 2008). The necessity for increased service to others in leadership has been recognized by many scholars (Greenleaf, 1977; Sendjaya et al., 2008). Leaders demonstrating a willingness to put followers' interests ahead of their own will likely garner great trust and dedication from followers, leading to a higher quality of exchanges.

Empowering Others: This refers to allowing followers the freedom to be independent, make decisions on their own, and be self-sufficient. According to Northouse (2013), this is a way for leaders to share power with followers and build the followers' confidence by allowing them to have control. Empowerment also builds the followers' confidence in their own capacities to think and act on their

own because they are given the freedom to handle difficult situations the way they feel is best (Sendjaya et al., 2008).

Vision: Blanchard (2000, p. 5) defines vision as “a picture of the future that produces passion.” Vision is necessary to good leadership. Hauser and House (2000, p. 258) posit that “the development and communication of a vision is one explanation for the success of charismatic/transformational leaders and their effect on the performance.” Laub (1999) found that shared vision builds up others (empowers them) and serves others’ needs (serves them). Additionally, “Servant leaders build corporate vision from their own personal vision” (Fairholm, 1997, p. 198), while Conger (1992) posits anticipating the need for change and acting in advance is one method of bringing the vision into focus. Bennett (2001) contends that the servant leader must dream while remaining in the past and focused on the future because this allows the leader to take advantage of the present opportunities. Focusing on a future state was very important to Greenleaf’s model, and that servant leaders must be preoccupied with the future.

Humility: It is defined as being stable and modest with a high self-awareness of one’s strengths and development areas, having a humble attitude, being open to new learning opportunities, and perceiving one’s talent and achievements from the right perspective (Patterson, 2003). Humility was not described as a self-deprecating attribute (thinking less of oneself) but rather as a characteristic that focuses more on others (thinking of oneself less). Humble leaders value and activate the talent of others, enjoy helping others succeed, and give credit to others when a task is completed successfully (Sun, 2013).

Authenticity: Authenticity is described as showing one’s true identity, intentions, and motivations adhering to strong moral principles, and being true to oneself. It was also seen as being open to learning from criticism and having consistent behavior (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010).

Listening: Listening was described as a deep commitment of a leader to listen actively and respectfully by asking questions to create knowledge, providing time for reflection and silence, and being conscious of what is unsaid (Spears, 2010).

Trust: According to Hauser and House (2000, p. 230), trust is defined as “confidence in or reliance on another team member” in terms of their morality (e.g., honesty) and competence. According to Story (2002), trust is an essential characteristic of the servant leader. Servant leaders model truth in the way they coach, empower, and persuade. This trust exists as a critical element for true leadership. Russell (2001) argues that the values of integrity and honesty build interpersonal and organizational trust and lead to credibility; this trust is essential in servant leadership.

Research Methodology

In carrying out this study, a descriptive survey research design was employed. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), descriptive survey design is a study that aims to collect data and systematically describe the characteristics, features, or facts about a given population. The research was conducted in secondary schools found in the sub-cities of Addis Ababa – the capital city of Ethiopia. There were ten sub-cities in Addis Ababa during the study, of which four (Bole, Gulele, Kirkos, and Yeka sub-cities) were selected through a simple random sampling technique. Under the four sub-cities in Addis Ababa, there were 60 secondary schools, of which 20 were government and 40 were private during the time of the study. Secondary schools fall under two homogenous groups (strata): government and private secondary schools. Each group consisted of schools nearly with

similar characteristics in many aspects such as structures, infrastructures, staff profiles, and so on. In doing so, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the sample government and private secondary schools. The target population of this study consisted of 60 secondary schools (20 government and 40 private) in the four sub-cities. Based on proportion, the sample schools used for this study from 20 government and 40 private secondary schools were 4 and 8, respectively. So, a total of 12 secondary schools were selected from both groups of schools, from which 331 participants were taken out of 748. Again, out of 331 participants, 91 were school leaders, and 240 of them were teachers. Moreover, out of 91 school leaders, 30 were from government secondary schools, whereas 61 were from private secondary schools. On top of this, out of 240 teachers, 80 were government and 160 were from private secondary schools. Overall, a total of 110 government and 221 private secondary school respondents were selected through a stratified random sampling technique. The strata for selecting the individual respondents in the two school categories were used to classify respondents based on sex and position in the school.

The researcher used a self-developed questionnaire as a data collection instrument designed based on Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree on the servant leadership dimensions. A pilot study was conducted on 80 participants (26 from government and 54 from private secondary schools) who were selected randomly. Accordingly, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated as 0.88 for the major scale, servant leadership dimensions. Therefore, it was suitable to use the questionnaire. To interpret the findings, the researcher used descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) to determine the level at which both government and private secondary school leaders performed servant leadership dimensions. Besides, the inferential statistic (independent samples t-test) was used to determine the statistical significance difference between government and private secondary schools of Addis Ababa with regard to servant leadership practices. The significance level was taken as $\alpha = 0.05$.

Results

The study involved 331 school leaders and teachers from government and private secondary schools in Addis Ababa. Thus, 331 questionnaires were distributed to 331 respondents in both government and private secondary schools, of which 320 (95%) questionnaires were appropriately filled and returned to the researcher. Hence, the collected data were analyzed based on this figure, and the analysis of the data for each variable was indicated in the following tables below.

The Level of Servant Leadership Practices in Government and Private Secondary Schools

School Type	Emotional Healing	Increase in Service	Empowering Others	Vision	Humility	Authenticity	Listening	Trust
Government	N	108	108	108	108	108	108	108
	Mean	2.55	2.59	2.62	2.86	2.57	2.56	2.62
	SD	.56	.44	.39	.74	.48	.55	.42
Private	N	212	212	212	212	212	212	212
	Mean	2.98	2.99	2.96	2.92	2.94	2.78	2.89
	SD	.65	.50	.49	.81	.53	.69	.43

The results in Table 1 indicate that the mean value for each dimension of servant leadership is below the average in both government and private secondary schools to describe the level of the practices. But, concerning the status of trust, one of the dimensions of servant leadership practices, the mean value (M = 3.19), is above the average orthreshold in private secondary schools. This indicates that the level of servant leadership practices in both government and private secondary schools as manifested through its dimensions were not adequate enough since the mean scores were lower than the midpoint of 3.0 on the rating scale, except trust in which its mean score was higher (Mean = 3.19) than the midpoint of 3.0 only in the sampled private secondary schools.

As shown in Table 1, it is loud and clear that servant leadership practices were not adequate in secondary schools of the study area. Even though servant leadership practices were low in both groups of schools, its implementation in private secondary schools was better than the government ones.

Statistical Tests for Mean Differences between Government and Private Secondary Schools

Table 2: Independent t-test of Servant Leadership Practices Pertaining to each Dimension between Government and Private Secondary Schools

Variables (Dimensions of Servant Leadership)	t-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
EmotionalHealing	-5.889	318	.000	-.43113	.07321	-.57516	-.28710
Increased Service to Others	-6.967	318	.000	-.39696	.05697	-.50905	-.28487
EmpoweringOthers	-6.404	318	.000	-.34740	.05425	-.45414	-.24067
Vision	-.674	318	.501	-.06269	.09306	-.24579	.12040
Humility	-6.002	318	.000	-.36523	.06085	-.48495	-.24551
Authenticity	-2.808	318	.005	-.21585	.07687	-.36707	-.06462
Listening	-5.200	318	.000	-.26474	.05091	-.36490	-.16458
Trust	-9.063	318	.000	-.58604	.06467	-.71327	-.45881

***The mean difference is significant at P<0.05**

Table 2 depicts the results of an independent samples t-test. Hence, the results indicated that there was a statistically significant meandifference between government and private secondary school leaderswith regard to the extent of the practice of servant leadership dimensions(i.e., for emotional healing: t (318) = -5.889, p = 0.000; increased service to others: t (318) = -6.967, p = 0.000; empowering others: t (318) = -6.404, p = 0.000; humility: t (318) = -6.002, p = 0.000; authenticity: t (318) = -2.808, p = 0.005; listening: t (318) = -5.200, p = 0.000, and trust: t (318) = -9.063, p=0.000). The 'P' values are less than the alpha level (0.05) for all the variables listed here. Private secondary schools had higher mean values than the government ones in the practices of these servant leadership dimensions(see Table 1 for the mean differences).However, as depicted in Table 2, there was no statistically significant mean difference between the two groups concerning the practice of the

servant leadership dimension, vision, $t(318) = -0.674, p = .501$. The 'P' value was greater than the alpha level (0.05). The magnitude of the difference in the mean between groups was minimal (i.e., mean differences for vision was $-0.06269, 95\%CI = -0.24579$ to 0.12040). Therefore, based on the results of an independent samples t-test, it is possible to say that with a 95% confidence level, private secondary schools had a better servant leadership practice than their government counterparts, except for the vision dimension of servant leadership.

Table 3: Independent t-test of Servant Leadership Practices (Overall) between Government and Private Secondary Schools

Variable	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
SLPs	EVA	1.616	.205	-6.19	318	.000	-.29667	.04793	-.3909	-.2024
	EVNA			-6.17	213.98	.000	-.29667	.04805	-.3914	-.2019

SLPs = Servant Leadership Practices, *The mean difference is significant at $P < 0.05$

As shown in Table 3, respondents in both government and private secondary schools rated the level of servant leadership practices (overall dimensions). The result of the mean difference for the variable, servant leadership practices, was statistically significant, i.e., servant leadership practices, $t(318) = -6.19, p = 0.000$, in which the alpha value was less than (0.05). In addition, the magnitude of the difference in the mean between groups (government and private secondary schools) was large with the mean difference = $-0.29667, 95\% CI = -0.3909$ to -0.2024 . Levene's test of equal variances was checked, and it was not significant at ($F = 1.616, p = 0.205$). Hence, equal variances were assumed. Therefore, based on the results of an independent t-test, it is possible to say that with a 95% confidence level, groups, that is, private secondary school leaders had much better servant leadership practices than the government ones.

Discussion

This study aimed to compare the servant leadership practices between government and private secondary schools of Addis Ababa. A survey study was undertaken in the secondary schools, where data were collected from a sample of secondary school leaders and teachers to explore the servant leadership practices. The study findings revealed that servant leadership practices in secondary schools of the study area were not adequate since the mean scores of the dimensions of servant leadership were below the midpoint, except the trust dimension, which was above the minimum threshold in private secondary schools. This result collaborates with the study on servant leadership practices by Bakare and Oredein (2021). The survey by Bakare and Oredein (2021) showed that servant leadership practices in both public and private secondary schools were not in place in Nigeria. In comparison, the results of this study revealed that servant leadership practices in private secondary schools of Addis Ababa were better than their government counterparts. This study was also in line with the survey of servant leadership by Ogbiji (2018). Therefore, servant leadership practices in private secondary schools in Ido, the Local Government Area of Ibadan, was much better than in government secondary schools. Furthermore, to check the significant differences between the servant leadership practices of government and private secondary schools, independent samples t-

test was used. Hence, there were significant statistical differences between the two groups for each dimension, except the vision dimension of servant leadership. On top of that, the overall servant leadership dimension's independent samples t-test also showed that there were significant statistical differences between the two groups. The servant leadership practices of private secondary schools of Addis Ababa were better than the government secondary schools (Tables 2 and 3 clearly show this). This study's result agrees with the comparative analysis of servant leadership of principals in public and private schools, Oriade local government area, Osun State (Onongha, 2018; Ibrahim & Al-Taneiji, 2012). The results of these studies (Onongha, 2018; Ibrahim & Al-Taneiji, 2012) indicate a significant difference in the servant leadership of principals of both public and private secondary schools.

Conclusions

Conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study. Hence, it was observed from the study that in both government and private secondary schools, servant leadership practices described through its dimensions were not in place. However, the trust dimension of servant leadership practices in private secondary schools of the study area was well-practiced since its mean score was above the midpoint. When servant leadership practices were compared through its dimensions in the two groups of secondary schools, servant leadership practices in private secondary schools were far better than their government counterparts. The overall mean scores of servant leadership practices also showed the same, that is, servant leadership practices were better practiced in private secondary schools. Besides, the significant statistical differences were also checked, and hence it was observed from the study that there were significant statistical differences between the government and private secondary schools of Addis Ababa with respect to the practices of the dimensions of servant leadership. The mean scores of private secondary schools were significantly higher than the government ones concerning servant leadership practices characterized through the dimensions, and the overall mean difference shows the same. However, there were no significant statistical differences between the two groups (government and private) in crafting and implementing a clear vision in the practice of servant leadership. The mean scores were not significantly different.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were forwarded:

- It is recommended that secondary school leaders, particularly the government ones, apply servant leadership vigorously so that they can render the required services and ensure the performance of employees to move forward at least one step ahead. Because the findings confirmed that the level of servant leadership practices was inadequate in the secondary schools of Addis Ababa though it was better in private secondary schools.
- Through the application of servant leadership, secondary school leaders, more specifically the government ones, should facilitate an environment that attracts employees to increase their performance, be dedicated to their jobs, and value the activities and goals of the organization. Besides, school leaders (particularly government school leaders) should support their employees' activities with less objection to their ideas.
- This study was conducted only in secondary schools found in a single city in Ethiopia. Thus, it is recommended that other researchers conduct similar studies further in secondary schools at the national level to develop a comprehensive understanding of the servant leadership practices based on the comparison.

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