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## Just a Leader or Servant Leader: How Do Teachers Perceive Their School Principals?

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the perceptions of teachers working in state schools in Kahramanmaras, Turkey, of their school principals' "servant leadership behaviors." This is a quantitative study conducted in a relational screening model. The sampling of the research consists of 330 teachers working in state schools in the city center of Kahramanmaras province, Turkey, during the 2016-2017 academic year. The "Servant Leadership Behavior Scale" developed by Ekinçi (2015) was used as the data collection instrument in the research. The scale comprises 36 items and five sub-dimensions of altruistic behaviors, empathy, justice, integrity, and humility. In the analysis of the data, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA test were employed. The study revealed significant differences between the school administrators' demographic characteristics of age, branch, seniority, and education status, and the attitudes of servant leadership. Moreover, the differentiation of teachers' views on servant leadership skills is dependent upon the education level of the school administrator, which leads to a statistical difference between the school principals' servant leadership behaviors and their education levels. Thus, teachers see a direct connection between the school principals' level of education and the exhibition of more servant leadership.

**Keywords:** servant leadership, teachers, school principals, leader.



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## Introduction

Throughout history, mankind has been in need of leaders who can regulate interpersonal relations and restore order between different groups of people. This need for regulation and guidance has led to the emergence of leaders; and therefore the leadership is becoming one of the most contested topics in the field of administration and the subject of much research (Tengilimliođlu, 2005). In these studies, leadership is defined in hundreds of different ways (Grint, 2011; Humphrey, 2002; Őiřman, 2004); so much so that Stogdill (1974) argues that there are as many leadership definitions as those who have tried to define it.

A leader is the one who works for the achievement of both individuals' and a group's common goal in a specific period and under specific conditions by appealing to individuals and people (Bařaran,1996; Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991). The most important characteristic of a leader is their focus on people and human relations. A leader's ability to become part of a team and have an influence on human resources to achieve its goals and take care of people's needs and wants reveals the human-oriented character of leadership and that emotions are at the forefront of leadership (Akgün, 2001; George, 2000). Leadership is not a manifestation of power on followers (Werner, 1993); rather, it is the combination of the ability and capacity to unite people behind common goals and to mobilize them for these goals (Tađraf & Ćalman, 2009). Leadership is the ability to win people over to its wish and will by earning people's respect, trust, obedience and commitment. Leadership is a result of the connection and interaction of a leader with other individuals, a role that a particular individual in a group distinctly takes upon themselves and shown in the manner in which they behave (İbiciođlu, Özmen,&Tař, 2009).

A leader impresses the personnel in their charge by energizing them through their ability to influence their followers' thoughts and actions, thanks to the powerful effect of their ability to influence and direct personal opinions, inclination, and actions (Bennis, 2009; Ćelik, 2011). A leader is open to new ideas whilst tolerant of different ideas; they approaches an issue from a wide perspective, give meanings to new information and events so that it influences and directs an individual's or a group's activities (DinĆer & Fidan, 1996; Preedy, Glatter, & Wise, 2003). According to Can (2014), in different definitions of leadership, an emphasis is often placed on a personal characteristic, the necessity of a post or a particular manner. The difficulty of defining the leadership notion rises from the fact that it possesses both indicative and evaluator components (Bursaliogđlu, 2005). In another definition, leadership is defined as the combination of ability and knowledge that can mobilize a group of people towards a particular action in order to bring people together behind pre-determined goals to achieve these goals (Zel, 2001). Leadership has a direct bearing on the prospect of successful outcomes in collective actions of individuals (Cemalođlu, 2007). Therefore, the success or failure that a leader's actions produce can be attributed to the leader by its followers.

Three main components emerge from the analyses of different definitions of leadership, which are "setting an objective," "group activities" and "influencing others' actions" (Ball, 2007). Bush (2008), on the other hand, argues that the three characteristics of leadership are "the process of influence," "values," and "vision." Because leadership is, in essence, a process of influencing societies, the characteristic of a society which a leader is in interaction with shapes their value judgements and behaviors. Thus, new approaches in defining leadership –

super leadership, servant leadership etc. – include more leadership cases from different contexts.

### *Leadership Approaches and Servant Leadership*

Today, social systems produce new approaches in leadership, due to the changing conditions, by affecting the environment of competition, ways of thinking and styles of method (Çağlar, 2004). The differentiation in leadership definitions brings new types of leadership to the fore. For example, because the traditional approaches in leadership do not cover wide range of cases, new leadership theories such as charismatic leadership, transformative leadership, visionary leadership, and servant leadership have emerged in many modern approaches in the literature.

Among these new types of leadership, Robert House coined the charismatic leadership theory 1977, which has three main characters; “high self-confidence, high verbal ability, high need for influence or power, and exceptionally strong convictions in the moral correctness of their beliefs” (House & Howell, 1992). In charismatic leadership, the leader exerts a powerful influence on their environment.

Transformative leadership was first used in 1978 as a new type of leadership. In this form, the leader has a powerful vision for the organization’s future and what should be done in order to achieve it (Ergin & Kozan, 2004). The transformative leader channels their personnel’s values and beliefs into working towards the achievement of this vision and mission (Özalp & Öcal, 2000). This type of leader can give up their personal interests for the organization’s vision and mission (Ergin & Kozan, 2004).

Visionary leadership has the distinct ability to outline a vision for the organization that can carry it into the future and always involves future-oriented thinking (Çelik, 2011). In other words, visionary leadership is the leader’s choosing of the best possible path for the organization’s future and envisioning that future in the best possible way.

Servant leadership, on the other hand, was first termed by Greenleaf in 1970. It is a form of leadership informed by the notions of “people first” and “serve first” and it works for the development of personnel’s skills and abilities, their prosperity and seeing their interests over and above the leader’s own personal interests (Laub, 1999). Servant leadership has gained popularity in the literature after Greenleaf, in his article “The Servant as Leader,” said “the great leader is seen as servant first” (Fındıkçı, 2009). According to Greenleaf (1997), “the servant-leader is servant first” who has an unusual power to inspire people to lead and makes the choice for leadership to serve first. Other than servant leadership, no other leadership theories prioritize making a difference on the lives of others. The idea of serving their followers is based on the belief that prioritizing their followers’ personal development before the immediate organizational goals would eventually lead to the achievement of the organizational goals (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Servant leaders are those who can build relationships upon mutual trust, have great empathy with people and unusual power and resources, guide other people by balancing the society’s expectations in a positive way, and make a positive change in people (Buchen, 1998, Spears, 2004).

According to Öner (2008), a servant leader’s adoption of moral values, their desire to serve and support the workers, and their perception of leadership as a moral duty attracts people’s attention to servant leadership. A servant leader is expected to dedicate themselves

to their workers without any personal ulterior motives or the meeting of their own needs (Işık, 2014), through which the servant leader demonstrates that their ultimate goal is to serve the workers by providing them with opportunities that can help their own personal development (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

The current literature shows that servant leadership plays an important role in revealing the true potential of individuals. The construction of a positive relationship between teachers and school administrators, the latter's caring for teachers and making sure that they develop a strong sense of belonging to their schools ensures a high performance in the teachers and makes it easier for the teachers to work enthusiastically (Akyüz&Eren, 2013). From this perspective, a school administrator can help teachers and students discover their true potential by becoming an effective servant leader. The current research aims to study the perceptions of teachers working in state schools in Kahramanmaras, Turkey, of their school principals' servant leadership behaviors. To this end, the school administrators' behaviors in the context of servant leadership will be evaluated from the perceptions of the teachers in order to understand whether any meaningful differences exist in the school administrators' servant leadership behaviors according to the school administrators' demographic characteristics of age, branch, seniority, and education status/level.

## **Methodology**

The research is a quantitative study and applies a relational scanning model. The relational scanning model aims to determine the correlation between two or more variables and/or its extent (Karasar, 2016). The research attempts to set forth the relations between the variables.

The population of the research is 7,352 teachers working in 128 state schools in the city center of Kahramanmaras province in Turkey. The sample of the research consists of 330 teachers who volunteered to take part in the study. Data was collected from 31 state schools randomly selected from the population of the study.

During the data collection process, The Servant Leadership Behavior Scale was employed. The scale is a five-point, Likert-type scale, with evaluation options of "Never = 1, Seldom = 2, Sometimes = 3, Mostly = 4, Always = 5." The Servant Leadership Behavior Scale was developed by Ekinci (2015) and consists of 36 items in five sub-dimensions of "altruistic behaviors" (six items), "empathy" (nine items), "justice" (seven items), "integrity" (eight items), and "humility" (three items). The reliability of the scale is assessed as .93.

The data collected from the study was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 21.0 for Microsoft Windows. In the analysis of the data, the arithmetic average and standard deviation was calculated and in order to determine the correlation between the variables, t test was used for the dual comparisons while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for multiple comparisons. The reliability values of the data analysis instrument were reassessed prior to the data analysis. The Cronbach Alpha reliability score of the scale's five dimensions were altruistic behaviors (.91), empathy (.87), justice (.79), integrity (.81), and humility (.67). The overall reliability score of the whole scale was found to be .95 and it is therefore accepted as a reliable instrument of evaluation.

## Results

In this section, the findings of the study are discussed. According to the study, the school administrators' servant leadership behaviors from the perceptions of the teachers are moderate. Table 1 shows the participant teachers' demographic characteristics and their frequency values and percentages.

**Table 1.** Teachers' demographic characteristics

<i>Variables</i>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	
<i>Gender</i>	Male	174	52.7
	Female	156	47.3
<i>Age</i>	21-29 years	76	23.0
	30-39 years	126	38.2
	40-49 years	107	32.4
	50 years or over	21	6.4
<i>Professional seniority</i>	0-5 years	53	16.1
	6-10 years	68	20.6
	11-15 years	84	25.5
	16-20 years	82	24.8
	21 years or over	43	13.0
<i>Branch</i>	Preschool teacher	26	7.9
	Classroom teacher	136	41.2
	Branch teacher	168	50.9
<i>Educational Status</i>	Graduate	288	87.3
	Post-graduate	42	12.7
<i>Total</i>	330	100	

According to Table 1, of the teachers in the sample, 52.7% ( $n=174$ ) are male and 47.3% ( $n=156$ ) are female. There is a proportionate representation of teachers in terms of gender. In terms of age, most of the teachers are 30-39 years old (38.2%,  $n=126$ ). The teachers' number of years working in their job are: 6-10 years (16.1%,  $n=53$ ), 11-15 years (25.5%,  $n=84$ ), 16-20 years (24.8%,  $n=82$ ), and 21 years or over (13.0%,  $n=43$ ). While the volunteered teachers' number of years in the job are the longest with 11-15 years and 16-20 years, these teachers are mostly middle-aged. The number of branch teachers is the highest (50.9%,  $n=168$ ), followed by classroom teachers (41.2%,  $n=136$ ) and preschool teachers (7.9%,  $n=26$ ). In terms of educational status, 87.3% ( $n=288$ ) of the teachers are graduates, while 12.7% ( $n=42$ ) have postgraduate degrees.

The results in Table 2 are from the t-test analyses of teachers' perceptions of their school administrators' servant leadership behaviors based on the teachers' educational levels.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of school principals' servant leadership behaviors based on teachers' educational levels

<i>Servant Leadership (Whole scale)</i>	<i>N</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SS</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Bachelor's degree	288	3.53	0.66	2.18	328	.03
Master's degree	42	3.28	0.77			
<i>Humility</i>						
Bachelor's degree	288	3.08	1.13	1.48	328	.14
Master's degree	42	3.80	1.02			
<i>Empathy</i>						
Bachelor's degree	288	3.59	0.73	2.29	328	.02
Master's degree	42	3.30	0.90			
<i>Altruist behaviors</i>						
Bachelor's degree	288	3.68	0.85	1.64	328	.02
Master's degree	42	3.45	0.88			
<i>Integrity</i>						
Bachelor's degree	288	3.49	0.72	2.09	328	.04
Master's degree	42	3.23	0.88			
<i>Justice</i>						
Bachelor's degree	288	3.48	0.70	1.61	328	.11
Master's degree	42	3.30	0.75			

As seen in Table 2, there are less teachers with postgraduate degrees than those with graduate degrees. In recent years, although there has been an increase in the number of teachers undertaking a Master's degree, the number has yet to reach the desired level. In order to understand whether or not the teachers' educational status has an effect on their views of the school administrators' servant leadership behaviors, t-test was conducted and the results found to be significant ( $p=.03 < .05$ ). The difference is in favor of the teachers with postgraduate degrees. The teachers with graduate degrees think more than those with postgraduate degrees that the school principals manifest more servant leadership behaviors. As the teachers' level of education increases, the average score of the principals' servant leadership behaviors decreases. This is more apparent in the three sub-dimensions of integrity, altruist behaviors, and empathy of servant leadership behaviors. This also shows that teachers with postgraduate degrees have higher expectations from their school principal in terms of servant leadership behaviors. However, there seems no difference in the perceptions of teachers in terms of other two servant leadership sub-dimensions of justice and humility. The reason is that the educational level does not have a direct bearing on justice and humility; rather, that they are intrinsic values. ANOVA test was used in order to understand whether or not the teachers have a different perception of the school administrators' servant leadership behaviors as the administrators' professional seniority increases. The results show that there is a significant difference between the school administrators' age and their professional seniority ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 3.** Evaluation of school principals' servant leadership behaviors based on professional seniority

<i>Professional Seniority</i>	<i>N</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SS</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LSD</i>
1-5 years	63	2.90	.44	3	107	.00	a< c, d
6-10 years	87	3.04	.68	326			b< c, d
11-15 years	56	3.79	.41				c>a, b
16 years or more	124	3.99	.34				d>a, b, c

\*p&lt;.05

Table 3 shows that there appears to be a meaningful difference in the teachers' views on the school administrators' servant leadership behaviors according to the professional seniority of the administrators ( $p<.05$ ). According to the teachers, the administrators show more leader servant behaviors as their professional seniority increases. The same result was also found when the age variable was tested by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Young administrators with less professional seniority in the job have lower scores in the servant leadership behaviors than those with more experience. Statistically, the results are significant. The teachers have the view that those school administrators with 16 or more years of experience show display ( $\bar{X}=3.99$ ) servant leadership behaviors. In other words, as the experience in the job decreases, the school administrators, according to the teachers, display less ( $\bar{X}=2.90$ ) servant leadership behaviors such those with five years or less experience. The reason is that, as the number of years of experience and age increases, the administrators are more likely to become better administrators.

T-test was used in order to determine the correlation between the school principals' educational level and their score in servant leadership behaviors, as shown in Table 4. The results are significant across all sub-dimensions of the scale.

**Table 4.** Evaluation of school principals' servant leadership behaviors based on educational level

<i>Servant Leadership (Whole scale)</i>	<i>N</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SS</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Bachelor's degree	179	3.15	0.69	12.21	328	.00
Master's degree	151	3.91	0.36			
<i>Humility</i>						
Bachelor's degree	179	2.71	1.19	6.35	328	.00
Master's degree	151	3.45	0.86			
<i>Empathy</i>						
Bachelor's degree	179	3.20	0.80	10.61	328	.00
Master's degree	151	3.97	0.43			
<i>Altruist behaviors</i>						
Bachelor's degree	179	3.26	0.91	10.43	328	.00
Master's degree	151	4.12	0.47			
<i>Integrity</i>						
Bachelor's degree	179	3.14	0.71	10.29	328	.00
Master's degree	151	3.84	0.50			

<i>Servant Leadership (Whole scale)</i>	<i>N</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SS</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Justice</i>						
Bachelor's degree	179	3.13	0.76	9.81	328	.00
Master's degree	151	3.84	0.48			

Table 4 shows that the school administrators of the schools in which 179 teachers are working have graduate degrees, while the other 151 teachers' school administrators have postgraduate degrees. The school administrators' educational level has an important effect on the overall score of their servant leadership behaviors ( $p < .05$ ). For example, the teachers think that the school administrators with postgraduate degrees show more servant leadership behaviors. This result is also true across all sub-dimensions of the scale. In other words, as the school administrators' educational level increases, the teachers develop more positive views of the administrators' servant leadership behaviors such as being more just and more honest.

### Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to understand the participant teachers' views on their respective school administrators' servant leadership behaviors according to the administrators' demographic characteristics during the 2016-2017 academic year. The sample of the study was comprised of 330 teachers working in state schools in the city center of Kahramanmaraş. According to the findings of the study, the overall score of the administrators' servant leadership behaviors is  $\bar{X}=3.49$ . This shows that the teachers believe that the administrators show servant leadership behaviors at the level of "sometimes."

The study did not reveal a significant correlation between servant leadership and gender in the t-test. In other words, the teachers' gender did not make a difference on their views of the school administrators' servant leadership behaviors. This result is consistent with the studies of Balay, Kaya, and Geçdoğan-Yılmaz (2014), Cerit (2005), and Gül and Türkmen (2016). Doğan and Aslan (2016) and Ekinci (2015), on the other hand, in their studies, found that male teachers have more positive views of their school administrators in terms of servant leadership behaviors than female teachers.

According to the findings of the current study, there appeared to be a significant correlation between the school administrators' educational level and their servant leadership behaviors. This was also proven true across all sub-dimensions of servant leadership behaviors. In other words, as the administrators' educational level increased, the teachers had more positive views of their administrators' abilities in terms of servant leadership behaviors. It can be argued that education increases servant leadership behaviors while it is also possible to argue that the ability of the servant leadership behavior can be developed/improved through education.

A significant correlation was found between the administrators' professional seniority and their servant leadership behaviors. In other words, as the professional seniority of the administrators increased, the prospect of them showing servant leadership behaviors also increased. The teachers' branches and ages did not make any difference on their views of the administrators' servant leadership behaviors. The administrators' ages did not also make any significant difference on the teachers' views. In a similar study, Yılmaz (2013) finds that

the professional seniority and educational level do not make any meaningful difference in teachers' perceptions of school administrators' servant leadership behaviors.

There appeared a difference in the understanding of and expectation from the servant leadership behavior among teachers according to their level of education. The teachers with postgraduate degrees had higher expectations of servant leadership behaviors from their administrators than teachers with graduate degrees. For example, from two teachers at the same school, the one with a postgraduate degree had higher expectations of servant leadership behaviors from the school administrator than the one with a graduate degree. In the sub-dimensions of humility and justice, however, there was no significant difference found.

The teachers, based on their own educational levels, thought that the school administrators show servant leadership behaviors at a moderate level. This finding is in line with Yılmaz and Çelik (2017)'s study entitled "Teachers' Views on School Administrators' Leader Servant Behaviors." Similarly, the participant teachers in Yılmaz and Çelik's study (2017) also found the level of servant leadership behaviors in school administrators as "moderate."

The teachers' views, on the other hand, did not show any significant difference in terms of the teachers' gender, age or professional seniority. In addition, the teachers' educational level made a moderate difference with regard to their views on empathy, humility and general understanding of servant leadership. There was a significant difference found between the teachers' branch and the school administrators' understanding of servant leadership. The school administrators' demographic characteristics did not have a direct bearing on the administrators' understanding of humility as a sub-dimension of servant leadership. There was, however, a direct correlation between the other sub-dimensions of altruist behaviors, justice, integrity, and empathy and the school administrators' demographic characteristics. As the administrators' educational level increased, their servant leadership abilities differed significantly.

According to the findings of the current study, the teachers thought that the experienced school administrators and those with postgraduate degrees portray more servant leadership behaviors. These findings suggest that the school administrators' criteria of selection, training and appointment need to be reconsidered. According to Akyüz and Eren (2013), it is argued that leadership abilities should be developed through education and training. School principals should be encouraged to undertake postgraduate degrees, and in the appointment of school administrators, priority should be given to those with postgraduate degrees. Collaboration between the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education can produce an extensive project that will allow school administrators and teachers to undertake studies at the postgraduate level.

## Notes

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