RESEARCH ARTICLE

Servant Leadership in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Servant leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes the leaders's role as a servant to others, with a focus on empowering and serving the needs of the community. In the context of higher education, servant leadership is essential for the success of academic institutions. Thus, this study aims to analyze servant leadership in the context of higher education using bibliometric reviews of scientific publications, such as journal articles, books, and conference proceedings. In all, 94 relevant and influential papers provided by the Scopus database from 2000 to 2023 are critically evaluated using VOSviewer to take note of key findings. The results indicate four different node colors (i.e., red, green, blue, and yellow) to the co-occurrences of keywords: (1) the red node is related to servant leadership, higher education, psychological ownership, affective commitment, and job performance, (2) the green node is connected to resilience, professional competence, interpersonal relations, and public relations, (3) the blue node is associated with career satisfaction and life satisfaction, (4) the yellow node focuses on job satisfaction and trust. Additionally, the findings show that servant leadership in higher education promotes a positive work environment to foster career satisfaction and job performance by focusing on employee trust and resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is important in preparing individuals for professional careers, thereby facilitating critical thinking skills, and contributing to the advancement of knowledge and society. Furthermore, higher education is an integral part of the educational continuum and a key driver of social and economic progress (Aslam, Imran, & Perveen, 2023) through research and innovation. The success of higher education is multifaceted, and particularly informed by global trends, technological advancements, and the changing needs of the workforce. Leaders need to navigate a rapidly changing landscape to meet the demands of the 21st century and contribute significantly to the success of the institutions. Leaders in academia must set the strategic direction to provide a roadmap for success and sustainability (Al-Zoubi, Issa, & Musallam, 2023; Maqbool et al., 2023).

The style of leadership in higher education has been a subject of considerable study (Esen, Bellibas, & Gumus, 2020; Tal & Gordon, 2020). Previous studies in this area aimed to provide insights into effective leadership practices for enhancing educational experience (Maheshwari & Kha, 2023) and improving outcomes for development policies in institutions. The leadership styles that have been explored by scholars in this context using bibliometric analysis such as transformative leadership (Kaliska, 2019; Udin, 2023), shared leadership (Hallinger & Kulophas, 2020), e-leadership (Garcia,
As servant leadership has gained attention in various organizational contexts, including business (Del Baldo, 2018; Taqi Norozi, Danaee Fard, & Khaef Alahi, 2021) and non-profit sectors (Ngah, Abdullah, Mohd Suki, & Kasim, 2023; Ogochi, Kilika, & Oduol, 2022), there is indeed a relative scarcity of studies using bibliometric review specifically focusing on servant leadership within higher education. Additionally, the concept of servant leadership is a potentially beneficial approach in academia (Ghani, Rahim, & Mat, 2021; Kyambade, Mugambwa, Nkurunziza, Namuddu, & Namatovu, 2024). Therefore, this study aimed to analyze servant leadership in the context of higher education using bibliometric reviews of written publications, such as journals, books, and conference proceedings.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief review of the literature. Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 presents the results of the study. Section 5 ensures a comprehensive discussion. Finally, Section 5 provides the conclusions and implications of the study.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Servant leadership is a style that focuses on the primary role of the leaders as a servant to an organization. Servant leadership is characterized by principles of other-centeredness, emphasizing service to others over personal power and control (Beehner, 2020; Robinson, Neubert, & Miller, 2018; Wong, Sendjaya, Wilson, & Rixon, 2023; Rashid et al., 2023). The concept was popularized in the public essay by Greenleaf (1970) "The Servant as Leaders", that the leaders should focus on serving and meeting the needs of others rather than the pursuit of power, personal interests, or wealth.

Servant leaders are knowledgeable, ethical individuals who bring value to organizations and the people they serve (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023; Pillay & Kikasu, 2024; Pressentin, 2019; Zada, Khan, Saeed, & Zada, 2024; Kanval et al., 2024). Servant leadership prioritizes the needs of followers and empowers them to have a sense of belonging, promoting happiness, health, and productivity within organization (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022; Meuser & Smallfield, 2023; Zarei, Supphellen, & Bagozzi, 2024).

According to Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008), Spears (2010), van Dierendonck (2011), and Beck (2014), the key principles of servant leadership include (1) *Servant mindset* – this mindset focuses on serving others to grow, succeed, and reach full potential. (2) *Awareness* – The awareness of the organization as a whole and the long-term consequences of actions are increased. (3) *Listening* – The leaders actively listen to the concerns and ideas to promote a culture of open communication. (4) *Empathy* – The needs and feelings of building strong relationships are understood. (5) *Healing* – The leaders recognize the personal concerns and well-being of others to promote professional development. (6) *Persuasion* – The leaders persuade and convince others to make collective decisions. (7) *Conceptualization* – There is a vision for the future and the ability to think beyond day-to-day operations. (8) *Foresight* – The leaders effectively anticipate future challenges and opportunities to make informed decisions. (9) *Stewardship* – The leaders act as a steward of resources for the benefit of organization. (10) *Commitment to growth* – The leaders are committed to the professional growth of others by providing opportunities for learning and advancement.

Servant leaders are often associated with positive organizational results (Ludwikowska, 2023; Zainab, Ahmad, & Sheeraz, 2022; Jam et al., 2017), employee satisfaction (McCann, Graves, & Cox, 2014; Udin, Rakasiwi, & Dananjayo, 2024), and a strong sense of community (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019) in the workplace. By focusing on serving others, servant leaders...
develop a collaborative environment that fosters the success and well-being of all organizational members. In addition, servant leadership has a strong positive impact on employees and organizations, leading to increased profit, improved work climate, and enhanced employee well-being and productivity (Meuser & Smallfield, 2023). Servant leadership promotes a culture of openness, transparency, empowerment, and sharing of ownership, as well as emotional intelligence (Floyd, 2022; Simon, Mathew, & Thomas, 2022).

**METHODOLOGY**

This study uses bibliometric analysis to analyze scientific publications and other written materials. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach used to study the evolution of knowledge in different research fields based on the analysis of related publications (Marvi & Foroudi, 2023; Toaza & Esztergár-Kiss, 2024). Additionally, bibliometric analysis captures various aspects of scientific and practical fields, including identifying influential research, trends, and models in a particular field (Aleixandre-Benavent et al., 2017; Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, and Lim, 2021; Lazarides, Lazaridou and Papanas, 2023; Jam et al., 2011).

This study used secondary data from the scientific database Scopus, which is a multidisciplinary and covers a wide range of studies access academic disciplines. The tool includes abstracts and citations from journals, conference proceedings, and patents. Based on the Scopus results, a total of 94 relevant and influential studies from 2000 to 2023 were reviewed using VOSviewer version 1.6.20. This dataset includes 67 (71.28%) journals, 22 (23.40%) books, 3 (3.19%) book series and 2 (2.14%) conference proceedings. VOSviewer version 1.6.20, which is often used for bibliometric analysis and visualization of scientific literature, was used to analyze the data sets.

**RESULTS**

VOSviewer is known for networks and often includes clustering algorithms that group related entities. This process allows for the identification of patterns and trends in the dataset.

![Figure 1: Documents by year](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number of related papers</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2009</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2014</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2019</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-2023</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 and Table 1 show that the number of studies on servant leadership in higher education from 2000 to 2004 is only 1 (1.06%). The study was written by McKinney, L.J. titled “Evangelical Theological Higher Education: Past commitments, present realities, and future considerations.” McKinney (2004) explored the historical roots, current challenges, and prospective considerations in evangelical theological higher education. The study critically examined the evolving nature of theological education within evangelical contexts, showing the importance of adapting to changing societal and educational dynamics while remaining faithful to core theological commitments.

An increasing emphasis on servant leadership in academic literature and organizational study was experienced from 2005 to 2009. During this time frame, 9 (9.58%) studies addressed key aspects of this leadership style, including the principles, characteristics, and impact on organizational results. For example, Jackson (2008), Garber, Madigan, Click, and Fitzpatrick (2009) showed the importance of servant leadership to promote collaboration, mentorship, and a supportive culture in nursing. This style of leadership has a robust contribution to long-term study capacity building by fostering teamwork, empowerment, and a focus on the growth of individuals.

Between 2020 and 2023, the study on servant leadership has been increasingly recognized as a valuable method in various industries, including education, business, and healthcare. During this period, 62.77% of the study addressed contemporary challenges, such as remote work, diversity and inclusion, and the evolving nature of leadership in rapidly changing environments. Studies and practitioners have explored the application in new contexts and developed innovative frameworks for the implementation of organizational resilience, employee well-being, and sustainable practices.

Table 2: Top-10 author on servant leadership in higher education (2000–2023)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>h-index</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of papers</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboramadan, M.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Doha Institute for Graduate Studies</td>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghasamy, M.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Universiti Sains Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marimon, F.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Universitat Internacional de Catalunya</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latif, K.F.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Department of Management Sciences</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahleez, K.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A'Sharqiyah University</td>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbas, A.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Universitas Airlangga</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekowati, D.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Universitas Airlangga</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saud, M.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Universitas Airlangga</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usman, I.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Universitas Airlangga</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burhanuddin, B.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Universitas Negeri Malang</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the result in Table 2, Aboramadan, M. from Doha Institute for Graduate Studies – Qatar became the most productive author in servant leadership studies from 2000 to 2003 by proficient 5 (5.32%) scientific studies. Aboramadan, Dahleez, and Hamad (2020) in the study “Servant Leadership and Academics Outcomes in Higher Education: The Role of Job Satisfaction” suggested that servant leadership fostered a positive work environment, enhancing job satisfaction, and subsequently influencing academic outcomes. The study showed the importance of the servant leadership method that prioritized serving others to contribute to the job satisfaction and effectiveness of faculty in higher education institutions.
Based on the number of publications in servant leadership studies, Ghasemy, M. from Universiti Sains Malaysia – Malaysia became the second top author. Ghasemy is known for 4 (4.26%) studies on servant leadership in the educational context. They were responsible for the study titled "Being Satisfied and Serving Communities as Outcomes of Servant Leadership in the Academic Context: Policies Based on a Multi-level Structural Equation Model". This study incorporated the results of servant leadership in the academic context, focusing on job satisfaction and community service as key factors.

Table 3: Number of papers by country for the 2000–2023 period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of papers</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 provides precise data on the study by countries, where the United States dominates the vast number of publications regarding servant leadership (34; 36.17%). This was followed by Malaysia with 11 (11.70%) scientific studies, the United Kingdom (9; 9.58%), Indonesia (8; 8.51%), China (6; 6.38%), Pakistan (5; 5.32%), and Australia (4; 4.26%). The most influential study from the United States was “Attitudes Towards Collaboration and Servant Leadership among nurses, physicians and residents” written by Garber et al. (2009). This study encouraged servant leadership behaviors to promote a positive and cohesive work environment among healthcare professionals. However, one of the studies that has had a significant influence in Australia is “Servant Leadership in Nursing: A Framework for Developing Sustainable Research Capacity in Nursing” written by Jackson (2008). The study incorporated servant leadership principles, such as empowerment, listening, and commitment to the well-being of others.

Figure 2: Documents by subject area

Figure 2 shows that the scientific publications related to a specific subject area of servant leadership from 2000 to 2023 are dominated by Social Sciences (41.2%). This was followed by Business, Management, and Accounting (21.6%), Arts and Humanities (8.5%), Psychology (4.6%), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (3.9%), Environmental Science (3.3%), Computer Science and Engineering (2.6%), Decision Sciences and Medicine (2%), and other (7.8%). Additionally, the most influential study in the field of Social Sciences was "Leadership Style and Job Satisfaction in Higher Education Institutions" written by Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2016), which promoted servant leadership behaviors, as well as enhanced a positive and fulfilling work experience among academic professionals in higher education institutions.
Figure 3: Network visualization of the co-occurrences of keywords

Figure 3 shows four different node colors, namely red, green, blue, and yellow in VOSviewer results related to the co-occurrences of keywords. Cluster 1 (red node) covers servant leadership, higher education, psychological ownership, affective commitment, and job performance. Cluster 2 (green node) includes resilience, professional competence, interpersonal relations, and public relations. Cluster 3 (blue node) covers career and life satisfaction, while Cluster 4 (yellow node) includes job satisfaction and trust. Based on the results, servant leadership was found to be the most prominent node, which was also a central and highly connected concept in the dataset.

Figure 4: Overlay visualization of the research trends

In Figure 4, the study on servant leadership in higher education expanded between 2000 and 2014. Scholars focused on various aspects and applications of this leadership style on professional competence and inter-professional relations. During this period, scholars worked on developing the theoretical foundations of servant leadership and explored the concepts, distinguishing characteristics, and the differences from other styles. The field of servant leadership further continued to evolve between 2015 and 2018, with ongoing studies exploring new dimensions and the relation to employee resilience and trust. Additionally, studies on servant leadership evolved and advanced from 2019 to 2023. The role of servant leadership in promoting psychological ownership,
affective commitment, career satisfaction, job satisfaction, job performance, and life satisfaction was explored.

**DISCUSSION**

**Impact of servant leadership on professional competence**

A previous study by (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017) reported that servant leaders prioritize the development of employees. This study contributes to enhancing the skills and competence of employees by providing training, mentoring, and opportunities for professional growth (Irfan et al., 2022; Spears, 2010). Furthermore, servant leaders foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement to promote employees to experiment with new ideas, and continuously adapt to changing circumstances.

**Impact of servant leadership on employee resilience and trust**

Servant leaders prioritize open communication (Eva et al., 2019), which fosters an environment where employees have a feeling of trust towards the leaders and can share information honestly. This style of leadership also develops a supportive and caring work environment to make employees feel valued, contributing to the emotional well-being (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016) and resilience (Najam & Mustamil, 2022). Servant leaders further ensure that employees have the qualified resources to perform tasks effectively.

**Impact of servant leadership on psychological ownership**

Servant leaders create empowerment by providing employees with high autonomy (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016) and decision-making authority. According to a previous study, employees tend to develop a sense of ownership when empowered to make decisions and have control over work (Najam & Mustamil, 2022; Shahab, Sobari, & Udin, 2018). Servant leaders also prioritize personal and professional development by investing in training, mentorship, and opportunities for growth. A deeper connection is developed with work when employees experience personal development and growth in an organization.

**Impact of servant leadership on affective commitment**

Servant leaders build trust through actions and genuine concern for the well-being of employees, as well as provide emotional support and a sense of pride (Lapointe & Vandenbergh, 2018). When employees feel genuine care and support from the leaders, there is a tendency to develop a strong emotional attachment to the organization (Dahleez, Aboramadan, & Bansal, 2021). Servant leaders also create a positive work environment by fostering collaboration and open communication to promote a culture of respect and appreciation. The emotional connection actively fostered by servant leaders can result in an engaging and committed workforce to the organization.

**Impact of servant leadership on career and life satisfaction**

Servant leaders often express appreciation and recognize the contributions of employees (Anwaar & Jingwei, 2022). Individuals who experience high support from leaders have a higher tendency to feel satisfied with careers and quality of life (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Udin, Handayani, Yuniawan, & Rahardja, 2019). Employees under servant leadership tend to have access to training, mentorship, and opportunities for growth, leading to increased career satisfaction (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). Therefore, organizations that implement servant leadership practices develop a supportive and fulfilling experience for employees, positively impacting both the professional and personal lives.

**Impact of servant leadership on job satisfaction and performance**

Servant leaders prioritize the personal and professional development of employees, offering support and mentorship. Employees who feel supported in growth and development tend to experience
higher job satisfaction (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Udin et al., 2024). Furthermore, servant leaders build trust, and clear communication in setting expectations and prioritizing the needs of employees (Bradley, Dowell, & Csaszar, 2023).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study showed four distinct nodes in the keyword co-occurrence networks. The first was the red node, related to servant leadership, higher education, psychological ownership, affective commitment, and job performance. Green node was the second and related to resilience, professional competence, interpersonal relations, and public relations. The third was the blue node, related to career satisfaction and life satisfaction. Finally, the fourth was the yellow node, which focused on job satisfaction and trust.

The result of this study showed that the implementation of servant leadership in higher education facilitated a favorable workplace atmosphere, contributing to increased job satisfaction and performance. Servant leaders were aware and addressed the different requirement of each person, providing personalized assistance to facilitate academic and personal growth toward reaching maximum potential. Furthermore, this style of leadership helped shape an inclusive organizational culture by promoting shared values and a sense of community to foster the success and well-being of all organizational members.

This study exclusively used the Scopus scientific database to analyze the focus and results. Therefore, using different databases, such as Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, PubMed, ProQuest, and JSTOR for future studies covering distinct sets of journals and disciplines was essential to ensure comprehensive coverage. These scientific databases served as valuable resources for researchers and academics to span multiple disciplines to ensure comprehensive access and relevant literature in the field of study.

REFERENCES


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