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Investigating the relationship between servant leadership in schools and teachers' job satisfaction: a case from the United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT

Servant leadership in schools pertains to meeting teachers and staff's social, professional, and academic needs, all through a reproductive and healthy approach to leadership. Previous studies on servant leadership supported the positive influence of servant leadership practices on employees' job satisfaction in various educational and non-educational sectors. This study aimed to quantify the relationship between teachers' perceived level of servant leadership practices of their school principals and the reported level of their job satisfaction within 2 campuses of one private school in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The participants included 81 teachers who responded to an online survey on Microsoft Teams, consisting of two integrated instruments namely Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) and Mohrman – Cooke – Mohrman job satisfaction survey (MCMJSS). Data collected was analyzed using SPSS version 25. The findings showed that schoolteachers are more satisfied with their job when working with school principals who possess servant leadership qualities, indicating a positive correlation between perceived servant leadership and employee job satisfaction. Implications and recommendations for school leadership practices that enhance teacher retention in UAE schools are offered.

Introduction

One of the main factors affecting job satisfaction for teachers in schools is principals' leadership and behavioral practices including personality, effective communication, and support. In the UAE, research on servant leadership and its association with teachers' job satisfaction at the workplace is scarce (Alahbabi et al., 2021). Many organizations worldwide have been interested in implementing the servant leadership approach due to the positive impact it has on job satisfaction. Related-research studies (Bal & De Lange, 2015; Davidescu et al., 2020) have indicated that job satisfaction is significantly important to support employees to overcome challenges and motivate them to increase productivity within the workplace.

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Factors such as valuing work, rewards, respect and appreciation, introvert, and extrovert motivation seem to yield job satisfaction (Mgammal & Al-Matari, 2021). From this end, organizations may need to revisit their strategies of supporting employees' overall wellbeing to enhance the satisfaction of their workers and optimize their performance. Arguably, when school leaders embrace a servant leadership style and prioritize teachers' success, they will ultimately cultivate satisfaction throughout the school premises and society at large (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016; Cerit, 2009). One of the reasons why schoolteachers leave their job each year is school leaders' coercive leadership style, a style that lacks both transparency and a supportive mind-set (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016).

The style of leadership may determine how a leader is perceived by his or her followers. According to Dannhauser and Boshoff (2006), one of the ingredients of leadership is *trust* which plays a significant role in leadership as it is associated with job satisfaction. For them, trust is based on predictability – to trust, one must believe that the other person or group will act in a predictable way, which will cause one to act similarly in a situation of high trust. Relatedly, educational leaders who establish a solid and collaborative school milieu are believed to be the ones who could bring about change and achieve success in their schools (Guarino et al., 2006). Several attributes such as cooperation and two way-communication continue to be seen integral for job satisfaction (Porter et al., 2007). Huber (2010) reminds us that not all school leaders have the capacity and skills to serve as effective leaders as they need to possess certain skills that allow them to manage their organizations more successfully. Consequently, effective servant leadership in the educational domain requires certain behaviors that need to be demonstrated in practice to establish a climate that features both trust and social values (Stoten, 2013).

Leadership and teaching context in the UAE

Although the literature has numerous studies about leadership, only few studies have utilized quantitative research to identify followers' perceptions of their leaders' qualities from a servant leadership approach. Moreover, in the UAE context, the literature severely lacks studies on servant leadership and job satisfaction, particularly among private school teachers. Hence, this study seeks to enrich the field of leadership in schools with new research findings that would offer insights on the servant leadership approach and its significance in creating more job satisfaction among teachers in the UAE and in turn promoting teacher retention rates.

In the United Arab Emirates, education is a high priority on the government's agenda based on the belief that a strong foundation in education is key to achieve the country's ambitions and its 2030 economic development plans (Kipples & Ridge, 2019). Further, education in the UAE has become more globalized due to the establishment of many international private schools in the last 20 years given the attractive incentives offered to teachers in both the public and private school systems (Gallagher, 2019). Consequently, teachers are being recruited from many international countries such as Canada, UK, Australia, U.S.A., and South Africa as well as Arab countries in the region (Rizvi, 2023). Reflecting the development of the teaching sector in the UAE, the Ministry of Education established the teacher licensing system in 2017 to ensure that all teachers have the necessary pedagogical and professional qualities for effective teaching (UAE Ministry of Education, 2020). However, students'

learning outcomes in the UAE continue to be lower than the average of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) despite the fact that the UAE government's spending on education is higher than that of the OECD average (Gallagher, 2019).

Research on teacher longevity in the UAE is very limited and official recent data on the issue is nearly unavailable. However, the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB), an entity that is part of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and oversees quality assurance in schools, assessed 136 private schools between October 2010 and April of 2011. DSIB found the rate of teacher turnover to be as high as 15% making it hard for schools to maintain educational standards (KHDA, 2011). It is worth noting that KHDA is developed by the UAE Ministry of Education and serves as the governing body for the teaching profession in Dubai private schools. According to the KHDA, the reasons for the high rate of teacher turnover includes the schools' continuous change of management, limited contracts for teachers (2 years or less), teachers' limited career advancement opportunities, the amount of support they receive, and challenging working conditions among other factors that vary across different schools in the UAE (KHDA, 2011).

Research context

Established in 2002, the surveyed schools are located in a residential suburb in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. These sister schools are renowned for delivering both International Baccalaureate (IB) and American curricula in ways that align with the schools' principles and mission statements. Both curricula are accredited to be offered from kindergarten to grade 12. As for Arabic and Islamic Studies, the school follows the teaching standards set by the UAE ministry of education and the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), an entity delegated by the ministry to overlook the teaching quality assurance of both public and private schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The participant teachers who took part in this study had 6 to 8 years of teaching experience across different grade levels (K-12) in both campuses and were under the leadership of the same school principal. The school principal has been leading both campuses of the examined school for eight years.

Teachers and school leaders come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, creating a rich and diverse working environment. Over the years, this diversity has contributed to the development of a school climate where collegiality, congeniality, and commitment became key success factors that would inspire other schools situated in similar contexts.

To further understand the relationship between school principals' leadership and teachers' job satisfaction in the UAE context, we were interested in answering the following research questions:

- 1) *To what extent do teachers believe their school leaders' attributes and practices reflect servant leadership qualities?*
- 2) *What is the teachers' self-reported level of job satisfaction? and*

3) *Is there a significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of their principals' servant leadership qualities and their job satisfaction?*

To answer these questions, we used Liden et al.'s (2008) Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) and Mohrman et al.'s (1977) Mohrman – Cooke – Mohrman Job Satisfaction Survey (MCMJSS) with 81 in-service teachers. In-service teachers are those currently practicing in schools while pre-service is a term that refers to those who are still completing their teacher education programs. The SLQ consists of twenty-eight items used to measure seven major dimensions of servant leadership. These dimensions are *conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community*. As for the MCMJSS, it is used by researchers as a tool to assess the level of job satisfaction among employees. For the purpose of this study, we focused on assessing the level of school principals' servant leadership as identified by their respective teachers and the effect of this leadership approach on teachers' job satisfaction in two campuses of one private school in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, UAE. The independent variable constituted *the teachers' perceptions of their school leaders' servant leadership characteristics*, whereas the dependent variable was *teachers' job satisfaction*.

Theoretical framework

This study draws from the perspectives of Robert K. Greenleaf on servant leadership (1970) and the work of Bass (2008). The term *leadership* itself remains one of the most observed and least understood phenomena (Bass, 1981, 2008; Burns, 1978; Stogdill, 1974), hence the absence of a clear consensus on defining the term in various academic circles (Stogdill, 1974). Servant leadership emerged in Robert Greenleaf's writings (Greenleaf, 1970) and has interested researchers and scholars in the field. In his essay, *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf explained what it takes to be a servant leader and how these servant leaders prioritize serving others first and themselves second. That is, servant leaders are mainly directed toward exhibiting a sense of care for the well-being and growth of the people who work with them.

Greenleaf was intrigued by issues of power and authority and how people in organizations could support each other (Robert & Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2021). That said, servant leadership becomes an approach that sheds light on how school leaders prioritize the needs of their team members, namely teachers according to this study, instead of focusing on their own personal success, power, and high control. Therefore, fostering a sense of community in schools, empowering teachers, improving their performance and job satisfaction, and overall success become significant key constructs of the servant leadership approach (Greenleaf, 1970; Robert & Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2021).

Similarly, Bass (1981, 2008) conceptualizes leadership as an approach that puts great emphasis on leaders, their behaviors, and communication skills as well as the influence they may have on their followers. His studies on servant leadership view leaders as servants possessing attributes that resonate with those of priests, chiefs, kings, and even prophets. In contrast and like any leadership approach, servant leadership was also subject to different forms of criticism in different leadership circles. Some of these

were addressed in the work of Larry Spears and Ken Blanchard (Blanchard, 1995; Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018; Spears & Lawrence, 2002, 2004). Criticism revolved around the perceived ineffectiveness of servant leadership in some critical situations where leaders may need to adopt a more directive and authoritative leadership. Other critics included the impact of organizational cultures and traditional hierarchies and structures on the adoption of servant leadership (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018; Spears & Lawrence, 2004).

Literature review

A large body of literature has explored the relationship between servant leaders' behavior and teachers' job satisfaction (Hebert, 2003; Laub, 1999; Thompson, 2003) and found a positive correlation between the two. Research on servant leadership has contributed tremendously to the domain of leadership. Although transformational and authentic leadership encompasses an ethical dimension, servant leadership is different as it puts altruism at the heart of the leadership process (Northouse, 2015, 2019).

Servant leadership and job satisfaction

The uniqueness of servant leadership lies in the fact that followers are put first, share control with their leaders, and celebrate successes and growth together. Thus, servant leadership as a concept becomes characterized by the amount of care that leaders demonstrate when they communicate and deal with their followers. A study by Cerit (2009) that started in Turkey and then spread out throughout Europe for further investigation found that a close-knit correlation between job satisfaction and servant leadership exists. Later, Williams (2012) identified certain instrumental causes which consolidate teachers' job satisfaction. Some of these included collegiality, congeniality, continuous support, professional development, and teachers' perceptions of their principals' servant leadership.

Recently, Grissom et al. (2021) stated that school principals are often regarded as one of the most influential leaders in schools and have a particular impact on teachers as they take part in hiring, retaining, encouraging, and developing teachers. For them, the school principal's role revolves around three areas that would cultivate success including instruction, people, and the school. As for instruction, Grissom et al. (2021) emphasizes the importance of instructional leadership where school leaders engage with teachers in evaluating, coaching, and mentoring them. The second and third areas look at people and how leaders need to establish a motivational and productive school environment that is characterized by teamwork, efficacy, satisfaction, and undoubtedly trust.

In their meta-analysis, Bruce and Blackburn (1992) found that there is indeed a relationship between job satisfaction and better job performance in terms of increased productivity and self-efficacy. Teachers who are satisfied at work often develop a sense of belonging to the workplace, a fact that enhances their achievement and commitment to their students (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2004). Furthermore, Krog and Govender (2015) studied the relation between servant leadership and the level of confidence and commitment among employees and revealed positive outcomes. These studies signaled several attributes to servant leaders such as ethics, emotional healing, and altruism, all of

which are seen as variables that significantly impact followers' level of job satisfaction and breed more commitment and confidence among followers toward their servant leaders (Hebert, 2003; Krog & Govender, 2015; Laub, 1999; Thompson, 2003).

Servant leaders: roles, practices, and attributes

A glance at leaders' practices and behaviors indicates that the focus is not on the development and training of followers but rather on doing certain tasks such as putting an agenda for the day-to-day tasks, covering absent staff, visiting classes for formal and informal observations, and monitoring the learning process (Hebert, 2003). Effective leaders are those reflective practitioners who continuously evaluate and re-visit the impact they have on their followers.

Bass (2000) contend that a servant leader should primarily dedicate his or her time to putting followers first, supporting them to take a leading role so that they could develop a sense of self-dependence and learn how to become self-adjustors and self-learners. When this approach to leadership prevails, it may result in the creation of an organization where all stakeholders embrace learning and develop a growth mind-set. Earlier, Laub (1999) found that teachers' job satisfaction emerges from the foundation of communities that value their constituents' well-being and where leaders act as servant leaders. Similarly, later studies (Hebert, 2003; Thompson, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2010) argued that there is an association and interconnectedness between how employees perceive their leaders and the level of job satisfaction they have.

To develop as a servant leader, certain factors like time, efforts and commitment seem to be required. Likewise, Coetzer et al. (2017) argue that it is not easy to turn into a servant leader as it necessitates a high level of self-reflection and self-evolving. Eva et al. (2019) maintains that servant leadership became a focus of study in the domain of organizational psychology and then was utilized in other domains such as education, hospitality, and healthcare. For instance, Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Ritz Carlton, and Zappos have been renowned for demonstrating servant leadership practices in their businesses (Eva et al., 2019).

In the educational domain and based on the belief that servant leaders strengthen their followers and allow them to realize their goals, Coetzer et al. (2017) speak about tossing the hierarchical pyramid and changing it upside down whereby students and teachers become co-leaders with their school principals. Graham (1991) highlights the instrumental importance of humility as a characteristic of servant leadership. When humility becomes the norm of the day, servant leaders get down the hierarchical pyramid and listen to their followers without showing any type of hubris or fiat. Hence, Waterman (2011) argues that servant leaders are committed to their communities and to the inculcation of values to maintain ethics and loyalty which together strengthen the concept of social service.

Coetzer et al. (2017) found that studies on servant leadership have determined eight attributes to servant leaders. These are risk-taking, altruism, humility, honesty, compassion, authenticity, listening, and accountability. For Peterson and Seligman (2004), *honesty* is described as a real and true presentation of oneself while *humility* is seen as a low self-regard whereby people are accepted irrespective of who they are. In the same vein, Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) attribute humility to modesty stating that

servant leaders highlight the successful tasks performed by followers and stand back behind the stage as a matter of humility. *Compassion* for Spears (2010) can be observed as an understanding of and the display of empathy with a recognition and acceptance of people qualities while *accountability* is about exhibiting responsibility, honest practices, and clear communication of expectations. In turn, Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) described *risk-taking* in servant leadership. For them, risk taking is the willingness to take risky actions and advocate for what is ethically true.

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) explained that *altruism* is related to the positive influence of servant leaders and the support they extend to others. Melchar and Bosco (2010) connect integrity to honesty, fairness, ethical tenets, and the establishment of a work environment that is characterized by ethics. Last but not least, *Listening* is described by Spears (2010) as a characteristic that involves lending one's ears, asking questions, and being reflective of and receptive to what others say. Taking the above attributes into account, Coetzer et al. (2017) conclude that servant leaders possess transparency, kindness, selflessness, and a sense of responsibility. That said, it can be argued that school leaders who espouse a servant leadership style will always have a positive effect on their followers and on job satisfaction. However, there is a consensual agreement amongst experts that any good leadership style can have a positive impact on the employees' level of job satisfaction (Bavendum, 2000). Similarly, Randolph-Robinson (2007) observed that in a school setting where the school principal embraces a participatory rather than an authoritative leadership style, teachers' spirits, morale, and satisfaction levels tend to be higher.

Method

This study employed a correlational research design with a quantitative methodology to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction. Quantitative research, as defined by Creswell (2012), is an inquiry-based approach that focuses on describing correlations between variables using statistical analyses. Correlational research designs are particularly suitable for examining associations between variables and capturing the complexities of the pattern of relationships that exist among measured variables (Stangor, 2014). Quantitative methodology produces systematic, consistent, and easily presentable data. It emphasizes measurement and the correlation or relationship between variables. This approach involves the use of objective measurement to generate numerical data, which is then statistically analyzed based on responses from questionnaires (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Creswell (2012) further describes quantitative research as an inquiry approach that is useful for describing trends and explaining the relationships among variables identified in the literature. Correlational designs, as defined by Creswell (2012), involve measuring the degree of association or relation between two or more variables using statistical procedures such as correlational analysis.

Participants

To achieve the study's aim, data was collected from schoolteachers serving in two campuses of one private school in Abu Dhabi, UAE through an online survey. The

survey was sent to all 100 teachers of the two school campuses, however, only 81 teachers have responded (81%). Participants' demographics were as follows: male 20.99%; female 79.01%; age range 24 to 65 (Mean = 39.56, SD = 1.101); a high percentage of teachers (55.56%) had bachelor's degrees.

Instruments

The survey conducted included the use of two validated and reliable instruments. These are 1) *Liden et al.'s (2008) Servant Leadership Questionnaire* (SLQ) consisting of 7 servant leadership attributes and 2) *Mohrman et al.'s (1977) Mohrman – Cooke – Mohrman Job Satisfaction Survey* (MCMJSS) that aimed to examine teachers' job satisfaction. The SLQ (Liden et al., 2008) was utilized to measure the independent variable *servant leadership* while the MCMJSS (Mohrman et al., 1977) was utilized to assess the dependent variable namely *teachers' job satisfaction*.

The SLQ consisted of 28 items with 7 dimensions for servant leadership. These dimensions are conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping subordinates (referred to alternatively as followers) grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering subordinates, and creating value for the community.

Each item in the SLQ was rated on a 4-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 as *strongly agree* to 4 as *strongly disagree*. The MCMJSS served as an instrument to measure teachers' job satisfaction. In fact, the MCMJSS consisted of 8 items in total, split into two sections. The first section comprised of 4 items that relate to intrinsic factors such as achievement and recognition while the other four items were related to extrinsic factors such as pay, job security, and working conditions. The study participants were asked to evaluate each of these items on a 4-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 as *most satisfied* to 4 as *least satisfied*. All responses were combined to compute an overall satisfaction score.

Data collection procedures

Data was collected online by combining the SLQ and MCMJSS into one MS Teams online survey. The choice of online surveys as the data collection method for this study was driven by several advantages. Firstly, online surveys provide convenience for participants, allowing them to access and complete the survey at their own convenience and from any location. This flexibility can increase the response rate and reduce the time required for data collection. Secondly, online surveys are cost-effective compared to other methods of data collection. They eliminate the need for printing and mailing paper surveys, thereby saving resources and reducing expenses.

Another advantage of online surveys is their ease of distribution and data collection. Once the survey is distributed electronically, responses are automatically collected and stored, simplifying the data management process and facilitating efficient analysis. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and disadvantages associated with online surveys. One potential disadvantage is the bias toward individuals who have internet access and are comfortable using technology, which may not accurately represent the entire population of interest. Additionally, online surveys may be more susceptible to issues of control compared to face-to-face interviews or telephone surveys.

Participants can potentially complete the survey multiple times or provide false information, which introduces concerns about data quality.

To recruit the study participants, e-mail addresses of all school principals and teachers of the two campuses were obtained from the Central Administration Office of the research site. Each participant was sent a separate e-mail including the online data collection tool, an explanation of the study purpose, participants' rights, and responsibilities, as well as a consent form. The ethics approval has been obtained from the Central Administration Office of the schools where this study was conducted, without a specific approval number. Before collecting data, the purpose of the research and the participants' rights were displayed to the respondents all of whom have provided a informed consent to participate in this study.

Data analysis

Demographic characteristics including gender, age, and educational background were computed using descriptive statistics (male 20.99% and female 79.01%). The age ranged from 24 to 65 (Mean = 39.56, SD = 1.101) and the results were tabulated. A regression analysis was completed to examine the relationship between perceived servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction using a two-tailed Pearson correlation. The internal consistency of the instruments was estimated using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (DeVellis, 2016). IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 was used for all analyses.

Results

The purpose of the present study was to examine, from a servant leadership approach, the relationship between the perceptions of teachers toward their school principals' leadership practices as the independent factor and their job satisfaction as the dependent factor. Overall, the findings of the study conform to previous studies in the field (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016; Krog & Govender, 2015; Noland & Richards, 2015; Sun, 2016; Von Fischer & De Jong, 2017).

In addition, inadequacy of support offered to teachers by their principals appeared to be among the major causes of dissatisfaction and *intention- to-quit* among the teachers who participated in this study. The Cronbach's alpha values for the SLQ and MCMJSS survey instruments were found to be 0.94 and 0.91 respectively. These values were far above the required 0.70, which indicates high internal consistency of the questionnaire items (DeVellis, 2016). The content validity of the instruments was determined by sending the tools to experts in the field.

Research question 1: to what extent do teachers believe their school leaders' attributes and practices reflect servant leadership qualities?

Overall, the results of this survey showed that the teachers held a general, positive perception that the leadership practices of principals at their campuses were reflective of the qualities of servant leadership. However, three of the items reached the highest rating from the participants: item 23 'When I have to make an important decision at work, I do not have to consult my principal first' ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.08$); item 28 'I am

Table 1. Frequency, mean, SD and % of gender, age range and educational background of the participants.

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Mean	SD	%
Gender	Male	17	39.56	1.101	20.99
	Female	64			79.01
Age range	24–35	26			32.10
	36–45	37			45.68
	46–55	15			18.52
	56–65	3			3.70
Educational background	Bachelor's	45			55.56
	Educational specialist	24			29.63
	Master's	11			13.58
	Doctorate	1			1.23

$N = 81$ and $DF = 80$.

encouraged by my principal to volunteer in the community'. ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.86$); and item 27 'My principal can recognize when I'm disappointed without asking me' ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.83$). On the other hand, three of the items received the lowest rating from the participants: item 5 'My principal holds high ethical standards' ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.43$); item 12 'My principal is always honest' ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.49$); item 15 'My principal has a thorough understanding of our organization and its goals' ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.46$). It should be noted that both the highest and lowest ratings are almost similar except for item 23. [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#) present a detailed summary of the findings from the SLQ survey.

Table 2. Frequency, mean and SD of responses to the SLQ items.

Item	Frequency	Mean	SD
1. My principal can tell if something work-related is going wrong	81	1.33	0.43
2. My principal gives me the responsibility to make important decisions about my job.	81	1.46	0.53
3. My principal makes my career development a priority.	81	1.49	0.54
4. My principal seems to care more about my success than his/her own.	81	1.60	0.70
5. My principal holds high ethical standards.	81	1.25	0.43
6. I would seek help from my principal if I had a personal problem.	81	1.37	0.53
7. My principal emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.	81	1.40	0.54
8. My principal is able to effectively think through complex problems (1)	81	1.33	0.63
9. My principal encourages me to handle important work decisions on my own.	81	1.54	0.74
10. My principal is interested in making sure that I achieve my career goals.	81	1.36	0.53
11. My principal puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.	81	1.49	0.57
12. My principal is always honest.	81	1.25	0.49
13. My principal cares about my personal well-being.	81	1.41	0.57
14. My principal is always interested in helping people in our community.	81	1.31	0.46
15. My principal has a thorough understanding of our organization and its goals.	81	1.25	0.46
16. My principal gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.	81	1.48	0.59
17. My principal provides me with work experiences that enable me to develop new skills.	81	1.40	0.52
18. My principal sacrifices his/her own interests to meet my needs.	81	1.64	0.60
19. My principal would not compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.	81	1.33	0.50
20. My principal takes time to talk to me on a personal level.	81	1.32	0.57
21. My principal is involved in community activities.	81	1.48	0.65
22. My principal can solve work problems with new or creative ideas	81	1.37	0.68
23. When I have to make an important decision at work, I do not have to consult my principal first.	81	2.44	1.08
24. My principal wants to know about my career goals	81	1.49	0.78
25. My principal does whatever she/he can to make my job easier	81	1.54	0.79
26. My principal values honesty.	81	1.37	0.71
27. My principal can recognize when I'm disappointed without asking me.	81	1.72	0.83
28. I'm encouraged by my principal to volunteer in the community	81	1.79	0.86

Table 3. Frequency, mean and SD of responses to the MCMJSS items.

Item	Frequency	Mean	SD
1. The feeling of self-esteem or self-respect you get from being in your job.	81	1.52	0.65
2. The opportunity for personal growth development in your job.	81	1.62	0.81
3. The feeling of worthwhile accomplishment in your job.	81	1.61	0.70
4. Your present job when you consider the expectations you had when you took the job.	81	1.82	0.77
5. The amount of respect and fair treatment you receive from your supervisors.	81	1.60	0.84
6. The feeling of being informed in your job.	81	1.76	0.95
7. The amount of supervision you receive.	81	1.50	0.89
8. The opportunity for participation in the determination of methods, procedures, and goals.	81	1.72	0.98

The dimension of creating value for the community, which comprised of item 7, 14, 21 and 28, scored the highest with $M = 1.73$ and $SD = 0.53$. Helping subordinates grow (items 3, 10, 17 and 24) scored the lowest with $M = 1.3$ and $SD = 0.40$. The high and low standard deviations in both cases indicate that data points are close to and away from the mean values.

Research question 2: what is the teachers' self-reported level of job satisfaction?

To answer this question, data from the Mohrman-Cooke-Mohrman job satisfaction survey (MCMJSS) was used. Overall, data from the survey indicated some level of self-reported job satisfaction among respondents in most of the items. The items that recorded the highest degree of self-reported job satisfaction among participants were item 4 'Your present job when you consider the expectations you had when you took the job' ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 0.77$) and item 6 'The feeling of being informed in your job' ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 0.95$). However, participants reported the least rating on item 7 of the level of job satisfaction measurement survey 'The amount of supervision you receive' ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.89$). Table 3 is a detailed summary of the findings of the MCMJSS survey.

From Table 3, intrinsic job satisfaction as specified by items 1, 2, 3 and 4 received the highest rating ($M = 1.63$ $SD = 0.63$). Extrinsic job satisfaction (items 5, 6, 7 and 8) reported the least rating ($M = 1.58$ $SD = 0.60$).

Research question 3: is there a significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of their principals' servant leadership qualities and their job satisfaction?

A positive correlation between extrinsic job satisfaction and the seven dimensions of SLQ can be observed in Figure 1 because the Y variable increases with an increase in X variables. The Pearson correlation coefficients (r) shown in Table 4 are greater than 0.5, indicating a strong association between the two data sets. From Table 4, the Pearson correlation coefficients (r) are conceptual skills (0.67), emotional healing (0.64), creating value for community (0.67), empowering of employees (0.62), helping subordinates (0.55), putting subordinates first (0.54) and behaving ethically (0.64). These values are greater than 0.5, indicating a large strength association between the two variables.

A two-tailed test was conducted for hypothesis testing and statistical analysis of the relationship between the servant leadership style of the principals and the self-reported job satisfaction of the academic staff. The key output data is represented in Table 4.

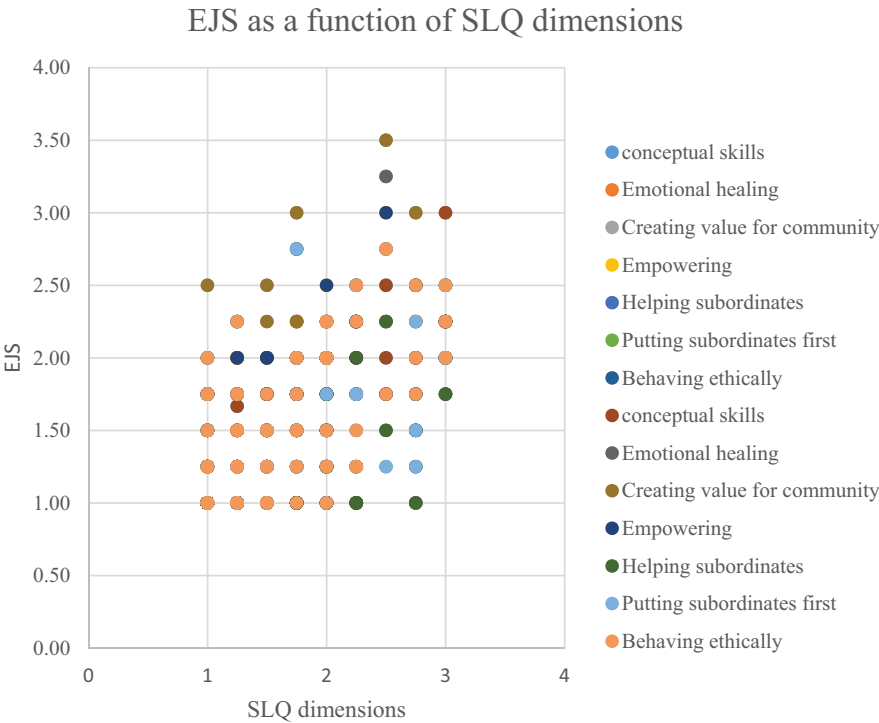


Figure 1. Scatter diagram of Extrinsic Job Satisfaction (EJS) as a function of the seven Servant leadership questionnaire dimensions.

Table 4. Pearson correlation and two-tailed test.

		CS	EH	CVC	E	HS	PSF	BE
IJS	r	0.67	0.64	0.67	0.62	0.55	0.54	0.64
	t stat	-3.76	-5.77	1.82	-1.09	-5.70	-2.97	-2.55
	P(T≤t) two-tail	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.28	0.00	0.00	0.01
	t Critical two-tail	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99
EJS	r	0.58	0.68	0.59	0.63	0.58	0.61	0.69
	t stat	-2.62	-5.30	2.57	-0.23	-5.23	-2.40	-1.84
	P(T≤t) two-tail	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.82	0.00	0.02	0.07
	t Critical two-tail	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99
OJS	r	0.63	0.69	0.65	0.59	0.59	0.61	0.70
	t stat	-3.49	-6.21	2.18	-0.90	-6.03	-3.06	-2.57
	P(T≤t) two-tail	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.37	0.00	0.00	0.01
	t Critical two-tail	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99	1.99

p = .05, N = 81, DF = 80, IJS = Intrinsic job satisfaction, EJS = Extrinsic job satisfaction, OJS = Overall job satisfaction, CS = Conceptual skills, EH = Emotional healing, CVC = Creating value for community, E = Empowering, HS = Helping subordinates, PSF = putting subordinates first, BH = Behaving ethically.

Discussion

Notably, teachers tend to have high levels of satisfaction when the leadership of their school demonstrates participative behavior (Randolph-Robinson, 2007). Relatedly, the success prospects of the educational process cannot be assumed without a commitment in dealing with job satisfaction issues among teachers. This assertion is founded on the fact that teacher shortage is increasingly becoming a global problem, UAE included,

hence the need for embracing engagement strategies that aim to promote and sustain the retention of teachers in schools, while attracting new ones (Toropova et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have established the existence of a significant and positive association between the level of job satisfaction and the *intention-to-stay* among teachers. In addition, high levels of job satisfaction are associated with better outcomes for the well-being of both teachers and students. As such, it is logically binding that job satisfaction is a critical determinant of the overall level of school cohesion and has a relational effect on job performance and generally the sustainability of the teaching profession (Toropova et al., 2021). Consequently, teachers who are satisfied with their job and the leaders they are working with are less likely to fall victims of workplace issues such as stress and teacher burnout. A core determinant of job satisfaction becomes the nature of the school's working environment. In other words, the type of leadership performed at the school serves as one of the critical factors that impact job satisfaction among teachers who are seen as the institutional crucial resources for knowledge, teaching, and learning (Bavendum, 2000). That said, the type of leadership practice may dictate the rate of teacher attrition, potentially affecting negative both schools' overall environment as well as pupils' learning journey.

Al-Mahdy et al. (2016) remind us that most of the factors behind poor job satisfaction levels and intention to leave the teaching profession among practicing teachers, relate to school leadership. Relatedly, Bogler and Nir (2012) assert that principals can and do impact the level of teachers' job satisfaction both intrinsically and extrinsically. Further, the findings from the bivariate analysis revealed a significant relationship between the seven SLQ dimensions and each of the eight items of the MCMJSS. This finding conforms to the findings of Gungor (2016) and Sun (2016). Resonating with the findings of Gungor (2016), the MCMJSS instrument's item titled 'The feeling of self-esteem or self-respect you get from being in your job' had the highest level of correlation with all dimensions of the SLQ instrument. This unique association between the servant leadership attributes of principals and teachers' job satisfaction, highlights the significance of the servant leadership style in developing and positively engaging employees, namely teachers according to this study (Von Fischer & De Jong, 2017).

Regarding the level of job satisfaction among the participant teachers at the two campuses, data analysis showed the existence of some level of self-reported job satisfaction in most of the items. Notably, the SLQ statements titled 'When I have to make an important decision at work, I do not have to consult my principal first' ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.08$), and 'I am encouraged by my principal to volunteer in the community' ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.86$) have received the highest rating by the study participants. In contrast, the least rated statements were: 'My principal holds high ethical standards' ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.43$); 'My principal is always honest' ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.49$); and 'My principal has a thorough understanding of our organization and its goals' ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.46$). These findings reflected those of previous studies as well (see Al-Asadi et al., 2019; Krog & Govender, 2015; Von Fischer & De Jong, 2017).

The data analysis for the SLQ items indicated that the participant teachers hold a positive perception that their school leaders' practices reflect servant leaders' qualities, resonating with the study findings of Toropova et al. (2021), Aboramadan et al. (2020), Kadarusman and Bunyamin (2021), and those of Von Fischer and De Jong (2017). Von Fischer and De Jong (2017) claim that this positive perception across the SLQ statements can be explained by the unique approach to leadership exercised by these servant leaders who simultaneously enjoy a positive and welcoming reception by their followers.

Conclusion

The impact of the workplace environment and leadership practices on employees' level of job satisfaction cannot be overemphasized. To this end, the study engaged teachers from two campuses of one private school in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi to investigate this relationship and offers insights on the significance of servant leadership practices in schools.

The study findings, supported by the related literature, confirmed the positive correlation between job satisfaction and servant leaders' practices from schoolteachers' perspectives. The participant teachers held a general, positive perception that the practices of their school principals reflected the qualities of servant leadership and shared a high level of job satisfaction when they see their school leaders practicing as servant leaders.

These findings contribute to the existing literature on school leadership and teachers' level of job satisfaction, particularly in the UAE context where research in these areas remains in its infancy stage. Furthermore, these findings will position servant leadership in schools as an informed strategy for safeguarding the prospects of education and the UAE vision 2030. Furthermore, these findings provide invaluable insights for understanding and valuing the specifics of interactions between teachers and their school leaders and how these interactions impact teachers' level of job satisfaction and perceptions toward school leadership. Consequently, due to the extended impact of these interactions on students' well-being and learning experiences (Toropova et al., 2021), adopting a servant leadership approach in schools becomes crucial.

While the study involved a significant sample size, it was marked by some notable limitations exemplified by involving only one private school in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. This limitation would prevent the generalizability of the study findings and the conclusions made, hence the need of future research to include more private schools and across different Emirates in the country. In addition, future research may investigate the effects of teacher-specific factors such as age, gender, teaching experience, socio-cultural and educational backgrounds on their perceptions of school leaders' qualities and how these, if any, impact their level of job satisfaction.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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