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CONCEPTUALIZING PRINCIPAL'S SERVANT LEADERSHIP WITH RELIGIOUS VALUES AND POWER DISTANCE IN RELATION TO TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION

Mohammed Zaber Hossain ¹; Harshita Aini Haroon ²;
MohammadEhsanul Islam Khan ³; Mahendran Maniam ^{*4}

¹ Faculty of Languages, Bangladesh Military Academy, Chattogram, Bangladesh.

Email: zaberhossain@unimap.edu.my

² Faculty of Applied and Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia.

Email: harshita@unimap.edu.my

³ Department of English, Manarat International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Email: ehsan@manarat.ac.bd

⁴ Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia.

Email: mahendran@fbk.upsi.edu.my

*Corresponding author

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Abstract

This article investigates the interrelationship among principal's servant leadership, principal's religious values, and power distance; and their impact on teachers' job satisfaction in Bangladesh. We frame our discussion in the context of the country's secondary and higher secondary level educational institutions. The education policy in Bangladeshi schools and colleges is biased toward educational administration. As such, a top-down hierarchical administration has developed that has invariably tended to focus on educational administration and management, not on any educational leadership, let alone consider teachers' job satisfaction. Servant leadership theory has been used as the underpinning theoretical framework to establish the relationship between principal leadership and teachers' job satisfaction. This paper contributes to the literature by extending servant leadership theory concerning teachers' job satisfaction, particularly in contexts where Islam is predominant. Religious values, particularly, Islamic values in Bangladeshi society are pervasive in effect. So, in the existing top-down bureaucratic educational administration which is a collocation of power distance, principal's religious values would steer the relationship of principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction to a positive end.

Key words: Servant Leadership, Principal Leadership, Teachers' Job Satisfaction, Power Distance

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Introduction

Educational leadership has received a lot of attention in recent decades due to school administrators' expanded responsibilities and the accountability-driven atmosphere in which they work (Daniëls et al., 2019)¹. The theory and practice of school leadership have reached its "golden age" as enunciated by Leithwood and Day (2007)². This is truer in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and some associated countries (Mulford, 2008)³ where education accounts for around 13% of overall government spending (Potrafke, 2020)⁴. It has been generally accepted over time that the key to academic success in an institution depends on the presence or absence of educational leadership (Crisp et al., 2015; Fernandez and Shaw, 2020; Gašević et al., 2016; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015)^{5,6,7,8}. It has also been taken into consideration, as has been advocated by Kotler (1996) that successful school improvement is 70-90 percent leadership and only 10-30 percent management (Zame et al., 2008)⁹.

Principals' servant leadership practices distinguish effective schools because servant leadership activities lead to higher levels of job satisfaction among teachers (Cerit, 2009)¹⁰. Among the several leading leadership styles, such as transformational, spiritual, and collaborative leadership (Karnan & Marimuthu, 2021)¹¹, servant leadership best represents human desire (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012; Graham et al., 2022)^{12,13}. It is a type of leadership that stems from a genuine desire to help others (Greenleaf, 2002)¹⁴. Servant leadership is concerned about the well-being of subordinates. It encourages them to participate in decision-making and policy-making in the organization, allowing them to feel happy and fulfilled in their work. According to Goh et al. (2020)¹⁵, servant leadership culture, such as compassion for workers, might motivate staff to treat customers similarly. Based on several empirical studies, Parris and Peachey (2013)¹⁶ concluded that servant leadership is a tenable theory that is feasible and helpful on an individual and organizational level and that it can lead to the increased overall effectiveness of stakeholders and team members.

Teachers' job satisfaction and motivation are essential for high instruction and academic success (Ingwu & Ekefre, 2006; Sumanasena & Nawastheen, 2022)^{17,18} and for helping employees build positive views about their careers (Sirin, 2009)¹⁹. Individuals get independence and empowerment (Carless, 2004; Haas, 2010)^{20,21} due to their job happiness and motivation, which fosters a healthy and meaningful interaction (Bordin et al., 2006)²² among co-workers and contributes to the success of both employees and organizations. Sahito and Vaisanen (2020)²³ found a relationship between head-teachers leadership style and teachers' job satisfaction. Another study found a considerable and favorable influence of a servant leadership attitude on faculty members' job satisfaction (Afaq et al., 2017)²⁴.

Salahuddin (2012)²⁵ recognized that a school head, by definition, has a particular sort of power connection with the school's personnel. That power connection, however, is embedded in a web of other power relationships, including those with the Ministry of Education and its regulatory bodies, influential community members, and the government and its policy processes. Power distance concerns how cultures are validated, resulting in degrees of power, authority, prestige, position, money, and material things between individuals (Hofstede, 1991)²⁶. One such country is Bangladesh, which is culturally marked with high power distance orientation. As a society, the country is hierarchical (Dutta & Islam, 2016)²⁷, where choices are limited, and the elite class exercises power. According to Zaccaro et al. (2013)²⁸, the hierarchical framework of leadership significantly impacts the personal, interpersonal, and organizational decisions that might be made.

On the other hand, the influence of Islam is characteristically both individualistic and collectivist (Yasin & Jani, 2013)²⁹. Though there is a divide between beliefs and practices, majority of the population in Bangladesh identify themselves with religious principles and strive to achieve the ideals set forth in the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings (PBUH) (Ali, 2008)³⁰. The teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, as reflected in the individuals, are prototypes of the characteristics of servant leadership (Ahmad, 2019)³¹.

Howlader and Rahman (2020)³² studied the prevalence of servant leadership in Bangladesh in which they verified the validity of Van Dierendonck and Nuijten's (2011)³³ Servant Leadership Scale. In Bangladesh, it was discovered that servant leadership is partially practiced. The study's key conclusion is that servant leadership has transcended cultural applicability, especially in emerging nations like Bangladesh, which has a distinct cultural identity from any other Western country. However, previous studies have not explored the integration of principal's religious values and power distance in the same model to better explain the relationship of principal's servant leadership on teachers' job satisfaction in countries where religious values are predominant in the lives of its people, such as in Bangladeshi society in general and schools and colleges in particular. This paper considers the mediating effect of principal's religious values and the moderating effect of power distance on the relationship. Hypothetically religious values will significantly and positively affect the relationship between principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction in Bangladeshi schools and colleges. On the other hand, power distance is supposed to negatively affect the relationship between principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction.

This paper contributes to the literature by extending the servant leadership theory with principal's religious values as a mediator and power distance as a moderator in the same model to understand the impact of servant leadership on teachers' job satisfaction in a context where the majority is practicing Islam.

Principal's servant leadership

Servant leadership outlines a set of behaviors that individuals may engage in if they aspire to adopt servant leadership, all of which are focused on a philosophical approach of 'caring for others' (Dinibutun, 2020)³⁴. As was first surfaced by Greenleaf (Spears, 1996)³⁵, most of the literature on servant leadership has an underlying philosophy of altruism and humanism. Rather than dominating and manipulating followers, servant leadership focuses on altruistic and humanistic behaviors, unlike trait leadership, which emphasizes specific leadership attributes, and path-goal leadership, which considers leadership style in various scenarios. Cultural leadership, social justice, stewardship, and enabling others are few qualities through which servant leaders guide, empower, and develop individuals in organizational contexts (Dierendonck, 2011)³⁶.

Each year, the number of studies on servant leadership as a worthwhile leadership paradigm grows (Brouns et al., 2020; Franco and Antunes, 2020; Prawira, 2021)^{37,38,39}, covering many disciplines. Comparing various servant leadership models leads to a better understanding of a servant leadership conceptualization that is adaptive to the educational environment in schools and colleges. It is worth noting that servant leadership is conceptualized in terms of traits, attributes, and behaviors. Northouse (2015)⁴⁰ presented a servant leadership model based on two studies considered the sine qua non (Liden et al., 2008, 2014)^{41,42}. The conceptualization made by Liden

et al. in 2008 and 2014 has become the theoretical underpinning of this paper. The seven scales developed by Liden et al. (2008, 2014)^{41,42} consist of conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community. The conceptual features described by Liden et al. (2008, 2014)^{41,42} are in line with the models of Farling et al. (1999)⁴³, Spears (Brewer, 2010)⁴⁴, Sendjaya et al. (2019)⁴⁵, Ingram (2016)⁴⁶, and Aboramadan et al. (2020; 2021)^{47,48}.

Aboramadan et al. (2021)⁴⁸, in a study on servant leadership in higher education using data from a non-Western culture, found that job satisfaction had a positive and mediating influence on the relationship between servant leadership and affective commitment. Georgolopoulos et al. (2018)⁴⁹ studied 141 teachers from 20 public elementary schools in the Trikala prefecture in central Greece. They found that most teachers had a favorable attitude toward the principles of servant leadership. Besides, they found a statistically significant and substantive positive association between job satisfaction and the perceived adoption of servant leadership concepts. In a study investigating the effect of servant leadership on job satisfaction at a private university in Atlanta, Georgia, Guillaume et al. (2013)⁵⁰ found positive association between servant leadership and work happiness among faculty and non-faculty staff. Another study (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006)⁵¹ concluded that servant leadership contributes to a content workforce. Thus, based on the above evidence, this paper presents the following proposition.

Proposition 1 (P1): Principal's servant leadership has a significant positive relationship with teachers' job satisfaction.

Religious values and leadership

Maldonado and Lacey (2001)⁵² regarded specific actions or attributes as having moral and ethical characteristics. Hidayati (2019)⁵³ advocated moral and religious values of becoming faithful and fearful people to God Almighty as a leadership behavior that should be inculcated in childhood. Stark (1999)⁵⁴ argues that the secularization "doctrine" should be buried in "the graveyard of failed theories". There is scope to focus on religious values as a better substitute of those materialistic theories. Gumusay (2019)⁵⁵ explored three religious qualities that are both important for leadership and unique to most religions: a god, a hereafter purpose, and Holy Scripture. He went on to say that non-religious leaders have also spoken about the importance of rituals and varied communities. The appeal of these qualities is that secular groups might even imitate religious ideas and behaviors, as postulated by Ashforth and Vaidyanath (2002)⁵⁶.

Abbas et al., (2020)⁵⁷ researched servant leadership and employee religiosity as performance measure in the educational sector. The regression analysis findings indicate that servant leadership is a proactive predictor of employee performance and that the relationship is strengthened when religion gets involved. Religion establishes a spiritual belief system that directly impacts the development of behavior, attitudes, values, and work ethics (Xu et al., 2017)⁵⁸. Eighty-two percent population worldwide that have taken on a reported leadership role in an organization believe their leadership behaviors are influenced by spiritual and religious beliefs (Kriger and Seng, 2005)⁵⁹.

Zooming in to the context of a religious society, religious values may prevail as playing a key role in one's leadership style. As Muslim-majority state, Muslims formed 90.4 percent of the

population in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Parisamkhyāna Byuro, 2012)⁶⁰. Principal's religious values, especially Islam as a religion, has an enormous impact on the Bangladeshi culture and society. Thus, this study presents following proposition.

Proposition 2 (P2): The Principal's religious values strengthen the relationship between principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction.

Power distance orientation in educational practices

The degree to which people, communities, or societies accept disparities (e.g., inequalities in power, position, or money) as inescapable, justified, or functional is referred to as power distance (Hofstede, 2001)⁶¹. Acceptance of power imbalances impacts ideas about how people with different degrees of power should interact (House et al., 2001)⁶². Individuals with a larger power distance, for example, feel that authoritative persons should be respected and treated with reverence, while those with a lower power distance do not see many differences based on social strata, power, or hierarchical position (Yang et al., 2007)⁶³.

The major features of the culture of high-power distance in the administration of Bangladesh generally include centralization of authority, politicization of administration, and obsequiousness. These have led to inefficiencies and malpractices in many situations (Dutta & Islam, 2016; Haque & Mohammad, 2013; Wahid & Prince, 2020)^{27,64,65}. Within the context of education, power distance prevails in the way in which schools and colleges are administered. Hossain's study (Hossain, 2019)⁶⁶ found that the educational administration in schools and colleges in Bangladesh is top-down. The activities of the schools and colleges are monitored and supervised by the local Governing Body and the field education officers such as Thana Education Officer and District Education Officer and so on. They work under the direct guidance and supervision of the Education Ministry and its sub-offices. As per organizational hierarchy, the position of the principals is at the bottom. Their views and experiences are rarely considered, resulting in an unutilized resource that could have contributed to strengthening education policies and their implementation.

A good portion of the research literature suggests that power distance significantly impacts job satisfaction. Hauff and Richter (2015)⁶⁷ observed that differing national power distance levels mitigate the impact of diverse situational employment factors on job satisfaction. When it comes to influencing human resource management practices, power distance has been considered an essential aspect of culture (Budhwar, 2000)⁶⁸. It reflects how much less powerful workers anticipate and tolerate the uneven distribution of power, authority, prestige, and material belongings (Javidan et al., 2016)⁶⁹. Given the importance of these factors in the workplace, it is reasonable to predict that the power distance level will influence the impact of situational job qualities linked to power and status on job satisfaction. Tepper et al. (2007)⁷⁰ studied that abusive supervision influences turnover intention, meaning that those subjected to it are more inclined to quit their positions. Good leadership and supervision, on the other hand, have a favorable impact on workers' general behavior. Employees and subordinates are motivated and devoted to the company because of excellent and ethical leadership and supervision (Locke, 2020)⁷¹. Thus, this study presents the following proposition.

Proposition 3 (P3): The relationship between a principal's servant leadership and teachers' jobsatisfaction is more substantial when a low power distance orientation exists. On the other hand, therelationship between a principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction is weaker when there is a high-power distance. Employees' work satisfaction is a good feeling about their employment (Akehurst et al., 2009)⁷². Regarding organizational behavior, job satisfaction is considered the most researched work-related attitude (Alvinus et al., 2017)⁷³.

Employees that are content with their occupations exhibit good work behaviors such as minimal turnover, high productivity, low absenteeism, and more outstanding performance (Meyer et al., 2004)⁷⁴. In addition to job satisfaction, the relationship between the leader and the follower defines the level of influence on employee job satisfaction (De Cremer, 2003)⁷⁵. It was found that employee dissatisfaction mainly stems from the confusing nature of the job demands coming from ineffective leadership styles (Schyns & Sanders, 2007)⁷⁶.

Eva et al., (2019)⁷⁷ found that servant leadership helps shape positive employee attitudes andcreate a positive work environment for both the organization and the employees. When leaders are concerned about the well-being of their followers, followers exhibit more significant levels of contentment. Kaur (2018)⁷⁸ concluded that servant leadership increases employee work satisfaction.In the Bangladeshi context, research on job satisfaction has been conducted mostly on demographic and motivational variables, including gender, length of service, pay, work responsibilities, variety oftasks, promotional opportunities, relationship with co-workers and others (Masum et al., 2015)⁷⁹. Inthis article, we propose that teachers' job satisfaction is seen from leadership, management and cultural perspectives, which will be reflected through servant leadership, power distance and religiousvalues. We hope that by doing so, studies will shed light on a new perspective in understanding teachers' job satisfaction, especially in secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh.

The framework

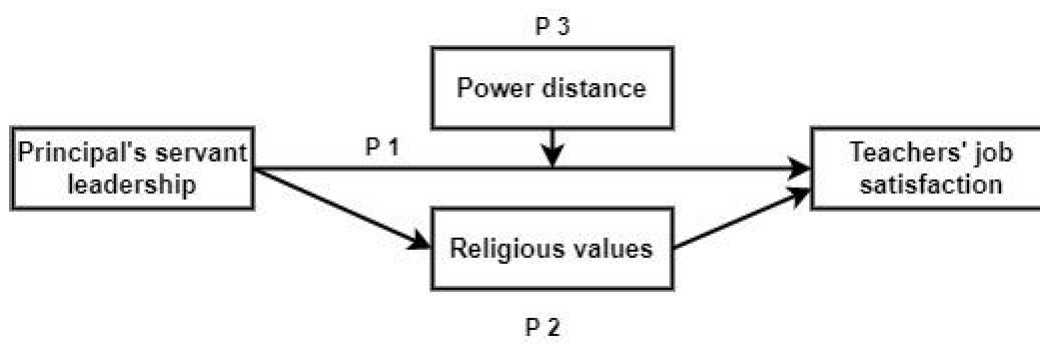


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of relationship between principal's servant leadership andteachers' job satisfaction. The roles of principal's religious values and power distance

Servant leadership refers to the principal's leadership style that positively influences the job satisfaction of teachers working under the supervision of the same principal in educational institutes(P1). Religious values mediate the relationship between servant leadership and the teachers' job satisfaction (P2). Religious values, especially Islamic ones, dominate Bangladeshi society (Asadullah& Chaudhury, 2010; Bhardwaj, n.d.; Eade, 1994; Huque & Akhter, 1987; Qazi & Shah, 2019)^{80,81,82,83,84}. With the same message in heart, service to others, they are

characteristically akin to servant leadership. Furthermore, they are more effective because of the social context as existed in Bangladesh. So, in the Bangladeshi perspective, a principal with internalized religious values would be better disposed to servant leadership. The prevailing high power distance management in schools and colleges cannot deter principals who practice these religious values from providing their best services to others, thus neutralizing and negating the impact of high-power distance management. Thus, it is hypothesized that religious values will enhance the principal's servant leadership and positively impact teachers' job satisfaction.

Power distance orientation is expected to moderate the relationships between the principal's servant leadership and the teachers' job satisfaction (P3) in school management, reflecting the top-down educational administration (Hossain, 2019; National Education Policy, 2010)^{66,85} practiced by the Ministry of Education in Bangladeshi schools and colleges. Educators' leadership, especially principals and teachers are evidence of prevalent educational leadership orientation (Bush & Sargsyan, 2020; Pont, 2014; Zame et al., 2008)^{86,87,9}. The leadership styles that principals and teachers practice are primarily learnt through tradition and experience (Salahuddin, 2011)⁸⁸. In the Bangladeshi perspective, high power distance is expected to impact negatively the relationship between the principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction.

The measurement

The researchers propose that a study to be carried out based on the proposed conceptual framework, with servant leadership as the independent variable and teachers' job satisfaction as the dependent variable, mediated by religious values and moderated by power distance. The measurement scale of all constructs is taken from previous studies. The number of items either adapted or adopted for each construct have been shown in the following table:

Table 1.
Measurement scales for all four constructs

Constructs	Items	Sources
Servant Leadership	My principal puts my best interests ahead of his/her own. My principal gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the best way I feel. My principal would not compromise ethical principles to achieve success. My principal gives me the right to question his or her actions and decisions. My principal respects me for who I am, not how I make him or her feel. My principal enhances my capacity for moral actions. My principal contributes to my personal and professional growth.	(Aboramadan et al., 2021) ⁴⁸
Job Satisfaction	I enjoy my work more than my leisure time. I feel that I am happier in my work than most other people. I find real enjoyment in my work. Most days I am enthusiastic about my work. My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored. My job is like a hobby to me.	Aboramadan et al. (2020) ⁴⁷
Religious values	My principal strives to fulfil the organization's trust. My principal leads by following the guideline set by the organization. My principal advises teachers to do good things. My principal advises teachers about religious matter. My principal realizes that rank is a test from Allah SWT. My principal believes that leadership ranks will be followed by severe punishment from Allah SWT, if not conducted fairly. My principal refrains from making a decision when in anger.	Mahazan et al. (2015) ⁸⁹
Power distance	People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting their subordinates. People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of their subordinates too frequently. People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with their subordinates. People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions made by their superiors.	Auh et al. (2016) ⁹⁰

Conclusion: Forwarding the concept

The conceptualization presented in this paper ventures to explore factors at play in considering the relationship between principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction, bringing together some essential concepts in the Bangladeshi context. The primary focus of this model is to provide a framework to enable the study of the relationship between principal's servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction in Bangladeshi schools and colleges. The model is unique in considering the principal's religious values, particularly Islamic values as a mediator and power distance as a moderator. Our hypothesis that religious values and power distance orientation play particular roles in the relationship has implications for practice and research. In practice, the model can help us better understand job satisfaction in a nation where the majority of the people practices Islam and high-power distance is the typical typology of the society.

Findings of future studies using this framework will provide insights into multidimensional contributions shaping teachers' satisfaction. The study will bring a new perspective to educational leadership research by demonstrating how principals' religious values and levels of power distance have a place in servant leadership theory and style.

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