



The Interplay of Servant Leadership on School Climate in Public Elementary Schools of Davao De Oro Division

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ABSTRACT

To attain a positive school climate, school heads need to showcase their servant leadership skills. Unfortunately, this had never been proven yet by means of academic research in the local setting. With this, the study determined the extent of servant leadership of school heads and the school climate of public elementary schools in Davao De Oro Division. Also, it investigated the association of servant leadership and school climate. With the use of probability sampling, 150 elementary teachers in the public schools were selected as the respondents. Utilizing the descriptive-correlational survey method, the data collated were analyzed through the use of Mean and Product-Moment correlation. Results revealed that there was an extensive servant leadership and school climate. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between the two variables. Based on the findings, it was further suggested that higher officials in the Department of Education and school may identify means on how to attain positive school climate by helping school heads to be effective servant leaders. Apparently, the entire school needs to work together for the realization of a healthy and positive school climate.

Keywords: Servant leadership, school climate, descriptive correlation, Davao de Oro Division, Philippines

1. Introduction

Teachers' school climate is very tough. Challenges are observed from the classroom practices, dealing with their colleagues, unprepared and demotivated students, uninvolved parents, and other conditions that impede teaching. These conditions are the result of societal problems such as rising poverty and insufficient public investments. In addition to the problematic situation in the school setting, teachers face threats to their safety. Compounding the stress, teachers expressed that received lack of support from the administrators and fellow teachers. More so, teachers feel that they have less than a great deal of influence over what they teach in the classroom and what instructional materials they use which suggests low respect for their knowledge and judgment. Apparently, the school climate is not that healthy for teachers.

In the Philippines, problems are identified in the school climate which are considered as closed and disengaged climate. Members of the school lack collegiality and concern for other members (low collegiality). Building principal's leadership is rigid and controlling with little to no input from teachers (high directedness). Building principals are unresponsive and unsympathetic teachers' or students' needs (low supportiveness). Similarly to building principals, teachers lack the interest to becomes friends with or collaborate with their colleagues or their building principal (low collegiality and low intimacy). At times, they ignore the building principal's support and are unresponsive to the building principal's request (low supportiveness). Teachers are clearly disengaged in the educational process (Lipata, 2019).

In USA, it was revealed that schools are having difficulties filling teacher vacancies and are leaving vacancies unfilled despite actively trying to hire teachers to fill them. One factor behind staffing difficulties is the high share of public school teachers leaving their posts. Schools are also having a harder time retaining credentialed teachers. Retaining credentialed teachers is also more difficult for high-poverty schools. Moreover, school climate is challenging for a number of reasons: Teachers confront widespread barriers to teaching and learning, face threats to their emotional and physical safety, lack influence over school policy and what and how they teach in their classrooms, and suffer from dissatisfaction and low motivation (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Locally, like the other State Universities and Colleges, Marawi State University is confronted by similar problems such as poor education spending and annual budget cutbacks. With poor finances, MSU is confronted with problems on meeting its basic academic needs like laboratory facilities and library resources which brought frustrations to both teachers and students. Issues on lack of school facilities and insufficient administrative support pose a great challenge to MSU in providing a framework within which all students, teachers, and administrators in feeder high schools can function cooperatively and productively towards the realization of their educational goals (Baoc-Daguisanan, 2018).

In the Division of Davao de Oro, the researcher observed that teachers were not empowered due to limited opportunities for professional growth and even promotion. This inhibited them to further their capacity in quality education. More so, they were not exposed to trainings that would help them to

get acquainted of the students' behavior in this generation. No further trainings were also provided that would help them in helping the students to fill in the gap in learning brought by the pandemic. Teachers also experienced conflict with their teachers due to misunderstanding.

Given these situations, the researcher further determined the status of school climate in Davao de Oro considering the servant leadership of the school heads. Furthermore, it explored the correlation of the two variables. The scarcity of studies involving servant leadership and school climate motivated the researcher to explore the involved variables. Apparently, this undertaking also hoped to provide insights to the policy makers in crafting policies, programs, interventions, projects, activities that would be helpful to public schools in fostering a healthy school climate through the aid of servant leadership.

Several theories and models had been associated with servant leadership of school heads and school climate. The theoretical framework of this study is based on Servant Leadership by Greenleaf (1970), Bandura's Social Cognitive (Bandura, 1977), Trait Theory by McCall and Lombardo (1983), and Transformational Leadership by Northouse (2007).

Norton (1984) stated that school climate is the collective personality of the school. Just as individuals have personalities, so do schools. In addition, climate is the human environment within which the administrators, teachers, students and staff do their work. Climate surrounds and affects everything that happens in an organization (Freiberg, 1983). Schools have their own unique personality that is a result of the overall climate.

Generally, these climates are a result of the leadership style of the principal (Freiberg, 1983). In addition, healthy schools that promote high academic standards, appropriate leadership, and collegiality provide a climate more conducive for student achievement and success (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990). Although there is not one commonly accepted definition for school climate, Cohen (2006) suggests that school climate, essentially, reflects subjective experience in school.

This study was mainly associated with the Servant Leadership Theory by Greenleaf (1970). He proposed that the best leaders were servants first, and the key tools for a servant-leader included listening, persuasion, access to intuition and foresight, use of language, and pragmatic measurements of outcomes. Servant leadership involves "knowing" one's followers as it pertains to their mental and emotional well-being rather than simply issuing orders and edicts to keep the workplace functional. The motivation of the leader is essentially what defines a leader as a servant. Leadership can affect school climate in either a positive or negative manner. It could be posited that the leadership style of a servant leader would have a more positive impact on the school climate than other styles of leadership. In the context of this study, servant leadership is linked to school climate.

Another theory that supported this study is the Bandura's Social Cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) which emphasizes the link between principal leadership which toward the development of school climate. The basis for the theory derives from the reciprocal interactions of people, their environment, and their behavior (Boston University of School and Public Health, 2013). Specifically, Bandura's constructs of behavioral capacity, observational learning, and reinforcements are characteristics that can affect a school's climate.

Wang and Degol (2015) stated that climate shapes the quality of all students, teachers, parents, and school personnel and reflects the norms, values, and goals that represent the school's broader educational and social missions. This also includes how the school leaders affect the school climate. Thus, school climate focuses on the environment as a whole and how the behaviors of individuals affect the overall environment. Furthermore, Trait Theory (McCall & Lombardo, 1983) suggested that people are born with certain leadership qualities that make them great leaders. Also, people who have the right combination of traits make good leaders. Leadership traits affect how the school climate is being developed.

Meanwhile, Transformational Theory is one of the most current leadership theories that supported the idea that school leaders do influence the school climate. This theory addresses how leaders motivate and inspire their followers to achieve greatness (Northouse, 2007). It involves leaders adapting to the needs of those in their sphere of influence. Transformational leaders are considered agents of change who have a clear vision and wean from the knowledge of those in the organization. Most importantly, transformational leadership depends on one's ability to motivate in order to inspire others. The leadership behavior shown by school administrators might affect the organizational perceptions of teachers and lead to a change in their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes about the organization. In this regard, the quality of the leadership in schools is reflected on teachers' and students' success.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study was a quantitative research approach utilizing the descriptive correlational approach. Quantitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. It can be used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and [generalize](#) results to wider populations (Bhandari, 2022). The purpose of quantitative research is to generate knowledge and create understanding about the social world. Quantitative research is used by social scientists, including communication researchers, to observe phenomena or occurrences affecting individuals (Allen, 2017). Moreover, a descriptive correlation study is a study in which the researcher is primarily interested in describing the relationships between variables without attempting to establish a causal relationship (Noah, 2021).

Meanwhile, in descriptive research, it aims to adequately describe the event as they occurred in their natural settings (Siedlecki, 2020). On the other hand, a correlational study establishes a cause-effect relationship between variables as there might be other extraneous variables involved that might lead to the change in the other variables (Curtis et al, 2016). Also, correlation investigates the strength and direction of the variables. This can be a positive direction or a negative direction, and a strong and a weak relationship.

This research journey was considered as quantitative since it relied on the numerical data when analyzing and interpreting the data. It was descriptive since its purpose was to determine the extent of servant leadership of school heads and school climate. In addition, this academic pursuit was correlational since its purpose was to measure the association between servant leadership of school heads and school climate in selected public elementary schools in the Division of Davao de Oro.

Research Respondents

This study considered the 150 public elementary teachers in the Division of Davao de Oro. It was claimed that for simple regression analysis, it needs at least 50 samples and generally 100 samples for most research situations (Hair et al., 2018). Hence, the 150 respondents were enough to address the purpose of this study. In the inclusion and exclusion criteria, all elementary teachers with 2 years teaching experience were chosen in this endeavor since the two years stay in the public school would help them to assess the servant leadership of school principals and school climate. In this academic quest, those elementary teachers in the private schools were not considered. Furthermore, respondents who felt awkward and uncomfortable in answering the survey questionnaire were free to withdraw from their participation. They were not forced to be part of the study. Their decision to withdraw was respected. Apparently, the respondents' welfare was given utmost importance in the conduct of the study.

Research Instruments

A survey questionnaire had been the primary source of gathering data. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first part was focusing about the servant leadership of school heads while the second section was about school climate.

The servant leadership questionnaire was adapted from Barbuto and Wheeler (2006). The instrument consists of 23 items. It has the following indicators, namely: altruistic calling (1-4); emotional healing (5-8); wisdom (9-13); persuasive mapping (14-18); and organizational stewardship (19-23). The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot testing having a result of .73 suggesting that the items have relatively *high* internal consistency.

The school climate was adapted from the study of McMillan et al. (2017). It was also subjected to pilot testing which revealed a result of .74 suggesting that the items have relatively *high* internal consistency. The test has a total of 25 items. It has the following indicators, namely: effective leaders (1-6); collaborative/engaged teachers (1-5); involved families (1-9), and engaged students (1-5).

The instruments in this study were contextualized to achieve the purpose of this study. The researcher integrated all the comments and suggestions of the adviser, panel members and expert validators for the refinement of the tools and to achieve construct validity.

Table

Table 1

Summary on the Extent of Servant Leadership of School Heads

| No | Indicators | Mean | Descriptive Equivalent |
|----------------|----------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Altruistic Calling | 3.16 | Moderately Extensive |
| 2 | Emotional Healing | 3.29 | Moderately Extensive |
| 3 | Wisdom | 4.36 | Very Extensive |
| 4 | Persuasive Mapping | 4.17 | Extensive |
| 5 | Organizational Stewardship | 4.34 | Very Extensive |
| Overall | | 3.86 | Extensive |

Table 1 provides the summary on the extent of servant leadership of school heads. It is exhibited that the overall mean of servant leadership of school heads is 3.86, which is in an extensive level. This means that servant leadership of school heads is oftentimes evident.

Data show that all five (5) indicators reveal a varying result ranging from extensive to very extensive result. as arranged chronologically, wisdom (4.36). this is followed by organizational stewardship (4.34), persuasive mapping (4.17), emotional healing (3.29), and altruistic calling (3.16).

The data presents a comprehensive perspective on the servant leadership of school heads, with results spanning from extensive to very extensive levels across all five indicators. These findings depict a multi-dimensional servant leadership approach that encompasses wisdom, ethical stewardship, effective communication, emotional well-being, and a genuine commitment to serving others. The implications of these outcomes underscore the multifaceted role that effective school leaders play in creating a holistic, empowering, and nurturing educational environment. By embodying these qualities, school heads pave the way for an institution that thrives academically, ethically, emotionally, and socially, ultimately fostering a culture of excellence, compassion, and purpose among both staff and students.

With the extensive status of the servant leadership, this reaffirmed the widely held belief of Whitlock (2017) asserting that servant leadership focuses on the responsibility of the leader not only to ensure the success of the organization, but also a [responsibility to his/her followers and stakeholders](#). This

includes acting in an ethical manner, putting others first, and showing sensitivity to others' concerns. The servant leader will also [assist subordinates in professional growth and empowerment](#), as well as building a supportive community environment.

Similarly, Turkmen and Gul (2017) described servant leaders as those leaders who have the passion for others' growing greatness of their followers and have an enthusiasm to visualize the goals of others to help with their achievement. Schools, especially those at the secondary education level, can be thought of as a great place for leaders to focus on servant leadership. Leaders with a servant leadership mindset tend to shy away from selfishness and self-conceit and foster encouragement, cooperation, and teamwork.

In the same vein, Schroeder (2016) believed that servant leadership remains as one of the most effective models of leadership today. School principals who embody this leadership paradigm encourage and enable teachers, and demonstrate a desire to build school community. Teachers' effectiveness increases as they are honored and served by their principal, thereby impacting students, colleagues, and parents positively. Servant leaders often put the needs of the organization ahead of personal needs and honor people, not programs and politics. Students ultimately benefit from this leadership approach as their teachers learn to serve them first as people, and then confidently lead them into their learning.

Table 2

Summary on the Extent of School Climate

| No | Indicators | Mean | Descriptive Equivalent |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Effective Leaders | 3.61 | Extensive |
| 2 | Collaborative/Engaged Teachers | 3.46 | Extensive |
| 3 | Involved Families | 3.33 | Moderately Extensive |
| 4 | Engaged Students | 3.34 | Moderately Extensive |
| Overall | | 3.44 | Extensive |

Table 2 provides the summary on the extent of school climate. It is exhibited that the overall mean of teacher empowerment is 3.44, which is in an extensive level. This means that school climate is oftentimes evident.

Data show that all four (4) indicators reveal a varying result ranging from moderately extensive to extensive level. As arranged chronologically, effective leaders (3.61). This is followed by collaborative/engaged teachers (3.46), engaged students (3.34), and involved families (3.33).

The data provides a comprehensive view of the school climate, with results ranging from moderately extensive to extensive levels across all four indicators. These findings illuminate a multifaceted school climate that thrives when leaders, teachers, students, and families collaborate harmoniously. The implications of these outcomes underscore the integral role that a positive school climate plays in promoting academic achievement, social growth, and overall well-being. When effective leadership, engaged teachers, motivated students, and supportive families come together, they create an educational environment that nurtures learning, encourages collaboration, and prepares students for success both academically and personally. This holistic approach to school climate cultivates a sense of belonging, purpose, and growth for all stakeholders.

The favorable findings of this study supported the notion of Jacobs (2018) describing school climate as characterized by the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational practices. A positive school climate can foster the development of students, parents, teachers, and administrators which make up the school community. Lee and Louis (2019) believed that a conducive and inclusive school climate that is free of hostility and bullying enhances teachers' job satisfaction, boosts self-efficacy, improves teacher-student relationship, reduces attrition and burnout.

Moreover, Lacks (2016) emphasized that school climate is comprised of common beliefs and shared experiences between school authorities and colleagues. Perhaps one of the most widely accepted definitions about school climate stated that it is the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children's cognitive, social, and psychological development. Zakariya et al. (2019) emphasized that school climate is equally beneficial not only to the teachers but also to students' behaviour, approaches to learning, total well-being and improved achievement.

According to Ainley and Carstens (2018), school climate is a multidimensional construct that encapsulates safety, relationships, engagement with teaching and learning, institutional environment, and school improvement activities. Schools reporting a positive school climate show more overall success for the school community. Added to that, schools must be both safe and supportive for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Table 3

Significance of the Relationship Between Servant Leadership of School Heads and School Climate

| Servant Leadership of school Heads | Dependent Variable | r-value | p- value | Decision on Ho |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| | | | | |
| Altruistic Calling | School Climate | 0.492 | 0.000 | Rejected |
| Emotional Healing | | 0.498 | 0.000 | Rejected |
| Wisdom | | 0.512 | 0.000 | Rejected |
| Persuasive Mapping | | 0.493 | 0.000 | Rejected |
| Organizational Stewardship | | 0.509 | 0.000 | Rejected |
| Overall | | 0.501* | 0.000 | Rejected |

*Significant at 0.05 significance level.

Presented in Table 3 are the data on the significance of the relationship between servant leadership of school heads and school climate. Reflected in the hypothesis, the relationship was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The overall r-value of .501 with a p-value of <0.05 signified the rejection of the null hypothesis. It means that there is a significant relationship between servant leadership of school heads and school climate. This shows that servant leadership of school heads are correlated with school climate.

Doing a pairwise correlation among the measures of both variables, it can be gleaned that altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship revealed computed r-values of 0.492, 0.498, 0.512, 0.493, and 0.509 respectively with p-values which are less than 0.05 in the level of significance. This implies that as altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship increases, the school climate also increases.

The result is in consonance to the study conducted by Berg and Aber (2015) revealing that leadership plays an important role in creating a positive school environment. The principal has both a direct and an indirect impact on school climate and student learning. Principals have an indirect effect on school climate by setting the tone for relationships, creating a professional working environment, improving instruction, and keeping the school clean and safe. Bartoletti and Connelly (2013) emphasized that leadership also affects student outcomes by strengthening professional learning communities and supporting best teaching practices increase student achievement.

Several studies have seen the relevance of servant leadership towards school climate. Gulses and Gulenay (2014) disclosed that the principal is the key figure in the organization who has a direct impact on school climate. School can have either an open-school climate or a closed school climate. In an open climate the principal listens to teachers, is supportive, and is respectful of their personal competencies.

Meanwhile, Hoy and Miskel (2010) underscored that the principal demonstrates facilitative leadership and teachers enjoy positive relationships among faculty members. Schools with a healthy organizational climate can adapt to their environment and use their resources effectively so they can attain their goals. Liethwood and Levin (2010) believed that leadership plays a significant role in student learning and is only second to classroom instruction in all school factors in supporting student learning.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were offered:

The extent of servant leadership of school heads of the public elementary schools implies that it is oftentimes evident. Specifically, wisdom and organizational stewardship are perceived to be always evident while persuasive mapping is oftentimes evident whereas altruistic and emotional healing are occasionally evident. Meanwhile, the extent school climate of the public elementary schools is oftentimes evident. In particular, effective leaders and collaborative/engaged teachers are oftentimes evident while involved families and engaged students are occasionally evident. Based on the findings, servant leadership of school heads and school climate are correlated. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Further, the result indicates that for every unit increase in the five domains servant leadership of school heads and school climate will increase.

Recommendations

The following suggestions were offered based on the conclusions of the study:

The higher officials in the Department of Education may craft effective policies, programs, projects, interventions and activities which may empower school heads to establish and characterize servant leadership. They may also create more initiatives that would further help school heads to create a positive school climate.

Meanwhile, school principals may keep on assessing the status of their servant leadership considering its impact to school climate. More so, they craft personalized initiatives to improve their servant leadership which would help them in developing a healthy school climate. They may also keep on intensifying their school climate by focusing on improving family involvement and student engagement.

More so, teachers may take an effort to help their school heads in creating a conducive school climate. They may particularly help the school heads in strengthening family involvement and student engagement by establishing a positive relations with them.

Lastly, future researchers may explore relevant information about servant leadership and school climate. They may consider using other research approaches to further explore the involved variables in this study.

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