A Systematic Literature Review of Servant Leadership in Education

Md. Farhad Hossain
University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), Ministry of Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Md. Shawan Uddin[1]
University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

Md. Sohel Rana & Md. Nur-E-Alam Siddique
International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, Bangladesh

Abstract[2]: This paper summarizes empirical findings on servant leadership (SL) in the academic domain. Using PRISMA guidelines, the study identified pertinent studies from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. A total of 20 quantitative studies that were published between 2020 and 2024 were selected using strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Descriptive and thematic analyses were employed to interpret the selected studies, and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was applied to ensure methodological rigor. The results have shown that SL produces a significant improvement in faculty engagement, commitment, and job satisfaction. It also shows positive relationalities between SL, psychological empowerment, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The implementation of SL principles leads to a favorable school climate, academic success of students, better performance, engagement, and extra-role behaviors of the staff, especially in crisis periods. The majority of studies used Liden et al.'s (2008, 2015) servant leadership scale, whereas the theoretical framework shows the dominance of social exchange theory, social learning theory, and leader-member exchange theory. These insights can be used by educational administrators and policymakers to design new educational settings that can strengthen faculty motivation and institutional performance. Nevertheless, the search is restricted to English-language articles included in two databases, which limits the review in terms of examining cultural implications or causal relationships. The study is the first synthesis through PRISMA particularly focusing on SL in education that demonstrates its great effect on teachers, students, and institutions.
Keywords: Servant Leadership, Servant Teacher, Servant Leadership in Education, Systematic Literature Review, PRISMA.

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[1]Corresponding Author: Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh. Secretary, Centre for Integrated Research for Business and Society (CIRBAS). E-Mail: shawanmgt@ru.ac.bd

Investment in education develops human capital, and effective educational leadership can determine the success of education to a great extent. Educational leadership concept has undergone significant changes throughout the past several decades (Singh & Ryhal, 2021). This is a vibrant sector of the education industry, and good accountable leadership is necessary to facilitate the process of this transformation into education institutions that are centers of excellence (Ramdan et al., 2024). Contemporary society recognizes leadership as a significant attribute for developing and strengthening education institutions. The dimensions of leader's role have a great impact on the outcomes of learning. Bush and Glover (2014) mentioned that leadership is a social influencing process in which one individual purposefully exerts influence over others to organize group interactions and relationships. Moreover, effective leadership promotes positive outcomes, such as student learning.

In education, servant leadership (SL) is deemed one of the most effective leadership approaches due to its distinct focus and features. Moreover, it differs from transformational leadership in its core emphasis and concentration (Al-Asfoura et al., 2022; Stone et al., 2004). It is acknowledged that traditional forms of leadership are no longer sufficient to motivate followers (Page & Wong, 2000). SL has been discussed widely in recent studies (Abbas et al., 2022; Aboramadan et al., 2020a, 2020b; Dami et al., 2022; Du et al., 2024; Eva et al., 2019; Gao & Huang, 2024; Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020; Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021; Gultekin & Kara, 2022; Khatri et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2021; Liden et al., 2008, 2015; Maalouf, 2023; Swart et al., 2022; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Widayanthi et al., 2024). The initial theorist to come up with the concept of SL, which holds that a leader must begin with service, was Robert K. Greenleaf in his classic research (Greenleaf, 1977, 2013; Spears, 1996, 2010, 2025). The Greenleaf model was a servant-leader model based on ethics and humility with virtues of listening, healing, and stewardship. This philosophical basis has been extended in modern scholarly literature, where a framework that is empirically testable and verifiable has been developed. In their study, Liden et al. (2008) operationalized SL and found six dimensions, such as empowerment, accountability, humility, service, vision, and trust. However, Van Dierendonck (2011) focused on empowerment of followers and corporate stewardship. Spears (1996) identified that empathy, healing, and awareness are still used extensively in education.

Academic leadership is more than a command-centered approach, and as a result, principals, teachers, and other educational leaders can act as agents of growth through servant leadership (Aboramadan et al., 2020a; Latif & Marimon, 2019). This kind of progression signifies a move towards a more idealized image of the moral leader towards a more psychologically informed and evidence-based model that has been shown to have a significant impact on job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and student outcomes. Recently, SL has been defined as "an other-oriented approach to leadership," "expressed through one-on-one prioritizing of followers' individual needs and interests," and "an outward reorientation of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community" (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114).

It is one of the leadership philosophies that can assist an organization in reaching high-performance levels (Harrison, 2017). A multifaceted leadership approach known as SL begins with a passion to serve, followed by an intention to guide and foster others (Aboramadan et al., 2020a; Al-Asfoura et al., 2022; Greenleaf, 1977). Serving followers is the hallmark of this exceptional leadership style, which aims to meet their needs and inspire others to follow (Greenleaf, 1977). A servant-leader is one whose main objective is to assist others by making investments in their growth and welfare to complete tasks and achieve goals for the benefit of all (Page & Wong, 2000). This concept has expanded significantly over the past decade and is a constructive leadership approach that works in a variety of settings (Aboramadan et al., 2020a). Being a comprehensive leadership strategy, this style empowers followers to develop their full potential by involving them in various areas, including relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Eva et al., 2019).

Researchers have developed various models to identify the key features of SL. However, every model has its strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Spears (2010) identified ten traits frequently cited as crucial to SL. He was among the first and probably the most significant contributor to converting Greenleaf's theories into a servant-leader model. Later, Van Dierendonck (2011) identified six traits as perceived by followers.

The ideas of SL are especially pertinent in higher education, where the emphasis is on fostering the personal and professional development of instructors, staff, and students (Negussie & Hirgo, 2023). SL provides a feasible leadership doctrine, "first to serve, then to lead," a philosophy that proves effective for educational leadership and management in contemporary educational institutions (Al-Asfoura et al., 2022; Latif et al., 2021).

This approach gives fellows the highest priority, and in the education sector, students receive the highest priority to enhance their skill development (Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021; Murphy, 2020). The role of a teacher in the classroom is vital because he is a servant teacher who implements the principles of SL as an agent of the learning and growth of students (Yousofi & Rahimzad, 2024). Greenleaf discussed that servant leaders, including school principals, could develop a common vision of what they wanted teachers to accomplish and help them reach their potential (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016; Singh & Ryhal, 2021).

SL also affects academicians as it brings job satisfaction, work engagement, and commitment (Aboramadan et al., 2020a; Cerit, 2010; Dami et al., 2022; Guillaume et al., 2013; Hashim et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the available literature demonstrates that motivated and dedicated educators contribute to a positive learning environment because they help pupils succeed in their studies and excel in their professions (Du et al., 2024; Khatri et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019; Yousofi & Rahimzad, 2024). SL research consists of three stages: conceptual formulation, measurement, and model creation. The third phase has seen an increase in the number of studies on SL, with more complex research strategies being employed to understand the antecedents, mechanisms of mediation, and other boundary conditions of SL, and beyond simple associations with outcomes (Eva et al., 2019). The proposed paper is designed to explore the connection between SL and its impact on the education sector based on a systematic literature review (SLR). This paper is a careful review of the literature that will analyze the presence of SL in the education continuum. The main aim is to find and prepare empirical studies on the impacts and results of SL in the educational contexts. The significance of SL in education, and the unavailability of SLRs based on the PRISMA model, give the stimulus to the proposed research.

Despite the growing interest in SL in the educational setting among researchers, there is a little evident gap; for example, no systematic review has applied PRISMA-compliant rigor and concentrated on the implications of empirical research in this setting. In education, systematic literature review of SL with high-quality quantitative evidence has remained limited. However, in the context of larger organizations, some narrative and scoping reviews have explored SL (Eva et al., 2019; Parris & Peachey, 2013). Besides, the context of the pandemic and its consequences brought into the limelight the significance of SL in crisis resilience, psychological empowerment, and academic performance, but these accounts have remained disconnected and not been presented as a single concept across various journals. To fill this gap, the current paper describes an empirical and quantitative research SLR conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines regarding studies published between 2020 and 2024 on the topic of SL in learning institutions. The present research is carried out with Scopus Q1-Q4 indexed journals because they are relevant, high quality and rigorous in their approaches. The current SLR is preset by statistical results, intervening variables, and cross-national trends that provide a detailed explanation regarding the effects of SL on teachers, students, and even on the school climate in comparison to previous reviews. The research questions (RQ) of this study are:

RQ1: What are the current empirical studies available about SL in education?

RQ2: How does SL affect academicians and students, and what are the effects?

The study is based on servant leadership because researchers have extensively conducted research on the subject in terms of educational leadership and organizational behavior, and the subject has been informed by both scholarly and experiential studies. Nevertheless, this paper also recognizes the shortcomings of the top-down methods of leadership in regard to the empowerment of the educators, as well as their reaction to the crisis, and the recent pandemic, in particular. In this way, the given research project can be considered one of the works on developing a human-centered model of leadership that will express care, moral guardianship, and mutual development, which are discussed as the important concerns of modern educational practice.

This study takes an interpretive approach recognizing SL as a philosophy rooted in Greenleaf's concept but practiced in varied ways depending on the context of different cultures and institutions. The present study synthesizes findings and critically evaluates ways in which SL operates as a transformative agent across diverse educational ecosystems.
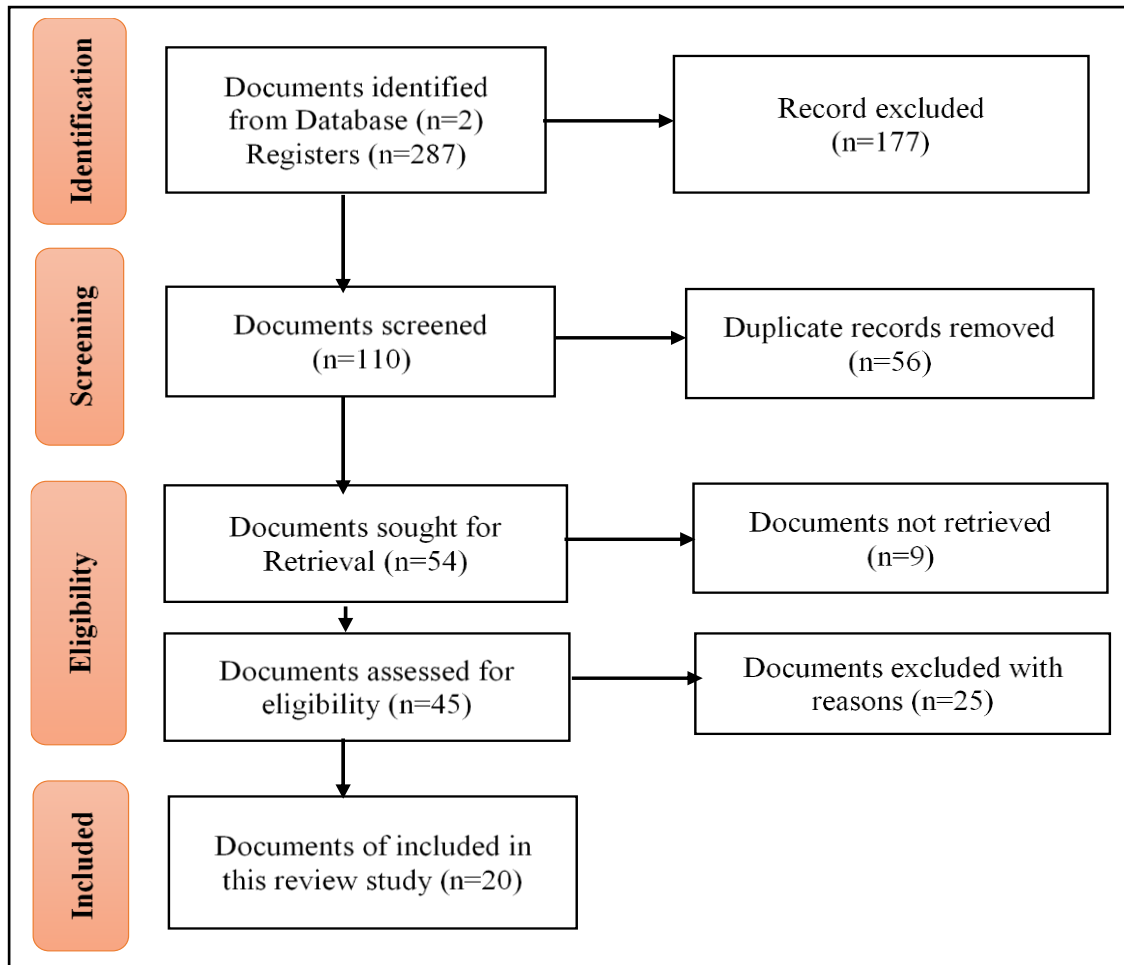
Methodology

SLR is a popular method for compiling and assessing prior research pertinent to the selected research issue within the designated field. Several approaches exist for conducting systematic review papers, but SLRs are widely recognized for their structured and transparent procedures. In the beginning, SLR emerged in the medical field and is now highly used in management studies due to its acceptability and range of benefits (Khatri et al., 2021; Parris & Peachey, 2013). However, inadequate reporting in earlier published systematic reviews has drawn criticism (Moher et al., 2009). Management research has a gap when it comes to carrying out an SLR, critically analyzing the studies, and integrating the results. SLRs are applied in management to provide transparency, clarity, availability, objective, and comprehensive coverage of a particular subject (Parris & Peachey, 2013). The PRISMA approach was used in this review to search and filter the relevant documents in the established databases. The methodology adopted in this review pertained to searching widely on the appropriate databases to locate all the literature relevant to the research questions. It reduces prejudice, enhances the quality of the results, and provides a transparent and repeatable review process. Finally, this study had to evaluate the search strategies, sample, data analysis, and inclusion as well as exclusion criteria.

Search Methods and Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

This paper has carried out a comprehensive review of journal articles and management literature to conduct an SLR on SL in education. The use of Scopus and Web of Science databases was based on the belief that they are the most optimal sources of studies in the social sciences (Rouf et al., 2024). Precisely, Scopus and Web of Science were chosen as they provide the most comprehensive peer-reviewed citation indexed coverage of the social science and educational leadership research and are considered to be methodologically rigorous and reliable. Their extensive indexing reduces overlaps and increases systematic reviews' credibility over larger or less edited databases such as Google Scholar or ProQuest. Two distinct search queries were constructed using Boolean operators and Keys that were related to AND, and OR to refine and broaden the search scope. To identify and select articles in this review, the queries used were: TITLE-ABS-KEY (("Servant Leadership" OR "Stewardship Leadership" OR "Moral Leadership") AND ("Education" OR "Educational Institution" OR "Higher Education")) was used in Scopus and ALL=((("Servant Leadership" OR "Stewardship Leadership" OR "Moral Leadership") AND ("Education" OR "Educational Institution" OR

"Higher Education"))) in WoS database. In the first place, 287 documents were found in the above databases. Filtering on inclusion and exclusion criteria was then done on these records. The year 2020 was used as the base year due to the tremendous increase in the number of SL applications in institutions of higher learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, Fernandez and Shaw (2020) demonstrated that the combination of crises could be successfully addressed with the help of the strategy of SL, which focuses on empowerment, involvement, and collaboration.

The timeframe of 2020 to 2024 was selected as it signifies a radical change in the sphere of leadership practices in higher education, as during this time, servant leadership has returned to its topicality in managing the challenges brought about by the pandemic. This period of time incorporates the latest empirical data on the development and operationalization of servant leadership in the situations of crisis response and post-pandemic educational settings. As such, publications that had been published since 2020 were selected during the screening. Articles released in the field of Business and Management were ranked as high priority, due to the fact that SL is closely related to management theories and practices. Peer-reviewed journal articles, but not review papers, conference papers, books, and book chapters, were considered to assure the quality and empirical validity of the selected articles. In addition, this review was limited to papers that were at the publication level and in written form, and which were in English language. On such grounds, 177 articles were eliminated in the preliminary search. The indexation of 56 papers was noted in the two databases and thus, eliminated these duplicates. A total of 54 articles were obtained in different journals, but 9 articles were not fully accessible. Based on the eligibility criteria, 45 papers were reviewed in order to discuss the RQs. Out of them, 25 papers were not correct in line with the RQs and were excluded. Lastly, both databases were used to select 20 papers (between the first quartile (Q1) and the fourth quartile (Q4) to ensure the methodological and data validity of the review. The PRISMA methodology was adhered to in order to address the possible selection bias. The PRISMA selection process is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Document Selection Process based on PRISMA (Adapted from Moher et al., 2009)

The papers were analyzed according to the themes identified in the RQs. Moreover, a bibliometric analysis was conducted to examine trends in research on SL in the education sector.

Potential Risk of Bias and Quality Appraisal

To evaluate the methodological rigor of the studies included in this review, we applied the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) using its quantitative evaluation criteria (Hong et al., 2018). Each study was systematically rated on sample representativeness, psychometric reliability of the instruments, relevance of the statistics, and report clarity. All twenty studies scored between 75-100 on the MMAT, thereby confirming a sufficiently high level of methodological soundness. We did not exclude any studies based on this appraisal, although we interpreted results in the context of possible biases, the main ones being limitations arising from self-report measures and the cross-sectional nature of the studies.

Reasons Explaining Databases and Timeframe

The selection of databases was done with the attention that Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) are the most effective sources for covering peer-reviewed literature in education and management and are widely used as reference standards in systematic research (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019). To identify other pertinent scholarly works, Google Scholar was also

incorporated, although a final inclusion criterion was added according to which the material should be published in a journal included in the Scopus, and WoS databases to avoid methodological inconsistency.

The 2020-2024 timeframe was deliberately chosen to capture the post-pandemic research wave. The global health crisis became the trigger to reconsider the models of leadership in the educational context, and the literature that has emerged highlighted the usefulness of SL in training resilience, adaptability, and psychological security in the uncertain environment (Al-Asfoura et al., 2022; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Such a narrowing of the review scope to this five-year outlook offers a sharp insight into the contemporary, policy-sensitive interpretation of SL.

Findings of the Study

The findings of this research are presented in two phases. In the first phase, a summary of bibliographic sources on SL in the educational context is presented in the table and figures below. The second phase discusses the findings under four themes.

Table 1
Bibliographic Sources on Servant Leadership in the Education Context

Bibliographic source	Number of Articles Reviewed	Quartile	Total %
Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies	2	Q1	10%
Applied Research in Quality of Life	1	Q2	5%
Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management	1	Q1	5%
Current Psychology	2	Q1, Q2	10%
International Journal of Organizational Analysis	1	Q2	5%
SAGE Open	1	Q2	5%
Frontiers in Education	1	Q2	5%
International Journal of Leadership in Education	1	Q2	5%
FIIB Business Review Sage	1	Q3	5%
Eurasian Journal of Educational Research	2	Q3	10%
SA Journal of Human Resource Management	1	Q3	5%
Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement	1	Q3	5%
International Journal of 7uctivity and Quality Management	1	Q3	5%
International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education	1	Q4	5%
International Journal of Professional Business Review	1	Q4	5%
Global Business & Finance Review	1	Q4	5%
Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction	1	Q4	5%
Total	20		100%

Source: Authors' compilation; *Note:* Q refers to Quartile.
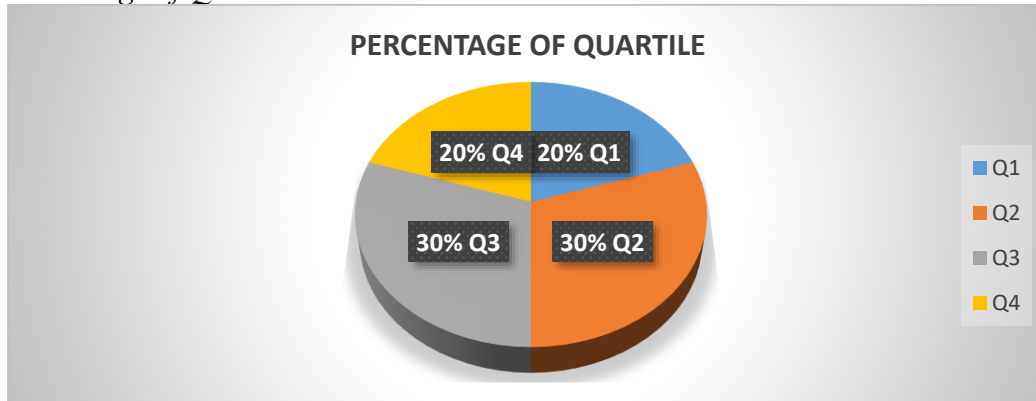
Figure 2
Percentage of Quartile

Table 1 shows that twenty articles have been selected for review. Among these, 60% of articles are Q2 and Q3 Scopus-indexed, while 40% belong to Q1 and Q4. This study finds that all of the reviewed articles used a survey questionnaire to collect data from respondents (Table 2). After collecting the data, various analysis tools were used to achieve the expected outcomes. Almost 55% of the studies employed descriptive analysis to easily demonstrate and summarize the data. Nine studies used correlation analysis to investigate the linear relationship between variables, while seven applied regression analysis to identify factors influencing the objectives. CFA & EFA, as specialized methods for factor identification, were applied in six studies. SEM, CB-SEM, and SEM PLS were most frequently observed in Q3 and Q4 Scopus-indexed articles. Approximately 15% of the studies incorporated a one-way ANOVA test to recognize measurable effects on the dependent variable. Univariate and multivariate analyses were used to help understand the features of variables and their interactions. Besides these analysis tools, the F-test, T-test, mediation analysis, and the Chi-square test were applied in the data diagnostic process.

This research has disclosed that literature on SL in education is spread over 11 countries. Figure 4 shows that 15% of the articles were published in the developed countries, while 85% were published in the developing countries. Figure 3 denotes that majority of the articles were published in Indonesia, though none of the articles are in Q1 or Q2 Scopus-indexed journals. The USA and Pakistan consolidated to take the second position in the output of publications. The fact that the developing countries represent the majority of studies (85%) indicates an increasing scholarly interest in the implementation of SL in the developing educational systems, where the issues of leadership and cultural dynamics are greatly different than those in the developed ones. This imbalance would, however, propose that cross-cultural generalizations would be undertaken with care because the practices and effects of servant leadership can be different depending on the institutional maturity and socio-cultural environment. Figure 5 illustrates that the maximum number of articles was published in 2020, while the lowest numbers were published consecutively in 2021 and 2023.

Figure 3
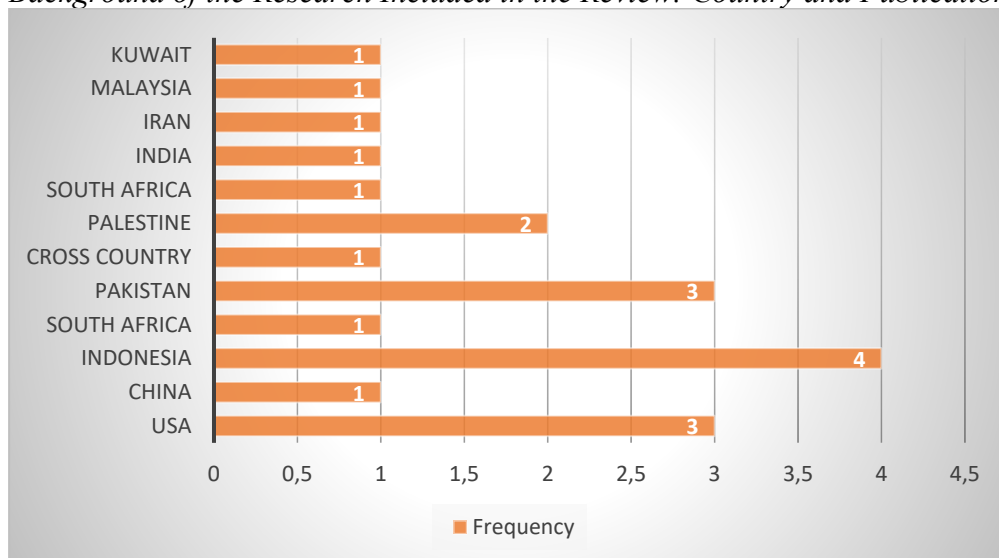*Background of the Research Included in the Review: Country and Publication Number*

Figure 4
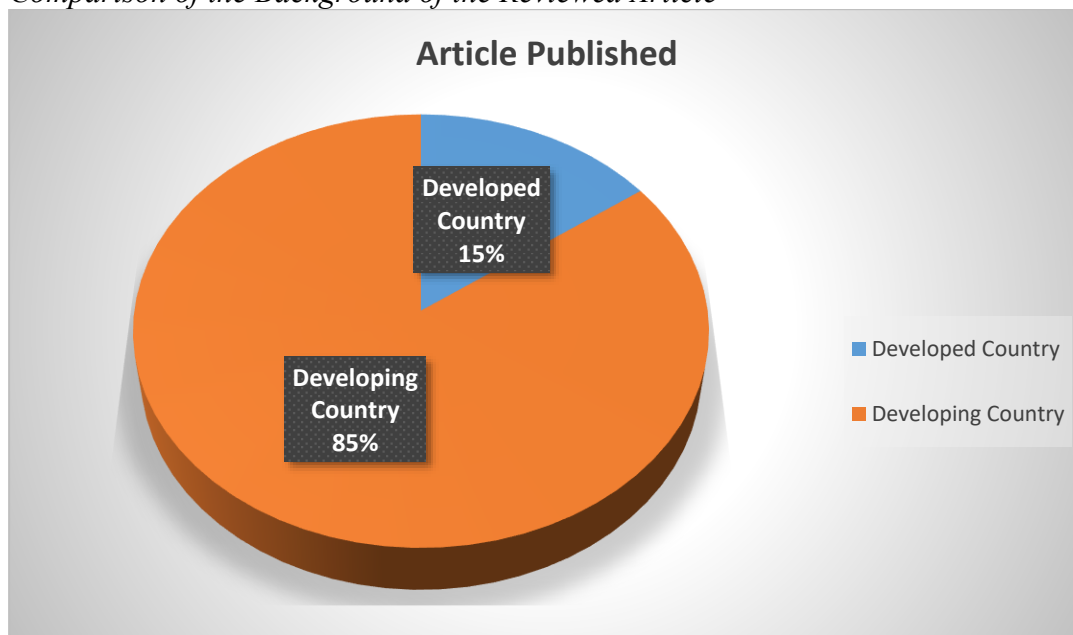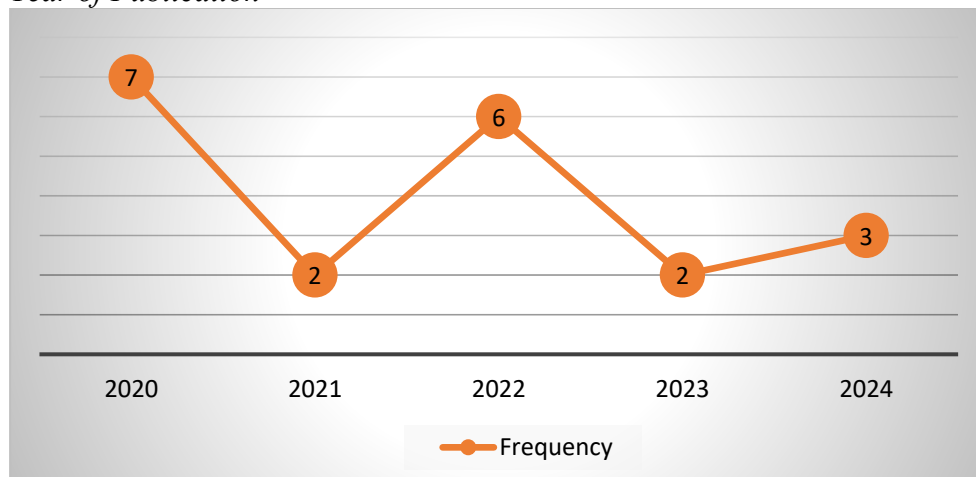*Comparison of the Background of the Reviewed Article*

Table 2

Frequently Used Methods

Methods (Quantitative)	Author(s)
Correlation Analysis	(Abbas et al., 2022; Aboramadan et al., 2020b; Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021; Sawan et al., 2020; Singh & Ryhal, 2021; Swart et al., 2022, Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020; Gao & Huang, 2024; Widayanthi et al., 2024)
Mediation analysis	(Aboramadan et al., 2020a; Du et al., 2024; Latif et al., 2021)
Univariate and Multivariate analysis	(Dami et al., 2022; Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021; Sawan et al., 2020)
Regression analysis	(Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021; Gultekin & Kara, 2022; Sawan et al., 2020; Singh & Ryhal, 2021; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022; Hashim et al., 2020; Maalouf, 2023)
Descriptive analysis	(Du et al., 2024; Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021; Gultekin & Kara, 2022; Sawan et al., 2020; Singh & Ryhal, 2021; Swart et al., 2022, Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020; Gao & Huang, 2024; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022; Maalouf, 2023; Asih et al., 2023)
Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) test	(Dami et al., 2022; van der Hoven et al., 2021; Ghasemy et al., 2022; Gao & Huang, 2024)
Exploratory Factor Analysis	(Gao & Huang, 2024; Widayanthi et al., 2024)
F & T Test	(Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022; Hashim et al., 2020; Maalouf, 2023; Asih et al., 2023)
Chi-Square Test	(Maalouf, 2023)
Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	(Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020; Singh & Ryhal, 2021; van der Hoven et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2020; Widayanthi et al., 2024)
SEM PLS	(Asih et al., 2023)
Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM)	(Ghasemy et al., 2022)
ANOVA test (One-way)	(Al-Asfoura et al., 2022; Hashim et al., 2020; Maalouf, 2023)

Source: Authors' analysis

Figure 5
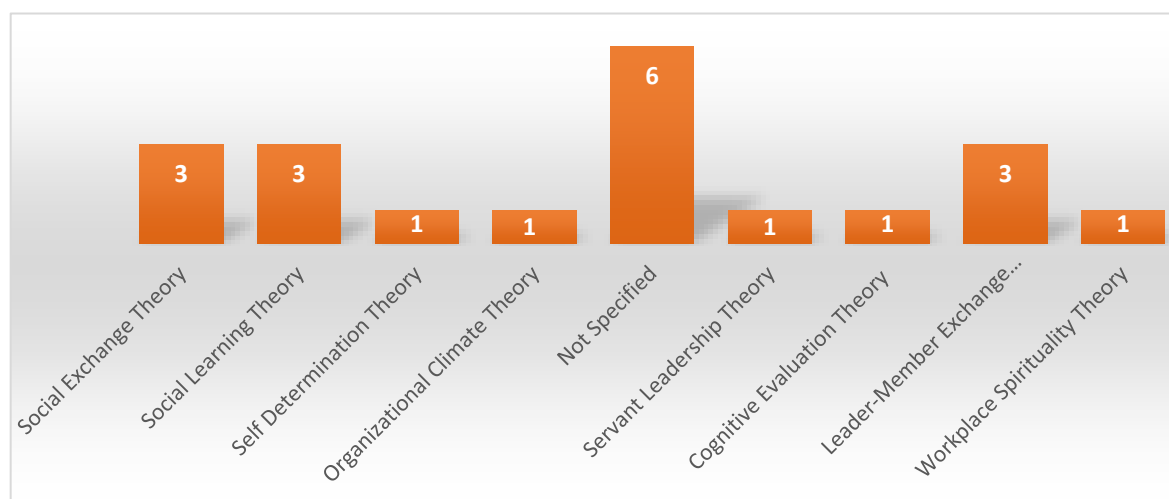
Year of Publication

Frequency

Theory in Servant Leadership in Education Research

Social theories are mostly incorporated into the theoretical frameworks for empirical studies on SL (Eva et al., 2019). Even articles on the application of SL in the education sector likewise draw on social-based theories. SL literature shows extensive use of social exchange theory, social learning theory, and social identity theory (Eva et al., 2019). This study identifies eight theories as the theoretical background for fourteen studies, while six studies did not employ any specific theories. Among the fourteen studies, three theories, such as Social Learning Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX), were used extensively. According to Bandura (1977) in Social Learning Theory, employees observe and then imitate their leader's views, values, and actions when they perceive them as a trustworthy authority within their organization.

The dimensions of SL, developed by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), are positively related to LMX, as demonstrated by Barbuto and Hayden (2011). The term "leader-member exchange" (LMX) refers to the unique bond that leaders form with each of their subordinates. A strong LMX measures the degree to which followers and leaders have established a mutually beneficial, interdependent, and trusted relationship. LMX is also used to explain the impact of SL on teachers' job satisfaction. Similarly, Social Exchange Theory is used in SL to conceptualize how a servant leader creates commitment and trust among followers. This theory provides a foundation for comprehending the interactions between followers and servant leaders. It also posits that social exchanges are voluntary acts initiated by an organization's treatment of its workers, in the hope that they will subsequently receive the same treatment in return (Ling et al., 2016).

Figure 6
Illustrating the theory

Organizational Climate Theory posits that the organizational climate has a significant impact on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. Employees' subjective assessments of how their workplace influences them are known as the organizational climate (Rusu & Avasilcai, 2014). An organization's positive atmosphere generates energy, making workers more inclined to go above and beyond (Swart et al., 2022). Members' attitudes and behaviors are shaped by the organizational environment, which ultimately influences organizational results (Fainshmidt & Frazier, 2017). Climate theory is mainly used in business-oriented research (Swart et al., 2022), but its application within the education sector has also proven valuable (Vos et al., 2012). The school climate completely mediates the relationship

between classroom outcomes and teachers' encouragement and discouragement. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), one can use both internal and external stimuli to simultaneously motivate people. Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), a sub-theory of SDT, focuses on examining the elements and behaviors that influence intrinsic motivation by fostering a sense of competence and independence (Aboramadan et al., 2020a). In the current review, it is observed that different theories are often employed simultaneously in a single article to logically explain the concept, although most articles typically use a single theory for clarity and focus. Ghalavi and Nastiezaie (2020) used the SL theory to explain the relationship between SL and OCB. Workplace spirituality theory helps build an intimate relationship with the tasks and co-workers of the organization. A friendly working environment, a sense of protection, and increased engagement are the outcomes of workplace spirituality. This study also identifies six articles indexed in Scopus (Q3 and Q4) that did not employ any specific theory.

Thematic Analysis

This review reveals four interconnected themes across the 20 studies: (1) Servant Leadership and Faculty Well-being, (2) Impact on Organizational Climate and Extra-Role Behavior, (3) Student Outcomes and Academic Achievement, and (4) Crisis Resilience and Institutional Adaptability.

Theme 1: Servant Leadership and Faculty Well-being

The results of a meta-analytic investigation that included fourteen individual studies investigating faculty outcomes confirm consistent findings of positive correlations between SL and a three-factor affective variable comprising job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective commitment (e.g., Aboramadan et al., 2020a; Hashim et al., 2020). Some studies have demonstrated that mechanisms through which SL can enhance engagement are premised on psychological involvement, self-drive, and leader-member exchange (LMX) (Aboramadan et al., 2020a; Dami et al., 2022). SL is then not just an associative attitude that is connected with fulfillment; instead, it enhances a sense of agency, belonging, and purpose among faculty. Nevertheless, opposite results were found in the study of Abbas et al. (2022), which reported that genuine leadership is a better predictor of performance, and SL failed in the performance of a similar predictive consistency. This implies that both contextual and cultural peculiarities can influence the style of leadership. Therefore, more cross-cultural studies are required.

Theme 2: Organizational Climate and Extra-Role Behavior

It is established that the school level variables form positive school climate (Swart et al., 2022), and organizational citizenship behavior is consequently allowed (Gao & Huang, 2024; Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020). Psychological empowerment also flourishes in situations when teachers are confident in their skills and own their professional roles. Nevertheless, the direct testing of the mediation effects of six studies implies that further empirical studies that would include more sophisticated statistical modeling and longitudinal data are necessary.

Theme 3: Student Outcomes

Even though such data are infrequent, the available literature focuses on the close relationship between the role of school principals in SL and students' positive academic success (Du et al., 2024; Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021). A notable addition by Du et al. (2024) is the demonstration of how servant-oriented pedagogy facilitates the cognitive development of

students through psychological empowerment, addressing an existing empirical gap concerning classroom-level applications of SL.

Theme 4: Crisis Leadership

The traits of stewardship, emotional healing, and altruistic calling of SL were also important predictors of institutional readiness during the pandemic (Al-Asfoura et al., 2022). This makes SL a developmental model as well as a strategic framework for managing crises, a finding that is not found in the transformational leadership literature.

Critical Analysis

The empirical research on SL in education reviewed here focuses on the influence of SL within educational environments. The purpose of this paper is to identify the impacts of SL on academicians and students. By fostering a trustworthy atmosphere mediated by leader-member interaction, SL has been shown to improve work satisfaction among faculty (Dami et al., 2022). This review demonstrates the direct impact of SL on teachers. Singh and Ryhal (2021) conducted research to identify these impacts using the SEM technique. Job satisfaction fosters job engagement, while affective commitment also partially boosts academicians' satisfaction levels.

Affective commitment and work engagement both enhance the effectiveness of academics' jobs (Aboramadan et al., 2020b). People with high levels of engagement are emotionally and cognitively invested in their work and are more likely to remain committed to it (Aboramadan et al., 2020a). Through SL, higher education institutions can cultivate an organizational culture in which staff members are deeply engaged in their work and feel a sense of dedication to the institution.

Aboramadan et al. (2020a) identified person-job fit, psychological ownership, and intrinsic motivation as intervening factors explaining the impact of SL on employee engagement at work. This paper also identifies SL as a promising strategy in post-secondary education. Intrinsic motivation was interpreted through theories such as SDT, CET and it was established that empowerment enhances intrinsic motivation in followers.

SL creates followers' psychological empowerment, which in turn fosters an environment for cognitive learning. Cognitive learning is the study of how students understand and remember knowledge. Several variables influence it, including emotional learning, teacher conduct, and student motivation. When people feel empowered, they are more likely to solve problems, thereby enhancing performance and learning outcomes. Likewise, students experiencing a sense of empowerment in the classroom are more likely to be motivated to study and perform better academically (Du et al., 2024).

Swart et al. (2022) found that the organizational climate of private schools and the SL constructs were significant and positively correlated. The work environment in schools has a significant impact on instructors' enthusiasm, which, in turn, carries over into the classroom and results in students who are eager to learn. Different leadership models are used depending on the characteristics of schools. Gultekin and Dougherty (2021) noted that schools with higher SL values tend to achieve higher student achievement values. Using several control variables, including school size, the proportion of low-income students, the teacher-student ratio, average teacher pay, average class size, and participants' gender. To further empirically validate the validity of the factorial model of SL-28, Ghasemy et al. (2022) tested the model in a higher education setting. Asih et al. (2023) discovered that this educational productivity is a determinant, most of which is based on the performance of teachers. They further indicated that there is an indirect mediation effect of organizational commitment on teacher performance. The

use of SL has the potential to develop innovation within higher education, and consequently, learner satisfaction (Maalouf, 2023).

This review shows how SL is applied in the educational context to boost student and teacher achievement. While other leadership philosophies struggled to adapt during the crisis, Al-Asfoura et al. (2022) found that SL was a practical and effective application during crisis periods. The findings are summarized in Tables 4 and 5. In all of the selected articles, SL was treated as the independent variable, while several dependent variables were identified. No moderating variables were considered in the reviewed articles, although several mediating variables were identified. Only Gultekin and Dougherty (2021) included control variables in their study (Table 3).

Gao and Huang (2024), Ghalavi and Nastiezaie (2020), and Van der Hoven et al. (2021) used psychological empowerment as a mediating variable to explain how the practice of SL positively and significantly impacts organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB is one type of extra-role behavior that employees demonstrate by exceeding their formal duties and contributing to the organization's well-being. Teachers' extra-role behavior and performance are impacted by the practice of SL in educational institutions (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022). This review identifies various dependent variables, some of which also serve as moderators. Mediators emphasize SL as a mechanism to achieve desired outcomes, though in some cases, the mediators themselves emerge as outcome variables.

Based on mediating processes, findings, and different conditions, this research constructs a nomological network of quantitative SL in education research from 2020 to 2024. This network explains several factors that are associated with teachers, students, and educational institutions. In Figure 7, arrows indicate the direction of influence between variables, where the (+) plus sign denotes a positive association.
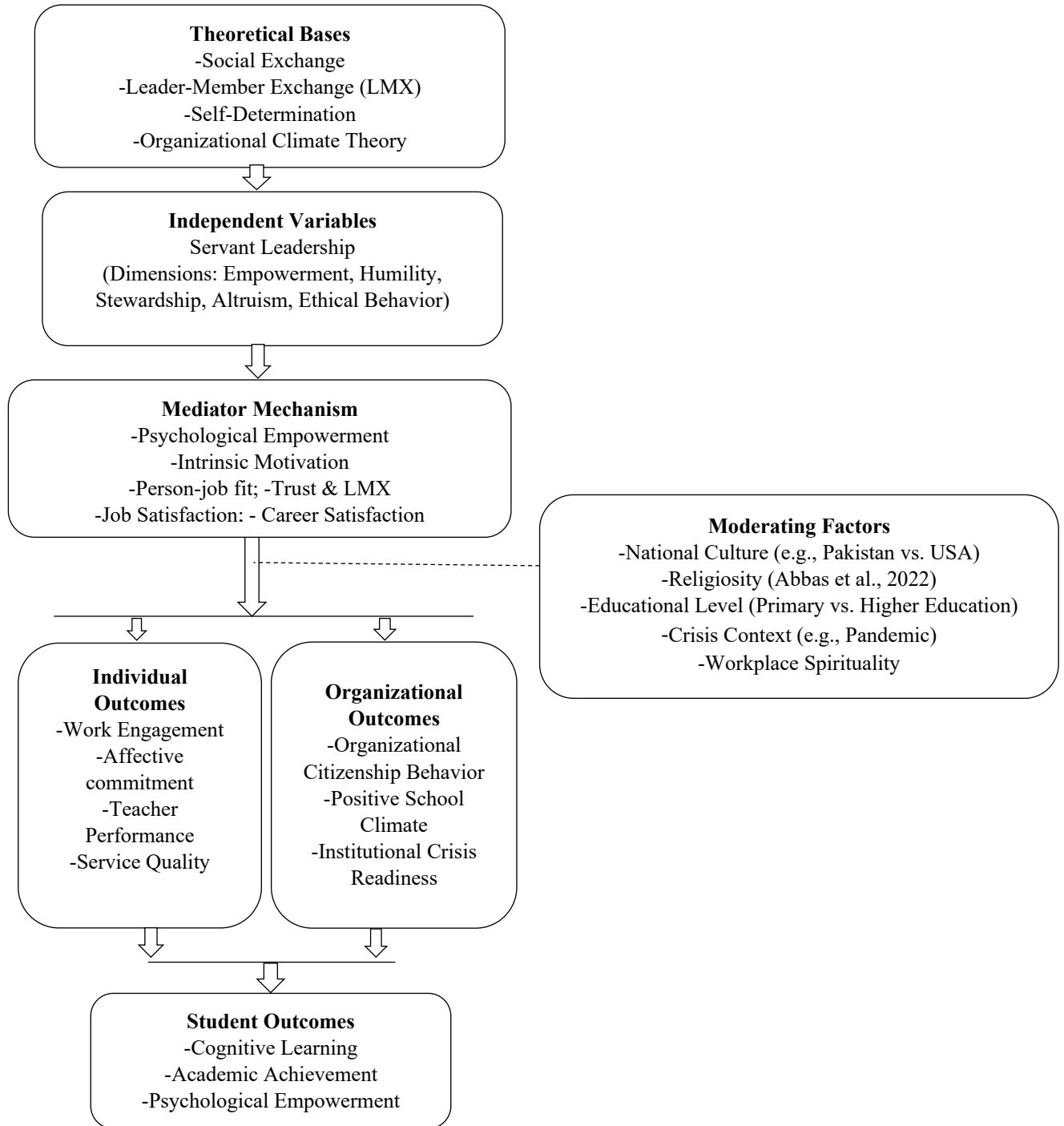
Table 3

Impact of Servant Leadership & Variables Used in the Sample

SL No	Publication	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Mediating variables	Impacts
1	(Dami et al., 2022)	SL	Job satisfaction	Trust and leader-member exchange	Trust, job satisfaction, and leader-member exchange
2	(Du et al., 2024)	SL	Cognitive learning	Follower psychological empowerment	Learning and empowerment
3	(Gultekin & Kara, 2022)	SL	Student achievement, organization health	Values people	Students' performance
4	(Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021)	SL behavior	Student achievement	Mediating variable: values people Control variables: school size, low-income students' proportion, ratio of teachers to students, average pay for teachers, average class size, and gender of participants	Students' performance
5	(Swart et al., 2022)	SL	School climate	N/A	Organizational climate (school climate)
6	(Latif et al., 2021)	SL	Life satisfaction	Career satisfaction	Satisfaction

7	(Abbas et al., 2022)	authentic leadership and SL	Performance	Religiosity	Performance and Commitment
8	(Aboramadan et al., 2020a)	SL	Work engagement	Intrinsic motivation, psychological ownership, and Person-job fit	Work Engagement
9	(Aboramadan et al., 2020b)	SL	Work engagement and affective commitment	Job satisfaction	Work engagement and commitment
10	(Al-Asfoura et al., 2022)	SL	Readiness for response	N/A	Crisis Leadership
11	(Singh & Ryhal, 2021)	SL	Job satisfaction	N/A	Satisfied fellows
12	(Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020)	SL	Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)	Psychological Empowerment	Extra-role Behavior
13	(van der Hoven et al., 2021)	SL	(OCB)	Psychological Empowerment	teacher empowerment and development
14	(Ghasemy et al., 2022)	SL	Factorial Validity	N/A	Dimension justification
15	(Gao & Huang, 2024)	SL	(OCB)	Teachers' Psychological Capital	Promotion of OCB
16	(Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022)	SL & Work engagement	Work involvement and Extra-role behavior	N/A	Performance, and OCB
17	(Hashim et al., 2020)	SL	Job satisfaction	N/A	Satisfaction
18	(Maalouf, 2023)	SL	Innovation	N/A	Promotion of innovation&learners' satisfaction
19	(Widayanthi et al., 2024)	Workplace Spirituality and SL	Service Quality in Higher Education	Job satisfaction	Ensuring service quality in higher education
20	(Asih et al., 2023)	SL, work ethic, and organizational culture	Teacher performance	Organizational commitment	Teacher performance improvement

Figure: 7
Nomological Network of SL in Education Research

The nomological network generated in the present paper goes beyond listing positive associations and incorporates mediating mechanisms and situational variables that, together, explain how SL works in the educational context. It generalizes empirical evidence into a logical structural framework that emphasizes the relational patterns among leader, employee, and organizational variables. Such a framework offers a theoretical basis for understanding the processes through which SL impacts educational performance, thus helping guide future model testing and theory development.

The sample sizes of the reviewed articles ranged from 126 to 1,864 respondents (Table 4). Among these articles, only Du et al. (2024) selected students as respondents from various

universities, while the rest collected data from teaching professionals only. No article was found to have collected data from both teachers and students. Therefore, a significant gap exists in understanding the comprehensive scenario of SL in education. During the review of the literature, it was observed that many studies focused on higher education faculties. Only four studies' samples were drawn from primary and secondary schools, while only one study's sample was drawn from vocational institutions.

Servant Leadership Measures and Traits

Robert Greenleaf proposed ten characteristics of SL. Extensive research was conducted to refine these qualities. The literature demonstrates many trait-based models. The fundamental idea of SL is shared by all models, despite variations in the number of attributes they comprise. According to this review, three studies utilized a six-item scale, while four articles used a seven-item scale. The measuring scales used in the other three articles were five, fifteen, and eight items, respectively. An overview of the characteristics of SL utilized for measurement and various SL metrics is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Purpose, Sample Size, and Findings of Reviewed Articles

Sources	Purposes	Sample size	Findings
(Du et al., 2024)	Assessing the mediation of psychological empowerment in the relationship between SL and followers' cognitive learning.	700 University graduates	Servant teaching significantly improved Students' cognitive growth and sense of empowerment.
(Dami et al., 2022)	Analyzing the role of trust and LMX in the relationship between SL and job happiness.	126 Lecturers	SL improved Job satisfaction, while trust and LMX positively mediate the relationship.
(Gultekin & Kara, 2022)	Investigating the connections among student achievement, organizational health, and the SL traits of educators in certain public schools.	362 school teachers	Teachers' servant leadership exploits both student achievement and the well-being of public schools.
(Swart et al., 2022)	Examining the impact of the SL model on private schools' climate to get practical insights.	249 respondents (teaching professionals from schools)	The leadership of private schools demonstrates the traits of SL.
(Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021)	Investigating how students' academic success and instructors' SL traits relate to one another.	362 teachers	SL and students' academic achievement are significantly related.
(Latif et al., 2021)	Investigating and evaluating the effects of SL on personal and professional satisfaction in China, Spain, and Pakistan. Verifying this study paradigm in several cultural contexts.	663 respondents (Academic Staff)	In the study countries, career satisfaction is significantly influenced by SL. Career fulfillment was found to be a noteworthy mediator in the relationship between life satisfaction and SL.
(Abbas et al., 2022)	Investigating a wide range of potential uses for SL and authentic leadership in both human psychology and organizations.	323 respondents (Academic Staff and faculty)	In contrast to SL in the nation's educational system, authentic leadership is a strong predictor of dedication and performance. Despite being demonstrated by employees, SL is not a reliable indicator of corporate outcomes.

(Aboramadan et al., 2020a)	Evaluating how SL practices influence the engagement levels of academics.	288 respondents from 12 institutions (Academic Staff)	There is a complex relationship between academics' professional engagement and SL. The factors under investigation were fully mediated by academic staff members' psychological ownership, intrinsic drive, and person-job fit.
(Aboramadan et al., 2020b)	Examining how SL affects the affective commitment and work engagement of higher education academics.	324 respondents from 12 institutions (Academic Staff)	Job satisfaction acts as a full mediator, and both affective commitment and work engagement positively affect academics' job performance.
(Al-Asfoura et al., 2022)	Examining the SL practices of education authorities and their preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic.	348 respondents (Top educational officials)	Combined SL qualities significantly predicted the readiness level of higher educational institutions' officials toward COVID-19.
(Singh & Ryhal, 2021)	Examining the role of the SL behavior of school principals and its consequences on Job satisfaction	728 secondary school teachers	SL and JS are positively correlated
(Ghalavi & Nastiezaie, 2020)	Understanding the mediation effect of psychological empowerment in building the relationship between SL and OCB	281 teachers of Zahedan city, Iran	OCB and SL showed a positive and significant correlation through the mediating variable of psychological empowerment.
(van der Hoven et al., 2021)	Examining the relationship between teachers' OCB, psychological empowerment, and SL in the South African educational system.	203 school teachers	OCB, psychological empowerment, and SL were found to be positively correlated.
(Gao & Huang, 2024)	Looking into the relationship between teacher SL behavior and OCB, and the mediation effect of Teachers' Psychological Capital	835 College teachers	Teachers perceived that SL positively affects their OCB, and this effect is partially mediated by psychological capital.
(Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2022)	Exploring how teachers' performance is affected by SL, work engagement, and OCB	813 teachers	SL affects work engagement, extra-role behavior, and teacher performance.
(Hashim et al., 2020)	Elucidating how SL factors affect the satisfaction of academicians.	335 academicians of 19 public universities	Servant Leader Behavior positively impacts academicians' satisfaction.
(Maalouf, 2023)	Investigating the role of SL in enhancing innovation in higher education institutions	208 respondents from universities	Promoting the innovation of learners and bringing satisfaction among them
(Widayanthi et al., 2024)	Assessing the influence of workplace spirituality and SL on service quality of tertiary education.	108 lecturers	In higher education, job happiness mediates the association between SL, workplace spirituality, and service quality.

(Asih et al., 2023)	Exploring how the working environment, work ethic, SL, and organizational commitment enhance teachers' performance.	181 teachers from vocational schools	Work ethic, workplace culture, organizational commitment, and SL all affect teachers' performance; organizational commitment serves as a mediating component.
(Ghasemy et al., 2022)	Investigating the dimensions of the SL style of academics and examining the factorial validity of the SL 28 dimension in Malaysian Higher Education	1,864 lecturers	All the dimensions are equally significant, though behaving ethically is considered the least important.

Table 5

Servant Leadership Instrument and Dimensions

Authors	Servant Leadership Measures	Traits of Servant Leadership
(Aboramadan et al., 2020a, 2020b; Du et al., 2024; Ghasemy et al., 2022; Gao & Huang, 2024; Maalouf, 2023)	Seven-item scale developed by Liden et al. (2008, 2015).	Emotional healing, Creating value for the community, Conceptual skills, Empowerment, Helping subordinates grow and succeed, Putting subordinates first, and Behaving ethically.
(Abbas et al., 2022)	Six aspects of SL by Sendjaya et al. (2008).	Voluntary Subordination, Authentic Self, Covenantal Relationship, Responsible Morality, Transcendental Spirituality, and Transforming Influence.
(Latif et al., 2021; Dami et al., 2022)	Seven dimensions of Latif and Marimon (2019).	Behaving ethically, Development, Emotional healing, Empowerment, Pioneers, Relationship building, Wisdom.
(Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021; Gultekin & Kara, 2022)	Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) from Laub (1999).	Values people, Develops people, Builds Community, Displays authenticity, Provides leadership, and Shares leadership.
(Swart et al., 2022)	SL Survey (SLS) of Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011).	Empowerment, Accountability, Standing back, Humility, Authenticity, Courage, Interpersonal acceptance, Stewardship.
(Singh & Ryhal, 2021; van der Hoven et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2020)	Selected five dimensions for SL by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006).	Altruistic calling, Emotional healing, Wisdom, Persuasive mapping, and Organizational stewardship.

Source: Authors' compilation

Measurement and Research Design in Servant Leadership in Education Research

Servant leadership metrics were first systematically identified in the existing literature by Eva et al. (2019). Nevertheless, the education sector lacks any recognized measurement instruments. However, Khatri et al. (2021) demonstrated in their study that Ekinci (2015) and Latif and Marimon (2019) developed two unique metrics for SL, particularly designed for educational settings. The majority of the papers (seven out of twenty) used the measures developed by Liden et al. (2008, 2015), which denotes the alignment with the measurement recommendations highlighted by Eva et al. (2019). Besides, the scale developed by Sendjaya et al. (2008, 2019) and Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) also meets the recommendations

proposed by Hinkin (1995). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) and Widayanthi et al. (2024) developed distinct measures that serve as praiseworthy exceptions within the corpus. In the study by Asih et al. (2023), no measurement tool was used for SL.
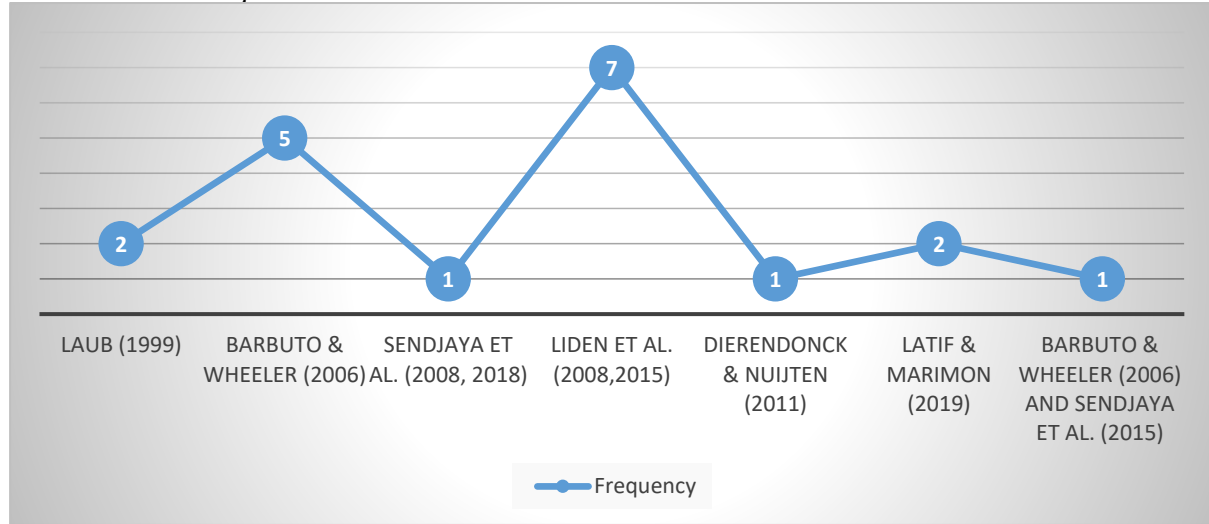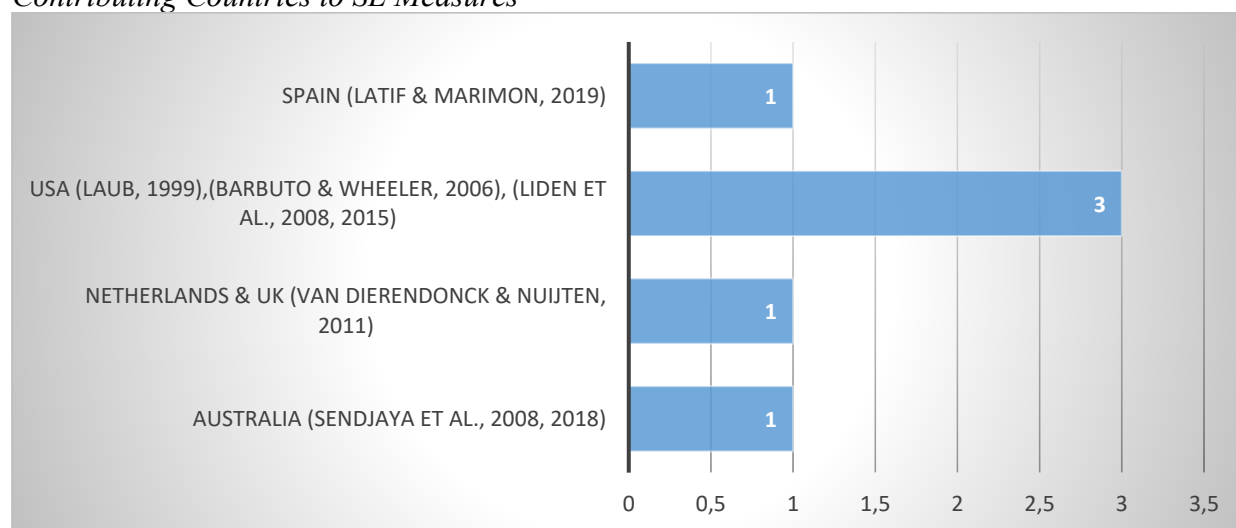
Figure 8
Servant Leadership Measures

Table 6
A Comparison of Six Measures of Servant Leadership

Key aspects	(Laub, 1999)	(Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006)	(Sendjaya et al., 2008, 2019)	(Liden et al., 2008, 2015)	(van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011)	(Latif & Marimon, 2019)
Number of items identified	60	23	6/35	7/28	18/30	15
Number of Dimensions	6	5	6	7	8	7
Uniqueness	When the idea of SL was in its infancy, this measure was introduced (Laub, 1999)	Persuasive mapping, a distinct item, illustrates a leader's capacity to persuade others (Al-Asfoura et al., 2022).	A holistic component of the growth of servant followers encompasses spirituality (meaning, purpose) (Eva et al., 2019).	Incorporate consideration for the community and the intellectual abilities of your followers (not just their traits and actions) (Eva et al., 2019).	The eight dimensions put the "leader" and "servant" facets of servant leadership into practice (Eva et al., 2019).	The first metric for assessing SL in higher education (Latif et al., 2021; Latif & Marimon, 2019)
Scale-generating country and sample size (taken for formulating the scale)	USA, 847	USA, 388	Australia, 277	USA, 164	Netherlands and UK, 1571	Spain, 148

Source: Authors' analysis

The concept of SL was introduced in the USA during the 1970s, and since then, different countries have contributed to its development. Still, the USA remains the leading country in formulating various measures. Most articles are primarily published by authors from developing countries. As illustrated in Figure 8, no developing country has developed any major measurement tools for SL.

Figure 9
Contributing Countries to SL Measures

Discussion

Although abundant evidence in this review has proven the positive effect of SL on faculty wellness, climate in the organization, and student performance, it should be mentioned that some inconsistent findings also exist and need to be interpreted openly. Interestingly, Abbas et al. (2022) in a study of Pakistani institutions of higher education have shown that authentic leadership, as opposed to SL, was a better indicator of academic performance and organizational commitment. This points out a significant methodological and conceptual fact. However, SL is likely influenced by cultural, institutional, and measurement-specific influences on its efficacy. The model used by Abbas et al. (2022) showed limited effectiveness of SL due to the role of contextual factors. Other-oriented ethos of SL may not seem as attractive as traits like self-awareness and relational transparency as exemplified by authentic leadership, especially in collectivist societies with hierarchical educational systems, such as Pakistan (Al-Asfoura et al., 2022; Walumbwa et al., 2008). This is in line with the cross-cultural leadership literature that postulates that some leadership qualities are either highly or weakly context-dependent in a given national and organizational context (House et al., 2004; Latif et al., 2021).

Moreover, Abbas et al. (2022) added religiosity as a mediator and found that it had a significant positive effect on the effects of authentic but not SL. This implies that professional identity and moral ethics developed under the influence of religious values lead to the more easily internalized leadership models based on the innermost self of the leader, rather than models focused on the externally reinforced virtues like service and humility. This fact does not exonerate SL, but it indicates the necessity of situational sensitivity in applying the theory of leadership. SL, as Eva et al. (2019) caution, is not a panacea, and its results depend on the behavior of the leaders, expectations of the followers, and the existing institutional norms. Future research, therefore, should assume comparative research designs, for instance, comparing SL to other paradigms of leadership (e.g., authentic, transformational, ethical) in the

same cultural and organizational setting to define the boundary conditions and determine the influence mechanisms. This review, in general, promotes a shift of celebratory narratives of SL to a more sophisticated theory-based explanation of how, when, and why it succeeds or fails in different educational settings.

Implications

The paper reveals the importance of SL in creating an inclusive and enabling learning and teaching environment and its effects on faculty participation, commitment, extra-role behavior, job satisfaction, and performance. Education leaders must therefore incorporate the principles of SL into professional development and leadership training programs to create a desirable workplace atmosphere in which educators, policymakers, and schools are willing to collaborate and devote themselves to the organization. The findings point out that SL is quite effective in enhancing the achievement of students through psychological empowerment and academic achievement, and thus should be classified as a significant strategy of education. Moreover, this research also mentions the usefulness of SL during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and portrays that it strengthens institutional resilience and adaptability. SL enhances teacher morale and student engagement through a school culture that has a positive impact on the enhancement of overall organizational culture. Although the currently existing research on the topic of SL in the field of education is not that systematic, the subsequent research needs to be dedicated to its applicability to different cultural contexts, the addition of the qualitative viewpoint, and assessment of its long-term impact on educational institutions. The findings present a useful model that education leaders and policymakers can adopt SL as a strategy to realize sustainable academic excellence.

Implications for Practice and Policy

*   Educational leaders should integrate SL principles into leadership training programs.
*   Institutions should recognize and reward extra-role behaviors fostered by SL.
*   Policymakers can promote SL through incentives for ethical, people-centered leadership.
*   Crisis preparedness plans should include SL competencies such as emotional healing and stewardship.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited in several ways. One could argue that, to cover a broader range of SL in education studies, more databases should be added. Other publications on SL in education can be located by using additional search terms and extending the systematic timeframe. To begin with, the intentional omission of qualitative studies and non-English language sources could lead to linguistic and regional bias, as most of the included literature is based in emerging economies (e.g., Indonesia and Pakistan). Second, the use of self-reported data across all studies raises concerns about common method variance. Third, the absence of longitudinal designs hinders the ability to draw causal conclusions.

Future research should:

*   Conduct multi-stakeholder studies (including students and parents).
*   Explore cultural moderators of SL effectiveness.
*   Use longitudinal or experimental designs to test causality.
*   Develop and validate context specific SL measures for global use.

Conclusion

This review highlights the substantial progress in education made through research on SL. Social exchange theory, social learning theory, and leader-member exchange theory are the dominant frameworks in Q1 and Q2 Scopus-indexed articles for understanding SL in education. Notable utilization of Liden et al.'s (2008, 2015) measures for validation was also observed.

Most of the research has focused on how well SL functions in organizational settings, often overlooking the educational field. This review examined this imbalance and identified how different theories and measures are used to conceptualize SL in educational settings. It also reveals the current state of the literature and indicates the future trajectory of SL in education. Our findings suggest that having servant leaders in higher education institutions offers an effective leadership style, providing empirical support for the claim that servant leaders are vital to these institutions. This study shows that all stakeholders are significantly influenced by the application of SL in the educational context and by the importance of embracing it. However, variations in demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and income may explain differing results.

The PRISMA based systematic review establishes SL as a strong, evidence-oriented approach to education. It not only enhances faculty well-being but also cultivates positive school climates, improves student achievement, and increases institutional resilience. Although rooted in Greenleaf's original philosophy, modern SL is a dynamic, quantifiable construct with tangible applications. However, this field remains underdeveloped in terms of global representation, theoretical synthesis, and measurement innovation. On this basis, the review not only supports the value of SL but also advocates for more rigorous, inclusive, and interdisciplinary research. Despite this article portraying SL as a promising leadership style, scoping reviews, network analyses, meta-analyses, and bibliometric studies remain scarce in this area.

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Notes on Contributors

Md. Farhad Hossain is a Lecturer in Management, BCS General Education Cadre, under the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), Ministry of Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He is currently an MPhil Fellow at the Institute of Bangladesh Studies (IBS) at the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh. His research interests include servant leadership, educational management, and teacher well-being in higher education. He likes to participate in national and international conferences to gather and share knowledge.

Dr. Md. Shawan Uddin, is an Associate Professor of Management Studies at the University of Rajshahi, Visiting Faculty at Chandigarh University, India, and Secretary of the Centre for Integrated Research for Business and Society. His research interests include organizational behavior, conflict management, and quality assurance in higher education, industrial relations, entrepreneurship development, and human resource management. He has published widely in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals and presented at international conferences and is supervising multiple PhD and MPhil theses. Currently, he is involved in funded research projects on circular economy, quality assurance, organizational effectiveness, and higher education management.

Dr. Md. Sohel Rana is an Associate Professor in the College of Business Administration at IUBAT, Bangladesh. He earned his PhD from the University of Malaya and MBA and BBA from the University of Rajshahi. His research focuses on microfinance, sustainable development, tourism, and industrial relations. Dr. Rana has published in several articles in the Scopus, WoS-indexed journals and in ABDC-indexed journals, and has contributed to books published by Springer, IGI Global, and Routledge. He actively collaborates internationally and frequently presents at global conferences.

Dr. Md. Nur-E-Alam Siddique is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at IUBAT, Bangladesh. He holds a PhD in Strategic Marketing and Sustainability from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, as well as MBA and BBA degrees from the University of Rajshahi. His research focuses on strategic marketing, CSR, sustainable banking, and SDGs. Skilled in qualitative analysis and SLR using ATLAS.ti, he has published widely in Scopus and WoS-indexed journals and presented at international conferences.

ORCID

Md. Farhad Hossain, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3589-7792
Dr. Md. Shawan Uddin, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2516-7144
Dr. Md. Sohel Rana, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8996-4484
Dr. Md. Nur-E-Alam Siddique, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3032-0887