

Faculty Perceptions of How Their Altruistic and Servant Teaching Behaviors Influence Student Learning

Robert Krise, Grand Canyon University, USA*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how faculty teaching social sciences in a post-secondary online modality judge or perceive the influence of their altruistic and servant teaching behaviors on student learning. This study analyzed altruism and servant teaching theories and used a qualitative case study method. The study was completed at a four-year university and included participants who had at least three years of online teaching experience. Three research questions framed this study, asking how online social science faculty judge the influence of instructor altruistic and/or servant teaching behaviors on student learning. The study used three instruments to collect data, a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and focus group discussions. The coding process identified five themes, which were rapport, barriers, values, success, and response. From these themes, the data was found to be consistent with previous literature, showing that these behaviors can be influential in student learning.

KEYWORDS

Altruism, Higher Education, Post-Secondary, Servant Leadership, Servant Teaching, Student Engagement, Student Learning, Student Success, Teaching Behaviors

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Advances in educational systems and education itself have caused educators to evaluate how to teach students and how instructors can help them learn (Aydin, 2017, Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021). Online coursework has introduced some unique challenges for students. Just having the availability of curriculum and instructors does not guarantee student learning (Kauffman, 2015). This dynamic indicates the importance of a deeper understanding of the instructor/student relationship. Since the concept of “teacher as leader” in the classroom was recognized, researchers and educators have considered the application of servant leadership in the classroom, adapting the terminology to servant teaching.

Similarly, as observed in nursing curriculum and teaching practices, altruism theory, referred to as caring in this study, showed students preferred instructors with altruistic behaviors. In turn, altruistic behavior could influence student success in the class (Boz & Saylik, 2021; Mann, 2014;

DOI: 10.4018/IJRLEDM.317372

*Corresponding Author

This article published as an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and production in any medium, provided the author of the original work and original publication source are properly credited.

Robinson, H. A., Kilgore, W., & Warren, S. J., (2017). Mann (2014) and Sitzman (2016a) indicated a gap in the literature regarding communicating altruism in the online modality.

The studies conducted by Noland and Richards (2015) and Robinson, Kilgore, and Warren (2017) pointed to a need for further research in the areas of servant teaching and altruism in online education. Coupled with the research completed by Sitzman (2016b) and Frazer, Sullivan, Weatherspoon, and Hussey (2017), which showed a need for research regarding the expression of altruism in the online modality and the need for effective teaching strategies, the present study was an effort to fill the gap in the literature and speak to this need.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This study has as its basis two theories which share similar characteristics but are not identical. Servant teaching is an adaptation of Servant Leadership theory, originally introduced by Robert Greenleaf in his 1970 essay, *Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 2012). Servant Leadership theory is defined as focusing on the follower, and how the leader might encourage success for that follower, and see the follower succeed regardless of the success of the leader (Greenleaf, 2012). Altruism theory was originally introduced by August Comte in 1848 by his work, *A General View of Positivism*. Altruism theory is defined as a caring mindset toward others that embodies other-minded thoughts and actions of care, concern, help, and understanding, without regard to self (Yildirim, 2016).

Servant leadership as a practice is not new, having been seen as early as the teachings of Jesus (Mark 9:35). The theory introduced by Robert Greenleaf has attracted a significant amount of attention amongst scholars since it offered a noticeably different leadership approach. Differing from the leadership models popular at the time of Greenleaf's writings, servant leadership promoted a "serve first" mentality, seeking to elevate the one being led rather than the top-down leadership models of the day (Patterson, 2003). As the research on this theory has grown, Focht and Ponton (2015) conducted a Delphi study, identifying 12 primary characteristics of Servant Leadership.

Servant Teaching Theory

Considering the popularity of Servant Leadership in the business world, Hays (2008) first proposed Servant Teaching theory as a teaching model based on Servant Leadership. This new teaching method incorporates the "serve first" principle of servant leadership, and focuses on education as a relational, liberating, and empowering process, rather than an authoritarian process (Noland & Richards, 2015).

Altruism Theory

In recent years, several researchers have proposed leadership models, many of these models include altruism. This theory centers on the mindset of denying one's desires, wants, wishes, and possessions for the benefit of other individuals, or for the benefit of a cause (Yildirim, 2016). Originally introduced by Auguste Comte (1848) in *A General View of Positivism*, altruism was defined as solidarity through subordination to one another.

Research Questions

This study included three research questions designed to reflect the instructors' judgments on the behaviors of each theory. Judgments in the context of this study are defined as the participants' opinions and perceptions regarding the influence of their behaviors. The author will not reveal the name of the university where the study was conducted, nor its location due to the research agreement between the author and the university. The first research question was, "How do online social science faculty judge the influence of instructor altruistic behaviors on online student learning in a post-secondary online, asynchronous environment in a four-year university in the United States?" The second research

question was, “How do online social science faculty judge the influence of instructor servant teaching behaviors on online student learning in a post-secondary online, asynchronous environment in a four-year university in the United States?” The third question was, “How do online social science faculty judge the use of both instructor altruistic behaviors and servant teaching behaviors in influencing online student learning in a post-secondary online, asynchronous environment in a four-year university in the United States?”

METHOD

Since the qualitative method is more appropriate for describing the intricacies of an event and seeking understanding, and since the case study design is the in-depth investigation of a unit or units in a social environment to capture or record instances of a phenomenon, the case study design seemed most appropriate. This study was designed to investigate the underlying dynamics of the practice of the theories listed. Contemporary non-manipulated events were examined using a questionnaire, interviews, and focus group discussions with those directly involved in the events. Therefore, a case study seemed most appropriate.

Phenomenon

The theories listed in this study are quite similar, with one theory (altruism) operating within the other one (servant leadership). However, altruism can be applied separately, apart from the traits of servant leadership and is seen in other leadership models such as Authentic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Spiritual Leadership. In the context of the online classroom, getting a deeper understanding of how altruistic behavior might be applied would help uncover specific examples of this behavior and help differentiate between the two theories. This study examined the phenomenon of the influence of instructor altruistic and servant teaching behaviors toward students on student learning.

Study Constructs

The study was designed to reflect the judgements on the behaviors of each theory listed according to participants in the study. The first construct, altruism, was examined in reference to its influence on student learning. This construct included selflessness, and emotional engagement (Yildirim, 2016). It also included working toward an end for the sake of another and utilizing personal efforts and capital without any expectation of a return. The second construct, servant teaching, was examined in reference to the influence on student learning. Education is seen in this theory as empowering and liberating, incorporating the “serve first” principle. The approach is relational rather than authoritarian.

The third construct, student learning, referenced how the first two constructs influenced it. Student learning was defined as the increase in development, performance, understanding, or participation by the student in the online classroom, as indicated by the instructor. The participants were able to reflect on the use of each behavior with students and the appropriate use of each behavior in different contexts.

Data Sources

This study utilized three data sources. These included a questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and focus group discussions. The questionnaire contained questions that referenced areas of the research questions, aligning the questionnaire with the study. An expert panel vetted the instructions and the questions of the questionnaire. The one-on-one interviews followed the shorter case study protocol which is more focused due to a shorter time and highlights follow-up questions. The focus group discussions contained questions exploring possible application of the data collected from the questionnaires and interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

The demographics listed in the questionnaire helped determine an individual's eligibility for the study. The first four demographic questions included general information on the participants. These questions included age, gender, subject(s) taught, and total length of time teaching in higher education. The next five questions gathered general information about the number of classes taught in the past year and the modes of communication the participants used.

The one-on-one interviews included similar questions, including age, teaching experience and subjects taught. Since the identity of those completing the questionnaires was not known, similar questions were necessary. The focus group discussions consisted of participants from the interviews, so demographic information had already been collected.

Data Collection Procedures

Each data source produced electronic copies of the results from the participants. The questionnaire was constructed and distributed through Survey Monkey and the initial invitations were distributed to the target population of 119. Those who wished to participate responded by first completing the informed consent form, which gave them access to the questionnaire. The invitations for the interviews were then distributed, resulting in 10 participants. The interviews with these participants were then scheduled and completed using the audio feature of Zoom. From this group, the researcher was able to get 7 volunteers to participate in the focus groups. Once the participants were determined, the focus groups were scheduled and recorded using audio Zoom. The audio files were transcribed using TRINT®, a transcribing software. The transcripts were then reviewed to ensure their accuracy. Member checking was used, sending the transcripts of the one-on-one interviews to the participants for their examination and approval.

The questionnaire was the first data source the participants completed. This type of instrument provided the widest distribution format to reach more potential participants. The questions of each of the data sources were organized according to the theories in the study. A semi-structured case study interview protocol was used since it could be more focused due to the limited time for the study. The one-on-one interview allowed a deeper probe into the questions. Focus groups provided the third data source for this study. The topics for this phase of data collection emerged from the analysis of the one-on-one interviews and investigated possible application of the behaviors. Using multiple data sources provided triangulation for the study, helping establish consistency and credibility.

Population and Sample

A university in the United States granted permission to conduct the study. The target population was 119 faculty members who had a minimum of three years' experience teaching social science coursework in the online modality. The case unit for the study was the asynchronous online social science environment of the selected university. The sample size of the study was 25 participants, with 15 participating in the questionnaire and 10 participating in the one-on-one interviews.

Specific criteria were established for participation in the study and these criteria were communicated to a third party for faculty selection and contact. Because of this process, there is a level of uncertainty in faculty selection. The best determination that can be made is a blending of purposive and convenience sampling. Both are types of criterion sampling, which are appropriate for selecting subjects for this study.

The executive director of online faculty acting on behalf of the university distributed the prepared invitations. The invitations included informed consent forms, which required completion to allow individuals to participate. Completing the informed consent form provided them access to the questionnaire. In this informed consent form, participants were assured there would be no penalty for withdrawing from the study, and that participants would not be harmed in any way.

Sample Profile

The following two tables give the demographic information for those taking the questionnaire and those participating in the interviews. Table 1 pertains to the online questionnaire. The age range showing the highest number of participants was 35-44. The female participants outnumbered the male participants. Only three of the 15 participants had less than six years' experience, and the majority of the participants taught more than 20 classes in the previous year.

Table 2 corresponded to the one-on-one interviews. This table listed the subjects taught. The age range with the highest number was once again, 35-44, the females outnumbered the males, and the participants had no one with less than seven years' experience, with most having more than 10 years' experience.

RESULTS

The data analyses followed the protocol described by Rowley (2012). The protocol defined by Rowley (2012) included assigning codes to specific aspects of the data, developing themes from these codes, and refining the identified themes into main themes. These become the basis of the findings (Rowley, 2012). Examining the data included a detailed inspection of the transcripts of the participants that were collected from the three data sources. This inspection resulted in gaining a high level of familiarity with the transcripts. Once inspected, the transcripts were coded using the software program MaxQDA®.

Table 1. Online Questionnaire Demographics

Age Range (Number)	Gender (Number)	Years of Experience (Number)	Number of Classes Taught (Number)
25-34 (3)	Male (4) Female (11)	3-6 (3)	11-20 (1)
35-44 (7)		6-10 (8)	>20 (14)
45-54 (3) 55-64 (2)		>10 (4)	
Mean: 38-47*		Mean: 7**	Mean: 20
Standard deviation: 6		Standard deviation: 8	Standard deviation: 6

* All values in the chart are expressed as whole numbers.

** Since range of values is undefined and all values are expressed in integers, the value used in calculating mean and standard deviation was $x+1$, where x = number expressed after the > sign in the table.

Table 2. Online One-on-One Interview Demographics

Age Range (Number)	Gender (Number)	Years of Total Experience (Number)	Years of Online Experience (Number)	Subjects Taught (Number) *
25-34 (3)	Male (2) Female (8)	7 (2)	7 (3)	Accounting (1)
35-44 (5)		8 (1)	8 (2)	Economics (1)
45-54 (0)		9 (1)	9 (2)	Psychology (7)
55-64 (2)		10+ (6)	10+ (3)	Communication (1)

* The "Subjects Taught" category does not indicate the specific degree of the faculty members teaching these courses.

Data Cleaning

The questionnaires were examined to determine the level of completion, ensuring all questionnaires were fully completed. The one-on-one interviews were also conducted with every effort to minimize any bias interjected by the interviewer. The participants were encouraged to talk without any external interference. As previously mentioned, member checking was implemented, encouraging participants to examine the transcripts of their one-on-one interviews for accuracy.

Data Analyses Procedures

Tables 3-6 show the general process of data analyses, with each containing examples of codes, categories, and themes. These tables show examples of the process for illustration, which includes examples, how they were assigned, and a brief definition or explanation of each level of refinement. The total process of coding required several passes through the transcripts, assigning and reassigning codes. Table 3 shows examples of how the raw data was assigned initial codes.

Table 4 shown below illustrates the process of codes being assigned categories. This process allowed similar codes to be grouped into the larger categories. The categories helped organize and generalize similar codes to form the categories.

Table 5 shows how categories are then assigned to themes. This process serves to further refine the data, revealing five themes. Each theme related to one or more of the research questions, indicating a connection to one or both theories employed in the study.

Table 6 shows the themes and the associated research questions they answer. A brief description of each theme and the corresponding research questions are included, along with a sample quote to illustrate the application of the theme.

Table 3. Raw Data to Initial Themes/Codes

Raw Data Examples	Initial Theme/Code Assigned	Code Defined/Explained
“So, I also share a little bit about my professional experience.”	Instructor/Student rapport	Outward efforts shown by instructors to promote relatability.
“You have to be real and caring and as soon as you’re not, they can sniff it out.”	Expressing caring	Intentional efforts to reach out to students in genuine ways

Table 4. Codes to Categories

Sample Codes	Category Assigned	Category Defined/Explained
Instructor/Student rapport	Instructor/Student Interaction	This category grouped codes that focused on relational aspects between instructors and students.
Expressing caring		
Classroom dynamics		

Table 5. Categories to Themes

Sample Categories	Theme Assigned	Theme Defined/Explained
Instructor/Student Interaction	Rapport	Entails all related aspects of relational development in the classroom.
Student support		

Table 6. List of Themes and Corresponding Research Questions

Number	Theme	Research Questions
Theme 1	Rapport	RQ1
Theme 2	Barriers	RQ1, RQ3
Theme 3	Values	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
Theme 4	Success	RQ2
Theme 5	Response	RQ2, RQ3

1. **Rapport (RQ1):** This theme addresses a common difficulty in the online asynchronous modality, namely the possible feeling of isolation felt by the student due to the lack of face-to-face contact with the instructor. To minimize this effect of desperation in the student, a successful instructor/student interaction is one that helps students clarify pressing issues by adopting a problem-solving attitude. Faculty also employed welcome videos to put a face on the instructor for the students. The use of welcome calls is at times used by faculty to provide personal contact.

Sample quote: “I feel like the tone of my communication is key in terms of building rapport with the students. So as long as I’m friendly and open and outgoing I tend to be able to build a good rapport with them.”

2. **Barriers (RQ1, 3):** This theme includes the online modality itself with no face-to-face contact and communication issues, or when students are experiencing difficulties in succeeding due to life issues. The barriers that the online environment can be formidable, including both academic problems and life issues for the student. Some instructors expressed efforts to overcome this by maintaining a consistent social presence in the classroom, and by reaching out to students outside office hours and doing more for students to promote contact with the student.

Sample Quote: “I think that teaching online automatically is a barrier because they must read everything to learn so they’re missing that face-to-face component that they would have. Also, I think all the nonverbal cues you would get from a face-to-face interaction, so that’s a barrier that I think all of us online instructors work to overcome in various ways.”

3. **Values (RQ1, 2, 3):** This theme includes how instructors might exhibit moral character, showing a willingness to do what is necessary for students to succeed and creating an inviting climate by establishing a moral foundation through coaching and modeling high moral values, and integrity.

Sample quote: “I treat all students equally in terms of fairness of the class requirements. However, I meet students where they are. By this, I mean that if they need additional assistance in any particular area related to the class (writing help, research help, a listening ear to keep going, etc.) I attempt to be compassionate with students, but fair concerning requirements.”

4. **Success (RQ2):** The participants in this study expressed their concern in their ability to convey concepts to their students in unique ways and to communicate caring to them in the process.

Sample quote: “Students are truly appreciative as they often feel isolated in the online environment.”

5. **Response (RQ2, 3):** Instructors discussed the need for both care and direction, they also explained the importance of accountability. The instructor can identify with the students' needs, rectify academic issues the student faced in the class and offering the support the student needed yet the main contribution is the student learning that occurs in the class.

Sample quote: "I try to put it in their own hands and tell them OK, here's what you're telling me. I understand what you're telling me. Now you tell me how you're going to fix this, or you tell me how I can help you."

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The data collected in this study helped to contribute to an understanding of the three research questions. The resultant data identified five themes. These data were derived from the university faculty who participated in this study. The findings of this study are organized below by research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, "How do online social science faculty judge the influence of instructor altruistic behaviors on online student learning in a post-secondary online, asynchronous environment in a four-year university in the United States?" The analysis of the data found three themes corresponding to this question.

- **Rapport:** The theme of rapport exclusively related to research question 1. Faculty found that altruistic behaviors were the most helpful when establishing rapport with students. Students coming into any new class are not sure what to expect, and since the asynchronous modality limits face-to-face contact, this enhances that uncertainty. Faculty members found that projecting an open and friendly attitude toward the students, the establishment of rapport was much easier.
- **Barriers:** The theme of barriers related to research question 1 and research question 3. This theme was revealed as a characteristic of the asynchronous online environment. Due to the nature of this environment, isolation is normal. When entering the class, the student is confronted with material displayed on their computer monitor with no immediate personal presence. Faculty members needed to display altruistic behaviors using various means to reach out in a personal way to overcome this problem.
- **Values:** The theme of values related to all three research questions. To establish a fair, inviting climate for student success, faculty members found it necessary to exhibit moral character through modeling integrity and moral values. These values include humility and trust. At times this required faculty to relate to the student from their perspective to communicate their moral character.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, "How do online social science faculty judge the influence of instructor servant teaching behaviors on online student learning in a post-secondary online, asynchronous environment in a four-year university in the United States?" The second research question had three corresponding themes from the data analysis. These themes were Values, Success, and Response.

- **Values:** As stated previously, this theme dealt with the instructor communicating an inviting climate for student success by demonstrating moral character and modeling integrity, fairness, and

personal accountability. Faculty members have demonstrated their integrity and moral character by owning their mistakes and making the appropriate adjustments.

- **Success:** The theme of success only corresponds to research question 2. As such, this theme dealt directly with servant teaching. Success from the instructor perspective involved both caring and direction. One instructor described it as grace with meaning. The student needs to know that the instructor cares, but the student needs to complete the work.

To facilitate student success, many faculty members employ 3rd party tools such as Flip-Grid to enhance success. According to one instructor, these tools increase student participation and engagement in the class, which has increased the success of students completing assignments, including essays.

- **Response:** Response involves student accountability. The instructor can establish good rapport and identify with the student's needs, but the main contribution is student learning. Faculty expressed their sentiments regarding this by conveying that they are behind the student, but success is in the student's hands. Instructors communicate accountability to students, stressing the need for engaging in the class and completing assignments.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "How do online social science faculty judge the use of instructor altruistic behaviors and servant teaching behaviors in influencing online student learning in a post-secondary online, asynchronous environment in a four-year university in the United States?" This question asked the participants to weigh which theory might be more important. Once again, the data analysis indicated that three themes corresponded to this research question. These themes were Barriers, Values, and Response.

- **Barriers:** As identified earlier, faculty members need to be proactive in their efforts to reach students since the environment provides barriers. In answering this question, instructors expressed applying both altruism and servant teaching to reach students. These differences are often evident when student difficulties involve life issues rather than academic issues. Applying altruistic behaviors spoke to the student's life issues and servant teaching spoke to the student's academic needs.
- **Values:** The climate communicated to the students must be inviting, with the instructor modeling moral character and integrity. Consistency in the classroom is important and giving the student the reassuring environment helped instructors to interpret the appropriate assistance a student might need. The type of need would dictate the theory used.
- **Response:** The participants regarded a combination of both theories applied to this question. They described their approach to this as care with consequences. Altruistic care might serve to help the student be more receptive, and the parameters of expectations gave the boundaries of accountability.

Finding Compared to Other Studies

These findings are in line with the literature review in this study, where scholars have indicated positive student responses to caring behavior in nursing programs (Mann, 2014; Sitzman, 2016b; Wei, Henderson, Peery, & Andrews, 2021). Like Sitzman, who found that altruism indicated a significant positive result in student perceptions of the instructor and coursework, the researcher found in this study the participants gave examples of rapport-building with students, helping them recognize they are not alone. The instructor is there to aid them (Boz & Saylik, 2021). Similarly, Mann (2014) showed positive results between altruistic behaviors and student perceptions in class. By exhibiting

persistence in contacting students who have not responded in the class, participants in this study have found the effort in caring behaviors have encouraged these students to engage in the class.

These findings are in line with previous studies, such as Noland and Richards (2015), Gultekin & Dougherty (2021), Narinasamy and Wan Mamat (2018), and Wei, Henderson, Peery and Andrews (2021), who found a positive influence on student learning, student satisfaction, and the development of positive character traits through servant teaching and caring behavior. Like Noland and Richards (2015), giving students both caring and direction, helped them not only feel supported, but recognize what is necessary to succeed.

One piece of divergent data came from one participant who suggested there could be a deleterious effect of too much instructor presence in the online classroom. One of the participants indicated a possible barrier to student motivation by too much teaching presence in the online classroom. This came from a study the participant read and this individual was following up on this with further research.

Theoretical Implications

Values as a theme provided answers for all three research questions, suggesting that the description of altruism and servant teaching might include the characteristics of that theme more directly. The theme *Values* had as its focus the expression of moral values and character.

The definition of altruism used in this study included the traits of denying one's desires, wants, wishes, and possessions for another's benefit (Yildirim, 2016). This definition may imply the presence of moral character, but moral character is not directly stated. The instructor/student online relationship seen in this study showed instructors expressing moral character in rapport-building helpful in building relationships.

The list of behaviors for servant teaching included trust, caring, integrity, and unconditional love, which implies a level of moral character (Hays, 2008). There is no direct statement of possessing moral character in the list.

Student accountability shown in the theme of *Response* appeared as positive since servant teaching behavior aided the faculty in helping the student complete assignments. Statements from the faculty not only showed caring behavior, but helped students understand the responsibility of completing assignments on time and helping them interact with the content of the course.

Practical Implications

The data received from the participants contained examples of the successful application of the behaviors ascribed to each of the theories listed in this study. Altruistic behavior toward the students influenced student learning through successfully building rapport. Servant teaching behavior then gave student direction helping student accountability. As previously stated, the theories in this study are similar and can act in tandem, helping prepare the student for openness and academic performance.

To apply the findings in this study, educational institutions could include stressing these behaviors as desirable in the hiring process for online instructors. These efforts could include policies for hiring and job descriptions could prepare material for hiring to determine to what degree a candidate might possess these traits. Further, hiring agents could incorporate behavioral interviewing techniques to help determine if a candidate possesses the desired traits.

To address the needs of the current faculty who desires increased influence with their students, training could be developed highlighting these behaviors to help these faculty effectively exhibit them. The literature indicated these traits can be learned so effective training could be established (Nagel, 1970). This training could be included for both full-time and adjunct faculty who may not have the advantage of being with other faculty regularly. Such training could include introducing scenarios faculty might face and possible solutions based on peer-reviewed research.

Study Strengths

The data analysis showed consistent participant responses in all data sources.

This study incorporated methodological (within-method) triangulation, using the three data sources included in the study to be able to compare the data through three different methods. The questionnaire was examined by an expert panel which gave valuable input, the interviews continued the items in the questionnaire in more depth, and the focus groups looked at applying the principles in real-time settings.

The interviewees were given an approximate timeframe for the interviews, but the interviews were allowed to continue without strictly adhering to a time frame to allow the interviewees to exhaust their thoughts on each question asked. Likewise, the focus group discussions were conducted in the same manner with every effort being made to allow the conversation to proceed without interruption.

The sample size allowed a more complete collection of data with 15 questionnaires and 10 interviews. From the interviews, the researcher was able to get 7 participants to be part of the focus group discussions.

Study Limitations and Weaknesses

The efforts to gain participants in the study came with some weaknesses and limitations. First, as participants began to volunteer, no information was obtained regarding the degrees possessed by the faculty relating to the subjects taught. Further, the limited number of degree programs offered at the selected university may be a limitation since less disciplines in the social sciences are offered. The participants were not provided with the definitions of the theories as referenced in the study may have skewed the data. Gaining participants exclusively from the one-on-one interviews and not seeking others from the target population may have skewed the focus group data. Those participating in the focus groups may have had their responses influenced by the others in the group, causing them to adjust their answers in a way that might not reflect their true positions.

These volunteers were obtained using a third party to aid in identify potential participants. This introduced a lack of confidence in the sampling technique, giving rise to the possibility of a blended sampling technique of both convenience and purposive sampling and the absence of a bracketing protocol added to the possible interjection of bias.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional studies, both quantitative and qualitative, could look more deeply into the trait of student accountability and moral character. Since the specific topic of servant teaching is relatively new, careful examination of the dynamics between the respective responsibilities and areas of accountability for both instructor and student could add definition. A second option could be repeating the study with faculty possessing related degrees to the subjects taught. This could help add to the understanding of how these traits might be administered.

Since this study was completed at a private Christian university, repeating the study at a different university may shed light on the results, either validating them or showing variations of the results. By repeating the study using a more direct approach to target population selection, a more straightforward sampling technique could be achieved.

Implications

Since the theories examined in this study have a variety of applications, some of the implications of this study might apply to a variety of modalities. Prior research has identified that teachers who are empowered are motivated and satisfied at work (Lyons, Green, Raiford, Tsemunhu, Pate, & Baldy, 2013; Vansieleghem & Masschelein, 2012). Empowered teachers have improved communication and fewer conflicts, in addition to improved student achievement (Noland & Richards, 2015). Further, Shaw and Newton (2014) established a strong correlation between perceived servant leadership and teacher retention. Given the finding that the SLQ factor Emotional Healing was associated with and a predictor of teacher empowerment, it is plausible that teachers may benefit from supplementary emotional healing support as provided through the leader practice of servant leadership.

Practical implications include the potential for teachers low in self-empowerment to become more empowered under the supervision of a school principal with a servant-leader orientation. In addition, emotional healing and organizational stewardship appear to play significant roles and provide significant advantages that may impact other activities within the school community and aspects of school environment. The relationship of SLQ Emotional Healing and SLQ Organizational Stewardship should be further explored to identify what other aspects of teachers and the school environment may be influenced.

Potential Practical Applications

Since the results of this study are in line with previous studies, there are some practical applications that might be possible. For example, due to the developing preparation of online instructors, possible certification in servant teaching and altruistic interaction with students could be possible. This certification could be issued via specific universities, or distance education organizations. Additionally, training modules could be prepared to help faculty ready themselves for the online modality. These modules could be developed with certification in mind and since there are a significant number of adjunct faculty operating in this modality, providing such training for them could be beneficial and help promote student leaning in this modality.

CONCLUSION

Educational advances continue to bring new opportunities for educators to explore avenues for aiding students in their learning. The advent of the internet and online coursework has introduced a powerful tool for reaching students globally. With this comes the challenge of instructors taking advantage of this modality in a way that promotes learning. The data gathered from the participants in this study revealed themes that relate to issues connected with both the modality and instructor/student interactions.

The servant teaching and altruistic behaviors of the instructors had an influence toward students in building relationships, overcoming barriers, projecting personal character, and communicating concepts in unique ways to promote success. They also aided in student accountability, helping them respond in responsible ways, owning their performance. The results of this study suggest the value of these theories as applied to the online modality, and the promotion of these theories amongst educators teaching in the online environment. Considering these findings, faculty and administrators have the opportunity to expand on them to further their teaching practices and pedagogy.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author of this publication declares there is no conflict of interest.

FUNDING AGENCY

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- Aydin, G. (2017). Personal factors predicting college student success. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 69(69), 93–112. doi:10.14689/ejer.2017.69.6
- Boz, A., & Saylik, A. (2021). The impact of enabling school structure on academic optimism: Mediating role of altruistic behaviors. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 7(1), 137–154. doi:10.12973/ijem.7.1.137
- Focht, A., & Ponton, M. (2015). Identifying primary characteristics of servant leadership: Delphi study. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 9(1), 44–61. www.regent.edu/ijls
- Frazer, C., Sullivan, D. H., Weatherspoon, D., & Hussey, L. (2017). Faculty perceptions of online teaching effectiveness and indicators of quality. *Nursing Research and Practice*, 2017, 1–6. doi:10.1155/2017/9374189 PMID:28326195
- Greenleaf, R. (2012). The servant as leader. In Spears, L.C. (Ed.). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness* [Kindle edition]. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com/>
- Gultekin, H., & Dougherty, M. (2021). The relationship between servant leadership characteristics of school teachers and students' academic achievement. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 8(2), 276–295. doi:10.29333/ejecs/698
- Hays, J. M. (2008). Teacher as servant applications of Greenleaf's servant leadership in higher education. *Journal of Global Business Issues*, 2(1), 113–134. <http://www.jgbi.org/>
- Kauffman, H. (2015). A review of predictive factors of student learning in and satisfaction with online learning. *Research in Learning Technology*, 23. <http://www.researchinlearningtechnology.net/index.php/rflt/article/view/26507>
- Mann, J. C. (2014). A pilot study of RN-BSN completion students' preferred instructor online classroom caring behaviors. *The ABNF Journal*, 25(2), 33–39. www.abnf.net/ PMID:24855803
- Mills, A. J., Durepos, G., & Wiebe, E. (2010). *Encyclopedia of case study research*. SAGE Publications, Inc., doi:10.4135/9781412957397
- Nagel, T. (1970). *The possibility of altruism* [Kindle edition]. Retrieved from Amazon.com
- Narinasamy, I., & Wan Mamat, W. H. (2018). Caring teacher in developing empathy in moral education. *The Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Science*, 1(1), 1-18. Retrieved from www.mojes.net
- Noland, A., & Richards, K. (2015). Servant teaching: An exploration of teacher servant leadership on student outcomes. *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 15(6), 16–38. doi:10.14434/josotl.v15i6.13928
- Patterson, K. A. (2003). *Servant leadership: A theoretical model* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database. (UMI No. 3082719).
- Robinson, H. A., Kilgore, W., & Warren, S. J. (2017). Care, communication, learner support: Designing meaningful online collaborative learning. *Online Learning*, 21(4), 29-51. Retrieved from <http://onlinelearningconsortium.org>
- Setliff, R. (2014). *A study of student perceptions on exemplary instruction and servant leadership behavioral qualities* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. (UMI No. 3617675)
- Sitzman, K. (2016a). Mindful communication for caring online. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 39(1), 38–47. doi:10.1097/ANS.000000000000102 PMID:26836992
- Sitzman, K. (2016b). What student cues prompt online instructors to offer caring interventions? *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 37(2), 61–71. doi:10.5480/14-1542 PMID:27209863
- Wei, H., Henderson, D., Peery, A., & Andrews, A. (2021). Nursing students' perceptions of faculty caring as a predictor of students' caring behaviors. *International Journal for Human Caring*, 25(2), 123–130. Advance online publication. doi:10.20467/HumanCaring-D-20-00034
- Yildirim, N. (2016). A qualitative analysis of altruism (selflessness): Views of headmasters in Turkey. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4(7), 82–91. doi:10.11114/jets.v4i7.1442
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.) [Kindle version]. Retrieved from <https://Amazon.com/books>

Robert F. Krise, Ed.D., is a full-time faculty member of the College of Theology at Grand Canyon University. He teaches undergraduate courses including Christian Worldview, Old Testament, New Testament, Comparative Religions, and Ethics. Dr. Krise holds an Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in Christian Ministry. His research interests include servant leadership, management, teaching and learning, and online teaching best practices.