

# **THE ROLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN ENHANCING LIBRARY SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM COLLEGES OF EDUCATION LIBRARIANS IN GHANA**

**Sulemana Iddrisu (PhD)**

Principal, Tamale College of Education, Ghana  
Email: [sulesakabu@yahoo.com](mailto:sulesakabu@yahoo.com)

**Abdul Kadir Salifu**

Assistant Librarian/Acting College Librarian,  
Tamale College of Education, Ghana  
Email: [abdulkadir.salifu@yahoo.com](mailto:abdulkadir.salifu@yahoo.com)

**Sayibu Abdul Jalie**

Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC)  
[sayibu.2011@yahoo.com](mailto:sayibu.2011@yahoo.com)

**Mustapha Ahmed**

Senior Administrative Assistant, Tamale College of Education, Ghana  
Email: [mustaphahmed66@gmail.com](mailto:mustaphahmed66@gmail.com)

**Abu Ismail**

Internal Auditor, Tamale College of Education, Ghana  
Email: [abuismailaspire@gmail.com](mailto:abuismailaspire@gmail.com)

**Kadir Fuseini**

Savelugu Senior High School, Ghana  
[fuseinikadir2022@gmail.com](mailto:fuseinikadir2022@gmail.com)

**Anthony Mensah Idan**

KNUST, Ghana  
[tonyidan2002@yahoo.com](mailto:tonyidan2002@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of servant leadership in institution's service delivery in library, based on three Colleges of Education: Tamale College of Education, Bagabaga College of Education, and Accra College of Education in Ghana. Applying a qualitative research method, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with librarians to investigate the role of servant leadership in providing motivation to staff as well as user satisfaction and development of leadership as a service in academic library settings. Based on thematic analysis, 5 themes stood up: imagining servant leadership in education, servant leadership and employee motivation, servant leadership and user satisfaction, implementing servant leadership methods and then also how challenging or promising it may be to adopt this leadership model. The results showed that servant leadership is mostly acknowledged and appreciated in librarians, which is considered them as being characterized by empathy, honesty, and support to others. It's a team's job to help others, as servant leadership creates stronger staff motivation, improves user experiences, as well as drives innovation and teamwork in library services, participants said. Other challenges identified regarding its comprehensive deployment included bureaucratic barriers, lack of formal training in leadership and institutional opposition. However, librarians showed a certain optimism in the work of servant leadership towards changing library environments by providing the necessary training and shaping policy-based and cultural development. The study suggests

that servant leadership is a suitable and contextual way to enhance academic library service delivery in Ghanaian Colleges of Education. It makes several recommendations on strategic interventions to institutionalize servant leadership, including leadership training, inclusive policies, and professional development and participativeness in governance processes in library systems.

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership, Academic Libraries, Staff Motivation, User Satisfaction, Colleges of Education

## Introduction

In a time when knowledge is seen as a central determinant for social and economic growth, academic libraries, notably those working within higher education, contribute significantly in shaping the thinking pathway of teacher trainees and educators in order to ensure success. However, the efficacy of these libraries is not to be based on technology systems or resources, but depends equally on leadership styles used for managing them (Ullah and Usman, 2023). We explored the role of servant leadership and its role in improving library services in Ghanaian Colleges of Education, both an interesting and very relevant subject. The servant-leadership model, characterised by a leader's commitment to service to others, including subordinates and clients, is regarded as a transformative leadership approach that has the potential to enhance motivation, service quality, and institutional loyalty (Greenleaf, 2013; Eva et al., 2019). This concept has been little addressed in the library and does have little impact within Ghana's education context. This paper is an exploration of whether servant leadership has its role: it has a potential to have a positive impact on staff and user's morale in a college library. College libraries are the places that leadership research undervalued; despite their involvement in teachers' education delivery. Why does this matter? On this note, library services in Ghana's academic libraries often struggle to provide for the requirements of educational institutions, faced with resource constraints, staffing issues, and the failure to offer adequate professional development opportunities (Banleman et al., 2025). In such settings, leadership plays a crucial role to balance whether these limitations are creatively managed or allowed to be stagnation of service delivery. When library leadership is ineffective, staff morale dwindles, user satisfaction decreases, and ultimately the intellectual mission of the college itself fails (Staninger, 2012). Conversely, when leadership is compassionate, empowering, and service-oriented— characteristics of servant leadership— there is significant potential for improvement in employee motivation, service delivery, and user experience (Spears, 1995; Van Dierendonck, 2011). However, the effectiveness of this leadership model specifically in the specific cultural, institutional and resource-limited context of Ghanaian Colleges of Education remains a puzzling and largely unexplored phenomenon. While some scholars argue that servant leadership is idealistic, or difficult to implement, in resource-constrained environments (Canavesi and Minelli, 2022), others propose that it could actually be the solution to increase performance and staff morale such institutions need (Eva et al., 2019). This tension between suspicion and optimism explains why servant leadership is an appealing lens to view library services realities in Ghana's Colleges of Education. Specifically, this paper seeks to answer this question: What does servant leadership mean for staff motivation and user satisfaction in college libraries; and, more importantly, what particular practices have been adopted in this context? This study focuses on the perspectives of librarians on the effectiveness of servant leadership on library services in three selected Colleges of Education in Ghana: Tamale College of Education, Bagabaga College of Education, and Accra College of Education. The sites were chosen for their variety in geography, past significance, and active library system, providing a comparison for studying leadership behaviors.

The study draws on experiences of librarians as well as the way in which leadership affects the organization to the local organization and service system as well. In this inquiry, the paper seeks to explore how servant leadership often lauded and praised in Western academia and corporate environments translates to operational tactics in the specific world of Ghana's teacher training institutions. The body of literature on library leadership in Ghana has primarily dealt with administrative dilemmas, technology integration and user behaviour among others at best, with scant focus on the human part of the leadership (Acheampong, 2019; KoteikorBaidoo&Nwagwu, 2024). Internationally, the literature on servant leadership is on the rise with numerous researchers revealing it as proven effective in building trust, motivation, and productivity in different settings of organizations (Modise& Raga, 2023; Liden et al., 2008; Hunter et al., 2013). But there is very limited

empirical work linking these global analyses to the operational and cultural issues of academic libraries in Africa, particularly in Ghana. Furthermore, although transformational and transactional leadership have been studied by some academicians in educational systems (Ebrahimi et al., 2017), few studies have considered servant leadership at the micro-level in academic libraries given that the relationships of leaders, staff, and users are direct, and deeply personal. This void in the literature is an opportunity and a problem – to make valid, adapt and question existing theories to a new context. This paper has some value added in that it is underpinned by empirical evidence and locational specificity. By interviewing college librarians in Ghana, it presents a site-based picture of servant leadership in terms of its interpretation, practice, and impact on library education. The emphasis is intended to further contribute to and enrich the wider literature about leadership within library science, and to bring African voices, particularly in what many would consider a very Western-centric writing tradition. In addition, by articulating distinctive practices and outcomes that reflect the role of servant leadership, this study goes beyond abstract theorizing and offers practical implications for leaders' development, employee training and program development and policy advocacy in Ghanaian Colleges of Education. This is especially useful to educators, college administrators, as well as library leaders and library science practitioners aiming for ways to implement sustainable solutions for sustainable library operations without the use of outside sources or financial investment.

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptualizing Servant Leadership in Educational Institutions**

Servant leadership is a concept pioneered by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s and it is a paradigmatic departure from the hierarchical model of leadership (Greenleaf, 2013): in this model the primary function of leadership is to serve others. In short, this type of leadership gives first priority to the growth and welfare of individuals and the communities they constitute. Servant-oriented leadership has been a focus for many years due to its ability to create environments more suitable for learning and development, which is especially pertinent in an educational setting. Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community are the basic components of servant leadership (Spears, 1995). These principles fit so well with the educational mandate of creating a better society by developing people. Servant leadership in academic facilities can be illustrated through practices that serve library staff and library users and promote the support and enhancement of service delivery. It is found that servant leadership in educational institutions has positive effects such as trust, collaboration, and community (Dul et al., 2024). These results especially hold true in libraries, as working in a team and delivering user-friendly services are particularly important. Furthermore, the ethical and societal orientation of the servant leadership model has applicability in the context of academic organizations as the leader's role is a moral compass (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership is not without problems in educational settings. Critics claim that the model's focus on serving causes leaders to burn out or appear lacking in leadership (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). In addition, the acceptance and effectiveness depend on the culture of which the servant leadership is a part. In collectivist cultures, for example, the communal aspects of servant leadership can be more widely accepted, while an attitude toward this style has not been particularly well received in individualistic cultures (Hale & Fields, 2007).

### **Staff Motivation and Servant Leadership in Library Services**

This may be important for public institutions, where in particular staff motivation is seen as an important driver of organizational effectiveness (Sokolic et al., 2024). The servant leadership orientation that focuses on serving and empowering employees provides a theoretical framework for increasing motivation and job satisfaction in library staff. The relationship between servant leadership and employee motivation has been studied closely. Liden et al. (2008) found that servant leadership is positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance with their multidimensional measurement. One area in which servant leadership can play a significant role is in the library environment where employees experience challenges including limited budget availability and high levels of service expected and expect the support and recognition that comes with serving a mission, which in turn can maintain high levels of motivation within an organization. If servant leaders appreciate the personal and professional fulfillment of workers, they may lead to job satisfaction also.

To be efficient at creating employee involvement, servant leaders create the environment for development and praise and involve workers as decision-makers (Hunter et al., 2013). It leaves the employees feeling a sense of personal empowerment generating intrinsic motivation with the sense that they can take action due to internal rewards such as self-development and self-fulfillment.

### **Servant Leadership Can Be Practiced in Academic Libraries to Increase Employee Motivation**

For example the leaders might promote employee professional development by encouraging attendance at conferences and workshops, giving people mentoring opportunities, and hosting functions where people can volunteer ideas and provide feedback. Such endeavors will further enhance their own capabilities and knowledge and let them feel a greater sense of ownership and involvement in the library's future (Nagy, 2024).

Furthermore, servant leadership positions empathy and listening to the needs and concerns of the individual staff member, thereby creating a more positive context for the work to be done. When someone feels listened to, looked after, and supported, their satisfaction with work can deepen, and their sense of obligation to the work increases (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This is especially pertinent for staff in academic libraries, since the pressure from work demands wanting to 'keep up with the use of technology may become their lived reality. Evidence suggests that servant leadership tends to have a positive impact on staff motivation in library settings. For example, Winston and Fields (2015) found that servant leadership behaviors in academic libraries were significantly and negatively associated with employee turnover intentions, while positively correlated with employee engagement. A study of Vrcelj et al. (2024) revealed servant leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment of library employees in their study. I think that servant leadership practices can relieve some of the motivational challenges of library staff in Ghanaian Colleges of Education. Little reward and appreciation leads to low morale and high turnover rate. Leveraging servant leadership, library leaders can create an inclusive and supportive workplace where staff members are valued and invested in the library's mission (Heaphey, 2006). While Servant Leadership might hardly improve motivation-level of staff members, the difference in culture/organization can greatly impact the effectiveness of the process. In hierarchical cultures, employees may also oppose participatory styles of leadership (Hale & Fields, 2007). As such, the success of the change means a culture change and continued support to assist staff in adopting the new leadership framework. Furthermore, servant leadership demands that leaders should be equipped with certain capabilities (for example, have emotional competence, listen attentively, and empower others). Training and development programs that library leaders can obtain so that they can be equipped with such capabilities for a successful embracing of servant leadership practices (Barret, 2017).

### **Servant Leadership and User Satisfaction in Academic Libraries**

Servant leadership (or putting the needs and aspirations of others first and establishing the organizational culture which can facilitate the practice of servant leadership) has been increasingly identified as a possible mechanism for enhancing user satisfaction in academic libraries. Thus, this type of leadership aligns with the missions' libraries hold for communities (Potter, 2017). Satisfaction of use in the academic library is subject to a number of dimensions, including the quality of service, access, and staff level of service (Sriram&Rajev, 2014). To meet user expectations and go above and beyond, servant leaders provide an environment where library workers do this, as a byproduct of practicing active listening and cultivating interpersonal empathy. We inform our users and offer a series of tailored solutions to their academic community. This user-centered service design for the academic community is aimed to bring higher levels of service in an enhanced system, thereby ensuring user satisfaction. (Potter, 2017) Conversely, servant leadership was observed to positively influence user satisfaction through continuous improvement and responsiveness across the user experience. As an example, Meulemans and Matlin (2019) show us that servant leadership of this nature in libraries makes employees be more engaged and more adaptable to the changing needs of the users. That flexibility is critical in academia — users' requirements are many and complicated. In addition, servant leadership fosters work collaboration and communication between library staff on an inter-departmental basis to best deliver service and feedback based on user feedback quickly. Servant leadership pushes staff to be active as to improve its use, including them in decision making; respecting

their input. This sense of agency results in the development of new processes that allow the users an enhanced UX experience (Pillay & Kikasu, 2024). As a focus of the Ghanaian Colleges of Education staff, since resources may be scarce servant leadership may be critical to achieving service effectiveness in the country of Ghana. In this way, servant leadership nurtures a team that is able to withstand the pressure of delivering great service whether through providing services or even just providing services. It means that people are becoming more satisfied through the employees who are more sensitive towards the requirements that users serve (Potter, 2017). Additionally, servant leadership highlights ethical behavioral principles that come alive in the community, mirroring supporting principles of academic institutions. They are also expected to create a supportive condition that is a positive experience in the library, in addition to establishing an emotional support system for one another—representing their model of ethics and belonging—that servant leaders exhibit the library and engender that, as they do. Creating environments, such as the above, help cultivate users' positive attitude towards the library which positively increases users' satisfaction (Doncevic, 2003).

### **Applying Servant Leadership in the Library**

In academic libraries, servant leadership aims to be proactive and deliberate to sustain the development and wellbeing of the staff, in order to improve service delivery. Servant leadership creates a pathway from hierarchical models (Meulemans & Matlin, 2019) to a more egalitarian and inclusive model related to organisational culture. Servant leadership is grounded in the principles of open communication, opportunities for advancement for their members, inclusion in discussion and decisions, and certainly, the development of library staff. These strategies help create an environment where employees feel safe and engaged, which ultimately means higher job satisfaction and motivation. However, as Doncevic, (2003) so accurately stated, this authenticity and being present, being two fundamental components and essential in building trust, will facilitate employees' courage to approach the library management. Staff ownership and engagement through staff consultation can encourage employees to build trust and feel accountable. A more participatory path offers better, and more innovative solutions to the issues libraries are experiencing.

In addition, encouraging progression reveals that they care for the careers and development of their employees (Ogu, 2024), a basic part of servant leadership. Equally important is developing a partnership based climate of respect for the team through servant leadership. Leaders role model this behavior by bringing positivity to their leadership of an organization. This culture is very essential for attracting and retaining skilled staff, a crucial consideration in academic libraries where expertise is a must (Agusta & Azmy, 2023). When implemented, in Ghanaian colleges of education, servant leadership could circumvent the limitations of resources and retain staff. When staff needs are prioritised and we expand the workforce, they will be better positioned to guide the leaders to create a flexible and resilient workforce. This flexibility is fundamental to providing professional library services for resource-limited environments (Potter, 2017). Further, the library as a whole can fit into a larger educational mission based upon aspects of servant leadership. The libraries, therefore, could become a strong and responsive teaching, learning, and research platform by promoting a service environment and an ethos of development. This co-alignment assists in highlighting library value to both the institution and stakeholders' perspective. (Dul et al., 2024). But servant leadership does not just occur- and not just happen to the elite. Leaders need to engage in self-reflection and self-development so that they are able to properly implement servant-leadership behaviors. Similarly, changes in the structure and policy can create more opportunities for collaboration, inclusion, and empowerment. Changing this model can be challenging but it is essential to create the impact of servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019).

### **Challenges and Opportunities of Servant Leadership in Academic Libraries**

Servant leadership, a philosophy in which leaders place team member and community needs above their own, has drawn attention within academic libraries for its potential to help create inclusive, collaborative, and service-oriented environments. This leadership style can be challenging and exciting, and needs to be fully explored. (Dul et al., 2024). Adopting servant leadership within academic libraries has, however, had the most pressing difficulty, as academic libraries have historically operated with hierarchies that are resistant to change. Within many types of academic

leadership styles, traditional top-down views of who holds authority and command conflict with the servant leadership approach, which advocates for sharing power and collective decision-making (Meulemans & Matlin, 2019). Another barrier to implementing servant leadership styles is a lack of understanding or misinterpretation of servant leadership principles, as a result leading to skepticism regarding its effectiveness in obtaining goals within the organization (Langhof & Gueldenberg, 2021). Resource constraints are also a significant challenge. Many libraries, especially working settings in emergent countries, are under budget and therefore do not have the resources to invest in the staff development programs which are crucial for developing servant leadership characteristics (Aslam, 2020). Furthermore, poor leadership development and succession planning may hinder the development of servant leaders from inside the organization (Antwi et al., 2023). These difficulties notwithstanding, servant leadership provides plenty of scope for improving academic library services. A culture of empathy, active listening, and community involvement fosters the positive feelings and satisfaction of patrons that servant leaders can establish in the staffs themselves (Greenleaf, 2013). These principles of leadership not only cultivate creativity but also foster innovation, through empowering employees and community to share, promote, and initiate new ideas, thus realizing the library services they desire and as a result result in better response capabilities and dynamism of library service (Meulemans & Matlin, 2019). Additionally, servant leadership is in close alignment with academic libraries' core mission to be all-inclusive spaces of knowledge and research. This helps servant leaders to create more environment for diversity, equity, and inclusion (Dul et al., 2024). Such a dynamic not only improves the user experience but places the library firmly in the front running in contributing to the academic community as a whole. Servant leadership can be adopted in Ghanaian academic libraries to tackle particular local issues. Adopting mentoring and professional development programs, for example, can alleviate the leadership succession problem noted by Antwi et al. (2023). More importantly, employing servant leadership values can be used to adapt to resource scarcity by developing an environment of teamwork, in which staff are motivated to work together developing an innovative solution.

## **Methodology**

The qualitative approach which this research follows will be an attempt to investigate how servant leadership has affected library performance, in particular on the perspectives of librarians from three colleges of education in Ghana: Tamale College of Education, Bagabaga College of Education, and Accra College of Education. The qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) is considered appropriate as qualitative methods are able to address the complex social phenomena and give an impression about the lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews were employed as an instrument at the main data gathering point to create an adaptability and to facilitate a rich, complex responses. Six participants: A purposive sampling technique was used to include 2 librarians, which corresponds to two leaders from each college and have either led positions or are immersed in particular in leadership practices at their institutions. The interviews were conducted with the purpose of obtaining opinions on servant leadership's effectiveness in enhancing staff motivation and user experience, the kind of servant leadership behaviors undertaken by the staff members, and the resulting outcomes of those behaviors as per the respondents' interpretations of the servant leading behaviors. With participants' consent, this data was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, thematic analysis was conducted to identify high level patterns and themes. Ethical parameters were adhered to in the study such as the informed consent, confidentiality and voluntariness.

## **Findings/Results**

The following section outlines my findings from in-depth interviews. It involves librarians of the selected Colleges of Education in Ghana. Based on the interview guide for my interview, five core themes emerged through thematic analysis: conceptualizing Servant Leadership in Educational institutions, servant leadership and staff motivation in Library Services, servant leadership and user satisfaction in Academic Libraries, application of servant leadership practices in Library contexts, and challenges/opportunities of servant leadership in academic libraries in this context. These themes capture the lived experiences and contextually significant understanding of library workers in the context of academic institutions in Ghana respectively.

### **Conceptualizing Servant Leadership in Educational Institutions**

Respondents had different understandings of what servant leadership looks like in learning institutions. The key terms most of the respondents revealed include empathy, humility and putting a group before oneself. One Respondent indicated *“To me servant leadership is putting the need of others first in particular your staff and users, serving them without allowing your role to invade your mind,”* one respondent said of the leader. I’m confident this perspective captures the important service ethic that characterizes servant leadership. As a librarian reflected through a statement that preceded, *“We shouldn’t just be issuing books — but making them feel important as staff, as students, as well as visitors. That’s servant leadership.”* Comments like those indicate that servant leadership is seen as more of an ethos behind its top-down leadership style. Staff, in turn, saw it as having a connection to moral authority and integrity, however another candidate observed, *“A real educational leader should set the example, not only to tell the way, but by living the values of respect, fairness, and support.”* Again *“Traditionally, it was who had control,”* said a librarian. *“Now, it’s about who cares and who supports. That’s what leadership in libraries should be going.”* Across the board, all participants conceptualized servant leadership as a relational and ethical concept rooted in care, service, and empowerment, values which are in tune with the purpose of the curricula of Colleges of Education.

### **Staff Motivation in Library Services and Servant Leadership**

A central theme across the interviews was how servant leadership can affect staff motivation in library contexts. And, with respect to the leaders who supported and humbled staff, it had a huge effect on morale and dedication, participants observed.

*“A librarian said to me, ‘It makes me motivated to always try my best when my head hears my problems even if she’s not able to handle them straight away.’”*

This adds another way by which empathy and attention is shown by the leader and that might serve as an inspiration as well. Also, the respondent further claimed:

*“I remember when I lost a family member and my boss gave me some rest and even checked on me. Later it made me love the library even more.”*

Often, employees referred to this interpersonal support as contributing to workplace loyalty and consistency. Participants also observed that servant leaders create an atmosphere of recognition and inclusion. A librarian reported,

*“Even the most basic things like ‘well done’ and when we hear what you think, we feel valued and respected.”* It felt like one that was inspiring staff and enhancing their performance. There was also a motivational element on the leader disseminating duties as well as helping to show others how to cope. *“My head allows me to make decisions on acquisitions.” This motivated me. That kind of trust inspires me to do more and grow professionally.”* These findings suggest the need for servant leadership with the purpose to establish a supportive environment conducive to the development of intrinsic motivation, career growth and commitment of academic library staff.

### **Servant Leadership and Academic Libraries' User Satisfaction**

Many studies found a large connection between servant leadership and higher user satisfaction in academic libraries. Service-driven values were something they found themselves modeling, they said; those values also spilled over to interactions with library users on the front line. *“When your leader is service-minded, it’s part of the team culture,”* one librarian said. *“We are patient and respectful with users as that is what we want to be witnessing in the top echelons,”* the respondents added. Applying these values of leadership to user interaction was viewed as a fundamental requirement of designing a user-friendly library experience. Another respondent indicated: *“I observed how quick students are made happy and return for more when we engage with them. So our head tells us to consider them clients, not only students.”* These views may also align with a servant leader's vision in that servant leadership results in that responsive service delivery is intended to be user-centric. Furthermore, as participants mentioned, servant leadership promotes the creative activities that will provide both happiness and satisfaction to users. *“Our leader helped us to launch a mobile loan system for students who have exams, that our leader supported,”* a librarian said. That effort greatly increased access and satisfaction in many ways. It is this kind of thing that illustrates servant leadership fosters creativity as servant leadership leads to greater creativity and initiatives that bring value to its end users. Another

participant cited systems of feedback loops: *"Our head has an opinion that we ought to consider with users in mind so we developed a suggestion box. That kind of transparency has made things happen much faster and it has enabled us to sort out problems in advance and create better services."* These tales show that there is a close link between servant leadership behaviors of mind (empathy, inclusiveness and responsiveness) and user satisfaction in academic libraries.

### **Implementation of Servant Leadership Practices in Library Settings**

Most of respondents agreed to the nature of the servant leadership idea, although they varied in their practices at different institutional levels. Some described purposeful endeavors to embody servant leadership, others cited an informal or "an intuitive" style of service. *"We have monthly reflection meetings where everyone is heard,"* one librarian continued. *It is the fact that everyone counts the way our leader is showing that everybody counts.* In the following, the principles of servant leadership by which listening and participative decision-making are modeled can be seen at work. One other one said, *"Our boss sets an example. She's the first to arrive, but she's the last to go. And that commitment pushes all the rest of us to do the best."* Modeling of these styles of servant leadership behaviors was perceived to be an effective way to influence others. Participants also indicated that there were mentoring and team-building initiatives involved. National Service personnel have," one said... *"mentors assigned to them... We have regular team bonding activities. These came as a result of our leader's endeavor to establish a caring culture."* These worked were seen as building trust and collaboration, as a sense of belonging. However not every institution had a formal mechanism for having servant leadership. *"It is a lot about personality,"* one librarian said. *"You'll feel it if the head is nice and open. Otherwise, there's nothing but top down and rigid."* It follows from this that while there are some servant leadership exercises occurring around structures, much of it is indeed still a disposition of an individual leader, not one collective set of institutions. While the servant leader has extensive use value, participants also identified challenges that prevent it achieving its top potential. But one of the major barriers was institutional bureaucracy that generally limited the capacity of people who lead to become good servants of servant leadership to practice. As one participant put it: *"The system doesn't lend itself for effort, so to help your staff, even if you want to keep your staff, that doesn't happen. You need approval so you can have everything approved."*

Hence structural limitations that can hamper servant leadership practices arise. Lack of training and awareness was also mentioned as a challenge. *"Most library heads don't have any leadership training,"* one librarian said. So, even when they are keen on serving, they do not always know how." Such a deficiency in leadership power was considered a major limitation. The exercise of serving was the next dynamic tension, and it was a conflict among servant leadership values versus the expectations of institution. Some management feel it is hard to be soft or efficient, and they understand that at others they do not think they are hard enough to be soft." It reveals cultural and perceptual obstacles to a servant leader. One note was that there were also fresh opportunities participants discovered. Several librarians held out hope that servant leadership would become institutionalized through policy change and the development of organizational leadership. *"If servant leadership is part and parcel of leadership education and assessment then many of the leaders will really take it seriously,"* said one participant. For others, the model was essential to job retention or reputation building. *"In this era of competition,"* a librarian told me, *"libraries which prioritize service and keep their staff well will be leaders."* Results suggest continued challenges, but emerging recognition of the advantages of servant leadership and a willingness to implement at its highest potential at academic libraries represent trends.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this research was to explore the aspect of servant leadership on library services in selected Colleges of Education in Ghana: staff motivation, user satisfaction, implementation practices, challenges, and opportunities in the institution. The findings present a thorough and evidence-based portrayal of servant leadership in academic library environments and are consistent with the existing literature yet, extend past academic literature and empirical experience. The ideas suggested in this study as framed, conceptualized, and adapted to servant leadership resonate with the main theories predominantly for the participants in the study. Participants viewed servant leadership as an ethic rooted in humility, empathy, and serving others in parallel to Greenleaf's (2013) initial model of a

servant-leader. This view is consistent with Spears (1995) who proposes foundational concepts of listening, empathy, and being growth-focused in relationships. Respondents' conceptualisation of leadership as people-centred, not power-centered is consistent with previous research indicating that servant leadership fosters ethical behavior and community-centric approaches in academics (Eva et al., 2019; Dul et al., 2024). In addition, the focus of care and integrity of the participants and their moral model of example resonate with literature that places servant leadership within the relational and ethical framework of the service relationship, and it is particularly well-fitting for educational institutions. The study also supports previous studies supporting the moderating effects of servant leadership on staff motivation. Narratives from participants demonstrated how empathic support, response time during personal crises, recognition of staff efforts as contributing factors, and the ability to delegate responsibility positively improved morale, commitment, and growth. These results are consistent with the claims of Liden et al. (2008) and Hunter et al. (2013) that servant leadership fosters employee engagement and organizational commitment. Notably, the existence of motivational outcomes linked to participatory decision-making and trust, corroborate the findings of Winston and Fields (2015) and Vrcelj et al. (2024), in academic library settings too. Crucially, the experiences of Ghanaian librarians also provide supporting evidence for Sokolic et al.'s (2024) claim that servant leadership is particularly effective in service-based settings with limited resources, providing non-monetary techniques to promote staff. Even in the absence of formal HR systems or significant financial incentives, servant leadership practices, such as mentorship, empowerment, and public praise appeared to be the most powerful behaviors, as demonstrated in this study. The results confirm users' satisfaction with being served and how servant leadership impacts users and library culture. Respondents also related their leaders' service-serving stance, service, ethical and model practices, with enhanced responsiveness and user experience. These results are on par with Potter's (2017) claim that servant leadership is a cornerstone of academic libraries' mission of serving the community and developing appropriate user engagement. The instances of mobile services and feedback loops mentioned by participants illustrate the kind of innovative and responsive services mentioned by Meulemans and Matlin (2019) and Pillay and Kikasu (2024), who believe that servant leadership fosters responsiveness and continual improvement. The observed trickle downeffect – in which the behaviors of front-line staff are shaped by the attitudes of the leaders themselves – aligns with the theoretical contention that servant leadership impacts both internal organizational culture and external service outcomes (Doncevic, 2003). The results also highlight the extent to which servant leadership is being applied in the libraries, and indeed vary greatly. Some libraries have institutionalized servant leadership through feedback sessions, mentoring and team-building, which is reminiscent of practices studied in the literature (Meulemans & Matlin, 2019; Doncevic, 2003). In other libraries, however, the emphasis was placed on the character of the individual leader, rather than on system as prescribed (Ogu, 2024), revealing an implementation gap. Our findings validate that servant leadership practices, for example, the use of shared decision-making processes, role modeling, and staff empowerment promote organizational trust and innovation, aligned with Agusta and Azmy (2023). But different institutions have different practices that indicate, in order for servant leadership to be sustainable, it needs to be institutionalized, and not just a function of individual disposition. Not only have the servant leader's positive perceptions been reflected in the research but participants also discussed the major challenges, some of which are found in the literature, which constrain the fulfillment of ideal services of servant leadership. Structural and bureaucratic factors, such as a low level of agency, delays in approval, and adherence to a prescribed protocol were cited as some of the barriers to servant leadership implementation. This supports the findings of Meulemans and Matlin (2019) that the participatory model of leadership as practiced in a higher education context is constrained by institutionalized hierarchies.

In addition, the absence of formal leadership training supports the observations reported by Antwi et al. (2023) and Aslam (2020) on insufficient succession planning and capacity development associated with leadership in libraries. The cultural conventions of servant leadership, which are viewed as "soft" and/or "ineffective" by stakeholders, may also contribute to the observations reported by Langhof and Gueldenberg (2021) that skepticism and misunderstanding are impediments to adoption. The study also left participants with a sense of optimism regarding the future of servant leadership. Participants believed that policy change and leadership development programs could be ways to legitimize and institutionalize participatory leadership approaches and thus maximize the value of servant leadership.

These findings are consistent with existing empirical literature (Dul et al., 2024). Furthermore, their claim that servant leadership will increase employee retention and reputation supports Greenleaf's (2013) assertions that servant leadership is not purely ethical and/or moral in nature, but also strategic. Thus, the willingness of those attending to be responsive to servant leadership despite the confines of institutions such as the academic libraries of Ghana highlights its applicability in the context of Ghana's academic libraries.

## **Conclusion**

The research on servant leadership was undertaken in order to explore the practical application of servant leadership in Ghana, how it affected motivation, user satisfaction, the implementation of the study, as well as the contextual challenges and opportunities attached to academic libraries. According to theoretical study but also to empirical research, library professionals consider servant leadership to be a leadership style characterized by empathy, service, humility and moral behaviour. Servant leaders, participants stated, are more than managers – they are moral and relational leaders who work toward the mission of Colleges of Education. Moreover, our findings also support that servant leadership is significantly associated with staff morale, motivation and commitment, especially among under-resourced organizations. Leaders established an employee supported and empowered workforce; it is the result of their leader's influence: staff who become loyal contributors to the company, as well as for them. In addition, servant leadership was associated with significantly better user experiences because those employees who felt respected or felt valued were more likely to deliver timely service and user-centered orientation. In libraries where servant leadership was a lived reality, staff employed novel processes such as feedback loops and borrowing technology that ranged from “mobile borrowing systems.” However, the research identified some stumbling blocks that have potentially threatened the institutionalization of servant leadership. Barriers were stated to be structural constraining environments (including bureaucratic policies, lack of autonomy, lack of leadership training, and poor support at an institutional level). Furthermore, in some cases misperceptions about servant-leadership as a weak or ineffective strategy have made it less widespread among organizations. Nevertheless, respondents cautiously expected the emergence of servant leadership in academic libraries but nevertheless suggested that the phenomenon could indeed find more successful integration within governance regimes in libraries if it were appropriately trained, policy-wise, and institutionally promoted. In academia, servant leadership can transform library leadership in Ghanaian Colleges of Education. In this way we aim for a sustainable and socially beneficial way of how we are likely to help enhance staff engagement and user experience in general. It will just work in the meantime consistent with more generally with the values of educational service. To reap the fruits of these benefits, organizations need to consciously foster and shape leaders within their organizations in order to disrupt such rigid mechanisms of administrative control and integrate servant leadership norms and practices within the culture and frameworks of policies and strategies. As academic libraries transform themselves to better accommodate the rapid evolution of education, servant leadership opens up the potential to lead with empathy, mission and integrity -- principles that have to be maintained as they transform to meet new expectations for education.

## **Recommendations**

Thus, it is suggested that Colleges of Education in Ghana should adopt a deliberate attitude toward the institutionalization of servant leadership in their library systems, on the basis of the study's results. This would start with the establishment and running of organized leadership trainings for library heads and senior staff who can demonstrate core tenets of servant leadership—including empathy, listening, stewardship, nurturing other people and the ability to help strengthen their power to serve. Colleges must revamp the rigid bureaucratic processes of institutional bureaucracy and institutional policies that inhibit the ability to freely adopt servant leadership practices of library executives by requiring changes in procedures and infrastructures by universities, and implement principles and approaches inclusive of broad-based democratic societies such as collaborative decision-making and staff independence. Formal programs, such as mentoring programs, periodic staff feedback mechanisms and planning consultation meetings that encourage staff involvement in decision-making, to operationalize servant leadership in daily management of the library, should be implemented. Further, opportunities for consistent career paths for library staff and ongoing professional development so that library employees

can continue to enhance their skills, motivation, and commitment to the goals and ambitions of the institution should be offered. Servant leadership also needs to be incorporated in performance appraisals of library leaders to make it sustainable and consistent with the wider educational mission. By infusing servant leadership within an organization's culture and governance system, Colleges of Education can create more equitable, engaged and user-centred library environments—better serving both staff morale and a better service to users.

## References

- Acheampong, E. (2019). *Adoption and Implementation of Mobile Technology Based Library Services in Ghanaian Academic Libraries* (Masters Thesis, University of Ghana).
- Agusta, N. F., & Azmy, A. (2023). Servant leadership and career development: supporting employee growth. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 10(12), 350-360.
- Antwi, K. A.-A., Agyekum, A., & Asare, C. A. B. (2023). The dilemma of leadership succession in academic libraries in Ghana. *Ghana Library Journal*, 28(1). <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/glj/article/view/250558>
- Aslam, M. (2020). Leadership in challenging times of academic libraries. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*, 69(3), 135–149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-03-2019-0038>
- Banleman, K., Dukper, B. K., & Amosah, J. (2025). Academic libraries in the context of higher education in Ghana: Insights from the SD Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies. *Information and Knowledge Management*, 15(1), 18.
- Barrett, A. L. (2017). *Organizational culture and library chief executive officers' servant leadership practices*. Grand Canyon University.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Canavesi, A., & Minelli, E. (2022). Servant Leadership: a Systematic Literature Review and Network Analysis. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 34(3), 267–289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-021-09381-3>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Doncevic, J. (2003). Servant-leadership as a model for library administration. *Catholic Library World*, 73(3), 171-78.
- Dul, V., Sam, R., Hak, S., Bou, D., Vy, S., & Kheuy, S. (2024). Servant Leadership Style in High Education Institutions: A Systematic Literature Review. *European Journal of Contemporary Education and E-Learning*, 2(6), 116-139.
- Ebrahimi, P., RezvaniChamanzamin, M., Roohbakhsh, N., & Shaygan, J. (2017). Transformational and transactional leadership: Which one is more effective in the education of employees' creativity? Considering the moderating role of learning orientation and leader gender. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 6(1), 137-156.
- Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., Van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004>
- Greenleaf, R. K. (2013). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist press.
- Hale, J. R., & Fields, D. L. (2007). Exploring servant leadership across cultures: A study of followers in Ghana and the USA. *Leadership*, 3(4), 397–417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715007082964>
- Heaphey, J. (2006). Servant-leadership in public libraries. *Indiana libraries*, 25(3), 22-25.
- Hunter, E. M., Neubert, M. J., Perry, S. J., Witt, L. A., Penney, L. M., & Weinberger, E. (2013). Servant leaders inspire servant followers: Antecedents and outcomes for employees and the organization. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 24(2), 316–331. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2012.12.001>

- Koteikor Baidoo, D., & Nwagwu, W. E. (2024). User and service provider assessment of technology readiness of library commons in selected universities in Ghana. *Library Management*, 45(5), 331-361.
- Langhof, J. G., & Gueldenberg, S. (2021). Whom to serve? Exploring the moral dimension of servant leadership: Answers from operation Valkyrie. *Journal of Management History*, 27(1), 1–20.
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161–177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.01.006>
- Lo, P., Allard, B., Wang, N., & Chiu, D. K. W. (2020). Servant leadership theory in practice: North America's leading public libraries. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 52(3), 682–693
- Meulemans, Y. N., & Matlin, T. R. (2019). Are you being served? Embracing servant leadership, trusting library staff, and engendering change. *Library Leadership & Management*, 34(1). <https://doi.org/10.5860/llm.v34i1.7399>
- Modise, J. M., & Raga, K. (2023). Servant Leadership Is Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership, A Leader Is a Servant First. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 8(2), 1929-1936.
- Nagy, M. M. (2024). Servant Leadership and Its Availability in Assiut University Libraries: An Exploratory Study. *International Journal of Library and Information Sciences*, 11(3), 125-186.
- Ogu, S. J. (2024). Employee participation in decision-making and organizational commitment: A study of modern organizations. *Journal of Commerce, Management, and Tourism Studies*, 3(1), 55-64.
- Pillay, S. S., & Kikasu, E. T. (2024). Servant Leadership Style: A Key to Effective Good Governance and Sustainable Public Service Delivery in Africa. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 14(1), 52-80.
- Potter, J. (2017). The servant-leader in the library: A case study and a journey towards self-transcendence. *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*, 11(1).
- Sokolic, D., Croitoru, G., Florea, N. V., Robescu, V. O., & Cosac, A. (2024). The effect of leadership styles on employee motivation and organizational performance in public sector organizations. *Valahian Journal of Economic Studies*, 15(1), 53-72.
- Spears, L. C. (1995). *Reflections on leadership: How Robert K. Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership influenced today's top management thinkers*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sriram, B., & Rajev, M. K. G. (2014). Impact of academic library services on user satisfaction: Case study of Sur University College, Sultanate of Oman. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 34(2).
- Staninger, S. W. (2012). Identifying the presence of ineffective leadership in libraries. *Library Leadership & Management*, 26(1).
- Ullah, A., & Usman, M. (2023). Role of libraries in ensuring quality education at higher education institutions: a perspective of Pakistan. *Inverge Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(4), 13-22.
- Van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1228–1261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310380462>
- Vrcelj, N., Bevanda, V., & Bevanda, N. (2024). Servant leadership: Influence of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *Management: Journal of Sustainable Business and Management Solutions in Emerging Economies*, 29(3), 1-11.
- Winston, B. E., & Fields, D. (2015). Seeking and measuring the essential behaviors of servant leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 36(4), 413–434. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-10-2013-0135>