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;

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

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/article/faculty-perceptions-of-how-their-altruistic-and-servant-teaching-behaviors-influence-student-learning/317372

Related Content

R&D Support Programs (the Need)
(2018). *Supporting Innovation Through National R&D Programs: Emerging Research and Opportunities (pp. 1-25).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/rd-support-programs-the-need/192289

Business Intelligence
Richard T. Herschel (2019). *Advanced Methodologies and Technologies in Business Operations and Management (pp. 578-588).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/business-intelligence/212140

Sustainable Digitization of Cultural Heritage Through CSR: Exploring Matryoshka Effects in Virtual Museum
Paolo Espositoand Paolo Ricci (2018). *Corporate Social Responsibility for Valorization of Cultural Organizations (pp. 120-138).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/sustainable-digitization-of-cultural-heritage-through-csr/197929

The R&D-Based Start-Up
(2023). *Moving From R&D Development to Production and Sales in Start-Up Companies (pp. 13-36).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-rd-based-start-up/319574

The Mind of Sustainability: A Mind Genomics Cartography
Dalma Radványi, Attila Gereand Howard R. Moskowitz (2020). *International Journal of R&D Innovation Strategy (pp. 22-43).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-mind-of-sustainability/258297