SERVANT LEADERSHIP THROUGH SUPPORT: A CASE OF CENTRAL KENYA CONFERENCE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Research Article

Meshack Mulongo (iD)

Karatina University

mulongomesh@gmail.com

Meshack Mulongo holds a Master degree in education administration and leadership and is currently a PhD student at Karatia University and professionally trained teacher employed by the Teachers' Service Commission of Kenya. His interests are education leadership and research on examination malpractices.

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Meshack Ambani Mulongo

Muongomesh@gmail.com

Abstract

Servant leadership is an important modern leadership style which is known for enhancing the ethical precedence in contemporary organizations. The objective of the study was to determine administrators' awareness and practice of Servant Leadership style through support in Central Kenya Conference SDA secondary schools. The research used descriptive-comparative research design. The target population was 280 respondents. Respondents were purposively sampled. Data was collected using structured questionnaires administered to 82 teachers and six principals. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze data. The study revealed that 83.3% Principals tend to agree that they practiced servant leadership; 83.3% of administrators were male, 66.7% had bachelor's degrees, 59.8% were middle aged and 66.7% of teachers had 5-10 working experience. There was no significant difference on teachers' evaluation on principals' practice of servant leadership in CKC SDA secondary schools through service, support and empowerment across categories of Gender, Age and Teaching Experience. The findings of this study therefore implied that although principals are aware of the concept, servant leadership style was not adequately practiced in CKC SDA secondary schools, hence there needs to be measures in place so that servant leadership will be practiced as expected of SDA educational leaders.

Keywords: servant, support, schools, leadership

1. Introduction

Servant leadership through support is one the leadership attribute identified by a number of scholars. Bosco and Melchar (2010) revealed that servant leaders support the professional growth of employees. When employees professionally grow, they tend to perform their organizational roles better. Spears (2010) posits that servant leaders are deeply committed to supporting the growth of every person in an organization. They support workers by nurturing their personal as well professional growth. This is practically achieved by the provision of funds towards their professional development. Servant leaders support followers by helping them to develop and succeed and by giving them opportunities to maximize the utilization of their abilities. Ikinci (2014) reported that leaders need to be qualified with competencies and work experience to lead workers in attaining organizational goals and projected objectives. The existence of servant leadership through support increased the levels of employee satisfaction (McNeff & Irving 2017)). In addition, servant leadership through support enhanced worker retention and satisfaction (Kaur 2018). According to Brohi et al. (2018), workers' retention and satisfaction had a positive impact on workers' relationship with servant leadership. In a research by Young et al. (2018), it was observed that workers' commitment to organization objective

helped in employee retention and engagement. Consistent with these authors, Declercq et al. (2014) reported that servant leadership support created desired feelings and enhanced job engagement between workers and employers.

Additionally, DeConinck & DeConinck (2017) reported that servant leaders support workers by helping them to have a caring and ethical work climate, which can largely increase their productivity at the work place. It is thus vivid that the importance of servant leadership through support cannot be underestimated in organizations. Organizational support is a critical aspect that assists workers to attain their set goals (Halbeslem & Wheeler 2015). This means that workers are able to realize that employees care about them and the work they do, hence they satisfy their social needs (Sihag & Sarikwal 2015). This is consistent with research conducted by Chiniara & Bentein (2016) informed that the more a leader by servant leadership, the more will be their subjects socially and psychologically satisfied. When servant leaders serve others, they transcend personal interests for the benefit of their subjects Parris & Peachey (2013). In another study, Sipe & Frick (2015) reported that servant leaders through support exercise acceptance, tolerance and accept other persons' weaknesses.

Devi (2017) observed that employee engagement led to enhanced organizational financial output. Consistent with him, was Kazimoto (2016) who reiterated that employee engagement led to great profit and benefits to an organization. Leaders who give support to workers prioritize their followers' needs as opposed to their individual needs (Newman 2017). According to Van Dierendonck & Patterson (2015), assisting employees includes giving interpersonal support. Similar views were affirmed by Jones (2012). It is therefore crucial that servant leaders need to support their subjects for the well-being of their organizations, learning institutions, in this context. Aguenza & Som (2012) informed that the techniques to support workers' commitment to led to successful organizational outcomes.

Servant leaders support workers by understanding their human character and embrace nurturing attitude that builds their self-esteem. Such leaders recognize team work, which multiplies effectiveness and momentum in leadership. Apart from Spears' thought, Serrat (2009) posits that servant leadership is about moving people to higher levels of individual as well as communal self-awareness. In addition, he argues that the principal tenet is duty of the leader to serve followers and his or her key role is to develop, enable and support team members. This implies that servant leaders should support workers fully to develop their potentials and in order for them to deliver their best at their place of work, provides creative and supportive pathways toward fostering goal attainment in institutions. Energies are therefore focused on provision of necessary support and resources to employees.

Servant leaders lead their institutions by intuitively making sound decisions on behalf of their institutions (Weaver et al. (2014). Spears (2010) asserts that servant leaders support their followers to grow both professionally and personally. According to Amah (2015), servant leaders must be ready to serve others from their hearts. Drury (2004) categorically states that servant leaders have supportive roles as coaches and mentors to their subjects. In addition, she argues that when employees perceive behavior in their managers, supervisors and top leaders, that is similar to coaches or mentors, they will also identify the characteristics of servant leaders in their institutions and practice them to their advantage. Spears, (2014) noted that servant leaders

support persons at work by identifying those who are hurting and assisting them as much as possible. They, in addition, support workers to grow from the yeast of their failures. The supporting role of servant leadership, therefore, helps to ensure that followers have relational and structural support needed to carry out their responsibilities. It was against this background that the researcher sought to carry out a study on Assessment of Servant Leadership through Support: A case of Central Kenya Conference Secondary Schools, whose objective was to determine administrators' awareness and practice of Servant Leadership style through support in Central Kenya Conference SDA secondary schools.

Objectives of the study
1. To assess the profile of school administrators and teachers based on the following; gender, age work experience and educational qualification?
2. To determine administrators' awareness and practice of Servant Leadership style through support in Central Kenya Conference SDA secondary schools.

Hypothesis of the study

There is no significant difference between the evaluation rating of male and female teachers on the principals' practice of servant leadership.

2. Methodology

This research was carried out using a descriptive-comparative research design. Descriptive research describes phenomena associated with or characteristic of a subject population. The focus in this study was the practice of servant leadership by secondary school principals. According to Orodho (2003), descriptive survey research design is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering questionnaire to a sample of individuals, which was the case for this study. Comparative research design was also used as it compares in quantitative terms the perceptions of groups of teachers on their principals' practice of servant leadership through service, support as manifested through various attributes listed in the questionnaire. The study targeted principals and teachers of both sexes, who taught in 12 SDA Secondary schools in Central Kenya Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Six schools were selected for this study. The choice of Central Kenya Conference schools was done purposively because this sample is appropriate to this kind of study. Sampling technique allows a researcher to use cases that have needed information with respect to the objectives of the study. The sample size was eighty-two (82) teachers and six (6) principals. The researcher used a self-constructed questionnaire because it gathers data over a large sample, it upholds confidentiality, it saves on time, and it does not give opportunity for interviewer biasness. Questionnaires are commonly used to obtain important information about a given population.

The questionnaires were of two types. The first was designed for Administrators (Principals of selected schools), while the other set of questionnaires was meant for teachers. The administrators' instrument had three sections. Section 1 was the demographic information of respondents. Section 2 had closed ended questionnaire items where respondents were required to choose by circling one answer from the four choices given to show the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with listed statements in relation to their awareness of servant leadership as follows: 4- Agree 3- Tend to Agree 2- Tend to Disagree 1- Disagree. Section 3 comprised of questionnaire items which required respondents to circle one number that indicated their leadership in relationship to servant leadership: 1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Always.

The Teachers' Questionnaires had 3 sections. Section one required respondents to fill in their demographic information. Section 2 had closed-ended questionnaire items which required them to choose from among the four alternatives provided as follows: 4- Agree 3- Tend to Agree 2- Tend to Disagree 1- Disagree. This section was meant to establish to what extent the Principals of SDA Secondary schools in Central Kenya Conference practice Servant Leadership through Support. The validity of the questionnaire was established through consultations with professionals in the School of Education of the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton. The advice from experts was used by the researcher to improve on the quality of the questionnaires. After the return of pilot questionnaires, responses were subjected to a statistical treatment using the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The sets of questionnaires for teachers yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.938, which was acceptable according to universal research standards. The researcher obtained an Ethics clearance letter from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton which was used to secure research permit from the National Council for Science and Technology (NACOST).The other permission was obtained from the Director of Education, Central Kenya Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. With a permit and permission from CKC Education Director, the researcher proceeded to the field for data collection.

The researchers carried out the actual study by taking the sets of questionnaire personally to relevant schools in order to save time and maximize the return rate of questionnaire. Prior to administration of questionnaire, the researcher gave a brief introduction to the study and clearly explained to respondents the purpose of the study and the need for their co-operation in the exercise. In addition, the researcher assured respondents that their responses would be treated confidentially. Questionnaire was then administered on the spot. The return rate for administrators' questionnaires was 100 % and that of teachers was 78.72 %. On average, the return rate of all administered questionnaire was 89.36 %. Generally, this return rate was good and would be relied upon in the findings. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics used measures such as means and standard deviations and present findings in form of tables, percentages and graphs and was done using the SPSS package, Version 21. Inferential statistics (t-test) was used to test the null hypothesis formulated in the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Research question 1: *What is the profile of respondents?*

Six Central Kenya Conference SDA secondary schools took part in the study. All selected schools were of mixed type. The greatest number of SDA schools were of mixed sexes were boarding in nature. This is commendable because young people are supposed to be exposed to both sexes as they grow in order to learn how to co-exist with the people of opposite sex.
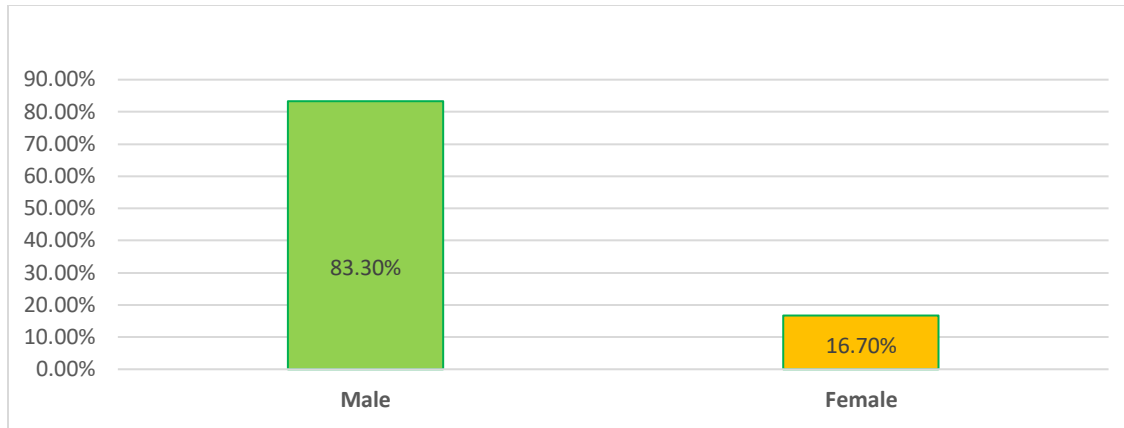
Figure 1: Gender of school administrators   N=6

Table 1 shows that out of the six administrators, 5 (83.3%) were males and one female administrator (16.7%). This finding implies that there were more men in the administration of Adventist Secondary schools. The reason could be the general trend in across cultures that men are expected to lead as women follow, which is consistent with Kent and Moss (1994), whose study supports universal trend that masculine subjects were the most likely to emerge as leaders. The world has changed and it is important that women reassert themselves and take leadership positions in the society as it is advocated by the new constitution of Kenya; "Not more than 2∕3 of the members of elective bodies shall be of the same gender" Constitution of Kenya (2010 Ed). The change is important in that it lays a platform for equality of all people which God expects. In addition, this change provides opportunities for women to make use of their leadership potentials (Kiamba, 2008).
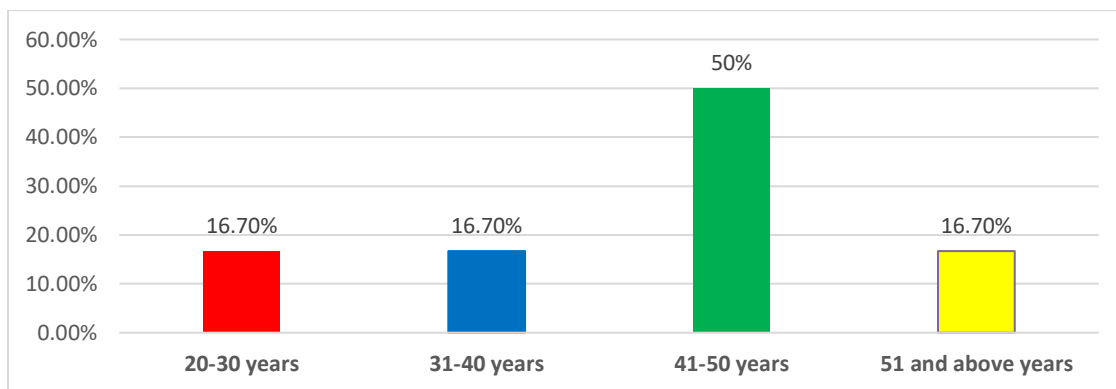

Figure 2: Age bracket of school administrators   **N=6**

Regarding the age of administrators figure 2 shows that 3 (50%) were aged 41-50 years old. 1 (16.7%) was between 20-30 years, 1 (16.7%) was 31-40 years old and the same, 1 (16.7%) was 51 and above years of age. This implies that leadership in SDA Secondary schools has higher concentration of those aged between 41 and 50 years of age. This trend differs from other countries in the world like U.S.A, Rwanda and Central Europe, where leadership roles are assumed by the younger generation. The trend could be that it is generally believed in Africa, the leadership is for the elderly in the society. However, Melchear and Bosco noted that servant leadership style can be practiced by any adult age group irrespective of age.
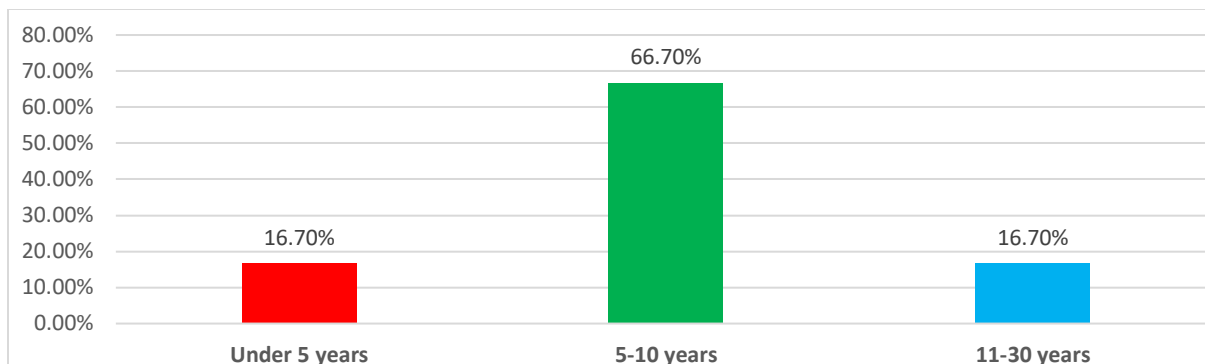
Figure 3: Work experience of school administrators   **N=6**

Figure 3 revealed that the work experience of administrators was; 4 (66.7%) of administrators had worked for between 5-10 years. Each, (16.7%) had worked for under five years and between 11-30 years respectively. No teacher had served for above 30 years. In terms of educational administration, these observations imply that Principals in SDA secondary school have a tendency of working for a short period (5-10 years) then move to other stations. It is therefore important for the CKC to find ways of retaining Principals longer for better growth of these institutions.
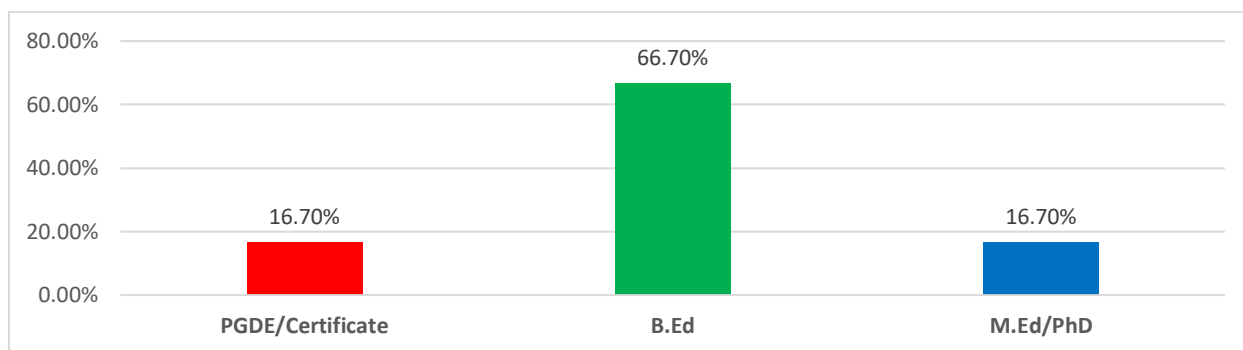

Figure 4: Education qualifications of administrators   N=6

On educational qualifications of administrators, it was credible to note from figure 4 that 4 (66.7 %) had Bachelor of Education degrees; One (16.7%) had Postgraduate Diploma and Master's degree qualifications respectively. On attendance of leaderships workshops, 6 (100%) of the administrators indicated that they have attended several leadership workshops. This implies that SDA Secondary schools have trained and well qualified teacher- leaders. . This is strength to be upheld by the CKC education leadership.

Demographic information of teachers

Table 1. *Gender of teachers*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	44	53.7
Female	38	45.3

N=82

Table 1 indicates that out of the 82 teacher- respondents, 44 (53.7%) were males, whereas, 38 (46.3%) were females. These findings imply that just like with principals there were more male teachers in Central Kenya Conference Secondary schools compared to female counterparts. This could be as a result of the higher levels of literacy among men compared to women in recent past. Time has changed and there is need to look into this gender disparity in teacher employment in SDA schools and enhance girl child education in order to promote teacher-leader in administration of SDA schools. This finding however, contradicts Barbuto et al. (2007) findings that male as well as female servant leaders equally and effectively utilized servant leadership style in their institutions.

Table 2. *Age bracket of teachers*

Age bracket	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	27	32.9
31-40	49	59.8
41-50	5	6.1
51 and above	1	1.2

N=82

From the analysis of data as shown in table 2 shows that most, 49 (59.8%) fell in the age bracket of 31-40, 27 (32.9%) in the bracket of 20-30, 5 (6.1%) in age bracket 41-50 and only 1 (1.2%) was above 51 years. These results imply that the largest number (59.8%) of teachers in CKC SDA secondary schools were middle aged, while the smallest number was above 51 years of age, which is a naturally expected trend.

Table 3. *Work experience of teachers*

Work experience	Frequency	Percentage
under 5 years	27	32.9
5-10 years	44	53.7
11- 30 years	11	13.4
Total	82	100

N=82

As for work experience, table 3 indicates that 27 (32.9%) teachers had worked for 5 years and below. The largest number, 44 (53.7%) had worked for 5 to 10 years while a small proportion, 11 (13.4%) had worked for 11 to 30 years. There is no teacher who has worked in their school for 31 years and above.
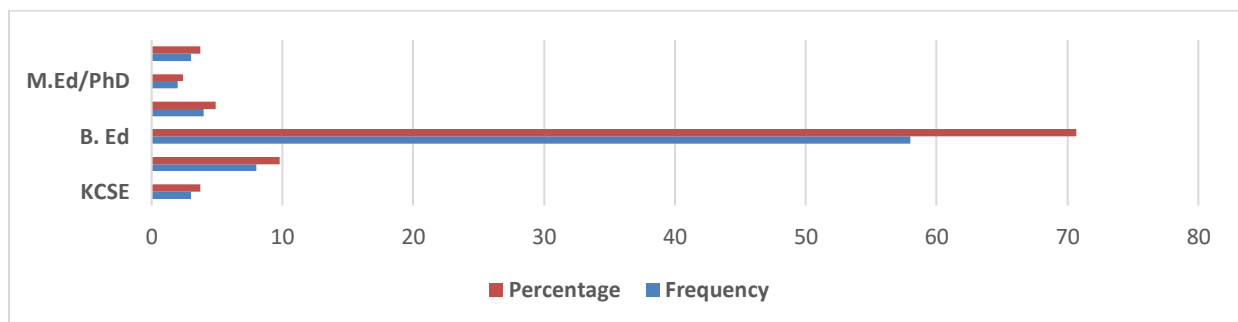

Figure 5. Education qualifications of teachers

It was significant to note as shown in table 5 that a large proportion, 66 (80.6%) of teachers in Central Kenya Conference SDA Secondary schools were trained and qualified to teach in secondary schools, as required by the Ministry of Education of Kenya. Fifty eight (70.7%) were Bachelor of Education degree holders. Eight (9.8%) were Diploma holders. KCSE holders were 3 (3.7%), PGDE holders were 4 (4.9%). There were 2 (2.4%) teachers who held a master's degree. Three (3.7%) teachers showed that they are trained in other areas like Bachelor of Science. However, it is, therefore, important to note that schools in Central Kenya Conference have well trained and qualified school teachers.

Table 5. *Teachers' perceptions of principals' practice of servant leadership through support*

	Statement	$\bar{x}$	s
1	My principal has a caring personality	2.45	1.12
2	My principal encourages me when I am discouraged	2.38	1.03
3	My principal supports me when need arises	2.45	0.97
4	My principal has best interests of workers in mind	2.43	1.11
5	My principal helps me in difficult times	2.35	1.07
6	My principal guides and keeps me on track when I err	2.43	1.06
7	My principal has confidence in me	2.44	1.07
8	My principal recognizes my unique abilities	2.47	1.06
9	My principal challenges me to develop my full potential	2.39	1.07
10	My principal gives me a second chance when I err	2.49	0.99
11	My principal gives me time to grow without coercing me	2.47	1.05
12	My principal is an inspiration to me	2.31	1.05
13	When I have challenges at work, I am free to share them with My principal	2.22	0.99
	Average	**2.40**	**0.87**

N=82

Table 5 shows the highest $\bar{x}$ = 2.49. Teachers at that $\bar{x}$ indicated "My Principal gives me a second chance when I err". This mean implies that CKC SDA secondary schools teachers tend to disagree that principals are patient with those who make mistakes; which should not be the case. The other mean score was 2.47 "My Principal gives me time to grow without coercing me". This mean implies that still, teachers tend to disagree that principals give them time to grow without coercing them. The same $\bar{x}$ =2.47 was generated by responses to "My Principal recognizes my unique abilities, which is another unfortunate aspect to have in CKC SDA secondary schools.

"My Principal has a caring personality" yielded $\bar{x}$ = of 2.45. A similar mean was generated by teachers on: "My principal supports me when need arises". This mean shows that teachers tend to disagree to the facts that their principals have a caring personality and support them when needs arise. This is a negative implication on the part of these principals. The attribute, "My Principal has best interest of workers in mind" had $\bar{x}$=2.43. "My Principal guides and keeps me on track when I err"; had $\bar{x}$ =2.43. This means teachers tend to disagree that principals guide and keep them on track when they err and it also implies that principals rarely have best interests of workers in mind. They therefore need to improve on these aspects. The variable, "My principal

has confidence in me had $\bar{x}$=2.44 and meant that according to teachers, principals tend not to have confidence in them. This shows that principals lack confidence in their teachers in CKC SDA secondary schools, an unexpected trend.

The lowest $\bar{x}$ =score was 2.20, generated by responses on "When I have challenges at work, I am free to share them with my Principal". This implies that teachers are reluctant to share their work challenges with their Principals; which should not be the case. This may be because they do not have trust that they can get assistance from their leaders. This low mean was not consistent with Spears (2004) who noted that servant leaders support persons at work by identifying those who are hurting and assisting them as much as possible. A mean score of 2.39 was generated by teachers on, "My principal challenges me to develop my full potential". "My principal is an inspiration to me" generated $\bar{x}$ =2.31, implying that principals tend not to inspire teachers in CKC SDA secondary schools. The overall mean score on this aspect of assessment was 2.40. This means principals rarely challenge teachers to develop their full potentials and teachers tend to disagree that principals practice servant leadership style in CKC SDA secondary schools.

Comparison by Gender

Table 5 shows the outcome of the hypothesis on differences on the perceptions male and female on the practice of servant leadership through support in the institutions under considerations. It had been hypothesized that there *is no significant difference between the evaluation rating of male and female teachers on the principals' practice of servant leadership.* Table 5 shows the output when the t-test was statistically computed.

Table 5. *T-test output on the evaluation rating of male and female teachers*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Leadership through support	Equal variances assumed	2.333	.131	1.084	80	**.282**
	Equal variances not assumed			1.071	73.001	.288

The t-test for equality of means generated sig. (2-tailed) of .282 for leadership through support Since *p*>0.05 for all the three cases, thus, there *is no significant difference between the evaluation rating of male and female teachers on the principals' practice of servant leadership.* Male and female teachers have similar evaluation of their principals' practice of servant leadership in all areas.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study: - Concerning demographic information of principals, there were more (83.3%) male principals in CKC SDA secondary schools than their female (16.7%) counterparts. Principals in CKC SDA secondary schools did work at the same station for a long period of time; (66.7%) had stayed for a period of 5-10 years. Principals in CKC SDA secondary schools were well trained and qualified to lead their institutions; (66.7%) had Bachelor of Education degree. CKC Education Department was sensitive and promoted principals' leadership workshops; (100%) had attended these leadership workshops significantly. On teachers' demographic information, there tend to be gender balance in CKC SDA schools teacher employment, because (53.7%) were males and (46.3%) were females. Majority, (59.8%) of teachers in CKC SDA secondary schools were middle aged. However, other age groups were represented from 20 to 50 years. Teachers in CKC SDA secondary schools had required qualifications to teach in their schools, except for (7.4%) of teachers who had KCSE and Bachelor of Science degree qualifications, which are not recognized by the Teachers' Service Commission of Kenya. CKC Education department, on average, sponsored teachers for workshops. On teachers' evaluation on principals' practice of servant leadership style in CKC SDA secondary schools through support, the teachers' evaluation rating revealed that principals in CKC SDA secondary schools rarely practice servant leadership style through support. On significance difference in the perception of teachers on principals practice of servant leadership style in CKC SDA secondary schools through support based on Gender, Age and teaching experience; Gender, age, and teaching experience did not affect the evaluation rating of teachers on CKC secondary school principals' practice of servant leadership style through support as they have similar evaluation across categories.

5. Conflict of interest
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

6. Ethics committee clearance
The author confirms that the study does not require ethics committee approval according to research integrity guidelines in their country.

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