

*The Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Social Sustainability: A Case of a Health-Dedicated University

Zeynep Görmezoğlu¹ 

¹Dr., Bezmialem Vakif University, General Secretariat, Istanbul, Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Social sustainability is one of the least researched and applied topics in the field of sustainability, and identifying the leadership approach associated with social sustainability is equally critical for organisations. The main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of servant leadership on social sustainability. The scope of this research is the Bezmialem Foundation University, which is a health-dedicated and nonprofit university, in Istanbul. The survey method was chosen as the data collection method, and a questionnaire was completed by 730 people working in the academic and administrative units of Bezmialem Foundation University. In accordance with the findings, positive and significant relationships were found between servant leadership and social sustainability. The originality of this study is derived from the fact that the relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability was examined. This research fills an important theoretical gap in the relevant field. Thus, it is likely that it would be beneficial for organisations that want to enhance their social sustainability practises to highlight the servant leadership approach as a leadership style. It is expected that the results of this research will be used by social sustainability practitioners and researchers within the framework of leadership approaches.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Social Sustainability, Health Sector.

JEL Code: M19, S01, P46

Introduction

The importance of the sustainability approach has also increased in the modern society of the new age to such an extent that all over the world, issues such as the rapid increase in population, the development of technology, the change of relations between economies, population, poverty, health, conservation of oil and ecosystems, food, water, climate change, etc. are dealt with (Bormane et al., 2017). Sustainability issues such as growing inequality and the degradation of livelihoods from natural resources transition to a more sustainable economic system gradually necessary (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). Various challenges such as globalization, climate change, resource depletion, and ageing population show that the development of societies can no longer be achieved with quantitative economic growth, and qualitative changes are a necessity (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018). In addition, many organisations have constantly faced environmental changes in recent years and have been forced to adapt to sustainability resulting from the laws implemented by the government and pressure from society (Cella-de-Oliveira, 2013). A successful realization of sustainability is only possible if economic, environmental, and social objectives are fulfilled together (Afshari et al., 2022). In this respect, while the concept of sustainable development generally refers to creating a balance between the environmental, economic, and social bases of sustainability, the meaning of the social basis and its related purposes remain uncertain (Murphy, 2012). Within this framework, social sustainability performance has been relatively neglected and developed far less than the statement that emphasizes its economic and environmental aspects (Kamali et al., 2018).

While social sustainability involves 'respecting human rights and equal opportunities for everyone in society', it also includes 'giving great importance to local communities, maintaining and strengthening their life support systems, recognizing and respecting different cultures, avoiding all forms of exploitation' (Mejia et al., 2022). As social sustainability focuses on individual assets such as education, skills, experience, consumption, income, and job/employment, it also includes each citizen's active physical, legal, educational, and participatory access to society's resources and services (Omann & Spangenberg), 2002). The complex and multifaceted nature of sustainability demands/needs exceptional leadership skills, such as servant leadership, which plays a

Corresponding Author: Zeynep Görmezoğlu E-mail: zgormezoglu@bezmialem.edu.tr

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crucial role in ensuring the sustainability and economic growth of both the organization and its employees and in establishing the mission and vision of the organization . (Batool, et. al., 2022). In this context, servant leadership surpasses many leadership theories because of its unique structure, such as philanthropy and multidimensional leadership characteristics. It primarily focuses on serving its followers, aims to achieve an extraordinary vision that will create value for society, and encompasses the situational, transformational, and personal characteristics of leadership. In addition, servant leadership offers a multidimensional theory of leadership that incorporates all aspects of leadership, including ethical, relational, and outcome-based dimensions. It is similar to existing leadership theories, but it also differs from them in that it proposes a meaningful leadership path for individuals, organisations , and societies to achieve sustainable results. (Coetzer et. al., 2017). Batool et al. (2022) emphasise that servant leadership is a vital resource that prioritises and empowers employees and contributes to their sustainability in the workplace by focusing on making them more resilient and creative in the workplace. Servant leadership is a timeless phenomenon that has existed in many cultures, civilisations, and religions for thousands of years. From ancient Greek philosophers to military commanders and religious leaders, there are examples of servant leaders in different civilisations (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The concept of ‘servant leadership’ first appeared in the literature on leadership in Robert K. Greenleaf’s article (1970) titled ‘The Servant as Leader’. Since the beginning of the 1990s, with Graham (1991), Spears (1995), Buchen (1998), Farming, and their colleagues’ studies (1999), it has become widespread in the academic field as a new leadership style. Especially in the 2000s, incidents such as the 2001 Enron and 2015 Volkswagen scandals, which occurred due to ethical violations in the world’s leading businesses, revealed the necessity of switching to the virtuous leadership model, which gives importance to human and ethical values, instead of the rational economic model (Markham, 2015). In this context, servant leadership takes its place in the literature as a leadership approach that focuses primarily on serving its followers, people, and society, while giving importance to ethical and moral values.

Servant leadership emphasizes the personal development of followers and adds a social responsibility component to transformational leadership. Employee well-being is highly important for servant leaders. Servant leadership emphasizes sustainability and corporate social responsibility by focusing on creating a pleasant work environment in which employees can work, rather than obtaining high returns on investments. This type of leadership best fits the theory of corporate social responsibility among the new leadership types (Broch et al., 2020). Corporate social responsibility theory defines a business’s responsibility for its environment, its social and societal needs, and the quality of management of its operations. Businesses with a corporate social responsibility understanding demonstrate/exhibit philanthropic and socially responsible business practises beyond compliance and economic self-interest (Liu, 2018). In this framework, servant leadership and corporate social responsibility embody similar basic principles. Corporate social responsibility theory brings together and explains both servant leadership and social sustainability on common grounds. In line with these theoretical connexions and evidence, it is likely that there is a relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability.

In this study, while social sustainability, which has just begun to be conceptualized, is examined at an organizational level from employees’ perspective, the concept of servant leadership is discussed as a factor that is expected to be useful and effective in the development of this concept. In the literature, more attention is paid to the organizational output of social sustainability; therefore, prior knowledge of this concept remains limited. In this context, this study aims to determine the critical effect of servant leadership on social sustainability and to provide new perspectives and insights to researchers working in this field.

1. Social Sustainability

In recent years, sustainability has been at the top of the research agenda for academic institutions and industries. Therefore, many businesses have begun to integrate sustainability into their business models (Popovic et. al., 2018). The inclusion of institutional sustainability in the business environment ensures that the business is aware of its environmental, social, and economic capital (Lopes et. al., 2017). The social aspect of sustainability has become more evident because of the public distrust of in business practises exemplified by scandals surrounding Enron and Volkswagen, alongside companies engaging in more actions for social welfare. While the social aspect presents the tension between the interests of the business and society, it also makes it possible to meet the interests of society through the sustainability practises of the businesses. In other words, from a micro perspective, when organisations respond to sustainability, they also respond to a macro-level social concern for habitat and quality of life. Therefore, significant efforts have been made in the academic literature to examine the social aspect of sustainability (Choi & Ng, 2011). According to Basiago (1999), social sustainability includes the concepts of equality, empowerment, accessibility, participation, sharing, cultural identity, and institutional stability. Social sustainability endeavours to protect the environment through economic growth and poverty reduction.

Social sustainability shifts the focus of organisations to both internal and external communities (i.e., employees). Social sustainability means that organisations (and production facilities) provide equal opportunities to people, promote diversity, support connexions within and outside the community, ensure quality of life, and provide democratic processes and accountable governance structures (Gimenez et.al., 2012). It also refers to actively supporting the creation and preservation of the talents of future generations, promoting healthy living, and supporting equal and democratic behaviours that favour quality of life inside

and outside the organization (Longoni & Cagliano, 2015). From a social perspective, society today has become more sensitive to issues that affect human life, dignity, and rights, such as fair labour practises and social justice (Vivoda & Kemp, 2019). Like the concept of sustainability, social sustainability is neither absolute nor fixed. Social sustainability should be considered as a dynamic concept that will change over time (year by year/decade by decade) at a certain point. While there is relatively limited literature focusing specifically on social sustainability, there is a broader literature on the overlapping concepts of social capital, social cohesion, social inclusion, and social exclusion (Dempsey et. al., 2011).

As can be seen, social sustainability is concerned with the human side of sustainability. Social sustainability encompasses the impact of organisations on the social systems in which they conduct business and maintain relationships with various stakeholders. (Hussain et. al., 2018). Social sustainability measurement requires a balance between quantitative and qualitative indicators. In addition, there is still uncertainty about what social sustainability really means. In these debates, it is seen that the determinants of the 'social' factor depend on the determining framework. In this context, businesses are being further examined daily regarding the social impacts they create. In parallel with this, Staniškienė and Stankevičiūtė (2018) developed a measurement system that can evaluate social sustainability from the perspective of the employee. Six aspects that make up this conceptualization are briefly explained below.

Employee Participation: Employee participation in organisations equips individuals with the skills, knowledge, and resources to generate new ideas, contribute to making informed strategic decisions, and apply them effectively through the distribution of power and knowledge and building motivation (Wohlgemuth et al., 2019). The basic principle behind management-led initiatives to increase employee participation in organisations is to ensure that low-level employees are more actively involved in decision-making and work processes, while simultaneously giving employees more autonomy and control over their job duties and working methods.

Employee Collaboration: Employee collaboration is the opposite of employee competition (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018). Collaboration at work is a crucial social behavior in the workplace, especially when work is interdependent. It is a key mechanism for employees to find solutions to work-related problems with the support of their colleagues. Collaboration in organisations with social sustainability is a phenomenon that occurs not only between employees but also between management and employees (Balser & Winkler, 2012).

Equal Opportunity: Equal opportunity is an ideal situation where everyone has the chance to participate in any form of organizational activities and achieve success (Jonsen et. al., 2015). Ensuring equal opportunities in organisations includes tolerating differences, adopting a management approach based on human rights, and developing policies to enhance the representation of women and minorities in senior management (Sharma, 2016).

Employee Development: Employee development is vital to maintaining and developing the capabilities of both individual employees, and the organization as a whole. The primary basis of the investment, which is perceived as something intended for employee development, is creating conditions for employees to believe their organization values their contributions and cares about their employability (Lee & Bruvold, 2003).

Occupational Health and Safety: Employed adults spend a quarter of their life at work, and work pressure and demands could affect their physical and mental health. Workplace hazards continue to take their toll on society in terms of employee morbidity and mortality and financial and social costs, which are part of the ongoing public responsibility to protect the well-being of the workforce (Schulte, 2007). Working in a healthy organizational climate under these changing unsafe working conditions has been one of the greatest needs of employees. Organisations with social sustainability practises are constantly improving their occupational safety and health practises by giving importance to those needs of their employees.

External Collaboration: Collaborations between global businesses and local communities are essential for meeting the challenges of well-being and sustainable growth. Collaborations can focus on different levels of planning, such as local, regional, or national, depending on the goal, and often include nonprofit organizations, businesses, communities, academies, and other external stakeholders (Cavicchi & Vagnoni, 2017). From a social perspective, sustainability both enables organisations to attract and retain skilled workforce and ensures access to the source of these human resources (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018).

2. Servant Leadership

At first glance, the idea of 'servant as leader' is perceived as an oxymoron; servant and leader appear to be contradictory concepts. This is because it is difficult to think and act as a leader and a servant at the same time (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). A person is either a leader or a servant. It does not seem logical to be both at the same time. However, Greenleaf has combined these seemingly contradictory concepts into a practical and powerful combination. According to Greenleaf, servant leadership is a management style in which leadership and service are in harmony with each other and in a logical interaction with the environment. The servant leader has a strong will to serve as well as strong leadership ability. Most importantly, the servant leader can combine these

two traits in a way that positively reinforces each other (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009). Greenleaf based his view of ‘servant leadership’ on the philosophical traditions and teachings of Judaism and Christianity (Reinke, 2004). He stated that the idea came about when he read Hermann Hesse’s book ‘Journey to the East’, and after reading this book, he came up with the idea that a person (the Leo character in the story) can be a servant and a leader at the same time (Greenleaf, 2002). There, he discovers that Leo, known as the servant, is actually the head of the community, the spiritual guide, and the great and noble leader (Greenleaf, 1998). A person who strongly supports the idea of serving the needs of others and then fulfils his duties conscientiously, that is, the person with the understanding of ‘servant first’ is more likely to be a natural servant than the person who is the ‘leader first’ (Greenleaf, 2002). This difference manifests itself in the concern of the one who makes servanthood a priority and ensures that other people’s primary needs are met. In addition, the understanding of ‘going beyond one’s own personal interests’ is adopted as one of the main characteristics of the servant leader. Although there are similar understandings in other leadership theories, this is the first to include this concept in the centre of the model (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

King (1994), emphasized that in the servant leadership approach, a leader’s primary responsibility is to serve the organization by establishing a fundamental connexion between himself/herself and his/her followers. According to Kouzes and Posner (1993), the admired leader does not place himself in the centre; he places his followers there. The servant leader does not seek people’s attention; instead, they show concern for others. Spears (1995) defined the characteristics of a servant leader as listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, dedication to people’s development, and community building. Graham (1991) states that servant leadership goes one step beyond transformational leadership; followers not only improve their intellectual and skill development but also their spiritual questioning capacity. Sendjaya and Cooper (2011) defined servant leadership as a holistic and multidimensional leadership approach that encompasses the rational, relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of both leaders and followers.

There are many studies in the literature dealing with the consequences of servant leadership in organisations. Empirical studies have found that servant leadership, which is positively related to, demonstrated the capacity to produce favourable individual and organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment (Hoveida et. al., 2011; Harwiki, 2016), work satisfaction (Mehta & Pillay, 2011), organizational citizenship behavior (Bambele et al, 2012; Harwiki, 2016), organizational justice and commitment to change (Kool & Van Dierendonck, 2012), organizational trust (Pouramiri, & Mehdinezhad, 2017), workplace spirituality (Herman, 2010; Williams Jr., 2017), team performance (Song et.al., 2015), employee performance (Harwiki, 2016), employee satisfaction (Donia et al., 2016), creativity (Williams Jr., 2017), and needs satisfaction (Peachey, 2018).

Servant leadership comprises religious terms such as God, spirit, and spirituality; psychological concepts such as personal development and self-awareness; and contemporary management approaches such as horizontal/flat organization, shared vision, and sustainability at the same time (Wong & Page, 2003). Servant leadership is essentially a phenomenon that is too complex to be defined simply. Thus, servant leadership has a multidimensional meaning as it freely uses terms from different disciplines.

3. Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Social Sustainability

In this study, the relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability is examined within the framework of corporate social responsibility theory. From an economic perspective, it can be argued that for profit-seeking businesses, corporate success equates to profit maximization (Toker, 2023). However, the corporate social responsibility approach emphasizes that success for businesses involves more than just achieving economic objectives; it also involves contributing to social solutions (Carroll, 1991). In its simplest form, CSR can be defined as a set of management practises that minimize the negative impacts of a business’ activities on society while maximizing its positive impact (Pinney, 2001). In this context, CSR expresses the overall relationship of the business with all its stakeholders. Stakeholders include customers, employees, communities, owners/investors, the government, suppliers, and rivals. Elements of social responsibility include allocating resources for social assistance, employee relations, creating and maintaining employment, environmental management, and financial performance (Khoury et al., 1999). In this regard, corporate social responsibility forms the theoretical basis of social sustainability. The corporate social responsibility efforts of businesses are significant steps towards ensuring social sustainability, so much so that supporting the welfare and development of societies is one of the key objectives of social sustainability.

Corporate social responsibility is related to a business treating its stakeholders ethically or responsibly. Being ethical or responsible means behaving in acceptable ways in contemporary societies, which involves both social and economic responsibilities. Stakeholders exist both within and outside the business. Accordingly, the broader aim of social responsibility is to create higher living standards for both those inside and outside the business while maintaining profitability (Hopkins, 2003). In this respect, servant leaders attach greater importance to corporate social responsibility. By behaving ethically and responsibly in their relationships with employees and stakeholders, servant leaders contribute to the development of a servant leadership culture within the organization through their corporate social responsibility efforts. Servant leaders also motivate employees to contribute to society and the environment by providing the motivation and support necessary for corporate social responsibility practises. The

combined implementation of these two approaches can help businesses achieve sustainable success that not only focuses on profit but also benefits society and the environment.

Since corporate social responsibility encompasses actions that go beyond the interests of the business and promote social volunteering benefits and actions required by the laws (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001), it creates the theoretical foundation and connexions necessary to determine the impact of servant leadership on social sustainability. Therefore, the corporate social responsibility approach contributes significantly to the formulation of the research question and the development of hypotheses.

Servant leadership is essentially a long-term and transformational approach to life and work life, and a way that has the potential to create positive change in society (Spears, 1995; Spears, 2004). Incorporated into the leadership vision, the leader identifies other appropriate individuals in the organization who will embrace the mission, organizational goals, and values. When this is complete, the organizational pyramid is inverted. Therefore, the servant leadership approach represents a *pull model* rather than a *push model* in achieving the vision (Page, & Wong, 2017). According to Van Dierendonck (2011), servant leadership is effective on followers at the individual, team and organizational levels. Servant leadership provides a stronger focus on sustainability and social responsibility, especially at the organizational level, than other leadership types. In this direction, servant leadership emphasizes the importance of philanthropy, stewardship, which form the basis of investment in the development and transformation of society, and community building, which are the main components of corporate social responsibility (Kincaid, 2012). Similarly, studies on social sustainability show that the main components of corporate social responsibility are philanthropy (Mani et.al, 2018; Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2020), social development (Uttam et. al., 2022), and social responsibility (Afshari et. al., 2022). According to Toussaint et al., corporate social responsibility is an antecedent of social sustainability, while social sustainability is a broader concept that includes social responsibility (Toussaint et al., 2021). For this reason, there are few studies in the literature dealing with the relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability. Batool et al. (2022) established a new relationship by investigating the roles of psychological resilience and creativity in the correlation between servant leadership and organizational sustainability, encompassing its economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Sher and Nawaz (2021), on the other hand, identified the mediating role of green human resources management in facilitating the positive impact of servant leadership on enterprises' social sustainability performance. In a similar vein, Alafeshat and Tanova (2019) explored the connexion between servant leadership and organizational sustainability, discovering a positive influence of servant leadership on employee satisfaction and retention, which is an indicator of organizational sustainability.

In sum, when studies related to social sustainability are examined, some empirical studies on the relationship between social sustainability and organizational performance show positive associations (Goel vd., 2020; Hale vd., 2019; Lee vd., 2021; Mani vd., 2020; Rotondo vd., 2019; Schönborn vd., 2019). In addition, studies in the literature have evaluated and examined the performance indicators and criteria of social sustainability, the impact of social sustainability on financial performance, and how businesses are assessed and examined in terms of social sustainability. There are very few studies on the relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability. It is important to consider and determine the relationship between these two variables for businesses to achieve their corporate social sustainability goals and objectives.

The originality of this study is derived from the fact that the relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability was examined. This research fills an important theoretical gap in the relevant field. Thus, it is likely that it would be beneficial for organisations that want to enhance their social sustainability practises to highlight the servant leadership approach as a leadership style. It is expected that the results of this research will be used by social sustainability practitioners and researchers within the framework of leadership approaches.

From this empirical evidence framework, servant leadership and its organizational results are conceptually related to the previously described social sustainability dimensions (employee participation, employee collaboration, equal opportunity, employee development, occupational safety and health, and external collaborations). For this reason, the potential role of servant leadership in social sustainability is reasonable. Hence, in this study, this research was conducted to test the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis: A positive relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability within organisations.

4. Research

4.1. Research Purpose and Model

This study examines the effect of servant leadership on social sustainability in organisations within the framework of the model shown in Figure 1. In this regard, cross-sectional data were collected from employees working in the institution. In the following sections, the methods and findings will be explained in detail.



Figure 1. Research Model

4.2. Data Collection Tools

The questionnaire method was used as a data collection tool for the variables in the research model of this study. The questionnaire form was compiled from scales previously used in the literature. For the ‘Servant Leadership’ independent variable, the ‘Servant Leadership Scale’ consisting of seven aspects and 28 statements developed by Liden and colleagues (2008) was used by Görmezoğlu Gökçen (2019) with its Turkish adaptation. For ‘Social Sustainability’, which is the dependent variable of the model, The ‘Social Sustainability Scale’ consisting of six aspects and 31 statements developed by Staniskiene and Stankeviciute (2018), was used. This scale is one of the first instruments based on the perspective of employees in the evaluation of social sustainability in organisations. This scale was adapted from English to Turkish for the first time by the author (Görmezoğlu Gökçen, 2019). Nyhan and Marlowe’s (1997) four-statement scale was used for the ‘Organisational Trust’ variable, which was used as a control variable in the model. The reason for choosing this control variable is that the phenomenon of organizational trust reflects the positive expectations of the employees that an organization will implement policies that care about its employees, are transparent towards them and take their needs into account (Börü et.al., 2007), and the assumption that this will be directly related to social sustainability. In addition, demographic variables such as gender, tenure, and department were used as control variables.

The original scales were translated from English to Turkish and back to English by a team of Bezmialem Foundation University Foreign Languages Department lecturers in order to adapt to cultural differences. After the final cheque, the statements were finalized. In addition, demographic questions were added to the questionnaire to measure the descriptive statistics of the sample group. A pilot study was conducted with 105 personnel working at Bezmialem Foundation University to evaluate the statements in the scales. At this stage, the respondents were asked to indicate incomprehensible or incomplete statements, and reliability analyses were performed using the collected data. In line with the findings, it was seen that there was no need to make any changes in the statements, and it was decided to apply the questionnaire.

4.3. Sampling and Data Collection

The data collected from personnel who worked at the academic units of Bezmialem Foundation University (faculty of medicine, faculty of dentistry, faculty of pharmacy, faculty of health sciences, institute of health sciences, vocational school of health services), the general secretariat, its affiliated administrative units, the university hospital, and Bezmialem Hospital were used as the primary sources. This is a study in the social sciences and was conducted with informed consent in accordance with ethical standards and guidelines. Before questionnaire forms were sent to participants, permission and ethical approval was obtained from the Rectorate of Bezmialem Foundation University so that questionnaires could be distributed to academic and administrative staff (Permission document no: 54022451-044-5047/ 05 July 2019). Informed consent was obtained by all participants, and all methods were carried out in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations. Questionnaire forms were sent to all 2,614 personnel at the institution, and 730 of the responses were edited to form the final data set. Thus, the questionnaire response rate is approximately 28%. To understand why Bezmialem Foundation University was chosen for this research, it would be appropriate to briefly provide information about the history of the institution (Görmezoğlu Gökçen, 2019).

In the establishment of foundation (vakif) institutions, serving the community through foundations and diversifying the services offered to contribute to the development of society, "Female Sultans" had an undeniably significant role in the Ottoman Empire. As an example of female sultans who founded foundation institutions and contributed to the development of society, Bezmialem Valide Sultan, the founder of Bezmialem University, will be briefly mentioned.

Bezmialem Valide Sultan holds the distinction of being the sultan who founded the most foundations in the Ottoman Empire. Between 1840 and 1853, Bezmialem Valide Sultan commissioned a wide variety of significant charitable works ranging from schools to mosques, fountains, and hospitals (Terzi, 2018). Her contributions were particularly notable for Istanbul. The first modern hospital for public health, the "Valide Sultan Gureba-y Müslimin Hospital," was established in her name in 1845, based on

a rich endowment. In addition to the hospital, a mosque and a fountain exist. In 1845, the opening of the hospital commissioned by Valide Sultan was reported, and the following comment about the hospital is significant: "To set a good example for philanthropists, a new and excellent hospital was built in Istanbul for the poor by the Sultan's mother, Bezmialem Sultan, and ever since then, every day, impoverished and destitute patients have come here for treatment. The hospital in Yenibahçe is a beneficial act of charity" (Sakaoğlu, 2008). Bezmialem Valide Sultan can be considered as an exemplary servant leader in history because of her charitable works and accomplishments aimed primarily at meeting the needs of the people and attaining the pleasure of Allah, based on the understanding of "Serve the people so that you may serve God." (Sakaoğlu, 2008).

In 2010, the decision to establish Bezmialem Vakif University instead of Bezmialem Vakif Gureba Hospital was made by the General Directorate of Foundations, in accordance with Article 130 of the Constitution and the provisions of Law No. 2547 on Higher Education. The university was founded on three well-established foundations, namely Bezm-i Alem Valide Sultan, Abdullah Silahtar Agha, and Abdülhamid Sâni, following publication in the Official Gazette dated 24.10.2010 and numbered 27561. Thus, Bezmialem Vakif Gureba Hospital was transformed into a genuinely non-profit foundation university, Bezmialem Vakif University. Today, Bezmialem Vakif Gureba Hospital continues to serve the community as a university hospital, providing uninterrupted health care services to the public.

Today, on the land of Bezmialem Foundation University Hospital, there are the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, and other institutes affiliated to Bezmialem Foundation University, as well as Istanbul University Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. Benevolence of the founder continues to spread throughout the country with the health services offered and the health professionals trained here (Yıldırım, 2013), and meeting the needs of society still maintains its importance and has an impact in terms of improving and developing the society. In addition, the mission of caring for the poor and orphans and educating students with scholarships, as outlined in the Foundation Deed, continues to this day. These ongoing efforts contribute to the social sustainability of society (Görmezoğlu Gökçen, 2019).

Greenleaf and Spears emphasized that the servant leadership approach can be applied at universities, churches, foundations and foundation trustees, businesses, and nursing services organisations (Spears, 1995; Greenleaf, 2002). Derived from this idea, Bezmialem Foundation University was selected for the research, which is an exemplary organization in Turkey established based on a thematic, non-profit, semi-public, semi-private model in the field of health as it offers education and health care services to society and has the characteristics of being a real foundation institution at the same time. Another reason for choosing a real foundation university with faculties and hospitals related to the health care sector in which the research would be conducted is that research on servant leadership has been carried out mostly in educational institutions, and less research has been conducted in health institutions. In addition, no academic research has been conducted at universities, health institutions, foundations, or other institutions on social sustainability in Turkey. Because Bezmialem Foundation University is a foundation university offering health education and health care services, it is possible to have a servant leadership approach and characteristics in this organization, since it contains all three of the characteristics of being an educational institution, a health institution, and a foundation. What is relatively less known here is the level of social sustainability at the institution and the effect of servant leadership on it (Görmezoğlu Gökçen, 2019).

4.4. Research Results

The descriptive statistics of the sample group are presented in Table 1.

Validity and Reliability: To ensure the validity and reliability of the scales used in the research, previously tested scales in the literature were used; translation-back translation method was used for the linguistic and cultural adaptation. In addition, a pilot survey was conducted. In the next step, confirmatory factor analyses were performed using the collected data.

Before the analysis, the skewness and kurtosis values of the data were measured. Since the values were within the range of ± 2.00 reflecting the normal distribution (George, & Mallery, 2010). It was deemed appropriate to apply parametric tests.

Because of the confirmatory factor analysis of the Servant Leadership scale, the standard factor loads of each item were initially examined, and three items with factor loadings below 0.50 were removed. Following repeated analysis with 25 items, the model fit indices were examined, and it was seen that the fit indices were within acceptable limits ($\chi^2 / df = 3.55$; $p=0.0001$; $RMR=0.026$; $GFI=0.905$; $TLI=0.946$; $CFI=0.954$; $RMSEA = 0.059$). To test the convergent validity of the scale, Composite Reliability (CR, Composite Reliability) and Average Variance (AVE, Average Variance Extracted) were examined. Accordingly, the composite reliability should be above 0.70, and the average variance should be above 0.50 (Hair et. al., 2010). Consequently, the average variance in the subscales is above 0.50. It was determined that the composite reliability value of only one subscale was below 0.70. Values above 0.60 are also acceptable for convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Because of the confirmatory factor analysis of the Social Sustainability scale, an item that showed high correlation with more than one factor at the same time was removed from the model.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for sampling

Characteristics	Frequency (n=730)	%
Gender		
Females	429	59
Males	301	41
Age		
18-30	349	48
31-40	213	29
41-50	115	16
51 and above	53	7
Department		
Academic	315	43
Administrative	415	57
Working time at the institution		
1-5 years	521	71
6-10 years	192	26
11 years and above	17	3

Following repeated analysis with 30 items, the fit indices of the model were found to be within acceptable limits ($\chi^2 / df = 3.05$; $p=0.0001$; $RMR=0.037$; $GFI=0.905$; $TLI= 0.940$; $CFI=0.947$; $RMSEA= 0.053$). When the convergent validity of the scale was examined, the composite reliability was above 0.70, and the average variance was above 0.50. Only one subscale was 0.49. However, because this value is very close to 0.50, the item was not deleted from the relevant subscale. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), if the explained variance is less than 0.50, but the construct reliability coefficient is higher than 0.60, the convergent validity of the construct is still established. Factor analysis was carried out using the maximum likelihood method for the one-dimensional Organisational Trust scale, and a single factor explaining 65% of the variance was obtained.

Correlations: After taking the arithmetic average of the statements of the subscales in the scales, the average, standard deviation, and correlations between the variables are presented in Table 2. Accordingly, there are positive and significant relationships among all variables. In addition, the average scores of the dimensions of Servant Leadership are in the range of 4-4.5, and the average scores of the dimensions of Social Sustainability vary in the range of 3.5-4 values.

Regression Analysis: Hierarchical linear regression was used to test the hypothesis of ‘there is a positive relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability’. The model’s dependent variable was Social Sustainability, and the independent variable was Servant Leadership. Values were calculated by taking the average of all statements belonging to the subscales. In the first block, dummy coded gender (female=0, male=1), tenure (less than two years of service=0, others=1), and department (academic=0, administrative=1) variables were analysed as a set of controls. The first model was significant with an R-square value of 0.023. In the second block, Organisational Trust was added to the model as another control variable. The new model accounted for a significant amount of variance in social sustainability with an adjusted R square value of 0.575. Servant Leadership was added to the model as the independent variable in the third block. In this final model, the adjusted R square value was 0.648, which significantly increased by 0.073 ($p<.001$) compared with model 2. This means that the inclusion of Servant Leadership in the model accounts for 7.3 percent variation in Social Sustainability. Table 3 summarises the analysis.

Looking at the coefficients for the final regression model, Gender, Tenure, and Department variables were insignificant. Organisational Trust ($B=0.432$, $p<.001$) and Servant Leadership ($B=0.325$, $p<.001$) were significant. In other words, when Gender, Tenure, Department, and Organisational Trust were controlled, for every 1 unit increase in Servant Leadership, Social Sustainability was expected to increase by 0.325 units. Table 4 displays the coefficients for each model.

Based on this finding, it was concluded that the research hypothesis was supported.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables

Variables	Subscale	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Servant Leadership	1 Emotional Healing	4,14	0,77	1													
	2 Creating Value for the Community	4,23	0,65	,666**	1												
	3 Conceptual Skills	4,36	0,67	,668**	,688**	1											
	4 Empowerment	4,19	0,76	,695**	,632**	,698**	1										
	5 Helping Subordinates Grow	4,10	0,81	,690**	,655**	,684**	,734**	1									
	6 Prioritising Subordinates	3,98	0,84	,728**	,661**	,696**	,752**	,787**	1								
	7 Ethical Behaviour	4,39	0,68	,636**	,637**	,728**	,661**	,632**	,695**	1							
Social Sustainability	8 Employee Participation	4,02	0,68	,541**	,534**	,508**	,566**	,571**	,588**	,523**	1						
	9 Employee Collaboration	4,01	0,71	,470**	,485**	,501**	,526**	,543**	,519**	,496**	,745**	1					
	10 Equal Opportunity	3,48	0,94	,328**	,346**	,347**	,397**	,418**	,453**	,421**	,549**	,557**	1				
	11 Employee Development	3,83	0,88	,333**	,337**	,363**	,385**	,436**	,436**	,425**	,516**	,512**	,688**	1			
	12 Occupational Health and Safety	3,85	0,77	,397**	,398**	,439**	,418**	,401**	,456**	,484**	,503**	,533**	,626**	,669**	1		
	13 External Collaboration	3,94	0,68	,380**	,417**	,415**	,418**	,407**	,441**	,486**	,520**	,524**	,594**	,660**	,726**	1	

** $p < ,01$; two-tailed test. $N = 730$

Table 3. Model Fit Measures and Comparison

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	ΔR^2	ΔF	df1	df2	P
1	0,153	0,023	0,019	0,023	5,821	3	726	< .001
2	0,760	0,577	0,575	0,554	949,225	1	725	< .001
3	0,806	0,650	0,648	0,073	151,543	1	724	< .001

Table 4. Model Coefficients: Social Sustainability

Model	Predictor	Unstandardised Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients Beta	t	p
1	Intercept	3,677	0,052		71,038	< .001
	Gender	0,181	0,049	0,139	3,713	< .001
	Tenure	0,056	0,048	0,043	1,169	0,243
	Department	0,094	0,048	0,073	1,955	0,051
2	Intercept	1,671	0,073		22,744	< .001
	Gender	0,042	0,032	0,033	1,303	0,193
	Tenure	0,033	0,032	0,025	1,036	0,301
	Department	0,036	0,032	0,028	1,144	0,253
	Organisational Trust	0,559	0,018	0,752	30,810	< .001
3	Intercept	0,801	0,097		8,225	< .001
	Gender	0,057	0,029	0,044	1,923	0,055
	Tenure	0,029	0,029	0,022	1,019	0,308
	Department	0,004	0,029	0,003	0,131	0,895
	Organisational Trust	0,432	0,019	0,582	22,206	< .001
	Servant Leadership	0,325	0,026	0,321	12,310	< .001

5. Conclusion

Especially since the 2000s, unethical practises and scandals that have emerged in multinational enterprises have reduced the trust of society and employees to organisations and leaders/managers and revealed the necessity of switching to a virtuous leadership model that gives importance to human and ethical values instead of the economic rational model. During the transition to this human model, the issue of which leadership styles can be more effective in the sustainability of organisations has been brought to the agenda and discussed in the literature. In this context, the need for ethical values, trust, and creating value for the community has brought the concept of servant leadership to the fore. Servant leadership, which primarily focuses on serving people, its followers, and society, has started to take its place in the literature as a leadership approach that gives importance to ethical and moral values.

Studies have been conducted on the relationship between servant leadership and many different concepts such as organizational trust, organizational citizenship behavior, individual differences, workplace spirituality, organizational justice, optimism, commitment to change, employee empowerment, leader-member interaction, collaborative attitude, organizational commitment, employee satisfaction, employee performance, creativity, and many others. It is observed that these studies started in the early 2000s and have increased by accelerating since 2010. In the literature review, approximately one-fourth of the studies covered the United States of America, and it was determined that these studies set an example in countries and geographies of different cultures such as Indonesia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, South Korea, Germany, Spain, and Australia. In addition, it is understood that studies were carried out in a wide range from education to tourism, hotel management, communication, banking, food industry, textile, retail, automobile, electric power, petrochemistry, military, cosmetics, and health care sectors. Although it has been determined that servant leadership has relationships with many variables at the employee, team, and organizational level, how it will relate to more current phenomena remains a mystery.

While the concept of sustainability primarily started with the discourse that a balance should be established between the environmental, economic, and social aspects of sustainability, the level of social sustainability has been relatively neglected and developed much less than the discourses surrounding its economic and environmental dimensions because the meaning and purposes of the social basis remain unclear. In fact, the studies that conceptualise the phenomenon theoretically are very recent (Atanda, 2019; Hutchins vd., 2019; Kumar ve Anbanandam, 2020; Montalbán-Domingo vd., 2018; Popovic vd., 2018).

Social sustainability is concerned with the human aspect of sustainability. Social sustainability includes concepts such as equality, empowerment, accessibility, participation, sharing, cultural identity, and institutional stability. Hicks and colleagues (2016) stated that there are four basic indicators for measuring social sustainability: welfare, values, institutions, and social inequality. Although social sustainability does not affect the financial performance of the organization in the short term, a sustainability and leadership strategy that is presented systematically in the long term forms the basis for improving social security and business life along with the competence of social sustainability. Empirical studies on the relationship between social sustainability and organizational performance show positive associations (Goel vd., 2020; Hale vd., 2019; Lee vd., 2021; Mani vd., 2020; Rotondo vd., 2019; Schönborn vd., 2019). On the other hand, if social sustainability is considered beneficial, information on its antecedents is very limited. In this study, a question was asked to fill this gap.

The main result of this research is that there is a statistically significant relationship between servant leadership and social sustainability in organisations. Thus, it is likely that it would be beneficial for organisations that want to strengthen their social sustainability practises to highlight the servant leadership approach as a leadership style. In other words, social sustainability policies can be implemented more effectively in organisations with managers who have servant leadership qualities. Therefore, hiring candidates who demonstrate servant leadership qualities in businesses will facilitate the implementation and development of social sustainability. In addition, it has been revealed in this research that managers should give importance to organizational trust as much as the importance given to servant leadership while implementing social sustainability practises within the enterprise.

In ensuring and maintaining social sustainability, human resources practises that are created and placed by servant leaders in the organization, which care about and take the participation and collaboration of employees into consideration, the development of employees, occupational health and safety of employees, and equal opportunity, have a rather important place. Because the research was conducted in only one organization, it is not possible to generalize the results to all organisations and businesses.

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ORCID:

Zeynep Görmezöğlü 0000-0002-0197-0653

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