

# **Teachers' Servant Leadership, Students' Learning Engagement, and Academic Achievement in the Ethiopian Higher Education System**

Mateb Tafere Gedifew and Fentahun Mengistu Bitew

*Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia*

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices, status, and relationships among teachers' servant leadership, students' learning engagements, and academic achievement in the Ethiopian Higher Education System. 270 participants (101 teachers and 169 senior students) selected using simple random sampling provided data via closed-ended questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with purposely selected deans. In addition, records of sample students' GPA were reviewed and analyzed. Mean, t-test, correlations and regressions were used to analyze data. The results were significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Thus, mean values for teachers' servant leadership and students' learning engagement showed weak and infrequent practices though the correlation and regression results showed statistically significant and positive ( $r = 0.072$  &  $R^2 = 0.09$ ). Besides, the correlation and regression results of students' learning engagement and academic achievement were positive and significant ( $r = 0.122$  &  $R^2 = 0.021$ ). Moreover, the association and regression results of teachers' servant leadership and students' academic achievements were also statistically significant and positive ( $r = 0.052$  &  $R^2 = 0.035$ ). From those findings observed, it would be possible to conclude that teachers' leadership has a positive influence on students' learning engagement, and thereby, students' academic achievement in the Ethiopian Higher Education system. Thus, to improve students' learning engagement for better results and make them meaningfully engrossed in their learning, teachers in the Ethiopian Higher Educational Institutions shall be capacitated in a way they create conducive learning environments and meaningfully apply effective instructional strategies like practical learning tasks, problem solving tasks, independent project works, peer-based academic discourses, and debates.

## **Introduction**

Beyond education inputs, students' learning becomes meaningful and productive when the instructional environment is friendly, supportive and service-oriented. Researches show that teaching staffs exhibiting servant behaviors set high standards for students' learning, create smooth interactions and encourage academic and civic excellence among students they serve (Greenleaf 1970). Scardino (2013) also explained that teaching staffs with brands of students first devote their time and effort working on

students holistic developments and bring them to “their highest potential [as well as] prepare them for challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century [so that they are able to withstand] with informed minds and understanding hearts”(p.2).

With regard to teachers as servant leaders, Greenleaf also capitalized that it is not only about sound classroom teaching and availing the required instructional materials but also creating shared responsibilities and enabling as well as empowering learning environments for students. Teachers as servants must also emphasis on serving students first, and focus on that the instructional processes are “relational, empowering, and liberating instead of [considering] teaching as a one-way, top-down, authoritarian enterprise” (Haye as cited in Noland & Richards 2015). At the time of enhanced learning engagement, students also exert their utmost effort and feel delighted in doing given tasks, adhering to the rules and regulations of the institutions, show good motivation to attend classes, and show active participations in and out of the classroom activities (Zyngrie as cited in Noland & Richard 2015).

The concept student learning engagement refers to “energy in action, the connection between person and activity” (DEST 2011). It is the amount of time and energy that students dedicate, and show willingness to complete given educational activities (such as assignments, projects, etc.), attend classes and involve in different educational activities (National Survey of Student Engagement as cited in Conner 2016). Thus, active involvements of students in educational tasks are indicators or signals for positive students’ learning engagements. Christenson et al. (2012) noted regarding this that students’ learning engagements are reflected in areas of academics, behaviorally, emotionally and cognitively; and become strong where teaching staffs’ servant attitudes and practices are high.

Above all, students’ holistic engagements in learning are largely credited to teachers’ professional commitment and servant behaviors exhibited during interactions with their students. Bowman (2005) in this regard confirmed that teachers’ servant leadership practices in the classroom and out of the classroom indicate “universal human longing to be known, to care, and to be cared for in pursuit of the common good”. While serving as servant leaders, teachers’ mentalities for developmental and professional commitment is not simply exhibiting controlling and exercising energy on others rather instilling concord and synergy with students, exercising morality, ethics and integrity, inspiring creative energy, empowering and enhancing growth in students as well as ensure growth and effectiveness of institutions. Besides, Noland & Richards (2015) explained when teachers act as servant leaders in and out of their classroom contexts; it is a great “opportunity to improve education by positively impacting students learning, development, and deepening student-centeredness of instruction”

Thus, when academic staffs (teachers) model themselves in the form of visible personal example and act as servant leaders in the instructional processes, students are highly committed, dedicated, disciplined and strive to excellence in their academic works (Scardino 2013). On top of this, Chan (2016) stated that applying servant leadership in an

instructional environment “creates a supportive, respectful, and demanding environment, which is conducive to cultivate learners with a growth mindset and grit”. If this is the case, students will show deep interests and initiations to attending classes regularly, engage themselves for further readings and learning tasks, and are concerned for their learning and acquire in-depth knowledge and skills during their stay in universities. Consequently, these have their own desirable repercussions on students' emotional, physical and cognitive engagements in their learning and academic achievements which otherwise result in deterioration of students' learning and achievements (Conner 2016).

However, it is not uncommon to observe non-collegial, disrespectful and authoritarian practices reflected by higher education institutions in Ethiopia. In many cases, student-teacher interactions are patriarchal and undemocratic, and they don't encourage students to show active engagements in their learning. In favor of this, a study by Yalew (2004) indicated that the Ethiopian education is characterized by high degree of power where teachers are dominant and assume to know everything in the teaching and learning processes. Besides, authoritarian cultures are also reflected and given high values by the larger society (Habtamu as cited in Yalew 2004) which implants undesirable sense of conformity of students instead of developing their inquisitive minds for critical thinking and creativity. Most surprisingly, teachers also assume themselves as sole sources of knowledge and “dominant figures to guide and control students” (Yalew 2004) activities in the instructional processes. In this regard, the study by David (2011) indicated that “...the educational process [in Ethiopian higher education institutions] is viewed as one of the teacher imparting their knowledge to the students” which de-emphasize learners' self-generated knowledge, examining new facts and ideas critically. On top of this, Abebe (2015) also strongly argues in relation to the norm of academia of Ethiopian higher education institutions in that “professors take roles of masters, bosses, givers, donors, sources, evaluators and experts while the student becomes the slave, subordinate, receiver, needy, destination, evaluatee, and amateur” (p.74). There are also assertions that a great number of teachers (professors) in universities are sustaining the legacy of their predecessors that follow traditional mode of academic life characterized by behaviors of fearful, dominant or authoritative, decisive and undemocratic teacher-student relationships. Thus, it is safe to utter that the kind of behaviors that teachers (professors) demonstrate to their students in the instructional settings in Ethiopian higher education institutions are undemocratic, and authoritative which lead students to mere recipients of knowledge poured from their teachers and limit them from further readings as well as wait for everything to be told to do so. Besides, with such poor learning engagements, students also show excessive reliance on and expect everything related to learning from their teachers than engaging on independent educational tasks and develop critical thinking throughout their academic career.

On top of this, a number of academic staffs usually involve in determining every task or activities for their students than letting them explore, read and come up with their own knowledge and understandings based on their preferences, interests, aptitudes and

competencies. Studies also showed that “for maximum learning to take place and for students to consider learning as something vital in their [academic career], they should actively participate and construct their own meaning out of [what they learn] (Lambert & McCombs as cited in Yalaw 2004). In light of this, Ramsden, (2003) emphasizes that in contemporary educational thinking, teaching is conceptualized as a process of mutual and cooperative works and dedications of both teachers and students that enable students explore knowledge and “change their understanding’ (p.110). Therefore, there is a need for teachers in higher education to encourage and create an environment suitable for students’ meaningful learning to happen.

Moreover, empirical studies conducted related to the status of teachers’ servant leadership, students’ learning engagements and their academic achievement in Ethiopian higher education institutions are inadequate or perhaps non-existent. There are also no studies conducted on teachers’ servant leadership practices and their associations as well as contributions to students’ learning engagements and academic achievement (GPA). This study was, therefore, aimed at investigating the practices, and relationships among teachers’ servant leadership behaviors, students’ learning engagements and academic achievement in the Ethiopian Higher Education System Besides, the findings of the study might help higher education institutions install and acculturate servant leadership behaviors in their work settings. As a result, academic staffs and leaders learn the benefits, strategies and play servant leadership roles that help them enhance students’ learning engagement, improve academic achievements and ultimately, ensure quality education in higher education institutions of Ethiopia. Hence, in addressing such aforementioned objectives and importance of the study, the themes of the study was made to focus on the following guiding questions:

1. What is the status of teachers’ servant leadership practices in the study context?
2. What is the status of students’ learning engagement in the study context?
3. Is there any significant correlation between teachers’ servant leadership and students’ learning engagements?
4. To what extent does teachers’ servanthood practice predict students’ learning engagement?
5. Is there any significant correlation between students’ learning engagements and their academic achievement?
6. To what extent do students’ learning engagements predict their academic achievement?
7. Is there any significant correlation between teachers’ servant leadership and students’ academic achievement?
8. To what extent does teachers’ servant leadership predict students’ academic achievement?

## **Research Methodology**

Descriptive survey and correlational research designs were employed to investigate

the practices and relationships between the study variables: teachers' servant leadership, students' learning engagements and academic achievement (GPA) in Bahir Dar University which is one of the leading first generation universities in Ethiopia. Bahir Dar University is situated at Bahir Dar City which is the capital city of the Amhara Regional State, the second largest region in the country. The university has about 39 PhD programs, 131 MA/MSc programs, and 78 undergraduate programs. Hence, 270 participants (101 academic staffs: 91 males and 10 females; and 169 senior students: 136 males and 33 females) selected from Bahir Dar University, using simple random sampling, were participated in the study to provide data via questionnaires. Besides, deans of the academic units of Bahir Dar University were purposely selected and interviewed to triangulate the data collected through questionnaire.

Closed-ended questionnaires were used with 5-point rating scales (0= Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, and 4= Always). The questionnaires were adapted from Laub's (1999) six standardized servant leadership dimensions with 20 items and total Cronbach alpha level of 0.866 to measure teachers' servant leadership practices. Besides, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris's (2004) three dimensions with 19 items and total Cronbach alpha level of 0.930 were used to measure students' learning engagement. Grade point average (GPA) of sample students was also taken from records of the registrar and analyzed. The quantitative data were analyzed using mean, one sample t-test, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and linear regressions; and the significance alpha level was set at  $p < 0.05$ . Moreover, data gathered through interviews and observations were also analyzed qualitatively through descriptions and narrations.

## Results

The Study involved 273 respondents of which 104 were academic staffs (teachers and deans), and 169 were students. 169 (93.89%) students and 83 (82.18%) academic staffs filled in the questionnaire appropriately and returned back. The non-response rate for students was zero though 11 of them were discarded because of in appropriate ratings,

**Table 1. Status of Teachers' Servant Leadership Practice in the Study Context**

| Dimension               | <i>One-Sample Test</i> |             |                       |          |           |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|
|                         | <i>N</i>               | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. deviation</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> |
| Value Students          | 241                    | 2.7490      | .63758                | 18.236   | 240       | .000                   |
| Develop students        | 241                    | 2.7334      | .59049                | 19.281   | 240       | .000                   |
| Build student community | 241                    | 2.7234      | .66110                | 16.987   | 240       | .000                   |
| Display authenticity    | 241                    | 2.7828      | .65994                | 18.415   | 240       | .000                   |
| Provide leadership      | 241                    | 2.7552      | .58492                | 20.043   | 240       | .000                   |
| Share leadership        | 241                    | 2.6252      | .65837                | 14.741   | 240       | .000                   |

\* $P < 0.05$

and academic staffs' non-response rate was 18(17.82%). Hence, both the quantitative and qualitative data are presented and analyzed as shown below.

As indicated in Table 1 above, the mean values for all dimensions depicted above the test value indicated that teachers exhibit servant leadership behaviors at middling levels or 'sometimes' in their instructional processes. Thus, the mean values for each dimension and their aggregate mean were found to be statistically significant (Mean= 2.7282, SD= 0.45942,  $t= 24.605$ ,  $df=240$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In addition, data obtained through semi-structured interviews with deans confirmed that the majority of teachers show collegial, friendly and supportive relationships with their students. They also use instructional times properly and provide tutorial supports, give continuous assessments and feedbacks to students. And the activities and feedbacks given to students were also checked through observations in teachers and department heads' offices. As a result, though weak in providing feedbacks for the activities given, it was observed that teachers provide different activities related to the courses for their students mainly in groups.

**Table 2. Status of Students' Learning Engagement in the Study Context**

| Dimension             | <i>One-Sample Test</i> |             |                       |          |           |                        |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|
|                       | <i>N</i>               | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. deviation</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> |
| Cognitive engagement  | 241                    | 2.7046      | .45169                | 24.215   | 240       | .000                   |
| Behavioral engagement | 241                    | 2.8225      | .35746                | 35.721   | 240       | .000                   |
| Emotional engagement  | 241                    | 2.8407      | .48563                | 26.873   | 240       | .000                   |

\* $P<0.05$

Table 2 above showed that the mean values of all dimensions used to measure students' learning engagements were above the Test value. Hence, the results showed that students' learning engagement behaviors were exhibited 'sometimes' in the study context. It was also found out that the aggregate mean value of students' learning engagement was also found to be statistically significant (Mean= 2.7892, SD= .31257,  $t= 39.198$ ,  $df= 240$  at  $P<0.05$ ). However, data obtained through interviews from deans showed that students' self- initiation for learning was not strong enough beyond activities initiated by teachers; and students lack self-initiation and commitment to refer to books and other reference materials made available at libraries and enrich their knowledge on the subject matter. It was also confirmed through repetitive field observations that students were not engaged in their tasks in open spaces made available for peer group learning (1 to 5). Even their participation at libraries was so weak.

**Table 3. Correlation between Teachers' Servant Leadership and Students' Learning Engagements**

| Dimensions                | Mean   | SD     | Correlations |        |        |       |       |       |       |       |   |  |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|--|
|                           |        |        | 1            | 2      | 3      | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9 |  |
| 1.Value Students          | 2.7490 | .63758 | -            |        |        |       |       |       |       |       |   |  |
| 2.Develop students        | 2.7334 | .59049 | .607*        | -      |        |       |       |       |       |       |   |  |
| 3.Build student community | 2.7234 | .66110 | .503*        | .474*  | -      |       |       |       |       |       |   |  |
| 4.Display authenticity    | 2.7828 | .65994 | .499         | .471*  | .406*  | -     |       |       |       |       |   |  |
| 5.Provide leadership      | 2.7552 | .58492 | .370*        | .470*  | .246*  | .421* | -     |       |       |       |   |  |
| 6.Share leadership        | 2.6252 | .65837 | .411*        | .449*  | .349*  | .400* | .444* | -     |       |       |   |  |
| 7.Cognitive Engagement    | 2.7046 | .45169 | .119         | .114   | .128*  | .229* | .228* | .132* | -     |       |   |  |
| 8.Behavioral Engagement   | 2.8225 | .35746 | -.147*       | -.167* | -.154* | .007  | .016  | -.055 | .152* | -     |   |  |
| 9.Emotional Engagement    | 2.8407 | .48563 | -.180*       | -.118  | -.097  | .056  | .060  | .044  | .282* | .400* | - |  |

\*  $P < 0.05$ ;  $n=241$ ; dimensions:1-6(servant leadership) and 7-9(students' learning engagement)

Table 3 above showed that four out of six teacher servant leadership dimensions have positive relationships with students' cognitive learning engagement. Besides, dimensions such as displaying authenticity, providing leadership and sharing leadership showed positive correlations with students' behavioral and emotional learning engagements. But dimensions that include valuing students, developing students and building student community in the instructional processes showed negative relationships with two dimensions of students' learning engagements. On top of this, sharing of leadership practices and students' behavioral learning engagement also indicated negative correlations.

Moreover, as indicated in the same table above, four of teachers' servant Leadership dimensions indicated statistically significant positive relationships with students' cognitive learning engagement. By the same token, the correlation between sharing of leadership practices and students' behavioral learning engagement; and the correlation between two of teachers' servant leadership dimensions and students' emotional learning engagement showed statistically significant positive relationships. However, the correlation among three of servant leadership dimensions and students' behavioral learning engagement indicated statistically significant negative correlations. And the same was true for the correlation between valuing students and students' emotional learning engagement. On top

of this, the Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there was statistically significant positive relationships between teachers’ roles as servant leaders for their students in the instructional processes and students’ learning engagements(  $r= 0.072$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 4. Regression Statistics of Teachers’ Servant Leadership on Students’ Learning Engagement**

| Dimensions                | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | b     | Std. Error | Beta  | t      | Sig. |
|---------------------------|------|----------------|-------|------------|-------|--------|------|
| 1.Value Students          | .300 | .090           | -.087 | .042       | -.177 | -2.060 | .041 |
| 2.Develop students        |      |                | -.083 | .046       | -.157 | -1.805 | .072 |
| 3.Build student community |      |                | -.018 | .036       | -.037 | -.490  | .624 |
| 4.Display authenticity    |      |                | .106  | .037       | .224  | 2.874  | .004 |
| 5.Provide leadership      |      |                | .095  | .040       | .177  | 2.339  | .020 |
| 6.Share leadership        |      |                | .025  | .036       | .053  | .710   | .478 |

**P<0.05**

The regression analysis of Table 4 indicated that the analysis was statistically significant ( $R^2=0.090$ ,  $F=3.864$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) indicating that 9% of the variance in students’ learning engagement was explained by the total servant leadership behaviors of teachers. The direct effect of each independent dimension on students’ learning engagement was also determined using beta coefficients. Thus, the effects of developing students ( $B=-0.157$ ,  $t=-1.805$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), building student community ( $B=-0.037$ ,  $t=-0.490$ ,  $P>0.05$ ), and sharing leadership ( $B=0.053$ ,  $t=0.710$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) on students’ learning engagement were found to be not statistically significant. Whereas valuing students ( $B=-0.177$ ,  $t=-2.060$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), displaying authenticity ( $B=0.224$ ,  $t=2.874$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and providing leadership ( $B=0.177$ ,  $t=2.339$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) showed statistically significant effects on students’ learning engagement.

**Table 5. Correlation between Students’ Learning Engagements and GPA**

| Dimensions               | Mean   | SD     | Correlations |       |      |   |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------------|-------|------|---|
|                          |        |        | 1            | 2     | 3    | 4 |
| 1. Cognitive Engagement  | 2.7046 | .45169 | -            |       |      |   |
| 2. Behavioral Engagement | 2.8225 | .35746 | .152*        | -     |      |   |
| 3. Emotional Engagement  | 2.8407 | .48563 | .282*        | .400* | -    |   |
| 4. CGPA                  | 3.0966 | .39266 | .131         | .067  | .058 | - |

\*  $p < 0.05$ ,  $n=169$

As indicated in Table 5 dimensions of students learning engagements have positive correlations with academic achievements (GPA) albeit the rigor of the relationships varies. Cognitive students’ learning engagement showed higher and positive relationships ( $r=.131$ ) with student academic achievements compared to behavioral ( $r=.067$ ) and emotional ( $r=.058$ ) dimensions of students’ learning engagements. Besides, the aggregate value of students’ learning engagement showed statistically significant positive correlation with



students academic achievement or GPA ( $r=0.122$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). As a result, students allocation and use of their time for studying and on academic tasks, efforts made to have in-depth understanding about the meaning and concepts that they learnt and engaging actively in classroom instructional processes result in improved academic achievement (GPA).

**Table 6. Linear Regression Statistics of Students' Learning Engagements on Students' GPA**

| Dimensions            | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | b    | Std. Error | Beta | t     | Sig. |
|-----------------------|------|----------------|------|------------|------|-------|------|
| Cognitive Engagement  | .144 | .021           | .118 | .074       | .125 | 1.596 | .112 |
| Behavioral Engagement |      |                | .057 | .092       | .053 | .627  | .531 |
| Emotional Engagement  |      |                | .011 | .072       | .013 | .154  | .878 |

*P<0.05; GPA=Grade Point Average*

As indicated in Table 6 the regression analysis showed that the analysis was statistically significant ( $R^2=0.021$ ,  $F=1.164$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) indicating that 2.1% of the variance in students' grade point average (GPA) was explained by the total learning engagements of students. The direct effect of each independent dimension on students' learning engagement was also determined using beta coefficients. Thus, the effects of cognitive engagement ( $B=0.125$ ,  $t=1.596$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), behavioral engagement ( $B=0.053$ ,  $t=0.627$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and emotional engagement ( $B=0.013$ ,  $t=0.154$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) on students' GPA were found to be not statistically significant.

**Table 7. Correlation between Teachers' Servant Leadership and Students' GPA**

| Dimensions                | Mean   | SD     | Correlations |       |       |       |       |       |   |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
|                           |        |        | 1            | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7 |
| 1.Value Students          | 2.7490 | .63758 | -            |       |       |       |       |       |   |
| 2.Develop students        | 2.7334 | .59049 | .607*        | -     |       |       |       |       |   |
| 3.Build student community | 2.7234 | .66110 | .503*        | .474* | -     |       |       |       |   |
| 4.Display authenticity    | 2.7828 | .65994 | .499*        | .471* | .406* | -     |       |       |   |
| 5.Provide leadership      | 2.7552 | .58492 | .370*        | .470* | .246* | .421* | -     |       |   |
| 6.Share leadership        | 2.6252 | .65837 | .411*        | .449* | .349* | .400* | .444* | -     |   |
| 7.GPA                     | 3.0966 | .39266 | .091         | .094  | -.048 | .071  | .038  | -.008 | - |

\*  $P < 0.05$ ,  $n=241$

The correlational analysis of Table 7 showed that four out of six dimensions used to measure teachers' servant leadership behaviors had positive and statistically significant relationships with students' academic achievement or GPA. But building student community and sharing leadership showed negative and not statistically significant relationship with students' academic achievement or GPA. It was also found out that the aggregate correlational value of dimensions used to measure teachers' servant leadership

behaviors showed positive relationships with students GPA ( $r= 0.052$ ).

**Table 8. Linear Regression Statistics of Teachers' Servant Leadership on Students' GPA**

| Dimensions              | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | b     | Std. Error | Beta  | t      | Sig. |
|-------------------------|------|----------------|-------|------------|-------|--------|------|
| Value Students          | .186 | .035           | .070  | .067       | .115  | 1.048  | .296 |
| Develop students        |      |                | .085  | .074       | .127  | 1.147  | .253 |
| Build student community |      |                | -.103 | .058       | -.176 | -1.771 | .078 |
| Display authenticity    |      |                | .024  | .059       | .040  | .406   | .685 |
| Provide leadership      |      |                | .003  | .063       | .004  | .041   | .968 |
| Share leadership        |      |                | -.038 | .057       | -.063 | -.676  | .500 |

\*  $P < 0.05$ ,  $n=241$

The regression analysis as indicated in Table 8 above showed that the analysis was statistically significant ( $R^2=0.035$ ,  $F=0.963$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) indicating that 3.5% of the variance in students' grade point average (GPA) was explained by the total teachers' servant leadership behaviors or practices. The direct effect of each independent dimension of teachers' servant leadership practice was also determined using beta coefficients and all dimensions showed not statistically significant effects on students' academic achievement (GPA) on individual basis.

## Discussion

The findings of this investigation showed weak and infrequent practices of teachers servant leadership and students' learning engagements albeit variations in their magnitudes (see Tables 1&2). Interview results with deans confirmed that teachers show collegial, friendly and supportive relationships with their students. Besides, they use instructional times properly and provide tutorial supports, give continuous assessments and feedbacks to students.

However, in relation to students' learning engagements, results of interviews and field observations showed weak engagements followed by students' lack of self-initiation and commitment to refer to books and other reference materials made available at libraries and enrich their knowledge on the subject matter. It was also indicated that students are poor at independent learning and not able to take responsibility for their learning; rather, show strong traditions of dependency and prefer to rely only on lecture notes and modules provided by teachers.

On the other hand, Pearson's correlation analysis indicated that teachers' servant leadership practices showed statistically significant positive relationship with students' learning engagement ( $r=0.512$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Thus, when there are supportive, caring, collegial and service-oriented instructional environments, students show increased motivation and involvements in their learning. That is, students spend adequate time, care about and demonstrate self-regulations for their learning. Literatures also confirm that the

roles played by teachers as servants to their students have direct links with students' engagements in their learning and academic achievements. In line to this, Chan (2016) stated that teachers with servant leader mindset "create supportive, respectful and demanding [instructional] environment, which fosters the development of grit and a growth mindset in learners" (p.3). Doraiswamy (2013) further strengthened that teachers as servant leaders exert relentless efforts and dedicate themselves to lead the learning and teaching process and build meaningful connections with their students and help them grow as well as create their best future. Moreover, academic staffs (teachers) acting as servant leaders to their students by removing obstacles that thwart students learning interests, helping them work beyond and utilize their talents undoubtedly heighten and transform students' higher engagements in their instructional processes and bring improved performances (Bowman, 2005).

The regression analysis results of the data obtained from respondents also indicated that  $R^2=0.09$  or 9% of students' learning engagement was explained by teachers' servant leadership practices (see Table 3). Therefore, when teachers as servant leaders are easily approachable to discuss academic issues with students, have supportive behaviors, and sensitive to students' needs and interest as well as good at creating inspiring learning environments, students show high engagements in their learning and perform better. In support of this, Middleton (2006) emphasized that though excellent teaching in the classroom is important, it doesn't suffice students' holistic learning engagements, development and bring academic success unless the learning environment is welcoming, collegial and supportive. It is true that staffs' considerate or caring emphasis in leading, mentoring, advising, serving, supporting, and creating positive and democratic relationships with their students have pivotal roles in enhancing students' learning engagements and bring academic success. Therefore, this research finding and literatures confirm that teachers' servant leadership practices and students' learning engagements are positively correlated and teachers' servant leadership roles have significant contributions for students to show better engagements for their learning.

The study was also attempted to investigate the correlation between students' learning engagement and their GPA. Hence, it was found to be positively correlated ( $r=.122$ , Table 5). Besides, the regression analysis result also showed that students' learning engagement indicated significant positive effects on their GPA ( $R^2=0.021$ ). Thus, the data showed that 2.1% of students' GPA was explained by their engagements in learning. That is, when students spend adequate time for their learning, seek teachers' advice and encouragement on how to perform better in their academic works, complete assignments and project works, and review as well as study their notes regularly, their academic achievement (GPA) will be improved. In line to this, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, (2004) stated that students' learning engagements have direct connections with positive student academic outcomes, and become strong in learning environments with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure.

Furthermore, another purpose of this study was to examine the correlation between teachers' servant leadership behaviors and students' academic achievement (GPA). It also attempted to investigate the contributions of teachers' servant leadership practices for students' academic achievement or GPA. Hence, Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated that teachers' servant leadership practice was positively correlated with students' academic achievement or GPA ( $r=0.052$ , see Table7). Besides, as indicated in the regression analysis,  $R^2=0.034$  or 3.4% of students academic achievement was explained by teachers' servant leadership behaviors and practices (see Table8). Literatures also pointed out that teacher as servant leader can have a profound impact on students' learning experiences and their academic successes. They also occupy great power and responsibilities for students' learning and make them achieve better results throughout their academic career (Spears 2004; Haye 2008). Therefore, teachers' servant leadership roles in the instructional processes have significant correlations with students' academic achievement (GPA), and about 3.4% of students' GPA could be accounted by teachers' servant leadership practices to their students.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The focus of this study was investigating the practices and relationships among teachers' servant leadership behaviors, students' learning engagements, and students' academic achievement in the Ethiopian Higher Education System. Accordingly, the study result showed that teachers' servant leadership behaviors and students' learning engagements were exhibited by teachers and students at middling levels. However, interview data and field observations were incongruent with data obtained via questionnaires. The interview data indicated that students' learning engagements were found to be weak in the sense that they were not good at library works, self-initiated and independent learning activities, and peer group (1 to 5) learning. Besides, students lack motivations and commitments to refer to additional reading books and materials to enhance their knowledge and develop in-depth understanding in their field of studies; rather, there was a tendency to depend entirely on teacher made lecture notes and abridged modules.

The Pearson correlation analysis and regression results also showed that teachers' servant leadership roles and students' learning engagements correlated significantly in positive direction ( $r=0.0512$ ). The regression analysis result also indicated that  $R^2=0.09$  or 9% of students' learning engagements were accounted by teachers' servant leadership practices in the instructional processes. Besides, investigation was made to examine the correlation between students learning engagement and their GPA. As a result, the correlation analysis indicated statistically significant positive relationships between the two variables ( $r=0.122$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). On top of this, the regression analysis was found out that  $R^2=0.021$  or 2.1% of students' GPA was determined by their learning engagements cognitively, behaviorally and emotionally.

Furthermore, the study was focused on investigating the correlation between teachers' servant leadership practices and students' GPA. As a result, it was found out that both teachers' servant leadership practices exhibited in the instructional processes and students' academic achievement (GPA) were positively correlated ( $r=0.052$ ). Besides, their regression analysis showed that  $R^2= 0.034$  or 3.4% of students' academic achievement (GPA) was explained by teachers' servant leadership practices shown in the teaching and learning processes of the Ethiopian Higher Education System.

## **Conclusion and Reflections**

It seems wise to conclude from the findings of this study that teachers are the ones who are to highly determine the academic success or failure of students as the students learning engagement is requiring the teachers to frame meaningful tasks that are able to meaningfully engage students on their learning, which perhaps is becoming the leading cause for students' academic achievement in the Higher Education System of Ethiopia. Thus, from the conclusion drawn, it would be possible to reflect that academic staffs in the higher education system of Ethiopia are advised to create tasks that enforce students to meaningfully engage in their learning, which could be possible through providing practical learning tasks, problem solving tasks, independent project works, peer- based academic discourses and debates, and providing opportunities for exchanging academic experiences, where all of which are supposed to pave the way for better academic achievements, and thereby, improved quality education. Academic staffs in the Ethiopian higher education system are also advised to model themselves for students through making adequate preparations for teaching, paying attentions to students' needs and gaps, instructional communications, assessments, and encouraging as well as tasking students to develop independent, and in-depth critical learning. Besides, academic staffs in the higher learning institutions of Ethiopia are recommended to exhibit high professional, ethical and moral commitments, develop strong and democratic relationships as well as build trust with learners in the instructional process. Most importantly, the higher educational institutions shall establish a servant mind-sets with responsive culture of instructional leadership system through which academic staffs can be better equipped and updated with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values necessary for providing better instructional services on continuous basis which could practically be possible through facilitating the development of a school vision; monitoring the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; improving instructional practices through the purposeful observation and evaluation of teachers; ensuring the regular integration of appropriate assessments into daily classroom instruction; using technology and multiple sources of data to improve classroom instruction; providing staff with focused, sustained, research-based professional development; and crating and sustaining a conducive teaching-learning climate for staff and students.

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