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# Bringing a 'Local' Voice to a 'Universal' Discourse: School Leadership Preparation and Development in Kenya

**Gladys Nyanchama Asuga, Jill Scevak and Scott Eacott**

**Abstract:** *In this paper we demonstrate, through content analysis of university-based programmes and one management institute, the construction of 'leadership' in the particular context of Kenya. The study paid attention to how the particularities of the locale are infused with universal discourses to develop an indigenous conceptualisation of 'leadership'. In the particular context of Kenya, school leadership is similar to the universal construction of leadership – with an emphasis on instructional leadership, the management of resources and change occasioned by rapid reforms in the education sector – but there are some context-specific differences. School leadership is also about negotiating between competing cultural and political interests, especially in relation to access, equity and equality. School leaders need to manage internal conflict in the school as well as external ethnic conflict. Leadership is also about implementing government initiated reforms that called for flexibility and innovation not only in the use of scarce resources, but also in identifying less traditional sources of funding. These unique roles have implications for leadership preparation and development.*

**Keywords:** school leadership preparation, school leadership development, Kenya.

## Introduction

Kenya is a sub-Saharan country located in the eastern part of Africa. It has a rapidly expanding population which has more than tripled to 40 million in the last four decades (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2009). Within this population, the largest cohort is young people of school age. There is a recognition that educating this group will impact not only their lives, but also the economic, social and political development of the country. As a result, education reform has been an enduring focus for the Government of Kenya since gaining independence in 1963. The reform efforts include increased access to education through the introduction of free primary and secondary schooling in 2003 and 2008, respectively (Republic of Kenya 2009); efforts to reinstate a culture of teaching and learning in schools; a more equitable basis for school finance, including an index of poverty, constituency bursaries and devolvement of funds to the school level; efforts to rationalise and redeploy staff; and wide-ranging curriculum reform in addition to the introduction of a new education system (Kinuthia 2009; Muricho & Chang'ach 2013; World Bank 2004).

Despite all of these reform efforts, the quality of education in Kenya is still perceived as poor (Odhiambo 2005; Uwezo Kenya 2012). A number of reasons have been advanced for this situation, including – but not limited to – a lack of education essentials such as adequate facilities, finances (Kipkoech & Kyalo 2010), and a shortage of suitably qualified and motivated staff (Odhiambo 2005; Onderi & Croll 2008).

A factor that has been recognised in the international literature over the last quarter of a century, at least as being critical in managing change and raising the achievement of learners, is effective school leadership. School leadership has been linked with successful schools because of its role in managing the teaching and learning environment, the level of professionalism in the school and the morale of teachers, and because of its influence on students' performance (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr 2010; Leithwood 2007; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008). In Kenya, school leadership has not only been recognised but has been an enduring focus of the government (Republic of Kenya 1998, 1999 2008 ). However, even with this focused attention there has been a lack of evidence about what constitutes school leadership in the particular context of Kenya.

This paper draws from a larger study theorising on school leadership preparation and development in Kenya during a period of large-scale reforms. In particular, the paper interrogates the narrative of leadership as legitimised in programmes aimed at developing the capacity of current and aspiring school leaders. It builds upon earlier work by the research team assessing the learning needs of principals in Kenya (Asuga & Eacott 2012), how leadership preparation and development is serving as a mechanism for universalising Anglophone constructs of leadership (Eacott & Asuga 2014), and evaluating the performance impact of and return on leadership development investment (Asuga, Eacott & Scevak 2015). Our purpose is to contribute an understanding of what constitutes leadership in the particular context of Kenya. In designing our study, we have focused on educational leadership programmes for current and aspiring school leaders offered by universities and one management institute. Notably, we pay attention to how the particularities of the locale are infused with universal discourses to develop an indigenous conceptualisation of 'leadership'. This conceptualisation of leadership discourse is against a backdrop of the emerging role of indigenous management research in the broader leadership/management literatures. Li (2012, p. 851) defines indigenous management research as 'any study on a unique local phenomenon, or a unique element of any local phenomenon from a local (native as emic) perspective to explore its local implications, and if possible, its global implications as well'. This is a contested area though. Tsui (2004) argues that for research to qualify as indigenous, it requires location-specific contextual factors that must be indigenous, although the theoretical lens can be borrowed, while Whetton (2009) argues that any research can be labelled as indigenous if it covers an indigenous phenomenon or topic, even if theories or concepts are adopted. Rather than aligning with any one particular version of indigenous management research, we 'seek to move discourse beyond content and contextualisation to an explicit engagement with epistemology and political nature of research' (Eacott & Asuga 2014: 922).

## Methodology

As indicated earlier, this paper draws from a larger study theorising on school leadership preparation and development in Kenya. Building upon previous work by the team (Asuga & Eacott 2012; Eacott & Asuga 2014; Asuga *et al.* 2015), the focus of this paper is on how the publicly articulated content of educational leadership preparation and development programmes constructs 'leadership'.

To compile a comprehensive listing of educational leadership programmes, a systematic search of publicly available documents was undertaken. Unlike in more developed countries, where programme information is frequently available online, such information was more difficult to come by in Kenya. In many cases it required the first author to physically visit various institutions. At the institutions, information was located in various places, including web pages, local newspapers, education policy documents, institutional libraries, notice boards, in course outlines available for purchase from bookshops, prospectuses, university calendars and/or bulletins and brochures for prospective students. In all places care was taken to ensure that as much information as possible was collected. Across ten institutions (nine universities and the Kenya Education Management Institute), a total of 14 individual degree/diploma programmes with 170 individual courses were identified. Particular attention was given to course titles and their content descriptions.

## Data Analysis

To engage with the data, content analysis was adopted to construct the core features of 'leadership' in the specific context of Kenya. Documents were analysed at three interrelated levels. The first was a modified frequency analysis of course titles. This was followed by an analysis of the course descriptions, before using that analysis to construct a context-specific articulation of leadership.

## Analysis of Course Titles

After the initial reading of the data, all the 170 course titles were entered into a spreadsheet. Rather than focusing on leadership as a basis, our intention was to conceptualise course features from within the text and through the identification of distinctive words and phrases. This analysis was conducted at two levels: within and across institutions (see Table 1). In doing so, it was possible to identify any institutional bias towards particular perspectives (e.g. the curriculum focus at institution A) or at scale acceptance of specific labels. From the 170 course titles, 20 clusters were identified. These clusters were developed through multiple rounds of tentative categories based on small clusters of words.

As Table 1 shows, the most frequent course titles across the programmes were focused on: resources/resourcing ( $n=21$ ), curriculum ( $n=14$ ), policy ( $n=10$ ), theories of educational administration ( $n=10$ ), information technologies ( $n=10$ ) and finance in education ( $n=10$ ). This is supported when the analysis is shifted to seeing how many institutions these courses are found in, with the results being nine (resources/resourcing), eight (theories of administration), seven (policy, information technologies, and finance in education), and six (curriculum), respectively. Across the ten institutions, these titles appear in at least 60 per cent of institutional programmes. Outside of this group, only 'organisational behaviour/theory' appears in more than five institutions ( $n=6$ ). From this, we argue that there is evidence of some importance being attached to these clusters. However, to gain further insights requires attention to the content of courses – or at the very least, the course descriptions.

**Table 1:** Matrix of course titles and conceptual clusters

Clusters	Number of courses per programme (via institution)												No of courses (institutions)		
	A	B	C	D1	D2	E1	E2	E3	F	G1	G2	H		I	J
Conflict resolution						1						1	1	1	4 (4)
Curriculum	5	1								3		2	2	1	14 (6)
Customer care / PR											1			1	2 (2)
Education & planning	1	1								1		1	1		5 (5)
Emerging issues			1		1	2							1	1	5 (4)
Ethics	1			1	1					1	1			1	6 (4)
Finance & education		1	1	1	2	1	1			1		1	1		10 (7)
Guidance/counselling		1	1						1						3 (3)
Gender issues		1	1			1									3 (3)
Information tech		1	1	1	1	1		1		1	1	1		1	10 (7)
Legal issues	1		1					1	1					1	5 (5)
Managing change		1	1	1			1				1				5 (5)
Managing programs			1				1	1							3 (3)
Monitoring/evaluation	1										1	1			3 (3)
Org behaviour/theory		1		2	1			1	2		1	1			7 (6)
Policy		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1			10 (7)
Project planning				1		1			1					1	4 (4)
Resources	2	3	1	1		1	1	1		1	3	1	1	5	21 (9)
Strategic leadership				1	1	2		1	1					2	6 (3)
Theories of admin	1	1	1	1			1		1	2	1	1	1		10 (8)
Other	1		2	2	1	3	1		2	5	4	2	2	2	12 (9)

### **Analysis of Course Descriptions**

The second level of analysis focused on the course descriptions. This involved a line-by-line reading and codification of description content. The aim was to identify any similarities in the content that could cluster and form the core of what is meant by leadership through these preparation and development programmes. To do so, distinctive words and phrases served as meaningful analytical units (Bowen 2009; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011; Richard 2009). Each analytical unit was assigned a code – i.e. a label or name that a researcher gives a piece of text that contains an idea or a piece of information (Cohen *et al.* 2011). A total of 540 codes were generated in this initial phase. Once all the data had been coded, similar codes or closely related codes were grouped together into themes. This data reduction was achieved by grouping similar words and phrases, and enabled the 540 codes to be clustered into 48 categories. Specific attention was paid to categories with a high



frequency, as the frequency of the codes indicates some sense of significance (Cohen *et al.* 2011). The process was undertaken by two members of the research team to strengthen the quality of the data generated, in addition to the first author doing the initial analysis.

Categories that were thought to describe the meaning that underpinned a theme were assigned into that theme. Some themes had more categories in them than others. Following multiple rounds of comparison and iteration, the 48 categories clustered around six themes:

- leading for equity, access and equality
- building relationship between the school and its communities
- managing programs and resources
- supervising curriculum and assessment
- leading change and innovation
- foundation knowledge in the discipline.

**Table 2:** Selective summary of categories that make up each theme

Theme	Categories
Leading for equity, access and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implementing policies on equity and fairness</li> <li>• supporting affirmative action (reducing disparities)</li> <li>• understanding traditional notions of masculinity and femininity,</li> <li>• gender impact on enrolment, retention and performance, subject and career choice, and administrative positions in school</li> <li>• countering practices that contribute to gender inequality</li> <li>• emerging issues (HIV / AIDS, alcohol / drug use, special education needs)</li> <li>• helping students cope with school and home issues</li> <li>• policies on early pregnancies</li> <li>• policies on guidance and counselling services</li> <li>• implementing policies on corporal punishment,</li> <li>• protecting school environmental (title deed, fencing)</li> <li>• safety and security of learners and learning environment</li> <li>• environment</li> <li>• managing disasters</li> </ul>
Building relationship between the schools and its community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public relations</li> <li>• school and community relations</li> <li>• relationship with school sponsors (e.g. leading faith-based schools)</li> <li>• working with education officials</li> <li>• accountability to education stakeholders</li> <li>• managing conflict and crisis (ethnicity and national unity)</li> <li>• harmonious living</li> <li>• facilitating communication</li> </ul>

Theme	Categories
Managing programmes and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing and planning education programs</li> <li>• managing people (e.g. recruitment, induction, training and performance appraisal)</li> <li>• staff and student welfare</li> <li>• working with trade unions</li> <li>• fiscal management (e.g. budgeting, mobilising funds, writing fund proposals, running income generating activities, and procuring and maintaining physical resources according to regulations)</li> <li>• supervising construction of classes</li> </ul>
Supervising curriculum and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supervising teaching and learning</li> <li>• knowledge of curriculum theories and models,</li> <li>• understanding the curriculum development process in Kenya</li> <li>• understanding the supervision process in Kenya</li> <li>• assessing and testing students</li> <li>• monitoring national examinations and evaluating their conduct</li> <li>• integrating ICT in teaching and learning</li> </ul>
Leading change and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• managing change in schools</li> <li>• understanding current reforms in education</li> <li>• role in formulating and implementing reform policies</li> <li>• managing reforms</li> <li>• strategic planning and providing direction to institutions</li> <li>• managing school performance developing plans setting targets</li> <li>• result based management / performance management,</li> <li>• research on school effectiveness and school improvement</li> <li>• using ICT by administrators</li> <li>• designing implementing and monitoring projects</li> </ul>
Foundation knowledge in the discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• theories of educational institutions and their implications</li> <li>• foundations of organisational theory</li> <li>• understanding the philosophy of education and sociology of education</li> <li>• management processes such as communication, motivation</li> <li>• decision making skills</li> <li>• understanding and managing people at work</li> </ul>

## Discussion

The following sections provide an elaborated discussion of the six themes identified in the data.

### ***Leading for Equity, Access and Equality***

The focus of this theme is the provision of opportunities for all learners through equity, access and equality. The primary means of achieving this are managing the learning environment, redressing gender equity, and guidance/counselling. These featured in the course descriptions in over half of the institutions ( $n=6$ ), and were identified by 12 ( $n=12$ ) unit descriptions in six institutions.

Managing the learning environment includes many elements, including conserving and protecting natural resources, protecting the school environment from human encroachment or land-grabbing (e.g. fencing the school grounds), and making the school friendly and safe for learners in general and particularly those at risk. Risk factors explicitly named include ethnic violence, early marriage and vulnerable HIV/AIDS orphans. All this had to be done within the established regulatory framework. Consequently, there was a need to understand the regulatory framework governing environmental issues.

Addressing gender issues emphasised understanding traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and how these define roles at home and at school. Curriculum coverage included how the traditional definition of what boys or girls can do impacted on student performance enrolment, retention and dropout, as well as the way in which gender-based stereotyping influenced not only subject and career choices among students but also administrative positions and school staffing patterns. Based on the course descriptions, there is an underlying principle that engaging with cultural beliefs on the role of different genders could redress issues of access, equity and equality in contemporary education. This was to be achieved through recognising gender conditioning and sex stereotyping messages in the academic environment at all levels – staff, students and community. In two of the institutions, course aims centred on developing the capacity of school leaders to address gender inequality in schools through implementing policies promoting gender empowerment (e.g. affirmative action to encourage female student participation in particular), working with parents and teachers to remove barriers that impede accessing schooling, and the provision of a safe school environment.

There were a number of social issues identified in course descriptions that impact on the learning environment. These include the effects of HIV/AIDS on students and teachers, alcohol and drug abuse by young people, causes of poor discipline in schools, inclusive learning, child-friendly schools, nutrition, sexual abuse/harassment and teenage pregnancies. These are constructed as not only the work of school leaders, but also as the responsibility of staff and students. To that end, guidance and counselling featured in a number of institutions. Guidance and counselling is considered as imperative to support students to cope with life's challenges and critical issues. In addition, since the abolition of corporal punishment in schools, guidance and counselling has been used as a primary tool to discipline students, cultivate life skills, and modify the learning environment to meet the needs of individual learners. Without guidance and counselling to equip students with life skills to cope with their environment, they are likely to drop out of school. It should be noted that counselling services are provided not only to students, but to teachers as well.

### ***Building Relationships between the School and its Communities***

Building and fostering effective relationships was identified through multiple pathways, including public relations, relationship management, and promoting a culture of respect and diversity.

In serving as public relations officers for their schools, leaders are expected to portray a positive image of the school, provide a quality service to students (referred to in one course description as ‘customers’), and maintain communication with parents and other stakeholders. There is an explicit assumption in the course descriptions that in doing so, parents and the community will support the schools to achieve educational goals – including through the provision of resources to support teaching and learning. Working in collaboration with the board of governors, parent and teachers association and the Ministry of Education and its agencies, leaders will better manage resources (this is picked up in the next theme). Importantly, building positive relationships will facilitate communication between different parties and enhance accountabilities for student performance and the utilisation of school funds.

The management of information exchanged was considered important in four institutions. This means that grievances and conflicts from the community, staff and between students and staff are managed according to the rules and regulations. Based on course descriptions ( $n=4$ ) across four institutions, a supportive environment is one in which crises and conflicts are managed. Conflict is portrayed as complex and multifaceted, and includes the internal tensions of day-to-day relations management and challenges in roles requiring an understanding of organisational behaviour (picked up in another theme), but also external pressures impacting on the school, such as ethnic conflict, discipline issues, disasters, safety and economic crisis affecting the country necessitating measures to develop strategies to enable students’ access to education. One institution noted this situation in the introduction to one of the courses of study, where it noted:

Natural disasters, man made disasters and armed conflicts are becoming more frequent around the globe affecting an increasing number of children, families and communities. There is a need to increase the disaster awareness and preparedness of educational personnel to provide quality education in all circumstances learners finds themselves in. [Institution H: Introduction to programme ]

These natural and man-made disasters have received increasing attention in the literature on education in Kenya, and include the burning of schools by striking students (Kindiki 2009) and ethnic violence experienced as a result of election disputes or land issues which have created internally displaced persons (Dattoo & Johnson 2013; Kanyingi 2009; Oucho 2002).

Building relationships was also highlighted in the need to promote a culture that respects and honours diversity. School leaders are responsible for all students and have to act in their best interests. This means recognising and honouring different ethnic groups and working towards fostering national unity. Developing and using a range of professional competencies, such as communication skills, was identified as one way of managing conflict and fostering unity.

### ***Managing Programmes and Resources***

Planning and managing resources and educational programmes was the most common theme across the course titles and descriptions. This includes an understanding of national policies and the practical processes of planning at the school level. Planning for education programmes requires continuous forecasting of needs and a degree of rigor in data generation and analysis. There is also

the expectation that a vision and mission will be established in collaboration with stakeholders. The vision and mission are significant as they focus and coordinate the work of teachers and the school community, as well as identifying facilities, personnel and funding required.

The success of any educational programme depends on how resources – human, financial, material and time – are managed and deployed to align with the school vision. Across the 170 individual courses identified in the survey, 21 courses explicitly focused on these practices. This is not surprising given the centrality of such practices to the field's collective understanding of what leadership is (e.g. Robinson *et al.* 2008). Human resources were the focus of almost half of these courses ( $n=9$ ), with content including human resource planning, recruiting staff, training and development, performance appraisal, rewards and motivation. Content also included compliance with industrial relations regulations and balancing organisational practices with regulations arising from collective bargaining and government laws. Although leaders are responsible for hiring teaching and non-teaching staff, a central system retains control of the confirmation of employment, promotion and remuneration, and how data generated from staff appraisal are used. Leadership also encompassed induction and ongoing in-servicing of teachers. However, given the centralised nature of training and development in Kenya, the leaders' role in most cases is to identify staff for system in-service programmes.

Translating long-term plans into operational activities is seen as central to leaders' work. According to the courses, budgeting helps to ensure accountability, to prevent the leakage of public funds, to increase efficiency in the use of scarce public resources, and to improve the prospects of meeting development goals. The leader works with a board of governors to create and implement financial systems best suited to the school needs. The procurement of goods and services is an area that also received attention in course descriptions. It seems that this has also been problematic in Kenya, as evidenced in the three course descriptions which focus on procurement processes, fraud and credit management.

Managing school physical facilities, equipment, curriculum supplies and other materials is a role of school leaders. They also mobilise resources, such as textbooks and other learning materials, to support student learning. It is interesting to note that although they are not necessarily knowledgeable in building construction, school leaders are expected to supervise the construction of classrooms and other building projects, including overseeing the procurement of construction material. Five out of the ten institutions had courses explicitly focused on developing skills in project planning and appraisal, while one institution had two courses focusing on the construction of classrooms, laboratories and playgrounds.

### **Supervising the Curriculum and Assessment**

More than half of the institutions ( $n=6$ ) identified curriculum supervision and curriculum-related areas as important functions performed by school leaders. Descriptors included being involved in curriculum development, supervising teaching and learning, monitoring student progress and understanding a range of curriculum theories and their application.

The need for leaders to be involved in curriculum development is well-rehearsed in the literatures of the field (e.g. Robinson *et al.* 2008), so it is of little surprise that it is similarly identified in Kenya. From the identified course descriptions, this involvement includes knowledge of curriculum design and its relevance to the students, and innovating and adapting the curriculum to students'

environment. Additionally, course descriptions focus on exposing candidates to different strategies that are used to address curriculum reform and innovation in Kenya in response to emerging issues. All of this is mediated by the centralised curriculum and national testing approaches in the country. Supervising and monitoring teaching and learning was constructed as both a quality assurance mechanism – undertaking classroom visits, inspection of units of work, timetabling of lessons and other teaching resources, etc. – but also as concerning innovation and change (picked up in another theme) – for example, assisting teachers to adopt new innovations such as the use of information technology in their teaching. The expansion of technologies into schooling was identified in course descriptions from all ten institutions. This was not necessarily about being an expert with technologies, but about being able to ‘assist teachers to use computers effectively, identify teacher and student ICT needs and also provide appropriate infrastructure (hardware and software)’ [Institution I: Information Communication Technology integration in Education]. Importantly, as stressed in another course, leaders should build their capacities to ‘support teacher effectiveness by helping them to develop a positive attitude towards supervision as a developmental process’ [Institution B: Supervision of Instruction]. In the context of the Ministry of Education appointing Quality Assurance Officers to provide support for teachers and to improve teaching (Ministry of Education 2008), this role is more concerned with cooperative effort to diagnose and solve substantive problems in classes rather than a punitive process – once again stressing the importance of relationships.

For school leaders to guide teachers to develop appropriate assessment strategies and monitor students’ progress, they themselves must be knowledgeable regarding assessment and evaluation. This includes being able to generate and interpret data for decision-making, as well as improving teaching and learning and the reporting process. This was stressed across four institutions with a particular focus on monitoring and evaluating (national) tests and guiding staff through the development of testing and assessment policy. Knowledge of how the examination council conducts the national examination is a key responsibility of Kenyan school leaders, as the results are used to determine the next level of student schooling and as a marketing tool to attract students. From the descriptions, school leaders are expected to have a deep understanding of a range of learning theories and their application. For example, they are expected to ‘examine in detail the philosophical, psychological, historical and social context that shape curriculum practice’ [Institution H: Curriculum theory and practice]. The course descriptions have an underlying assumption that understanding these theories and strategies will help leaders recognise whether teachers are using effective instructional strategies to establish the conditions that will enable them to work effectively.

### **Leading Change and Innovation**

The course descriptions stress the importance of leaders bringing about change in schools. All ten institutions identified leadership in policy reforms as a critical role for school leaders – they are seen to be instrumental to the successful implementation of reforms. In addition to overseeing the implementation of policy reforms, they also develop mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating these changes. To maximise the likelihood of successful reforms, school leaders need to be aware of the different policies and the challenges likely to be faced during implementation – a form of situated awareness.

Recent reforms – such as the devolution of teacher recruitment to the school and district level, calls for greater parental involvement, the introduction of free primary and secondary education, management of school budgets, alternative modalities of financing education such as cost sharing and constituency bursary fund, the introduction of ICT into schools and the abolition of corporal punishment – featured prominently in the course descriptions.

There is an expectation for leaders to act as change agents who innovate in response to societal changes. This includes identifying disparities in resources allocation and using knowledge of fundraising and proposal writing to achieve equity and fairness in their schools. Content included identifying potential and non-traditional revenues such as partnering with donors, parents and the private sector, and also identifying income-generating activities, such as school farms or keeping poultry. While securing diverse financial resources for a school was recognised as an important skill to have by a number of courses and institutions that focused on financing education ( $n=10$ ), it should be noted that only one institution focused on the development of proposal writing skills.

As change agents, leaders monitor and evaluate school programmes to ensure goals are being achieved. Three courses across three institutions identified monitoring and evaluation as part of effective leadership practice. This included the use of information and communication technologies, particularly to generate data to inform decision-making.

### ***Foundation knowledge in the Discipline***

All institutions emphasised that school leaders should not only have knowledge of educational leadership theories, but should also be able to apply them in practice. The general position is that school leaders should have some theoretical insights that will help improve their abilities in the administration of programmes, resource acquisition and allocation, and will improve their capacity for instructional work analysis. The importance of theoretical knowledge is well-rehearsed in the field's literatures (e.g. Bush 2006).

In all the institutions, knowledge of the foundations of educational administration (with some slippage between 'educational administration' and the more contemporary title for the field, 'educational leadership') was seen as a solution to a number of challenges facing the institutions. For example, one course described the context in which school leaders work as being 'faced with myriad challenges which include unrest, inefficiencies, and complaints of falling standards, mismanagement of resources, in discipline cases, and accountability issues'. In undertaking the course, therefore, school leaders 'will draw from major theories and concepts that dominate the field of educational administration to address some of these challenges' [Institution C: Theories and concepts in educational administration]. The theoretical foundations are seen as complimentary to a set of core skills for educational leaders, including – but not limited to – ethical understandings, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted an enduring tension in educational leadership research and practice: universalism and/or particularism. While the argument that context matters is well-rehearsed (Clarke & O'Donoghue 2013), what this actually means is rarely brought into question. The argument that each and every school is unique does not hold up to rigorous and robust challenge. After all, there are plenty of behaviours regarding schooling that are predictable across time and space, such as the arrival and departure of students/staff, the transmission of knowledge from experts to less knowledgeable individuals, and so on. This raises some serious questions for the role



of a universal language and a recognisable set of behaviours and the localisation of that universal (Eacott & Asuga 2014). Arguably, what is required is to get beyond the rather unhelpful binary of 'universal' and 'particular'. The underlying assumptions of universalism rely heavily on an equivalence and stability to the research object – in this case, leadership – across time and space. What our analysis has shown is that such assumptions are limited. Even if the same (or similar) language is used in the titles of educational leadership preparation and development programmes, a more fine-grain analysis of course descriptions has shown that what is meant by this language when it is deployed differs. This argument has implications both empirically and theoretically. In the case of the former, we have shown that Kenya mobilises a particular version of educational leadership that is not necessarily the same as elsewhere. This is not necessarily problematic; it offers a point for comparative work. However, it does highlight the potential errors that could be made if we assume that leadership, for example, means the same things across contexts. The equivalence cannot be assumed, not to mention that neither can it be assumed that any construct is stable over time. With the latter, our argument troubles the binary of universalism and particularism. That is, if language is recognisable across time and space yet the meaning is different, binary thinking cannot provide the intellectual resources to productively work in the space. There is a need for more fluid resources for thinking through practice. The arbitrary division of local and global and the artificial construction of increasingly larger structures from the local to the global (often portrayed in concentric circles) do nothing to demonstrate any potential interplay between discourses.

The analysis and arguments we have presented in this paper are not the definitive word on the issue. What we have done is sought to start a discussion on the conceptualisation of an indigenous leadership research agenda. It is hoped that the understandings created through this study will stimulate dialogue between academics, policy-makers, training institutions and practitioners for the purpose of generating more empirical evidence to enhance educational leadership preparation and development programmes.

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