

School leadership preparation and development in Africa: A critical insight

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Abstract

When it comes to organizational performance, leaders matter. Without significant attention to the preparation and development of school leaders, government initiatives aimed at building world class education systems are unlikely to succeed. Across the Anglophone world leadership preparation and development has become a key leverage point in education policy, with many nations establishing systems of licensing, accreditation and mandatory programmes. Outside the Anglophone world and central powers of the global north, school leadership preparation and development exists in a highly contested space that balances colonial legacy, deficit thinking and an unrelenting desire to compete on a global scale, with calls for localized knowledge, values and histories. In this article we problematize this context by arguing that the ontological complicity of policy interventions – particularly those funded by the global north – is shaping African developments in a manner that is exclusive of localized knowledge and in doing so, constrains that which it sort to improve in the first place. We build our argument on two key points: first, the centrality of preparation programmes in our understanding of educational leadership, management and administration, and second, the apparent absence of interrogation of the socio-political work of constructing the research object. What we propose is a greater need to focus on the epistemological preliminaries of research, rather than just the confirmation or disconfirmation, of the researcher's model of reality.

Keywords

Africa, critical, leadership, preparation

Introduction

School leadership preparation and development is one of the 'hot topics' in both the practice and scholarship of educational leadership, management and administration. There has been special issues of some of the field's leading journals (see *Educational Administration Quarterly* 47(1); *Journal of Educational Administration* 46(6); and *School Leadership & Management* 29(3),

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published in the USA, Australia and UK, respectively), handbooks (see Lumby et al., 2008; Young et al., 2009), and multi-national research ventures such as the collaborative project between the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). That being said, school leadership preparation and development is not a homogenous space. England and Wales have mandated a minimum national qualification prior to appointment and many states in the USA require a master's degree or doctorate in educational administration. In Australia there is a hybrid category where the 'apprentice model' (Su et al., 2003) continues, yet Dinham and colleagues (2011) claim that a master's degree is an unwritten expectation. In contrast, throughout much of Africa there is no formal requirement for aspiring or current headteachers to have any formal preparation and/or development (Arikewuyo, 2009; Bush and Oduro, 2006; Herriot et al., 2002; Oduro and MacBeath, 2003; Pheko, 2008). Despite the different forms of delivery and expectation, the underlying generative principle of school leadership preparation and development globally is that 'leaders' – whoever they are – matter in relation to the quality and improvement of schools and schooling. In many cases, this is based on anecdotal evidence from lived experience and the heroic/motivational leader mythology, or the often cited quote from Leithwood and colleagues that leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its effect on student outcomes. As a result, it is rare that school leadership preparation and development is brought into question (exceptions include Eacott, 2011; English, 2003, 2006; Gunter and Thomson, 2009).

In the diverse geographic and socio-political space that is Africa, school leadership preparation and development, as with much education reform, is caught up in the donor logic of 'catch up' frequently mobilized by the power centres of the global north. Further complicating this social space is the colonial legacy of much of sub-Saharan Africa. With increased pressure on ministries of education to meet the demands of the international aid community, particularly since implementation of the United Nations' *Millennium Development Goals* (Foulds, 2012), many post-colonial reforms are in fact providing the mechanisms through which Anglophone constructs are becoming universal and mobilized at the expense of indigenous constructs.

In this article, we argue that school leadership preparation and development is serving as a mechanism for the universalizing of Anglophone constructs of leadership in African focused scholarship. This is despite substantive rhetoric in policy and scholarship that context, or localization of knowledge, matters. Our argument aligns with three markers: first, there is an emerging trend of African focused scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration discourses; second, a consistent call across these discourses is that 'context' matters and models/methods cannot merely be adopted from other nations and effectively mobilized in Africa (or anywhere for that matter); and third, despite this claim, the mainstream hegemonic position is to replicate the universal constructs of the mainstream Western intellectual terrain. We recognize the well-rehearsed arguments of post-colonial and critical studies in educational leadership, management and administration. In this article we explicitly seek to point out a pattern we see in recent African focused studies in educational leadership, management and administration and provide a productive means of engaging with, if not overcoming, the trend.

The Emerging African Unit of Analysis

It is important to note that we are not advocating here that there is an emerging African tradition of scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration. Rather, we contend that that Africa is an increasing unit of analysis – or research site – in the research published in

Table 1. Articles focusing on Africa in leading journals, 2008–2012.

| Journal | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | Total |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| <i>EAQ</i> | | | | | | |
| Issues | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 |
| Articles | 21 | 24 | 23 | 25 | 23 | 116 |
| African | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>JEA</i> | | | | | | |
| Issues | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 30 |
| Articles | 44 | 39 | 39 | 33 | 36 | 191 |
| African | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| <i>EMAL</i> | | | | | | |
| Issues | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 28 |
| Articles | 29 | 39 | 41 | 42 | 41 | 192 |
| African | 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 15 |
| Total | | | | | | |
| Issues | 15 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 83 |
| Articles | 94 | 102 | 103 | 100 | 100 | 499 |
| African | 4 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 20 |

Anglophone journals in the field. This is not to suggest that academic research has not focused on African nations in the past, as there are numerous examples to the counter (Harber and Dadey, 1993; Kitavi and Van der Westhuizen, 1997; Van der Westhuizen et al., 2004). In order to generate some data from which to stake our claim, we analysed the table of contents for the past five years in the field’s three oldest journals: *Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ)*; *Journal of Educational Administration (JEA)*; and *Educational Management Administration & Leadership (EMAL)* (see Table 1). Two things stand out from this generated data. First, and not surprising, there is little attention to African matters in *EAQ*. As a journal, *EAQ* is US-centric, and even expanding the search to non-US contributions the percentage remains at a very low level, especially for an internationally leading journal in the field (there is however an emerging Asian trend). The percentage of works drawing upon African research is slightly higher in *JEA*. Unlike *EAQ* though, *JEA* has a much higher representation of contributions from across the globe. *EMAL* stands out among these three journals as a publication outlet for African scholarship.

The articles across *EAQ*, *JEA* and *EMAL* over the past five years cover a range of topics, including, but not exclusively, the African contributions to the *International Study of Principal Preparation* (Onguko et al., 2008, 2012), gender (Agezo, 2010; Moorosi, 2010), instructional leadership (Moswela, 2010; Wanzare, 2012), centralization/decentralization (Ikoya, 2008), spiritual leadership (Ngunjiri, 2010), leadership identity (Lumby and Heystek, 2012), performativity (Pansiri, 2011), data driven performance (Prew and Quagrains, 2010), and the roll out of free schooling (Dixon and Tooley, 2012; Tooley et al., 2008), with studies from Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and particularly South Africa (Christie, 2010; Lumby and Heystek, 2012; Mestry and Naidoo, 2009; Moloi et al., 2009; Moorosi, 2010; Ngcobo and Tikly, 2010; Prew, 2009). The significantly higher percentage of papers in *EMAL* (7%) during the sample period compared to *EAQ* (<1%) and *JEA* (2%) is not surprising given that *EMAL* is edited by Tony Bush, who holds a professorial position at the University of Warwick and is a visiting professor at the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South Africa). He has himself written on educational leadership matters in Africa (see Bush, 2011; Bush and Heystek, 2006; Bush and Oduro, 2006;

Bush et al., 2011) and played a role in developments in South Africa as lead of the evaluation of a pilot initiative for a preparation programme the Ministry of Education.

These are of course not the only outlet for publication. This data has been limited to three journals from the field, and if expanded to include others such as *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *International Journal of Educational Management*, *School Leadership & Management*, and *International Studies in Educational Administration* or the relatively recently launched *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies* (published in Africa) the outcome would arguably be more diverse. This is not to mention broader focused journals such as *International Journal of Educational Development*.

In the broader management literature, particularly given the economic rise of China, the role of indigenous research has attracted increasing attention in mainstream (Anglophone) publications. Most importantly, notions of indigenous research seek to move discourses beyond content and contextualization to an explicit engagement with epistemology and the political nature of research. Li (2012: 851) defines indigenous 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, however, a contested space. Tsui (2004) contends that indigenous research requires location-specific contextual factors that must be indigenous, but the theoretical lens can be borrowed. Similarly, Whetten (2009) argues that any research qualifies as indigenous if it covers an indigenous phenomenon or topic, even if theories or concepts are adopted. Li (2012) offers four dimensions which serve as core criteria to delineate indigenous research: (1) *what* (research target, that is, a unique local phenomenon in contrast to a generic global one); (2) *why* (research rationale, that is, highlighting the endogenous and divergent natures of a local phenomenon in contrast to its exogenous and convergent natures); (3) *how* (research approach, that is, adopting a context-specific approach to create locally relevant constructs, methods, and theories); and (4) *for whom* (research result, that is, a contribution in terms of substituting or superseding the 'imported' components and/or as an 'export' toward a culture-integrative framework from a geocentric perspective). Anything that meets two of the latter three criteria qualifies as indigenous research. These four dimensions sit within a larger four-stage framework for indigenous research (Li, 2012: 853–854). It is these four stages that are most useful for our argument regarding the notion of African scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration. Stage one is the most basic, and non-indigenous, approach involves the uncritical local adoption of extant theories from the West labelled as *basic exploitation*. This is an emic-as-etic (imposed etic) approach with mostly Western content, thus neither unique nor novel. Stage two is a more advanced approach involving multi-context comparative research with the potential to discover one or more novel local constructs unique to a local phenomenon, thus possible to modify or revise the extant theories from the West as *advanced exploitation*. This is an etic-to-emic approach by comparing two perspectives, thus both unique and novel to a limited extent. Stage three is an even more advanced stream or approach involving the development of a local theory to explain a unique local phenomenon as *basic exploration*. This can complement or supersede extant theory from the West as an emic-as-emic approach with mostly non-western content, thus both unique and novel narrowly at the local level. Stage four is the most advanced approach involving an integration of the above three approaches toward a geocentric or *advanced exploration*. This is an emic-and-etic approach

with both Western and alternate contents being integrated, thus both unique and novel broadly at the global level.

Although at first glance it may seem useful to construct a matrix of the sample articles using Li's (2012) framework for indigenous research, we however seek a slightly different outcome – one that requires nuancing and is more appropriate to educational leadership, management and administration discourses, those which remain more parochial than general management discourses. It is here where Ribbins' (2007) identification of two differing epistemic communities is most useful. For Ribbins there are two major groups operating in educational administration discourses: first, policy studies – those concerned with 'what should be done' and 'how far is this being achieved' questions; and second, leadership, administration and management studies – those which overemphasize 'how to do it' and 'what works', frequently with relatively small scale studies or what would contemporarily be categorized as case studies of 'turnaround' leaders. Ribbins saw this division, or at least separate epistemic communities, as a detriment to advancing scholarship, understanding and practice. We too see this as a problem, but when combined with Li's (2012) work on indigenous research, for a different reason. Policy studies that focus on the evaluation of policy implementation, describe how a policy plays out, or editorialize about how things should be, offer little in the theorization of policy or practice. Such papers give rise to Li et al.'s (2012) argument that contextualized research is not necessarily indigenous. That is, the study of universal constructs (for example, school leadership, leadership preparation), even if contextualized, does not necessarily involve adopting a localized perspective. As such, the contribution of the work to the body of knowledge is frequently limited to the novelty of this type of work has never been done in this context before. This problem is not limited to work coming from developing countries. As is it, a scan of many journal articles in educational leadership, management and administration, even in many leading journals, would enable the generation of a substantial list of papers that conform to this claim.

For the purpose of our article, we draw attention to the relative absence of epistemological and political arguments in papers with Africa as a focus. This is not to suggest they are completely absent from the corpus. Ngunjiri (2010) provides what is arguably the best example of indigenous research in the sample as it provides an argument regarding women's spiritual leadership that integrates Western and indigenous (Kenyan and Sudanese) perspectives to generate a geo-centric construct. Similarly, although not to the same extent, Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) do work around the universal construct of 'effective leadership' (primarily taken from Western literature) and interweave that with the unique context of South Africa, notably township and rural schools – a context also taken up by Prew (2009). An important observation is made by Christie (2010) in her mapping of the intellectual and empirical terrain of educational leadership, management and administration in South Africa. Significantly, she (2010: 695) notes that scholarship, particularly South African, is not 'simple replicas of universal constructs, though they may appear to be so at first sight. Following Christie, we contend that an African educational leadership, management and administration academic community has to grapple with the challenge of generating locally relevant research while also negotiating the larger academic game of publishing internationally.

The data generated and mobilized here does not tell the full story – if such a claim is even possible – rather it is to highlight that despite the presence of African focused research in internationally leading journals of educational leadership, management and administration what we see is not for the most part, an emerging set of indigenous African theoretical resources, but the adoption of Anglophone hegemony in the African context. In doing so, we see not a unique and original intellectual tradition emerging from the socio-political space, taking into consideration the unique

configuration of time and space, that is Africa. Instead, we see the novelty of mapping the terrain with conceptual tools and topics that have come about elsewhere. Central to our argument here is the level at which the engagement with Africa takes place. For the most part, we see the mobilization of Africa as a research site as limited to empirical problems rather than that of theoretical problems – those which are embedded in empirical problems. This goes part of the way to explaining why Africa is a site, with the originality of the research caught up in the novelty of this work having not previously been undertaken in the context. What this does is fail to engage with the larger theoretical question of legitimation of the social world and instead focus on specific examples of how this plays out. A significant contributor to this situation we believe to be the generative work of school leadership preparation and development especially those mobilizing models from Anglophone nations.

Reproducing the Global North?

A consistent message in scholarship emanating from and about Africa is that programmes and theories developed in Europe and the USA (among others) cannot merely be transferred to and adopted in the African context (Harber and Dadey, 1993; Oduro and MacBeath, 2003). This is not however a universal message. For example, Pheko (2008) calls for Botswana to replicate the English model. However, given it was published in a journal based in England, it is arguably a well-placed socio-political argument. It is also to be noted that English consultants were hired to develop school leadership preparation and development models in Botswana (Monyatsi et al., 2008). Similarly, the South African model and the role of the Matthew Goniwe School of Governance and Leadership is also very similar to that of England. Bush and Oduro (2006) argue that a productive means of advancing school leadership preparation and development in Africa is through partnerships between governments, international agencies and universities in Western countries. Such relations are usually formed through access to donor funding. This creates a substantive issue in the African context as it potentially constructs a dependence on external expertise (and funding), all the while legitimizing the deficit view of Africa nations.

While recognizing that Africa is not a homogenous whole, and with reservations of contributing to deficit discourses, we believe it is fair to say that, at least in East Africa, school based educators work in extremely challenging circumstances. Many of which are difficult to comprehend in much of the Anglophone world. Schools are poorly resourced (both personnel and materials), community support is frequently limited due to (extreme) poverty and parental education levels (especially given that many nations have not long rolled out universal free education) and there are broader social issues such as pregnancy, poor personal hygiene, HIV/AIDS, orphanage placements, child labour (Onguko, et al., 2012), water, sanitation (Dreibelbis et al., 2012) and armed conflict (Poirier, 2012). As noted above, we mobilize this to not further legitimize the deficit view of African nations, rather to highlight that context matters and we cannot assume a universality of problems – both theoretical and empirical – ‘solutions’ and even constructs. Here we have both an internal tension for reform and external pressure to conform to funders. As a few examples we draw on Kenya, Botswana and South Africa, albeit briefly, to build our argument.

In Kenya, the preparation and development of school leaders has been an enduring question for governments. The Primary School Management (PRISM) project was implemented from 1996 to 2000 courtesy of donor funding, providing 16,700 teachers the opportunity to participate in school management learning activities with a range of educational stakeholders (Crossley et al., 2005). Sustained activities established during the PRISM project include support groups (Waudou et al.,

2002), but the long-term impact of this programme is contested. There is a national institute, the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), established to serve as a catalyst for poverty reduction by enhancing educational leaders' management competencies and bringing about a paradigm shift among educational leaders. The Ministry of Education, through funding from US Agency for International Development (USAID), conducted the *Kenya Educational Management Capacity Assessment* (KEMCA) which concluded that despite considerable financial resourcing, most headteachers feel that they either had not been prepared for their role or lacked key administrative skills even when they had attended courses. Kenya is also part of the current United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Varkey GEMS Foundation funded *10,000 Principals Leadership Programme* (with Ghana and India). As a policy initiative, the Teachers' Service Commission (the employing body of educators) requires school administrators to attend a minimum of two development courses annually. Although there are some courses offered by KEMI, universities, systemic authorities, professional associations and consultants, school leadership preparation and development remains ad hoc, haphazard and not responsive to the needs of current and aspiring principals (Asuga and Eacott, 2012).

Since gaining independence from the British in 1966, Botswana has prioritized education in public policy under the guise of nation building, improving productivity and global competitiveness. While Pheko (2008) suggests that most headteachers feel they are contributing to educational development in Botswana, large scale evaluations such as the National Commission on Education (1993) and that of the Commonwealth Secretariat (1996) have drawn attention to the lack of adequate preparation for the headteacher role, poor support structures and a general concern regarding the skill set of school leaders. Two specific initiatives trialled include: the Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) in 1981, funded by the USAID; and the Primary Schools Management Development Project (1999–2002), a joint venture between the government and the UK Department for International Development. The PEIP sought to improve, among other things, the headteacher leadership skills in primary education, and was institutionalized through the establishment of a Department of Primary Education at the University of Botswana (Evans and Yoder, 1991; Pansiri, 2011). The primary purpose of the PSMDP was to develop the management and instructional leadership skills of primary school heads in order to make them more effective at their jobs. It consisted of three training units: (1) leading the learning school; (2) leading the ethical school; and (3) leading the person-centred school. Although it is argued that this project has had a significant impact (Monyatsi, et al., 2008; Pansiri, 2008), there is a general consensus that much work is to be done in relation to leadership preparation and support in Botswana. A particular focus of the work needed to be done is how leadership preparation can best be used to provide the support for current and aspiring headteachers (Pansiri, 2008; Pheko, 2008), and whether a systemic national training policy and/or national training institute is a desirable path forward (Pheko, 2008).

One nation that has taken the path to national qualifications through an institute is South Africa. Aspiring school leaders must obtain the National Professional Qualification for Principals (NPQP) to qualify as a school headteacher candidate – very similar to the English system. Additionally, the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) based on the National Qualification Framework has been introduced, believed to be the first national qualification of its kind in Africa – although Bush et al. (2011) raise questions as to whether it is a 'genuine' national programme. The ACE is delivered by universities through an agreed common framework with the former national Department of Education and the National Management and Leadership Committee (Bush, 2011). The ACE is a practice-based, two-year, part-time course addressing the professional development concerns of headteachers, by providing opportunities for both current and aspiring headteachers to develop

their competencies, change their career paths, and/or adopt new roles (Mestry and Singh, 2007). This opens a new, but well-rehearsed, issue regarding the theory–practice divide in school leadership preparation and development (Eacott, 2011). While calls have been to make the ACE an entry-level qualification, some university faculty have suggested that post-graduate qualifications in educational management (a.k.a. administration and/or leadership) are a better or at least alternate option. In response to these calls, Bush (2011: 798) writes:

While this argument is understandable, it underestimates the practice-based elements of the national programme, and the distinctive portfolio-led assessment strategy. However, given the inevitable short-term supply problems created by requiring an entry-level qualification, it may be appropriate to allow holders of other similar qualifications to become principals, subject to a conversion process, allowing graduates to demonstrate the application of theory to school-based practice, for an interim period.

This is a significant move, one that speaks directly to the underlying generative assumptions of the hegemony of school leadership preparation and development. While Bush's comment does not explicitly de-value the role of theory (a position that would be counter to Bush's wider body of work), it does raise the dominant privileging of practice. In doing so, it constructs university qualifications as something other than practically based. It is however noted that this position was taken in the context of research arguing that despite many graduates there was little, if any, evidence to suggest that a university qualification had an impact on practice and arguably the focus was more on achieving accreditation than improving schools (Bush et al., 2011). Interestingly though, whereas Botswana and Kenya have mobilized foreign donors to fund programmes, South Africa has established relations with English universities. This is not an uncommon move, with many other examples, including Seychelles with the Universities of Lincoln and Warwick just to name another.

We seek to raise two matters here: first, the scale of these reforms; and second, and arguably more important, at least for this paper, a larger theoretical question. In relation to the former, donor funding and/or international collaboration has enabled a far greater number of current and aspiring school leaders to access professional learning that they arguably would not have had the opportunity to do otherwise. Given the difficulty in measuring professional learning, not to mention matters of temporality regarding over when and what time period effects will occur, it is difficult to argue that such moves have not been positive, at least to some extent. This is not to suggest an endorsement of the approach, rather a recognition of the work that such initiatives have undertaken. The larger theoretical problem that this raises is the legitimization, or de-legitimation, of indigenous African concepts. Or more specifically, the legitimization of 'local' contributions in the empirical problem of preparing and developing school leaders. This is because national qualifications, by their very nature, even if factoring in for local variation/contextualization, assume a universality to concepts, problems and contemporary issues.

Constructing Preparation and Development

A question that arises from the above narratives is 'What exactly is school leadership preparation and development in the *African* context?' What we are suggesting here is not simply a call for descriptive narratives of an empirical reality but rather an engagement with the epistemological preliminaries of work. We are seeking to interrogate the construction of school leadership

preparation and development *in Africa* as a research object. This serves as a key point of distinction for our paper in the broader discourses of school leadership preparation and development. That is, we are arguing for the need to focus on the construction of the research object, rather than just the confirmation – or disconfirmation – of the researcher’s model of what that reality should be. The examples cited previously from Kenya, Botswana and South Africa demonstrate a particular orthodoxy of thinking about school leadership preparation and development. On a global scale, contemporary thought and analysis is based on notions of national institutes and systems of accreditation, licensing and/or mandatory programmes. Two things stand out here, first, the centrality of programmes – both empirically and theoretically – to our understanding of school leadership, and second the absence of any meaningful interrogation of the socio-political work of constructing the research object.

What we have come to know as school leadership preparation and development, and school leadership in general for that matter, is significantly shaped, if not limited to, our location as embedded and embodied agents (Eacott, 2014). What we mean by this is that due to the lived experience and our own engagement with the ordinary discourses of the social world, our recognition of and thinking about school leadership preparation and development is limited as much as it is limiting. The label ‘school leadership preparation and development’ is most frequently mobilized to identify a set of practices that exist outside of the pedagogical/educative space. That is, school leadership preparation takes place outside of the physical setting that is the school, just as school leadership takes place outside of the classroom and immediate instructional context. The ontological complicity of school leadership preparation and development scholarship, primarily that of the spontaneous analysis of the social world using ordinary language, does little to question the underlying generative principles of such thinking. Overcoming this is not easy. It requires intellectual work around the very construction of school leadership preparation and development as a research object. This is what Bourdieu et al. (1991[1968]), following Gaston Bachelard (although often attributed to Louis Althusser), refer to as an ‘epistemological break’ and serves as the key distinction between scientific – in the Francophone sense of the word rather than the Anglophone which is caught up in the exhibitionism of data and method – discourses and those of the ordinary, or pre-scientific, discourses.

Although this may seem like a dense philosophical argument and one that has little importance for school leadership preparation and development in Africa, we contend it is actually at the very core of the issue. As noted above, the examples we have used are evidence of a particular orthodoxy of thinking about preparation and development. Significantly, this orthodoxy is one grounded in the practices of the global north. It is to be noted that for the most part educational leadership, management and administration as a field of study finds its genesis in the establishment of departments in US universities in the early 1900s. By their very nature, departments of educational administration were founded on the preparation and development of school leaders. Understandably, Kenya, Botswana and South Africa, as Commonwealth nations, all have colonial ties to the UK rather than the USA, but the centrality of preparation and development remains. In addition, moves to national curriculum, associated examination systems, uniformed school calendars, and a culture of national and official languages (Pansiri, 2011) is reflective of a colonial legacy and replication of the global north. The engagement with ‘experts’ and donors from the north are both productive yet inhibitive. The reason being that the underlying generative principle of such moves are internal tensions built around notions of developmental thinking where the central tenet is to see one’s system as lesser than more developed nations and wanting to call on their expertise to better yourself. Although there is the opportunity to learn from the lived experience of others, there is also the highly likely outcome of replication – even if it is contextualized. As Pansiri (2011: 762) states:

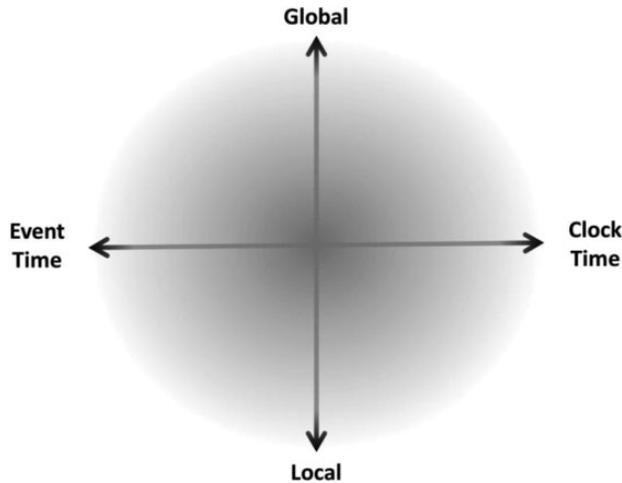


Figure 1. Relational administration framework.

... Both USAID and DfID brought with them the ready-made programme to improve school management skills, and lost focus on the real problems and overlooked policy dislocation within the context they were being applied ... Experience has shown that most of the claimed achievements from foreign aid programmes in developing countries have been difficult to sustain and have little impact on the majority of citizens in aid receiving countries.

Theoretically, we argue that such engagements with external expertise need to be problematized in relation to socio-geographic and temporal conditions. In doing so, we mobilize the framework being developed by the lead author (Eacott, 2014) for the study of educational leadership, management and administration from a relational perspective (see Figure 1). This approach gives us two features of school leadership preparation and development in Africa to interrogate. First, the relationship of policy reforms and initiatives to the socio-geographic space, or more specifically, the degree to which moves are localized. Second, is the relationship that reforms have with time, and specifically whether they mobilize event or clock time.

The question of socio-geographic space, or localization, has an apparently clear cut perspective at present in the literature. As Bush and Oduro (2006: 370) argue '[w]hat is more likely to succeed is a set of recommendations firmly grounded in the realities of African education'. Africa is, at both the continent and individual nation level, unique. As is any context. The question that we see emerging from these discourses of localization (as opposed to universalism) is 'What makes this approach to school leadership preparation and development African?'. This is an important question. That is, apart from the fact that school leadership preparation and development is taking place in an African nation, what is it that makes it distinctive to that continent, nation, region, and so on. What is it that distinguishes it from a one-size-fits-all model imported from outside? These are significant questions to ask in a socio-geographic space dominated by external donors and experts. As the examples cited earlier in the article indicate and those from others (Bush and Oduro, 2006), numerous African nations are importing school leadership preparation and development systems and structural arrangements courtesy of donors or external experts. Nonetheless, it is a mistake to construct a binary of internal or external initiated reforms. Such binaries are rarely productive

spaces, and for the most part make it impossible to grasp the nature of any social practice. Instead, there is a need to weave the macro with the micro in trying to come to grips with the social world. This is because education, and more importantly educating, is defined as much by its relations with other social institutions as anything else. Therefore, education is a dynamic notion that can only be understood – even if partially – through locating and recognizing that any description is merely a snapshot of practice at a given point in time in a particular space. This snapshot however is neither ahistorical nor apolitical.

Public interest in improving the access to and quality of schooling is high in all nations across the globe. Due to the centrality of education in national, and global, productivity and with the advent of (or at least goal of achieving) universal primary education courtesy of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, education and educating are deeply political practices. This is not surprising. Education is a means of achieving some form of advantage, for example (upward) social mobility or economic progress, among others. However, as soon as we move beyond the criteria referenced goal of universal access (although it is also possible to argue that such a goal is embedded with a principle that continues to advantage those already advantaged) into a comparative space (progress) the political, or asymmetrical resources of the social world come to the fore. One of the most glaring examples of this is large scale international testing regimes such as the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). In many cases, performance in these comparative tests is used by those beyond the immediacy of education (for example, bureaucrats, politicians, social commentators) as a proxy for school system performance, much like national level testing. Although few African nations participate in PISA and TIMSS and the subsequently constructed rankings or global league table of school system performance, the significance of global competitiveness and equitable school systems is not lost on African systems. This is demonstrated in the engagement with higher ranking education systems and experts from afar, not to mention the large number of African scholars sponsored to undertake doctoral students in the West and return to their posts after study with the explicit purpose of advancing national standing in education on a global scale. We are not suggesting that this is an unproductive practice, rather as part of a rigorous and robust 'scientific' inquiry, scholars should seek to both locate and problematize that location in the context of local and global discourses. In doing so, our scholarly narratives foreground social relations as opposed to relationships. The distinction is significant. For the most part, relationships are conceptualized in ways that enable one to map ties and chains of interaction between individuals, organizations, and the state (among others). In contrast, as our lead author has argued elsewhere:

... I contend that there is a need for a more relational understanding of educational administration and policy. That is, a theoretically grounded mobilization of policy and administration that pays attention to the abstract systems of difference and distance within the social space established through asymmetrical distribution of resources within society. (Eacott, 2014:48)

What this is suggesting is that it is inappropriate to conceive of any individual educator, school, school system, and so on, as operating in an apolitical or isolated social space. Whether we like it or not, we are all part of a larger social fabric and as with everything, this plays out in school leadership preparation – both in the scholarship on the topic and the practice of it. This speaks to the originality of research. Simply arguing for the novelty of something never being done in a particular context is not enough to warrant an original contribution to knowledge. Rather, a more

scholarly question to ask is ‘Why is this initiative taking place in this place at this particular time?’ In doing so, the mobilization of time moves beyond that of ‘clock time’, that which artificially partitions the social world to construct timetables, targets, calendars, schedules and targets and does little more than bring our understanding of the social world into alignment with a particular narrative of measurement. For a discussion of how this plays out for leadership as a concept, see Eacott (2013). In contrast, ‘event time’ focuses on how the social world is unfolding without the need to prescribe a past–present–future model of reality. This is an important lens for mobilizing the histories that actors bring to a particular situation and how they play out. In doing so, it also removes an inbuilt comparison based on developmental thinking (for example, this nation is 20 years behind this other nation) and again reintroduces the socio-political space into the description. As a result, comparative studies which take as their foci two completely different contexts and make arguments about similarities and differences are no longer sufficient – if they ever were. Such point-in-time comparisons require ‘clock time’. As noted above, mobilizing ‘event time’ means asking questions of ‘why now?’. That is, why are the current practices taking place now (and just as importantly, why are other practices not)? What is it about the unique socio-geographic conditions, including the configuration of key actors that is producing the contemporary condition? This shift in focus moves beyond the description of a particular initiative or reform and requires a degree of engagement with the political nature of the socio-geographic space and the events that have led to this particular point in time. Adopting this perspective does not necessarily remove the possibility of comparative studies. Rather, it moves the nature of such studies from what is taking place to why is it taking place in this particular context. This is consistent with the earlier question of what makes this perspective African.

What we are doing here is proposing an intervention built around the theoretical problem of the legitimation of the social world and the empirical manifestation of that problem in the preparation and development of school leaders. For example, a question from this lens that is embedded within the current literature is why, if we are in a post-colonial world (which having achieved independence, most African nations would claim), are African nations subjecting themselves to colonial masters in the reform of their education systems? Such questions are more than intellectual puzzles designed to fill the days of ivory tower academics. They are essential for nation building and national identity. These questions may not appear directly relevant to stakeholders seeking to embed improvements or bring about change, but they are important questions and important questions are by their very nature, always relevant for those seeking to improve practice. Are the answers or solutions easy? Arguably not, but then again, as English (2006) reminds us, educational leadership as a vibrant field of theories and practices is a dynamic environment with fissures, antinomies, multiplicities and contradictions. Significantly, advances may ‘almost never be efficient, perhaps not even cost-effective, but then, true discovery and significant intellectual and practical breakthroughs rarely are’ (p. 470).

Education, in this case school leadership preparation and development, is both the creator of opportunity but also a potential death of the local. As scholars and field-based practitioners, there is a need to think through temporality, socio-geographic conditions, colonial legacy and the construction of leadership as a concept as we seek to engage with, and improve, the practice of school leaders. Constructing an African nation as a poor performing education system that needs to be saved from itself by external expertise does little productive work. In contrast, such a move instils an orthodoxy of perpetual improvement in both individuals and the system at large, one where you can never be good enough and there is always more to do. This internal tension in school leadership preparation and development research, especially for those non-African nationals – or even those

not based in Africa – undertaking it, needs to be actively engaged with and problematized if we are to see the emergence of an African tradition of research appearing in Anglophone journals for educational leadership, management and administration.

Conclusion

In order to engage with the central question of this article, we have sought to not apply or map the intellectual terrain of educational leadership management and administration in Africa using an external narrative. Such an approach is not desirable or helpful, as it leaves the existing theorization of educational leadership intact. Rather, what we offer is a theoretical intervention that enables a new understanding of the relationship between socio-geographic space and temporal conditions of African education. The colonial legacy of importing ideas and expertise from outside to fix problems in Africa prevails. As does the drop and go approach of external donors. This is not to question the intentions of those working with African education systems, rather to point out a need to ask new questions and construct alternate narratives of school leadership preparation and development. As a field of scholarship and practice, educational leadership, management and administration, at least in mainstream Anglophone journals primarily from the global north, have yet to move beyond the colonial nature of engagement with Africa. In this article, we have sought to contribute to these discourses by suggesting that while Africa has been paid increasing attention in certain outlets (for example, *EMAL*) and across a range of topics within educational leadership, management and administration as a scholarly space, this engagement has not for the most part moved beyond the novelty of a ‘new’ research site. Our call is for a theorization of practice, one that contributes to rather than against contemporary African based discourses in the field. We acknowledge the contributions of our fellow academics working in the African educational leadership space and aspire to an ongoing dialogue seeking to better theorize the space.

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