

Editorial

Decolonising Education Leadership Knowledge and Practice: What direction for Sub-Saharan Africa?

Jean Pierre Elonga Mboyo

Teesside University, Middlesbrough, United Kingdom

Much of the literature that has contributed to school leadership being widely accepted as the second most important school-based factor to classroom teaching that correlates to student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2006; 2020) is based on knowledge produced in the Western world (Khalifa et al., 2019). Although this mono-cultural dominance of the discipline is slowly being reversed by a growing diverse global knowledge base (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018; Hallinger, 2020), the quantitative increase only begs the question about the qualitative decolonising direction that should shape the body of knowledge being produced. In response, the collection of articles in this issue offers a promising overall decolonising agenda for educational leadership and management particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa without claiming to prescribe a single definitive path as doing so would be counterproductive to the spirit of diversity that triggered this enquiry in the first place.

The first linked article by Jean Pierre Elonga Mboyo, therefore, sets the tone for cross-context comparative research as one of the ways to decolonise educational leadership research and practice. The author

argues for Comparative Research Concept (CRC) as a paradigm to help to ontologically, epistemologically and culturally ground future multicultural and cross-context (Africa and West) educational leadership research and practice capable of offering authentic decolonising alternative approaches to school leadership. While various researchers using CRC may elect to take different research approaches, Jean Pierre's discussion rehearses the viability of a narrative research approach to realise a decolonising agenda in rather non-impervious contexts.

In the second linked article, Jean Pierre operationalises CRC through leadership (narrative) conversations with two urban primary school headteachers based in Kinshasa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo's [DRC] capital city) and two others based in South Yorkshire (in the North of England). The author notes that, like their English counterparts, the DRC's headteachers displayed an awareness of how objectively or subjectively structured the local and/or national contexts could be before deploying their personal, professional and, ultimately, comparative values in order to develop what they deemed, at a time, to be effective decolonising school leadership approach for their settings.

Linking school leadership with the achievement of set educational goals is crucial, and Colleen Loomis and Abdeljalil Akkari explicitly analyse school readiness, numeracy and literacy test results of 2,304 children in four regions (Antananarivo, Tuléar, Sava, and Betioky) of Madagascar and 242 children in the same region to evaluate progress over time. They note a positive contribution that preschool has on school readiness and attribute some of the success to their proposed decolonising multilateral model to school leadership which they discuss in greater detail.



For his part, Vuyisile Msila draws from his earlier research to add to the decolonising agenda in Africa that should arguably bring what he calls ‘conscientious leaders’ to consider some level of hybridisation of knowledges and approaches to school leadership. This is made possible through his proposed five-stepped TURNS (Thinking, Unthinking, Rethinking, Nurturing and Solidifying) leadership empowerment model. With TURNS model shaping leaders’ behaviours, Vuyisile hopes to ground educational leadership in Africa on a value system that not only decolonises the practice itself but also pursues a transformative social justice agenda for the wider community.

The paucity of African school leadership knowledge base within the literature may, according to Pontso Morrosi, have something to do with the deficiency model that has often been used to characterise the continent. In response, Pontso undertakes an analytical discussion of various mis/representations of the field in Africa and proposes a post-colonial reading that, among other features, includes promoting indigenous knowledge while remaining true to the multiplicity of histories that are an integral part of the continent’s legacy.

Although the articles in this issue offer various theoretical and empirically based perspectives to decolonising school leadership in Africa, they nevertheless converge on the need to integrate various perspectives and knowledges in order to lead effectively. Such a stand presupposes a unique understanding of context in educational leadership. To that end, Jean Pierre Elonga Mboyo concludes with a discussion that seeks to frame context from a critical realist relational perspective and acts as a contextual launchpad for the proposed and future educational leadership and management theorising and practice that subscribe to this decolonising agenda.

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About the author

Jean Pierre Elonga Mboyo is Senior Lecturer at Teesside University. He teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses and researches educational leadership.

Email: jp.elonga@tees.ac.uk

Twitter: @jpelonga