

Situating School Leadership in African Discourses: Reflections from Zambia

Oliver Mubita Kalabo

PhD Student, Department of Education, University of Africa, Box 35440, Thorn Park, Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract: *In this paper, a selected historical position of leadership theorising is explained starting with the mainstream four categories of the essentialist, relational, critical, and constructionist concepts. This is followed by the educational leadership theory outlining the four core positions in leadership studies of critical, humanistic, instrumental, and scientific. The phenomenon of culture and the location or context in which research into leadership is conducted is also articulated. The issue of culture, context and perceptions in the discourses of leadership in Africa as they relate to the Butu-Ubuntu leadership philosophy that is considered as a model and framework for an Afro-centric leadership concept are explored. The paper argues for scholars and researchers to challenge the current position of school leadership public policy and practice in Africa in general and Zambia in particular as to whether the intended objectives are being realised and if not propose an alternative course of action as appropriate based on research findings.*

Keywords: Leadership, School leadership, Butu-Ubuntu philosophy, Zambia.

1. Introduction

Scholars and researchers who endeavour to study educational leadership have first to re-wind and understand the many different conceptualisations of leadership. This arises from the fact that research in the field of leadership started much longer as compared to educational leadership. The interest in the study of school leadership is against the belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes despite the lack of clarity about which leadership behaviours are most likely to produce the desired results [2].

The various theories of educational leadership speak to the different ways scholars and researchers understand and interpret this field. Most theories of leadership emerged from developed western countries. However, there is recognition that African ideas also have much to offer in these discourses. This raises the issue of culture and the location or context in which research into leadership is being articulated and enacted. Scholars and researchers in developing countries like Zambia have to navigate through these many issues and positions to first, make sense and second, to propose models of leadership that will be useful in the local context. The advantage here is that the starting point will be from theories, models and concepts that have been tested elsewhere.

This paper, therefore, examines, reviews, and explores the theoretical/conceptual underpinnings in the field of leadership in general and school leadership in particular. The paper also deals with the issues of culture, context, and perceptions of leadership in Africa relative to school leadership.

1.1. Evolution and Theories of Leadership

A brief history of the early conceptualisation of leadership in the Western World is captured in Plato's, 'The Republic' in Ancient Greece around the fourth century BC in which Plato

provides a narrative of Socrates' reflection and thoughts about leadership [3]. Socrates is said to have perceived leadership as being based on professional and on technical competence than through populist or democratic decisions (Bolden et al., 2011:21-22 in [3]). A contrary position to Socrates' was Xenophon's who argued that successful leadership require more than knowledge and competence distinguishing between a leader whose followers showed willing obedience and those whose followers complied grudgingly (Mitchell, 2009 in [3]).

It is clear that leadership has been the subject of debate for many centuries, but it is only in the twentieth century that it has become a topic for sustained formal analysis by researchers and scholars. Most theories of leadership have been developed in the last 70 years. Like most other theories of human behaviour, however, ways of testing these theories and, hence, of establishing their scientific credentials have remained elusive (Blunt, 1997 in [3]). The result is that such theories can be assessed only regarding the intuitive appeal of the explanations they offer, rather than by their ability to withstand repeated attempts to falsify predictions drawn from the following conventional norms of scientific testing (Blunt, 1981; Popper, 1959 in [3]).

In an examination of some of the leading thoughts on leadership theories, Bolden and Kirk [1] group theories of leadership into four categories: the essentialist theories, the relational theories, the critical theories, and the constructionist theories. Kuada [10] explains that the essentialist theories rely on the objectivist paradigm and seek to identify and define what "leadership" is in universal terms -, i.e. focusing on predictable leadership traits and behaviours. He further states that the works of scholars in leadership such as Blake and Mouton (1964), Fiedler (1967), Stogdill (1974), Hersey and Blanchard (1977) and Bass (1985) are examples of this theoretical perspective. The relational theories, on the other hand, argue that leadership resides not within leaders themselves but in their relationship with others. These theorists, therefore, call for recognition of the emergent nature of leadership processes and the distributed nature of expertise and influence [10]. The critical

theories focus their attention on the underlying dynamics of power and politics within organisations and therefore emphasise the social and psychological processes that characterise the performance of leadership functions in groups [10]. Finally, the constructionist theories draw attention to the manner in which the notion of “leadership” is utilised to construct shared meanings that enable people to make sense of their predicaments.

1.2. Leadership in Educational Setting

In the educational settings, leadership is equally a subject of debate and analysis with researchers and scholars seeking to redefine roles and tasks of school leadership. Gunter [5] in investigating the literature reveals four primary positions taken by those who research and write about leadership in educational settings.

The first Gunter [5] states are the critical position that is concerned to inform and emancipate leaders and followers from social injustice and the oppression of established power structures as illustrated by scholars such as Bell (1994), Blackmore (1999), Grace (1995) and Smyth (1989). The critical position Gunter [5] states, draws on the social sciences to map and analyse the interplay between the agency of the role incumbent and the structures that enhance or limit that agency. Providing practitioners with opportunities to reflect on what they do, are told to do, and would like to do, enables them to link their work with the bigger picture outside of the immediacy of action. Thinking through the power issues underpinning their professional practice gives scope for interpretation, refusal, and the generation of alternatives to prescribed ways of working. Gunter [5] indicates that there is currently marginalisation and often ridicule of this approach.

The second is the humanistic position that gathers and theories from the experiences and biographies of those who are leaders and managers and is illustrated by scholars such as Day et al. (2000), Gronn (1999), Ribbins (1997) and Southworth (1995). The humanistic position [5] is based on a narrative biographical epistemology through which head teachers can tell their own stories of what it feels like to lead and to exercise leadership in particular settings over time (Ribbins, 1997; Tomlinson et al. 1999 in [5]). The perceived realities of doing the job, combined with how the tensions and dilemmas that are encountered and worked through in real time, can be revealed (Day et al., 2000 in [5]). Gunter [5] states that because the policy emphasis is on the immediacy of action, then the longitudinal and contextual location of professional experiences is seen as too subjective and immeasurable to be of significant use in the drive to improve standards.

The third is the instrumental position that provides leaders with effective leadership strategies to deliver organisational outcomes as illustrated by Cadwell & Spinks (1988, 1992, 1998 in [5]). The instrumental position provides models of effective systems and cultures designed to enable site-based performance management to be operationalized (Grace, 1995 in [5]). Post holders are defined as leaders, and the behaviours of effective leaders are described, and this type of

work has become very popular through ‘management by ring binder’ publications (Halpin, 1990 in [5]).

The fourth, Gunter [5] states, is the scientific position that abstracts and measures the impact of leadership effectiveness on organisational outcomes as illustrated by Leithwood et al. [11] and Simmons et al. (1997 in [5]). The scientific position seeks to measure the causal impact of head teachers as leaders (and other post holders) on follower behaviours, functions, and emotions, and on student learning outcomes, and so enables statistical evidence to be generated about the link between policy and practice. This supports the abstraction of leadership attributes and skills that can be instrumentalised through bullet point listings of what is effective [5].

1.3. Culture and Context of Leadership

The phenomenon of culture and the location or context in which research into leadership is articulated and enacted has emerged as a contentious issue in contemporary leadership studies (Sveiby, 2011 in [3]). Leadership scholars hold three main points of view about culture and context namely: the essentialist or universal, the cross-cultural and critical constructions. The archetypal mainstream account of leadership tends to advance a theory of universalization, staying blind to cultural diversity and contextual differences. Mainstream scholars argue that there are such global brands as McDonalds and Disneyland which are collectively enjoyed across the world suggesting that cultures may be converging and consolidating creating cultural and human universality (Brown, 1991; Deguchi, 2014 in [3]).

Eyong [3] states that contrary to the above mainstream ideas; cross-cultural leadership theorists and researchers (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1997; Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004 in [3]) emphasise cultural differences between countries. For instance, Hofstede (1980 in [3]) presents five dimensions of culture that distinguishes one national culture from the other including the dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and long-term versus short-term orientation. Also, the GLOBE leadership project, House [6] subsequently added four more cultural dimensions to Hofstede’s five above making a total of nine dimensions including assertiveness, gender equality, human orientation and performance orientation. Nevertheless, concerns have been raised about the methods employed in both research works. The main argument according to Eyong [3] is that the quantitative methods used have reduced such complex phenomenon as leadership and culture by placing them into boxes under a few sets of variables (Tayeb, 2001; Williamson, 2002 in [3]). Another critique Eyong [3] adds been that these studies conceptualise culture at a country level, suggesting countries and regions to be homogenous when they are not (Fang, 2003; McSweeney, 2002 in [3]).

Eyong [3] further argues that contrasting the above mainstream disregard for cultural specificity but complementing cross-cultural recognition of cultural difference is the more recent anti-essentialist critical argument. Culture and context are key determinants of

leadership 'knowing' and 'doing' (Collinson, 2011; Ford, 2010; Jackson and Parry, 2010 in [3]). This argument is founded on the consideration that leadership is fundamentally a cultural activity infused with values, beliefs, language, artefacts and rituals (Jackson and Parry, 2010 in [3]). Also, that constructions and meanings of leadership are mainly representations of local realities or constructions of the immediate worlds in which people live and experience life on a daily basis (Schwandt, 2003 [3]). It follows from the pro-cultural argument that globalisation cannot be denied and that there are behaviours and practices within the leadership that will always be common amongst human beings wherever they are. However, even such standard features would not yield precisely the leadership narratives or practices.

2. Leadership in Africa

Eyong, [3] argues that contemporary representations of leadership in Africa have sought to compare and to contrast between Western practices and perceptions and approaches considered being representative of 'African' leadership thinking. Such comparatives have led to opposites such as: instrumental versus humanistic, developed versus developing, and civilised versus uncivilised (Jackson, 2004 in [3]). Ironically such mainly asymmetric and political assumptions continue to be held more broadly due to limited of knowledge of leadership in the African context (Bolden and Kirk, 2009 in [3]). This paucity of knowledge, Eyong (2015) further states, has meant that analysts and critics continue to rely on the above dichotomies established during the Western colonial governance of Africa as representations of leadership in the African context.

However, it has been argued that given that the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser was one of Western dominance this power asymmetry could not have evolved a fair appreciation of the fundamentals of leadership thinking in Africa (Inyang, 2009 in [3]). The overriding assumption of colonialists was that Western ideas and practices were civilised and best while African cultural and traditional approaches to leadership were wrong or inferior (Blunt and Jones, 1997; Inyang, 2009; Jackson, 2004 in [3]). Based on this assumption, Eyong (2015) suggests that African cultural approaches to leadership were relegated and have from the colonial époque assumed to be lost. Nevertheless, more recent empirical work is beginning to resurface constructions of Afro-centric organisation and leadership in much better ways (Bolden and Kirk, 2009, Fouries et al., 2015; Jackson, 2013; Khoza, 2012; Van Zyl and Dalglis, 2009 in [3]). The emerging views that have surfaced in the literature advance the notion of 'hybridity' Jackson [7]. Other writers have found similarities between leadership in the African context and particular aspects of leadership elsewhere while some have doubted the existence of typologies of Afro-centric leadership (Bolden and Kirk 2009). In the midst of this dilemma, the more important question and limitation of some of the studies have been about the extent of which the African continent constitutes a homogenous social entity given the complex configuration of the continent [14]. These issues have led to various connotations, narratives and assumptions. However, beyond the rhetoric, Butu-Ubuntu leadership

philosophy has featured as the most recognisable Afro-centric leadership theory in leadership studies [3].

2.1. The Batu-Bantu Origin

A significant part of Africa is inhabited by a collection of related ethnic groups classified linguistically as Bantu. The Bantu are known to have at some time been, settled in the equatorial rainforest and migrated to different parts of Africa, absorbing other communities and also becoming assimilated as they migrated [12]. Bantu and Bantu-heritage cultures are widespread in central, eastern and southern Africa.

According to Littrell [12], 10,000 years ago Bantu-speaking people set up cattle-based financial communities; these eventually were presided over by the community and national leaders and stratified by age, gender, and wealth signified by ownership of livestock. Traditional leadership in most kingdoms and communities was based on ascribed power passed on through matriarchal or patrilineal inheritance. Values, customs, beliefs and rights were developed and codified through oral traditions. On the other hand, traditional rulers had to continually seek the council of elders before resolving weighty or ambiguous matters that had no precedent. To a large extent, leadership decision-making and legislating processes were based on consensus among a select group of elders concerning the interpretation of oral traditions and customs. People achieved leadership status as they advanced in age within the community. Age was explicitly associated with seniority and accumulated wisdom. However, failure to adhere to universal values and norms often led one to be ostracised (Littrell & Gregory 2008 in [12]). These situations and traditions were heavily influenced, and leadership practices were to various degrees changed by European colonisation.

While European expansion was taking place, the process of conversion to Christianity was being facilitated by gifts, favourable trade arrangements, and other commercial activities. This was followed by gradual enculturation to the home culture of the colonisers, and by gradual conversion of the population to Christianity, the establishment of missionary schools to teach the local community to read and write, and to educate a local cadre of administrators to facilitate the aims of the colonisers [12]. It is against this background that African countries gained its independence from the 1950's to the 1970's, and finally, South Africa was liberated in 1994. The outcome of this process of gaining independence and achieving liberation was the creation of new African countries that were different from the pre-colonial formations of kingdoms and traditional nations. The new structures were designed and launched by European colonialism, across indigenous African boundaries of countries and nations, and amalgamated previously separated and distinct traditional cultural customs, values and ethnic groups. The departing European colonial powers handed power and leadership of these non-indigenous countries to a non-indigenous crop of leaders, without obligation or fidelity to indigenous African systems, institutions and leaders. This, with the enculturation of the colonisers, explains the challenges faced by the new leaders in coming up and articulating their leadership philosophy.

2.2. The African Cultural Paradigm

This is not to say that enculturation per se was not good for Africa. As Rukuni [16] stated, “every culture and civilisation both in historical and in contemporary terms always has something to offer to other cultures”. So the question should be ‘what did Africa learn from the period of colonisation that we could add to our traditional systems to develop further? The Western cultural paradigm [16] has had its philosophy built on scientific thought and logic. Western civilisation has largely been built on the advancement of science and technology. Europe expresses itself as a culture that has largely been built on the value and belief of French philosopher Rene` Descartes, who wrote in 1637: ‘I think, therefore I am’, a phrase made famous in the Latin translation: ‘Cogito ergo sum’. The American took this European guiding value further to the belief that ‘I am because I can’. This faith in the individual self may explain the drive and many achievements of the American society. The Eastern cultural paradigm [16] has had its philosophy built around continuous improvement. Eastern traditional religions have resulted in an underlying cultural philosophy of ‘I am because I improve’. After recovering from the nuclear destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima by the United States, which devastated Japan, the Japanese over time developed a highly competitive stance and strategically borrowed technological knowledge from the west. They applied their underlying cultural and spiritual philosophy of ‘continuous improvement’ in the same field of technology that Western civilisation had spearheaded.

The African cultural paradigm in contrast to both the Western and Eastern cultures has had its philosophy built around relationships, not technology, material wealth or competition. African value relationships so much that the underlying premise for existence is that ‘I am because we are’. The African philosophy of Butu-Ubuntu is based on the same premise [16]. In his address to the members of the Fordham University before Zambia became independent in 1964, Kaunda remarked that:

‘We believe that both the East and West are failing humanity. We see far too much emphasis being placed on material development, which is very quickly leading to the eclipse of man as the centre of all human activity. Can they recover from this or is there going to come out of Africa a new ideology to help our fellow man in these two camps?’ [13].

By this one scholar concluded that this explains 1967 the Zambian founding president Dr K. D. Kaunda declared humanism as guiding ideology for the country. Lungwangwa [13], in his analysis of education and Zambian Humanism, contended that education is a Sine qua non of ideology because one of the cardinal functions of education in any society is to transmit the prevailing systems of principles, values and beliefs of that society to its members. This may be taken to have been Kaunda’s way of redressing the inherited colonial educational system that was hitherto serving the objectives of the colonial masters or his way of underscoring a variation of the philosophy of Ubuntu. However, Zambian Humanism is not only different from the European Humanism referred to above; it is also distinct from the indigenous humanism of Butu-Ubuntu. Kenneth Kaunda’s

Zambian Humanism had its foundation in European Christian mission station upbringing and his association with European Christian leaders, REV. Merfyn Temple and his co-author of the book “A Humanist in Africa,” Rev. Colin Morris [9].

2.3. African Philosophy of Butu-Ubuntu

The word ‘Ubuntu’ derives from Nguni languages, such as Isindebele, Isiswati, Insizulu and Xhosa, which is one of the indigenous languages groups in South Africa. In Silozi of Barotseland, Setswana and Serolong of Botswana and South Africa, Sesotho of Lesotho and South Africa and Sepedi of South Africa the equivalent is ‘Butu’. The spirit of Butu-Ubuntu is captured within the Silozi expression ‘Mutu ki Mutu kabatu’ meaning: the life existence of an individual is actualised through other persons, acknowledging that a human being is a social animal. In other words, one lives with and about others. Translated into the English language, the word Butu-Ubuntu would mean something like: ‘humanity or the habit of exhibiting humane behaviour’ (Karsten and Illa 2005 in [3]). Butu-Ubuntu has been presented as an indigenous African leadership philosophy that projects central African value systems such as group solidarity, teamwork, service to others, harmony and interdependence within a community or an organisation (Khoza, 2012 in [3]). Within Butu-Ubuntu thinking, primacy is accorded to re-enforcement of social relations, creating a family atmosphere in various communities and in promoting affinity and kinship (Karsten and Illa, 2005 in [3]). In a nutshell, Butu-Ubuntu is in principle a humanist concept or philosophy of leadership (Bolden, 2014 in [3]). However, unlike the humanism of 14-16th Europe, the Butu-Ubuntu humanism of all ages is not alienated from the spirit of ancestors and God and is devoid of the personal self-centred-ness and materialism of Western society.

While the philosophy of Butu-Ubuntu may embody such admirable, humanistic and people-oriented attributes, questions have nonetheless been raised in respect to the extent to which these values may be considered to be uniquely African [14] in [3]. For instance, it has been argued that these attributes may be general human values ubiquitous in other cultures and that nothing makes Butu-Ubuntu any different from such natural commitments to social welfare as common in every human community (Sigger et al., 2010 in [3]). Further, there is the more serious critique that Butu-Ubuntu may have naturally emerged as a response to the series of threats and attacks to which African communities were historically subjected. The historical waves of attacks - it is argued typically required community solidarity. Thus, analysts suggest that it may well be that the philosophy of Butu-Ubuntu might merely be a social strategy for community survival during uncertain times and in the face of poverty and occupation rather than a theoretical construct [14] in [3]. Against this backdrop of questions and debate regarding the validity and credibility of Butu-Ubuntu, the theoretical status of Butu-Ubuntu as a management concept remains questionable (Sigger et al., 2010 in [3]). Despite the above concerns and notions by some advocates of pan-Africanist resistance to European colonial mental indoctrination and political domination, researchers, present Butu-Ubuntu as a model and framework to develop more

Afro-centric leadership concepts (Bolden and Kirk, 2009; Karsten and Illa, 2005; Inyang, 2009 in [3]). Following from this, Inyang (2008 in Eyong, 2015) argues:

‘The concept of Ubuntu is therefore considered as an important value of African culture that can form the foundation of African management philosophy in tune with the peoples of Africa’ (P.128)

It follows from the above that there is amongst African and Africanist scholar’s lots of support of Butu-Ubuntu as a unique or relevant African concept.

2.4. Butu-Ubuntu Critique

Nevertheless, perhaps the strongest critique levied on Butu-Ubuntu has been that although it upholds such good values, these have hardly materialised even in South Africa of its provenance (Bolden, 2013 in Eyong, 2015). Also, academics have raised concerns about the fact that the concept lacks empirical support and that its foundations detach it from an idea destined to provide solutions to managerial or leadership problems in an organisational context [14] in [3]. It would seem therefore that Butu-Ubuntu may be suitable for leadership within an original community setting, but it might not apply as presented in an organisational context like a school. Further criticisms have been to the effect that while the philosophy of Butu-Ubuntu might capture the Xhosa (or Lozi in the case of Barotseland) original way of life at a time long gone, it fails to account for contemporary political and social developments such as the effects of colonialism. Hence it is argued that the philosophy might be out of its time. This latter criticism may be backed by research into the nature of culture, which is said to evolve in a dynamic process changing with time, space and other multiple influences (Hofstede, 2001 in [3]). Further critique of Butu-Ubuntu - like most writings and thoughts on leadership in the African context is the tendency to homogenise the African continent by assuming all African cultures, traditions, territories and people to be the same. This attempt at always homogenising Africa leads [14] in [3] to argue further saying:

‘The notion of a homogenous African leadership or management may be just as dangerous as the idea of a universal theory of leadership’(p.16).

The above criticism panders to the truism that the impact of African experience of European occupation has meant a colonisation that to various degrees undermined, distorted and changed the African world of both governance and social operations, and imposed new systems, philosophies and ways of thought and action. The gaining of independence or the ending of Apartheid did not lead to a through decolonisation that fully restored the indigenous African world of both governance and social operations or reinstates the old African systems, philosophies and ways of thought and action. As many, including Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, have observed, what replaced overt European colonialism was covert neo-colonialism [15], and this – apart from bringing forth leaders of a darker skin - did not fundamentally or operationally depart from the worldview and action of colonialism. Similarly, the Apartheid political and socioeconomic system and institutions remained substantially intact after the 1994 ending of Apartheid except for the skin colour of the majority of political actors. Under these circumstances, it should be

expected that the revival and application of Butu-Ubuntu philosophy and leadership approaches be naturally bound to be of mixed outcomes. However, it should be born in mind that a restoration and use of Butu-Ubuntu is both relevant and essential to any radical and genuine decolonisation of Africa.

2.5. Education Leadership and Butu-Ubuntu

Therefore, despite the above criticisms, it is generally agreed that the philosophy of Butu-Ubuntu encapsulates the central elements of indigenous African leadership, as its primary virtues seem to resonate with many indigenous African countries, communities and tribes. It might be that the concept needs further development and adjustment as responsive to the various communities and contexts both in Africa and the rest of the world [3]. As Rukuni [16] states, Africa needs to modernise its culture rather than Westernise it. It is good to borrow ideas from other cultures; however, those ideas should be translated into African terms to build our foundations. The same principles apply to leadership, as the primary duty of leadership in any society is to reproduce itself. For example, the leadership mentoring process can be developed from what already exists in the traditional leadership process concerning education function. Rukuni [16] states that one of the duties of the village council traditional had to do with education. One of the most important educational processes as one enters adulthood is taking part in the Kuta-imbizo process. This process is where young people are tutored and mentored in leadership skills. When the village council performs this educational function, it is truly a ‘village school’. Here education or learning is enhanced through the process of applying ideas to real issues, hence action-learning [16]. The real life, action learning and mentoring process done by the village council need to be researched and documented to establish which aspects can be incorporated in the school leadership development programs of today Africa.

3. Research on Leadership in Africa

In their article, Fourie, van der Merwe & van der Merwe [4] provide a more comprehensive map of existing peer-reviewed research articles on leadership in Africa situated in the post-colonial era. In the 114 articles reviewed, the authors came up with 14 most important themes associated with articles on leadership in Africa. Political leadership articles lead the pack with over 40 followed by leadership and management less than 20, while leadership in education is at the tail end with less than five.

According to Fourie, van der Merwe & van der Merwe [4] research on leadership in Africa (or at least published, peer-reviewed and digitalised research) had a plodding start during the first decade of the first wave of African states’ gaining independence. Only two articles are included in their review from the 1950s. Both articles focus on political leadership. By 2000 to 2009 more articles on the topic were published in this decade alone than the articles from 1950 to 1999 combined. The 2000s is also the first ten years in which contributions from within Africa outnumber contributions from outside the continent [4].

Of most significant to this paper is that it is in the 2000s that Fourie, van der Merwe & van der Merwe [4] state,

“A surprising and, based on the available data, new theme related to the leadership management nexus is its contextualization in the education sector. In the majority of the contributions, the principal is the point of reference.”

In their research, Hoadley et al. (2009 in [4]) test the relationship between “various dimensions of leadership” and “student achievement over time” in South Africa and find that school-community relations are an important factor in optimising this relationship. In a similar vein, Christie (2010 in [4]) distinguishes managers and leaders in South African schools and argues for a “situated” rather than a “generic” understanding of principals. According to Christie (2010: 708),

“Constructions of the principalship in discourses that conflate leadership and management, that over-generalise, and do not engage seriously with local conditions and the day-to-day experiences of principals, are likely to provide distorted pictures and to create unrealistic expectations.”

Christie’s findings seem to be supported by Ngcobo and Tikly (2010 in [4]), who show that effective leadership in high-performing South African schools, is dependent on contextual realities.

In Zambia, Kalenga et al. [8] article on leadership practices among the Lamba people of Zambia looking at some implications for school leadership is revealing. They argue that learning from the Lamba leadership practices, Africa indigenous knowledge in general and indigenous leadership, in particular, has a lot to offer regarding school leadership today. The community spirit, the spirit of service, the high sense of identity, the vast sense of responsibility, and personalised contextualised learning, are all abundant examples of what it means to lead an institution successfully.

The Lamba people of the copper belt region of Zambia, in a way, can be representative of a larger part of the rest of Zambia due to similarities in culture. The confession of Doke (1931:9 in [8]) about the Lambas might as well be a confession about any other ethnic group in Zambia:

“..... understand better the people and their point of view this is a record of the thoughts and lives of the people as far as I can observe them, unaffected by Christianizing and the influence of Western civilisation I can only say that I wish I had more knowledge of the significance of the native customs when I first went to work among the Lambas. I should have been saved from many grievous mistakes and many misjudgements.”

One can only reflect and speculate as to the opportunity lost at the time when African nations gained independence from the colonial rulers. One can only wonder as to what would have happened if there were a complete reversing of the African colonial education. Would Africa development trajectory have been different? Would African nations of today have had a foundation for real sustainable development? What would have come of the empires of Monomotapa, Timbuktu etc.?

4. Conclusion

In the educational setting, despite leadership being a subject of debate and analysis for some time, with researchers and scholars seeking to redefine roles and tasks of school leadership, theories of leadership are still undergoing refinement to establish their scientific credentials. Given this contested nature of the notion of leadership, it looks unlikely that scholars and researchers will ever reach an agreed position on the idea of a universal theory of leadership in education.

The phenomenon of culture and the location or context in which research into leadership is articulated and enacted will continue to be a contentious issue in contemporary leadership studies. This position it appears will not change shortly given that scholars and researchers view the concept of leadership differently. This paper, therefore, lends support to the critical argument given the reality - not only of cultural complexity, multiplicity and diversity of context but perhaps, more importantly, the complex nature of human behaviour, which is at the very centre of leadership. This is also with the understanding that researchers research different philosophical worldviews, many organisational types and for various purposes; it, therefore, seems more plausible that school leadership will be expressed in a variety of ways.

Research on leadership in Africa had a weak start. Contemporary representations of leadership in Africa have sought to compare and contrast between western practices and perceptions and approaches to be representative of Africa’ leadership thinking. Despite the many critiques, it is agreed that the philosophy of Butu-Ubuntu encapsulates the central elements of indigenous African leadership, a basis upon which an African or indeed a country-specific educational framework could be anchored.

The implications arising from this paper concerning theory development, research, practice, education and training, and public policy are bound. There is a need for scholars and researchers to challenge the current position on public policy and practice in Africa in general and Zambia in particular as to whether the intended objectives are being realised and if not propose an alternative course of action as appropriate based on research findings. One important area is the theory development as it pertains to principles of Butu-Ubuntu philosophy being incorporated into any new theories on educational leadership as a result of research activities while borrowing the aspects of the western, European, and eastern drivers of development which are best suited to a local scenario. Education and training will be a beneficiary of increased scholarly and research activities that lead to public policy changes.

References

- [1] Bolden, R., & Kirk, P. (2009) African leadership surfacing new understandings through leadership development. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*. 9(1), 69-86.

- [2] Bush, T. (2007) Educational leadership and management: theory, policy, and practice. *South African Journal of Education Vol. 27 (3) 391-406*
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?Doi=10.1.1.729.7350&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- [3] Eyong, J. E. (2015). *Constructions of Indigenous African Leadership: A Social Anthropological and Discursive Exploration of Two Regions*. PhD. Thesis, University of Leeds.
- [4] Fourie, W., van der Merwe, C., & van der Merwe, B. (2015). Sixty years of research on leadership in Africa: a review of the literature. *Leadership. 0(0), 1-30*.
- [5] Gunter, H. (2001). Critical approaches to leadership in education. *Journal of Educational Enquiry. 2(2), 94-108*.
- [6] House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (2004). *Culture, Leadership, and Organisations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*. London, Sage Pub.
- [7] Jackson, T. (2004). *Management and Change in Africa: A Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. London, Routledge.
- [8] Kalenga, R. C., Chikoko, V., & Khanare, F. (2013). Leadership practises among the Lamba people of Zambia: some implications for school leadership. *African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Vol. 12(2) 2013 pp. 231-241*.
- [9] Kaunda, K. (1966). *A Humanist in Africa*. Veritas, Lusaka and London.
- [10] Kuada, J. E. (2010). Culture and leadership in Africa: a conceptual model and research agenda. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies. 1(1), 9-24*.
- [11] Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1999). Transformational school leadership effects: A replication. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 10(4), 451-479*.
- [12] Littrell, R. M. (2011). Contemporary sub-Saharan Africa managerial leadership research: some recent empirical studies. *Asia Pacific Journal of Business and Management. 2(1), 65-91*.
- [13] Lungwangwa, G. (1976). *Education and Humanism: An Investigation into the Ideology of Zambian Humanism as a basis of Education in Zambia*. Masters thesis. University of Zambia. Lusaka.
- [14] Nkomo, S. M. (2006). *Images of African Leadership and Management in Organisations Studies: Tensions, Contradictions and Re-visions*. Inaugural Lecture, University of South Africa.
- [15] Nkrumah, K. (1966). *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. International Publishers, New York, New York, U. S. A.
- [16] Rukuni M. (2009). *Leading Afrika*. South Africa: Penguin Books.

Author Profile



Oliver Mubita Kalabo is Chairman and Managing Partner of Brand-Line Africa a communication and media consulting company. He received a Bachelor of Arts with Education and Master of Education from the University of Zambia. He worked as a teacher, lecturer at the National Institute of Public Administration, Performance System Specialist, Director Human Resources and Administration, and Permanent Secretary in charge of Administration at Cabinet Office, Zambia.