

**A Multilateral Model for Decolonising African  
Educational Leadership: Addressing Conceptual  
Problems and Integrating the Past-Present  
Continuum across the Local-Global Axis**

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>Article Info</b>
<p><i>In studies on educational leadership across African countries, researchers are using different concepts that do not have the same meanings or similar histories, including variations in involvement by local, national, and international leaders. In the first part of this article, we problematize conceptualizing globally minded school leadership in Africa and attempt to understand the way local and global actors apply these concepts to and from within African contexts. In the second part, we present research working at the intersection of the NGO-Postcolonial border working with educational leaders in Madagascar. The findings show that early childhood education makes a difference on school readiness and that quality matters. In the third part, we propose a multilateral model for decolonising educational leadership in Africa by working on the past-present continuum and holding the tension between “border-specific” and “cross-border” perspectives.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b> <i>Received</i> September 3, 2020  <i>Accepted</i> April 26, 2021</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Educational Leadership Practices; African-led educational innovation; multilateralism; African early childhood education; Decolonized systems-change</i></p>

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**Introduction**

**Problematizing Conceptualisations for Globally Minded School Leadership in Africa**

How to decolonise education in African countries is one of the most pressing questions in educational leadership. Border-specific approaches or cross-border approaches seem to stand at odds, forcing leaders to choose one over the other. Embracing border-specific tactics has the promise of rendering educational processes and outcomes immediately accessible and relevant to learners but with the likelihood of closing off opportunities to participate in and benefit from social, political and economic resources mobilizing globally. Border-specific education is also insufficient to contribute to development and sustainable solutions that have global impact such as on quality education, poverty, gender equality, and the environment. Cross-border leadership practices address global concerns through multilateral agreements of exchange of human and material resources for the purpose of advancing educational outcomes for more than one nation. Cross-border leadership has been criticized for not valuing and incorporating local languages and traditions and for extracting individuals from resource poor regions (see also brain drain) (Serpell, 2010). Despite tensions between the two approaches, we think that border-specific and cross-border perspectives can coexist and Africanize education, developing quality education and contributing to reaching some of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the



United Nations (2015) to achieve by 2030. However, transforming educational leadership in Africa by considering both border-specific and cross-border perspectives requires addressing certain conceptual struggles.

### **Conceptualizations of Educational Leadership across African Countries**

*The old version of Western schooling in colonial times:* The establishment of schooling in Africa can be situated between the rise of the slave trade and the beginning of the domination and colonial exploration of the African continent. Two important remarks about colonial schooling: it is intimately linked to power and control meant to create docile and non-subversive colonies. Colonisation has an ancient and modern history with a multitude of actors who imposed value systems, languages, education and more on African peoples. According to the famous expression of Cheikh Hamidou Kane published in 1961, the African's contact with Western modernity, especially in schools, can be qualified as an ambiguous adventure. Adventure in the sense that the Western school opens up new perspectives in terms of knowledge, skills and therefore power. But at the same time, as the African ventures into this Western modernity, he loses his soul, he is lost, he is only a shadow of himself. He no longer has the opportunity to have leadership.

*The contemporary version of Western schooling in Africa—international organizations and imported/imposed solutions:* From 1950s to 1970s, most African countries became independent. The fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa ended the European colonisation of the African continent. Can we, therefore, say that African countries have regained leadership in their education and schools? Not really. On the one hand, decolonisation was not an opportunity to rethink the

colonial school. The latter has been maintained with superficial (cosmetic) modifications. Colonial languages of instruction were now in most countries. The most painful episode was arguably the period when the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank (World Bank) put in place budgetary austerity policies, which resulted in the weakening of African education systems (Van de Walle, 1991). More recently, we can observe that the orientations and the reforms undertaken in the African education systems have most of the time an exogenous origin and do not allow the African school to become more relevant. Examples of this problem include reforms based on the competency-based approach in which the competencies are imported and consequentially decontextualized (Anderson-Levitt, 2017; Lauwerier & Akkari, 2013).

On the other hand, international cooperation has taken up the initiative to orient African education policies. Certainly, it can be animated by a real commitment to help Africa build its education as evidenced by UNESCO's campaigns in favour of literacy or the work of Paulo Freire with a goal of consciousness raising (i.e., conscientization, Freire, 1970/2009) in the ex-Portuguese colonies. But the record of international cooperation has been disastrous in terms of African leadership. Asuga, Scevak and Eacott (2016) suggest "the lack of African grounded theory means that while researchers may base their work in an African context, the intellectual resources are overlaid – a form of epistemic imperialism" (p.392-393), which could be explained as "double decontextualization" meaning that both the theories and the practice are from external contexts (e.g., practitioners unaware of the colonial roots of a practice and apply it as though it is African) (Elonga Mboyo (2016, p.79). In a way, we can say that the colonisation by the military occupation of Africa by the European colonial powers is a much less pernicious process than mental or



cognitive colonisation. The latter passes through the elites and the domination of thought.

The colonisation of the mind remains active in many African countries. For example, parents living in poverty in Madagascar desire for their children to learn the French language at school so they may gain jobs in policing and governing (Loomis & Akkari, 2012). Driven by colonial power, French remains the official language despite the fact that it is not spoken on a day-to-day basis among these professions (Loomis & Akkari, 2012). De Sousa Santos (2018) believes that the Western school form or what he calls the cognitive empire is on the decline and we are seeing the emergence of Southern epistemologies, particularly in the call for international organizations to base interventions in the philosophy of Ubuntu (or communalism) (Piper, 2016). One of the cornerstones in the process of being laid in African educational leadership and management is generating leaders with the power to innovate from within as well as 'from without' colonised minds in order to engage in conceptual blockbusting.

As Elonga Mboyo (2016; 2019) has articulated clearly, educational leaders and managers often find themselves at a crossroads applying a Western conceptualisation of time that is linear and divisible (Dixon, 1977) to recapture the precolonial African ideals (Obiakor, 2004) or to consider chasing an exogenous postcolonial vision. A third position, Elonga Mboyo (2016) argues, is to work from an African sense of time fusing and feeling simultaneously pre- and post-colonial ways of knowing with all the challenges wrought by double-decontextualization (2016). From this perspective, African educational leaders can work to address the imbalance of external actors by drawing from their experiential bases while also deriving actions for school improvement from a larger knowledge base of high-

quality rigorous research, of which there is a dearth, conducted from various paradigms in Africa.

An examination of educational leadership and management published 1960 through 2018 found that prior to the year 2000 African literature is nearly non-existent with only 5% of publications before that date (Hallinger, 2019). Since then, the body of research has grown with most contributions (74%) from South Africa (Hallinger, 2019). A narrower review on educational management and leadership during 2008 through 2014 in three prestigious international journals found only 4.92% from Africa (36 of 731 articles) and of these 36 articles 15 (or 41.7%) were from South Africa (Asuga, et al., 2016); the remaining studies with 2 to 6 per country represented seven countries and two were across Africa (Asuga, et al., 2016). In addition to the need to increase the number of studies and the regions represented in Africa, reviews of the literature show several other aspects to develop research. The corpus of African research needs to be broadened in terms of ontological and epistemological assumptions, methods used (most are qualitative), sample sizes (most are small), and concepts with meanings that vary across contexts (Asuga, et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2018 & 2019).

### **Revisiting Concepts**

Gaining competency in the leadership of schools in Africa is not something you can obtain only through training or professional interactions without immersion into and understanding of culture, tradition, and what empowerment means in the African context. In the following paragraphs, we discuss these concepts in order to break existing ambiguities in education systems in Africa and foster border-specific and cross-border decolonising innovations when leading schools.



*Ubuntu (communalism) community, culture, and ethnicity.* The concept of Ubuntu is held up as a foundational pan-African philosophy (Etieyibo, 2017). The community, the village, the ancestors are truly the bearers of the soul and of African epistemologies. Communal life and personhood are inextricably linked (Mkhize, 2004). Some have defined the term as kindness and others as collectivism and communalism. Narratives from three women educational leaders in South Africa have identified spirituality, interdependence, and unity as the essence of Ubuntu (Mogadime, et al., 2010). The term has varied meanings across African contexts so taking a cross-border perspective is critical. For example, a recent study of how Ubuntu is realized by educational leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) found a circular relationship between individual and collective needs: “‘doing’ Ubuntu in an urban school context in Kinshasa/DRC has been framed as following the pattern of understanding others’ needs, negotiating and prioritising needs, assessing available resources, attending to others’ needs, and raised expectations and commitment to organisational goals” (Elonga Mboyo, 2019, p.218). This finding from the DRC is from a context in which teachers’ pay is insufficient to raise them out of poverty. Whether a context is impoverished or plentiful in school resources, school managers and leaders practise Ubuntu within a conceptualization of community or multiple communities.

In addition to the reference above, in South Africa the term community has been applied in at least two other ways. One way is to refer to disadvantaged groups as a community to avoid addressing racialized privilege (Sigogo & Modipa, 2004, p. 317), though this use is not always the case. In another use, African legal scholar Sunelle Geyer (2010) argues that the *Intellectual Property Laws Amendment Bill of 2010* proposes the following definition of *indigenous community* be inserted

into four related legal acts of the Republic of South Africa: "indigenous community" means any community of people currently living within the borders of the Republic, or who historically lived in the geographic area currently located within the borders of the Republic." He criticizes the Intellectual Property Laws Amendment Bill:

*Unregimented use of the word 'community' in the said definition and its apparent inconsistency with the meaning of the phrase 'indigenous community' in other South African legislation... [and] is further contrasted to the much narrower understanding and/or defining of indigenous communities in Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as the United Nations (Geyer, 2010, p. 128).*

Related terms with similar conceptual issues are culture and ethnicity. Ironically, the representations of 'African' leadership and management' found in Western texts as well as the alternative, African management philosophy, show a tendency to essentialize 'African' culture. Whether it is descriptions of Africa's national culture in the management literature or the alternative conceptions of 'African' culture by mostly African scholars, 'African culture' is portrayed as a homogeneous concept (Nkomo, 2011, p. 377). In this article, we use a pluralistic view because "Africa" is comprised of 54 countries (on the continent and islands) with thousands of cultures and ethnic groups.

Ethnicity should be seen as one of the important identities/affiliations in Africa, but it is not the only one. When relevant, educational leaders need to address the experiences of systemic inequality by ethnicity and language in school systems while also working with and understanding interethnic alliances in Africa. These alliances can provide a means of resolving conflicts in which ethnicity seems to play a role, however and importantly, not all problems in Africa have to do with ethnicity. It is clear that more action and research is needed to reinvent Ubuntu (Elonga Mboyo, 2019) or





return to various African conceptualizations of community, culture, and ethnicity and to understand it in each and every African country.

*Tradition.* While Africa is full of traditions, the concept of tradition is often connoted as from the past, from archaism, connoted as a brake on modernity. But modernity, including education, is not built in a vacuum. Contemporary education has been influenced mostly by relatively young colonial traditions (Anderson-Levitt, 2001). The challenge facing African educational leaders is disentangling colonial pedagogy from northern concepts of progress and acknowledging that the African traditions have a longer history of preserving their societies and knowledge, often this was accomplished through spirituality that took form in many different religions and philosophies (Mbiti, 1989). There are two further comments regarding the notion of tradition. First of all, it is not necessary to see tradition as the perfect opposition to modernity (i.e., development or progress). Tradition and modernity exist in a dialectic. Second, it is impossible to construct appropriate education systems within a vacuum, that is to say without a link with the past and the oral tradition.

*Knowledge.* To talk about knowledge, we can develop two points: (a) the importance of orality in the transmission of knowledge in Africa and (2) the absence of African languages at school is a major obstacle to the transmission of knowledge. For example, oral transmission of culture has long been an effective method for intergenerational transmission of languages and preserving the environment. Prior to colonialization, African languages persisted thousands of years, whereas after it, the number of languages decreased (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2021). Similarly, African traditions have protected indigenous plants and species. The extraction and destruction of African resources has mostly occurred

through exogenous actors from the global north. We see one of the biggest challenges facing African educational leaders is the integration and the prioritization of African languages that provide access to African ways of knowing. All types of knowledge (scientific, academic, informal, social, traditional, religious, etc.) must be invested in order to solve the problems a society faces. We note in particular that school knowledge in Africa, however, struggles to contribute to solving the continent's challenges.

*Indigenous: Debating the global use of the term indigenous.* We debate the global use of the term indigenous because meanings vary across countries. We observe that in North America (Mexico, the U.S., and Canada) and South America people are saying they want to use the concept of indigenous to fight for rights; whereas in Africa after decolonisation, the concept of indigenous was used to push individuals into slavery-like positions (De L'Estoile, 2000; Warren & Jackson, 2003). All African people do not feel indigenous and many South Americans do not identify as indigenous. Some authors prefer the terms autochthonous or endogenous (Bellier, 2012). In short, all these terms (indigenous, autochthonous, endogenous) highlight the need to decolonize education systems but also the need to develop the appropriation and local production of education – in other words ownership and empowerment.

*Empowerment through education.* Empowerment is critical in the development and growth of children and learning across the lifespan. Educational experiences that are empowering result in students with enhanced self-esteem, confidence, ability and motivation to succeed (Cummins, 1986). Yet, empowerment is an ambiguous concept to the majority of individuals as it is often used differently in numerous contexts. This term is embedded within various institutions such as



community development, management, political organizations, therapeutic-wellness groups and the education system (Cummins, 1986; Perkins, 1995). When individuals consider the definition of empowerment, it often involves the interconnection of people, organization, and communities functioning together in order to control or overcome certain adversities (Saegert & Winkle, 1996). Empowerment, a multilevel construct (Rappaport, 1995), occurs through “intertwined changes in behaviour, self-concept, and actual improvements in the conditions of the individual, the group, and the community” (Saegert & Winkle, 1996, p.518). Researchers argue that the most powerful definitions and descriptions of empowerment originate from social change movements rather than research or the policy because empowerment is linked to concrete action rather than theorising (Perkins, 1995). Empowerment includes actual control and influence as well as constituents of personal control (Riger, 1993). The goal of empowerment is to recognize and give a voice to individuals in order to sustain their lives in an affirmative way (Rappaport, 1995). For these reasons, we see the empowerment of administrators and educators/teachers as a critical component of decolonising African educational leadership.

### **A Multilateral Model for Decolonising African Educational Leadership**

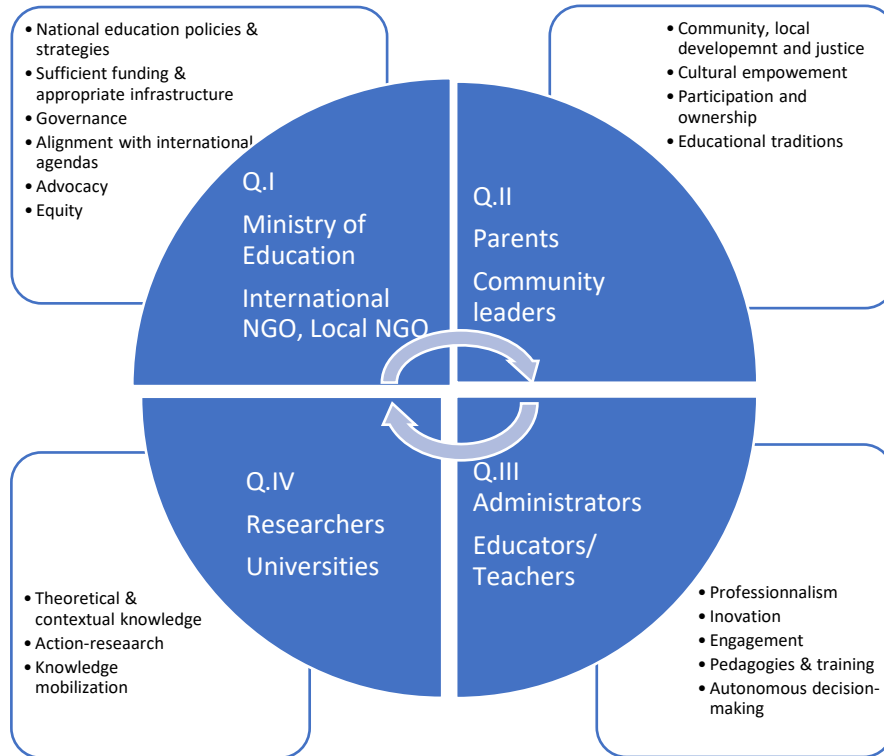
Existing strategies in some African countries suggest decolonising with various actors and responsibilities that are multilateral. As Yukl and Van Fleet (1992) suggest, leadership influences the work goals and strategies of a group or organization. It allows the implementation of strategies and the achievement of objectives. Ultimately, it transforms the functioning, identity and culture of an organization. The impact of educational leadership is

particularly marked in African contexts, which confront educational actors with particular challenges such as poverty, malnutrition, alienation, violence. Educational leadership can bring actors together to address these issues and to resolve their differences, drop their power struggles and unite around a common project for the development of quality education, the design and implementation of which are coordinated by a set of capable people. Miller (2018) suggested that school leadership has four dimensions: social (focused towards society), personal (leader's agency), environmental and relational. Taken together, conceptual problems and the literature lead us to propose that in order to decolonise African educational leadership we need a multilateral model (see Figure 1) that describes an organizational structure in which historically unequal powers negotiate with each other from positions of equal power. These shift in power require individuals to work with historical positions of subjectivity and to assume positions when leading.

The multilateral model for decolonising African educational leadership works on the past-present continuum (inner most arrows) circulating across four dynamically interacting core groups of actors (inner quadrants) to generate and ensure several responsibilities (outer quadrants). We resolve conceptual fights by offering suggestions for analysing educational leadership policies and research that will decolonise educational leadership in post-colonial African countries. In particular, we navigate the past-present continuum across conceptual frontiers and multiple groups of actors. We argue for practices that hold the tension between "border-specific" and "cross-border" perspectives and by doing so build decolonised collaborations.

Figure 1.

*Multilateral Model of African Educational Leadership*



In quadrant I, there are six domains that a Ministry of Education, local and national non-governmental organizations are primarily responsible for developing and sustaining: national education policies and strategies, sufficient funding and appropriate infrastructure, governance, advocacy, alignment with international agendas, and equity. In quadrant II, the four domains of parents and community leaders are development and justice, cultural empowerment, participation and ownership, and educational traditions. In quadrant III, administrators and educators/teachers provide educational leadership within the following five domains:

professionalism, innovation, engagement, pedagogies and training, and autonomous decision making. In quadrant IV, researchers and universities contribute to educational leadership by achieving responsibility in action-research, theoretical and contextual knowledge, and knowledge mobilization.

One of the pressing issues to address is the strong geographical imbalance in the knowledge production on educational leadership and management with small but growing production from the Global South (Hallinger, 2020). These contexts are very different from those in many other parts of the world and it is important to be aware of the dangers of ‘policy borrowing’ – applying models from Western contexts to very different settings (Bush, 2014). Developing the dimensions of the Multilateral Model for Decolonising African Educational Leadership requires building on the strengths and addressing weaknesses of African leaders. One example is the strength of leaders to collaborate and mobilise both material and financial resources. One threat to this strength is that within public and private institutions corruption among African leaders is pervasive (Uzomah, 2018). There are other threats so having a risk assessment and management plan is essential to risk identification and mitigation. There are cases that illustrate our proposed model in varying degrees.

### **A Study of Early Childhood Education in Madagascar**

The present study in Madagascar used a repeated measures research design with a purposeful sampling strategy. Data were collected with an average of 40 weeks between assessments. Four regions of the country were chosen by Aide et Action International (discussed in Section 4) because of the limited number of pre-primary education options available: Antananarivo, Tuléar, Sava, and Betioky. Within each region, 2,304 children were assessed in 20 communities;



children attending preschool on the days data were collected were randomly selected.

Students were assessed on school readiness, numeracy and literacy. All assessments were administered in the Malagasy language and adapted to the cultural context. School readiness was assessed using the School Readiness Index (SRI) a tool used previously in India with children ages 5 to 6 (Early Childhood Education Program Evaluation Package, The World Bank India, not dated). The SRI is based on the following 10 concepts: pre-number, space, sequential thinking, classification of fruits and vegetables, following instructions, number/object matching, reading readiness (identifies beginning sounds), pattern making, sentence meaning, and relative comparison (number – greater/lesser). This measure is representative of a global assessment. Items were scored and summed ranging from 0 to 40 with higher scores reflecting greater school readiness.

To explore literacy exclusively, the following two concepts of the SRI were used: reading readiness and sentence meaning. Reading readiness was assessed by a child's ability to identify beginning sounds and to indicate pictures with a similar beginning sound. Children's knowledge in speaking meaningful sentences was tested by asking a child to describe two pictures, and scores reflected the correctness and completeness of a sentence that was also a test of active vocabulary. Item scores were summed and the literacy raw score ranges from 0 to 12.

A separate assessment of numeracy was conducted. This test was based on a student's ability to count from 1 to 10 and 1 to 20, combined with performance on seven addition tests of magnitude comparison (Lee & Schell, unpublished). Children had to distinguish between two piles of physical objects separated by different magnitude

(e.g., showing a pile of 3 objects and a second pile of 8 objects and asking students which pile has a greater number of objects in it). Children received a score of 1 for correctly counting from 1 to 10 and 1 to 20 respectively, and one point was scored for each correct response on the seven items of magnitude comparison for a maximum numeracy score of 9 with a possible score range of 0 to 9. For ease of comparison across all three measures all scores were converted to 100 percentage scores.

**Study 1 Findings: A Snapshot of Children’s Abilities**

*Results.* Summary information for all 2,304 children who were assessed in the four regions of Madagascar is reported in Table 1. Information is presented by educational level.

Table 1.

*Demographics and Assessment Scores by Educational Level for all Children (N = 2,304) Assessed in Antananarivo, Tuléar, Sava, and Betioky, Madagascar*

Educational Level	Not Attending School	Preschool	Grade 1
Gender			
Girl	234	465	434
Boy	251	461	459
Total	485	926	893





Table 1. (continued)

*Demographics and Assessment Scores by Educational Level for all Children (N = 2,304) Assessed in Antananarivo, Tuléar, Sava, and Betioky, Madagascar*

Average Age or Score, (Standard Deviation) and Number of children	Mean (SD) N	Mean (SD) N	Mean (SD) N
Age	5.58 (1.86) N = 485	4.70 (.85) N = 742	6.74 (1.32) N = 582
School Readiness	24.42 (17.08) N = 478	37.80 (20.71) N = 923	53.18 (21.65) N = 893
Literacy	25.50 (22.23) N = 463	36.54 (25.74) N = 920	47.18 (29.09) N = 893
Numeracy	42.72 (40.00) N = 471	55.47 (44.28) N = 918	84.04 (22.72) N = 893

\* Sample sizes vary because of missing information. For example, age was not obtained for all children tested in schools.

*Does attending preschool make a difference on Grade 1 Outcomes?* In all four regions 893 students in Grade 1 were tested and 761 of these students had an indication of attending preschool (public or private). For this research question, students who had attended a public or private preschool attendance were analysed together. Across all four regions on average 35 % of students previously attended school before entering Grade 1. The percentage of students who had attended preschool was similar in 3 of the 4 regions (ranging from 36 – 44 percent), but only 13 % of Grade 1 students in the region of Tuléar had attended preschool.

*Does preschool attendance reduce the likelihood of repeating first grade?* Of the 761 children tested in Grade 1, 21.6% ( $n = 164$ ) repeated Grade 1. Of these students 4.5% (12 of the 266) had attended preschool whereas 30.7% (152 of the 495) had not attended preschool. It is clear

that attending preschool acts as a protective factor and decreases the likelihood of repeating Grade 1<sup>1</sup>.

*What is the impact of preschool attendance on course grade, school readiness, literacy and numeracy in Grade 1?* Of the 761 children tested in Grade 1, comparing the 266 children who had attended preschool (public or private) with the 495 who had not attended showed attending preschool is significantly positively related to teacher rated report card grade in Grade 1 and school readiness. No significant differences were found on scores of literacy and numeracy. Although statistically significant differences were found on two indicators, course grade and school readiness, it is important to consider what the practical significance of these differences is. Specifically, how meaningful is a 0.35 difference in course grade on a scale of 0 to 10? What is the practical meaning of a 3.3% difference on school readiness? The mean scores are reported on a 10-point scale and the other three measures are on a scale of 100 percent. Concerning Teacher Assigned Course Grade, those with no attendance at Preschool had a  $M = 6.05$ ,  $n = 355$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ , whereas attendance at Preschool was observed with a  $M = 6.35$ ,  $n = 266$ ,  $SD = 1.83$  ( $F = 3.76$ ,  $p = .053$ ). On School Readiness: No attendance at Preschool;  $M = 51.13$ ,  $n = 495$ ,  $SD = 21.78$ , whereas Attendance at Preschool;  $M = 54.50$ ,  $n = 266$ ,  $SD = 22.01$  ( $F = 4.10$ ,  $p = .043$ ).

*Do scores of Grade 1 students differ by whether they attended a private or public preschool?* This analysis tested the effect of attending a private preschool. This information was gathered from 78 students in Grade 1, 29 who had attended public preschool and 49 who had

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<sup>1</sup> A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between preschool attendance and repeating Grade 1. The relation between these variables was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 761) = 70.23$ ,  $p < .01$ .



attended a private preschool. All three measures were statistically significant. Scores on school readiness, literacy and numeracy differ by type of preschool attended; those who attended a private preschool score significantly higher than those who attended a public preschool.

*Do children in preschool score higher than non-schooled counterparts?* This analysis tested whether children attending preschool score higher on learning tests than non-schooled children? This two-group design required the use of all cases across all regions, excepting children in Grade 1. The age of children ranged from 3 to 8<sup>2</sup>. In a test of more than 1,000 children on average the nearly 730 preschoolers scored higher on all three measures tested than the 425 children who do not attend any school. (Note: the numbers of students vary slightly depending upon the test because of some missing test scores—e.g., SRI 1,179, Literacy 1,162, and Numeracy 1,169). All three measures were statistically significant. Children attending preschool score higher than children not attending school on school readiness, literacy and numeracy. Statistical notation:

**School Readiness:** No-Schooling: *Mean* = 22.53, *n* = 439, *SD* = 15.08; Preschoolers: *mean* = 36.96, *n* = 740, *SD* = 20.84 (*F* = 159.76, *p* = .000).

**Literacy:** No-Schooling: *Mean* = 23.94, *n* = 425, *SD* = 22.72; Preschoolers: *Mean* = 35.95, *n* = 737, *SD* = 25.55 (*F* = 66.21, *p* = .000)

**Numeracy:** No-Schooling: *Mean* = 39.47, *n* = 433, *SD* = 38.94; Preschoolers: *Mean* = 54.98, *n* = 736, *SD* = 38.94 (*F* = 34.19, *p* = .000)

<sup>2</sup> The pre-school sample (N = 742) age ranged from 3 to 8, with a Mean = 4.70 (Standard Deviation = .85), Mode = 5, Median = 5. In the pre-school sample 184 children did not have an age indicated so they were excluded from this analysis.

The non-schooled sample (N = 485) age ranged from 3 to 13, so it was restricted to 3 to 8 for this statistical test. The measures of central tendency for this group follow: Mean = 5.21 (Standard Deviation = 1.39), Mode = 4, Median = 5.

*How do scores of students in Grade 1 attending a school that is partnered with Aide et Action compare to those attending a school not affiliated with AEA?* This analysis tested the effect of attending a school affiliated with Aide et Action (AEA). This information was gathered from 817 students in Grade 1, 323 students in an AEA school and 494 a school not indicated as being connected with AEA. Students differed on the measure of School Readiness, but not on literacy and numeracy.

*Tests for Regional Differences.* Regional differences were examined on all three tests, school readiness, literacy, and numeracy across three cohorts. The first cohort tested was comprised of children who were not currently attending school. The second and third cohorts were preschool and Grade 1 students, respectively.

*Regional differences exist among children not attending school.* Children aged 3 to 8 years who were not attending school showed regional differences on test scores. On school readiness Betioky (average score,  $M = 17$ ,  $n = 81$ ) scored significantly lower than Tuléar ( $M = 25$ ,  $n = 198$ ). Even though the score in SAVA ( $M = 25$ ,  $n = 35$ ) was that same as Tuléar, this difference was not statistically significant, most likely due to the differences in sample sizes. Children not attending school in SAVA scored significantly higher on numeracy compared to non-schooled children in all the three other regions. Among this group of children, literacy scores in Betioky were significantly lower than in Tuléar.

Regional differences were found among preschool students. Preschool children in the region of SAVA scored significantly lower on school readiness and literacy than all three other regions. Among this group numeracy scores were similar across regions (i.e., differences were not statistically significant): statistical notation – the Tukey HSD,  $p < .01$ . Regional differences were also found in Grade 1. Grade 1



children in SAVA score lower than children in the three other regions on all three measures. Statistical notation for regional tests is that the Tukey HSD,  $p < .01$

*Test for Gender Differences.* No gender differences were found among children not attending school. Testing for gender differences among children who do not attend school can inform us about between gender socialization outside of school and scores on school readiness, literacy, and numeracy. No significant gender differences were found among children not attending school on assessments of school readiness, literacy and numeracy. No gender differences were found among preschool students. This test compared the scores of 464 girls to 459 boys, from all regions on school readiness, literacy and numeracy. On average for literacy scores calculated with a maximum of 100% boys scored 38% and girls scored 35%. This difference of three percentage points is not statistically significant. Girls, on average, scored three percentage points higher than boys on measures of numeracy, which was not statistically significant. In preschool, there were no significant differences in boys and girls score on school readiness, literacy, or numeracy. No gender differences were found among children in Grade 1? Another analysis was conducted to test whether gender differences were observed in Grade 1. Scores on assessments of children in Grade 1 do not vary systematically by gender.

### ***Study 2 Findings: Progress of Pre-schoolers Over Time***

Case study 2 reports on lessons learned from assessing 242 children two consecutive years from nine schools across all four regions researched. Of these 242 preschool students 140 students were promoted to Grade 1 and 102 remained in preschool. Overall, the changes in scores on all three outcomes increased significantly from

Time 1 testing to Time 2 testing, but there are some important differences. School readiness was positively impacted more so than numeracy and literacy. Statistical notation: Among children who were not attending school the change in numeracy and literacy scores from Time 1 to Times 2 were not statistically significant. The 10% change in literacy scores was not beyond the level of chance for this sample, although it was approaching significance with  $p = .06$  (statistical significance is determined at  $p < .05$ ). There are several factors that affect statistical significance – e.g., sample size, standard deviation.

*Study limitations.* Every study has limitations and strengths. One limitation of this study is that the test of literacy is comprised of two items from the measure of school readiness. Any measure with few items is subject to criticism in terms of construct validity, meaning that too few questions may not accurately (or fully) reflect what be measured (Glenn, 2021). Interpretations related to literacy outcomes should be made cautiously. Future research will lead to stronger findings by using a more in-depth assessment of literacy that will require more questions (e.g., speaking, reading, and writing as defined by the local school and relevant education governance).

*Discussion and directions for future interventions and research.* The overall finding is that preschool contributes to higher levels of school readiness. It also makes a difference in some cases on numeracy and literacy. The rate of preschool attendance observed in 3 of the 4 regions studied (Antananarivo, Tuléar, Sava, & Betioky) is approximately 35%; notably only 13% of children in Tuléar have attended preschool. Given these numbers, investing in outreach to families and making pre-primary education accessible is needed. At the same time, attention is needed for the quality of pre-primary education. Children in private preschools are scoring significantly higher than children from public



preschools. That finding withstanding, public schools are making a positive impact. In this study, children attending pre-primary education score higher on school readiness, literacy and numeracy compared to children not attending school. Importantly, attending preschool is related to greater success in Grade 1. Findings show that 95.5 percent of children who attended preschool do not repeat Grade 1, whereas only 30.7 percent of children who did not attend preschool are successful in completing Grade 1 the first time around. In other words, 69.3 percent of children who did not attend preschool repeat Grade 1 and only 4.5 percent of those who attended preschool repeat it.

A standard in educational testing is to examine gender differences. In looking at a snapshot of children's learning among those in all four regions combined, no gender differences exist on school readiness, literacy, and numeracy. Fairly even numbers of girls and boys were tested in all regions, though there are more boys in the sample from Antananarivo. Future research may want to examine if there are gender differences within these regions.

Finally, a rigorous way to examine change is to assess the same group of children at two points in time. In this study we found that overall pre-primary education in Madagascar is increasing children's readiness for school, literacy and numeracy. All children in pre-primary education who were promoted to Grade 1 show higher scores on all three tests. Among children who stayed in pre-primary education (probably because of age), across schools they have increased scores on school readiness, whereas differences on literacy and numeracy vary by school. It may be possible that the lack of change in some cases was related to age or school curriculum and teaching methods. Future research may consider examining these

factors more closely. From this research in Madagascar, an important question is whether the observed effects will endure. Will children who attended pre-school continue to outperform those who did not in Grades 2 and 3? Following children from pre-primary through Grade 3, at a minimum, will be important to understanding the impact of pre-school education in Madagascar; providing comparable international data is also needed.

In closing this section, pre-primary education in Madagascar is showing a positive difference on some outcomes for children and shows promise for further development of early childhood education by educational leaders from many sectors. The finding that literacy and numeracy were not different by a school supported by Aide et Action suggests that more work is needed on curriculum development and teacher education for Aide et Action schools in particular, and for all schools in general. This study's finding that schools affiliated with Aide et Action had a more positive effect on children's school readiness than unaffiliated schools lead us to consider ideas for educational leaders to partner with non-government organizations, managing border-specific and cross-border practices.

### **Ideas for School Administrators' Practice within the Multilateral Model for Decolonising African Leadership**

In this section, we explore how school administrators can enhance their practices by re-considering key concepts (presented in section 1) by using the model multilateral model for decolonising African educational leadership (presented in section 2). We illustrate the complexity of these practices with the case studies of Madagascar and Ghana.





A cross-border issue is that many African countries rely on financing from external powers that may create a dependence not only on funds but also on knowledge (Eacott & Asuga, 2014). School administrators have to choose carefully which organizations to engage with and determine if a potential partner is working from a neo-colonial or decolonising framework. Referring to our proposed model, this is a point in quadrant 3 where educational leaders and administrators execute autonomous decision-making. Key indicators of neo-colonialism are imposing decontextualized competencies or providing curriculum materials in colonial languages. Local African administrators need to hold on to the understanding that their ability to work in the colonial language is simultaneously privileging and oppressing. It is providing the privilege of bringing in from the outside much needed resources. It is oppressing because the next generation of teachers and administrators witness the power the colonial language has with outsiders and desires to retain it and the conceptualisations inherent to the language, further decontextualizing education. School leaders can stop the cycle of decontextualization by embracing international partners who do not come with ready-made solutions but rather rely on the leaders to provide them.

In the case of Madagascar, the research reported herein was initiated and funded by UBS Optimus Foundation when it decided to fund an NGO, Aide et Action International, for the development of formal preschools in Madagascar. Aide et Action International grew from a French non-governmental organization Aide et Action founded in 1981 with a mission of supporting access to education for children in India. Since then, the organization has continued its focus on education, broadened its reach to 25 countries, and implemented an approach that mobilizes and develops human and financial resources.

This shift in approach to “horizontal solidarity” came in 2007 when Aide et Action International was established and UNESCO published a report “Strong foundations Early childhood care and education” (2007). Aide et Action International works with local governments, community stakeholders and parents “at the service of the great cause of education for all” (Aide et Action International, 2014). The focus of the approach used was on capacity building.

In the case of Aide-et-Action International, the approach is to create initiatives for, with and by local governments, school administrators, parents, external funders and researchers is an exemplar of collective effort in the multilateral model. Hence, decolonising educational leadership cannot be the business of school administrators only. The international organisation attempts to engage educational leaders at all levels of government and to provide-funding and share the international knowledge on the effects of investing in early childhood education. This is where the ‘engagement’ domain in quadrant III is critical. The goal is for school administrators to determine what, if any, of that knowledges and resources will resolve educational challenges that leaders face. In the case of Madagascar, the educational leadership and management literature show only one study published from this country that is indexed in SCOPUS from 1960 to 2018 (Hallinger, 2018); the study that student test scores do not vary by whether a teacher is on a limited term contract or fully employed (Glewwe & Maïga, 2011). The dearth of literature means that leaders must engage researchers (quadrant IV) to rely on and generate contextual knowledge.

Ultimately, educational leadership is about ensuring quality education for students (Bush, 2020). In the study of Madagascar presented above, educational leadership in developing early



childhood education may be defined as the influence on a commitment of any educational actor in a decision-making situation in the education system concerned with developing or stimulating knowledge and practices in the early childhood sector. Here again, leaders' decision-making is a critical. The intervention and study on child outcomes illustrate a fusing of global north resources with present local-centric interventions in the global south. Working from a model to empower local schools, Aide-et-Action International, with support from the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) Optimus Foundation, invested in and evaluated a pre-primary initiative in Madagascar to better prepare children for school. One of the limitations of the initiative in Madagascar is that the partnership mostly addressed quadrants I and IV of our models to decolonise leadership practices. Also, it was only three years, which is not enough time to make a lasting impact. The decolonisation of African educational leadership can be realized through multi-year, multi-sectoral partnerships.

Another example of decolonized African educational leadership that approaches realising the work on the past-present continuum with language (quadrant II) and teacher training (quadrant III) is evidenced in Ghana's national education strategy for establishing literacy in a mother-tongue language before receiving instruction to read in the English language. To accomplish this goal, the government, specifically the Ghana Education Service, partnered with two international organizations (the Centre for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and the Education Development Centre) with funding from USAID and developed the project, Education Quality for All (EQUALL). Informed by the Ghana Education Service, CAL developed milestones and standards for teaching and assessing children as they learn to read 1 of 13 Ghanaian languages illustrating

how innovation and training can lead to professionalism as important components of quadrant III. The success of this program relied on the leadership from the Ghana Education Service working with school administrators and teachers, and then schools working with parents to reverse cultural norms that privileged English over the mother-tongue language. Following EQUALL which operated in 20 districts, Ghana Education Service with funding from USAID developed the National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP) that now supports children nationwide in learning to read in 1 of 11 Ghanaian languages (Khepera, 2020).

Globally, the context of the COVID- 19 pandemic places new pressures on educational leaders, and particularly in already poorly functioning corrupt African states (Arowosegbe, 2021). School administrators working within these systems can find strength in working from a social justice framework particularly when working with international and non-governmental partners. Within an already stressed educational system in which leaders have developed the skills to mobilize resources from government and non-governmental organizations, they must now attend to health risks.

Another critical issue for educational leadership in African is the need to develop progressive policy frameworks and induce culture shifts conducive to women leaders thriving. Educational leadership is impacted by government policies. For example, the South African Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 prohibits discrimination by race and gender and other social characteristics (Republic of South Africa 1998), and as a result, more women have been appointed as school principals in post-apartheid compared to before. This progress brought cultural resistance into schools with women principals



reporting experiencing insubordination and sexual harassment by male colleagues (Khumalo, 2021).

Our proposed multilateral model still needs to be tested and we invite readers to conduct research on it in Africa from perspectives valuing the importance of rethinking leadership from a marginal perspective (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). We agree with Nkomo (2011) that “Instead of searching for or imagining ‘African’ leadership and management, it may be worth-while to engage in more descriptive research that examines how leaders and managers in schools and the ministries of education in Africa are responding to the dual pressures of globalization and local needs” (p.377). Conducting research on educational leadership in Africa is critically needed and must be done in ways that are very careful with the use of concepts and epistemologies using a comparative approach because knowledge generated in this way will move educational (leadership) practice in Africa from slavery-like positions to cross-border perspectives.

In Africa, school administrators and managers have (or may develop) the competencies that render them specialists of the complexities inherent in decolonising leadership approaches. They are uniquely positioned to work with all agents in both a top-down and a bottom-up manner within and across borders to fulfil their responsibilities in an open system in which communication and collaboration flows easily along the past and present continuum.

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