



COVER NOTE



Transformative Learning, Leadership, and Technology in Education: Experiences from Global South contexts

Barney Walsh^a

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Welcome to this Special Issue of the Journal of Leadership and Developing Societies. This special issue is titled '*Transformative Learning, Leadership, and Technology in Education: Experiences from Global South contexts.*' This compilation forms part of African Leadership Centre's Research Cluster 6 ongoing research agenda on Peace, Society and the State in Africa, which focuses on the interface between international political-economy contexts and the notions and realities of African statehood across times. It is also an extension of the Universities Network on Global Leadership, Peace and Development, a research and education collaboration between ALC-King's, Peking University, and nine African partner universities.¹

The papers featured here were received following a call for papers which drew interest from across the Global South. Contributors were asked to take an African or Global South perspective on transformative and leadership education, including a focus on online

learning where appropriate. The swift rise of online education in the Global South brings with it distinct opportunities to cultivate leadership through transformative learning. Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning has been discussed, critiqued, and revised since his early work in the late 1970's,² but at its core is a belief that adult learners can experience "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions."³ This approach to education focuses on deep self-reflection, challenging ingrained assumptions, and enhancing problem-solving skills.

These are elements that are particularly crucial in regions where socio-political struggles and educational disparities intersect. There are also clear linkages between transformative learning and the 'decolonise the curriculum' agenda, which has gained prominence since the 2011 Malaysia conference on Euro-centricity in university curricula.⁴ But to what extent are these ideas and theories relevant to the practicalities of complex

^a Dr Barney Walsh is a Senior Lecturer in Security, Leadership and Development Education at the African Leadership Centre (ALC). He is programme convenor of the MSc Global Leadership and Peacebuilding programme.

¹ This 3-year project was led by the African Leadership Centre (ALC), King's College London, as a joint collaboration between: Centre for African Studies, Peking University; Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi; Department of Political Science, University of Pretoria; Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Buea; Department of History and International Studies, University of Jos; Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University; Debre Berhan University; Institute of African Studies, University of Legon;

and University of Port Harcourt. All partners are from countries that are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative

² Mezirow, J., 1978. Perspective transformation. *Adult education*, 28(2), pp.100-110; Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome Way, San Francisco, CA 94104.

³ Transformative Learning Centre, 2004, quoted and discussed in Kitchenham, A., 2008. The evolution of John Mezirow's transformative learning theory. *Journal of transformative education*, 6(2), pp.104-123.

⁴ Alvares, C. and Faruqi, S.S. eds., 2014. *Decolonising the University: The Emerging Quest for Non-Eurocentric Paradigms* (Penerbit USM). Penerbit USM

Global South contexts? How can a leadership and/or online educational programme enable a transformative experience for learners from the Global South? What are the implications of technological limitations, the digital divide, and a disconnect between Western leadership frameworks and local cultural traditions on learning in the Global South? These were some of the guiding questions that the papers in this special issue sought to answer.

At the heart of *leadership* development there is an idea of encouraging personal and intellectual growth through critical self-examination. Learners from 'societies in transition' (countries experiencing socio-economic or politico-security ruptures) pose challenges to educators at all levels. Complexity occurs due to the experiences of several shifts and transitions - colonial to post-colonial society, demographic transitions (youth bulge), conflict to post-conflict situations, or processes of democratisation. Learners therefore require critical consciousness, specific problem-solving skills and a solution-oriented mindset outside of dominant narratives or 'textbook' explanations. As noted recently by Olonisakin and Flavin, "not all leadership problems are transferable, and the specific context is a major determinant in leadership problems, but leadership manifests in an extensive range of human experiences and a fit-for-purpose curriculum takes this into account."⁵ This special issue is about scholarship that recognises, unpacks, and interrogates any of the relationships and contestations between transformative learning, online education, and leadership education within the Global South or as experienced by Global South learners or educators.

The first article in the special issue is *Examining Intricate Dynamics of Transformative Education among Junior Academic Staff in HEIs: A Nigerian Perspective*, by Kazeem Oyedele Lamidi, an early career Lecturer within the Department of Local Government and Development at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. From his personal experiences and detailed desk top review, Lamidi provides less well-known insights around the intricacies of being able to establish and deliver (or not, as the case may well be), a transformative learning agenda within the Nigerian Higher Education context. He discusses Nigeria as a case for analysing how early-career academics engage with transformative pedagogies in settings characterized by structural inequality, inadequate technological infrastructure, and ongoing educational reforms. It is a story of struggle and resilience, whereby junior academics often battle again

conservative institutional cultures less responsive to the ideas and innovation of younger academic educators, as well as the material realities of technological costs and real-life financial concerns of staff members. Lamidi nonetheless analyses examples of what he calls grassroots creativity and adaptable leadership that shows a strong dedication to meaningful change. To better empower younger academics as agents of change within Nigerian education, Lamidi advocates for focused interventions in capacity building, inclusive policy frameworks, and sustainable technological integration

Next is *Re-imagining Academic Leadership through Transformative Coaching: A Reflective Account from Uganda* by Rosemary Nakijoba, Associate Professor in Development Studies at and Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at Muteesa I Royal University in Uganda. This work explores *coaching* as a distinct method of training educators within African Universities, that is a more personalized, goal-oriented process through one-on-one or small group interactions that focus on facilitating individual reflection, growth, and capacity building. The paper argues coaching helps to foster strategic clarity, emotional resilience, and potentially institutional transformation. The paper's innovative methodology draws on both interviews with participants from a coaching program as well as the reflective journals they wrote during that process. Another key contribution is the insight into how coaching grounded in feminist and systems leadership theories offers an emerging pathway for rethinking academic leadership as a holistic practice of self-awareness, care, and strategic influence. Overall, Nakijoba puts forward a compelling argument of coaching as a powerful, context-sensitive model of leadership education and recommends integrating it into leadership programs across African universities.

The third paper moves focus away from Africa, with the paper *Cooperative Leadership in the Digital Age: The Case of the Universidad FUNDEPOS de Costa Rica*, authored by Gloriana Rodriguez Alvarez, an early career Lecturer in Leadership, Development, Peace and Security at ALC-King's, and, her father, Ennio Rodriguez, Professor (retired) at FUNDEPOS. It is nice to present a familial work, with this daughter-father co-authorship. This study of the Costa Rica's only cooperative-owned university interrogates the transformative potential and challenges of digital education within the institution. Grounded in decolonial and cooperative education frameworks, the study uses interviews with Faculty and

⁵ Olonisakin, F. and Flavin, M. 2024. Teaching Global Leadership in Higher Education. Springer Nature.

students at FUNDEPOS to understand the implications of how the cooperative values - empathy, co-construction, and real-world relevance - manifest in the online teaching shift during and after COVID-19. It presents generally positive outcomes, with online programs potentially democratising access to learning and cultivating collective leadership between learners and educators. However, the digital infrastructure gaps, uneven participation, and emotional fatigue remain important challenges and barriers. It argues that FUNDEPOS represents an evolving experiment in digital education justice that does not simply mirror blueprints developed elsewhere but seeks to develop locally rooted alternatives, as it navigates the complexity of embedding cooperative values into pedagogy and leadership.

The final main paper is *Education in Central Africa's Cameroon, CAR and DRC in the Era of Virtual Learning: What Leadership Process?* by Albert Mbiatem, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of International Relations and Conflict Resolution at the University of Buea. This exploratory piece, based on desk-top research, reviews the challenges faced within Central Africa in terms of taking advantage of the increasingly global shift to digital education formats. It argues these three countries remain particularly constrained by deep-rooted infrastructural and governance challenges, with internet access remaining markedly more limited than in other parts of Africa. This limited internet access along with unreliable electricity, inadequate digital infrastructure, and weak policy implementation all present intense issues not easily overcome in the short term. The work does not attempt to provide definitive solutions to these challenges but offers deeper understanding of the central issues and variables at play, with a call for further and deeper research to help tackle such issues. The objective was to interrogate the kind of leadership processes that could potentially make virtual learning viable and effective in Cameroon, CAR and DRC. The paper's innovative approach moves focus away from 'the leader' as the sole authority responsible for such issues, to understanding leadership as a shared process whereby empowered individuals at all levels are required to take ownership of the changes needed within education (and across the each of countries at large). It offers hopeful examples of the promising, adaptive approaches that do, indeed, occur in some school and community-led engagement with low-tech, accessible means to deliver virtual or hybrid learning (albeit on a limited scale). Generally, the paper laments and calls to account the persistent gaps between policy rhetoric and practical implementation in all three of the central African states of focus due to the poor quality of policy and educational leadership. But it also offers

something of a call to action, suggesting the situation does not merely require technological solutions, but, importantly, a more adaptive and context-sensitive leadership that empowers stakeholders at all levels to drive change, bridge the digital divide and build educational systems that are resilient, equitable, and future-ready.

The shorter commentary piece again moves to Latin America, titled *Leadership Training for Middle Managers: An Organisational Turning Point* by Francisco Sanchez Moreno, a former Senior Partner at Campamento Base, a leadership training organisation. He has also worked as Director of Housing and Director of Recycling and Circular Economy at the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, and is an Alumnus of the MSc Leadership and Development at ALC-King's. The discussion is based on the authors own experiences as a middle manager in Argentina, and interviews conducted as part of Moreno's research undertaken on his MSc programme. It highlights how the implications of 'middle managers' being put into leadership roles within Global South contexts remains very much under-researched and an underappreciated issue. Within an area of the world searching for all means to increase efficiency, competitiveness and productivity this is a striking gap. The interviews and piece generally offer valuable insight into the experience of managers thrust into new roles that require leadership skills and capacity, for which they have not been properly trained for. It highlights how middle managers often do not have the time to learn the skills they need to perform duties effectively, and often carry a sense of 'feeling alone' when undertaking their complex tasks. It shows the problematic conflation, even within generally functional and profitable workplaces, between *management* and *leadership*. These are distinct concepts in theory and practice; and the work calls for the better institutionalising of a leadership training culture as one of the most impactful ways of assuring a competitive advantage for any given organisation over the longer term.

Finally, the leadership in practice piece is titled *Community-led Leadership for Urban Youth: Food-Based Learning and Rites of Passage for Transformation*, a new collaboration between Barney Walsh, Senior Lecturer in Security, Leadership and Development at ALC-King's, and Darren Springer (also known as Darren Le Baron), a self-labelled 'grassroots researcher', world-renowned educator in Ethnomycology and Psychedelic studies, and community activist and influencer. This is the only contribution that moves directly away from Global South contexts; but remains focused on transformative education interventions within the challenging

environment faced by urban youth in London. This is a complex context for large swathes of the populace who face deprivation, stigmatisation, and are at risk of violence (as victims and/or perpetrators) whilst being in mainstream educational institutions ill-suited to deal with the challenges or their lived realities. This exploratory piece is based on desktop research, Springer's personal knowledge of working with the groups discussed, and supplementary interviews with relevant educators. It discusses nature and food-based learning (Organiclea; The Grow Academy; and Healthy-Mind-Healthy-Grind); and ritualistic deep-dive discussion groups with rites of passage ceremonies (Manhood Academy Global) in relation to literature on transformative and experiential learning that has historically been more focused on adult education or larger scale alternative provision. It argues these experiential learning interventions offer young learners in need the chance for transformed personal and world views; and align more closely with the transformative learning literature that recognises the role of *emotional* changes beyond just rational reflection. It explores the potentially transformative benefits of: alternative physical spaces; the communal and familial aspect of transformational learning; and the need for emotional and/or spiritual change, rather than purely rationalist self-critique. The work reinforces the view that more experiential, social, and identity-forming work can shift world views and connect to younger learners' true identities, but calls for more detailed studies to fully understand the longer-term impacts and replicability of such interventions.

This special issue of the Journal of Leadership and Developing Societies is proud to fulfil one of the journal's core priorities: providing a platform for both early-career and established academics, particularly from the Global South, to contribute to scholarly discourse and publish their research. By championing these diverse voices, we aim to ensure that the discourse on leadership and development remains inclusive and rooted in varied lived realities. The voices represented here – be they junior faculty navigating institutional constraints, more experienced researchers examining systemic challenges, or 'grassroots' researchers utilising academic outputs for their work – better our understanding of transformative learning and leadership processes across varied contexts.

I hope the special issue has also demonstrated that effective transformative learning and leadership education in the Global South (and elsewhere) requires a combination of contextual adaptation, technological accessibility, and the courage to challenge dominant frameworks. While universal theories of transformative

learning provide valuable foundations, and the challenges of the digital divide and structural inequality remain very real, across diverse African and Latin American cases the authors illustrate the power of coaching, experiential learning, cooperative education and adaptive leadership to spark transformation even within restrictive or under-resourced environments. Each identifies the importance of moving beyond 'textbook' Western narratives to foster genuine intellectual and personal growth. As we navigate the evolving landscape of global education, these articles emphasise that technology alone cannot bridge systemic inequities, nor can leadership models be transplanted without regard for cultural realities. Rather, transformation requires local ownership, adaptive practices, and continuous experimentation. It is my hope that this Special Issue stimulates further scholarship, comparative research, and practitioner engagement that deepens understanding of how transformative learning and leadership education can genuinely serve communities across the Global South and elsewhere, and contributes towards building more equitable, resilient and future-ready educational systems.