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Book Review

Education Research in African Contexts: Traditions and New Beginnings for Knowledge and Impact

Edited by Paul Webb, Mathabo Khau, and Proscovia Namubiru Ssentamu Nomalungelo

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Education Research in African Contexts: Traditions and New Beginnings for Knowledge and Impact, edited by Paul Webb, Mathabo Khau, and Proscovia Namubiru Ssentamu is a comprehensive, timely text that showcases the significance of engaging with educational research methodologies and practices specifically designed to African settings. In this sense, it addresses a critical gap in academic literature by foregrounding African perspectives and realities in educational inquiry. Its focus on Indigenous research approaches such as storytelling, theatre, and eco-pedagogy, amongst others, demonstrates how research in African contexts can be decolonised so that African researchers can embrace solutions to address their unique regional challenges without having to rely on Western models. In this regard, for example, the use of Indigenous methodologies like the imbizo (South Africa) and baraza (Kenya) communal, oral-based traditions are presented as more effective and culturally relevant alternatives to standard Western research methods like focus groups.

The book's primary strengths lie in its contextual relevance, methodological rigour, and inclusive perspectives. In terms of contextual relevance, its major strength lies in its commitment to contextualising education research within African socio-political, economic, and cultural frameworks by demonstrating how research can be adapted to reflect local realities, challenges, and aspirations within African contexts. Furthermore, the authors strive to maintain methodological rigour in their chapters by providing practical guidance on conducting rigorous research while ensuring that cultural sensitivity is maintained. A feature of the text is its accessibility to both experienced researchers and emerging scholars by creating a balance between theoretical frameworks and actionable advice. Another significant strength of the book is its recognition that because educational challenges and opportunities vary significantly across countries, regions, and communities, research approaches must engender inclusive practices so

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that diverse African insights and experiences are acknowledged in order to subvert monolithic, Western representations.

Further strengths include the book's exploration of Indigenous knowledge systems and their roles in educational research, the focus on ethical considerations specific to African research contexts, an examination of power dynamics and positionality in educational inquiry, and practical strategies for community engagement and participatory research approaches. The book's focus on promoting African-centred educational research by reimagining educational paradigms that respect African realities and that challenge Eurocentric assumptions in academic inquiry, provides a platform for researchers to explore new possibilities for inclusive and transformative research. The book makes a concerted attempt to advance knowledge, promote equality, and empower individuals and communities to thrive in an ever-changing world.

The book, which provides a platform for scholarship holders and researchers from the East and South African-German Centre of Excellence for Educational Research Methodologies and Management (CERM-ESA), is structured into two primary sections:

- Chapters 1–6 explore higher education issues by focusing on current challenges and innovations within African universities.
- Chapters 7–14 explore school-based research by focusing on interactions between schools and society, offering practical findings from local educational sites.

In Chapter 15, the final chapter of the book, Michael Samuel provides a critique of each of the other chapters. The chapters in the book cover a broad spectrum of modern educational concerns including issues such as academic resilience, gender, and identity, and incorporate a wide range of research genres, with a specific focus on their reimagination for African contexts and experiences.

In Chapter 1, "A Reflection on Collaborative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: The Case of the East and South African-German Centre of Excellence for Educational Research Methodologies and Management," Noel Japheth, John K. Chang'ach, Susan Kurgat, and Mercy Chemutai Barasa highlight the successes and challenges of establishing joint teaching and research programmes across five universities, focusing on capacity-building and context-sensitive research. The authors examined the case of CERM-ESA through the lens of collaborative teaching and learning in higher education postgraduate research.

Janet Ronoh and Paul Webb explore the intricate interplay between traditional wisdom and contemporary education by investigating the efficacy of an Indigenous methodology with teacher educators in Chapter 2, "Exploring Teacher Educator Views on Place and Position of Indigenous Knowledge in the school Curriculum Using an Indigenous Methodology." The findings are significant in that they illuminate the potential of Indigenous wisdom to enrich and contextualise educational experiences, leading to a deeper understanding of cultural heritage and identity.

Curwyn Mapaling, Paul Webb, and Belinda du Plooy, in Chapter 3, "A Quantitative Study on Academic Resilience Among Engineering Students at a South African University," examine factors

that contribute to academic resilience among engineering students at a South African university, despite challenging educational and socioeconomic environments. Their findings inform strategies for fostering student success and well-being, empowering future generations of engineers to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

In Chapter 4, “Exploring Faculty and Student Perspectives Regarding Training and Research Interventions on Climate Change and Sustainability at Makerere University in Uganda,” David Ssekamatte, Karsten Speck, and Bernd Siebenhüner examine the current state of sustainability education and its challenges through participatory inquiry, highlighting the significance of holistic approaches to environmental education and advocacy.

Issues of climate change are further explored by Nelson Mandela, David Ssekamatte, and Benjamin Kyalo Wambua in Chapter 5, “University-Community Engagement Opportunities to Address Climate Change Issues in an African Context. The Case of Makerere University, Uganda,” in which they analyse university-community engagement opportunities aimed at addressing climate change issues in an African context, by evaluating initiatives led by Makerere University to foster local, sustainable solutions.

In Chapter 6, “Picturing the Experiences of the Student–Supervisor Relationship Towards Completion of Doctoral Studies in African Universities,” Cornelius Kipleting Rugut explores the experiences of doctoral candidates in African universities, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in the supervision process. His insights inform strategies for enhancing support structures and fostering academic success.

In Chapter 7, “Exploratory Factor Analysis of Stakeholders’ Participation in School Management and the Enhancement of Learners’ Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Uganda,” Dorothy Nakiyaga, David Serem, Proscovia Namubiru Ssentamu, and John Boit investigate the complex dynamics of school management and community engagement and its impact on academic achievement in Ugandan secondary schools through exploratory factor analysis.

Chapter 8, “Exploring the Use of Participatory Visual Methods in Teaching Sexuality Education Within the HIV and AIDS Education Programme in Kenyan Secondary Schools,” by Lily Yego, Violet Nabwire Opata, Heloise Sathorar, and Mathabo Khau investigate the effectiveness of participatory visual methods in broaching sensitive topics such as sexuality, HIV and AIDS education, and fostering inclusive and empowering learning environments in Kenyan classrooms.

In Chapter 9, “Barriers and Enablers of Educational Inclusion of Children in Street Situations in Uganda,” Annah Atuhairwe, Jonah Nyaga Kindiki, Stella Kyohairwe, and Susan Kurgat delve into the perceptions of street children in Kampala, Uganda, advocating for their inclusion in mainstream education, and challenging societal stereotypes and prejudices.

Chapter 10 by Evans Mos Olao, Bernard Misigo, and Karsten Speck, “Using Participatory Visual Methods to Teach Character Education in Early Childhood, Kenya,” highlights how visual tools can engage learners and teachers in moral and social development because visual methods are not only innovative approaches, but also child-friendly since they offer an alternative for better teaching and learning of character education in early childhood settings.

In Chapter 11, “A Focus on Drawing as Method: Insights From a Novice Participatory Visual Methodologies Researcher,” by Naomi Mworira with supervisors Dr Felicity W. Githinji and Professor Naydene De Lange, the researcher reflects on her experiences of the use of drawing as a participatory visual methodology to gain deeper insights from participants in primary education.

Simon Ekiru, Mathabo Khau, and Sammy Chumba in Chapter 12, “Using Gender-Atypical Kiswahili Children’s Stories to Deconstruct Gender-Stereotyped Roles Among Learners,” examine how the use of gender-atypical Kiswahili children’s stories can be used to deconstruct gender-stereotyped roles among primary school learners.

Chapter 13, “A ‘Play Way’ Method for Developing Digital Literacy Among Pupils in Primary Schools in Nandi Sub-County, Kenya,” by Sarah Jemutai, focuses on the transformative potential of play-based learning in developing digital literacy among pupils in Kenyan schools. She deduces that, through the play way method, educators can empower students to become active participants in their learning, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and technological fluency.

Ayanda Simayi and Paul Webb, in Chapter 14, “Culturally Appropriate Linguistic Responses to Taboo Issues When Teaching Biology,” focus on how language and local culture influence the teaching of sensitive topics in the science curriculum. The research underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in educational practice, fostering dialogue and understanding across and within cultural contexts.

Chapter 15 by Michael Anthony Samuel, “Beyond Saviour Research: A Critical Synthesis of the CERM-ESA Project Celebration,” critically synthesises the book’s themes, offering a review of the CERM-ESA project by critiquing the perception of Africa as needing external “saviours,” and emphasising that relevant educational solutions already exist within local, homegrown projects. The chapter is divided into two parts, Part A reviews *Education Research in African Contexts* within the context of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, showing how the CERM-ESA project supports continental transformation. Part B examines CERM-ESA’s institutional research, focusing on higher education and school–society studies.

Collectively, the narratives in this book offer a rich tapestry of African scholarship and inquiry, illuminating the multifaceted intersections of education, society, and culture, and provide an insightful resource for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers committed to shaping responsive and inclusive educational systems across Africa. Furthermore, the book successfully bridges the gap between tradition and modernity to create a new, empowering narrative for African education research. It will appeal to educational researchers working in African contexts, development practitioners and policymakers, graduate students in education and related fields, and readers interested in developing a better understanding of culturally responsive research practices and how to implement them for research purposes.