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AVATARS MEET FACE-TO-FACE:

Learning Leadership Online: A Thematic Analysis of East-African Perspectives

Abstract

Within education, the online forum is becoming a preferred mode of study across the globe and the COVID-19 era highlights its importance. Research around online education has concentrated on the USA and Europe, and this study sought to redress the Western bias by exploring and comparing the perceptions of six post-graduate East-African students and lecturers at Pan Africa Christian University in Kenya on learning leadership online versus on-campus. It is debatable whether leaders are born or made; however, post-industrial theories embrace the concept that leadership is teachable. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed, using a top-down approach, from a critical realist perspective. The results show that participants' leadership ideals synthesised Afrocentric perspectives of communality, with Western ideals of transformational and servant leadership. Furthermore, there are differences between perceptions of East-African students and lecturers on online leadership learning. Students preferred the online avatar experience, whilst lecturers preferred on-campus or blended methods of leadership studies. Face-to-face connection was deemed important by students and lecturers but impeded by the inability to see facial reactions using the current online platform. This exploratory study gives insight into an East-African experience and sends a clear message to Kenyan institutions to invest further in video technology. Future research could include a longitudinal study of destinations and successes of Kenyan University online leadership alumni. The impact of the global coronavirus pandemic, with lockdowns and social distancing, further underlines the importance of ongoing online leadership research and education across the world.

Key words: online leadership learning, African leadership, leadership training, qualitative research, cross-cultural leadership perspective

Introduction

From settling disagreements to finding directions, a few clicks on your smartphone provides an internet solution. Access to learning is no different and a Google search for online leadership courses accessed 711 million results in less than a second with over 70 percent of Chief Academic Officers in the USA regarding online learning as critical to the success of their Universities (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Google, 2019; Keeney, Shelton, Mason & Young, 2017). The advantages of online learning include convenience, time efficiency and increased possibilities of dynamic and creative interactions (Mbuva, 2014). However, disadvantages include requirements for high computer literacy, affordability of devices, access

to reliable internet provision, and self-discipline (Mbuva, 2014).

Online learning is expanding as advantages appear to outweigh disadvantages (Mbuva, 2014). Keeney et al. (2017) conducted a study involving 306 master's degree students in Texas to provide data on how to optimise the effectiveness of online learning. They found the strongest predictors of student satisfaction were personal relevance and instructor support (Keeney et al., 2017). This finding was surprising, as Palloff and Pratt (1999) argue the need for social connections between students as integral to successful online learning. In addition, although student interaction is an indicator of high-quality online learning, it was not found to have a large effect on success or student satisfaction (Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Beldarrain, 2006). This was an interesting result when considering the topic of learning leadership online, as the nature of leadership being relational suggests that social connectedness between students would be key to successful online leadership learning. The discrepancy may be due to technological advances since the date of Palloff and Pratt's (1999) study, whereby social media and online social interactions are now the norm, therefore students fail to see this as a determining factor. Instead, students are more concerned with instructor support and course relevance (Keeney et al., 2017). There is ongoing debate as to whether leaders are born or made, and a number of different leadership theories, which affect the advancement and education of leaders, online or otherwise, in any given culture, including East African culture, (Kenyan, Tanzanian & Ugandan), which provides the context of this study (Britanicca, 2019; Zekan, Peronja, & Russo, 2012; Haber, 2011).

Leadership Theories. Galton (1869) led the way with his theory that leadership was linked to high intelligence, trait based and limited to certain unique individuals who were capable of radically changing their environments. He coined the term 'Hereditary Genius' and in this framework leadership skills were not something that could be taught or learnt. In the mid-twentieth century, Stogdill (1948) and Mann (1959), rejected Galton's ideas and theorised that leadership skills were not innate but were skills based and could be taught. House (1977) maintained that leadership effectiveness was the result of both innate personality traits and personal attributes that could be taught. More recently, Zaccaro (2007) echoed this view, theorising that leaders possess a combination of meaningfully integrated traits and attributes. He made the distinction between distal attributes or traits, such as high intellectual capacity, and proximal attributes or developable/teachable skills, such as problem solving and social skills (Zaccaro, 2007).

More recently in the USA, the concept of servant leadership, that the best leaders commit to the growth of the people in their community and serve that community, emerged (Greenleaf, 2002). Spears (2010) developed Greenleaf's theory, maintaining leadership is relational and effective leaders convince rather than coerce followers (Spears, 2010). He laid out ten characteristics of good leaders and concluded that character attributes important for leadership can be taught, evidencing this with a school program in the United States named Character Counts (Character Counts, 2019; Spears, 2010).

Galton's trait theory, that highly intelligent individuals can bring about radical change, partially re-emerged, under the guise of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Galton, 1869). However, transformational leadership skills are regarded as teachable, with transformational leaders using role modelling to effectively encourage followers to invest in new directions and endeavours (Yaffe & Kark, 2011; White, 2018). Yaffe and Kark (2011) define leadership as being a process whereby a person motivates and enlists the assistance of others, through leading by example, to achieve a common goal. Their research focused on Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB).

More recently the relational perspective of contemporary leadership theories, including servant leadership, has been investigated comparing 142 articles and 45 studies from 1999 – 2014 using an integrated conceptual review (Carter, DeChurch, Braun & Contractor, 2015). This research, in an organisational context, found a consensus that good leadership allows organisations to effectively function, by coordinating the efforts of the whole organisation towards shared goals (Carter et al., 2015). In this setting, delegation, shared leadership, high contributions to team efforts and leader's close proximity to the team were some indicators of high team performance (Carter et al., 2015). This supports research promoting both servant leadership and leading by example and emphasises the strong relational aspect of effective leadership (Spears, 2010; Yaffe & Kark, 2011).

Two qualitative studies in Europe and the USA investigated students' ideas of what makes a good leader. The Croatian study explored 182 college leadership students' perceptions of good leaders, whilst the American study of 1100 college students in the USA found it was necessary for them to understand and define leadership skills in order to develop these skills (Haber, 2011; Zekan et al., 2012). Both studies distinguished between two leadership paradigms, industrial and post-industrial. The industrial paradigm proposes that leaders are born, not made, and there is one way of leading effectively, which resonates with Galton's theory (Galton, 1869; Haber, 2011; Rost, 1991; Zekan et al., 2012). Contrarily, the post-industrial paradigm proposes that leadership is relational, promotes change, and can be learnt, which fits with the servant leadership theory (Haber, 2011; Spears, 2010; Rost, 1991; Zekan et al., 2012). The study in the USA highlighted differences in concepts of leadership related to gender and race, with people of colour and women embracing the post-industrial paradigm, emphasising collective approaches to leadership that bring about positive change, and white men approving more transactional, top-down leadership styles (Haber, 2011). In the same way as

there may be gender and race differences within a country, it is likely that there are differences in concepts of leadership across varying cultures and countries.

Cross-Cultural Differences. Most publicised theories of leadership are embedded in individualistic, capitalist, democratic, Western nations and these cultural differences transpire to leadership values (Hofstede, 2001; Mamman & Zakaria, 2016). Hofstede's (2001) organizational research found that cultures differ on five dimensions: including individualism vs collectivism. Determining what makes a good leader is culturally loaded, as different cultures and organisations within those cultures admire and respect different leadership skills (Hofstede, 2001; Ning et al., 2012; Goldstein, 2016; Mamman & Zakaria, 2016). Along with different leadership skills being valued, leaders from different cultures adopt different styles. One example is in India, a hierarchical collectivist culture which values Authority Leadership (AL) where it is acceptable for leaders to act more like parents (paternalistic leadership or PL), being involved in all aspects of their subordinates' lives to the extent of providing advice on family matters or even arranging a marriage (Ning et al., 2012; Sinha, 1995). Just as this Indian leadership style would be hard to apply in the USA or Europe, Western leadership styles are not necessarily transferrable to other cultures, with African culture being one example.

Leadership in an African Context. There were mixed reactions to the death, on 6 September 2019, of Robert Mugabe, ex-president of Zimbabwe. He is remembered as an icon of African liberation who was imprisoned for resisting white rule before rising to leadership in 1980. However, he is also remembered as a dictator, responsible for widespread violence, corruption and poverty in Zimbabwe and for the death of 80,000 of his own citizens (Withnall, 2019). Unlike other African leaders, Nelson Mandela and Jomo Kenyatta,

also imprisoned for protesting white rule, Robert Mugabe did not pursue a reconciliation strategy with white settlers, post-election (Charton, 2013; Withnall, 2019). Instead, he opted in 2000 to encourage the forcible eviction of white farmers from their land, resulting in widespread famine across Zimbabwe (Withnall, 2019). Robert Mugabe's death and legacy are recent reminders of the need for more effective leadership in post-colonial Africa.

Due to extensive colonisation of Africa by European nations, European leadership ideals were imposed on indigenous cultures (Bulhan, 2015). Colonial rule replaced the rule of the tribal chief in African cultures whilst retaining some tribal leaders to help them govern (Fallers, 1955). Present day Africa lacks good, effective leadership which is needed due to the fundamental development challenges of this post-colonial continent (Adeyemi, 2017; Bikoko, 2007; Blake, 2005; Bulhan, 2015; Mathooko,2013). African economies have high potential, but many remain underdeveloped for a variety of reasons linked to leadership issues (Adeyemi, 2017; Bikoko, 2007; Blake, 2005; Bulhan, 2015).

There has been debate as to which leadership theories and ideals would work best in a post-colonial African context. Bulhan (2015) asserts that the African mindset needs to be decolonised and infused with thought liberation to change its focus away from individual happiness to collective well-being. Others argue for a return to traditional pre-colonial leadership styles and values, promoting Afrocentric concepts of leadership which challenge objectivism, individualism and linearity with transcendental and metaphysical concepts, including non-human aspects of leadership (van der Colff, 2003; Bolden & Kirk, 2009; du Preez, 2012; Eyong, 2017; Gumede, 2017). In contrast, Jallow (2014), a Gambian researcher, asserts that post-colonial Africa suffered a development crisis, due to the failure of the new state leaders to adopt transformational, servant leadership styles, needed to empower the new citizens, instead adopting colonial transactional, autocratic styles where the leader was there to be served, not to serve (Jallow,

2014). Furthermore, Jallow (2014) argues that Africa needs an understanding of Western organisational leadership theories to advance. Yet others contend for a synthesis of traditional African ideals of leadership, incorporating the Western approach to managing people and organisations, in order to move forward in a rapidly changing interdependent world (Mamman & Zakaria, 2016; Mathooko, 2013). The underlying concept is that leadership brings power, and, whilst all have different ideas of the best way forward, they agree that leadership power should have the interests of all the people and not the leader at its centre.

One uniquely Kenyan maxim is Harambee, (pulling together) and it is rooted in the Sub-Saharan concept of Ubuntu, a philosophy and belief system that identity is attained through community commitment and mutualism resulting in community strength (Swanson, 2007; Wesonga, 2017). Mamman & Zakaria (2016) seek to promote a change in leadership ideals and training in a Sub-Saharan context, using a combination of Ubuntu and spirituality, defined as a longing for values, vision and meaning in life, which helps one to apply knowledge with integrity, honesty and commitment. They argue that Ubuntu and spirituality can augment Western leadership styles, and that people can be trained to acquire both these sets of qualities (Mamman & Zakaria, 2016). Spirituality is seen to complement Western ideals of ethical decision making, valued as a leadership quality (Smedick & Rice, 2018; Mamman & Zakaria, 2016; Zaccaro, 2007). Furthermore, Ubuntu, with its focus on collective rather than individual gain, is akin to Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) (Mamman & Zakaria, 2016; Yaffe & Kark, 2011). Both Ubuntu and OCB help to mobilise institutions and organisations forward in the attainment of a common goal and many southern and eastern Africans already live by collective principles (Mamman & Zakaria, 2016; Yaffe & Kark, 2011).

Any leadership paradigm adopted must, however, be rooted in local African traditions, settings and mindsets, as Africa is a diverse continent with

many peoples, cultures and tribes (Mamman & Zakaria, 2016). Most current psychological studies are conducted on white middle class college undergraduates in North America (which contains five percent of the global population but 60 percent of the world's psychologists) and Europe, making them unrepresentative of the various populations of even these continents (Goldstein, 2016). One model of leadership will not fit all situations, and, due to rapidly changing world conditions, such as population growth, economics and technological advances, leaders need to be flexible, adaptable and culturally contextual in their approach (Mathooko, 2013). Colonisation transplanted Western ideals onto Africa, and it has been argued that post-colonial Africa needs to de-colonise and move away from globalising top-down approaches toward contextual culture sensitive approaches (Jallow, 2014). Whilst it is acknowledged that Africa needs good leaders, there is little research in an East African context on effective leadership training and debate as to how this should eventuate (Banfill, 2018).

Online Education. At this crucial stage of post-colonial African leadership, a twenty-first century, online leadership education solution, is worth exploring. Online education, defined as distance education that is based on the use of the internet for delivery, has become a preferred mode of study across the globe (Mbuva, 2014; Milman, 2010). It provides opportunities for learners to study at a convenient pace and time without the need for travel. As a relatively recent phenomena, it provides a growing area for research and its accessibility makes it attractive both in developed and developing countries (Mbuva, 2014; Milman, 2010; Shelton & Pedersen, 2017).

The perceived accessibility of online learning depends on reliable internet connections. Internet speeds in Africa are notoriously slow, but Kenya has one of the highest in Africa at 15.58 Mbps (megabytes per second) download speed, which is

adequate for streaming purposes (Macharia, 2018; Speedtest, 2019). Several Universities in Kenya offer online degrees. This study is focusing on Pan Africa Christian University (PAC University) in Nairobi, as it brands itself as a 'Leadership University' founded on strong Christian values (Nyambura, 2016; Pan Africa Christian University, 2019; Wamaitha, 2017). In addition, PAC University is somewhere the researcher had strong personal connections which facilitated communication as Kenyan culture places elevated importance on close personal bonds (Goman, 2011). This choice is also representative of the country's predominantly Christian population with 80% of Kenyans identifying as Christian (Dowd, 2017).

PAC University. PAC University offers 35 courses accredited by the Commission for University Education in Kenya including eight leadership courses (Pan Africa Christian University, 2019). Two of the courses are offered both online and on Campus and these are a PhD in Organizational Leadership (PhD-OL) and a Master of Arts in Leadership (MAL), (Pan Africa Christian University, 2019). Pan Africa Christian University (2019) describe their online leadership courses as cost effective, flexible, and accessible and all staff are required to be identify as Christian, whereas students' entry is based on purely academic requirements.

The online Learning Management system used at PAC University as reported by participants was Blackboard 6. Their version had no video facilities, and they did not use an online plagiarism check for submitted work. Some workshops were audio synchronous, some learning like DQ (daily questions) and WC (weekly compendium) were asynchronous. Some lectures were audio pre-recorded.

Research Aims. This study aims to compare the perceptions and experiences of post graduate students at PAC University on learning leadership online vs on-campus. Previous studies have shown that online learner satisfaction is linked to personal

relevance and instructor support (Keeney et al., 2017). In addition, this study aims to compare the perceptions and experiences of the lecturers at PAC University in delivering both online and on-campus leadership courses. Of note is how they view the effectiveness of both modes of leadership teaching. From an educator's point of view, providing opportunities for interaction between students has previously been seen as an integral aspect of online courses in contributing to online learning success, but the opinions of the online students differ with regard to this previously held assumption **(Beldarrain, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Moreover, the study considers whether the two modes of learning are thought to have fostered any specific leadership skills.**

Furthermore, this research aims to examine if these differences exist, do they support previous findings in the European and American studies, or were there variances influenced by the unique cultural context (Beldarrain, 2006; Keeney et al., 2017; Palloff & Pratt, 1999)? It will consider if the perceived leadership qualities reported by students and lecturers reflect Western or Afrocentric ideologies or a combination of both (Bulhan, 2015; Gumede, 2017; Smedick & Rice, 2018). In addition, it addresses some challenges presented in online learning platforms at PAC University in Kenya. This research is interested in both the students' and lecturers' personal accounts and experiences of leadership education at PAC University.

Method

Research Methodology. This research was exploratory in nature, and a qualitative method of thematic analysis, suited to educational contexts, was chosen (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Fisher, 2005; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The themes were generated using a top-down approach. The researcher took the stance of a critical realist with the epistemological assumption that knowledge is situational, local, provisional and valid in particular

contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Madill et al., 2000; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1997).

Ethics Approval and Research Permit. Prior to commencement of the research, Ethics approval, ID 19315, was obtained from Monash University, and a research permit (NACOSTI/P/19/70505/28831), was granted by the Kenyan Government.

Participants. The participants were recruited via publicising the research in the Leadership Department at PAC University. All interested students and lecturers were asked to contact the researcher via email. Potential participants who responded via email and WhatsApp were sent an introductory email. Those who agreed to participate were provided with consent forms, a demographic questionnaire, and questions for the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted via Skype (version 8.44.0.40, 2019) following receipt of the signed consent forms and demographic questionnaires. The final sample for this research comprised of six East African adults, three post-graduate students and three lecturers from the leadership department at PAC University (see Table 1). All were either Kenyan residents or citizens who identified as Christian.

Table 1.

Participant information

Participant	Age[1]	Gender[2]	Interview[3] length	Highest[4] Qualification	Ethnicity[5]	Status[6]
Adam*	32	M	28 mins	BA	East African	Student
Bel	35	F	29 mins	MA	East African	Student
Cali	50	F	21 mins	MA	East African	Student
Al	47	M	31 mins	PhD	East African	Lecturer
Bess	42	F	42 mins	PhD	East African	Lecturer
Cora	54	F	24 mins	PhD	East African	Lecturer

Anglicised pseudonyms were used, reflecting the mainly anglicised first names of participants.

1. Mean age of participants (M=43); Lecturers' age (M=48); Students' age (M=39).

2. Female(N=4); Male (N=2).

3. Length of interview in minutes (M=29)

4. Highest Qualifications ranged from BA to PhD, all lecturers had PhDs.

5. East African (N = 6)

6. Lecturers (N=3); Students (N=3)

Data Collection and Analysis. The instruments used were a demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview (Chan & Boyd Farmer, 2017). All participants met the inclusion/exclusion criteria of being Africans who had experience of learning/ teaching leadership both online and on-campus. In order to provide anonymity, participants were assigned a pseudonym (Braun & Clarke, 2013) (see Table 2).

Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phased framework was used to analyse the data from the interviews. The six phases were: becoming familiar with the data; producing codes; generating sub-themes; revising sub-themes; creating and naming themes; and writing up the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). A total of five main themes and 40 sub-themes were identified. A table of the final themes and sub-themes are included here (see Table 2a and Table 2b).

Results

Table 2a

Summary of Qualitative Themes Related to Leadership Learning Online

Themes	Students' sub-themes	Lecturers' sub-themes
Leadership qualities	a. Good leaders are influencers (Adam, Cali) b. Good leaders lead by example (Bel, Cali) c. Good leaders are people-centred (Adam, Bel, Cali) d. Good leaders learn from experience (Bel, Cali) e. Good leaders learn from others (Bel, Cali)	a. Good leaders are influencers (Al, Bess, Cora) b. Good leaders lead by example (Al) c. Good leaders are people-centred (Al, Cora) d. Good leaders learn from experience (Al, Cora) e. Anyone can be a leader (Bess) f. There is a spiritual aspect to leadership (Al, Bess)
Experiential on-campus learning fosters leadership skills	a. Group work helps you to interact positively with others (Adam, Bel) b. On-campus presentations teach you communication skills (Adam) c. Role play enables you to practise leadership skills (Bel) d. Teachers inspire you to be leaders (Adam, Cali) e. Learning through shared interactions (Adam, Cali)	a. Group work develops motivational and visionary skills (Bess) b. Communication skills of students can be directly assessed (Bess) c. On-campus is a constructivist teaching space (Bess) d. Lecturers provide examples of leadership (Al, Cora) e. It's all about attitude (Al)

Independent online learning fosters leadership skills	a. Online learning is deep and wide (Bel, Cali) b. Improves research skills (Adam) c. Online learning is flexible and convenient enabling working students to further their leadership studies (Adam, Bel, Cali) d. Online learning helps you influence others through discussion boards (Adam, Cali) e. Improves your I.T. skills to give you an advantage over your peers (Adam) f. Learn from others in a global village (Adam, Bel, Cali)	a. Online learning is deep and wide (Al, Cora) b. Improves research skills (Cora) c. Online learning is flexible and convenient enabling working students to further their leadership studies (Al, Bess, Cora) d. Online learning gives students skills in debating and influencing others (Bess)

Table 2b: *Summary of Qualitative Themes specific to cultural context*

Themes	Students' sub-themes	Lecturers' sub-themes
Implications of technology use in online learning	a. Unstable/intermittent internet connectivity (Adam, Bel, Cali) b. Power cuts affect learning (Bel) c. Computer skills necessary (Adam) d. Up to date gadgets required (Adam, Cali) e. Anonymity a cultural advantage Avatar experience (Adam)	a. Unstable/intermittent internet connectivity (Al, Bess, Cora) b. Power cuts affect learning (Al, Bess) c. Computer skills necessary (Bess) d. Up to date gadgets required (Bess, Cora) e. Online submissions hard to verify as authentic (Al, Cora) f. Dependent on software and technology used by the institution (Bess)

Importance of face-to-face interactions in Kenyan culture	a. Facial expressions and body language are important (Bel, Cali) b. Face-to-face learning more memorable (Bel) c. You get the human touch when you are face-to-face (Adam, Bel) d. When you see peoples' faces you bond with them (Adam)	a. Facial expressions are important (Bess, Cora) b. Face-to-face enhances engagement between teachers and learners (Bess, Cora) c. Face-to-face allows emotions to be evident (Bess) d. You see the real person face-to-face (Cora) e. Face-to-face learning facilitates mentoring (Al)

Qualitative Themes

Leadership Qualities. "A good leader is one who is able to influence and lead the way" (Cali), who "puts the interests of the people he is leading above his own interests" (Al). You become a good leader "by learning from your mistakes and by being who you are asking people to become" (Bel). Good leaders are able to "rally a whole community" (Cora) and are people-centred/"serve the people" (Adam). They "meet the needs of their community" (Cora). The students' and lecturers' ideas of quality leadership mainly concurred. Although they discussed whether leaders were born or made, the common thread was that people could be trained to be leaders. "There are those who are not born to be leaders, but they can be trained to be leaders" (Bess, lines). The lecturers all spoke about the spiritual aspect of leadership and held that "spiritual leadership is not only in the church but can actually work, in your workspace" and spiritual formation is the "total transformation of, of, a person" (Bess) whilst leadership involves "giving God a part a chance of their lives" (Al).

Experiential on-campus learning fosters leadership skills. There was some consensus between students and lecturers that the on-campus environment provides "a constructivist space" (Bess). Tasks such as role play, giving presentations and group work helped students to practise their leadership skills. "Well... I also feel like on-campus gives you the opportunity to actually exercise those skills" (Bel).

It was said that leadership was not all about learning skills, instead it was all about attitude which aligns with the spiritual component of leadership. "... Attitude is the whole is the elephant (in Kenya this refers to the largest factor at play), in leadership... sometimes we say if we have to choose between attitude and ability choose attitude" (Al).

On-campus, lecturers provide examples of leadership and inspire their students. "So that... aspect for people, sitting you down, and teaching you through his life experience...interacting with someone taking you through how he has dealt with it in leadership...that the main thing because that's what inspired me" (Adam,).

Independent online learning fosters leadership skills. Students on the whole valued the online space more than lecturers. They felt part of a "global village" (Bel):

> So that experience of mixed perspectives, helped me to become a better leader, because I am able to see where my culture is and what other cultures are doing...I am thinking of whereby, the um role of women in leadership in Africa, compared to Europe... it's clearly understood and taken positively but in Africa the role of women in leadership is a little bit undermined.... you really have to up your game for you to be able to be a leader/influencer (Cali).

Another student states "from this (online) platform I can also pick different cultures and understand the way they think and the way they want to be served, ...as a good leader I learn...how to serve people" (Adam).

Lecturers on the other hand saw online learning as a way for students to develop other leadership qualities such as goal setting and perseverance, with independent learning itself growing their leadership qualities:

> So independent learners, you have to look for the knowledge....., have to go to the forest of books and read a lot about it so you become, you become a leader, you have to have the vision... you have to purpose to finish your assignments, you know, nobody is driving you so it helps them to become independent thinkers (Cora).

Both students and lecturers believed that online learning helped students to gain a deeper understanding of leadership through online research, "I will share my thoughts (online), who is a good leader and through my research support that" (Adam) and online "you are able to explore (leadership) in a lot of depth...you are able to make the student extract a lot of knowledge" (Cora).

Implications of technology use in online learning. Of major concern to both students and lecturers was the unstable/intermittent internet connectivity in Nairobi, alongside the power cuts. All participants talk about this factor; the students say, "online you must be on the internet, sometimes there are outages, so you end up missing some lessons" (Cali) and "Internet is a problem...sometimes I have been going to my neighbour...when I don't have internet... if you don't have internet you cannot submit your work, you can't learn" (Adam).

Also:

> The disadvantage now if you are in our world is CONNECTIVITY to internet 'cos I have history with that one where you are in class and the internet goes down, or where you are in class where power goes out... or you are doing an exam...and the internet goes down and you are locked out and you just pray that something happens (Bel).

The lecturers recognise the problems this poses for students as well as themselves. "This student did not have network...definitely he has suffered...Because this is technology and it can go off, including...now – you can go off, I can go off and it's like - Oh, what has happened?" (Al), and "the internet stability it keeps off and on...and that can really tamper with the process of teaching" (Bess). Also "the (online) video (in the future) it may not be there every day for you to have it" (Cora). There was also the factor of students needing technology skills, "Online is a very good space but the disadvantage can be...when students don't have the knowledge of I.T. ...That is a really big problem...sometimes they don't even know how to connect." (Bess).

One student agrees that, although this can be a challenge, "if you are computer illiterate it will be very hard for you to learn" (Adam). Yet he sees as advantageous the I.T. skills he gained during the course, "I didn't know how to...plan online but through the training I can." (Adam).

Another consideration with online learning is that you have to have the right equipment and that this makes face-to-face learning more inclusive "but uh for face-to-face even those who …can't afford computers can be able to learn, so poverty contributes to that as well" (Bess).

The question of anonymity vs accountability was also a factor with lecturers seeing the question of being able to verify both the students' work and conduct as an issue in online education. Lecturers comment "you cannot really link the student to the assignments they give you…you don't actually know if the student is doing that work" (Cora), and "the conduct of the student means a lot" (Al), with the implication being that you can't check the conduct of students online.

Conversely, students liked the freedom from cultural restrictions that anonymous online communication can give:

So, you can, you can ask anything. So in a classroom, you know there are some questions for example in our culture… first before asking the question, I will check what kind of age of people that are around me… but when it is open on platform, we can ask, anything because you are hiding in cyber space, so if you have any challenge on anything you can share… So, for me I can say anything…from that platform… it is a plus as a… student who is doing leadership (Adam).

The importance of face-to-face interactions in Kenyan culture. Four of the participants (Adam; Al; Bess; Cora), re-named on-campus learning, face-to-face learning, and both students and lecturers cited it as beneficial. Face-to-face interactions help people to bond "something good on face-to-face… you bond" (Adam) and understand the other person more fully:

You know we…sometimes…say things

because it is what would please people, even as leaders you want to be…very cautious on what you say, how you say it, but sometimes our bodies defy what we are saying…we are telling someone 'Oh I'm happy for you' but your face is saying something or you'll be saying 'I agree' but that tone with which you say it , that facial expression is saying, I agree but just uh because I want to get it out of the way…(Bel).

Participants cited context "it's the context…in Kenya and generally Africans we like face-to-face" (Bess), and "traditionally, uh, we have always been known to see the people who are telling us things face-to-face" (Al), while another states that with "face-to-face …you know about how they feel…you are able to be 'in touch' with the real person (Cora) and "you have that real experience with the face-to-face" (Cora). They also saw this as one disadvantage of online learning "sometimes…you want to see the person on the other side answering…that what they are saying is real" (Cali).

Overall there was a difference between the students' and the lecturers' perceptions of the best method of online leadership learning. The students favoured online, "if you are a student and you are working, I'll opt to go with the online" (Adam) and "a hybrid of those both but where I stand right now I'm thinking of a fully online program" (Bel), also "I learnt more online than on-campus" (Cali). On the other hand, lecturers favoured either face-to-face or blended delivery "in my thinking it has been of course the lecture method" (Al) and "I prefer blended" (Bess), finally "for certain (leadership) courses I prefer online but for others I would prefer face-to-face" (Cora).

Discussion

Results in Context. This study focused on the perceived effectiveness of online education in the acquisition of leadership skills, from an East African perspective. Those who understand leadership to be teachable, see it as relational and change orientated (Haber, 2011; Rost, 1991; Spears, 2010; Yaffe & Kark, 2011; Zekan et al., 2012). Keeney et al. (2017), in their study of master's degree students in the USA, found that they rated instructor support and content relevance as the highest indicators of successful online learning, not interconnectedness with other students. In addition, although Palloff and Pratt (1999) argued that such interconnectedness indicated high quality online learning, they found it did not have a large effect on student satisfaction. However, the relational element of leadership suggests that interconnectedness with lecturers and other students would be a factor in the perceived effectiveness of leadership learning, whether online or on-campus (Haber, 2011; Spears, 2010; Rost, 1991; Zekan et al., 2012).

The research aimed to show whether both on-campus learning and online learning fostered particular leadership skills. The results show that both East African students' and lecturers' perceptions and experiences of online and on-campus leadership study were mixed. For both groups, the most positive experiences of on-campus leadership courses were the practical aspects, particularly activities such as role play, group work and presentations. In addition, students and lecturers particularly enjoyed the face-to-face experience of on-campus study, important in East African culture and providing physical interconnectedness with both other students and lecturers, which confirms the perceived value of interconnectedness in leadership courses (Haber, 2011; Spears, 2010; Rost, 1991; Zekan et al., 2012).

However, for online leadership courses, the perceptions of students and lecturers differed, confirming previous findings of a difference (Beldarrain, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Conversely, unlike Beldarrain's (2006) findings, students most valued the online opportunity to engage with others worldwide without cultural constraints. They appreciated the ability to anonymously share experiences, insights and research across cultural boundaries, which supported their leadership learning through cross-cultural, global interconnectedness, again confirming interconnectedness in leadership courses as a perceived value (Haber, 2011; Spears, 2010; Rost, 1991; Zekan et al., 2012). Conversely, these results were inconsistent with previous findings where students had rated course relevance and instructor support as the most important elements of online learning (Beldarrain, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Lecturers, on the other hand, perceived that online leadership study gave breadth and depth to their students' learning, helping them to develop their organisational and research skills, important in leadership, but felt it had less accountability and effectiveness than on-campus leadership courses, where the face-to-face interconnectedness was key. In addition to this, the attraction of online interactions for students was that they could create a virtual avatar, or representation of themselves and their attributes, online, which was not bound by cultural norms, gender or age. Anonymity was seen as an online issue by lecturers but as an advantage by students. On balance, their experiences led students to prefer online leadership study, whilst lecturers preferred either on-campus or a combination of online and on-campus courses.

Cultural Considerations of Leadership. Studies in the USA and Europe found that it was necessary to first define what constitutes good leadership before assessing leadership skills (Haber, 2011; Zekan et al., 2012). In addition, there are cultural differences in determining what makes a good leader (Hofstede, 2001; Goldstein, 2016; Mamman & Zakaria, 2016). African leadership ideals are focused on collective, not individual, well-being and have a spiritual dimension and are based on tribal cultures, not democracy (Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Bulhan, 2015;

du Preez, 2012). There has been much debate about the influence of colonialism on traditional leadership ideals in Africa, with a call for effective leadership in this post-colonial era (Adeyemi, 2017; Bikoko, 2007; Blake, 2005; Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Bulhan, 2015; Mathooko, 2013). Some argue for a return to indigenous Afrocentric leadership ideals (Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Bulhan, 2015; du Preez, 2012; Eyong, 2017; Gumede, 2017). On the other hand, Jallow (2014) argues the need for African nations to understand and adapt Western transformational and servant leadership styles in order meet the challenges of post-colonial Africa.

This study therefore investigated what the participants perceived as leadership qualities and provided some evidence of which leadership ideals were being pursued, whether Afrocentric and/or Western. Both students and lecturers described good leaders as influencers, who lead by example and learn from experience. They used terms such as transformational leadership and servant leadership, implying that they had adopted some Western leadership ideals recommended by Jallow (2014). However, lecturers defined leadership as having a spiritual aspect and both students and lecturers saw leaders as people-centred, values more akin to Afrocentric leadership ideals with a focus on spirituality and collective good (Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Bulhan, 2015; du Preez, 2012). From these findings it would appear that these East African participants maintained an African perspective of communality in leadership whilst embracing and adopting the Western ideals of transformational and servant leadership, with the sub-group of lecturers emphasising the spiritual aspect of leadership.

Technological Challenges in Kenya Affecting Online Learning. The research aimed to address the particular challenges of online learning at PAC University. Kenya has one of the highest internet speeds in Africa; however, frequent power cuts are problematic (Kenya Power, 2019; Macharia, 2018). This and unstable internet connectivity affected online leadership learning. All the participants mentioned power cuts and the resultant loss of internet as negative factors. Mbuva (2014) highlights internet connectivity, requirement for computer literacy and up to date I.T. equipment as being potential disadvantages of online learning and this is borne out in this study, as students and lecturers also cite these issues. Despite this, all students preferred online leadership learning and lecturers were aware of its advantages for working students and themselves, which parallels findings in the USA, where online learning is seen as key to the success of academic institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Keeney et al., 2017).

Research Strengths

The sample size of six participants, three for each cohort, selected using a purposive sampling strategy allowed the researcher to address the research questions in this time limited, exploratory study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The semi-structured interviews, length in minutes M=29 (see Table 1), allowed the participants to share their experiences of online and on-campus leadership courses in depth and provided rich data for the thematic analysis used (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Furthermore, given the importance that the participants gave to face-to-face interactions, Skype interviews allowed for better rapport building.

The use of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to generate and create rich sub-themes and themes which provided an insight into the perceptions of the students and lecturers of their experiences of both online and on-campus leadership learning from an East African perspective. The themes provided dense answers to the research questions and further insights into the participants' leadership ideals. This fitted with the contextual nature of the research in one Kenyan university.

The researcher kept a reflexive journal throughout, enabling them to consciously bracket their views (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). They

were aware of their role as both an insider, having experience of both online and on-campus post-graduate study, and of being both a student and a teacher, and as an outsider, not being ethnically African or studying leadership. They acknowledged their own concept of African culture, as, although they are ethnically European, they were born and brought up in Central and Eastern Africa. Some would regard the researcher's parents as part of colonialism, as they worked as teaching and medical missionaries in Central and Eastern Africa for forty years, so the researcher was careful to retain impartiality on the impact of colonisation in Africa. Furthermore, as an older woman, the researcher has experienced both gender and age stereotyping and reacted both positively and negatively to comments made by some of the participants on gender and age. Keeping the reflexive journal aided them in maintaining neutrality (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Fisher, 2005; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017).

Implications for Future Research. These findings have significant importance due to the novel nature of the research. They signal the need for investment in improved video facilities in on-line leadership courses due to the high value placed on face-to-face interactions in Kenyan culture alongside the increased connectivity it provides, important in effective leadership. Although it was felt that the importance of face-to-face communication was seen by participants to be integral to East African culture, it may fit in to a more global educational context. Furthermore, the findings add to the growing body of research on online education generally, as prior to COVID-19 this was increasingly becoming the norm, due to its availability, flexibility and adaptability to modern life across the globe (Allan & Seaman, 2015; Mbuva, 2014; Keeney et al., 2017). It has subsequently proved to be an essential mode of communication and study during the COVID-19 era.

Moreover, these findings will be of particular interest to PAC University as they brand themselves as a "Leadership University", and provided the context of the study (Nyambura, 2016). The

students all indicated that they would choose online leadership courses going forward, and this has planning implications for PAC University. In addition, one of the concerns that lecturers had regarding online study was that it lacked accountability, which could be addressed by improved video capabilities. It is difficult to assess whether other variables, not specifically addressed in this study such as differing teaching/learning strategies also affected the students' preferences for online learning. Furthermore, an analysis of the personalities of the participants might reveal that they have high self-motivation, which could have contributed to them choosing to study leadership and also to prefer online learning.

Female students were inspired by seeing examples of women in leadership in Europe and felt that this was more acceptable in other cultures than their own. Whilst all student participants liked the face-to-face aspect of on-campus learning, this was in some cases a barrier, as they felt obliged to either conform to cultural expectations particularly regarding age-appropriate discussions, or the need to strive harder and prove themselves to overcome cultural norms, if they were female. Certainly, perceiving online anonymity as an advantage in studying leadership may be transferable to other learning contexts, and was an outcome that was not anticipated in this research. Further studies investigating the avatar factor in a range of online leadership course settings are needed to corroborate this finding.

 In order to more fully assess the effectiveness of online leadership learning, as opposed to the it's perceived effectiveness a longitudinal study would be beneficial, looking at post-graduation destinations and leadership outcomes at those destinations. In addition, having two or more researchers would enable both data and researcher triangulation.

Implications Following the Global Coronavirus Pandemic. The global COVID-19 2020 pandemic has highlighted both the effectiveness and

necessity of online communications, education and leadership. Social distancing, curfews and lockdowns have been used in most countries around the world (Kaplan, Frias, & McFall-Johnsen, 2020). Schools and Universities across the world closed their physical classrooms with 91% of enrolled learners affected, and efforts are being made to move towards widespread online and distance learning (UNESCO, 2020).

Moreover, the pandemic has brought online communications to the fore (UNESCO, 2020). A consequence of this could be that leadership training should incorporate how to lead online, in situations such as a pandemic, when social distancing is key and face-to-face interactions limited or prohibited. Many of the world's leaders have had to adapt to leading online in 2020. The global connectedness valued by the students in this study and the chance to learn from other cultures is very topical in 2020, as different leaders and countries approach dealing with the global coronavirus pandemic in different ways.

Research Limitations. The credibility of the research would be strengthened if data and researcher triangulation had been undertaken (Nowell et al., 2017). The opportunity for transcript review was provided to each participant; however, full member checking, which would strengthen the credibility of the research, was not possible, due to the time constraints of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). It is hard to determine exactly how the researcher influenced the process; however, in qualitative research, they are integral to the process and it should be acknowledged that the researcher's presence had an effect (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). It is questionable whether the researcher would have gained access to the participants at the University if they had not had personal connections to the University and Kenya (Goman, 2011). In this sense, their relationship with the University was an advantage to conducting the research, whilst their gender (female), age (older than participants) and

ethnicity (white) could be perceived as having either positive or negative influences.

Conclusion

This thematic analysis of East African lecturers' and students' perceptions of online versus on-campus leadership studies has provided novel insights into their experiences of leadership courses at PAC University in Nairobi, Kenya, and forms a basis for further research in this area. It shows that the participants have combined the Afrocentric leadership ideals of communality and spirituality and adapted Western concepts of transformational and servant leadership to form their own leadership ideals. The results show that the perceptions of East African students and lecturers on the perceived effectiveness of learning leadership online differed. Whilst internet provision can be problematic in Kenya, students showed a preference for online leadership learning, and experienced the global interconnectedness and cultural freedom it provided as being crucial to leadership learning. When online learning platforms at PAC University are upgraded to include video and audio capabilities, the face-to-face interconnectedness, important in Kenyan culture and in leadership acquisition, will also be available in the online scenario and lecturers' fears regarding accountability of students' work will be allayed. Avatars will meet face-to-face.

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