Equitable Leadership as an Emerging Concept among School Principals in Kenya: An Institutional Perspective

Perez Oyugi

Abstract

This paper is a part of a larger international comparative study entitled *"Institutional Dimensions of Professional Knowledge: Processes and Implication for School Leaders across Educational Contexts"*. This study explored the influence of institutional factors on Kenyan and Canadian school administrators' constructions of knowledge and practice related to equitable leadership. A secondary purpose of the study was to develop a theory on the processes that school principals use to link institutional imperatives to their constructions of knowledge and practice. The study uses a constructivist grounded theory approach within a qualitative design. 7 principals from Kisumu County, Kenya and 5 principals from Ontario, Canada participated in the study. This paper explores knowledge of equitable leadership amongst school principals in Kenya. Results show that equitable leadership is an emerging concept in Kenya among school principals. Results also indicate that equitable leadership is conceptualized as shared and inclusive leadership, equal access, and fairness. These understandings are nested within institutional frameworks and arise from interactions with institutional actors and from institutional processes for sense making and for organizing knowledge for the principalship.

Key Words: equitable leadership, educational equity, principalship, school leadership.

Contact details: Perez Oyugi, Lecturer, Department of Education, Great Lakes University of Kisumu, Kenya. Email:poyugi@gmail.com or perez.oyugi@gluk.ac.ke

Introduction

Education is characterized by diversity, complexity, and demands from individuals and groups competing for scarce educational resources. In the process of competing for scarce resources, some groups are excluded while others are included. Similarly, educational leaders have a role to play in either sustaining or redressing persistent disparities and inequities for students (Theoharis, 2010), establishing, improving, and maintaining high-quality education that serves all students (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Oyugi, 2013; Theoharis, 2009), and setting the tone, expectations, and directions related to educational equity. Therefore, although only recently has educational leadership been associated with equity and social justice (Ryan, 2010), equitable leadership is vital if education is to deliver on its intended benefits to all students, redress persisting disparities in schools, and open up democratic space (Theoharis, 2010; Ryan, 2010).

This article is informed by results of an international comparative study entitled *"Institutional Dimensions of Professional Knowledge: Processes and Implication for School Leaders across Educational Contexts"* (Oyugi, 2014). Equitable leadership is used as an entry point to explore school administrator constructions of knowledge and to illuminate how conceptions of knowledge represent theoretical and ideological constructs designed to organize social life. The study uses Scott's (2013) framework to analyze the influence of regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive institutional elements on knowledge constructions for school principalship. This article reports on findings from Kisumu County, Kenya.

Review of Literature

Issues of equity and social justice are perennial educational issues. For educational leaders, equitable and inclusive education is fundamental to delivering high-quality education (Ryan, 2010; UNESCO, 2008). However, the terms equity and social justice elicit diverse strategies based on individual understandings of their theoretical underpinnings and intent (Dantley & Tillman, 2010) not in references; coexist with a range of ideas about equality, fairness, and human rights (McInerney, 2004); and are often used interchangeably (Chege, 2006). Specifically, justice is viewed as a central concept in social and political structures (Murphy, 1999) whose interpretations seek to establish universal principles revolving around (re)distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources that arise from social cooperation (Rawls, 1971). Equity, on the other hand rests on a value system that incorporates principles of social justice and concepts such as fairness and equality. For example, in equity as *fairness*, the focus is on actions and circumstances that disadvantage individuals and/or which negatively impact individual educational potential as well as social and altruistic goals (Oyugi, 2013). In the principle of *equality* the focus is on equal access and outcomes irrespective of social or family background. Clearly, whether understood as social justice, equality or fairness, equity is grounded on ideas that some individuals are disadvantaged by existing social relations.

Various understandings also exist regarding educational equity. Scholars have argued that educational equity is about "raising the achievement of all students while narrowing the gaps between the highest and lowest-performing students" (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 46); correcting "shortcomings in the regulations, rules, and laws that would otherwise be open to abuse by the majority, wealthy, influential, and powerful members of society." (Chege, 2006, p. 177); and according to Galloway, Ishimaru, and Larson (2013),

> Shifting from perspectives and practices that reflect either a deficit orientation or a belief in sameness-as-fairness to a collectively owned equity culture… and prioritizing decreasing disparities by addressing their systemic and structural roots. (p. 3).

Clearly, educational equity is about practices that ensure equality and fairness for individuals who are underserved and underrepresented in current schooling arrangements. While different interpretations about equity exist, educational equity is also key to ensuring education delivers high quality schooling, promotes social inclusion, and reduces disadvantages for students. This literature review outlines concepts of equity and equitable leadership in education.

Equity and Equitable Leadership in Educational Settings

Unraveling the subtle differences between social justice leadership and equitable leadership can be problematic because of the conceptual underpinnings of both terminologies often go unnoticed. In a literature review such an ambiguity can either be

problematic or can broaden the conceptual scope of equitable leadership. Acknowledging a temporal need for clarity, Ryan's (2010, p. 2) assertion that equitable leadership is about equity principles that allow for "leadership responsibilities to be shared with a wider community than individualistic and positional perspectives" will suffice. While this conceptual starting point does not necessarily resolve inherent predicaments, those being, terminologies such as equity, social justice, and equitable leadership are contested and value laden (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Not in references), it ensures that the "ideas and insights of our predecessors provide the context for current efforts and the platform on which we necessarily craft our contributions." (Scott, 2013, p. 55).

A review of understandings of equitable leadership show that emphasis is often placed on approaches that individuals use to ensure just social arrangements, equality of outcomes, equitable treatment of individuals, and on leadership practices that can mitigate inequity in educational institutions (Galloway, Ishimaru, & Larson, 2013; Ross & Berger, 2009). This cluster is divided further into studies that deconstruct existing logics of social justice and equitable leadership, preparation of educational leaders to ensure equity in schools, theoretical underpinnings of both social justice and equity, equity oriented instructional leadership, and equity and inclusion in education (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; UNESCO, 2008).

In studies deconstructing existing leadership perspectives, equitable leadership concepts can be gleaned from literatures that take a critical stance to educational

leadership. A critical stance refers to practices where educational leaders challenge educational structures "built upon the so-called neutrality of objective reality." (Bogotch, 2002, p. 3) or those that "privilege some and disadvantage others" (Furman & Shields, 2005, p. 123). Clearly, encapsulated in these equitable leadership understandings are individual and systemic intentionality; understanding of personal, social, and professional implications of (in)equity; and institutional imperatives that are focused on role expectations, inclusive practices, and educational outcomes. Implicitly, equitable leadership is about transforming "structures, systems, policies, and practices that reinforce disparities" (Galloway, Ishimaru, & Larson, 2013, p. 6) by going "beyond the question of equality" (Chege, 2006, p. 177); and problematizing who benefits, who is included, and who is excluded in educational arrangements in order to address conditions and situations that give rise to inequalities in educational settings. Literature within this cluster also outline the following equitable leadership practices: inclusive development of an equity vision; creating and sustaining an equitable culture; culturally responsive teaching; and equitably allocating resources (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014); modeling equitable practices (Brown, 2004: Furman & Shields, 2005); influencing policy (Dantley & Tillman, 2010), and influencing beliefs, values, and attitudes of the school community (Murakami, 2009).

Literatures on cognitive development theory show that social justice and equity are dominant discourses in the preparation of educational leaders. For instance, a literature review undertaken by Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) identified 11

studies that offered suggestions for preparing school leaders in order to ensure individuals develop the knowledge, skill, and desires to address equity issues. Another study of 11 educational leadership centers in 7 countries conducted by Bush and Jackson (2002) noted the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity in leadership preparation programs. Within this literature cluster, equitable leadership is understood as practices that address issues that arise out of "changing social and historical contexts" of education (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009, p. 12) and "systematic organizational practices and policies…endemic to schools and administrator practice" that perpetuate injustice (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 7).

Finally, theoretical understandings of equity can be gleaned from literature focusing on social justice theory. Rawls (1971) theory of justice, for example, positions justice as "the first virtue of social institutions" and relates justice and equity to the way in which major social institutions distribute rights, opportunities, and resources that arise from social cooperation (p. 3). The underlying intent of Rawls theory of justice, also referred to as distributive justice, is the notion that each person should be accorded an equal share of opportunity according to individual needs, rights, efforts, societal contribution, and merit. Three ideas can be inferred from Rawls's theory of distributive justice: (a) Distributive justice is promoted through structural reform of the society, (b) Justice is a compromise between persons of equal power who would enforce their will on each other if they could and (c) Justice is a collective responsibility. In education, Rawls theory of justice social justice links equitable distribution of educational

resources to *equal rights* to education; *equal opportunities* to benefit from the process of schooling; and *responsibility* to ensure equal access to educational resources. However, because distributive justice can be problematic in situations where existing social arrangements disadvantage some while privileging others, associational aspects of (in)justice, understood as recognition of difference, diversity, and equity in participation (Lister, 2008; Young, 1990) are important lenses for questioning inequitable norms, habits, and ideas.

In summary, equity and equitable leadership concepts are not easy to define, are contested and entail multiple interpretations. However, the definitions coalesce around the assumption that equitable leadership is about addressing conditions in education that enhance inequity and social arrangements that reinforce wider social hierarchies and injustices (Ryan, 2007). Therefore, irrespective of one's understanding, equitable leadership is vital for ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to achieve comparable educational outcomes. Further, the principles of equity, equality and social justice that underlie equitable leadership coalesce around norms, and practices in schools and society that impact social, political, economic, and educational (in)equities for students (Dantley & Tillman, 2010).

Research Problem

Equity is also a key concern of many contemporary educational contexts (De Angelis, Griffiths, Joshee, Portelli, Ryan, & Zarestsky, 2007), with the challenges

presented by issues of (in)equity in education calling for bold equitable leadership practices, significant knowledge and skills on the part of school principals, and the collaboration of many people (Ryan, 2010). However, few studies exist in Kenya that examine equitable leadership knowledge and practices of school principals. At the same time, assumptions that underlie equity can result in competing definitions, foci, and emphases (Johnson, 2008); are contested (Dantley & Tillman, 2010), and lead to feelings of uncertainty when individuals face unfamiliar and complex challenges (Bengtson, Zepeda, & Parylo, 2013; Lazaridou, 2009; Leo & Wickenberg, 2013). Clearly, as awareness of the need for equity and equitable leadership in schools increase (Hafner, 2010; Mullen, 2008), feelings of uncertainty are exacerbated when school principals have to navigate complex information (Johnson, 2008). Therefore, failure to understand knowledge ideas that underlie equitable leadership can lead to actions that reproduce unequal relations, and contradict individual beliefs (Miller, 2012; Oliva, Anderson, & Byng, 2010; Scott, 2013; Smith, 2005).

Research Purpose

The primary purpose of this grounded theory study is to explore institutional factors that influence school administrator constructions of knowledge and practice related to equitable leadership. Out of this understanding, it is hoped that a theory will emerge on the processes that school administrators use to link institutional imperatives to knowledge constructions. A review of literature shows that there no international

comparative studies that examine the institutional factors that influence school administrators' constructions of equitable leadership. This research can contribute towards a global understanding of the principalship and generate data that can lead to the development of strategies for equitable leadership, culturally nuanced theories of practice, and inform the professional development of school principals.

This study was driven by a desire to understand how institutional factors influence school principals' knowledge and practice related to equitable leadership in diverse educational contexts. This study is relevant and beneficial to educational leaders, students, policy makers, and the community in general because it addresses this gap in the literature, contributes to deepening knowledge of self for school principals when constructing knowledge of equitable leadership, and generates a better understanding of how institutional factors influence constructions of knowledge and practice for the principalship. This research contributes towards a global understanding of the principalship and generates data that leads to the development of plans, culturally nuanced theories, and inform the professional development of school principals.

Research Question

Knowledge that influences administrative practice is often abstracted from daily actions (Lazaridou, 2009), mediated by dominant knowledge regimes (Scott, 2013;

Smith, 2005), and sanctioned through institutional and social practices that can solidify unequal relations. The overarching question for this study is:

- How do regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive institutional factors influence school administrators' constructions of knowledge and practice related to equitable leadership?

Conceptual Framework

Institutional structures provide a framework within which individuals act inside institutions. To elucidate, Scott (2013) identifies three elements that underlie institutional structure: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that influence individual actions and which are linked to knowledge truths. I draw upon these three institutional elements to illustrate how institutional factors influence school administrators' constructions of knowledge for equitable leadership. The regulative pillar is used to assess rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities. The normative pillar is used to assess prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory institutional norms. The cultural cognitive pillar is used to assess common schemas, frames, and shared symbolic representations (Scott, 2013). As a conceptual entry point, an institutional framework is ideal for a theory-informed analysis of school principalship.

Methodology

The study used a constructivist grounded theory approach within a qualitative design (Charmaz, 2011). The study employed purposeful sampling procedure (Creswell, 2012). Data was collected through two sixty-minute semi-structured interviews with 12 school principals (7 from Kenya and 5 from Canada). Data was also be collected through a review of relevant public documents (minutes from meetings, official memos, and records) and from websites (government, district offices, schools, and professional associations). Data analysis consisted of various steps, as outlined in grounded theory approaches and incorporated the process of constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Study Findings

School principals regularly make connections between knowledge and practice. Three major findings emerged from this study regarding how equitable leadership is conceptualized. First, equitable leadership is an emerging concept in Kenya. Second, equitable leadership was conceptualized as shared leadership, equal access, and fairness. These findings are explored.

Tracing the Roots of Equitable Leadership

Study results indicate that equitable leadership is an emerging concept within Kenyan educational leadership circles. According to one participant, "this concept that I am remotely understanding, equitable leadership …it's a concept I'm trying to

understand, but it is still so remote" (Martha). Another observed, "in the past there was no equitable leadership…most principles did things singlehanded. They were not blamed. In fact the blame was on other people. They could transfer blame even if they did something wrong on other team members" (Patrick). Reasons provided for the emergence of equitable leadership included changes in the education system and legislative changes precipitated by the Constitution of Kenya Revised 2010 (Law Society of Kenya, 2010). These influences were linked to Basic Rights, the Children's Act, and emerging educational leadership concepts associated with decision-making and accountability.

Discernible turning points in equitable leadership knowledge were described as follows: "I noticed that equitable leadership was gaining momentum when individuals displayed more awareness of their basic rights… demanded their rights. It happened with teachers, students, and support staff" (Patrick). Martha noted, "in the last three years, I have noticed that the principal started involving others…I would say that the expectation to be inclusive is making us become more responsible, knowing too well that it is your duty to involve others in decision-making." Providing another glimpse, Mercy noted,

> In the past teachers' words were final and you were not allowed to question anybody, you only obeyed…teachers used a lot of intimidation in order to get things done. But, you cannot use that now…leadership has changed. You cannot be authoritarian anymore.

Narrating his journey Benson indicated,

…In the last four years I have learned to be accommodative, tolerant, sympathetic, and empathetic… They form part and parcel of what I do and think of in terms of equitable leadership. So the leadership that we have is all inclusive. You cannot be a boss on your own… you need others when you practice equitable leadership... (Benson).

Institutional texts were also key factors. According to Patrick,

Current leadership is owned by those you are serving as opposed to when leadership was on the principal alone…Anytime you make a complex decision you must look at the Code of Regulations, the Education Act, and the Constitution of Kenya…for Basic Human Rights, the Children's Act.

From these narratives, there were different triggers and perspectives on emergence of equitable leadership, with changes at the personal and institutional levels contributing to shifts in knowledge and practice of school principals.

Equitable Leadership: Ideas and Narratives

Diverse conceptualizations of equitable leadership exist. Results show that equitable leadership was understood as being fair (Martha), shared leadership which encompassed accountability, inclusion, and collective decision-making (John, Martha, & Patrick), and quality leadership in terms of educational results (Mercy). For some participants, equitable leadership meant ensuring access to education for students from low income families (Benson; Diane). Equitable leadership was also about practicing

good leadership, democracy, "looking at both sides of the coin...at the negative parts and the positive parts in the line of administration" (Benson), inclusive, and fair (Diane & Patrick). These constructions of equitable leadership coalesce around concepts of shared leadership and ensuring equitable access and outcomes.

Constructions of equitable leadership as shared and inclusive leadership was echoed by a number of participants. John indicated, "equitable leadership is where everyone has an equal share...whereby, one is not singled out or leadership does not rest on one particular person. It is where everyone takes the blame, everyone takes the praise." Patrick, another participant noted that equitable leadership is about "shared leadership, where we are all responsible and delegations are done. We are all answerable and it is not about an individual leader." Inclusion of stakeholders in decisions, involvement, accountability and alignment with school regulations, expectations, and obligations were important equitable leadership considerations. Further, since "the culture of making decisions on behalf of other individuals without consulting them is coming to an end very fast" (John), individuals in school leadership positions were expected to involve relevant stakeholders in their decisions.

At the root of ensuring equal access and equitable outcomes were concerns for students living in poverty. Poverty was articulated in terms of school funding and payment of school fees. For example, participants argued that poverty influenced the ability of parents to support school initiatives and pay fees. Access to education, therefore, depended on whether the school is located in a poor or in a resource rich

community. Implicitly, because the Kenyan government does not fund school infrastructure development, schools in poor communities lagged behind and were under-resourced because parents only "support what is within their financial means" (Diane). This problem was further compounded as follows: First, smaller (low enrollment) schools typically do not have a large resource base of parents to draw from. In contrast "large enrollment base means more resources which increases access...supports teaching and learning activities for poor students, even if some parents are unable to pay tuition or contribute to infrastructure development" (Patrick). Second, small schools also tend to be affected more by school principals' (in)ability to collect fees, which compounded access and equity issues. Specifically, small schools, struggle to collect fees from students, with students constantly sent home due to lack of fees (Benson, Diane, John, and Patrick). Third, concepts of equitable leadership were also rooted in concerns with educational outcomes of both low and high performing students. Educational outcomes meant "good academic performance of students" (Benson) and ability to bridge the gap between low and high performing teachers and students "in order to improve their performance" (Benson). Accordingly, achieving the goals of education, producing students that are self-reliant and able to fit in society are important access and outcome considerations for equitable leaders.

Finally, in constructions of equitable leadership as fairness, overarching concerns were individual and team perceptions of fairness. Issues of unfairness arose when team members were not contributing equally or where

Individuals feel they are hardworking while others are not hard working…yet all are supposed to be work towards the same goals. So, teams with active members feel that others are not hardworking, giving them a raw deal, and there is no fairness. (Martha).

Relating these concepts to student leadership, perceptions of unfairness arose when students "feel that they are not getting support from teachers and the administration" (Martha).

In summary, equitable leadership as an emerging concept was tied to institutional expectations and changes in education. Equitable leadership was also primarily understood as shared leadership, access, and equitable outcomes, with participants routinely reflecting on institutional imperatives when constructing their understanding of equitable leadership.

Discussions

Education leadership, as traditionally perceived and practiced has not always been consistent with the principles of equity (Ryan, 2010). Because of this contradiction or perceptions that equitable leadership is an incompatible *ménage à trois*, to enact equitable leadership, school principals must first understand the ideas that undergird concepts such as equity and equitable leadership, separate traditional concepts of leadership from equitable leadership conceptions, and then judiciously underlay their day-to-day approaches with contextual equitable leadership notions. Presuming

knowledge requirements for the principalship are nested in intersecting and interlocking network of relationships and expectations that reflect institutionally and professionally sanctioned "ways to do leading and leadership" (Thomson, Gunter, & Blackmore, 2013, p. viii), Scott's (2013) framework and Smith's (1987, 1990, 2005) work on ruling relations helps to unravel constitutive schemas and shared logics that influence equitable leadership.

Equitable Leadership as Emerging Concept and Knowledge

Knowledge emerges from subjective human interpretation and complex social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Stacey, 2000). Arguably, subjective interpretations and subsequent constructions of social and professional reality related to equitable leadership arose in part from the institutionalization of patterns of interaction and meaning associated with educational leadership. Further, because equitable leadership occurred within a community of practice, it is possible that its knowledge reflected institutionalized ways of constructing knowledge realities and/or is influenced by "maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 65) about the principalship. The central assertion being, the emergence of equitable leadership knowledge is embedded in elements that underlie institutional structure (Scott, 2013), contribute to patters of interaction, and is equated to reality by consensus (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Stacey, 2000).

Knowledge of equitable leadership also emerged from institutionalized sense making processes. Sense making occurs when the current state of an organization is

perceived to be different from its expected state, when new rules emerge, or when ambiguous organizational situations arise (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Weick, 1995). For example, the Constitution of Kenya of 2010 created a new regulative environment, thereby compelling school principals to develop new knowledge, such as those related to Basic Human Rights, the Children's Act in order to bridge current knowledge and new legal reality. Similarly, the revised Basic Education Act of 2013 Section 4, 36 (1-2) outlined new rules on physical punishment and mental harassment of students, contrary to prior practices. According to the new Education Act 2013,

> A person who contravenes the provision of sub-section (1) commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding one hundred thousand shillings or to imprisonment not exceeding six months or both. (Basic Education Act, 2013, p. 241).

Implicitly, individuals have to develop new knowledge given the changing environment.

Changing environments often provide the impetus for emergence of new knowledge since institutions must recalibrate to ensure stability and maintain relevance in changing environments (Kakihara & Sorenson, 2002). Similar sentiments are echoed by Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009). In the case of equitable leadership, school principals are equally compelled to enact or conform to changing institutional knowledge requirements. However, the new knowledge emerges within a pre-set regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive structure. Perhaps, the rules and

expectations, knowledge individuals need to possess, how knowledge can be demonstrated, and the extent to which appointed third parties, such as the school Board of Management, Ministry of Education, and Teacher's Service Commission provided the impetus for emergence of equitable leadership knowledge. In other words, new rules and prohibitions contained in the Constitution of Kenya Revised 2010 and the Basic Education Act of 2013 triggered changes in education and contributed to emergence of equitable leadership as a way of ensuring compliance with educational changes.

In summary, the emergence of equitable leadership knowledge reflected normalized institutional rituals of acquiring professional knowledge (Armstrong, 2010) and the influence of subjective, improvised and situated "institutional arrangements for organizational knowledge" (Kakihara & Sorenson, 2002, p. 13). To be precise, institutionalized sense making processes, including interactions between individuals, institutional and non-institutional actors acted as a normative agent by shaping and stabilizing social behavior (Scott, 2004, 2008). Arguably, equitable leadership knowledge emerged in an "interpretative, process-oriented and relational" as well as "complex, dynamic and fluid" (Kakihara & Sorenson, 2002: 13) environment informed by, and coerced by constitutive discursive practices.

Making Sense of Equitable Leadership from an Institutional Perspective

Institutional imperatives contribute to "a common framework of meanings." (Scott, 2013, p. 70) when they are perceived to legally sanctioned, morally governed,

and/or culturally supported. In particular, individual subjective understandings of institutional imperatives, such as those embedded in the values and goals of education that incorporate student results, management efficiency, and control of schools allow school principals to establish leadership meanings within a broader educational frame. Arguably, equitable leadership is valuable because of presumed educational outcomes and its potential to advance the inclusion of individuals in the cultural, institutional, and economic lives of schools (Ryan, 2010).

A common framework of meanings emerge when obligatory institutional values are legitimated as shared norms or when they assign "cognitive validity" (Scott, 2013, p. 72) in ways that crystalize and objectify meanings within a broader framework of what is acceptable within a community of practice or within existing educational arrangements. When for example, equitable leadership is widely supported, attendant cultural cognitive ideas assume obligatory values. In other words, concepts such as shared and inclusive leadership connect equitable leadership to wider cultural frames, norms or rules (Scott, 2013, 2008), and relate it to "larger generalized complex of social relations" (Smith 1987, p. 156) because of "perceived correctness and soundness" (Scott, 2013, p. 68) of the ideas, but without obscuring individualistic and hierarchical practices that reproduce practices and confer legitimacy.

In addition, normative institutional elements refer to norms and values that prescribe what is desirable and preferred, the standards for assessment, and legitimate means to pursue valued institutional ends (Scott, 2013). To elaborate, normative

institutional elements lead to the establishment of organized institutional systems and professional associations, which help stakeholders to create collective meaning and realign individual and organizational goals (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Weick, 1995). For example, institutional processes for constructing equitable leadership, which include interactions with and between institutional actors, such as the Ministry of Education, the Teachers Service Commission, and the judicial system can give rise to concepts such as equity as a way of dealing with emerging educational issues. In turn, the interpretive frameworks associated with equitable leadership become normalized as a way of making "sense of the ongoing stream of happenings" (Scott, 2013, p. 67), thereby constituting the nature of equitable leadership reality.

Within a normative framework, individuals comply with institutional imperatives based on social obligation and fear of shame (Scott, 2013). Supposing that equitable leadership is an institutional imperative, the constitutive elements of equitable leadership as shared and inclusive leadership; as fairness; and as equal access to education for students living in poverty are perhaps related to social obligation and shared understanding of leadership demands. It would seem, therefore that expressions such as "leadership does not rest on one particular person" (Diane, John, Martha, Mercy, Patrick) and "equal share in decision making and equal responsibility" (Benson, Diane, Mercy, & Patrick) arise because social obligation or because they align social obligations to institutional knowledge requirements.

Institutional texts that outline regulative, normative, and cognitive elements influenced equitable leadership knowledge. Because the regulative institutional pillar involves "explicit regulatory processes – rule setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities" (Scott, 2013, p. 59), assertions that "somebody will take you to court…you must look at the Code of Regulations, the Education Act, and the Constitution of Kenya…for Basic Human Rights, the Children's Act…" (Patrick) allude to conformity as a possible response of those subject to regulatory rules (Scott, 2013, p. 67). The primary mechanism of control is fear of sanctions and instrumentality (Gillies, 2013; Scott, 2013) assigned to the judicial system. Concurring, Smith (1990: 61) argues that institutional texts work as "objectified forms of knowledge" that appear "independent of their making" (1990, p. 61) inform situated practices. In equitable leadership, the Constitution of Kenya of 2010, Education Act of 2013, and other educational texts act as objectified forms of knowledge and illuminate "virtual realities" (Smith 1990, p. 62) with legal and professional ramifications that are encoded in institutional texts. Additionally, a child's right to education, as an independent fact linked to United Nations' Covenants and the Constitution of Kenya, relate equitable leadership as access and outcomes to broader knowledge norms because they assume "taken for granted" status (Smith 1990, p. 93) and order leadership priorities.

In conclusion, equitable leadership as a concept is by no means clear. Further, it is evident that regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive institutional elements contribute to a common framework of meanings, such as, shared and inclusive practices

which can lead to equal access and equitable outcomes for all students (Ryan, 2007). However, equitable leadership concepts are only institutionally acceptable in so far as they "constrain and empower" and contribute to "comprehensibility, acceptability, and legitimacy" of educational leadership (Scott, 2013, p. 228). Implicitly, equitable leadership is constituted within discursive rules that determine objects, subjects, and concepts of what is included or excluded in education.

Implications and Recommendations

Institutions routinely place responsibility for what happens in organizations in the hands of single individuals like school administrators. However, because equitable leadership cannot be carried out solely by individuals in positional authority (Galloway, Ishimaru, & Larson, 2013; Ryan, 2006) it is important to move away from institutional norms that construct the principalship as positional and hierarchical (Ryan, 2010) by relating equitable leadership to "democratic collaborative" conceptions (Galloway, Ishimaru, & Larson, 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, since concepts of equitable leadership as shared and inclusive leadership, access, and equitable outcomes confirm the existence of democratic underpinnings of education, it is recommended that school principals enact reflective practice as a way of problematizing institutional structures that influence their understanding of equitable leadership.

Diverse equitable leadership knowledge ideas exist stemming from individual cognitive conceptions of the terminology, ingrained schema, and from institutional

imperatives. Given these diverse conceptions of equitable leadership, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission, as key stakeholders in education, should provide opportunities to engage educational leaders or those interested in putting equitable leadership into practice to dialogue on conceptions of equitable leadership. This approach will open up democratic space in schools for all stakeholders. Ryan (2010) also argues that equitable leadership dialogue is important for infusing understandings that ensure that equitable leaders works for the wellbeing of all students

Finally, results show that individuals referred to the Constitution of Kenya, Ministry of Education regulations, and TSC documents when conceptualizing equitable leadership knowledge and practice. This absence of a clear policy framework contributes to different equitable leadership knowledge conceptions and actions. It is therefore recommended that the school Board of Management in consultation with various stakeholders develop and adopt equity policies in order to guide the principalship and to ensure educational equity. In tandem with the development of equity policy, schools should be clear accountability mechanisms.

In summary, because of the institutional undertones in equitable leadership knowledge, the ideas that undergird equitable leadership can reinforce existing ruling relations because they are open to manipulation and/or deliberative processes under the control of regulative and normative elements (Scott, 2013). However, out of this contradiction one can reimagine equitable leadership and the very foundations of

education in ways that contribute to comprehensibility, acceptability, and legitimacy of

equitable leadership as a valued educational norm in Kenya.

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About the author

Perez Oyugi is a Lecturer at Great Lakes University of Kisumu, teaching courses in educational management and administration.