

# How Indigenous Leadership Research in Africa Can Inspire National Prosperity

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## Abstract

This paper challenges leaders involved in governance, politics, academia, industry and leadership training to access the Afrocentric leadership advantage to unlock the wisdom and benefits of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) across the continent. The authors conducted a review of recent published literature by African leadership scholars that authenticate indigenous leadership thought in the face of historic, colonial and imperial Eurocentric western theory. The authors re-position indigenous leadership research as a critical center-piece and last-mile strategy to achieve pragmatic national transformation. The authors argue that hegemonic Eurocentric leadership models serve to satisfy global, financial and economic capital gains metrics, but do not always serve the social wellbeing and transformative growth interests of local communities. The paper urges policy makers, leadership program developers and business innovators to access and incorporate the findings of Indigenous Leadership Research in Africa (ILRA) to inspire national development and prosperity over the next 200 years.

## Keywords

Afrocentric Leadership, Ubuntu, Indigenous Leadership Systems, Sustainable Development, Colonialism, National Prosperity

## 1. Introduction

The international calls for a transformed Africa are echoes of a deeply embedded desire within the heart of the continent (Agenda 2063, 2015). According to UNEP, Africa has 40% of the world's gold, 90% of the world's chromium and platinum alongside the largest continental reserves of diamonds. Africa holds 65% of the worlds arable land and 10% of the planets renewable water resources (UNEP,

2023). Indeed, according to a published 2019 news report, Africa, “produced almost 1 billion tonnes of minerals worth \$406bn” (Aljazeera, 2022). Anybody controlling such a vast amount of wealth has to be a world power! Nonetheless, the perennial issues of poverty and corruption persist under national leaders with a western education and familiar with global leadership principles and standards. While Eurocentric leadership theory provides a popular lens to interpret and criticize local problems of poor governance and mismanagement of resources, indigenous leadership research may hold the key to pragmatic, transformative and sustainable socio-economic solutions to unlock Africa’s prosperity (Eyong, 2007). However, while Africa’s prosperity is tied to constructing a bridge out of poverty using its virgin natural environment (Steiner, 2008), its transformation may not be practical without an emerging vibrant indigenous knowledge industry driven by Afrocentric leadership theory.

Nevertheless, the search for authentic indigenous leadership theory cannot begin without acknowledging that Africa ruled itself for over 5000 years. This heritage is captured in ancient records, community culture and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) acknowledged by local and global historians, anthropologists and archeologists. Historic records in detail: the origin of mankind (Pobiner, 2022), the migration of humanity (Blainey, 2004), the wonders of the pyramids of Egypt, Sudan and Greater Zimbabwe (Walker, 2006), the engagement of African kingdoms in world wars and wealth quests (Meredith, 2014), the impact of transatlantic slave trade (Nunn, 2008) alongside global religions (Platvoet, 1996) and the invasive run up to colonialism in the 19th century by European powers (Pakenham, 1991). These records form the evolutionary foundations on which modern leadership practice in Africa stands.

Our research study delves into appreciating the value of indigenous leadership in the face of dominant western leadership theory, as well as to unearth the competitive advantage and benefits of indigeneity, in a world that is in a hurry to modernize and globalize itself. Many leadership and governance models practiced in modern Africa are derived from Eurocentric models such as: transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), results-based leadership (Ulrich et al., 1999) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2003). However, these concepts need to be customized and contextualized (at a cost) to find application in local environments. The unchallenged adoption of these Eurocentric perspectives of leadership ignores the existence of indigenous practices that have engaged in the conservation management of nature’s resources for millennia (Behailu et al., 2016). Yet, limited efforts have been made by local government, academia and business to access, research, publish or promote the use of indigenous leadership theory to drive national policy, social harmony, industry, productivity and global prosperity (Karsten & Illa, 2005).

A 2017 study examined sixty years of published peer-reviewed research on leadership in Africa from 1950 to 2009 and found that its content and coverage was skewed towards political perspectives aligned to (western) democracy and (eastern) socialism with an emerging search for legitimacy and authenticity of

indigenous African values (Fourie et al., 2017). However, the post-colonial turmoil that engulfed many nations soon after independence can be interpreted as a miscarried transition from Eurocentric to Afrocentric governance as local leaders struggled to find authentic indigenous leadership theory to replace colonial models of statecraft (Meredith, 2006).

In a study focusing on the need for indigenous leadership in setting a political agenda, Gumede (2017) notes that while the development of the continent is unimpressive, relative to its potential, it is critical that Africa pursues an Afrocentric thought leadership process instead of a colonial development mindset where inappropriate policies drive national development (Gumede, 2017). Similarly, Abebe et al. (2020) indicate that the status of leadership research in Africa is not as comprehensive as that in the West and Asia. There is an urgent need for researchers to give a distinctive interpretation to African leadership theory and method in areas such as enterprise, followership and style to advance the efficacy of leaders in the African context (Abebe et al., 2020).

Another Sub-Saharan study notes that Africa produces less than 1% of global research yet the numerous problems on the continent are ripe ground for indigenous leadership researchers to take the lead in developing local solutions. Very little local ideation has been advanced to help resolve persistent socio, political and economic problems that plague the continent. The importance of indigenous leadership needs to be promoted through, 1) training of leaders to be aware of its benefits, 2) collaboration between researchers and industry, and 3) governments committing more resources to the process (Ngongalah et al., 2018).

The concept of “Africa rising” has caught the attention of global capitalists analyzing the declining poverty statistics over recent years. The rising uptake of (western) technology, infrastructure, education and a growing population of economically empowered citizens opens up opportunity for greater consumption of foreign goods and services (de Soto, 2001). While these capital growth statistics are derived from global development metrics, it should be of concern that, despite its vast potential, the bulk of the African economy remains rural, agrarian and informal. In other words, global advancement does not automatically translate to the local advancement of indigenous populations (George et al., 2016).

Many African national development policies are designed to favor capital outflows, foreign investment, loans and economic aid that supports the adoption of western ideals, values and ethics (Chang, 2002). These strategies are unsustainable Africa as they exclude indigenous knowledge, property and wealth systems that deny the continent the opportunity to bring to bear its natural Afrocentric advantage in national development (Gorjestani, 2001). However, the scantiness of researched Afrocentric leadership theory and decoded IKS places the continent at a severe disadvantage in terms of accessing local wealth.

## 2. Problem Statement

The research context on the African continent is dominated by western academ-

ic and scientific research methodologies with little formal reference to indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). African scholarship needs to decolonize research practices and create unique models that are able to pragmatically capture local leadership philosophies, theory, values and cultural nuances to facilitate socially acceptable, ecofriendly transformative change in society. Afrocentric research is needed to explore, codify and design indigenous leader training curricula to address the unique local challenges of the African context (Tekleselassie & DeCuir, 2021). Part of the inefficacy of local leaders is due to their lack of indigenous knowhow to resolve local community problems and development interests. Nonetheless, modern approaches do not consider local indigenous methods as viable alternatives to resolve global and local problems (Yelesieliere et al., 2023). Inadvertently, African society has abandoned the development of IKS to embrace readily available eastern technology, global political ideology and western economic policy as the only path to national development.

### 3. Methodology

The authors conducted a literature review of recent philosophical and academic research publications on leadership in Africa generated by scholarly online search engines using the search term, “Leadership and Research in Africa”. The search revealed documents focused on the application of global leadership theory, critique of governance, political leadership, modern practices, technology advance, scientific research method vs local practice, cultural themes and philosophy in the academic, social and development context. An evaluation of shortlisted articles identified recurring themes regarding the history and development of dominant scholarly thinking and practice in terms of “leadership” and “research” practice in Africa. These were “Indigeneity”, “Academia”, “Afrocentrism”, “Western theory” and “Colonialism”. The researchers used these themes to formulate four research questions to investigate these phenomena with regards to leadership research in Africa drawing on empirical studies, conceptual publications and case studies from across the continent. The questions were; 1) What is the historical context and status of indigenous leadership research in Africa (ILRA)? 2) How does academia contribute to the production of indigenous knowledge and research in Africa? 3) What is the impact of Eurocentric vis a vis Afrocentric leadership theory on developing transformative leaders for Africa? 4) What opportunities exist for indigenous leadership research to secure national prosperity? The findings were analyzed using positivism, interpretivism and critical enquiry to identify emergent arguments, ideas and hypotheses (Pham, 2018). The researchers used grounded theory to examine their findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations on how the study outcomes may be applied.

### 4. Findings & Analysis

**Research question 1: What is the historical context and status of indigenous leadership research in Africa (ILRA)?**

While there is need to appreciate the context of ILRA, it is prudent to recognize that the concept of leadership is not uniquely African. Scholars and leadership gurus have over time developed multiple frames to capture the evolving concept, spirit and form of being a leader and leadership including; great man theory, behavioral schools, charismatic and humanistic theory among others (Nohria & Khurana, 2010). Nonetheless, these efforts have been characterized by a “seemingly enduring ambiguity surrounding leadership” (Iwowo, 2015). Leadership is a sum of coreperceptions, perspectives, positions and principles born out of a success experience. Hence the greater debate over whether leadership can indeed be conclusively researched. Nonetheless, the need for an authentic African definition and interpretation of leadership in the 21st century is critical to Africa’s future success (Lerutla & Steyn, 2017).

The underlying philosophy driving the efficacy and inefficacy of leadership theory and practice in Africa also requires interrogation in the face of post-colonial and dominant Eurocentric theory that drives leadership practices in modern Africa (Asadu & Aguinam, 2020). A suitable operative worldview is necessary to facilitate the design of effective leader development programs. Indeed, the act of leadership can be framed as an individual activity or social process (Owusu et al., 2017). Euro-centered definitions of leadership favor individualistic action while Afro-centered perspectives advance leadership as a corporate social responsibility. The gender leadership roles ascribed to individuals in African communities further complicate the understanding of “leadership” in society. Gender classes of men, women, youth, married women, elders, fathers and mothers and clan age groups are tasked with distinct leadership responsibility within a community. Thus, “general” or “blanket” interpretations of leadership in African society may lead to role conflict unless the definition is attached to the responsibilities of specific age and gender groups in a community (Ngunjiri, 2016). A similar thought is reflected in the desire for the voice of native American Indian women to be heard in societal leadership (Hill & Keogh Hoss, 2018).

Thus, leadership may be practically and pragmatically defined by its perspectives, orientation and cultural interpretation rather than “correct or incorrect” description (Lerutla & Steyn, 2017). Eurocentric and Afrocentric definitions are therefore valid constructs, not because one is better than the other, but because they capture the unique evolutionary contexts of leadership in these two culturally distinct environments. Eurocentric leadership theory has evolved as a personal competence aiding objective achievement and environmental dominance, while leadership theory in Africa has evolved as a symbol of unity, strength and a key to corporate success among the people. Leadership issues in Africa are resolved through consultation, collaboration and consensus guided by community values (Iwowo, 2015). In Africa, leadership has been ascribed to “divinity” and an “animistic” culture. In Europe it has evolved among the privileged classes as “sovereign” and “deified” in Greek mythology. These roots of leadership tend towards the spiritual (Wasserman & Leslie, 2003). These philosophical dimen-

sions of leadership present a fair amount of ambiguity and confusion when it comes to defining (suitable) qualitative or quantitative measures of a leader's performance.

Understanding that leadership in Africa is people driven and welfare (process) oriented rather than objective and outcome focused will help organizations design suitable policies to harness human capital, manage employee behavior and drive productivity aligned to African success ethos (Abebe et al., 2020). Research is needed to mainstream competitive, innovative and advantageous leadership philosophies such as Ubuntu, Botho, Gada and other indigenous leadership systems to help local organizations access the Afrocentric advantage of doing business in Africa.

While western forms of governance engulfed the continent at the advent of colonialism, these bureaucratic governance models remained in place long after African nations declared independence from western powers. Nonetheless, Wane et al. (2022) cite the existence of centralized models of government among the Kingdoms of Buyoro-Kitara (East Africa) and Ashanti (West Africa) as well as recognition of dispersed systems of government among the Luo and Keiyo communities in Kenya where the people were ruled by councils, moral elders' courts, chiefs and priests (Wane et al., 2022). These references raise research queries as to whether African leaders would perform more effectively if their nations employed concordant indigenous leadership and governance models.

Abebe et al. (2020) explain that while published African leadership studies have risen over the last two decades (see Figure 1), a lot more research needs to be done to authenticate, establish, promote and institutionalize African leadership thought as an efficient, viable alternative to western methodologies.

Fourie et al. (2017) note that African perspectives of leadership are different from western paradigms, suggesting that there is a unique science to the way

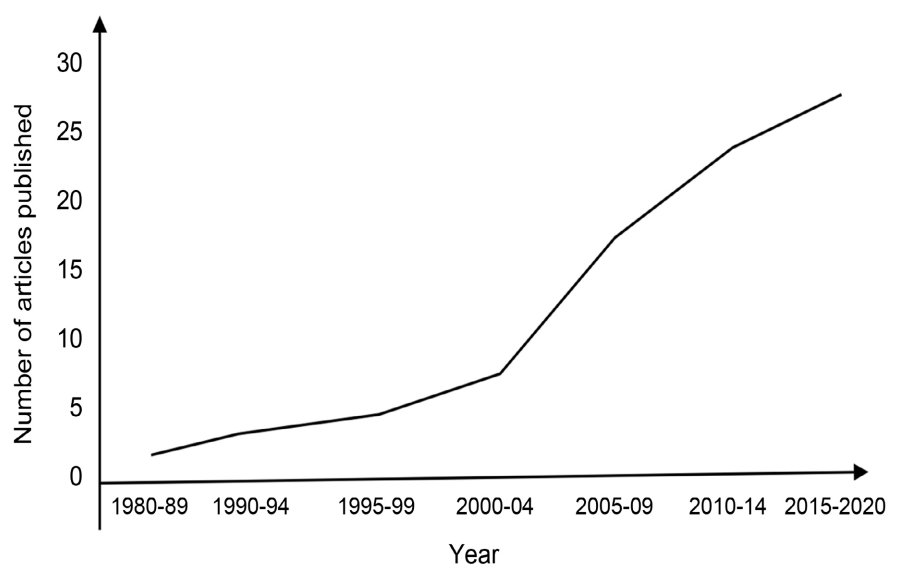


Figure 1. African leadership studies over the Years-Source (Abebe et al., 2020).

leadership is practiced effectively in Africa that “contradicts” western models in terms of style and images of leadership such as follower driven submission, acquiesce or support. The difference in perspective between the western (etic) interpretation and the indigenous (emic) understanding of leadership is a paradox that plagues leadership discussions as leaders take conflicting positions as to what leadership should be, should do and the expected outcome thereof. Western perspectives of African leadership are from “outside looking in” while the indigenous understanding of African leadership are principles emanating “from within” a local community.

By the turn of the 20th century, African leadership scholars looked to politics for definitions of leadership suggesting that it is majorly interpreted as a “political” agenda. This image has been difficult to shed both locally and abroad as westerners continue to judge the quality of African leadership by the performance of its political elite. Indeed, the local terminology for “politician” and “leader” are no different in the understanding of the general populace. Business, science and the arts are bereft of researched Afrocentric leadership definitions. More research is needed to interpret and equate indigenous theory to global concepts (Malunga, 2009). Reclaiming socio-cultural resources to construct authentic forms of African leadership reflected in culture, religion, ethnicity and values is necessary for the development of African leadership theory (Mbiti, 1975). Such knowledge and knowhow will facilitate comparative peer-to-peer conversations with western theoretical models (Fourie et al., 2017).

In a bid to interpret an African definition of leadership Lerutla and Steyn (2017), identified 13 empirical studies (carried out between 2009-2014) they could examine for articulated definitions of leadership. The limited number of these studies illustrates the ill appreciation of African leadership as a scientific construct. Nonetheless, the authors observe that in these studies the concept of African leadership is defined in western tradition and not in the African context. Indeed, no Africa-specific models are presented in these empirical studies. Modeling, definitions and hypothesis used were drawn from western contexts none was unique to Africa except to acknowledge that “Africans aspire to leadership based on humanity”. Truth statements measured with western instruments predictably affirmed western models, since the models and conceptual frameworks never included elements unique to the African context in the first place. The replication of Eurocentric research paradigms and methodologies in researching leadership in Africa explains the lack of operational definitions of indigenous leadership theory (Lerutla & Steyn, 2017).

Africa contributes less than 1% of the worlds research output. Member countries of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD countries spend 2.4% of their GDP on research. While “money and technology” may be needed to produce, use and benefit from research, developing countries spend less than 1% of their significantly smaller GDP, or financial turnover, on research and lack the will to use it profitably (Czerniewicz, 2015). Advanced na-

tions invest heavily in research for policy making, planning and strategic action. Unfortunately, inadequate research exposes critical information gaps necessary for decision making. The consequence of this leads to unsustainable problem resolution.

However, negative factors affecting researchers in Africa include, 1) lack of resources, 2) lack of motivation for research, 3) low research uptake by governments, industry and policy makers, and 4) poor research supervision in universities. In another observation from the study, drawing participants from six countries in sub-Saharan Africa, was the lack of known institutions providing research training and researcher development programs. The study also observed the need to develop a research culture through quality education systems that promote curiosity as a foundation for research and problem-solving careers. However, this finding may also suggest the need for reprofiling “research” as a professional career with governments and private industry creating research jobs and promoting the influence of researchers in national development. The insignificance of (indigenous) research positions in public and private industry causes a concomitant lack of interest in indigenous leadership research as a whole (Ngongalah et al., 2018).

While some may criticize the emergence of IKS to be a pushback from colonialism, neo-colonialism and the ills of globalization (Mapara, 2009), South Africa has gone ahead to put in place a national policy framework on IKS and therefore endorses the value of indigenous leadership research in national development (Republic of South Africa, 2004).

In summary, the backdrop of Africa’s turbulent experience in global affairs and recent colonial history has substantively influenced the adoption of western paradigms in the modern practice of leadership in Africa. Indeed, neither academia nor governance institutions advance authentic, Afrocentric leadership nor do these institutions prioritize indigenous research. However, the fledgling status of ILRA suggests that; 1) Indigenous leadership research needs to be promoted and prioritized by modern leadership researchers, 2) Western models of leadership research are not sensitive to authentic African leadership theory or conceptual frameworks, 3) Very little empirical ILRA has attempted to capture the African leadership experience and expertise as a viable scientific construct, 4) ILRA and authentic African leadership thought is under-represented in global and local social governance, leadership, politics, economics and industry, entrepreneurship and national development, and 5) ILRA does not play a strategic role in national development. Countries would rather import technology to plug need gaps rather than invest in the tedious task of developing researched solutions to local problems. Nonetheless, ILRA provides a mirror to evaluate the efficacy of western leadership advances from a local perspective.

**Research question 2. How does academia contribute to the production of indigenous knowledge and research in Africa.**

The construction and legitimization of knowledge in Africa is historically



pegged to neo-colonial paradigms that ignore the identity, culture and context of the local student. Education is communicated in such a way that local students abandon indigenous wisdom and adopt monologous western knowledge systems upon entry to primary school (Abah et al., 2015). This not only results in progressively eroding and diminishing local knowledge systems, but also removes learners from appreciating their African identity by replacing it with vaunted westernized value systems.

While globalization presupposes an inevitable cross fertilization of cultures, African students find themselves unquestioningly attracted and integrated into western leadership thought. African learners need to draw from IKS to equip themselves to be partners and value adding contributors to the global cross fertilization of knowledge. African education systems need to enable the production of students who appreciate their identity and comfortably challenge dominant global theories that do not recognize the value of their local IKS (Shizha, 2010). However, obtaining this balance can only be achieved with established knowledge bases developed through ILRA. Western oriented education systems introduce local published tensions that cause social rifts between the “educated” and “non-educated” that crystalize into conflicts between perceived “modern” (western) vs “backward” (local) values in day-to-day social intercourse (Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2021).

A study conducted in Southern Africa by Keane et al. (2016) suggest that conventional science training and methods of observation and interpretation of findings are often made from the researchers own worldview of scientific education and training. In other words, indigenous knowledge cannot be objectively tested by a western scientific investigation and needs a primary appreciation and interpretation in the local context. This suggests that western trained research methods may not unearth the indigenous value of a local phenomenon. This calls for the development and application of indigenous research methods to interpret local findings and objectively equate them to western interpretations for balanced reporting and decision making (Keane et al., 2016).

Investigating the omission of African (minority) indigenous knowledge systems in Euro-American Academies, Dei (2000) argues for the nondiscriminatory inclusion of indigenous knowledge without having to profile it as an addendum to Eurocentric theory. This makes indigenous knowledge appear to be “second-class” and only studied for general interest rather than as empowering education frames that equip students with a broader sense and understanding of global reality. School curricula need to encourage investigation of alternative community knowledge bases as a means of decolonizing education systems and empowering society with new knowledge processes (Regmi, 2022). This should encourage researchers to codify indigenous knowledge for teaching and equipping students with an African identity around the world (Dei, 2000). Indigenous knowledge bases in African education systems are invisible, except at basic preschool language (mother tongue) levels. By the time students reach high school, indigenous knowledge is not viewed as an option pursued by the “educated” or “career”

oriented students (Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2021). Thus, for proper national development, “indigenized African innovations and knowledge systems” (Higgs et al., 2003) need to be conscripted into higher education curricula.

Research in African universities is of a basic nature as a requirement for degree certification or employee promotion. Such research is hardly innovative or interrogative. A study of post graduate students at the university of Botswana, suggests that research pursued as an academic requirement does not empower nor inspire students to pursue social or action research after graduating. However, student researchers face a myriad of challenges including lack of funding, poor supervision and inconsistent program bureaucracy while struggling to maintain work-related and family bread winner responsibilities (Mutula, 2009).

Figure 2 illustrates four research quadrants within which studies take place, bounded by academic, applied, conceptual and empirical paradigms. Much of African research output is in the academic (thesis) and philosophic quadrants. These need not, and do not, have much application to leadership practice. Public and private research institutions are tasked to produce innovations in medicine and crop science, but little local innovation occurs in the field of leadership (Marincola & Kariuki, 2020).

For many academicians research is a thankless, passionless, sacrificial process that takes substantial personal time, resources and logistics to produce knowledge that is eventually “free for all”. It takes between 3 - 6 months of research to produce a meaningful academic paper, yet the cost of publication in top tier western journals may be 3 - 5 times the monthly wage of a lecturer in an African university. Unless sponsored, research is simply not a financially rewarding priority (Mutula, 2009).

The poor administration of intellectual property rights in African countries discourages and demotivates researchers operating without legislative support or professional protection. Academia could do more to encourage, support, protect and reward African researchers for their efforts to advance knowledge for national development (Kibuka-Sebitosi, 2008).

A study in Ghana examined how the colonial political economy of the day

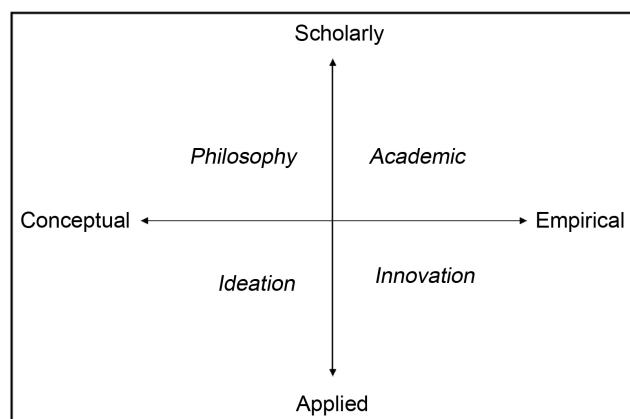


Figure 2. Research Quadrants, source: author notes.

ignored fisheries as an industry, allowing it to continue to flourish under indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) or “citizen science”. However, western legislation has since set limits on the advancement of the successful fishing industry. Nonetheless, the author explains the transferability of IKS as “a way of life and not just a livelihood” of the people and stresses the importance of including community interests in the national development agenda. Ignorance of IKS is typical of western approaches that focus on financial returns and numeric quantities of crops, production statistics and post-harvest losses. Such research forgets that people weave their lives and culture into and around those numbers in seasons of celebration, socializing, marriage, market days and every day social intercourse as a way of life. If you focus on changing the agricultural numbers and statistics without appreciating the local culture and IKS, you disorient the people’s way of life. *The net result of connecting piped water to a village from a stream three miles away may thus include, a rise in pregnancy rates, delinquency amongst the youth and an upsurge of neighborhood cattle raids. This happens because the water pipe has taken away the way they used to occupy their time and changed their way of life. The “pipe” destroyed the delicate balance of the social ecosystem.* This vital social data is not recognized by well-meaning Eurocentric donor funded research methodologies and data collection tools (Akyeampong, 2007). To access the Afrocentric advantage, research needs to capture interpret and integrate indigenous wisdom in development initiatives. ILRA will also be able to define what qualifies as suitable, sustainable transformative change for the advancement of a society from an indigenous perspective.

A research study among stakeholders in Nigerian cultural industries urges the intensification of efforts to digitize indigenous knowledge systems and knowledge bases that ought to begin and be grounded at the community and cultural level. These digital knowledge bases can be used to enhance and advance local industry and environmental sustainability initiatives. The principle of digitization can be applied to other socio-economic sectors as well. Nonetheless, this cannot take place without ILRA answering the call to lead the process of establishing and institutionalizing indigenous knowledge bases (Akinwale, 2013).

The practice of African medicine vis-à-vis modern medical practices provides a glaring example of how IKS systems are ignored. When not described by “scientific” metrics they are classed as “mysterious” and “frivolous” and thus excluded from the privilege of intellectual property rights. Without the protection of IKS, African intellectual property rights are simply “pushed under the rug” as governments lack the will to protect indigenous creativity and innovation (Kibuka-Sebitosi, 2008).

A study carried out in Namibia to evaluate the development of innovation systems with reference to indigenous knowledge, showed that the practice of interactive (participatory) learning and the integration of indigenous knowledge advances community transformation while innovation based on IK is limited. This suggests that there is need to engage indigenous knowledge transmission methodologies in order to advance societal change in local communities (Hooli &

Jauhiainen, 2018).

African scholars should foster consciousness and promote an “African university underpinned by African experiences, values, and cultures” (Tshishonga et al., 2023). However, a Pretoria, study found that the work of African scholars, that had an indigenous angle, did not obtain entry to university curricula. It was ignored by those who maintained a western epistemology and science notion of rationality (Bredlid, 2009). Research institutions should take endogenization seriously and make local research findings available as public teaching curricula (Ntsoane, 2005).

A Central Africa study, by Charles Takoyoh Eyong (2007), confirmed that African indigenous knowledge is very rich and would help the continent in becoming more sustainable and less dependent on developing countries. The author strongly recommended that more research should be done in documenting IKS so as to help re-educate citizens who have abandoned local knowledge for modern western values. However, indigenous knowledge has been passed on selectively and not prominently through academic institutions (Eyong, 2007).

There is need for an emancipatory and participatory type of research which values and includes indigenous knowledge, because in western oriented academic investigations, the African voice is either sidelined, suppressed or ignored on the premise that it lacks validity. Yet the value of authentic African research thought and ideas should be incorporated from the inception of policy design to implementation (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). Leadership scholars from Africa would do well to develop theory based on African experiences and socio-cultural resources to establish dialogue and equation with western theories imported for consumption in Africa (Fourie et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, education systems in Africa are still too academic and neophyte in form when it comes to empowering the people to address personal development and equipping them to constructively engage in community enterprise. Graduates from academia simply cannot employ themselves. They must of necessity look for employment. A framework for the production, sharing and teaching of indigenous knowledge may serve to empower communities to address their local survival and success challenges. This places a huge responsibility on education systems and academia at all levels to integrate the teaching of indigenous knowledge to bridge the gap between “education” and local enterprise (Kaya & Seleti, 2013).

Authors Abah et al. (2015) indicate formal education in African countries reflects western cultures rather than cultures of learners and teachers. The authors suggest the need to align educational curricula with indigenous realities. ILRA can develop case-based materials for teaching culture, science art and entrepreneurial subjects in schools (Abah et al., 2015).

In their study, Iroulo and Tappe Ortiz (2022), indicate that research practice in Africa is still entangled in epistemic injustices resulting from colonialism. “Academic coloniality affects the quality of research and is detrimental to the

subject and knowledge consumers” (Iroulo & Tappe Ortiz, 2022). In other words, the integrity of the subject matter being taught is compromised while the vulnerability of knowledge consumers (students) is violated. Michael Cross and Logan Govender (2021) conclude that, “the future of tertiary education in Africa must be located within a new horizon of possibilities, informed by a nuanced political epistemology and ontology embedded in complex African experience and visibility of the colonized and oppressed” (Cross & Govender, 2021). The authors suggest that there is no social justice without epistemic justice. There has to be a radical and determined change if there is to be leadership changes that will support the continent to reach its full potential. In other words, the way we teach what we teach directly affects learning outcomes. Learners are vulnerable to slanted information. Thus, decolonizing leader education will change leadership outcomes in Africa.

The findings from this research question identify numerous opportunities for researchers to engage in ILRA for the transformation of Africa through the exploration, codification, systematization and publication of indigenous knowledge systems. It is needed to; 1) advance thought leadership in IKS, 2) drive indigenous national development, 3) enable the equation of IKS with relevant global systems, and 4) enable the recognition and emergence of authentic African leadership theory to correct the epistemological and pedagogical imbalance of western leadership thought over indigenous leadership knowledge in African education systems. Unless indigenous African research findings begin to emerge on the global platform, it will be believed that no such knowledge exists and that the only (viable) research is provided by the west. While African leadership is often referred to as traditional, historic and static, it is important and practical to consider authentic African leadership as evolving in context, in tandem with the times, sustainable and futuristic.

**Research question 3; What is the impact of Eurocentric vis a vis Afrocentric leadership theory on developing transformative leaders for Africa?**

According to Yawson (2017), Africa’s effort towards authentic leadership development will not succeed until endogenous leadership systems are institutionalized and taught in leadership development programs. However, leader development is about acquiring relational intrapersonal competencies while leadership training is about capacity building, interpersonal skills and organization development. In other words, a leader can be developed as an individual without being effective in the organization context. Thus, leaders trained in western, individualistic, leadership principles will be severely challenged to achieve goals in the African context without an understanding of community values and ethos. The efficacy of Eurocentric business leaders in pre apartheid, autocratic corporations with western values were disoriented when multicultural collectivist workforces were engaged and promoted to leadership in the post-apartheid era. However, post-colonial governments and businesses across the continent continue to train leaders in western value sets and wonder why they become ineffective in the African context. It would appear that culture and context are deter-

minant of the most appropriate leadership style and efficacy of a leader's approach to maximize organization performance (Yawson, 2017).

Nevertheless, very little researched Afrocentric leadership philosophy has been published to form substantive curricula for the design of indigenous leader development in education, public service and corporate training programs in post-colonial Africa. The Eurocentric leadership theory retained in post-colonial institutions ensures the perpetuation of the intellectual dominance and legacy of the exploitative colonial agency. Reversing the retrogressive hegemonic effects of colonialism (which stripped society of its indigenous ethos) will require a resurgence of African social ethics to empower the peoples' humanity as a basis for national development, "Epistemology stands to help man acquire knowledge which helps him transform his society" (Asadu & Aguinam, 2020). This reasoning suggests that Afrocentric leadership theory has its own unique and independent ontology and epistemology framework that can be unearthed by ILRA as the last mile of national transformation.

While acknowledging that African research respondents preferred strong elements of humanness (ubuntu) in their approach to leadership development, Owusu et al. (2017) showed that leadership development in Africa is driven more by "learning by doing" and "informal mentoring" and less by formal training programs. Addressing the weak local research capacity, the authors point out that most leadership training programs focus on theory that does not result in the development of skills among participants. Leadership programs need to adopt Afrocentric and indigenous learning methodologies to develop transformative leaders for the continent (Owusu et al., 2017).

The paucity of leadership development literature in Africa, as discussed by Osafo and Yawson (2017) is undermined by the existing theory and empirical work done to help western expatriates understand local business contexts rather than empower the understanding and development of indigenous (local) organizations, community advancement or employee maturity. However, what is not appreciated by western perspectives is that Africa is not a monolith, but rather a diversity of cultures fused into nations colored by religion with vast geographic and socio-politico-economic differentials between east, west, north and south. A substantive discussion of Africa covers six distinct social strata; the continent, the country, the community, culture (ethnic), clan (family) and the individual. While global leadership principles engage the continent, country community to a degree, indigenous leadership theory has a commanding impact on the foundational three. Thus, generic western leadership development programs may produce minimal value among leaders in local community and cultural contexts. ILRA is needed develop relevant IKS content to design meaningful programs to develop local transformative leaders (Osafo & Yawson, 2017).

According to Iwowo (2015), the non-acknowledgement and ignorance of local cultural contexts and leadership systems blanks out a wealth of indigenous knowledge from mainstream global leadership theory and advances the hegemonic dominance of western theory. Leader development programs need to empower

participants with a core understanding of the limits and extravagance of Eurocentric and Afrocentric theory and help them select, 1) what kind of leadership is most suitable in a particular context, 2) what is its purpose, and 3) what should be its outcome? The authors perspective suggests four paths available for developing leaders for Africa, a) continued uncritical dominance of western leadership theory, b) renaissance of indigenous theory to over shadow western leadership theory, c) embrace a hybrid Eurocentric leadership with the development of Afrocentric modelling as an unapologetic option, and 4) that all Eurocentric, Afrocentric and other mainstreamed leadership theory and training should be equated, adapted and contextualized to the local environment to allow for the emergence of grounded endogenous leadership knowhow (Iwowo, 2015).

The management gap, in the Ghanaian mining industry, as discussed by Oppong (2013), can be described as the lack of “local” talent to take over the management and operations of western corporations in Africa. Under these circumstances corporate training programs are designed to fast track the development of local talent to take up management positions within the corporate structure. However, the corporations’ ignorance of the local leadership paradigms means that it operates “outside of the local context”. In other words, corporate training programs import western leadership theory to run western business in local contexts. This does not allow for the advancement, emergence or injection of IKS in the running of the local business. Many western corporate businesses therefore simply operate OUT of Africa rather than IN Africa. While it is arguable as to whether it is the ethical responsibility of western corporations to promote indigenous leadership development in their programs, such knowledge would rescue local leaders from using western leadership theory as a panacea to fix every local problem (Oppong, 2013).

In the work of Eyong (2017), the author indicates that Anglo Saxon writings present leadership as linear hierarchies and leader follower relations, individualism and heroism while stating that the humanistic Afrocentric indigenous concept of leadership often challenges these same tenets. This would suggest that western trained leaders experience limiting operational and philosophical barriers while trying to practice (western) style leadership in Africa. Nonetheless, far from assuming that Eurocentric leadership is in competition with African leadership theory or that western leadership theory intends to smother Indigenous leadership into oblivion, the author suggests that researching the long-capped wellspring of indigenous leadership practices in Africa will enrich global practice by uncovering substantial empirical, cultural and ontological perspectives that underpin local leadership theory. Such studies will aid in debunking the misconceived superiority of western leadership constructs and theoretical models in local contexts (Eyong, 2017).

In summary, the findings of this question suggest that the unknown value of indigenous leadership knowhow and IKS robs Africa and the world of a vast treasure cove of unresearched theory, organizational wisdom and models of transformative social advancement. Nonetheless, Afrocentric research favors ethno-

graphic (lived) research rather than observatory (exterior) studies to appreciate, understand and interpret IKS and unlock theories hidden in indigenous knowledge bases (UNESCO, 2023). However, leader training programs need to incorporate indigenous leadership theory and local ideation to address the specific challenges faced in African context.

**Research question 4: What opportunities exist for indigenous leadership research to secure national prosperity.**

Indigenous research stimulated by “thought leadership, thought liberation and critical consciousness” (Gumede, 2017) can be used to address local socio-economic imbalance in society and challenge global hegemony that keeps Africa at the bottom of every wealth, prosperity and development listing. The author points out that there are two subtle perspectives to the “Africa rising” debate. It can either be interpreted as, 1) a progressive report of the advance of Africa’s indigenous leadership thinking, or 2) the opening of new doors to imperial domination. The former is yet to take root, while the latter highlights the urgent need to detach African development thought from its colonial umbilical cords. Africa, needs a long term, 200-year, time frame of thought leadership for ILRA to pay a development dividend through the study of classical, contemporary and futuristic modelling of indigenous African leadership theory (Gumede, 2017). Curiously, Africa’s development and prosperity is measured against western financial metrics. However, money is a western value of prosperity. Prosperity in indigenous African communities is the collective conservational advancement of a community within its environment. Western measures of prosperity conflict with indigenous metrics of social success. It would be advantageous for Africa to define and advance its own metrics of community development and national prosperity as primary goals for the sustainable pursuit of global SDGs (UNDP, 2015).

The devaluation and neglect of cultural models and paradigms without understanding their origins and objectives not only robs Africa of its identity, but also of development models and acceptable foundations of future societal advancement initiatives. There exists an opportunity for ILRA to compile of formidable databank of wholistic and futuristic leadership models for the design of acceptable high impact grassroots leadership theory in all spheres of development. Indeed, Africa’s leader failings such as “corruption” and other ills can be attributed to “leadership that fails to connect with local societal values and cultures” (Aliye, 2020). Eurocentric leadership theory and values are a “hard sell” at the roots of African society. Nonetheless, it is important to guard against the assumption that all African leaders exemplify authentic or indigenous African leadership theory or practice. Advancing authentic African leadership theory should inform the efficacy of leadership practice.

As African nations continue to utilize western models to advance the education of leaders for the continent, the gap between quality and effectiveness can be bridged by indigenous leadership strategies. This gap can be filled by the acceptance, and institutionalization of indigenous research driven models (Tekle-



selassie & DeCuir, 2021). ILRA is required to unearth profitable indigenous African leadership practices submerged and negatively painted under globalization, colonialism, militarization and economic dominance of the continent (Onukwuba, 2018).

The complexity of harnessing Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) for national prosperity is related to the unique context of indigeneity in Africa. African states are a complex web of more than 2000 indigenous communities, “Indigenous peoples are people living in an area within a nation-state, prior to the formation of a nation-state” (Eyong, 2007). The implication of this understanding is that the ground application of “indigenous knowledge Systems” translates to a complex web of 50 - 60 ethnic community interpretations in each country.

In summary, the opportunities for ILRA to secure the continent's prosperity include; 1) capturing and documenting IKS, 2) designing and advancing indigenous leadership models. 3) countering the loss of IKS reserves due to modernization and urbanization, 4) harnessing the findings of ILRA for sustainable national development and industrialization, 5) developing indigenous knowhow to capitalize the value of environmental resources and prevent them from being spirited away by foreign investors and returned as value added products such as turning cocoa into chocolate, cotton into clothes and poverty into loans, 6) challenging African researchers to overcome the tendency to take the easy path provided by modern research methods to “microwave” short-term solutions rather than use indigenous research “firewood” to curate sustainable solutions for Africa's long-term prosperity (Eyong, 2007). In essence, the critical gap between Africa's abundant potential and its floundering prosperity can be bridged by recognized and institutionally protected ILRA. Nonetheless, seven forces compete against the institutionalization of ILRA. These include; a) Colonialism; in as far as it advances imperialism, ensures that African leadership theory remains buried in history, b) Modernity and globalization; for its onslaught on local cultures, ensures that authentic African methodologies and approaches to social issues are abandoned and forgotten, c) Technology; by its debilitating ease of access to “convenience and advancement”, ensures that ILRA is on its deathbed: why re-invent the wheel, when you can import it from the east or west? d) Western theory; by its hegemonic dominance, colonizes raw African intellectual talent and subjugates IKS as irrelevant, e) Global religion; by its vilification of traditions and customary practices, causes the loss of valuable indigenous knowledge, f) Academia and education; by its ignorance and avoidance of IKS, neglects its responsibility to produce transformative leaders for the continent, and g) National governance institutions; in as far as they do not incorporate indigenous research into operational policy frameworks, ensure that western models of hegemonic thought continue to dominate leadership practice in Africa.

## 5. Conclusion

ILRA presents researchers with a vast blue ocean of opportunity to add value to both local and global prosperity. Indigenous leadership research is needed to es-

establish authentic Afrocentric leadership theory as a unique body of knowledge that can be equated with global leadership practice. However, indigenous leadership research is also needed to give voice to African perspectives on universal problems such as global warming and climate change. This indigenous voice needs to be heard, shielded and nurtured through schools, education systems and at all levels of academia. Finally, academia, policy makers, institutional leaders, and leadership trainers need to employ the findings of indigenous leadership research to access the Afrocentric leadership advantage for sustainable development, transformative social advancement and national prosperity.

## 6. Recommendations

1) This study shows that ILRA lacks an audible voice in: a) global research, b) the design of national policy, c) education systems, and d) the training of transformative leaders for Africa. We recommend that governments and institutions create frameworks to establish and promote ILRA in these contexts.

2) Academia, at all levels, needs to take up the singular responsibility for affirmative action to teach, maintain and develop indigeneity as a national heritage. Teaching western theory without establishing the understanding of local IKS is to lose a wealth of innovative knowhow to sustain social-economic order and conserve the environment for generations to come.

3) The design of leadership training programs should include Afrocentric leadership theory. It should equip African leaders with a consciousness of local cultural values to advance transformative change among local communities without destroying their way of life. It will also ensure that leaders present an authentic African identity on the global stage.

4) Indigenous leadership research centers should be established among local communities so that local knowledge, knowhow and success methods can be conserved and advanced. Such centers will enable the collection and advancement of a groundswell of indigenous leadership theory and practice and serve as consultative resources for collaboration, research and sustainable national development.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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