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Book Review

Developing School Leaders in the Pacific: Building Capacity to Enhance Student Learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the book *Developing School Leaders in the Pacific: Building Capacity to Enhance Student Learning,* published by Springer Nature in 2023, the authors Narsamma Lingam and Govinda Ishwar Lingam provide a critical intervention into the mainstream comparative education and institutional governance that is culturally anchored in the Pacific educational context. With a specific empirical emphasis on Fiji, the scholarship addresses how school heads are trained and sustained within the Pacific region, an educational administration structural gap that has endured within the geographical and cultural realities of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Among the rising demands worldwide to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for equitable learning, the text puts forward an essential argument that sustainable educational progress could not be sustained by Western-centric top-down models. Instead, the authors advocate for a decolonial research framework where school leadership is transformative, fundamentally embedded within the local cultural practices built on pedagogical centeredness and Pacific values including respect (*veidokai*) and communal responsibilities (*veikauwaitaki*).

2. SUMMARY OF CORE THEMES AND EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY

The methodology is extensively grounded in original empirical research across multiple Pacific Island nations. The authors have investigated the practical occupational realities of local school leaders, and as the chapters progress, they shift focus from the broad regional overviews to a case study presenting in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of leaders from Fiji rather than relying purely on the theoretical perspective

in this discourse. Using the indigenous Pacific concept of Talanoa dialogue as both a primary research methodology and a philosophical model of leadership, they systematically analyzed how local practitioners perceived the real impact of administrative and management training on their everyday decisions and structural operations. This reflects a paradigm shift from open interviews to deep listening and sensing (Johansson-Fua, 2023).

The prominent thematic thread throughout the monograph is the intense structural friction that school leaders face when working under severe resource constraints due to extreme geographical isolation and indirect domestic economic bases. A core issue highlighted is the "accidental principal" phenomenon, a reality of many Pacific nations where classroom teachers are promoted to complex administrative positions based on seniority or instructional skill without prior formal preparation or specialized training in the field. When these leaders navigate fragile economic environments and limited materials or human resources through imported frameworks, their leadership often fails. The authors demonstrate that effective leadership practices have a direct impact on classroom dynamics and student learning outcomes, mirroring current international evidence on instructional management (Karadağ & Sertel, 2026). As a result, the book calls for a systemic shift, with leadership training realigned to the Pacific context, specifically, adapted to its socio-cultural and logistical environment so that it functions as a relationship-driven process.

3. CRITICAL EVALUATION: DECOLONIZING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The main scholarly value of this book lies in its deliberate decolonial focus. By framing leadership as a collaborative, capacity-building process rather than as a static corporate hierarchy, the authors successfully redefine what it means to be a leader in a developing context. They bridge the historical gap between community norms and pedagogical practices, showing that parental involvement and engagement with local traditions and culture are assets rather than hindrances to student achievement.

While criticizing historical dependence on Western administrative modalities, the text maintains a notable balance as it does not advocate isolationism; rather, it proposes a dual-pathway approach. Such an approach encourages the local authorities to develop frameworks that honor indigenous traditional values, while actively engaging with global educational standards. This delicate balance ensures that the work remains highly practical for the present policy implementation. The empirical findings of the study show that when leadership training is contextually relevant, it directly improves the classroom teacher's morale and contributes to structured learning for students. A notable limitation of this work lies in the scope, as it deeply focuses on Fiji's highly centralized system, which may need to be adapted when applied to the more decentralized island nations across the wider macro-regional context; yet, the foundational principles of community resilience remain universally relatable.

4. CONCLUSION AND GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The book by Lingam and Lingam (2023), Developing School Leaders in the Pacific, is a dynamic addition to the international literature on education, reflecting many years of valuable experience and deep roots at the University of the South Pacific. It shifts the conversation from identifying institutional deficits to building indigenous capacities for Oceania. The authors have written a persuasive text for both policymakers and international donor agencies, as well as made an immense contribution to regional scholarship. This work asserts that educational institutions can only prosper if their leaders are well-equipped to build capacity from within. It provides a blueprint for a resilient and context-sensitive governance that will resonate beyond the Pacific boundaries.

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