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Encountering works by Nyerere and Freire: Exploring the connections between education for liberation and education for self-reliance in contemporary radical popular education

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Abstract

This conceptual paper presents an encounter of a work regarding education on self-reliance by Tanzanian educator Julius K. Nyerere (1922–1999) with a work by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (1921–1997) on education for liberation to explore their relevance for contemporary radical popular education. To this end, the study aligns with the methodological approaches used in qualitative comparative education research. Entering into a comparative dialogue between both contributions contextualises the respective features of each contribution and allows a systematic dialogue between commonalities and differences and for conclusions to be drawn regarding radical popular education. Solidarity and sustainability serve as guiding categories in this endeavour. They point conclusively to the benefits of further theoretical encounters (with, for example, the philosophy of ubuntu), to the risks of neoliberal reinterpretations and, against this background, to the quest for nurturing contemporary approaches in radical popular education in adult education academia, research and practice under the auspices of social change and transformation.

Keywords: Freire, Nyerere, solidarity, comparative research, service learning

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Introduction

This conceptual paper presents an encounter of the work by Tanzanian educator Julius K. Nyerere (1922–1999) on education for self-reliance (Nyerere, 1967a) with a work by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921–1997) on education for liberation (Freire, 1993) and aims to explore their relevance for contemporary radical popular education. These two landmark contributions under study had emerged at a specific period of time (between 1967 and 1973) and geographical locations (East Africa and South America) and in particular socio-political constellations before becoming *travelling concepts* (Ozga & Jones, 2006) across the centenary and across various strands in the geographies of academic knowledge production and debate as well as local education practices.

Yet, the contributions of Julius K. Nyerere to the debate on popular education and the theory of education tend to be less widely known than Paulo Freire's work, even though there exist vital contributions connecting their works not only at that time (Hall, 1974; Kassam, 1983) but also in recent times (see e.g. Díaz-Arévalo, 2022; Major & Mulvihill, 2009; Maluleka, 2021; Mulenga, 2001; von Kotze, 2010). This may be explained by the bias in the worldwide knowledge production and dissemination machinery, having long neglected authors from the African continent and rather imported deficit-oriented views on (adult) education to Africa, legitimated by Western liberal and neo-liberal paradigms (see, e.g., Ahluwalia, 2001; von Kotze, 2010, pp. 134–135). By contrast, according to von Kotze (2010), a sustainable livelihood approach as part of an adult learning and education understanding is to be valued as a 'conceptual and methodological tool developed in the Global South' (p. 132), offering vital contributions to the Global North. Similarly, Mayo and Vittoria (2021, p. 119) refer to Nyerere's educational thinking as key to postcolonial discourse in education.

Taking up these arguments, we aim to re-encounter the two landmark contributions through the lens of radical popular education, using methodological approaches from qualitative comparative education research that provide a seminal analytical procedure (Fairbrother, 2016; Manzon, 2016). It helps not only to contextualise the features of each contribution but also to promote, what we call, a *systematic comparative dialogue* between these two contributions and the commonalities, differences and conclusions to be drawn with regard to contemporary radical popular education. *Solidarity* and *sustainability* serve as guiding categories and focal points in this comparative dialogue.

We begin by introducing the paper's *Conceptual and methodological framework of analysis*. This provides the necessary understanding for unfolding the enquiry in *Freire and Nyerere: A comparative dialogue*. As transfer from rhetoric to practice in the case of Nyerere receives less attention in the Global North's academic body of knowledge than in Freirean case studies, we exemplify such transfer by briefly referring to *Education for self-reliance: An example of the Service-Learning Initiative Tanzania*. This example showcases a particular curriculum and pedagogy that attempts to foster collective learning and social change (Martin et al., 1999, p. 9). This leads to a conclusion addressing the benefits and limitations of our enquiry and pointing to implications for further considerations (*Discussion and concluding remarks*).

Conceptual and methodological framework of analysis

Conceptual framework

As our analysis elaborates on conceptual approaches to transnational adult education research, we align our understanding of adult learning and education (ALE) with the definition suggested by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO (2015). It asserts that adults are those ‘who engage in adult learning and education, even if they have not reached the legal age of maturity’ (p. 7). ALE, then, denotes:

the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies (UNESCO, 2015, p. 6).

The overall aim is ‘to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work’ (p. 6).

In contrast to (neo)liberal understandings of ALE, which prioritize learning for ‘individual intellectual stimulation or personal enrichment’ (Jesson & Newman, 2004, p. 253), approaches to radical popular education highlight the value of learners’ experiences as both the starting point and continuous driver of any educational endeavour (Lovett, 1988, p. xviii). Such dialogical learning and teaching settings target a collaborative learning process, driven by teachers *and* learners and acknowledging having both knowledge *and* agency. Learning is, then, seen as a social activity that incorporates the reciprocity of individual and collective learning. Learning is to contribute to developing ‘really useful knowledge’ (Johnson, 1988, p. 3) and ‘contesting orthodoxies, in theory and practice’ (p. 4) about, for example, hegemonic structures of social knowledge production, including those of adult education institutional settings. From this way of learning, according to Jesson and Newman (2004), we ‘learn not only to see the world more clearly but also *to see ourselves seeing* the world’ (p. 261; emphasis in original). This enables dialogue on multiple levels:

We learn to solve problems through reflection that may transform our whole way of thinking—that may transform our perspectives. In this kind of learning we can learn to see through ourselves and so may be able better [*sic*] to understand others (Jesson & Newman, 2004, p. 261).

Accordingly, such learning emphasises ‘action and reflection’ (Freire, 1993, pp. 60, 98) as key elements of achieving social change (Jesson & Newman, 2004, p. 253). Educational practice, then, enables experiencing, discussing and practicing freedom, equality, solidarity and social justice, aiming at nurturing social change by challenging the present conditions of society (Lovett, 1988, p. xviii). For this reason, the rich history of social movements may serve as ‘learning resources to build and sustain change. The past gives us resources that we can use to change the present to create the future’ (Jesson & Newman, 2004, p. 251), which points to the benefit of re-discussing landmark contributions to social movements, such as those provided by Freire and Nyerere. In this sense, until today, radical popular education has sought ‘to link experience and theory in a critical way and facilitate learners with a deeper understanding of their lives and how they are positioned in society and become transformative agents’ (Finnegan et al., 2022, p. 1).

The pedagogical aim of strengthening learners' development as 'agents in constructing a different trajectory of societies' (Barrett, 2016, p. 108), however, still requires answers from an ALE perspective to the question of who or what exactly should be transformed due to learning and education and for what purpose. Freedom, equality, solidarity, sustainability and social justice may serve as the widely agreed-upon normative leitmotifs of such change. From this range of leitmotifs, we chose solidarity and sustainability as guiding categories and focal points for our enquiry. Hence, for a popular education to be called radical, a strong link to the concept of solidarity is needed, given the understanding of solidarity as a social practice to abolish or transform existing and oppressing social, political and economic boundaries that define and regulate the status quo of societies (Eble, 2022). Furthermore, sustained individual and collective learning in today's world is not achieved without—equally radically—questioning the temporal durability and global (re)production and distribution of resources in their widest meaning (UN, 2015). Sustainability, then, is not restricted to serving as only a cognitive content delivered by ALE but is likewise perceived as a social practice of ALE (Schreiber-Barsch & Mauch, 2019).

A radical popular education viewpoint, therefore, emphasises that neither solidarity nor sustainability are necessarily a given motivational driver or outcome of collective learning. Instead, realising sustainability requires the social practice of solidarity to overcome the dominant social, political and economic rationales and, hence, proceed in the direction of a sustainable society. In this sense, ALE's fundamental role and the adult educator's work are far from redundant. Jesson and Newman (2004) argued that learning 'may not be articulated as learning until someone helps them [the adult learners; the authors notes] make it conscious' (p. 255). This includes discussing the direction to which change or transformation should proceed in a 'broader political economic environment of a community, a nation and maybe the world' (Jesson & Newman, 2004, p. 252) in favour of those who are socially vulnerable or excluded in some way. Popovic (2013) cited the example of Serbia, where adult education, as a conscious and intentional learning process, has played a vital role since the mid-1990s in fuelling a non-violent revolution. However, in the recent debate, Evans et al. (2022) declared that, today, 'much of adult education is not providing any response to the great social problems' (p. 1), which emphasises the need to put the topic of radical popular education back on the agendas.

Methodological approach

To establish a comparative dialogue between these two contributions, we adhere to qualitative approaches in comparative education research. These approaches seek to understand educational phenomena or topics of interest using an interpretive and ideographic approach that believes in the importance of contextualising and locating such phenomena historically, sociopolitically, geographically and temporally; generalisation is not its primary aim (Fairbrother, 2016; Manzon, 2016).

Our comparative enquiry follows, moreover, the approach of *comparing places* (Manzon, 2016). This is due to the geographic contextualisations of Freire's and Nyerere's contributions in their context of origin and to the regional associations that are made to Freire and Nyerere, which are still valid today. However, the study does not intend a strict country-to-country comparison in the traditional sense. Instead, it uses the problem approach elucidated by Bereday (1964), which shifts the focus to a particular selection of one theme or topic within the comparative enquiry (p. 23).

Accordingly, we identified as the *tertium comparationis* of our enquiry the conceptual idea of *adult learners as change agents*. To explore this, the two pedagogical

concepts of adult learners served as *units of comparison*. Based on the classification by Manninen (2012), both contributions are similar in their theoretical approach and normative background by emphasising the dialectics of individual and collective learning, by following a ‘transformative’ agenda (‘learning for change’) and by being located at the intersection of radical humanist models (‘critical awareness and change of own life situation, values and attitudes; individual/personal change’) and radical functionalist models (‘Innovations, entrepreneurship, change agents; change in society/community activists’) (p. 75). However, they have emerged in two conceptual variants: education for liberation (Freire) and education for self-reliance (Nyerere), which opens up the question of commonalities and differences.

In establishing a comparative dialogue between these two variants, our objective is not only to describe but also to capture, understand and explain these commonalities and differences and to use the findings in a discussion on today’s relevance of radical popular education approaches. The idea of a comparative dialogue ties in with Mason’s (2016) argument that ‘comparative education is best conceptualised as a critical social science, incorporating an emancipatory interest focused on the distribution of power and its associated attributes’ (p. 253).

Against this background, we elaborate on the landmark contributions of Paulo Freire and Julius K. Nyerere.

Freire and Nyerere: A comparative dialogue

Introducing Freire and Nyerere

Whereas Nyerere, in his position as the founding president of the United Republic of Tanzania (1961), placed strong emphasis on developing a postcolonial nation-state from the 1960s onwards under the challenging legacy of centuries of colonial rule, the historical situation to which Freire was exposed to was different. Although Brazil was also struggling with its colonial history at that time, the nation-state’s formal independence had already been gained in the 1820s. However, Brazil was overtaken in 1964 by a military dictatorship that ruled from 1964–1985, forcing Freire to go into exile in Chile in 1964. Thus, Freire, on the one hand, experienced an ongoing discussion and struggle related to pedagogical questions, which were also political issues. Nyerere, on the other hand, had to overcome fundamental challenges as a political leader in Tanzania, including a defensive war. Strategies were needed for adopting an educational policy and for budget planning under the imperative of their transfer into practice for the good of the developing postcolonial nation-state.

Yet, as geographically far apart as both nation-states may be, and even though their historical situations at the beginning of the 1960s differed, the two educators shared the emergence of their reflections and pedagogical work in the wake of a local and global social-emancipatory movement at the time, criticising the excesses of capitalism and broadcasting the quest for social change through learning and education. Within this context, both educators ‘admired each other’s writings’ and aimed to establish an environment of cooperation (Mayo & Vittoria, 2021, p. 128), having personally met, for example, at a conference on adult education in Dar es Salaam in 1975 (Hope, 2008).

Freire

Brazilian Paulo Freire (1921–1997) is considered one of the most influential educators of the 20th century as an advocate for emancipatory popular education. In his comprehensive

oeuvre, the ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ (written 1967–1968 in Chile, published in 1970) is recognised as a ‘masterpiece’ (Lima, 2022, p. 20) and a ‘world-historical event for counter hegemonic theorists and activists’ (West, 1993, p. xiii). Still today, it has a firm place in the ‘critical pedagogy’ collections and serves as a vital resource for liberating educational practice.

Freire’s ideas and concepts were informed by his educational practice experiences, gained as a researching educator in the field of political alphabetisation in Brazil and Chile, as well as in North America, Europe and Africa (see below). His particular concerns were the educational issues of subaltern population groups facing socio-structural oppression (such as peasants or urban workers). In this context, Freire cooperated with numerous international organisations worldwide, including UNESCO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Council of Churches. He was also the secretary in charge of municipal education in Sao Paulo for more than two years (1989–1991).

Tackling the Freirean approach means working at the heart of popular education, drawing upon a path of hope and aiming at a truly democratic society, including the economic sphere (Freire, 2004). Freire held a strong belief in the people and their self-reliance, potential and abilities, as well as their capability to act in solidarity. By this, he offered ‘a socialist approach to education which locates politics in education and education in politics’ (Allman, 1988, p. 92), rejecting the neoliberal ‘ideology of ideological death’ (Freire, 1998, p. 14). Key to his understanding is that ownership of the pedagogy of the oppressed belongs to the people and not to the teachers or educators (Freire, 1993, p. 22). This understanding is diametrically opposed to the prevailing understanding of a ‘banking education’ (p. 45), which is characterised by a subject (teacher/oppressor/active)–object (student/oppressed/passive) relationship (p. 46). Such a class-based organisation of education is defined by Freire as a ‘cultural invasion’ (p. 125). Lima (2022) asserted that the prevalent structures and practices in adult education in neoliberal societies should be interpreted accordingly: ‘In more general terms, the frequently depoliticised and socially atomised stress placed on the right skills, purportedly tailored to the job market presents an inherent risk of becoming an oppressive pedagogy’ (pp. 21, 25–28). In Freirean terms, this risk creates a ‘culture of silence’ on the side of the oppressed and nurtures a ‘fear of freedom’ (Freire, 1993, p. 9).

In contrast to the concept of oppressive banking education, Freire conceptualises education as a practice of freedom, being processed in a problem-posing and consciousness-raising way (named ‘conscientização’ [Freire, 1993, pp. 9, 87]). It is committed to a radical dialogical, intersubjective practice, claiming a dialectical amalgamation of reflections for an incessant, ideology-critical deciphering of oppressive structures, mechanisms and individual actions in which people place themselves as intervening subjects.

In this sense, adult education is understood as a practice of ‘dialogical cultural action’ (Freire 1993, pp. 167). The relationship between educators and learners in the educational process is based on solidarity and the reflection of power. Educators are also learners, and learners are also educators (p. 53). This is based on Freire’s anthropological assumption that human beings are historical beings:

When I think of history I think about possibility—that history is the time and space of possibility. Because of that, I reject a fatalistic or pessimistic understanding of history with a belief that what happens is what should happen” (Freire, 1989, as cited in Darder, 2002, p. x).

From the perspective of popular education, the principle of common-sense knowledge is a significant starting point for educational work. Antonio Gramsci similarly discussed the ‘senso comune’ (Gramsci, 1975, pp. Q1, 65). Jesson and Newman (2004) also emphasised that ‘Learning radical education is learning to challenge accepted common sense to create social change’ (p. 261). Key elements of Freire’s ‘conscientizacao’ are, therefore, the so-called ‘generative’ themes (Freire, 1993, p. 75), meaning words and practices that play a vital role in people’s everyday lives (unemployment, alcoholism, sexism, work contracts, etc.). Thus, the objects of the educational process must be developed collaboratively with learners following a dialogical problem-posing process. Freire’s dialogical principle is often adopted exclusively as a method that neglects its socio-critical, popular education context. Organising learning as an investigative process, however, provides learners with a shared position that allows for the analysis and dismantling of the world.

Nyerere

Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922–1999), the former and founding president of the United Republic of Tanzania (1961), is well known as a teacher, an anti-colonial activist, a political leader and an educational philosopher. In Tanzania, he is often referred to as *mwalimu*, a Swahili name for ‘teacher’. Despite leaving the teaching profession to pursue a political career in the 1950s, Nyerere retained the title *mwalimu* during and after his political leadership tenure. To attain equity and promote the development of the diversely uneducated population of the mid-20th century in Tanzania (Mulenga, 2001, p. 449), Nyerere crafted ‘Education for Self-Reliance’ (1967a) as a collaborative guiding education philosophy for Tanzania’s nation-building in the 1960s. This work continues to reflect the status of the national education philosophy in Tanzania (URT, 2014) and, as part of the political ideology of *ujamaa* (‘familyhood’ in Swahili), of a national vision and ethics with the goals of egalitarianism and human-centred development (Nyerere, 1967b, p. 316; Mulenga, 2001, p. 450; Pacho, 2013, p. 11). Such a socialist society, connecting communalism and familyhood (*ujamaa*), as seen as ‘the most fundamental element in traditional African society’ (Mulenga, 2001, p. 450), should be based on three principles: ‘equality and respect for human dignity; sharing of the resources which are produced by our efforts; work by everyone and exploitation by none’ (Nyerere, 1967a, pp. 5–6).

Education for self-reliance philosophy is supported by several actions. The first is orienting the masses, especially young people, to a culture of learning by doing. School curricula are intended to integrate academics with economic activities. According to Nyerere (1968):

Each school should have, as an integral part of it, a farm or workshop which provides the food eaten by the community, and makes some contribution to the national income. [...] This is not a suggestion that a school farm or workshop should be attached to every school for training purposes. It is a suggestion that every school should also be a farm. (p. 283)

Second, adult education as a form of lifelong learning is emphasised to ensure that the developing community and the nation-state become self-sustaining. Nyerere clarified that adult education must contribute to an enlargement of human being’s ability in every way. More specifically, it must help individuals decide for themselves—in cooperation—what development is. Moreover, it must help them to think clearly, it must enable them to examine possible alternative courses of action and to choose the option that best keeps with their own purposes and it must equip them with the ability to translate their decisions

into reality (Nyerere, 1978, p. 28). Nyerere further proposed that the ‘first function of adult education is to inspire both a desire for change, and an understanding that change is possible’ (p. 29). The ‘belief that poverty or suffering is ‘the will of God’ and that a human’s ‘only task is to endure, is the most fundamental of all enemies of freedom,’ he argued (p. 29). In this way, Nyerere (1968) inspired and influenced the establishment of an adult education system (pp. 85–90; Nyerere, 1971, pp. 92–97 as cited in Lema et al., 2006) to augment the efforts of the formal education system to increase the literacy rate, as well as productivity and efficiency in socioeconomic and political endeavours.

Third, as part of the education for self-reliance philosophy, the learning process must be contextualised to inspire youth not only to appreciate their experiences but also to share their local education in the process of enriching learning. This process empowers learners and citizens to creatively apply educational solutions to address local issues and sustain their development initiatives (Nyerere, 1967a).

Fourth, the demand to maximise learning activities, despite the limited teaching and learning resources, was paramount in Nyerere’s philosophy: education stakeholders—that is, educators, parents and students—must work hand in hand to ensure the greatest outcome of a learning activity. Thus, curricula interpreters ought to be creative in designing interesting and meaningful learning activities to keep learners engaged in the entire learning process.

Despite Nyerere’s appealing education theory for a post-colonial nation-state, the process and outcome of its implementation cannot be spared from criticism, pointing to an overly ‘uncritical appeal to the African traditional past’ and major implementation challenges (Mulenga, 2001, p. 451). Schools and colleges kept playing only a marginal ‘part of the economic and community system’ (TANU, 1974, p. 4, as cited in Mulenga, 2001, p. 460) and did not turn into drivers for nation-building as envisioned in the philosophy. Although a ‘well-meaning, sincere and idealistic philosophy’ (Mulenga, 2001, p. 461), and showing an enduring relevance for Africa today and contributions to social and economic prosperities in countries such as Botswana (Major & Mulvihill, 2009, p. 19), its implementation at that time, however, suffered from ‘unfavourable macro-economic conditions, inadequate resources and lack of commitment among the key players in the implementation process’ (Mulenga, 2001, p. 461). This was also due to the then profound societal shifts in direction to a post-colonial nation-state that was still experiencing a ‘Tanzanian elite [who] had adopted capitalist ideas of individualism and survival for the fittest’. There were also remnants of teachers who had been groomed in the colonial system to appear for work in a neck tie and jacket; thus, they were ‘not prepared to do manual work’ as part of curriculum implementation (Major & Mulvihill, 2009, p. 21).

To summarize, the expected revolutionary achievements (Sanga, 2016) of ‘education for self-reliance’ are to be seen as exemplary outcomes of a radical popular education in the context of a people or society in dire need of redefining itself and determining its destiny. Education for self-reliance plays a liberation role, and its influence on education systems, at least in Africa, is of great significance in building an egalitarian society.

Entering the comparative dialogue

On this introductory basis, the analysis shifts the focus to a more in-depth discussion to identify commonalities and differences between the two landmark contributions under study.

Exploring commonalities

First, Freire and Nyerere shared a strong belief in the ability of the people to build a society characterised by freedom, equality, solidarity, social justice and, based on these values, sustainability. This belief is to be contextualised in socio-historical situations: Both authors shared the experience of being confronted with the socio-psychological impact of having lived in times of colonialism and capitalism and the ways in which such structures of oppression are incorporated in people. Both referred to the socio-psychological works by Frantz Fanon ('Black skin, white mask', [1952]/1986; 'The wretched of the earth', [1961]/2001), another highly influential Pan-African thinker of that time in the field of postcolonial studies, critical theory and Marxism. However, neither Freire nor Nyerere systematically elaborated on the foundations of theories of socialisation. More important were the conclusions drawn from these theoretical considerations regarding the objective of restoring 'the African traditional value system that was despised by the colonizers' (Major & Mulvihill, 2009, p. 16) and developing a postcolonial nation-state on its own characteristics and worth, rather than perpetuating its legacies by heading for visions of now 'Black Europeans'. These considerations have been highly influential—to the present day and surely beyond these geographical contexts—in the sphere of education and the decisions made when establishing an educational system: Which authors are part of a curriculum? What value is given to what kind of knowledge? Which symbolic practices and structural features are perpetuated in the future? In an ideal picture of equality, educational institutions are often awarded with a too neutral role while neglecting their powerful impact on fuelling what Lima (2022) has called a 'cultural invasion', thereby, risking reproducing or even consolidating social, political and economic barriers across categories like class/milieu, gender and migration. Freire and Nyerere shared in this sense the opinion that capitalism is an intolerable system, characterised by 'Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham' (Marx, 1962, p. 189). However, pursuant to their experiences with colonial history, they regretted the idea brought forward by some Marxists that capitalism would be necessary as a historical phase (Mayo & Vittoria, 2021, p. 120).

A core component of this strong belief in the people is the significance given to education for planting the desire and ability to participate in transformation and social change and, thus, to fostering (adult) learners as change agents. Although Freire experienced the rise of neoliberalism and, by this, a new quality of aggression directed at the people, he, nevertheless, insisted on the element of hope and on the vision that people will fight these forms of governance, dominance and discrimination and will again take charge of social change and create a different history. In this sense, Lima argued that the Freirean approach of 'education for humanisation' even gained significance in the wake of 'cultural invasion, accommodation and deproblematisation of the future' (2022, p. 25). Thus, from Freire's and Nyerere's points of view, education is key to developing all social spheres and human beings. Both understood education for freedom as a means of raising consciousness on the structures of oppression and the ambivalences of society: 'Only free people conscious of their worth and their equality can build a free society', as Nyerere (1967a, p. 9) pointed out, referring to the denial of equality as the core of colonialism. This was achieved by learning in educational settings and reading texts, but even more importantly, by doing and working practically on issues of everyday life—the dialectics of action and reflection.

Second, we refer to their joint anthropological understanding of human beings as interdependent and interrelated social beings. Due to this, the relevance given to social practices in the sense of the everyday practices of the people in their communities

(families, villages/quarters, companies, religious communities, worker unions and so on) is paramount for the aim of developing and acting as a change agent. This is mirrored by the idea of learning and education as a dialectic of the individual and the community with concrete settings and features. From this context, the Freirean generative themes emerged in a dialogical manner. These themes focus on and dismantle the 'limit-situations' while developing and reflecting on the tasks for the 'limit-acts' (Freire, 1993, pp. 72–73), overcoming the existing boundaries by, again, action and reflection. Nyerere described education as a means of addressing socioeconomic and political woes that led the masses to abject poverty and suffering. In a similar sense, Freire was convinced that oppressive socioeconomic and political structures should be overcome by developing critical consciousness and fighting against the banking system of education. Thus, Nyerere's vision of self-reliant people and Freire's vision of critically conscious people both rely on an understanding of humans as equal subjects in all spheres of life. Although Nyerere did not use the Freirean wording of 'limit-situations' and 'limit-acts', he followed the same track. Both shared the belief that learners, in the context of their relationships and social settings, should be seen as the focus of educational endeavours in the classroom and beyond. This focus on such learning settings inspired Nyerere to advocate placing much less emphasis on examinations in favour of learning activities in a practical context. In Freire's 'Education as a practice of freedom', the educator addresses a joint problem from the learner's everyday context to resolve the matter and raise the individual's as well as the collective consciousness in favour of taking choices and making decisions.

As a third commonality, we point to their enormous influence on mass adult education in the form of literacy programmes to provide the basic foundations for being an (adult) change agent, both conceptualising and working successfully in literacy campaigns. Freire's approach continues to inspire educators (in literacy campaigns and beyond) across the world and has been transferred to international and transnational contexts. Nyerere's contribution to this issue was of the same significance, manifested in the impact of his presidency in Tanzania: In 1961, the literacy rate in Tanzania was barely 20%, whereas by 1985, when Nyerere retired from the presidency, the literacy rate had increased tremendously to over 85% (Hall, 1974, p. 199; Heisel, 1979; Kassam, 1983, pp. 65-66; Mulenga, 2001, p. 449; Yahl, 2015).

Exploring differences

In addition to the commonalities identified, the analysis also highlighted (much fewer) differences between the two educators. The differences originated from the respective geographical contexts in which both landmark contributions were conceptualised. These contexts are each embedded at a particular time in history, in a certain version of a capitalist economy and in a specific political situation and cultural framing.

A core difference between the two works lies in the political dimension and the direction given to the activities of each author. The political economy aspect was crucial for Nyerere, who focused on the model of a subsistent economy due to the situation and existing structures in Tanzania at that time. Prioritising the development of the industrial sector would have been possible only by relying on foreign investments from international capital owners. In a different manner and in accordance with his pedagogical beliefs, Nyerere focused on installing the concept of a political economy for the development of a postcolonial nation-state for the masses, not for the elite:

If we use these resources [land in abundance and people willing to work hard; the authors] in a spirit of self-reliance as the basis for development, then we shall make progress slowly but surely. And it will then be real progress, affecting the lives of masses, not just having

spectacular show-pieces in the towns while the rest of the people of Tanzania live in their present poverty” (Nyerere, 1967a, p. 6).

However, this vision relied on educating appropriate leaders. In this sense, Nyerere, as president of the Republic, was privileged to possess the power and influence to transfer his pedagogical visions and values to Tanzania’s emerging educational system. A range of policies and programmes were adopted during his presidency to realise the education for self-reliance philosophy (Lema et al., 2006)—even if, at the end, many leaders and institutions did not turn to be the envisioned change agents (see Section *Nyerere*). Freire, by contrast, prioritised counter-hegemonic social movements as agents for change, keeping his focus on the people’s potential for empowerment. His concept was intended to bring social movements, political parties and state representatives together to let the political parties and state representatives learn from the progressive subaltern activists (Mayo & Vittoria, 2021, pp. 71–72).

Against this backdrop of commonalities and differences, we complement our analysis with a brief glance at contemporary initiatives aimed at transferring the conceptual rhetoric to an educational practice with (young) adults. Although the Freirean approach is echoed in projects run in numerous countries and by diverse groups (see for example, da Silva, 2021), the transfer of the education for self-reliance concept into educational practice still receives less attention in the Global North’s academic body of knowledge, which prompted us to select the following example.

Education for self-reliance: An example of the Service-Learning Initiative Tanzania

According to the American Corporation for National Community Service, or CNCS (2002) and Pacho (2017), service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instructions and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. The background of service learning as an approach to education traces back to the US-American tradition of pragmatism and the philosophical ideas of Dewey (1938) on experiential education. These entail the components of progressive education, learning from experience, the democratic approach to education and linking the school to the community for mutual benefits. As described by Bringle and Hatcher (2009), service learning is:

a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility (p. 38).

The main goal of service learning in the context of education is to connect learning objectives to service objectives so education stakeholders as change agents can attain knowledge, life skills and values, shape a positive attitude towards creative hard work and inspire collective approaches to addressing community needs—and, thus, inspire others to be change agents as well. Education stakeholders include students, teachers, support staff and members of the surrounding community within which the school or higher education institution exists. The assumption that stakeholders learn from each other is vital because it is the active and creative involvement of everyone involved that makes service learning complete and impactful for the individual and, thus, the

community. This concept is in line with Freire's essence of education as a means of liberation and Nyerere's emphasis on a sustainable livelihood approach that requires an individual to commit to and through the collective for the benefit of the individual and the common good of the group. This allows following the sustainability agenda (on protecting natural resources, fostering food security, sanitation, justice, etc.) as well as informing 'both policy and provision of an adult education that helps people make their own decisions and act on them' (von Kotze, 2010, p. 135).

This example of the St. Augustine University of Tanzania Service-Learning Programme (SS-LP) provides insight into a particular curriculum and pedagogy highly inspired by the ideas of radical popular education and, thus, attempts (Martin et al., 1999, p. 9) to foster collective learning and social change.

Freire's idea that the liberation of the individual is similarly a liberation of the collective had a significant influence on SS-LP development. Along those lines, the SS-LP is dedicated to exposing youth to the essence of liberation through a partnership with Fr. Ramon Boys Secondary School (FRBSS). FRBSS is a private school owned and managed by the Catholic Archdiocese of Mwanza, Tanzania. Similar to other private schools in Tanzania, it does not receive government capitation, so the school mobilises various sources of income to meet its operating costs. The contribution of the SS-LP to the school's efforts towards economic self-sustenance and promoting sustainability awareness are greatly appreciated at FRBSS. Since 2016, the SS-LP has implemented a voluntary initiative that involves some faculty members and university students, mostly from the Faculty of Education, who interpret education for liberation and foster sustainability activities at FRBSS.

The SS-LP focuses on sharing theories and related information ranging from environmental sustainability, global citizenship and democracy to leadership, economic sustainability and information and communication technology, among other pertinent themes. Seminars and workshops on selected topics are run prior to SS-LP activities at FRBSS in particular. For instance, the annual tree planting activity that takes place on (and in the future will expand beyond) school premises is preceded by an environmental sustainability seminar. This sustainability initiative, which represents the SS-LP's response to climate change, engages SS-LP mentors to serve as prompters, while SS-LP students conceptualise ideas and select and share a theme that resonates with the current needs of the surrounding community. Afterwards, SS-LP students share the idea with the FRBSS community for further brainstorming, reflection and, finally, decision-making. According to this approach, stakeholders' involvement serves as an empowerment building endeavour, as the stakeholders contribute constructive ideas and oversee the implementation of those ideas. The level of project ownership is usually beyond measure.

Over time, service learning at FRBSS nurtures committed, active and creative individuals, both youth and adults, who maintain a collective and collaborative attitude and values, as well as knowledge for dealing with socioeconomic and political issues. In light of Freire's commitment to social justice, the SS-LP has immortalised the centenarian's thoughts in various honourable ways, such as dialogues on sociopolitical sustainability themes between SS-LP and FRBSS students and between students and staff, with the aim of developing individuals with a sense of decency and responsibility for the common good. Specifically, students engage in discussions on universal human rights, global citizenship, healthy living and building healthy communities, in addition to addressing the place of democracy in nurturing leadership and inspiring sustainable development in communities. The transformation of individuals, seemingly, is key to the SS-LP's commitment to empowering communities. The practical component of these themes involves activities such as the composition of short stories and poems for public

consumption or can be realised by inspiring some participants to assume leadership roles in student associations and government organisations.

In summary, the SS-LP successfully interprets Freire's thoughts and partly engages Nyerere's ideas on education for self-reliance and ALE as necessary elements of popular education for 21st-century developing society. Extension of this initiative beyond FRBSS would mean an increase in the number of critically conscious individuals in the community and, hence, assurance that socioeconomic and political predicaments will be addressed. It is a noble commitment for the SS-LP to be part of an effort to immortalise Freire's thoughts in Mwanza, Tanzania. His ideas are so relevant and fitting in the present Tanzania with its youthful population that they need awakening of their critical consciousness to 'name the world' (Freire, 1993, p. 88) and enjoy education as 'the practice of freedom' (p. 81).

Discussion and concluding remarks

In this conceptual paper, encountering works by Nyerere and Freire invites a comparative dialogue, unfolding commonalities and differences in a systematic manner while respecting each scholar's work context of origin and embeddedness. The limitations of this methodological approach can be seen in its exclusively conceptual, not empirical, objectives. However, in our view, such a comparative dialogue in the field of transnational ALE helps to establish a discourse that does not prioritise the logic of installing better–worse hierarchies, as it is widely used in, for example, the ranking of countries or the identification of best practice models. The African continent has been subject to this bias in comparisons, as Ahluwalia (2001) revealed in discussing African inflections of politics and postcolonial theory:

For too long, Africa has been subjected to a history of analogy, in which it is compared to other parts of the world, notably Europe. By taking into account the specificity of the African case, it is possible to move beyond such analyses. (p. 72)

Considering this, the debate on the concept of solidarity may benefit from the influence of the rich tradition of the philosophical concept of *ubuntu* (humanness) in African societies, aiming at cultivating a culture of humanity and responsibility and fostering the virtues of respect, caring, communal sharing and trust (Waghid, 2014, p. 57). Lessenich (2019, p. 99) argued that solidarity is both a social norm and a social practice, being cooperative (a shared commitment for concerns mutually agreed upon, despite possible dissensus), performative (to be achieved only by performing the act of mutual commitment) and transformative (not maintaining but radically changing social inequalities and living conditions). By *ubuntu*, the understanding of human beings as interdependent and interrelated social beings (see Section *Exploring commonalities*) is even more strongly emphasised in the collective dimension of a community. *Ubuntu* stands out as a contrast to Western liberal and neo-liberal paradigms and as an example that illustrates the central role of humanity in the culturing process of a person from the African perspective. *Ubuntu*, as humanness, defines the individual. If well translated, *ubuntu* is a bedrock for community building, as in *ubuntu* there is social justice, freedom with responsibility and care and support for individual and collective actualisation. *Ubuntu* also inspired the SS-LP, which grounded itself on its values with the intention of strengthening individuals for their good and for the betterment of their communities. In *ubuntu*, the individual is equally important and responsible to the community, just as the community is to the individual. Supporting an individual in becoming liberated or self-

reliant means liberating the family and the community and, thus, the nation-state and the world at large. Thus, Mbiti would say, ‘I am because we are; and because we are, therefore I am’ (Eze, 2011).

In this sense, the concept of education for self-reliance provides a pivotal connection between the paper’s guiding categories of solidarity and sustainability as social practices. *Doing solidarity* needs to be complemented, as argued previously, by *doing sustainability* by radically questioning the temporal durability and glo-cal (re)production and distribution of resources in their widest sense for the good of the survival of humankind and the earth. Transferring this to the pedagogy and curriculum of radical popular education, service-learning offers a concrete example from the field of higher education and its embeddedness in the glo-cal community as well as its facilitation of adult learners’ ‘action and reflection’ (Freire). This may be well addressed by service-learning concepts, considering the high priority that the European higher education sector currently gives to the university’s so-called third mission (research and teaching comprising the other two), which is the transfer of academic knowledge to further education settings under the auspices of social engagement and in response to modern society’s key agenda items (such as sustainability, inclusion and the like).

However, as noted previously, discussing these concepts also emphasises the quest to continuously review their compatibility with the features of modern societies and the contexts of nation-states that differ from their countries of origin. Freire had been aware of this and emphasised the need for an ongoing rethinking and reworking, as Mayo and Vittoria (2022) indicated, in which ‘a philosophy of learning in which praxis is a central concept that has to be ‘reinvented’ time and time again, depending on situation and context’ (p. 73). Revisiting the concept of education for self-reliance from the current neoliberal architecture of many modern Western societies, the quest for self-reliance can, in turn, involve the risk of fuelling the individualisation of responsibilities (for instance, for successful learning careers or the provision of comprehensive ALE infrastructures). It might be launched under the utilitarian ideology of seeing self-reliance as a means to an end (shifting state responsibilities to communities and the individual) and not as an end in itself. This would reverse the concept’s original meaning to its opposite. Similarly, Freire’s dialogical approach to education for freedom can also be given a hollowing twist by reducing its method to a narrow didactical tool, serving, instead, the aims of soft governance and thus representing a technique for oppression in learning and education. Moreover, in the debate on the concept of education for self-reliance, the context of origin needs to be considered. This philosophy was grounded in the urgent quest for nation building, acquiring independence, and tackling colonial legacies. Although nationalism on the African continent, according to Ahluwalia (2001), needs to be considered a ‘European construction that had been exported to the colonies’ (p. 68), in African countries, while gaining independence, it served ‘as an important means to attain unity’ (p. 68) and also modernise the education systems. This impetus of nation-building on the given basis of an economy of subsistence provides the necessary context for understanding the conceptual frame—and for rethinking and reinventing its highly relevant key ideas.

The pedagogical purposes and needs connected to both Freire’s and Nyerere’s concepts have not lost their worldwide relevance despite possible geographical differences, which Nyerere observed in 1967:

The content of education is somewhat different from that of Western countries, but the purpose is the same—to prepare young people to live and to serve the society, and to transmit the knowledge, skills, and values and attitudes of the society. Wherever education fails in any of these fields, then the society falters in its progress, or there is social unrest as

people find that their education has prepared them for a future which is not open to them. (1967a, p. 2)

This again focuses on radical popular education in general and its contemporary tasks in the field of ALE. As stated previously, Evans et al. (2022) diagnosed ALE's lack of response to today's great social problems and pointed to communities as one of the core topics. In general, adult education academia seems to have long neglected the debate and conceptual work on socio-critical, emancipatory issues, such as solidarity (see for example, Eble, 2022). This led to reducing their conceptual impact and power to the level of didactical tools and to their usage as buzzwords and not 'contested concepts' (Gallie, 1956, p. 169)—losing their potential as leitmotifs for pedagogical work and debate in the field of ALE and radical popular education. Nyerere (1978) was highly aware of this potential: 'Adult education is a [...] highly political activity. Politicians are sometimes more aware of this fact than educators and therefore they do not always welcome real adult education' (p. 31). Yet, this incorporates not only the political, theoretical and conceptual level but also the level of methodology and research. An urgent need exists to explore the 'links between research, pedagogy and creative forms of transformative social, cultural and political agency and address how creative research can support meaningful learning in education institutions as well as non-formal settings' (Grummell & Finnegan, 2021, p. 1; see also Díaz-Arévalo, 2022; Evans et al., 2022; von Kotze, 2010). As we had elaborated on in earlier works (Curdt & Schreiber-Barsch, 2020; Schreiber-Barsch & Rule, 2021), acknowledging and negotiating power and control in research designs broadcasts a different ethos that strives for learners' capacity building and empowerment as change agents *through* research and, thus, also contributes to the collective transformation of social reality.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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