



FIFTY YEARS OF PSYCHOLOGY IN NIGERIA: ARE WE STILL TEACHING SCIENCE OR FOLKTALES?

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examined the current status of the teaching of psychology in Nigeria fifty years after the discipline was first taught in a Nigerian University. With around thirty departments across the nation's universities, there is no indication that an indigenous approach to the teaching of the discipline has evolved. Secondly, there is a gradual decline in the level of adherence to universal values underpinning the teaching of psychology as a science in the country. The teaching of psychology and as a consequence, the practice of the discipline is drifting in the direction of irrelevance mostly as result of weak institutional support for the discipline by university authorities and the absence of a law backing the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) as the regulatory body of psychology in the country. As a result, the NPA has been incapable of dealing with a myriad of problems of teaching psychology as a science as well as unwholesome practices within the profession. In order that the discipline becomes relevant to growing national demands for psychologically- oriented solutions to problems and contribute to the development of globally acceptable explanations of human behavior, Nigerian psychologists need to actively support on-going efforts of the NPA to urgently put in place legal-sanctioned mechanisms for regulating the teaching and practice of psychology in the country.

INTRODUCTION

This must be a very unpopular and possibly irritating title to read by my fellow compatriot Nigerian psychologists. We belong to a glamorous discipline that is unashamedly and unequivocally advertised to the world as the science of human behavior. Why then would any member of this glamorous discipline choose a title of an article that apparently cast some doubts about the scientific credentials of that discipline? The answer from our point of view is simple: Fifty years is a long time in the life of any biological or social organism; usually a defining period in the life of individuals and organizations. Now that Nigerian psychology has attained this important milestone, provides us an opportunity to look inwards and pause to ask questions as to how well the discipline has fared in the last fifty years and in what direction it is moving. We will therefore feel comfortable with any such accusations and would indeed accommodate and welcome any allegations that we are questioning the integrity or for that matter, the identity of psychology in Nigeria as a science. This is what we set out to do in this paper. In our view, a critical evaluation of the teaching of psychology in Nigeria and by implication the practice of the discipline in the country is warranted at this point in the history of the discipline for, if we do not do it, somebody else will do. When someone else outside the discipline asks such questions, we would most probably be more embarrassed, humiliated and infuriated. So, rather than seeing such exercise as a needless and unwelcome self denigration, we would urge our fellow Nigerian psychologists to feel obliged to undertake similar exercises even in the micro level environment where they work. They should ask themselves questions as to how well they are doing their work as psychologists. Can they do things better than they are currently doing? In this way, we can engage ourselves in a productive discourse about how to move the discipline forward.

We have been active player in twenty-five of the fifty years of psychology in Nigeria, during which we have been privileged to work and learn under the guidance of the first generation of psychologists in the country. Having graduated from the University of Jos in 1988 with a Bachelors Degree in psychology, a one-year compulsory national service at the Department of Psychology,



Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti in 1988/1989 was followed with our appointment as a Graduate Assistant by the University of Jos in 1990. Between 1991 and 1998 while maintaining the teaching appointment with the University of Jos, we studied and obtained a Masters Degree in Organizational Psychology (1993) and a PhD in Social Psychology (1998) from the University of Jos and Nigeria respectively. Apart from our affiliation with the University of Jos, we had some spell at the Department of Psychology, University of Uyo during which we also provided leadership as Head of the Department. We have also served as a Directorate level staff of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Presidency, Abuja as well as a visiting lecturer to the Department of Psychology, Benue State University, Makurdi. We would therefore argue that within the period, we played some roles in training psychologists and in a way contributed to shaping the future directions of the discipline in the country. For these reasons, we feel confident that we can offer some commentary regarding the status of the teaching of psychology in Nigeria. By saying this, we do not claim to have a better insight into the problems bedeviling the teaching and practice of psychology in Nigeria. Instead for us, this is an attempt to draw attention to the need for everyone of us as members of this noble field to show some concern about the health of our profession. We think this is an especially auspicious period to undertake such an exercise of self reflection. Half a century of existence is indeed an opportune time for us to look backwards while at the same time redirecting the searchlight into the future of the discipline.

This paper is intended to be a reflection of a Nigerian psychologist on the current status of the teaching of psychology in the country. We hope that by doing this, we shall be able to identify some of the forces shaping the development of psychology in Nigeria and offer suggestions on the way forward. We shall argue in the paper that the received values that underpinned the teaching of psychology in the early years of the discipline are being gradually eroded as a result of weak institutional support for the discipline and some unwholesome practices bedeviling the discipline in Nigeria. The paper is organized along five themes: The first provides an overview of the history and features of the early years of psychology in Nigeria which were dominated by foreign researchers. The second theme examines the contributions of the first group of Western-trained indigenous psychologists in Nigeria. The third theme highlights the consequences of the economic decline of the mid-1980s for the development of the discipline with specific focus on the impact of home-grown psychologists on the teaching of psychology in the country. The fourth theme is an evaluation of some forces shaping the status of the teaching of psychology in Nigeria. There is an evaluation of the implications of the identified forces currently shaping the orientation of the new generation of psychologists for the teaching of psychology in Nigeria in the last theme which dovetails to some recommendations on the ways of reversing the negative trends in the teaching and practice of psychology in the country. We shall now begin the discussion by providing an overview of the character of the early beginnings of psychology in Nigeria.

The Early Beginnings of Psychology in Nigeria

Psychology, a product of Western European intellectual development is a relatively young academic discipline compared to its sister fields of the social sciences as it became an independent discipline only in 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt, the acclaimed father of the discipline opened an experimental laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany devoted to the investigation of the nature of human consciousness. The goal of psychology in its formative years was the analysis of the content of consciousness into distinct elements and then determining the relationship between the elements; an approach that was termed structuralism by the early leaders of the discipline (Eyo, 2004). The enthusiasm that greeted the birth of the discipline resulted in its rapid expansion within the Western world. It was only a matter of time for the



euphoria to catch up with non-Western societies and surely it did. There is practically no country in the world today that psychology is not recognized.

For us in Nigeria, it took over half a century of its existence; precisely 85 years before the discipline made a rather belated entry into the Nigerian University education curriculum in 1964 when it was first introduced at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka by Professor Carl Frost (Olomolaiye, 1985) with the first home-trained Nigerian psychologists graduating in 1967 (Eyo, 2004). University of Lagos became the second University in the country to establish a department of psychology in 1969 when the psychology unit that had been in existence since 1966 transformed to a full-fledged academic department following the arrival of Professor Alastir Charles Mundy-Castle who is credited as the founder of the department in Lagos (Mefoh, 2014). In the year 1976, Professor S. M. H. Zaidi, a London-trained Pakistani national pioneered the establishment of the third department of psychology; the Department of General and Applied Psychology at the University of Jos. See Mefoh (2014) for a comprehensive history of psychology in Nigeria. Psychology was undoubtedly becoming a popular field in the country and even in the universities where it had not been formally established as a separate discipline, some “psychologizing” was going on in especially Faculties of Education (Eyo, 2004). By the end of the 1970s; new psychology departments were established at the University of Ibadan by Professor D. C. E. Ugwegbu in 1977 and University of Ife (Now, Obafemi Awolowo University) by Professor A. A. Olowu in 1978. There were about ten departments of psychology in universities across Nigeria in 1990.

Psychology in Nigeria was not merely the off-shoot of Western model of the discipline; in its early years, the discipline was dominated by Western researchers. The initial motivation for the expansion of psychology into Nigeria and most other African countries by Western psychologists it would seem was to provide suitable settings to carry out studies to test Western-derived theories especially about human development. Mallory Wober (1975) who provided a comprehensive review of the early research done in parts of Africa including Nigeria confirmed that psychology in Africa in the early years was dominated by Western Europe both in terms of personnel and the values underpinning the teaching of the discipline. By getting affiliated to Nigerian universities, these researchers played important roles in the teaching of psychology in the country. The model of psychology they taught was unequivocally a mirror image of the model obtainable in the Western world. Accordingly, psychology was taught strictly as a science and as such the basic equipment necessary for teaching the discipline as a science were provided. Experimental laboratories in the nation's universities had equipment as Tachitoscope, Reaction Time Apparatus, Skinner Box, Logic Box, Mirror Tracers and so on which were suitable for the sort of experiment that dominated psychology at the time. Similarly, psychological tests such as the Wechsler intelligence series, the Thematic Apperception Test, the Rorschach test, Draw-A-Person test and many other tests were routinely used to teach psychology and conduct studies in the country. It should be noted that this was the period in Nigeria's economic history that witnessed rapid expansion in educational and other infrastructure by the military regimes at the time occasioned by the prosperity that resulted from the oil boom of the 1970s. It is important to also note that during this era, the studies conducted by psychologists in Nigeria were within the framework of Western theories and not surprisingly published in journals in Western countries and as such they met the methodological and ethical standards in those countries. It is in this sense that we say that the teaching of psychology in Nigeria during this era by foreign psychologists was similar in every respect to the Western model. Having looked at the character of the earliest years of psychology in Nigeria, we shall now turn attention to the era dominated by the first generation of indigenous psychologists in the country.



The Early Dominance of Psychology in Nigeria by Indigenous Psychologists

Just as economic progress helped in the expansion of the field of psychology in Nigeria, the economic decline of the mid-1980s had some negative effects on the development of the discipline in the country. The Structural Adjustment Programme adopted by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida to cope with lowering oil prices resulted in the devaluation of the Naira against major currencies. As a consequence, Nigeria became an unattractive destination for foreigners and Western-trained Nigerian psychologists. The foreigners who were already in the country left as soon as their contracts expired.

Between 1984 and 1987, the founder and pioneer Head of the Department of General and Applied Psychology at the University of Jos, Professor S.M. H. Zaidi and four other key members of staff of the Department including; Dr. Pawel Boski, Dr. Khan, Dr. John C. Munene and Paul Creighton left the country. From the University of Lagos, Professor Mundy-castle left in 1986 just about the same time that Eileen Wilson left Ife and Leonard Bloom from Nsukka. Thus, the Nigerian psychologists who worked with the foreign psychologists immediately took over from the departing foreigners. This however did not signal a radical departure from the Western model of psychology that was introduced by the European forbearers. It only meant that the discipline was in the hands of Nigerians who were similar in outlook to the departed foreigners in terms of their orientation to the teaching of psychology. As you can probably guess, nearly all the people who belonged to this category had all or some of their training in Western countries which probably accounted for the similarity in their approach to the teaching of the discipline once the foreign psychologists left the country prompting Mallory Wober to cynically suggest that these psychologists were “brainwashed” by Westerners for according to him, “...those who have been involved in psychology in Africa have been either Europeans themselves, using their own peculiar modes of thinking... or they have been brainwashed Africans who employ European methods and thinking modalities” (Cited in Mefoh, 2014, p. 72). Brainwashed or not what we can say is that the early indigenous psychologists such as Drs Chris Onwuzurike, Amechi Nweze, Isidore S. Obot, E. U. Egwu, Frank Eyetsimitan and James Gire in Jos; A. F. Uzoka, Isidore E. Eyo, O. N. Osuji, Emeka Okpara, B. N. Ezeilo and J. O. C Ozioko in Nsukka inherited the facilities left behind by the departing foreigners and naturally had to continue with the tradition required in order to use the inherited technologies for research and teaching. Thus, some two and half decades after Wober’s (1975) assertion that psychology in Africa was in the hands of foreigners, Obot (1988) was making similar assertion that Nigerian psychology was still firmly rooted in Euro-American model of psychology both in the conceptualization and execution of research ideas. This is in spite of suggestion to “indigenize” psychology in Nigeria (See for instance, Mefoh, 2014). Mefoh (2014) argued that psychology in Nigeria should divorce itself from European model, and stressed the need for separate Nigerian journals devoted to the publication of studies done in the country as publishing the articles in the so-called international journals will “diminish the opportunity of studies by Nigerian psychologists to advance new theories that have not been covered in international psychology or an opportunity to challenge existing theories when necessary” (p.72). This artificial bifurcation of psychology into local and international brands seems to contradict the essence of our collective humanity. That culture and environment influence human behavior is no longer a new idea but to insist that in all instances we should have a separate psychology to account for such influences will be counterproductive to attempts to build universal theories of human behavior. In any case, within the same country there are sub-cultural or sub-national units that account for differences in behaviours. In Nigeria, would we for instance advocate for a separate model of psychology for each of the over 350 ethnic groups in the country? More worrisome however, none of the advocates of indigenous model of psychology has articulated the principles and features of the indigenous psychology they wish we should adopt as a



replacement for the Western model of the discipline. As can be seen in even attempts to present an African orientation to psychology (Eyo and Obi-Keguna, 2004), there is nothing in the 46-chapter edited book that offers an insight to what is termed an “African” orientation. Instead, all the chapters treated the same topics you would find in any Western books and largely cited Western literature to back their claims. Furthermore, a close examination of the local journals would indicate that those who promise some commitment to advancing African model of psychology at least from their names do not keep such promises as their content do not justify or betray allegiance to the idea of African psychology.

Whatever is the case, our intention in this section has been to attempt a description of the features of psychology dominated by indigenous Nigerian psychologists. In this regard, we can affirm that one of the major features of the psychology taught and practiced by this indigenous pioneers of the discipline in Nigeria were; dependence on Western literature for teaching and imparting knowledge about the discipline, the reliance on Western journals for publishing research results done in Nigeria, sharing the values of the Western psychologists in dealing with problems. Thus, it can be argued that the main objective of the teaching of psychology in Nigeria in the early years after the departure of the foreign legion was to continue with the tradition of producing psychologists that were similar in outlook to their Western-trained counterparts. For sure there were some attempts to develop indigenous psychological tests or at least standardize Western tests to suit the Nigerian population. See for instance, Awaritefe (1982) and Ebigbo (1981) and Ebigbo and Izuora (1981). Even then, there are no clear distinction between these locally-developed instruments and their foreign equivalents in the style, the content and the philosophy underlying these indigenous instruments.

It would seem in all likelihood that the goal of psychology during this era was to prepare Nigerian psychologists to compete with Western-trained psychologists for jobs, publication space and so on. In a word, the aim was to replicate Western training models in order to reproduce Western-oriented psychologists. The laboratories in Nigerian universities still had the Western equipment and instruments for experimentation left behind by the departing foreigners. Accordingly, Nigerian students were taught how to use those equipment to conduct experiments and report those experiments. Furthermore, academic departments maintained subscriptions to Western journals to which they contributed articles.

One notable contribution of the first generation of indigenous psychologists was the formation of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) in 1984. The association in those early years was very vibrant as the members sought to replicate the structures for regulating Nigerian psychology as is obtainable in the Western world. Regular annual conferences were organized and the proceedings of the conferences were published and widely circulated (See for instance, Okpara, 1985; Wilson, 1986). In one word, the early years of the involvement of indigenous psychologists in Nigeria can be viewed as an era of relative prosperity for Nigerian psychology characterized by commitment of psychologists to advance the discipline.

Just like their foreign counterparts, the economic decline of the 1980s instigated the exodus of some of the indigenous psychologists from Nigeria for greener pastures abroad. And it was not difficult for many of them to make the transition to Western countries as they continued to maintain contact with colleagues and their alma mater in the Western world. As a consequence, psychology in Nigeria fell into the hands of wholly home-grown psychologists whose approach to the teaching of psychology in Nigeria is the focus of the next section of this paper.



The dominance of Home-Grown Indigenous Psychologists in the teaching of psychology in Nigeria

It should be pointed out that the growth in the popularity of psychology was not restricted to Federal Government Universities alone as the decentralization of university ownership ensured that psychology was a part of the curriculum of new state-owned universities. Thus, Ondo State University in Ado-Ekiti (now, Ekiti State University) became the first state university to establish a full-fledged department of psychology in 1986. The transition to civilian democratic rule in 1999 apart from instigating competition among state governments to establish universities the decision of the Federal Government to establish universities in all the 36 states of the federation led to the mushrooming of universities across the country. There is no state in Nigeria today that does not have a university of its own. All of this is in addition to the growing legion of privately-owned universities in the country resulting in a corresponding increase in the number of universities both private and public offering psychology in Nigeria. As Eyo (2004) put it "It is no exaggeration to say that psychology has spread faster in Nigeria than any other African country, north or south" (p.19). As at last count, the following state universities have established departments of psychology; Ekiti, Imo, Enugu, Benue, Ebonyi, Anambra, Ondo, Delta, and Nasarawa, whereas, five privately-owned universities in Madonna, Renaissance, Godfrey Okoye, Redeemer and Covenant Universities have started psychology programmes. The Nigeria Defence Academy, Kaduna and the Police Academy in Wudil, Kano have full department of psychology just as the new Federal Universities in Yobe, Taraba and Ebonyi states. There are probably no less than thirty departments of psychology in the nation's universities.

It should be pointed out that no department of psychology in Nigeria was spared from the exodus of indigenous psychologists that occurred as a consequence of the economic decline of the 1980s we discussed in the previous section of this paper. For instance, Drs Chris Onwuzurike, Frank Eyetsimitan and James Gire left Jos for North America. Similar exodus occurred in the other departments across the country. For instance, Dr. Emma Enekeuchi left Nsukka for the United States. By the end of 1990, nearly all the departments of psychology in Nigerian universities were firmly in the hands of its own people just as Mallory Wober (1975) predicted when he stated that "...psychology in Africa will be increasingly in the hands of new people, its own people, with their own outlooks, needs, and directions of inquiry" (p.x). However, the reality of psychology as taught and practiced in Nigeria on a closer examination would indicate that the discipline has not in any way departed from the Western model in terms of the curriculum inherited from the founding fathers of the discipline in Nigeria. In other words, whereas psychology and the teaching of the discipline are in the hands of indigenous psychologists in a visible sense, there is no indication that an indigenous approach to the teaching and practice of the discipline has occurred. Strangely however, the teaching of the discipline appears to be undergoing tremendous transformation in the sense that there is a gradual decline in the level of adherence to the universal values underpinning the teaching of psychology as a science in the country.

The new crop of indigenous psychologists in Nigeria is people who were trained locally in Nigeria by the first generation of indigenous psychologists we described in the preceding section of this paper. They are the ones controlling Nigerian psychology today both in terms of the management of the national regulatory structure put in place by the older generation of Nigerian psychologists as well as in the regulation of the standard of training in psychology. The present executive council of the NPA led by Professor Andrew E. Zamani is made up of entirely home-grown psychologists. Since the early 1990s, nearly all the academic departments of psychology in Nigeria have had a home-grown psychologist as head of department. As Mefoh (2014) indicated, the Department of General and Applied Psychology at the University of Jos has witnessed the rotation of



departmental headship between locally educated psychologists such as Drs Zubairu K. Dagona, Grey G. Ejikeme, Paul S. Wai and Haruna Karick. In the case of Nsukka, the locally educated psychologists who have headed the department include; Professors Edwin Onyeneje, Mike Ifeagwazi, Leonard Ugwu and Chris Uzundu.

The main feature of the psychology in the hands of the new group of indigenous psychologists is the proliferation of local publishing outlets. These outlets include textbooks and journals. There are about as many textbooks introducing psychology in Nigeria today as there are departments of psychology in the country. Similarly, the number of journals published in Nigeria has increased dramatically in the last few years but as Mefoh (2014) noted, many of these journals wither away almost as soon as they commence publication. It is significant therefore to note that the official publications of the NPA and academic departments of psychology have not enjoyed the sort of patronage enjoyed by the journals owned by individual psychologists and other social scientists in the country. In terms of quality control, there are very minimal interactions among colleagues from across the different parts of the country as was the case in the early years of the discipline in Nigeria. Nowadays, conferences of the NPA tend to be regionalized as attendances in the conferences are mostly people within close proximity of the hosting institutions and officials of the NPA. Furthermore, the regulation of examination using external examiners has become largely regionalized as institutions go for external examiners next door. As a consequence, psychologists in one region of the country have little or no idea of what colleagues do in other regions. In such a situation, it is difficult to make a nationwide assessment of the standard of psychology in the country. Apart from these features of psychology in present day Nigeria, we shall attempt a fuller discussion of some factors shaping the development of psychology in the country in next section of the paper and specifically point to how the teaching of psychology has been shaped by these forces.

Factors shaping the development of psychology in Nigeria

There is no doubt that the teaching of psychology in Nigeria in recent years has significantly departed from the tradition handed over to the indigenous psychologists by the founding fathers of the discipline in the country. In particular, our allegiance to Western values and methods of teaching psychology is being gradually eroded. We have attempted in this section of the paper a discussion of the factors that account for this apparent shift in allegiance to the Western methods of teaching psychology in Nigeria. Later in this section of the paper, we shall undertake an overall assessment of the impact of these forces on the teaching of psychology in the country.

Lack of a law backing the Nigerian Psychological Association

The NPA is the highest body of psychologists in Nigeria established in 1984 following the merger of two parallel organizations; the Nigerian Association of psychologist and the Nigerian psychological society. The only official recognition the association enjoys at the moment is its registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The association is not backed by law and operates just like a non-governmental organization. As a result it has been unable to put in place effective legally-sanctioned mechanisms to regulate the teaching and practice of psychology in the country. The current EXCO of the NPA led by Professor Andrew Zamani has been trying to mobilize effort towards the enactment of a law to regulate the teaching and practice of psychology in the country but has received minimal support from the members of the association. The regionalization of psychology we alluded to in the previous section has negatively affected the financial standing of the NPA. The Association has not been able to collect annual dues from members thereby hampering its effort to effectively pursue and follow up on the on-going attempt to get the National Assembly enact a Law to regulate psychology in the country.



Weak institutional support for psychology in the country

In many of the departments teaching psychology in the country, there is very little appreciation of the discipline as a unique field within the social sciences. Psychology is treated in just the same way the other social science disciplines are when it comes to funding of the programme. University authorities do not recognize the fact that psychology is basically an experimental science that needs some special equipments for teaching and research. Accordingly, most departments in the country do not have laboratories and even those that have one, lack the required facilities. The equipments used for psychological experiments in the early years of the discipline in the country have become obsolete and these have not been replaced by modern ones. That leaves us teaching the experimental method to students just like history classes as there are rarely any practical demonstrations on how to manipulate, control and measure variables. It is not surprising then that most graduating students in many departments in the country undertake non-experimental studies for their final year projects in spite of the fact that the experimental method receives the most attention in their training on research methodology.

Cash and publish syndrome

The non-utilization of recognized publishing outlets and the proliferation of unofficial or individually-owned journals we discussed above has contributed to lowering of the standard of publications in Nigeria. It is absurd that an individual would establish a journal publishing outfits just like any other business venture. These proprietors of journals which have become a thriving business in the country act like the all too familiar General Overseers of Churches. They are the editors, editor-in-chief, reviewing editors, publishers and proofreaders of the journals. What manner of knowledge do we expect from these outlets? It needs to be pointed out that scientific knowledge is a product of consensus among scholars in a given discipline concerning the validity of the information provided by any single researcher or group of researchers as the basis for explaining a phenomenon of interest. This consensus is facilitated by a system of checks and balances regarding the publication of new research findings in such a manner that the new evidence is closely scrutinized by other scholars. It is when those responsible for the evaluation of the study affirm that the research has complied with acceptable standards within the discipline that the research is published. There is no way that one single scientist acting as a General Overseer of a journal can complete this complex but vital process all on his/her own and the research is accepted by the members of the relevant scientific discipline. In spite of the ethical issues involved in this unwholesome practice, these “publishers” nevertheless enjoy heavy patronage. Occasionally you hear the remarks of colleagues appreciating the “good deeds” of such persons: “He is trying ooh” by “helping” colleagues get the required number of papers for promotion within the university system that operates on the popular slogan of “publish or perish”. These “publishers” seem to operate on a “cash and publish” philosophy. The sole criterion for accepting papers for publication in these journals is the payment of the required fees. So long as there is money to pay for publication and processing fees, you are guaranteed that your article will be published regardless of its quality. Indeed quality is not a part of the criteria for accepting papers since there is no form of peer review. A look at some of these papers would reveal that the authors sometimes undertake poorly designed studies and in some other cases they use data with questionable reliability and validity. For some, the data collected is subjected to unsuitable statistical analysis that would jeopardize the conclusions of the study. Yet, this is the type of information that we hope to form the basis of any theory about human behaviors in Nigeria.



Infiltration of the discipline by charlatans and quacks

One of the most worrisome aspects of the weak mechanism for regulating the teaching and practice of psychology in Nigeria is the infiltration of the discipline by quacks who engage in hacking and/or poaching of training programmes. Many of these people had training in courses that probably had some psychology content. They then use the limited knowledge of psychology to claim authority in the field and get affiliation to sometimes recognized training institutions. As a result of the lack of depth in their knowledge of psychology, they engage in unwholesome practices in the training of future psychologists. Often they act as factories for the mass production of PhDs and Masters Degrees as they have devised strategies that appeals to a large number of aspiring psychologists. They are generous to people who want certificates in psychology. Through collaboration with like minds, they arrange for the award of PhDs and Masters Degrees at record time at the expense of quality training. Only recently, one university was said to have had a “mass defense” of PhD for eight candidates in a single day with each candidate taking on the average three minutes to defend their thesis. Unfortunately, many of the people who receive this type of training find their ways into other institutions and will most probably perpetuate such practice in the new place of affiliation. Any attempt to condemn such practice will be met by resentment from the beneficiaries of this practice. Very often you hear such remarks as “professor xyz is trying” or that “...Professor xzy is helping ooh”. The overriding concern of some aspiring psychologists in Nigeria today it would seem is to acquire paper qualifications. Your guess as to how this may have hampered the development of psychology in the country is as good as mine.

Sorting

Sorting is a variant of examination malpractice that is becoming well known in Nigerian institutions of learning. It is a practice which involves the exchange of course grades by lecturers for a negotiated monetary fee from resource-bearing students. This is a new development in examination malpractice that was unknown a few years ago. In most cases, the students do not even take examinations in those courses. This practice must rank as one of the most depressing aspects of the rot that we have seen in the teaching of psychology in Nigeria today. As people conversant with testing, you wonder why any psychologists would be involved in such practice. Examinations are a test of some sort and like other assessment instruments should produce valid and reliable outcomes. After all, the scores awarded to students are statements about their level of competence acquired from taking a course. If such statements are untrue, we would have misled the people that would depend on such scores to make decisions about the candidates. For instance, if a student is awarded a first class degree whereas his/her actual class of degree should be a second class lower division, such a graduate may be offered teaching appointment in a university. Ultimately, this practice would have negative repercussions on the teaching and practice of any discipline.

The Proliferation of Universities in Nigeria

In the wake of the decentralization of ownership of universities in Nigeria, there has been a rapid growth in the number of universities in the country including Federal government-owned, state- and privately-owned ones. Many of these universities are unable to attract sufficient number of staff with higher degrees in different areas of specialization. Some of the universities operate relatively closed door policy in terms of employment of staff to ensure rapid production of man power for the catchment states or local government areas even if those admitted or employed are less capable than their counterparts from other parts of the country. The practice in some of these universities is to attract one professor to pioneer the establishment of a department and nurture it. Rather than overseeing the recruitment of qualified lecturers, many of these professors



transform themselves to what might best be described as “Emperor Professors” to be assisted or shall we say worshipped by a few lower ranked lecturers recruited from the pool of largely unqualified unemployable graduates. These new entrants into the teaching profession will be the ones to run the programmes of the department as they seek to demonstrate their loyalty to the sole Professor and life-Head of Department who is content with enjoying the monopoly of the use of the title “Prof”. These “Professors” would invite their trusted friends in the more established departments to attest to the quality of their training as visiting lecturers and as external examiners. In this way, the quality of their training may be compromised. But many graduates of these universities find their ways into other institutions what with the high demand for psychologists following the opening up of new departments across the country and the shortage of qualified people to fill the gap. These are some but by no means the only factors shaping the direction of psychology as a discipline in the country. We shall conclude this paper by pointing to the consequences of these factors for the current status of the teaching and practice of psychology in Nigeria in the remaining section of the paper.

Evaluation of the Status of the Teaching and Practice of Psychology in Nigeria

The major concern of this section is to attempt to answer the question as to whether the teaching of psychology in Nigeria today still meets the criteria to be classified as a science or folktales. From the foregoing observations, the answer to the question in our view is pretty obvious. Since the effective control of the teaching of psychology in Nigeria fell into the hands of the home-grown indigenous psychologists, no indigenous model of the teaching of the discipline has evolved in the sense of the unique model of the discipline for Africa that Wober (1975) anticipated and which has occasionally been echoed by indigenous Nigerian psychologists such as Mefoh (2014). This is in spite of the fact that there are today around thirty departments across the nation’s universities. The indication really is that there is a gradual decline in the level of adherence to universal values underpinning the teaching of psychology as a science in the country. Yet, the curriculum of psychology programmes across the nation’s universities remains decidedly Western-oriented. What appears to have changed is our commitment to the philosophies, values and methodologies of Western model of psychology. It appears to us that we are getting less and less committed to the methods of teaching psychology that we inherited from our Western forbearers but not in the sense advocated by those calling for an indigenous approach to the discipline (See, Mefoh, 2014). Neither is the change in commitment to methods of teaching of psychology an indication that the subject matter of the discipline has changed in form or content. Human behavior has not become less complex today than they were some hundred, fifty or twenty years ago. There is therefore no justification in abandoning the universal methods for understanding human behaviours such as the experimental method. Rather, it was expected that in the absence of an indigenous approach to the teaching of the discipline, Nigerian psychology would keep faith with the only methods they know and try to evolve in line with changing global realities. Instead, the teaching of psychology and as a consequence and the practice of the discipline is drifting in the direction of irrelevance mostly as result of the weak institutional support for the discipline by university authorities and the absence of a law backing the NPA as the regulatory body of psychology in the country.

The absence of a legally-sanctioned mechanism for regulating the discipline in the country at the moment implies that the NPA is incapable of dealing with the myriad of problems of teaching psychology as a science in Nigeria as well as the unwholesome practices within the profession. In this regard, we would argue that the teaching of psychology in many training institutions across Nigeria these days do not meet the standards required for transmitting scientific knowledge as was the case during the era of the founding fathers of the discipline in the country and the first generation of indigenous psychologists. We may best describe the features of the teaching of psychology in many Nigerian institutions today as fitting into a model of what we have termed “folktale psychology” as against scientific psychology. By folktale psychology, we mean a system



of training in which students are merely told stories about what psychologists can do or what they are doing in other parts of the world. In this model, students are not being prepared to contribute to knowledge or to use the knowledge of psychology to solve behavioural problems. It is essentially an awareness creating programme to enable trainees acquire the “knowledge” of what psychology is about and what psychologists do but not in the sense of making them become psychologists.

There is however, a clear indication that more and more Nigerians and Nigerian institutions are beginning to look to psychology to provide solutions to the problems faced by individuals and the society (Obot, 1993). The suggestion from Obot’s survey of the Nigerian public’s perception of psychology and psychologists is that there is a rapidly growing demand for psychologists in nearly every aspects of our national life. From the health sector to education, social sector, and industrial organizational sector and to many other sectors, there are indications that the prescriptions of the more established fields of the social sciences in Nigeria have not provided the relief Nigerians seek for the numerous challenges associated with our transition from tradition to modernity. Psychology and psychologists are therefore seen as holding the key to the successful transformation of the Nigerian economy that will result in improved prosperity for all the citizens. Aside from the appreciation of the public about the potentials of psychology in national development, the consensus amongst Nigerian scholars and practitioners appears to be that their discipline is relevant to all areas of national affairs (Eyo, 1995; Obot, 1988; 1993; Ojiji, 1989; 2007; Ojiji, 2011; Ojiji and Alaedu, 1995). However, experiences of a few psychologists who have worked in applied settings indicate that the discipline has so far played peripheral roles in national development (see, Ebigbo, 1985; Ojiji, 2011). The goals of psychology it should be restated are to provide evidenced-based explanations of human behavior and to use the knowledge acquired to solve problems of individuals and the society. It is in this regard that we have made some suggestions in the next section of the paper on how to move psychology in Nigeria forward.

Recommendations

In order that the discipline becomes relevant to growing national demands for psychologically-oriented solutions to problems and contribute to the development of globally acceptable explanations of human behavior, Nigerian psychologists need to actively support the on-going effort of the Nigerian Psychological Association to urgently put in place legal-sanctioned mechanisms for regulating the teaching and practice of psychology in the country. The discussion of the forces shaping the development of psychology in Nigeria is an ample justification of the need for such regulatory mechanism. The present EXCO of the NPA is making frantic effort to mobilize support for an Act of the National Assembly to put in place institutional mechanisms for regulating psychology in the country. We all need to contribute to the realization of this goal so that we can effectively control the training and practice of psychology in the country.

Furthermore, Nigerian psychologists in their individual capacities should educate relevant authorities and the general population about the activities of quacks and charlatans in their midst. These people are well known to us and we know what they are doing in the name of our discipline. In the end, we are the ones that need to protect the identity of our discipline and we cannot keep quiet when the unwholesome practices are being perpetrated by non-professionals who claim expertise in our noble profession.



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