



Emergence of Scientific Psychology in the Nigerian University System and Reflection on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Philip Chukwuemeka Mefoh

Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Enugu State, Nigeria.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Anniversary
Black psychology
Education
Expatriate influence
Folk psychology
Pioneers of psychology

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the sixtieth anniversary of founding the Department of Psychology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Department is the *numero uno* academic Department of Psychology in Nigeria and its historicity is usually told together with how scientific psychology emerged in the Nigerian university system. The two accounts are inseparable and are interlinked in a complex way. Sixty years of the emergence of psychology in the Nigerian university system and of the existence of Department of Psychology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka were historic occasions. This reflection, however, is only on the latter. While the Department of Psychology at the University is believed to have contributed, and in fact, is still contributing to research and development, the Department is faced with many challenges that tend to retard its growth rate. Until the challenges of space, and perhaps funding, are resolved, the Department of Psychology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka would be operating at a level less than its optimum.

Psychology is not taught at the primary and secondary school levels like many other subjects, and so there was unfamiliarity of the concept of psychology at the time it emerged in the Nigerian university system in 1964. Compared to other social science disciplines in the Nigerian university system, psychology is a relatively younger discipline. For instance, Geography was founded in the Nigerian university system in 1948, Economics in 1948, Political Science and Sociology in 1960. The youthful nature of psychology in Nigeria is however pertinent only for scientific psychology. It bears no significance for informal (or pre-scientific) psychology; as long as Nigerians have inhabited Nigeria, everyone is a (folk) psychologist that carries around some intuitive theories about people and their behaviours. But the curious thing about everyone's quest to understand human behavior is that many people think they know all about human behaviour without even taking the trouble to study it. But unguided intuition is not always reliable. Attempt at describing, predicting, or explaining human behavior without in-depth knowledge of psychology may lead to fatal consequences. Though there are a few simple answers, understanding human behaviour is a very complex and demanding task. Psychologists always approach the study of human behavior from the viewpoint of science because science is a repeatable, self-correcting undertaking that seeks to understand phenomena based on empirical observation.

Emergence of Academic Psychology in the Nigerian University System

Although the history of psychology as an academic discipline dates to 1879, with the founding of Wilhelm Wundt's laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany, psychology as an empirically based academic discipline started in Nigeria, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1964. The Department of Psychology is the first of its kind in any Nigerian university. In the 1960s, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka had international cooperation with the Michigan State University (MSU) in the United States. It was therefore not surprising that the Department of Psychology in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was founded by an expatriate American from MSU, who was on an overseas assignment in the University. The Department of Psychology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was the *numero uno* and the only Department of Psychology in the Nigerian university system between 1964 and 1968. Then in 1969, a new Department of Psychology in Nigeria was established at the University of Lagos. It was the second in the series of Departments of Psychology in the Nigerian university system. After the Department at Lagos was established, it took another long time, between 1969 and 1976, for the next (third) Department of Psychology to emerge at the University of Jos, in 1976.

Perhaps, in apparent awe of the seemingly equitable localization of those first three Departments of Psychology to each

of the three major geo-political regions of Nigeria (then), Egwu (2012), in a keynote address to the Annual Convention of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA), described the localization as *triangular equilibrium*. The Department of Psychology at the University of Ibadan was established shortly after the Department of Psychology in its former campus (i.e., University of Jos) was founded. Indeed, the University of Jos used to be a satellite campus of the University of Ibadan, but it acquired the status of a full-fledged university in 1975, following a military interregnum. The Department of Psychology at the University of Ibadan started admitting students in 1977 after it emerged from the Department of Guidance and Counseling in the Faculty of Education of the University. The Department of Psychology at the University of Ife started next after Ibadan also in 1977. These five Departments of psychology at Nsukka, Lagos, Jos, Ibadan and Ife were the Departments of Psychology in the Nigerian university system until the dawn of 1980 when many other Departments of Psychology started to emerge. Currently, there are fifty-eight universities, approved by the National Universities Commission (NUC), which have established degree-awarding Departments of Psychology (Ezenwa et al. in press).

Pioneers in the Development of Psychology in Nigeria

Two sources of influence affected the development and perhaps teaching of psychology in Nigeria. The first was the expatriate influence. In the 1960s, Nigerian psychology was dominated by expatriate influence both in terms of personnel and philosophy. The Department of Psychology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was founded in 1964, by an American clinical psychologist, Professor Fredrick Carl Frost. Professor Frost was serving the university as Deputy Vice Chancellor at the time he established the Department of Psychology. He was also Head, Department of Psychology between 1964 and 1966. When Frost left Nigeria on account of an impending civil war, another clinical psychologist, Professor Edith Lord, volunteered to come down from Michigan State University (MSU) to fill the gap in manpower needs of the Department. Other expatriate lecturers that taught psychology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka were the British social psychologist, Dr. Leonard Bloom and an Indian psychologist, Dr. Leena Kar. Dr. Bloom was Head, Department of Psychology between 1972 and 1974.

Psychology began at the University of Lagos in 1969. Professor Alastir Charles Mundy-Castle was the brain behind the establishment of the Department of Psychology at the University of Lagos. Earlier in 1966, there was a contraption, called the Psychology Unit, in the University. The Unit was, however, not established for any academic purpose; it had no student and was established to prosecute the Nigeria civil war (Mefoh, 2014a). Professor A.C. Mundy-Castle was a developmental psychologist and the pioneer Head, Department of Psychology at the University of Lagos. He was Head of Department between 1969 and 1982. One former student of Professor Mundy-Castle, in appreciation of his

efforts at founding the Department of Psychology, wrote:

“in terms of the pioneer zeal, commitment and tenacity of purpose with which Professor Mundy-Castle founded and nurtured the Department of Psychology at the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria” (Oguntashe, 2010, p.2).

The Department of General and Applied Psychology at the University of Jos began admitting students into the new Department in 1976. The man who often gets the credit of starting the Department of Psychology at the University of Jos was a Pakistani national with British background, Professor Sayyid Mohammed Hafeez Zaidi. Professor S.M.H. Zaidi was the pioneer Head, Department of Psychology at the University of Jos, between 1976 and 1985. There was zero expatriate contribution towards founding the Departments of Psychology at the University of Ibadan and University of Ife. However, expatriates like Barbra Lloyd and Beatrice Ashen helped the Department of Psychology at the University of Ibadan during its infancy stage. Also, Dr Eileen Wilson, an American psychologist, joined the Department of Psychology at the University of Ife in the early 1980s to help strengthen the new Department.

The second major influence on the development of psychology in Nigeria was the role of education. The beginning of psychology in Nigeria must necessarily acknowledge the efforts in the various departments of education where psychology was taught in a variety of subject combinations (Uzoka, 1989). The Department of Education at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was instrumental to the founding of the first full-fledged Department of Psychology in the University. The only other lecturer who joined Professor Frost to begin the Department of Psychology in the University was Mr. John Anowi. Mr. Anowi was formerly a lecturer in the Department of Education. He obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in educational psychology in 1955 and 1958, respectively, from the University of Edinburg. He became the Head of Department after Professor Frost left the country; his headship was between 1966 and 1972. Mr. Anowi had substantive autonomy to develop the new Department. He knew based on the problems the south-eastern people encountered following the political upheavals in the country that post-conflict psychology would expand dramatically in the fields of social and clinical psychology. He then beefed up these sub-areas of psychology while serving as Head of Department. Mr. Anowi was a diligent teacher. One of his students, who was in the Class of 1964, wrote this about him:

“There was John Anowi, an excellent teacher whose teaching was so down to earth and so practical. He was a teacher par excellence. I believed I coped rather well in my postgraduate studies in the United States because of his lucid teaching” (Uzoka, 2011, p. 83).

Mr. Micheal Ogbolu Okonji helped Professor Mundy-

Castle develop the Department of Psychology at the University of Lagos. Mr. Okonji, like Mr. John Anowi, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka worked hard with Professor Mundy-Castle to guide the Department of Psychology at the University of Lagos to maturity. The likes of Dr. Josiah Shindi and Dr. Amechi Nweze minded the Department of General and Applied Psychology at the University of Jos after Professor Zaidi left the country.

After the end of the civil war in 1970, many Nigerians who studied psychology in Europe and America began to return to the country. Many of them were recruited into the university system, but some were forced to start their careers in the Faculties of Education or Medicine. At that time, there were only two Departments of Psychology in the Nigerian university system (Nsukka and Lagos). Dr Denis Ugwuegbu was one of the psychologists who began his career outside the Department of Psychology. Dr. Ugwuegbu had M.A (1968) and Ph.D (1973) in Social, Personality, and Organizational Psychology from Kent State University, United States. He was appointed to lecture in the Department of Guidance and Counseling of the Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan in 1973. Of course, there was no Department of Psychology at the University of Ibadan then. But three years later, in 1976/1977, Dr Ugwuegbu founded the Department of Psychology at the University of Ibadan and became the pioneer Head of Department. He was Head of Department between 1977 and 1982, in the first instance, and again between 1983 and 1997.

Concise History of the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

The Department of Psychology at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is the first full-fledged Department of Psychology in the Nigerian university system. It was founded in the Department of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The curriculum in the Department of Education at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the 1960s, was somewhat encompassing that some courses with psychological content were taught in the Department. Perhaps, it was this practice that informed Okpara's (1985) remark: "and whenever there was a department of education, it was assumed that psychology has been taken care of" (p.212). Professor Frost did not fall for that; he understood the importance of professionalism and demanded that the curriculum in the Department of Education be divided into two divisions: Education and Psychology. He took substantive control of the psychology division. Professor Carl Frost and Mr. John Anowi developed the psychology curriculum. The psychology curriculum in the University at that early foundation stage was grounded in experimental and physiological psychology. Professor Frost became the pioneer Head of Department of Psychology in 1964, and Mr. John Anowi was the only other lecturer. The two lecturers supervised the movement of the new Department of Psychology from Harden Building (Faculty of Education) to the Russwurm Building. The Department is still at the Russwurm Building up till this day in 2024.

Classes started in the Department on Monday 21st September 1964, with an enrolment of 16 students and two members of academic staff (Olomolaiye, 1985). One of the pioneer students in the Class of 1964 was asked during an interview to reminisce about his class, and this is what he said:

"We had a wonderful experience. It was a fantastic group of brilliant and warm human beings that I had the privilege of studying with. Two of the brightest were Regina Nnacheta, a pretty and vivacious young girl (now Professor Eya) and Henry Amatu. University life then was quite pristine and enjoyable. There were fewer students and therefore we could access our teachers more frequently. I am eternally grateful for the wonderful experience that the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, gave us, academically and socially" (Mefoh, 2014a, pp. 123-124).

If not for the resilience of those 16 pioneer students in the Class of 1964, perhaps, all graduates of psychology from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and probably from other Nigerian Universities that offer psychology, may have ended up with a Bachelor of Arts (B. A) degree and not a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) degree. During the 1960s, being a science student was trendy and students believed that the BSc degree was superior to the B.A degree. The 16 pioneer students wanted to be awarded the BSc degree, not the B.A degree; and because the two lecturers in the Department then, Professor Frost and Mr. Anowi, had each obtained the B.A degree in psychology, the students feared that the University administration would tow the same tradition to award to them the BA degrees at their graduation. This made them to protest to the University administration. They argued that psychology is science, and that most of the courses they offer in the Department involve a lot of experimental works and demonstrations. The University administration responded that declaring one's discipline a science does not by itself bring about such standing. However, it acceded to their request and directed the Department to register for some courses in the Faculty of Biological Sciences, such as BIO 151 (General Biology), notwithstanding that the students were already taking some science-based General Studies (GS) courses.

Reflection on the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka at sixty

This section of the paper is a reflection on the sixty-year-old Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, henceforth referred to as "the Department." This reflection focuses on the following: (i) development and capacity building for younger departments of psychology, (ii) growth in student enrolment, (iii) quality of academic staff in the Department, and (iv) contributions to the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA).

1. *Development and capacity building for younger Departments of Psychology*

As the oldest department of psychology in Nigeria, the department was instrumental to the emergence of some younger departments of psychology in the south-east and south-south regions. Some staff of the department were founding fathers for some younger departments of psychology in Nigeria. These staff practically established the departments of psychology in some universities from the scratch and saw their growth to promising levels. The departments of psychology at the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and the Renaissance University, Ugbakwa, Enugu were beneficiaries of this kind of intervention in 1999 and 2010, respectively. Again, some fledging universities (at the time) harvested some newly retired staff from the Department to help them strengthen their newly established departments of psychology. The Departments of Psychology at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and the Imo State University, Owerri, where Professors Azubuike Uzoka and Oluigbo Osuji, spent the later part of their work life were beneficiaries of this other intervention. Also, staffs of the Department were at different times employed as adjunct staff in nearby universities, such as Benue State University, Makurdi; Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu; and Imo state University, Owerri, to help the universities grow their new departments of psychology. The Department has also graduated students (i.e., trained psychologists) who now serve as academic staff in many new departments of psychology across the country.

In no small measure too, the Department has contributed, and is still contributing to building capacity for academic staff in several departments of psychology across Nigeria. Through knowledge impartation and training, the Department has significantly contributed to building capacity for fledging departments of psychology. Oftentimes, staffs of younger departments of psychology receive sponsorship from their universities, through the Staff Development Programme (SDP), to study and acquire higher degrees in their chosen area of specialization from the Department. Within the last ten years, an estimated 35 academic staff of other departments of psychology from nearby universities had been trained in the Department.

2. *Growth in Student Enrolment*

The Department has come a long way since 1964. Although the Department initially admitted students for the four-year standard degree programme (copied from the US) and the three-year degree programme (copied from the British educational system), the curriculum structure and the programme at the Department now is largely American in orientation. Students begin their first year in the Department with 18 to 19 credit hours and are required to take up to 40 credits hours in each of the remaining three years. The enrolment of students in the Department was unimpressive at the beginning. The small number of students in the Department was at the time attributed to the public perception that psychology was irrelevant. This perception is gradually changing,

as some recent findings (e.g., Abikoye et al. 2023; Ezenwa et al., in Press; Mefoh, 2019) show that a noticeable proportion of the Nigerian population now appreciate the place of psychologists in the manpower needs of the country. Consequently, there has been growth in student enrolment in the Department; from a modest enrolment of sixteen students in 1964, to 128 students in 1988/89 academic session, to the current 546 students in 2022/23 academic session. There is now phenomenal interest of students in the Department. Even students of other academic departments now take psychology as a service course, especially the Introduction to Psychology (PSY 101). Psychology is now offered by students of many faculties, including students in the Faculties of Law, Medicine, Environmental Studies, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Agriculture, Business Administration, and other social sciences. These disciplines now recognize the relevance of psychology to the practice of their different professions. Many lecturers in psychology now hold parallel positions in many faculties/institutes in the University. Similarly, many students who were asked to withdraw from Medicine and surgery, Veterinary medicine, Pharmacy and Engineering, frequently preferred to switch to psychology; about 16 of such students are currently at various levels of study in the Department in the 2023/2024 academic session.

3. *Quality of Academic Staff in the Department*

Wilson Oluigbo, who delivered the keynote address during the 1986 Annual Convention of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) wrote the Foreword of the book, "*Handbook of Psychology in Nigeria: African Orientation*." The book was authored by the academic staff members of the Department in the 1980s. Part of the foreword reads thus:

"Consider the background of the authors. One of the authors is, as it was, completely homegrown. Eight others have UNN degree in addition to qualifications obtained in USA, England, Canada, and Zambia. Of those who qualified entirely abroad, three did so in USA, two in England, one in Scotland, and the remaining one combined both English and Irish experiences. Surely, this galaxy of authors is embodiment of international scholarship" (Oluigbo, 2004, p. v).

Oluigbo was right, the Department made an early bid to scholarship. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, had a practice to retain its best students who graduated First Class or in the higher bands of Upper Second in the University. Most of the staffs now in the Department were recruited through this process. But unlike their teachers, the present crop of academic staff in the Department is completely homegrown, except for two, who had a mixture of University of Nigeria, Nsukka and a US degree. But despite the homegrown status of the staffs or of what Erinoshio (2004) called in-breeding (i.e., a situation where lecturers have little or no exposure to the international scholarship, and generally become, local champions), the academic staff of the Department have won different competitive Fellowships in the USA, Germany, Canada,

South Africa, China, and Russia, just to mention but a few. Also, many staffs in the Department have established functional networks and collaborations with leading researchers in psychological science across the world. If what distinguishes a good department from an indifferent one is the quantity and quality of research carried on within it, then the Department has kept the flame of academic excellence burning. The Department is in the forefront of psychological research in Nigeria. Staffs in the Department have published journal articles in some of psychology's best journals across the world, often involving journals with double figure impact factor. The AD Scientific Index (2024) mentioned that the most cited psychology researcher in Nigeria is a member of staff in the Department, and that the Department contributes significantly to the visibility of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

4. Contributions of the Department to the Nigerian Psychological Association

The scientific association that provides a rallying point for all psychologists in the country is the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA). The NPA was formed and inaugurated on the 4th of April, 1984, at the University of Benin, Nigeria. The founding and inauguration of the NPA arose from the merger of two parallel psychology associations, namely: the Nigerian Psychological Society (NPS) and the Nigerian Association of Psychologists (NAP). The Department was a major stakeholder in the psychology project in Nigeria; its staffs who were majorly members of the Nigerian Association of Psychologists (NAP), actively participated in the peace talks that eventually led to the formation of a single association for Nigerian psychology. A member of staff in the Department between 1972 and 1998, Professor Oluigbo Osuji, was the President of NAP when the peace talks about forming a single psychology association started. He naturally led other staffs in the Department to many long and useful discussions that culminated to the birth of NPA in 1984. Professor Osuji was the first Nigerian psychologist to earn a PhD degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology; he earned the PhD degree from the University of Manchester, United Kingdom, in 1969,

When NPA was formed, it was Dr. B.A. Babalola of the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, who has background training in psychology that was elected as the first President of the new association. Dr. A.F. Uzoka, from the Department, and who was a pioneer graduate of the Department was elected vice president (Nweze, 2007). The tenure of the National Executive Council (NEC) of the NPA was two years (NPA, 1984 p.6); so, the Babalola led Executive completed its tenure in 1986. That year, Dr. Oluigbo Osuji, from the Department mounted the saddle as the second President of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA). This was in line with the agreement reached at the University of Benin peace talk in 1984. At the peace talk, it was resolved that NPS will take the first shot at the presidency of NPA, and the NAP will produce the vice president. After the tenure of the first executive, the arrangement would reverse; the NAP would produce the next president, while NPS would produce the vice president. Thereafter,

any qualified psychologists can aspire to be president of the association irrespective of whether the individual's earlier allegiance was with the NPS or with the NAP.

Indeed, the Department has always taken active part in the administration of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA). The NPA has had eleven presidents since the inception of the professional association in 1984. The Department has produced three national presidents, two vice presidents, three general secretaries and several other members of the National Executive Council of the NPA since 1984.

Modest Proposal for a Robust Department

The reflection above may have portrayed the Department as a center of excellence. But impressive signboards do not make centers of excellence! The Department has several challenges. In this last section of the paper, the author makes some modest proposals to help the Department reposition itself for better service delivery. The proposals are outlined hereunder.

1). Need for more space (or Psychology Building)

This year, 2024, marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Department. With the age and reputation of the Department, it deserves more space than it currently occupies at the John Brown Russwurm Building (usually called the Russwurm Building). The Russwurm Building offered psychology only two small classrooms, which only cater for two levels of students. The other two levels, for a department of psychology usually have four levels (year 1 - 4), would then have to appeal to other departments in the faculty to use their classrooms. Other facilities in the Russwurm Building, such as the psychological laboratory, the students' library, and the Psychological Services Centre have all been reduced to makeshift facilities of some sort due to the strain on space. Sometimes, these facilities serve their original purposes, but at other times, they are used as examination office, staff offices or staff common room. The Department also runs postgraduate programmes leading to the following qualifications: Postgraduate Diploma (PGD), Master of Science (M.Sc) and Ph.D honours degree; it is therefore challenging for the Department to provide quality education under the present arrangement. More importantly, staffs of the Department do not have offices in the Russwurm Building; out of the 46-academic staff in the Department, only three have offices in the building. Many staffs do not even have offices at all, but the few that have, had their offices dispersed around the faculty or the University campus. This fragmentation has greatly reduced the sense of collegiality and identity within the Department.

This lack of sufficient research and office space need to be addressed for the Department to re-position itself to truly restore the dignity of man. More space or a complete psychology building is needed to unbundle psychology into semi-autonomous areas like the Mass Communication Department in the University, which is now a full-blown faculty. The areas of psychology can then tailor their programmes individually to enhance their specialties, acquire training fund and admit more students. This is the way most contemporary departments of psychology are going and the

Department cannot afford to be left behind.

2). *Need to take Psychology out of the classroom*

Many years ago, Akin-Ogundeji (1991) argued that psychology in Nigeria is largely a classroom research enterprise “with little relevance to the problems of living in contemporary Nigerian society (p. 3). This assertion is still valid today. This author once conducted a random survey on graduate students of psychology about their career wish. The finding revealed that most graduate students desire to be absorbed in the Department or any other department of psychology across Nigeria. Why do students prefer to be in the classroom, rather than to use psychology to address societal problems in the civil service, in private or public industrial organizations, in banks, in security agencies, immigration, drug law enforcement, just to mention a few? The question that can be asked is, what type of knowledge does psychology lecturers impart on their students? Of course, it cannot be denied that lecturers in the Department know a lot about psychological science, especially in theoretical terms. But psychology, like all sciences, has *techné*, referring to know-how or the psychological knowledge of the art or craft of the discipline. Students should not just be merely taught psychology; they should be groomed to practice psychology. It is therefore high time lecturers begin to organize their classes and lectures in a way that cater for the practical training of psychologists that would make students want to move out of the classroom to meet the people at the base of the society. The Department should develop a process of inviting agencies of government to come to witness staffs/students’ seminars. Such meetings would stir debates that can make the researcher gain more insight into the issues of interest and thereby enhance their ability to engage in credible research. Also, the interaction would present the agency of government the opportunity to access needed resources in manpower.

3). *Need to tell Nigerians what Psychology is and what Psychologists do*

Olomolaiye (1985) argued that one of the basic things that psychology can offer Nigeria (now) is an opportunity for Nigerians to know what psychology is and what psychologists do (p. 343). As basic as this clarion call is, it is an important one because of the public’s equation of psychology with fortunetelling and mind reading (Mefoh, 2014b). It is surprising that many literate Nigerians do not have much idea about psychology and psychologists. Ojiji (2021) narrated an experience he had during an interview at the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), Abuja, Nigeria. At the interview, a member of the panel, who was a fellow social scientist, asked him, “What are you looking for in a Conflict Resolution Institute?” When Ojiji responded, “I am a psychologist and I think psychologists have important roles to play in conflict resolution...” The panelist exclaimed ‘Oh yeah!’ It was like saying, ‘is it really true that psychologists can be involved in conflict resolution?’

Another example that was even more embarrassing was an encounter Professor A.F. Uzoka had with a fellow professor. The two professors chattered about many things at the airport. When the

flight to Lagos was announced, the two acquaintances formally introduced themselves to each other. The other professor introduced himself as a professor of Economics in a university in the Cameroons. Professor Uzoka similarly introduced himself as a psychologist from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). Immediately the Cameroonian professor heard that Professor Uzoka is a psychologist, he became uneasy, and his face depicted the face of someone who had been betrayed. He felt alarmed that Prof. Uzoka did not warn him that he is a psychologist and was probably reading his mind all the time they chatted. Prof. Uzoka recognized the professor’s fears. He reassured him he did not read his mind and that no psychologists can read anyone’s mind.

Although the Nigerian public is gradually beginning to appreciate psychologists and the work they do (Abikoye et al., 2023; Mefoh, 2014b), the Department has enormous responsibility to create awareness about the variety of psychological services it can offer to the university community, especially students. Many students are rapidly losing their sanity in their struggle to survive the stress of academic works and the harsh economic realities under which they study. Much of human pathology contains significant psychogenic features (Legg, 2023); thus, these conditions put strains on their mental health, leading to low mood or depression, negative thinking, severe anxiety, and so on. The unfortunate and avoidable death of Chukwuemeka Akachi, a 400-level student of English and Literary Studies of this University, who died by suicide is still fresh in our minds. The sad end of Chukwuemeka Akachi would have been averted if he or his friends knew that the Department has a Psychological Services Centre, where his problems would have been handled professionally. The Department therefore needs to undertake extensive public campaigns around the University community, including using the University radio station (Lion FM) to create awareness about the Psychological Services Centre and the work done at the Center.

4). *Need for a Nigerian Psychology*

Psychologists in the Department, and most Nigerian psychologists for that matter, tend to believe that all theories and philosophies, have been, with finality, propounded by people from the western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich et al, 2010), and they make no sustained efforts to put forward any coherent philosophical and theoretical points of view that are Nigerian, or indeed African. Eweka (1985) argued that what one finds are Nigerian psychologists, who are sheepishly ape-ing after those whom they inwardly believe to be their betters (p.367). To what extent has psychology made impact on the Nigerian society? From all indication, the impact of psychology to the Nigerian society is less than encouraging, compared to the impact psychology has made in other African countries like Egypt and South Africa. Psychology is only relevant when the synthesis between psychology and the society becomes a reality, and this can only happen in Nigeria when Nigerian psychologists interrogate existing theories and phenomena or begin to develop new ones, and/or begin to apply them to address issues in society.

Sixty years after starting psychology in the Department, there has been very little attempt to 'nigerianize' psychology or use it to address the cultural needs of the Nigerian people. Indeed, Nigerian psychologists may not reinvent the wheel all over again, but they can realign the wheel; Gire (2004) makes similar point, but more aptly. He said: 'The uncritical acceptance of concepts and methods without testing their validity or appropriateness to the Nigerian situation is unacceptable' (p. 56). The call here is not to blithely recommend that western or international psychology be jettisoned. No, it is simply a call to develop authentic Nigerian philosophies or theories that can address our local problems.

Concluding Remarks

Psychology as a scientific discipline is relatively new in Nigeria when compared to education, which started in 1932 at the Yaba Higher College and later at the University College, Ibadan in 1948, or with geography, and perhaps history, which started in 1948 at the University College, Ibadan. Psychology officially started in Nigeria, in 1964 when the first Department of Psychology was established at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with sixteen students and two lecturers (Olomolaiye, 1985). Both the discipline of psychology in Nigeria and the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, celebrated joint Golden Jubilee in 2014. Since after the fifty years celebration of psychology in Nigeria, many psychologists started to argue that psychology should no longer be referred to as a new (or younger) discipline. They started to identify with the position earlier advanced by Uzoka (2005), who maintained that "we are not young as a discipline anymore, either internationally or nationally; introduced into the Nigerian educational system in 1964, we cannot be a dormant element in the social engineering of the nation" (p. 14).

Indeed, psychology has not made appreciable impact in national development, but it has great prospects. One of the reasons why the impact of psychology has not been visibly felt in the Nigerian society is because there are very few practicing psychologists in Nigeria. The ratio of psychologists to the population is grossly low; Gire (2003) estimated that there are about 53 psychologists per 100,000 citizens. Mefoh (2014b) made a more conservative estimate by stating that 'the ratio is probably as low as 50 psychologists to about 150,000 citizens' (p.62). The prospects then lie in the fact that more and more Nigerians are now studying psychology and would therefore provide more psychological services to the public. As for the Department of Psychology, UNN, with necessary funding and expansion, the department can be a center of excellence where well-trained and roundly educated graduates are produced.

Note: This is a revised version of an invited Anniversary Lecture presented at the 11th Annual Departmental Conference of the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, May 15 - 17, 2024.

References

- Abikoye, G.E., Ottu, I.F.A., Mefoh, P.C., Ezenwa, M.O., &Obot, I.S. (2023). Psychology in the eye of the public: A national survey on perceptions of psychology in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Psychology*, 23(1), 10-24.
- AD Scientific Index (2024). *Nigeria scientists' rankings in Nigeria 2024*. Retrieved from <https://www.adscientificindex.com>
- Akin-Ogundeji, O. (1991). Asserting psychology in Africa. *The Psychologist*, 4, 2-4.
- Egwu, E.U. (2012). *Psychology, public policy and national transformation*. Keynote address at the annual national conference of the Nigerian Psychological Association. 17th - 20th November.
- Erinosho, L. (2004). Challenges in higher education in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Social Scientist*, 7(2), 31-38.
- Eweka, I. (1985). Psychological apartheid: A case for. In E. Okpara (ed.). *Psychological strategies for national development*. Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA).
- Ezenwa, M.O., Atiobioko, O.P., &Chukwuorji, J.C. (in press). Psychology is growing in Nigeria, but needs to be nurtured. In M. Bullock, A. Clinton, M.J. Stevens and D. Wedding (Eds.), *Handbook of International Psychology* (2nd ed). Routledge.
- Gire, J. T. (2004). *Psychology in Nigeria: Origins, current status and future*, In M.J. Stevens and D. Wedding (eds), *Handbook of international psychology*. Taylor & Francis.
- Legg, T. J. (2023). *The effects of stress on your body*. Retrieved from <http://www.healthline.com>
- Mefoh, P. C. (2014a). *A handbook of psychology in Nigeria: 1964- 2014*. University of Nigeria Press.
- Mefoh, P.C. (2014b). Challenges and prospects of psychology in Nigeria. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 42(1), 57 - 64.
- Mefoh, P.C. (2019). Psychology in Nigeria: Reflections on the second half of the century (2015-2065). *Practicum Psychologia*, 9(2), 206-226.
- Nigerian Psychological Association (1984). *The constitution of the Nigerian Psychological Association*. Author
- Nweze, A. (2007). Psychology in Nigeria: Status and development. In G. G. Ejikeme and D. Dagona (Eds), *Readings in psychology*, pp. 1-13. Jos: Department of General and Applied Psychology, University of Jos.
- Oguntuashe, K. (2010). In the beginning: A short history of Psychology Department, University of Lagos and other universities in Nigeria. In K. Oguntuashe (Ed.), *A festschrift in honour of Professor A.C. Mundy-Castle, a foremost Africanist Psychologist*. University

of Lagos Press.

<https://www.unilag.edu.ng/departmentaldetail.php>

- Ojiji, O.O. (2011). Psychology, social science and the management of violent conflicts in Nigeria. *African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues*, 14(1&2), 234-247.
- Olomolaiye, F. (1985). What psychology has to offer Nigeria now? In E. Okpara (Ed), *Psychological strategies for national development*, pp. 341-351. Nigerian Psychological Association.
- Uzoka, A.F. (2011). *Growing up, growing old: Chronicle of an ordinary life*. iUniverse Inc.
- Uzoka, A.F. (2005). *Psychology, attitude change, and nation building*. Keynote address at the Annual National Conference of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA), Benue State University, Makurdi. June 2nd - 4th, 2005.
- Uzoka, A.F. (1989). Twenty-five years of professional psychology in Nigeria. *Journal of Basic and Applied Psychology*, 2, 93-115.