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Analysis of Importance of Psychology Today in Africa

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Abstract - This paper examines the contribution of the discipline in Africa. It is argued that psychology has a significant role to play in solving educational, social, psychological, health and other related problems affecting developing countries. Due to problems of urbanization. Modernization and westernization, the need for adequately trained indigenous psychologists who can skillfully analyze and suggest solution has been underscored. The use of proper methodological designs suitable to the African environment will have to be employed in order to avoid the pitfalls heretofore encountered by researchers in the interpretation of results arising from biased techniques. The complexity and diversity of cultures in African countries should enrich the research base for psychological investigations, which should in turn lead to wide-ranging solutions to the ensuring problem. The challenge and role of psychology to development in Africa cannot therefore be gainsaid.

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Analysis of Importance of Psychology Today in Africa

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Abstract - This paper examines the contribution of the discipline in Africa. It is argued that psychology has a significant role to play in solving educational, social, psychological, health and other related problems affecting developing countries. Due to problems of urbanization. Modernization and westernization, the need for adequately trained indigenous psychologists who can skillfully analyze and suggest solution has been underscored. The use of proper methodological designs suitable to the African environment will have to be employed in order to avoid the pitfalls heretofore encountered by researchers in the interpretation of results arising from biased techniques. The complexity and diversity of cultures in African countries should enrich the research base for psychological investigations, which should in turn lead to wide-ranging solutions to the ensuring problem. The challenge and role of psychology to development in Africa cannot therefore be gainsaid.

I. Introduction

The development of psychology in many African Universities has dragged, unlike many other disciplines. Some of the possible explanations which underly this condition and which have to a large extent, hindered the development of psychology are cultural factors past colonial education influences, alien concepts and the non-existence of trained native psychologists

Perhaps the need for systematic application of psychology and its principles has not been perceived in Africa, since the traditional set up provided for ways of coping with personal or group problems. There were for instance, elders, "learned men: or wise men" "gifted women" in many communities with the skills, talents and abilities to heal the psychic problems of the sick [1]. Similarly, the educational, counselling and other socialization activities of the community were carried out within the homestead by astute traditional te4achers. Our ancestors used their knowledge to control the environment, knew important facto4s in child rearing, altruism, teamwork as well as dealing with conflict situations.

Thus prior to the advent of western influences, there was hardly any felt need for professional counselors, psychiatrists and psychologists. Today, however, in the rush to acquire western skills, it is possible that the indigenous adaptations to particular situations will be lost or be merely treated as stumbling blocks.

It may be noted here that the former colonial masters did not attempt to train Africans as psychologists. The planners of the colonial universities in most African did not establish independent depart5iments of psychology in either the arts or the sciences. The absence of psychology from many faculties of African universities has effectively prevented more than a very small number of Africans from becoming psychologists. This may be seen from the perspective of colonial; education whose aim was to produce loyal servants and to acculturate native Africans for colonial manipulation.

Since the aid of psychologists was seldom requested there was no foreseeable future for those fee Africans who would be trained in the field of psychology. The word psychology does not even exist in any of our African languages.

The concepts of psychology, its theories and methods as understood by westerners remains alien to the thinking of non-westerners. As such, a lot of hard work is still required to create new terminologies and sell the idea about the critical importance of psychological principles to the educators and policy-makers who are still unaware of the need of such a discipline.

Probably the above state of affairs can be explained by the fact that Africa is involved in endless war against hunger and mass starvation, ignorance, diseases and economic stagnation. Under such circumstances, one might question the need, relevance or even the use of "pure theory" or "luxury-oriented" alien psychology. One may also doubt whether the use of standardized intelligence tests, which are western-oriented, would be of any value in helping a preliterate African. The need for African- oriented psychology, which is based on the needs and problems of the people of African, cannot be overemphasized[2].

II. Justification for Studying Psychology in Africa

In the late nineteenth century, evolutionary theory led many researchers to view non-western people as less developed or less evolved than their European or American observers. This racist anthropology did not take into account the environmental constraints on

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which thought operates, or the interactive nature of culture and cognition. Such studies imposed an outsider's view rather than fully utilizing the perspective of the particular non-western culture. This led [3] to conclude that "what has been hitherto demeaned as "primitive thinking ' may indeed be quite sophisticated and that the reason such thought has been labeled inferior is that we have no understanding for it".

It can be clearly seen that western writers who wrote about African in psychological terms frequently applied European or cultural prejudices in grossly antagonistic and ethnocentric ways. These foreign psychologists carrying out research in Africa utilised the western frame of reference to analyze African problems. Their work was necessarily handicapped by their philosophical perspectives, by methodological problems, by absence of systematic synthesis and by their alien backgrounds. And since there is lack of adequate research findings by Africans themselves, a biased interpretation of the available literature has ensued [4].

[5] most of the work on psychology in Africa were done primary by ex-colonialists reflecting, " colonially influenced thinking" as a result , one of the blatant weaknesses apparent in these materials, a weakness that still persists, is that too much has been written strictly for communication to other foreigners. This poses a challenge to African psychologists who understand the African environment to conduct research for the benefit of other Africans.

Research by African psychologists may go a long way to show that people from different intellectual skills but that these skills are differentially realized in culturally diverse settings. As such, no one setting should be acclaimed as superior or as producing superior beings. [6] rightly proposes that all human behaviour is adaptive and unless one understands another culture in the manner of the anthropologist, it is not possible to explore the interaction of satiation and psychological process.

Since African is not immune to the social, economic, culture and political turmoil of our time, it is important that the potentialities of Africans should be identified, studied and clarified as they are influencing the world and being influenced by it.

The non- existence of psychology in our educational system means that the special abilities, assets and skills of African remain mysterious, misguided or unknown.

The importance of psychology in an African context will however not be known unless the few African psychologists take up the challenge and demonstrate that psychology can undoubtedly make a contribution to notion- building and to solving the educational and social problems of developing countries. The challenge may take the form of psychological research directed to uncovering the assets of particular cultural environments, which may prove the means to avoid some of the mistakes which are currently posing serious problems in many culturally diverse modern societies.

The main aim of studying psychology in Africa is not only the demonstration of cultural differences, but rather the explanation. As such, the field required dedicated workers wiling to immerse themselves in another cultural or in their own cultures, and painstakingly unravel the effects of situational variables on psychological processes. Perhaps when this is done we may be able to say [7] " I believe that when psychological research in Africa comes of age, it will contribute new ideas and concepts as important to psychology as a whole, as the African fossil evidence has been for the scientific understanding of hominid evolution."

III. The Role of Psychology in Developing Countries

An examination of recent bibliographies of psychological research done in Africa, of international journals, and of international conferences reports show that the overwhelming majority of this research is carried out by North American and European scholars. As such, this research embodies the different perspectives which these expatriates brought to Africa.

The relatively few indigenous psychologists in developing countries are involved in many roles other than research. They are called upon to fill such roles as chairman of departments, academic deans, government consultants, and administrators and often they are virtually the sole teachers of their discipline in their institutions. This allows little time to engage in research. This condition should not, however, be used to justify lack of rigorous involvement in meaningful research.

In posing a challenge to indigenous psychologists in Africa, [8] points out that Psychology has a special role to play in going beyond the other social sciences to uncover the subjective meanings and personal satisfactions derived from their existing cultural patterns by the many rural Africans who are still relatively insulted from the force of social change. If psychologists do not accept this role in the selective conservation of human cultural resources in Africa, I'm not sure who will.African social scientists have t a big task to act as researchers on their own people and on the consequences of force westerns influence, migration, urbanization and modernization[9].

A danger which African psychologists will perhaps be equipped to avoid is one of adopting an absolutist view based on some western culture, with which a particular person might be most familiar[10]. Through their educational experience, family background, tradition and other environmental circumstances, they are in a better position to understand the problems of human development in an

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African context. They could use the knowledge developed in the west to deal with the problems which developing countries have imported from the west, as well as helping to avoid some of the mistakes which the expatriate social scientists, for all their efforts and goodwill have made[11].

The aim of psychological research in African should therefore be to come to grips with a developing nation's problem. For example, how do people perceive family planning propaganda? What are the critical environmental factors leading to delinquency, the street children phenomenon or child abuse? What is the psycho gist's role in the HIV/AIDS pandemic?

What then should be the function of psychological research in Africa?

Firstly it should be to deal with practical problems. Developing countries for instance, need to know the kind of leaders they require for public service and how to select them. Thus the need for aptitude testing which is related to work productivity, reduction of training time and vocational guidance. In our multicultural settings, how do we handle issues of prejudice and discrimination or even frustration and aggression?

Secondly, the study of culture per se ins important in understanding the origin and function of customs and beliefs, it has been observed that certain features of African cultures are very important and relevant in conveying meaning. For example, meaning be conveyed by tonal changes in what is aid or by body language. In addition, Africans are adept at harmonizing music and the important of rhythm for them cannot be overemphasised.

Another area of concern for psychologists should be in exploring how much traditional culture still persists when people no longer grow up and live in their traditional societies[12]. How does witchcraft, for example, as part of the traditional cosmology and not a mere superstition, survive the impact of western science and rationalism? Of importance also is the influence of urbanization and the accompanying change of values, particularly in attitudes towards sex, marriage, family life, and the educated working woman.

Looking at the available materials, one sees that unlike other social sciences, psychology has been comparatively late in entering the arena of problems connected with social change and rapid social-economic development, which are so important to the newly independent nations of Africa[13]. Perhaps the potential relevance of a psychological perspective to understanding and handling problems of developing countries has not been as evident as it is today. The need for relevance in education is these countries is one of the major and critical areas where psychology will have a major contribution to make. The need for change in the educational systems and curricula has been felt and expressed by people in government, universities, in learning conferences, seminars, and in the teaching professions. The demand is for relevance in the education of the African child with the content and format which is relevant to African needs. The cry is for education which is functional in terms of the usability of skills and knowledge which is offers within the context of the African setting. To work out how these can be most effectively achieved I believe, is the problem of psychology.

By now it is apparent that psychology, which is developed in and related to the African settings, is necessary for the education of our children and for helping to cope with the social problems of our time. The role of psychology in the training of teachers is immensely important since the attitudes and experiences in many African homes are very different from those that are emphasized in the school setting. The values and language of the school are often not shared by the home, as most parents especially in the rural areas are illiterate. Also the rich experience and the diversified human relationships of African homes are hardly ever related to the teaching and learning process. The child's school experience often belong to an entirely different world from his home experience

Perhaps is a need to avoid wastage in education, for which a large proportion of the total revenue of many counties in Africa is devoted. There's growing realization that these countries need teachers who can bring about desirable change in the curriculum, in the methods of teaching and in the attitudes of children and parents. With the aid of psychological principles, teachers should aim at making the African child able to develop all his potentialities, abilities and skills to the full.

IV. Problems of Psychological Research in Africa

Compared to other disciplines like anthropology, no adequate research has been done in the field of psychological research to the needs and conditions of Africa. For instance it must be realized that the personality and background of the psychological research will be bound up with the question they ask, the way they ask then, as well as the methods they may employ to answer them.

For example:

- How should African " intelligence" and other psychological characteristics be measured?
- What is an African personality?
- What should be given priority in the psychology study of Africans?
- What theoretical framework and rationale should be accepted?
- How relevant and reliable are tests important from overseas for African children?

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General research activities about the role of psychology, considering the limitations of the western approach, have been handicapped by questions such as the above, by inadequate theoretical constructs and by lack of proper methodological designs. Methodology is a particularly crucial problem due to several alternatives arising from indigenous philosophies, and hence one cannot hope to use the same western-oriented techniques in Africa for the same results. Similarly, there is a great lack of communication among African psychologists which is probably due to the great distance, isolation, language and cultural differences across Africa. This makes coordination of research activities difficult. In addition, African countries do not have the same problems, and many people are unaware of the great heterogeneity that is present.

In showing the complexity of African countries., [14] points out that:Not only is African a huge continent, it has a huge population and huge problem. Its people are of numerous linguistic groups and diverse ethnic origins./ many differences exist in cultural;, in religions, and diets, in geographical features, in clothing, in gestures, in rituals, in mode of expression, and in psychological motivations there are huge and yawning gaps between the rich and the poor, the rural and the urban, the farmers and the pastoralists, the whites and black and in between , the educated and the uneducated, the literate and the illiterates, the factory workers and the shopkeepers, the male attitudes and the female attitudes, attitudes to children and those to adults, the stay at homes and the abroadians, virtually any kind of differences one can think of, exist.

No doubt researchers may benefit from the existence of such diversity and complexity, but they should be alert and careful not to generalize the interpretation of their findings to the whole population of African. In order to understand Africans, one must be familiar with the foundations of their cultures, history and social economic situations[15].

While we may see the application of psychology as useful for any society, we should not be blind to some of its limitations. Insipte of its importance, psychology by itself cannot be the panacea for all the educational, social human problems that are facing Africa. As suggested by [16] psychologists should focus on relatively limited and specific applied problems. They should also establish close co-operation with policy-makers and professionals in other fields, as they search for support systems needed in the process of adaptation to change and acculturation to western technological demands, with which all developing countries are currently confronted. In this way, the role of psychology will be beneficial and relevant to the conditions of Africa[17].

Psychological research in Africa should be able to find ways and means of helping us in changing the attitudes and behaviour of people[18]. It may not be enough to change one's economic conditions without at the same time changing ones' attitude. Indeed the psychological transformation of the individual prerequisite to effective social and economic changes[19]. The main objectives psychology should therefore be to help fulfill the optimum development of Africans. This could be done if psychology is made relevant to the African reality and provide Africans with behavioural tools to solve their own problems in their own ways[20].

V. Conclusion

It has been noted that psychology can be doubt make some contribution in solving the educational and social problem of developing countries. There is an immediate need and a challenge in African for the development of human resources and consequently psychology should be given priority. The Talents and potentialities of African children should be identified and tapped. Appropriate vocational and educational counselling should be offered in every school at every level of our educational system.

Interest in the area of concepts formation and intellectual development should for instance receive priority because of its major role in the process of adaptation to change and acculturation to western technological demands. The education of teachers require the use of the skills in psychology in order to effectively guide the learning processes of African children, by raking into account the special circumstance of the African environment.

Although many of the developing countries in Africa do not have resources to make major contribution to psychological theory based on research, they can concentrate on more immediate practical question. Such problems may include unemployment, drug abuse, child abuse, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS etc. for which the educational system is often held responsible. Though we may not entirely blame education for these problems, we must look to education for these problems, we must look to educate for a way minimizing the effect of other factors.

We have noted that in concept, theories and methodology psychology in Africa still reflect a western orientation. This is probably because there are far too few indigenous African psychologists, and the few that be, are all western trained with very exceptions. I believe that there is need for African psychologists to go beyond the confines of the western orientation, if they are to respond effectively to the problems that confront our societies. Other wise, psychologists are likely to be seen as somewhat of a luxury by developing countries, if they do not demonstrate their potential as contributors to nation-building and the whole process of national development.

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