



A BOOK REVIEW

“A HANDBOOK OF PSYCHOLOGY IN NIGERIA, 1964 – 2014”.

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Introduction

Fifty years in the life of a human being is not a joke, and in the same vein, fifty years in the life of a discipline like psychology that studies human behavior for the purpose of solving behavioural problems in our society, calls for greater joy and celebration. Unlike the rapid growth and acceptance of psychology as a discipline and profession in developed countries like United States of America and United Kingdom, psychology in Nigeria is still not growing fast as expected, perhaps, due to ignorance or inability of Nigerians to understand the importance of psychology to human existence.

Despite the fact that psychology is the latest entrant into the family of social sciences in Nigeria, the handlers of the discipline have made frantic efforts in the last fifty years to live above board both in the academics and practice, even though the effort is yet to take psychology to the level it should be compared to other countries mentioned above. Notwithstanding the relative achievement recorded, Nigerians, most especially psychologists should have deemed it fit to come up with documented works to celebrate the behavioural discipline at the age of fifty. Perhaps the love and passion for psychology as a discipline and profession informed the author of the handbook under review, Philip C. Mefoh, to put notes together to celebrate the birth and development of psychology in Nigeria in the last fifty years.

The author has two major goals in writing this handbook as documented in its preface. In summary, the first goal is to search for and safeguard vital details about psychology in Nigeria from disintegrating into oblivion. Secondly, the book seeks to encourage psychologists to embrace genuine scholarship route in aspiring for academic excellence rather than going through the back door. The 204- page book written in nine (9) chapters gave the perception and knowledge of the author on the development of psychology in Nigeria. It is hoped that the goal and purpose of writing this book will be achieved.

General Overview of the Book

The book is written in nine chapters. It also contains pictures of known psychologists either dead or alive, and two pie charts. Apart from its cover pages (front and back) that are printed in colour, other pages and contents appear in black and white print.

The first chapter of the handbook provides the introduction, definition and overview of psychology and the second chapter discusses the development of scientific psychology in Nigeria. While chapter three of the book captures the pioneers of psychology in Nigeria and the role played by them, the fourth chapter reviews psychology as a discipline and profession in Nigeria. Chapter five reflects the area of usefulness of psychology and the role psychologists play in national development. Chapters six and seven deal with the prospects of psychology in Nigeria, and the history and dilemma of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA), respectively. The dialogue with a participant observer was documented in chapter eight, while the last but not the least is chapter nine which treats the memoir of psychologists in Nigeria,



showing the faces of notable psychologists in the country. The perception of the author as reflected in these chapters is evaluated in our next discussion.

Evaluation of the Book

Adequate emphasis was not laid on the qualifications required of anyone to be qualified as a psychologist. The author mentioned Masters degree as a qualification, but he did not give the operational definition of "Masters degree" to reflect the specific qualification to be acquired. It is very important to state that for anybody to be a professional psychologist, he or she must have gone through courses in psychological test and test construction and experimental psychology at the undergraduate level, and theoretical and applied psychometrics at postgraduate level. This is the basic required technical knowledge that enables a psychologist to study human behaviour, which is the thrust of the discipline of psychology.

Today, what we see are the so called psychologists that went through a year diploma course in psychology, or one year professional Masters degree (Masters of Managerial Psychology (MMP) or Masters of Personnel Psychology (MPP)) courses in psychology without having the fundamental knowledge and solid foundation as described above considering that psychology, like other professions such as Medicine, deals with human lives, quacks in the profession of psychology will definitely complicate human problems rather than solving it. This fact should be made known to all and sundry.

In an attempt by the author to discuss the development of scientific psychology in Nigeria, he wrote gloriously on the establishment of psychology as a course in five Nigerian Universities, how the Universities were established, departmental and staff structure of these Universities. Borrowing from the work of Nsamenang (2007), I will suggest that the author should have discussed this chapter in line with the following themes: emergence and growth of scientific psychology in Nigeria; factors shaping it; its Nigerian indigenisation; recent advances in the science and applications of psychology; and Nigerians' potentials to contribute to the discipline. This will throw more light on the total picture of the development of psychology in Nigeria.

It is also expected that the author should discuss more about the emergence of experimental/psychological laboratories, development and use of psychological tests to study human behaviour, development of psychological research in the health, education and the general society.

The author should have resisted making any statement he could not defend. For instance, he claimed in the handbook that University of Nigeria, Nsuka, psychology department is doing better than other departments of psychology in other Nigerian Universities. He should have told the readers the criteria or indices he used in arriving at this conclusion, to avoid misinformation.

The author listed the names and background of the founding fathers of psychology in Nigeria at the foundation stage, indigenisation/maintenance stage and the period of consolidation and professionalism. In as much as I am not averse to his categorisation of the pioneers, I think that some names traversed these three stages. I am therefore of the opinion that the author should have categorised these distinguished psychologists as follows: the foreigners that started psychology in Nigeria; the foreign trained psychologists that took over from the foreigners; and the Nigerian trained indigenous psychologists that are piloting the science of psychology in Nigeria. This categorisation will give a better picture of the psychologists at each stage, and their contributions to the development of psychology in Nigeria..



In addressing the fields of psychology, the author should have mentioned one or two renowned psychologists in these areas of specialisation and where they perform their primary assignments, preferably, one academic and one practitioner. This will go a long way to encourage the young ones that are studying psychology and persuade those who are planning to study psychology to do so.

In view of the roles played by psychologists in national development, I was struck by the declaration made by Akin Mabogunje (1999), as documented in this book. In summary, he believes that the questions to ask are not just what we Social Scientists know but what type and how useful is the knowledge we provide. Psychologists are also guilty of this mind bugling question. For instance, with reference to the book under review as captured by the author, almost ninety (90) percent of Nigerian psychologists are academics that reside within the University, and therefore churning out abstract knowledge that are not really applicable to national development in the real sense of it. This book should have addressed the status of psychologists in the industries, non-governmental organisations and the public service sectors in this regard. Future authors in similar work should endeavour to make a wider consultation and address this issue rigorously.

In addition to the author's expectation from the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA), I will suggest that NPA should, as a matter of urgency organise seminars and workshops for government functionaries at all levels of governance, and their counterparts in the private sector. This will go a long way in making the discipline popular and image of psychology professionals will be promoted. I will also like to advocate that NPA should work towards convincing the government that psychological advisers be appointed for leaders in governance at all levels. NPA should do more to regulate the profession of psychologists and issue appropriate certificates and licences aimed at promoting psychology and psychologists in Nigeria. NPA should also make her presence felt and begin to make scientific statements and take positions on various issues bothering on security and economy in Nigeria.

In my opinion, there is no need for chapter eight (8) of this book, entitled dialogue with a participant observer. Much has been said about the personality that was interviewed and his institutional affiliation in most chapters of the handbook. This is repetitive.

Even though the author admitted that the list of notable psychologists as documented by him in the book is by no means exhaustive, I am still of the opinion that some very notable names are obviously omitted on the list whilst some names that were listed should not have been there at all. It is expected that the book will be read across globe and should be a true reflection of the face of psychology and psychologists in Nigeria for the last 50 years.

General Observations

One would expect that a book of this magnitude, discussing the Fifty (50) years of existence of psychology in Nigeria, authored by a Nigerian, be endorsed by the highest authority of psychology in Nigeria, NPA, to give it credence. Better still, a foreword should have been written in the book by a renowned psychologist in Nigeria.

The handbook is a substantially reconceptualised and reorganised update of an article entitled "Challenges and Prospects of Psychology in Nigeria", written by the same author of the book under review, Mefoh, P.C. (2014), documented in European Journal of Social Sciences.

Going through the book under review, I was tempted to suggest a more suitable and relevant title for the book. Suggested titles like: The Contribution of The University of Nigeria, Nsuka (UNN) to the Development of Psychology in Nigeria, or Fifty (50) Years of Development of Psychology in Nigeria: The Role of The University of Nigeria, Nsuka, would have been more apt in my opinion as a title for this book. What informed my suggestion is the much reference made by the author to University of Nigeria, Nsuka, its lecturers and graduates. This should not be so because it is expected that the book should be a true reflection and an evenly representative of its title: “A Handbook of Psychology in Nigeria, 1964 – 2014”; and not a handbook of University of Nigeria, Nsuka Psychology Department.

Aside from the above, other observations were also made in the book which includes:

- Ondo State University as it was then called, was not located in Ago Iwoye as documented in the book on page 11, rather, it was situated in Ado Ekiti.
- The citation on page 82: Uzoka and colleagues (1981), is not in order. The word, “colleagues” should be substituted with “et al”, even though the colleagues were not mentioned in the book.
- Several usage of the word “probably” by the author indicates uncertainty of his assertions.
- The pie charts on pages 64 and 65 should have been done in colour print, to properly reflect the population and the indicators.

Strength and Weakness of the Book

In line with the work of Ogundipe and Edewor (2012), the major strength of this book is its ability to educate and create awareness in the readers on the importance and usefulness of psychology to humanity.

On the other hand, the major weakness is the inability of the author to make wider consultations in arriving at some conclusions, and high concentration of the work built around the University of Nigeria, Nsuka, in all its ramifications.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The goals set by the author in writing this book may not have been totally accomplished, the book was well thought of at this time that the discipline and profession of psychology is not well known to the Nigeria publics. The Handbook is therefore a good source of information for the undergraduates, postgraduates, academics, professionals and the public, to have a fair knowledge about the origin of psychology in Nigeria and what psychologists are doing and should be doing. Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement for future authors that may want to work in this area of endeavour.

This handbook will go a long way to educate the public and make the discipline of psychology popular. I do hope that the book will be well circulated, well read and well referenced. It is therefore my candid opinion to recommend this work entitled “A Handbook of Psychology in Nigeria, 1964 – 2014” to all and sundry but not without consciousness of the issues raised in this review.



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Particulars of the Book

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