

The Challenges And Compromises Of Culture-Centered Therapy: Nigerian Evidence

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Abstract

Ideally therapeutic processes ought to be context-bound; therefore culture plays vital role in setting the status quo for the interaction between the therapist and the client. It is against this background that this paper examines the challenges and compromises of culture-centered therapy in Africa (Nigeria), particularly as the scheme of work and curriculum for teaching psychology (and all other related areas of study), seems to omit cultural orientation to some extent. Correspondingly, National Universities Commission (NUC) benchmark is used as unit of analysis to portray the seemingly lack of culture-centered therapy in higher education in Nigeria. Supportively, narratives from focus group discussion with students are presented to intensify the lack of inclusion of culture-centered curriculum. As a result, the paper advocates for methodological and clinical integration of cultural perspective (indigenous knowledge system) into higher education's teaching of psychology otherwise the noble idea of culture-centered therapy would continue to be an illusion. Hence, the African therapist to say the least would be irrelevant in his/her cultural milieu and to the clients who may urgently need culture-bound therapy as means of maintaining mental health and sustainable development.

Key words: *Culture-centered Therapy, Indigenous Knowledge System, Curriculum, Methodological, Clinical Integration*

Introduction

This paper uses the discourse of culture-centered therapy to present the absence of African indigenous knowledge system, particularly Nigeria's worldview in the current curriculum for teaching psychology in Nigeria's universities. Therefore, argues that the continual absence of African worldview in the teaching of psychology within Africa's higher education would negatively impact on the successful achievement of culture-centered therapy.

The starting point of this argument emerges from the surface survey of Nigeria's higher education curriculum for teaching psychology (including all its related areas) reflected in the National Universities Commission Benchmark (NUC) (2018), supported by narratives from students' focus group discussion. Consciously or unconsciously most curriculum for teaching psychology in Nigeria's higher education tend to lean on Western perspective in articulating its scheme of work, as such the

prevalent modules reflect theories that are Western-based including psychodynamic, behaviorism, humanism, cognitive, positivism and transactional among many others (Eze, 2018b; Eze & Emen, 2018; Nwoye, 2013, 2014). Significantly, most of the reflections in these theories and concepts are mainly foreign featuring theorists such as Abraham Maslow, Albert Bandura, Alfred Adler, Aaron Beck, B.K Skinner, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers, Eric Erikson, James Williams, Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Kurt Lewin, Gordon Allport, Michael Eysenck, Martin Seligman, Sigmund Freud among many others.

The emergence of this lack of inclusion could be traced to historical circumstances within the African continent, particularly in the face of colonization which has positioned African nations as dependents not only in the sphere of socio-economic-political sense but also educationally (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Nsamenang, 1992). As a result, the trajectory of Africa academic development in spite of its laudable achievement has experienced severe setback in terms of relegating its own cultural identity and values to the background. Correspondingly, the argument is that, if African psychologists wish to validate culture-centered therapy, then its higher education curriculum must integrate African worldview. Otherwise, culture-centered therapy would not only be challenged but also compromised. Thus, the paper argues that concrete effort be made to integrate African worldview into higher education teaching of psychology and all its related areas of study in order to foster the achievement of culture-centered therapy. If not, the African therapist would continue to be an alien in his/her culture, thereby, ridicules the achievement of culture-centered therapy.

Conceptualizing the exclusion of African worldview in the current higher education teaching curriculum

Primarily, this paper argues that the achievement of culture-centered therapy in Africa (Nigeria) would mean integrating African worldview into current curriculum of teaching and learning psychology in higher education. On this basis, the central argument is that the dominant psychological curriculum taught in most African higher education is predominantly Western based, arising from colonial history including the aftermath of globalization. In principle Africa has come a long way to work out its independence but in practice there are multiple evidences of dependency orientations which present Africa as still struggling to own and name her values. This is evident in nearly all sphere of life and the academic activities are no exception. To this effect, Nwoye (2014, p.57) states:

For the past 50 or 60 years, the professional study of psychology in Africa has been dominated by the Euro-American approaches. Thus, modern scientific psychology, drawing exclusively upon the empirical, positivistic, mechanistic, and materialistic traditions of the West, gained absolute ascendancy in African academies as part of the general impact of our colonial contact with the West. For this reason, the study of psychology in African universities became the exclusive province of mainstream Western psychology. This situation severely overshadowed and encumbered any early attempts to introduce African perspectives to psychology in African universities.

No doubt, this quote clearly presents the scope of exclusion of African worldview in the teaching of psychology in higher

education curriculum among African universities, which if true would certainly impact on the success of achieving a culture-centered therapy. However, Nwoye (2013, 2014) still acknowledges that much concerted effort has been made in the 80s and 90s by African psychologists who saw the dare need to encompass African worldview as means of 'selective accommodation' of the best that is thought and said in both African and Western psychological traditions. Basically, he argues that these African psychologists recognize that not all aspects of Eurocentric worldview, psychology and epistemology are relevant for meeting the challenges of current African worldview. In agreement with Achebe (2009), these emerging African psychologists affirm that Africa has passed the age in which the people of Europe and America were doing all the talking including thinking and Africans were busy doing all the listening. Thus, the time is due for Africans to speak and reconstruct their past and present towards advancing and evolving a self-sustaining African-centered psychological curriculum of study. Besides, the notion of exclusion of Africa's worldview rises the question of what is it that constitutes an African worldview worthy of inclusion as part of the on-going psychological scheme of work and curriculum. To say the least, the African worldviews that need to be included are best reflected in the cultural, political, religious, social (the community) and the contextual life of the individual that is highly profound to Africans with the influence of wars and other human-made disasters plaguing the continent (Nwoye, 2013). It is anticipated that such engagement is the starting point for integrating Afrocentric perspective into psychological teaching curriculum and on-going scheme of work.

Consequently, all the sub-units that make up the whole of who 'an African person is' and 'is becoming' need to be integrated and developed as modules to be taught in higher education alongside Western concepts. Thus, the Africa's psychological worldview that needs to be integrated could be articulated as follows: Joys and losses, needs and preferences, celebrations and rituals, hopes and impediments, marriages and family, frustrations and challenges, attitudes to place and people, land ownership and displacement, death and the after-life, war and peace, reconciliation and conflict resolution, spirituality and the supernatural order, morality and ethics, and African healing traditions, institutions and practices/psychotherapeutic techniques including the dynamics of superstitious belief. All of these reflect the unique experiences of what it means to be an African in an African continent (Nwoye, 2013).

Furthermore, African psychology focuses on understanding the psychological significance of oral traditions and metaphors/proverbs of the great peoples of Africa. In this context, Obiechina (1992, p. 2 cited in Nwoye, 2013) refers to African psychology as "the encyclopaedia of African values, attitudes, history and ethical models" including the expression of cultural traditions, worldviews and ways of knowing. In this perspective, African psychology can be associated to many disciplines of study such as African history, literature, sociology, anthropology, religion, politics, economics, etc., in order to draw from a diversity of knowledge in an endeavour to seeking the truths about the factors that nurture an African human behaviour. Hence, African psychology aims at capturing the unique characteristics of

'who an Africa is' and his/her ways of creating meaning out of life experiences.

As well, Jamison (2008) describes African Psychology as a field of study interested in investigating and understanding the key psychological costs of being an African in America. Therefore, understanding the diaspora Africans' experiences add up to what African psychology is, particularly in the struggle to overcome denigrations and limitations of his/her past, including the understanding of the positive qualities of his/her life in terms of success stories and triumphs. Furthering this argument of what is African Psychology, one could say it encompasses the knowledge of pre-and post-colonial era, which requires that its study goes beyond subjectivity under one paradigm.

Therefore, the description of African Psychology not only requires an in-depth understanding of pre-and post-colonial African people but also the present crossbreeds emerging as a result of globalization, reflecting limits and boundaries within a sustained indigenous knowledge sense making (Eze, 2015, 2018a, 2018b; Nwoye, 2014). Aptly, African psychology attends to emerging themes of hybridization and its impact on human act of meaning making comprising the psychology of the 'hard surfaces' of the human existence in the contemporary world, including the enduring problems of war and refugee conditions and the ironies and paradoxes, and the contradictions and humiliations of the complicated present African environment (Nwoye, 2013). In addition, African psychology deals with the psychology of motherhood associated with limits and boundaries including the stresses of inheritance right, childlessness, cases of polygamy and widowhood. Therefore, it encompasses the psychology of feminism and women's concerns.

Besides, one could still argue that African psychology comprises of corrective psychology, which seeks to redeem the erroneous image of African people as has been presented by Western psychology. There has been erroneous representation of African people by some Western psychologist, as in the case of research findings reported by Gordon in collaboration with F.W. Vint (Nwoye, 2013) emphasizing that the cortical development of 'the brain of the adult African corresponds to that of a European child of seven or eight years of age'. This was reported in a study conducted to examine cranial capacity and brain weight of materials selected from autopsies of dead bodies from Nairobi hospital mortuary. This report, to say the least is disrespectful suggesting some kind of biased, judgmental and misinformation of humanness of African people, both in the past and the present. On this basis, African psychology is a corrective psychology that positions itself towards re-construction of African distorted image both in the past and present. Hence, a psychological presentation of Africa by African psychologists is urgently needed, and it is not that Africans are not already doing psychology (including psychotherapy) but there is need to do greater in-depth psychological study in which Africans could explore further issues of Africa's worldview in terms of methodological and clinical application of Africans' indigenous knowledge system.

In fact, Nwoye (2013) continued to emphasize that what is African in Africa psychology is based on the directives:

From the African content of its worldview that is holistic in range, and in which the African universe is understood as an alive, circular and dynamic universe, a universe of multiple realities (natural, abstract and

Eze, C. (2019) *The Challenges and Compromises of Culture-Centered Therapy: Nigerian Evidence, International Journal for Psychotherapy in Africa* 4(1):25-36

spiritual) in close proximity and complicated transactions with one another (p. 11).

Based on these varieties of insight, African psychology ought to be included for its unique contribution to be recognized and celebrated. It includes the bio psychosocial-spiritual (BPS-S) model of explaining sources of psychopathology in human beings within the holistic interaction of religiosity and spirituality. Basically, it reflects a cultural psycho-thesis process. Of course, it is impossible to exhaust the list of themes that come under the legitimate object of study of African psychology. Nonetheless the survey already given is enough to show that African psychology as an academic field of study is extensive and capable of sustaining the academic resources for inclusion as modules of curriculum and could in the future suffice for the award of diplomas, degrees, Masters' and Ph.Ds. However, this can only happen when African psychologists begin to integrate and teach African psychology. In this regard, the African psychologists must engage meaningful ways of mapping out appropriate strategies of action for greater inclusion of African psychology in its curricula of higher education in every region. Otherwise, psychology as being taught in African higher education will remain to some extent irrelevant to attending and nourishing culture-centered therapy within the continent.

Epistemologies in African Psychology

In attempting to appreciate what is African Psychology or what is Africa in African psychology, that needs to be integrated into higher education curriculum, it is imperative to understand its sources of knowledge creation as well as methods of acquiring them. In this context, some psychologists have described African psychology as

drawing from several sources such as the observationist, the narrativist, the proverbial, the sage, the generational, the hermeneutic, the kamukunji, the revelatonist, the dialogical, the propositional, the instrumentalist, the dream-related, the rationalist and the mythical/metaphorical epistemologies (Mkhzie, 2004; Mpofo, 2011; Nwoye, 2013). Maybe the ritualist and the vocalist could be added. In fact, the list is endless, pointing to the reality that African psychological epistemologies are pluralistic, involving multiple dimensions. Perhaps, the same assumption informs the Western traditions.

On this basis, it can be affirmed that African psychology draws from the writing of its forefathers/mothers as in the writings of great African scholars such as: Aime Ce saire, Chinua Achebe, Steve Biko, David Diop, Flora Nwapa, Franz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Jane Nardal, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Suzanne Ce saire, Wole Soyinka, Ngugiwa Thiong'o, Okot p' Bitek, Obimma Nnaemeka, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Mariama Ba etc. These writers mainly emerge from literary genre, expressing the voice of pan-African movement that had been described as negritude with the main concern of projecting African cultural identity.

Brief analysis of some of these African epistemologies might be insightful. Starting with the observational epistemology wherein emphasis is laid on knowledge gained through careful observation, study and experimentation (Bailey, 2005). Culturally, Africans learn through close observation and monitoring the other. In this stance, Africans revered good stories and storytellers, as do most past and present peoples around the world who are rooted in oral cultures and traditions. In contrast to written literature, African 'orature' is outstandingly rich, which in the words of

Ngugiwa_Thiong'o is orally composed and transmitted, and often created to be verbally and communally performed as an integral part of dance and music. This oral art sustains the development of African cultures and meaning making, and they have remained as living traditions that continue to evolve and flourish today and could be integral aspects of methodological and clinical psychotherapy.

In similar ways, proverbs are constituent part of African epistemological ways of knowledge creation expressing in-depth philosophical wisdom. Proverbs are used to illustrate ideas, reinforce arguments and deliver messages of inspiration, consolation, celebration and advice. Achebe (1958) describes proverbs as the palm oil with which words are eaten. It is an integral part of knowledge creation. Hence, proverbs are integrated part of African culture and had been in use for centuries, and they are still in wide use today and are very much part of everyday speech and meaning creation.

As well, the term mythical or metaphorical epistemology is used to refer to knowledge gained through the avenue of myths and metaphors. It portrays the African operating logic of things as different from the binary logic of Aristotle adopted in Western science and psychology. For the Africans things are not either/or but could be the same and one thing in spite of the difference it points to. In this regard, Adésíná (2001) refers to the Ti'bi-t'ire logic of indigenous African traditions wherein one's aunt could

as well be perceived as one's mother at the same time. This Ti'bi-t'ire logic is in sharp contrast to the Aristotle's binary logic, in which she is either the aunt or mother, not the two at the same time. In Africa, importance is accorded to the notion of inclusive logic, which forms part of Africans' epistemological ways of knowledge creation expressing sources of truth with regards to metaphorical logic of inclusion and the reality of complementarity of opposites or the belief in identity of contraries in human existence.

The basic tenet for looking at these epistemologies is to stress the fact that Africa has got what it takes to develop as well as integrate its own valued ways of knowledge creation into a viable teaching curricula. The tasking demand here is to diligently work out feasible strategy for developing all its prospects and precepts, which certainly calls for scientific based research similar to the steps taken in developing Western based knowledge. Having said this, the next section presents the survey of dominant curriculum.

Survey of Dominant Curriculum

The NUC benchmark is used to present the dominant psychology curriculum taught in Nigeria's universities indicating lack of inclusion of cultural worldview. In addition, some students' narratives are presented as evidence-base supporting the seemingly lack of cultural context.

National University Commission Benchmark Programmes

The NUC course content for teaching psychology B.Sc. Honors is presented in the tables below:

Year 1 Courses For Teaching Psychology

Compulsory Courses	Elective from the Faculty	Elective from outside Faculty
Introduction to Psychology	Introduction to Sociology –	Chemistry
History of Psychology	Introduction to Political Science	Biology/Zoology
Quantitative Methods in Psychology	Micro & Macro Economics Analysis –Introduction	Physics
Learning Processes	Fundamentals of Organisation Settlement Geography	Business Studies
Basic Concepts in Experimental Psychology		
General Studies		

Year 2 Courses For Teaching Psychology

Compulsory Courses	Required Courses	Elective Courses
General Experimental Psychology	Psychology of Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups	One elective from the Department
Physiological Psychology	Psycho-Biology	One elective from the Faculty
Industrial Psychology	Experimental Design	Another elective from outside the Faculty
Introduction to Social Psychology	Principles of Criminology and Juvenile Delinquency	
Development Psychology in the Social Sciences		
Total General Studies		

Year 3 Courses For Teaching Psychology

Compulsory Courses	Required Courses
Statistical methods in Psychology	Psycho-Biological Study of Behaviour
Clinical Psychology	Theories of Economic Development
Personality Assessment	Advance Experimental Design
Sensory Processors	Political Psychology
Psychology of Substance Abuse	The Psychology of Guidance and Counselling
Psychological Testing and Test	Cross – Cultural Psychology

Construction	
Research Methods in Psychology	Environmental Psychology
Total General Studies	Cognitive Psychology
	Personal Management
	Demography

Year 4 Courses For Teaching Psychology

Compulsory Courses	Elective (Any 5 from the below)
Psychological Testing and Test Construction	Consumers Psychology
Psycho-Biological Study of Behaviour	Behaviour modification
Social Perception	Psychology of Vocational Behaviour
Practicum in Psychotherapy	Organisational Psychology
Psychology of Union Management Relations	Forensic Psychology
Clinical Psychology	Psychology of Social Change
Research Project/Original Essay	Current Issues in Psychology

The tables above reflect that little or no attention has been accorded to the integration of Afrocentric worldview (Nigeria) for courses to be taught for the award of B.Sc. Psychology. The slightest representation of the Nigeria's cultural orientation in the courses recommended by NUC benchmark only appeared in the detailed description wherein emphasizes are laid regarding contextualization, demanding that lecturers factor in contextual issues into everyday teaching and learning. Such expectation makes one ask the question if contextualization of teaching and learning is all there is to Nigeria's worldview. Is it not possible that at least two or three courses be designated to teaching African psychology, reflecting Nigeria's belief systems, values, healing, rituals, proverbs etc.

However, the course recommendation for teaching year two psychology mentioned 'Psychology of Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups' which is rather broad a speculation and may not be very much narrowed down

to Nigerian's context. That notwithstanding its contextualization depends on the lecturer's subjective choice since there exist no parameter for measuring such details. Narratives from counselling students' focus group discussion affirmatively confirm the exclusion of cultural worldviews as follows: So far, I would say the curriculum we are taught do not pay much attention to our local context. The way of life of our people in Nigeria is not taught...though our lecturers would always say, as counsellors we must focus on the client's culture including language, values and norms but I think for this to be achieved we need to have an encompassing curriculum that includes our cultural value system in order for us to be abreast with it, leading to its application whilst interacting with clients.

Another extract that confirms the exclusion of African worldviews argues that it might be based on lecturer's lack of knowledge:

Eze, C. (2019) *The Challenges and Compromises of Culture-Centered Therapy: Nigerian Evidence, International Journal for Psychotherapy in Africa* 4(1):25-36

I feel that even our lecturers either do not know much or do not know how best to integrate contextual knowledge... therefore, there is needed to explore African cultural views. For some of them even the

disembodied from its context (Owuor, 2008). In the face of such exclusion, meaningful engagement with culture-centered therapy would be compromised.

knowledge of their own ethnic group is wanting, so how can they teach it...

Yet another extract focusing specifically on the cultural concept of witchcraft and what/how such should be handled in order to portray lack of skills for handling therapeutic engagement, have this to say:

I remember asking one of my lecturers the other day about witchcraft and what if a client presents such issues in therapy; what should I do. She just sniff her nose and say that I should send such clients to traditional healers or Church people to deal with it... and I am still wondering, is that all we need to do... My concern is that some of the clients would bring forth such issues and/or similar issues as our cultural belief may often reflect such issues...

The last extract argues that though they are in their final year of study no African theory has yet being taught:

Surprisingly, as a final year counselling psychology student there is no module or course designated to teaching African theories... so far we have not been taught any African theory and I am wondering if there is any theory focusing on African background. Maybe there is none!

To some extent, these students' narratives validate the exclusion of Nigeria's worldview from the current teaching curriculum, indicating disrespect for the context, and by extension the people as well. It means that the higher education as offered to Nigerian citizens to a large extent is

What makes this exclusion daunting is the fact that today's Nigeria curriculum planners are Nigerians themselves. All the players are drawn from within the country; therefore, one is bound to ask what has led them towards relegating their own cultural worldview to the background. The easiest answer would always be based on the fact that the Nigerian's academics are by-product of Western education, which did not so much integrate culture-bound context. Be that as it may, the Nigeria academics today have come a long way to knowing better and as Achebe (2009) puts it; Africans have reached the crossroad of not only listening to others but also ought to speak as well, so that others would listen. Therefore, the pedagogies of teaching and learning psychology within Nigerian Universities ought to challenge the hegemony of Western mainstream psychology. The proposal is not to replace Western Psychology but to integrate African Psychology (Nigeria) into what is taught and learnt. This may include exploring all that have been said above regarding what African psychology is and its epistemologies and the possibility of selective inclusion. In this way the best of what is thought and perceive within African and Western Psychology would compliment each other.

Prospects and precepts of inclusion of African Psychology into viable teaching curriculum

Although the concept of African psychology might appear young if not indefinable but there are ample evidence of scholarly engagements that have explored and continue to explore what is Afrocentric

Psychology and its epistemology. Concisely, they are emerging theorists such as Nwoye's (2007) *Remapping the Fabric of the African Self: A Synoptic theory*; Nwoye's (2006) *Theory and method of marriage therapy in Africa*; Nwoye's (2005) *Memory healing processes and community intervention in grief in Africa*; Mhikzie's *African Communitarian Self*, and a number of therapeutic techniques including Ubuntu therapy (Nefale & van Dyk, 2003; Louw & Madu, 2004), the Meseron therapy (Awaritefe, 1995, 1997, 2004; Ofovwe, 2005), the Harmony Restoration therapy (Ebigbo *et al.*, 1995) and the Culture-Centered Psychotherapy (CCP) (Madu, 2013). These theories and therapeutic techniques indicate that African psychologists are steadily engaging with African worldviews; therefore, nothing ought to prevent the inclusion of African oriented curriculum into higher education scheme of work (and if possible envision further development for awarding diplomas, degrees, Masters and Ph.Ds in the near future).

Hence, it can be argued that many African Psychologists (including Nigerians) have researched and published Africa's viewpoints and granted that much more research is still needed but what is published so far is rich enough. Therefore, what is paramount at the moment is an urgent inclusion of available Africa's worldviews (Nigerian) into what is taught and learnt in higher education. Now is the time to integrate Nigeria's viewpoints into the curriculum and course content of what higher education offers to its recipients, so that they in turn would be able to engage culture-centered therapy in their provision of service and as well hand over such knowledge to the future generation they would encounter in the process of teaching and learning in kindergarten, primary,

secondary and tertiary institutions. No doubt, the future of African psychology is bright portraying fertile grounds for cutting edge research that will inspire greatness, as well as fill the gap for lack of documented knowledge and body of literature.

In this context, research on African indigenous knowledge system is a platform for methodological and clinical investigation, leading to publication and on-going study, facilitating the consolidation of African psychology as an inclusive curriculum for teaching/learning and practice. Globally, such a development will foster greater frontiers for African psychology as a specialized area of study.

Conclusion

The main concern of this paper has been that the achievement of culture-centered therapy largely depends on successful integration of African (Nigerian) worldview into higher education curriculum. The engagement has been to surface ways such exclusion has happened based on NUC benchmark course content alongside students' narratives. Some of the risk factors sustaining such exclusion include the colonial experiences of the past in which Africa in spite of gaining political independence still remains to some extent dependent. But beyond this limitation, the paper maintains that African scholars have made tremendous contributions in developing African-centered psychological theories/therapy though more contributions are needed to install African perspective as an integral part of teaching curriculum in Africa's higher education. In this way, psychology as taught in African higher education will be relevant to trainees, enabling them to nurture culture-centered therapy. Hence, the paper argues that African centered-curriculum for teaching psychology ought to be planned and mapped out in order to ensure that Africa's cultural

Eze, C. (2019) *The Challenges and Compromises of Culture-Centered Therapy: Nigerian Evidence, International Journal for Psychotherapy in Africa* 4(1):25-36

identity is not relegated to the background. It is only in this way will psychology taught in Africa's higher education be reoriented to nurture itself towards achievement of culture-centered therapy.

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