

Meaning, relevance and prospects of psychology: A survey of undergraduate students of University of Ibadan

N. A. Shenge, R. A. Adu

ABSTRACT

Psychology is defined as the scientific study of human and animal behavior including mental processes. Psychology as a discipline of study was first introduced to the Nigerian University fifty years ago. Although the discipline has grown and diversified in the relative terms, little is known among non-psychologists and even psychologists themselves about its relevance and prospects. This study set out to fill this knowledge gap. The study surveyed the views of 83 psychology and non-psychology undergraduate students of the Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan on the meaning, relevance and prospects of psychology. Participants were students of a second-year social psychology course. The class has 51 males and 32 females students. Participants' written responses are being quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. It is hoped that findings of this paper will add up to existing literature on the prospects and relevance of psychology in the national development. As well, findings of the study will serve as a useful guide for non-psychologists and intending psychology students that may be willing to learn about prospects and relevance of psychology in the national development.

Keywords: Prospects, Psychology and national development, Relevance, Qualitative survey

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INTRODUCTION

Psychology is a science as well as a profession. As a science, psychologists study how people perceive, think, feel, and act. In the professional arena, careers that are based on psychological principles seek to predict how people will act; help people modify their behavior; and help organizations, businesses, and communities to change [1]. Surprisingly, many psychologists consider themselves primarily to be scientists and researchers. As a result of this many of them are found working in the academic setting. For any discipline and psychology in particular to grow both scientific and professional aspects must go hand-in-hand. Today in Nigeria, little or nothing is known among psychologists and non-psychologists as per the prospects and relevance of psychology to national development. This research, therefore, seeks to empirically examine the meaning, relevance, prospects and general perception of psychology among undergraduate students in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevance and contribution of psychology to the development cannot be overemphasized. Psychology has contributed immensely in solving educational and social problems in many countries of the world. According to Berliner DC, psychology has an exceptional role to play in surpassing the other social sciences to contribute its own quota to nation-building. Psychologists' acceptance of their role as leading social scientists would make them to be better positioned to contribute more meaningful to the development of society beyond what they are currently doing now. The central goal of psychology should be to contribute to growth and to optimum development of the society. According to Binet A, this could be done if psychology is made relevant to the society reality and provide society with behavioral tools to solve problems in its own ways [2, 3].

Psychology's relevance has been demonstrated in some areas. For instance, Carl Hovland developed the Yale Communication and Attitude Change Program after the completion of his military assignment in World War II of analyzing the effectiveness of propaganda and training programs [4]. The work of Carl Hovland helped in training some selected pilots to overcome fear and subsequently return to combat. His work in this area laid the foundation for what is known today as biofeedback [5–7]. Apart from the area of military strategies, psychology has made so much useful contributions to our lives and many of which are taken for granted. Psychological testing and assessment pioneered by Kasschau RA and Lewin K. are of tremendous benefit to humanities today. Psychology has also proved its own relevance in the field of teaching and learning. The role of psychology in education has enabled teachers/educators to know what to teach learners of different ages. Influential role play by industrial/organizational psychologists today has made the world of work to become more humanized than ever before [1, 8–16].

Considering some of the relevance of psychology highlighted in this article shows that there is a bright future ahead of psychology as a discipline and psychologists as professionals. The present and future prospects of psychology can be enhanced by psychologists by concentrating on how to make the discipline to be relevant and visible [17].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

The study adopted qualitative survey design. The research design enabled the researchers to get detailed information from participants on meaning, relevance and prospects of psychology.

Setting

The study was carried out in a lecture room of Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Nigeria where one of the authors teaches and do research. University of Ibadan is an institution of higher education owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The university is one of the most diverse universities in Nigeria. The university comprises thirteen faculties and many other academic units. Both the faculties and the academic units composed of many departments that are accredited by the universities regulatory body in Nigeria known as National Universities Commission (NUC).

Participants

Eighty-three undergraduate (male and female) students taking Social Psychology were purposively sampled from three different departments Psychology, Sociology, and Economics in University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The participants' age ranged from 18–32. Their mean age was 22.06 (SD = 3.52). One inclusion criterion was that the participants must presently be offering one or more psychology courses. The study comprised of 51 (61.4%) males and 32 (38.6%) females. Sixty-eight (81.9%) of the respondents were psychology students, male: 43 (63.2%) and female: 25 (36.8%), 8 (9.6%) were sociology students, male: 6 (75.0%) and female: 2 (25.0%), and 7 (8.4%) were economics students, male: 2 (28.6%) and female; 5 (71.4%). All the participants were single.

Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed because participants were relevant to the issue being investigated by the research. Participants were asked to provide written answers to specific questions on meaning, relevance and prospects of psychology. No restrictions were given to participants regarding the answers they were to give. At the point of administering, participants were assured of absolute confidentiality, telling them that names were not needed on the questionnaires. The participants were likewise informed of the purpose of the research and that they were not under any obligation to participate and that they were free to pull out from the research at any stage they consider fit.

Data Analysis

Data were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. Frequencies and percentages were generated and calculated. Chi-squared test was also conducted to know if association existed between what participants hope doing after graduation and what they want to be in the next ten years.

RESULTS

This section presented data gathered at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria through unstructured questionnaire with the undergraduate students from three different departments i.e. psychology, sociology, and economics.

Research Question One: Meaning of psychology

Sixty-seven (80.72%) of the participants gave explicit (clear) definition of psychology. An example of such definitions given was that; psychology is the scientific study of human and animal behavior and their mental processes. Other similar definitions offered by the participants include; scientific study of human and animal behavior for the purpose of understanding, predicting and controlling behavior. Six (7.23%) of the participants offered uncommon definitions of psychology. For example, it is the scientific study of human mind in relation to daily activities. Ten (12.05%) of the participants gave vague meaning of the subject matter psychology. For instance, psychology is an enquiry into understanding behavior that is, why people act the way they do.

Research Question Two: What are the areas where psychology is applied? (Relevance)

All 83 (100%) participants listed the commonly known areas where psychology is applied. For instance, psychology is applied to industries, education, health, politics, sport and many more.

Research Question Three: Areas of specialization in psychology (Relevance)

All 83 (100%) participants listed the commonly known areas of specialization in psychology. The specialization areas identified by the participants include industrial/organizational, clinical, social, forensic, developmental psychology and many more areas of specialization in psychology.

Research Question Four: Is psychology relevant to the development of Nigeria? Why or why not? (Prospects)

All 83 (100%) participants opined that, psychology is critically relevant to the development of Nigeria. For instance, our adequate knowledge of human behavior assists us to relate well with our human beings and which in turn leads to our peaceful co-existence in the society. Development is always possible in the atmosphere of peace. According to some of the participants, although psychology is relevant to Nigeria's development, adequate attention has not been given to the discipline in the country Nigeria and psychologists themselves have not been cooperating to advance the cause of the discipline psychology in Nigeria.

Research Question Five: After your first degree in psychology what do you hope to be doing? (Prospects)

Seventy-two (86.70%) of the participants were certain as per what they hope to be doing after their first degree in psychology whereas 11 (13.30%) of them were uncertain regarding what they hope doing after their first degree in psychology.

Research Question Six: In the next 10 years, by God's grace, what do you want to be? (Prospects)

Sixty-four (77.10%) of the participant were certain of what they want to be in the next ten years while 19 (22.90%) of them were not certain as per what they want to be in the next ten years.

Research Question Seven: If you were to choose a course of study again, will you choose psychology? (Personal conviction about choice of psychology)

Fifty-eight (69.90%) of the participants will choose psychology if they were to choose a course of study again, 22 (26.50%) will not choose psychology and 3 (3.60%) of the participants were uncertain as per whether or not they will choose psychology if they were to choose a course of study again.

Research Question Eight: If not psychology, what course will you choose?

Two (2.40%) of the respondent will choose accounting, 3 (3.60%) law, 1 (1.20%) economics, 3 (3.60%) sociology, 1 (1.2%) communication and language arts, 1(1.20%) computer science, 1 (1.20%) business administration, 1 (1.20%) theatre arts, 1(1.20%) mechanical engineering, 1 (1.20%) international relations, 1(1.20%) philosophy, 1 (1.20%) medicine, and 2 (2.40%) music. The results showed that only 19 (22.90%) out of the 83 (100%) of the participants will choose other courses rather than psychology if they were to choose a course of study again in the nearest future and 64 (77.10%) of the participant will still prefer to choose again and again.

Research Question Nine: How do people around you perceive psychology? (General perception of psychology)

The participants reported that 63 (75.90%) of the people around them perceived psychology positively, 18 (21.70%) had negative view of psychology and 2 (2.24%) were neutral as per their general perception of psychology.

Table 1 illustrates that 59 (81.90%) of the participants who were certain of what to be doing after graduation were also certain of what they want to be in the next ten years.

Table 1: After your graduation what do hope to be doing (Prospect) * What do you want to be in the next ten years (Prospect) Cross tabulation

| After your graduation what do hope to be doing? | What do you want to be in the next ten years? | | Total | df | χ^2 | sig. |
|---|---|------------|-----------|----|----------|-------|
| | Certain | Uncertain | | | | |
| Certain | 59 (81.9%) | 13 (18.1%) | 72 (100%) | 1 | 7.20 | 0.007 |
| Uncertain | 5 (45.5%) | 6 (54.5%) | 11 (100%) | | | |

Surprisingly, 13 (18.10%) of the participants who were certain of what they hope doing after graduation were uncertain of what they want to be in the next ten years. Regarding uncertainty, 5 (45.50%) of the participants who were uncertain of what they hope doing after graduation were certain of what they want to be in the next ten years. Finally, 6 (54.50%) of the participants who were uncertain of what they hope doing after graduation were also uncertain of where they want to be in the next ten years. Table 1 gives chi square value ($\chi^2 = 7.20$; $df = 1$; sig 0.007). The chi-square value is significant because the value under sig column is less than 0.05. This implied that, there was association between what students hope doing after graduation and what they want to be in next 10 years.

DISCUSSION

The research question one concerns itself about meaning of psychology revealed that larger percent of the participants gave clear (explicit) definition of psychology. This implies that majority of the participants were able to give explicit meaning of the subject matter psychology. Further analysis showed that 7.23% of the participants offered uncommon definition of psychology that showcase the relevance of mind in our day-to-day functioning as human beings. Surprisingly, 12.05% of the participants gave vague meaning of psychology.

The research questions two and three asked questions on the areas of application and specialization of psychology. Results showed that all the participants know the common areas of application and specialization of psychology.

The research questions four, five, and six asked questions pertaining to the relevance and prospect of psychology. Analyses of results revealed that, psychology is relevant to the development of Nigeria. Some of the participants commented that psychology is a discipline with many areas of applications that are relevant to the development of Nigeria. Others noted that although psychology is relevant to the development of Nigeria, psychologists have not been contributing their quota to Nigeria's development. This may be due in part to the lack cooperation among the founding fathers of the discipline in Nigeria.

The research question regarding general perception of psychology revealed that many people hold psychology

in high esteem. But then, the participants sampled disclosed that 21.70% of the people around them perceived psychology negatively. The participants noted that, some people around them perceived psychology as a dead course without significant purpose. Still others perceived the course as course with little or no effect in the society.

CONCLUSION

In reality, psychology has been making useful contributions to the development of Nigeria in many areas. These include areas of professional helping including psychotherapy, everyday living, and industries. It should be noted that these roles play by psychologists are not well known among non-psychologists. Therefore, psychologists should make concerted efforts in order to make themselves and psychology as a discipline visible and well recognized in the society at large.

Author Contribution

N. A. Shenge – Substantial contributions to conception and design, Acquisition of data, Analysis and interpretation of data, Drafting the article, Revising it critically for important intellectual content, Final approval of the version to be published

R. A. Adu – Analysis and interpretation of data, Revising it critically for important intellectual content, Final approval of the version to be published

Guarantor

The corresponding author is the guarantor of submission.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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