


Editorial: Psychological assessment in Africa: The time is now!

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It is indeed an honour to pen the inaugural editorial for the *African Journal of Psychological Assessment* (AJOPA). Whilst psychological assessment in its present form has largely been the domain of Western psychologies located primarily in the Global North, African researchers and practitioners have in recent decades adopted some of these techniques and used them successfully. Others have adapted the techniques to suit the African context, often amalgamating these techniques within indigenous knowledge systems and contexts. Some African researchers and practitioners have developed new and exciting methods congruent with local belief systems that tend to have better contextual fit. Contrary to popular belief, psychology and psychological assessment in particular are active areas of engagement and robust debate in Africa.

South Africa, for example, has an intimate history with psychological assessment, with the field being abused firstly to justify the ineducability of the native and then to support apartheid politics and post apartheid to almost being outlawed in the country (see Laher & Cockcroft, 2014). The field currently is a hotbed of development and discussion. In the policy sphere, the *Employment Equity Act* 55, Section 8 (Government Gazette 1998) states that psychological assessment of an employee is prohibited unless the test or assessment is reliable, valid, unbiased and can be applied fairly to all employees.

South Africa is one of the few countries that has legislation pertaining to the use of psychological assessments. However, Botswana recently embarked on a process to develop a framework for the use of tests in the country's schools (see Mpofu, Oakland, Ntinda, Secco, & Maree, 2014). Whilst having legislation for assessment is progressive, ensuring compliance with the legislation, as with the *Employment Equity Act* in the case of South Africa, is a challenge. Added to this is the difficulty in ensuring that ethical procedures are followed with psychological assessment. Test review processes in South Africa are also under discussion. Despite these challenges, research in the field is ongoing and in diverse areas of psychology, ranging from the more traditional, clinical and industrial psychology areas through to more community-based approaches (see Laher & Cockcroft, 2013, 2017).

Drawing on the South African context yet again (as this is the context most familiar to the editors), the economics that underlie psychological assessment in South Africa are interesting and have relevance across the continent. South Africa is home to many companies that specialise in psychological assessment and also supply material across African countries. The interplay between profit-making, negotiations with bigger multinational companies in the Global North and the ethical responsibility to ensure access to quality assessments across the country and continent makes for discussion not often encountered in current assessment journals.

South Africa, like some other countries in Africa, evidences two economies: one that is not too dissimilar to Western contexts, generally with an educated, employed population, and one in which most people are unemployed, have little access to quality education and by and large live in poverty (Leibbrandt, Woolard, Finn, & Argent, 2010). Hence, the assessment field is split in that one caters for the more advantaged parts of the population who can afford to do assessments and who have the level of education necessary to do so and are demographically very similar to the Western populations on whom tests are developed and normed. Researchers and practitioners in this segment of the population are very much in sync with Western developments in assessment, with the most recent being the focus on the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, amongst other aspects (Ayentimi & Burgess, 2018; Schwab, 2016). Gamification, in particular, features strongly in this sphere (see Armstrong, Ferrell, Collmus, & Landers, 2016; Herzig, Ameling, & Schill, 2015).

The second economy is characterised by poverty and inequality. Communities with no or little access to education, low literacy, large-scale unemployment and high crime rates have unique

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challenges for assessment (see Laher & Cockcroft, 2017). Traditional pen-and-paper assessments from the West are often inappropriate in these settings, where most people do not have English as a first language. These communities are prevalent throughout Africa, with other countries having contexts of famine, war and unrest in addition to poverty and illiteracy (see Kagaari & Kibanja, in press; Tchombe, Asangha, Melem, Wirdze, & Ndzetar, in press). Emic measures rooted in the philosophies of indigenous knowledge and emanating from local customs and context are increasingly being used in such contexts. The work of colleagues in Zambia on the Panga Muthu test, the Zambia Child Assessment Tool and the Object-Based Pattern Reasoning Assessment evidence this (Matafwali & Serpell, 2014; Zuilkowski, McCoy, Serpell, Matafwali, & Fink, 2016). Research on the use of GraphoGame to enhance literacy in children (see Jere-Folotiya et al., 2014) also demonstrates the possibility of using digital technology in developing contexts, suggesting that the Fourth Industrial Revolution is happening in a different way for assessment in African contexts.

Another interesting example of indigenous research can be found in the area of personality assessment. Thalmayer (2018) collected data from 116 Maasai herders in rural Kenya and 114 Supyire-Senufo agriculturalists in Mali and found evidence to match a Big-Two model (social self-regulation and dynamism) and a four-factor model (anger, laziness, virtue and happiness) that was common between the Maasai and Senufo. Research is currently being conducted with the Khoekhoe people in Namibia (Thalmayer, 2018). Research using the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI), an indigenous personality instrument, also supported a two-factor model (an agentic or personal growth factor and a social relational cluster) (see Valchev, Van de Vijver, Nel, Rothmann, & Meiring, 2013; Valchev et al., 2014). In the area of cognitive assessment, Serpell (2011), using empirical data from Zambian children, argues for the relevance of social responsibility as a dimension of intelligence. Super, Harkness, Barry and Zeitlin (2011) use research conducted in Loupa, Senegal, to critically examine the concept of socially responsible intelligence, arguing for reciprocal relationships between African and Western contexts – the need to ‘think globally but act locally’.

From this brief snapshot it is clear that psychological assessment is a vibrant and active field in Africa. However, much of this research is not disseminated across the continent. The AJOPA aims to serve as the platform for the current disparate research being conducted in psychometrics and psychological assessment in Africa. Furthermore, AJOPA will open up opportunities for collaboration and indigenous knowledge production. Submissions that analyse and debate the current Eurocentric and Western cultural hegemonic practices that dominate the field of psychological assessment are encouraged, as this will lend much support to international debates in psychological theory and assessment. Hence, the journal aims to be of relevance to local and international policy, research and practice.

Manuscripts in the areas of psychometrics and psychological assessment are invited. Manuscript submissions must

demonstrate a clear contribution to the field and must be of relevance to the African context. Manuscripts can focus on, but are not limited to, ethics in assessment, establishing the psychometric properties of an instrument, methods in assessment, research on core issues in psychological assessment (e.g. assessment in low-resource settings, multicultural assessment, acculturation and assessment, language and assessment and assessment of people with disabilities), specific areas in assessment (e.g. cognitive, personality, vocational, intelligence and aptitude assessment) and/or particular settings (e.g. clinical, educational, forensic, organisational and neuropsychological assessment). Manuscripts may take the form of original research studies, theoretical papers, case studies, test reviews or methods papers. *African Journal of Psychological Assessment* is fully open access and charges no article processing fees.

The Editorial Team looks forward to interacting with authors, reviewers and readers.

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Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

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