



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Psychology in Africa: a bibliographical survey

Marais, H.C.; Hoorweg, J.C.

Citation

Marais, H. C., & Hoorweg, J. C. (1971). Psychology in Africa: a bibliographical survey. *International Journal Of Psychology*, 6(4), 329-335. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/8915>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/8915>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

PSYCHOLOGY IN AFRICA A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

H.C. MARAIS
J.C. HOORWEG

University of Port Elizabeth, Kampala, Ouganda
Makerere University, Kampala, Ouganda

Several methods of surveying a social science in a particular country or continent are conceivable. A *professional* approach could be used, consisting of an analysis of the opportunities for both research and training in a specific geographical area, supplemented with a description of the professional societies. An example of this approach is Ardila's (1968) description of psychology in South America. A second, *personnel* oriented method could consist of a systematic analysis of the activities of indigenous psychologists, complemented with a list of professional societies and visiting psychologists from abroad. Van Bergen and Jaspars (1968) used this approach in their review of social psychology in the Netherlands.

A third alternative was followed in the present study, a *bibliographical* approach, *i.e.*, a descriptive analysis of publications in terms of a number of categories. Although until recently there were few indigenous psychologists or training facilities, a considerable amount of psychological research has been done in Africa, so that a bibliographical study of publications pertaining to African populations could be elucidating.

This paper presents an analysis of the titles in a recent bibliography on psychology in Africa (Hoorweg and Marais, 1969). In this bibliography, publications were included irrespective of quality, but confidential reports or papers pertaining to white subjects only were omitted. The 1312 entries were categorized in terms of (a) year of publication; (b) field of psychology using the classification of the *Psychological Abstracts*,¹ (c) geographical location, *i.e.*, that part of Africa with which the paper dealt; (d) language of publication; and (e) publication medium, *e.g.*, journals, books, etc. Cross-tables were extracted from these data. In the presen-

¹ In the compilation of the bibliography, the authors classified, independently of each other, each reference into the main categories. These judgments corresponded in 95 % of the cases. The remaining 5 % were classified after discussion. The classifications into subdivisions were done jointly.

tation below, the totals for each category are presented first, while in the second part some cross-tables are discussed.

RESULTS IN EACH CATEGORY

Year of publication

The number of publications per decade is presented in Table 1. It can be seen that since the emergence of psychology as a modern science at the end of the 19th century, there has been a continuous increase in papers over decennia

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS PER LANGUAGE AND OVER DECADES

	1880-1889	1890-1899	1900-1909	1910-1919	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949	Sub Total	1950-1959	1960-1969	Rest & unknown	Total
English	—	2	6	7	14	76	39	144	239	470	9	862
French	—	—	2	—	8	9	24	43	169	163	6	381
Other	2	—	—	1	—	5	5	15	25	29	—	69
Total	2	2	8	8	22	90	70	202	433	662	15	1312

(except for the period 1940-1949), with a rapid expansion since 1950. A breakdown in four-year periods since 1950 shows the following totals : 99, 179, 284, 279 and 254 for the last period of 1966-1969. The greatest increase apparently occurred from 1954 to 1961, with a more even development since 1962^a.

Language of publication

Table 1 shows that the total of 1312 compiled titles, 862 (65.7 %) were in English, 381 (29 %) in French, and 69 (5.3 %) in German, Afrikaan, Dutch and other languages.

Field of psychology

Table 2 shows both the totals and the important subdivisions for each separate field of psychology. The field of personality headed the list in number of publications, followed by social psychology, clinical psychology and personnel psychology. These four fields accounted for 63.1 % of all publications.

There was a heavy emphasis on what might be called *testing aptitudes and abilities*. Four subdivisions concerned with this topic, *i.e.*, tests (methodology), aptitudes and abilities (personality), testing (educational), and selection and

^a The bibliography was closed in June 1969; the period 1966-69 thus barely covers three and a half years.

placement (personnel) together constituted more than 20 % of all publications. "Aptitudes and abilities" also stood out as the most prominent area in the field of personality psychology. Few studies were concerned with other aspects

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATIONS OVER FIELDS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Field	N	Subcategory	N
General	70 (5.3 %)	Psychology of <i>the</i> African or specific African group	22
		Bibliographies & reviews	22
		Others combined	26
Methodology	75 (5.7 %)	Tests	49
		Others combined	26
Experimental	89 (6.8 %)	Perception	27
		Vision	29
		Others combined	33
Physiological	25 (1.9 %)	Neurology & electroencephalography	16
		Others combined	9
Developmental	123 (9.4 %)	Infancy	15
		Childhood	90
		Others combined	18
Social	231 (17.6 %)	Culture & social processes	80
		Attitude and opinion	65
		Group and interpersonal processes	47
		Others combined	39
Personality	236 (18 %)	Aptitudes & abilities	149
		Personality measurement	29
		Psychoanalysis	18
		Others combined	40
Clinical	207 (15.8 %)	Therapy & analysis	40
		Psychosis	35
		Behaviour disorder	26
		Neurosis & emotional disturbance	16
		Others combined	90
Educational	102 (7.8 %)	Testing	30
		School learning, teaching method & special education	23
		Others combined	49
Personnel	154 (11.7 %)	Selection & placement	65
		Performance & job satisfaction	24
		Others combined	65
Total	1312		1312

of personality, even if one allows for the fact that studies relating to child rearing and personality were classified under developmental psychology.

Social psychology provides links with the other social sciences as is reflected in the relatively large number of studies on culture and social processes. *Clinical psychology* has mostly been concerned with the classification and description of mental illnesses, therapy and analysis, and paid moderate attention to behaviour disorders. *Personnel psychology* consisted largely of studies on selection and placement, and on performance and job satisfaction. In *experimental psychology*, the emphasis on studies of perception and vision is striking.

Geographical location

The number of publications which each geographical area has contributed towards the total was as follows: 42 (3.2 %) from North Africa, 798 (60.8 %) from sub-Saharan Africa (*i.e.*, excluding South Africa), and 243 (18.5 %) from South Africa; 135 (10.3 %) dealt with Africa and Africans in general. Ninety four studies (7.2 %) were unclassifiable, mainly because these studies were not at the compilers' disposal. (See Table 4, p. 334).

Publication medium

Most papers, more specifically 889 (67.7 %), were published in journals, while 227 (17.3 %) were book references, 117 conference reports (8.9 %), 56 (4.2 %) theses, and 23 (1.9 %) unpublished papers. The 889 journal references were distributed over no less than 254 journals. Of these 254 periodicals only 40 contributed more than five articles³. These 40 journals among themselves produced a total of 495 titles. Consequently, the other 393 references were scattered over 214 periodicals, which ranged from sociological and anthropological publications through medical and psychiatric journals, to educational journals, and journals concerned with work and labour. This diffusion may well have hampered the development of psychology in Africa. Many of the journals are relatively unknown, difficult to obtain, have low circulation figures, and are, on face value, unlikely places to look for psychological papers.

CROSS-TABLES

Year of publication × *Field of psychology*

The number of publications per field of psychology set out against decade of publication can be found in Table 3 (p. 333).

For each decade from 1880 to 1959 the section on personality contributed the largest number of studies. This singularly prominent position is, however, almost entirely due to publications on aptitudes and abilities. The concentration on aptitudes and abilities probably reflected a general preoccupation of psychologists everywhere at that time. However, not everywhere did this preoccupation last until 1961, as it did in Africa. This may well have contributed to the relative isolation of psychology among the social sciences concerned with Africa. Only in recent years have departments of psychology been established at a number

³ Six journals produced more than 20 references each: *Journal of Social Psychology*; *Journal NIPR* = *Psychologia Africana*; *Psychopathologie Africaine*; *Africa*; *Bulletin CEPESI*; *International Journal of Psychology*.

of African universities, and interestingly enough, this also coincided with a shift of research interests after 1961.

During the past decade social psychology has become the most productive area, followed by clinical psychology, while personality psychology has been relegated to a third position with the number of publications in this field steadily declining. The rise of social psychology is mainly due to a greater interest in the areas of attitudes and opinions and group and inter-personal processes. Also striking is the change in the rank of educational psychology — from eighth position in 1950-1959 to fourth position in 1960-1969.

TABLE 3
NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS PER FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY FOR VARIOUS PERIODS

Field	1880-1919	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949	1950-1959	1960-1969	Rest & unknown	Total
General	1	2	4	8	27	27	1	70
Methodology	1	—	6	4	25	38	1	75
Experimental	4	—	7	1	18	58	1	89
Physiological	—	—	5	1	12	6	1	25
Developmental	6	2	8	5	40	60	2	123
Social	1	1	6	9	49	163	2	231
Personality	3	12	33	16	93	78	1	236
Clinical	1	1	8	15	71	110	1	207
Educational	3	3	9	3	19	62	3	102
Personnel	—	1	4	8	79	60	2	154
Total	20	22	90	70	433	662	15	1312

Even more striking was the increase in studies in the field of experimental psychology since 1966. As a matter of fact, for the least four years covered by the bibliography, studies in experimental psychology have taken second place, being exceeded only by studies in social psychology.

The overriding interest in aptitudes and abilities has lessened. Psychologists have become more concerned with experimental research into basic psychological processes, and with social psychology and its complex social problems, a meeting point with the other social sciences.

Year of publication × Geographical location

Table 4 (p. 334) reflects the yearly totals for the various parts of Africa. Before 1949, South Africa contributed a relatively large percentage of the total number of publications; nevertheless, studies on South African populations numbered only half of those concerned with other sub-Saharan populations. The rapid expansion in the 1950 period was relatively greater for sub-Saharan Africa than

for South Africa. In the nineteen-sixties, South Africa no longer showed an increase in number of publications, whereas the growth in number of studies concerned with sub-Saharan Africa and Africa as a whole was less than before, but still considerable.

Language of publication × *Year of publication*, & × *Field of psychology*

Tables 1 and 5 present, respectively, publication language against year of publication, and against field of psychology.

Over the period 1880-1949, English publications outnumbered French publications by a ratio of 3 to 1 (Table 1). In the nineteen-fifties the number of

TABLE 4
NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS PER PART OF AFRICA FOR VARIOUS PERIODS

Part of Africa	1880-1949	1950-1959	1960-1969	Rest & unknown	Total
Africa-as-a-whole	18	37	76	4	135
North Africa	6	17	19	—	42
Sub-Saharan Africa (except South Africa)	103	263	425	7	798
South Africa	54	93	93	3	243
Unclassifiable	21	23	49	1	94
Total	202	433	662	15	1312

both English and French publications increased rapidly, but in the years since 1959, the English titles have shown an increase of 49 %, while French titles increased by only 3 %.

TABLE 5
NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS PAR LANGUAGE IN DIFFERENT FIELDS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Field	English	French	Other	Total
General	31	36	3	70
Methodology	55	19	1	75
Experimental	18	4	3	25
Physiological	59	4	6	89
Developmental	74	44	5	123
Social	177	47	7	231
Personality	142	74	20	236
Clinical	116	79	12	207
Educational	71	24	7	102
Personnel	89	50	5	154
Total	862	381	69	1312

English and French publications differ in their distribution over subjects (Table 5). French titles were relatively overrepresented in general, clinical, and

developmental psychology, while the great bulk of the studies in experimental, physiological, and social psychology were written in English. In particular, experimental psychology seems confined to English publications.

CONCLUSION

Since 1880, surprisingly large number of papers dealing with psychology in Africa have been published. The large and sudden increase in the number of publications in the fifties was followed by a more even development in the sixties.

As elsewhere, changes in the popularity of the various fields of psychology over decades seem to be a characteristic of psychology in Africa. However, there is reason to believe that psychology will become more oriented towards the needs and requirements of Africa, rather than towards the interests of incidental investigators. Furthermore, if the present trends continue, the English-speaking sub-Saharan countries (excepting South Africa) will become the main focus of psychology on the continent.

Finally, one can only hope that investigators will try to publish their work in journals more readily available to all workers in this field, rather than publishing in the diversity of journals noted.

REFERENCES

- ARDILA, R. Psychology in Latin America. *American Psychologist*, 1968, 23, 567-574.
HOORWEG, J.C. & MARAIS, H.C. *Psychology in Africa. A bibliography*. Leyden, The Netherlands : Afrika-Studiecentrum, 1969.
VAN BERGEN, A. & JASPARS, J.M.F. *Social psychology in the Netherlands*. Report SP 004-69. Psychological Institute, University of Leyden, The Netherlands : 1969.