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Forty Years Of The Nigerian Psychological Association (1984-2024) In The Lens Of Wilensky's Professionalization Framework

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ABSTRACT

This paper utilized the Wilensky (1964) five-stage structured framework of professionalization to assess how well the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) has guided the psychology profession in Nigeria toward becoming a recognized and authoritative profession in the past forty (1984-2024) years. The paper used the Wilensky's 5-stage framework, including the emergence of a full-time occupation, establishment of training schools, formation of professional association, public recognition and legal support, and formal code of ethics, to specify NPA's progress in the professionalization of the psychology profession in Nigeria. The analytical approach used in the paper indicated that the NPA made significant progress on the first three markers of Wilensky's professionalization framework, but it still struggles on the fourth and fifth stages - legal support and formal code of ethics. The research concluded that the forty-year journey of NPA reflects significant progress toward the professionalization of the psychology profession in Nigeria. The challenges associated with the lack of statutory regulation and the weak enforcement of NPA's code of conduct have made the psychology profession unable to achieve full occupational closure and/or attain full professionalization.

Keywords: Code of Conduct, Nigeria Council of Psychologists Bill, Nigerian Psychological Association, Occupational closure, Wilensky (1964) professionalization framework

Introduction

The concept of professionalization has become a topical issue for both individuals and occupations seeking recognition, credibility, and long-term success. Professionalization refers to the process through which occupations develop the characteristics of a recognized profession. Fraser (2025) described professionalization as the process by which occupations establish formal education, certification, ethical standards, and associations to distinguish qualified practitioners from amateurs. Similarly, Zou et al. (2026) defined professionalization as a process in which an occupation evolves into a recognized profession with formal standards, specialized knowledge, and social legitimacy. The core elements that characterize the process of professionalization include specialized education and training, regulation and credentialing, professional associations, ethical code of conduct and regulatory standards. These elements help occupations gain prestige, social trust, and credibility in the services provided by individuals within the profession. An essential element in the process of professionalization is ‘occupational closure,’ which is a process of closing off entry to a profession except for people who are suitably qualified. William and koumenta (2020) defined occupational closure as the mechanism that professions use to control entry into the occupation, to maintain their status and exclusivity. By defining entry requirement and regulatory practices, professionalization creates a clear boundary between qualified professionals and the unqualified, thereby preserving the profession’s reputation and authority (McAllum et al., 2024; Ogieva & Izuhuiwa, 2024).

Professional associations play important roles in the elevation of occupations to professions. For example, when Olomolaiye (1985) declared that: “every professional needs a base where he or she can find refuge in times of need and be called to order when he or she goes too far astray” (p.349), the researcher was calling attention to the need to have a strong professional structure that can protect and safeguard the profession of psychology in Nigeria. That professional body is the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA). The NPA was created to advance the practice of psychology in Nigeria and to protect the professional territory of Nigerian psychologists. Its objectives were to bring all Nigerian psychologists under one professional umbrella, and to promote the

professional interests of psychologists in Nigeria. The NPA has had a chequered history. In the early times, the NPA inspired tremendous optimism among Nigerian psychologists, it connected members by providing them with opportunities to network during professional conferences – exchanging ideas, testing out their presentations and learning from one another in the various domains of the field. But later on, the Association failed to offer hope to members, for example, there were some years that the NPA was not able to organize its annual meetings.

This theoretical paper assessed the Nigerian Psychological Association’s contributions in guiding the psychology profession in Nigeria towards becoming professionalized in line with Wilensky’s five-stage model. The paper assesses how the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) has fared in forty years, towards the professionalization of psychology in Nigeria. As the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) inches closer to her Golden Jubilee anniversary, in 2034, it is pertinent to assess how much progress the Association has made towards making psychology a recognized profession in Nigeria.

The Wilensky (1964) Theory of Professionalization

The Wilensky (1964) theory is the theoretical framework adopted in this research to evaluate NPA’s progress in guiding psychology in Nigeria towards achieving full professionalization status. Wilensky (1964) developed the professionalization theory to explain how occupations evolve into full-fledged professions and to identify the social processes that distinguished a ‘profession’ from a ‘mere occupation.’ The theory aims to explain how professions gain legitimacy, authority, and control over their work, not just by their skills, but through institutionalization and public recognition (Noordegraaf & Brock, 2021). Wilensky (1964) examined the history of eighteen occupations and observed that despite their differences, these occupations went through similar stages of development – from informal practices to formal education, to code of ethics, and eventually to the formation of professional associations. Based on this background knowledge, Wilensky (1964) proposed five sequential stages that occupations typically pass through to become recognized professions. These stages include: (i) the emergence of a full-time occupation, (ii) establishment of training schools, (iii)

formation of professional association, (iv) public recognition and legal support, and (v) formal code of ethics. The Wilensky’s model of professionalization

assesses progress along these five professionalization continuums (see Table 1).

Table 1: Wilensky’s Five-Stage Process of Professionalization

<i>Five-stage Process</i>	<i>Professionalization Goal</i>
The Emergence of Full-Time Occupation	The first stage starts when a group of people doing a specialized work begin to do it full-time.
Establishment of Training Schools	The second stage involves the establishment of formal education to produce qualified professionals and knowledge for occupations.
Formation of Professional Associations	The third stage refers to the creation of a professional association to unite practitioners and regulates entry into the profession.
Public Recognition and Legal Support	In the fourth stage, a profession gains recognition and legal backing.
Formal Code of Ethics	This stage involves the development of a formal code of ethics and professional autonomy.

The Wilensky’s (1964) model is a parsimonious theory that provided researchers with concrete structural indicators like education, certification, associations, and autonomy that are straightforward for understanding the evolution of professions (Lalaonuis et al., 2011; Maijala et al., 2024). The model has helped to explain how and why occupations become professions; identify the stages of this transformation; and understand the social and institutional processes that give professions authority and legitimacy. But despite the applause for the Wilensky’s professionalization model, the theory was criticized (Abbott, 1988; Neal & Morgan, 2000) for being unrealistically too simple. For instance, Abbott (1988) argued that professionalization is not just about structural indicators or developmental stages, but it is also about power, social closure, and market controls. Abbott argues that external environment such as governments; social innovations; and markets play much larger roles in evolution of professions than Wilensky’s (1964) professionalization model admitted.

The critique of Wilensky’s (1964) professionalization framework notwithstanding, the

theory is germane for use to assess how the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) has worked to professionalize psychology in Nigeria. The theory is preferred because it assesses progress of how and why occupations become professions along a professionalization continuum. This theory is auspicious for assessing how the NPA has progressed on essential traits such as code of ethics, specialized knowledge, credentialing, autonomy and public recognition, toward achieving full professionalization status for the psychology profession in Nigeria. The NPA is the professional and academic body responsible for promoting the training in, and practice of psychology in Nigeria. The NPA is the focal point of the occupation of psychology in Nigeria; it has influence on almost all the five-stage processes in the Wilensky’s model. The NPA leads in the institutionalization of psychology as a profession in Nigeria, including definition of the profession’s core task, expansion of training programs, regulation of university courses, control of entry into the profession, provision of ethics to guide the profession, and ensuring the passage of the psychology bill.

Historical Foundation of the Nigerian

All the reviews and social analysis of psychology in Nigeria published in the last ten years (e.g., Abikoye et al., 2023; Mefoh, 2024; 2019) recorded that the NPA was formed and inaugurated in April, 1984. The Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) is a hybrid of the merger between two associations, namely: the Nigerian Psychological Society (NPS) and the Nigerian Association of Psychologists (NAP). The Nigerian Psychological Society (NPS) was formed at the University of Ibadan, in 1974. The Association was an off shoot of two international conferences on psychology in Africa, which were held in the University of Ibadan, first in 1966, and the other one in 1973. The membership of NPS was composed largely of educationists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and people from other professions; there were only a few psychologists in NPS. Nweze (2007) described these other professionals as “representatives of psychology” (p.6). Also, Gire (2004) described the NPS to consist of people, “which had a high proportion of its membership from departments and colleges of education” (p.45). The objective of the NPS was to bring together all persons interested in the study of research and application of the knowledge of psychology in different academic disciplines. The Nigerian Association of Psychologists (NAP), on the other hand was formed at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1980. The NAP was a breakaway faction of the NPS. The NAP was “founded by a dissident group of “real” psychologists (i.e., those with bachelor’s and graduate degrees in psychology)” (Gire, 2004, p.45). The major grouse of the members of NAP against the leadership of the NPS was that the membership profile of the NPS was made too loose, such that the Association became all-comers affair. The membership of NAP was largely younger and vibrant psychologists who were trained overseas in Europe and America, and a few others who graduated locally. Those younger psychologists wanted a professional association that would serve the interest of psychologists in Nigeria, the same way the American Psychological Association (APA) serve the interest of American psychologists.

Few years later after the disintegration of NPS, the leadership of the NPS and that of NAP started peace talks that were aimed at unifying the two associations into a single psychological association

again (Mefoh, 2014a). The leaders of the two associations crisscrossed Nigeria, negotiating with each other, and with other colleagues on how to build one united, and stronger professional body. During the final meeting for the amalgamation of the NPS and the NAP in Benin, several issues were decided upon and some resolutions were taken. One important resolution reached at the meeting was the introduction of what was called the “grandfather clause.” The clause was to allow people with education background, some of whom helped to pioneer the course and growth of psychology in Nigeria to register in the [new] Association. Another notable resolution reached at the merger was that the first President of the [new] Association would come from the NPS, but with a strict condition that the nominee must be someone with background training in psychology. The slot for the Vice President for the [new] Association was ceded to NAP. It was also agreed that after a single term of two years, the arrangement would reverse; the NAP would then produce the President, while the NPS would produce the Vice President. After the four years of this arrangement, any psychologists, irrespective of whether the individual’s earlier allegiance was with the NPS or with the NAP or none at all, can aspire to lead the [new] Association. These resolutions were signed on 4th April, 1984 at the University of Benin, Nigeria. The merger was achieved at an inaugural conference of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) at the University of Benin, between 5th and 7th April, 1984. The theme of that inaugural conference was “psychological strategies for national development.” The theme was to evaluate the concern that most of the problems of national development relate increasingly to the behavioural aspects of development (Okpara, 1985).

With the formation of Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) in 1984, the NPS and the NAP were liquidated and they became moribund. The constitution of the Nigerian Psychological Association (1984) declared in Article 3, section 3.1, that:

“It [NPA] would take over the real and personal property or any part thereof belonging to, and to undertake all or any of the assets and liabilities of the defunct Nigerian Psychological Society (NPS) and Nigerian Association of Psychologists (NAP) and to adopt, develop and extend the

objectives of the said defunct NPS and NAP” (NPA, 1984, p.1).

The NPA has eight categories of memberships, consisting of: Full, Associate, Graduate, Affiliate and Student members. Other categories of members include: Honorary Fellow, Associate Fellow, and Fellows. The NPA is the rallying point for all psychologists in Nigeria. It organizes professional conferences, which provides a veritable medium for psychologists in Nigeria to meet for intellectual discourse. The Association also disseminates research information through the instrumentality of its scholarly journals: the *Nigerian Journal of Psychology* and more recently, the *Nigerian Journal of Psychological Research*. The NPA began the process of its incorporation at the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), in 1994. However, the Commission issued the NPA with a certificate of incorporation on 12th March, 1996. The NPA had a six-member Board of Trustees.

Application of the Wilensky (1964) Professionalization Framework to Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) Progress Analysis

Wilensky (1964) observed that occupations develop into professions through a sequential process of stages, from informal work to a formally recognized, self-regulating profession. As most occupations become more complex and specialized, they tend to move through a sequence of stages towards becoming full-fledged professions. Not all occupations which struggle for professional identification achieve full professionalization status; some occupations do not complete all the stages, or the stages might not occur in line with Wilensky’s sequence. Lalaounis et al. (2011) maintained that occupations are idiosyncratic; stating that it is not the sequence in which the stages have occurred that signifies a full professional status, but their achievement. This paper uses the Wilensky’s (1964) model as a lens to assess how the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) has enabled the psychology profession in Nigeria toward achieving full professionalization status. Specifically, Wilensky (1964) proposed a five-stage model of professionalization to explain how occupations evolve into full-fledged professions. The stages are: (i) the emergence of the full-time occupation; (ii) establishment of training schools; (iii) formation of

professional associations; (iv) public recognition and legal support (v) code of ethics. These five stages provide a structured framework to assess NPA’s status, or its impact toward achieving full professionalization for the psychology’s profession in Nigeria.

The Emergence of Full-time Occupation

The emergence of full-time occupation is the first of the five stages of Wilensky (1964) professionalization model. This stage occurs when a group of people perform specific work to develop a sense of common identity and purpose. The work referred to must be done full-time, not part-time or sideline hustle. The goal of the work is to achieve occupational identity. Does the NPA align with Wilensky’s ‘emergence of full-time occupation’ in guiding the psychology profession in Nigeria to become a fully established profession?

Psychology was founded in Nigeria by expatriates, but the discipline got nurtured and grown in the country by indigenous efforts (Mefoh, 2014a; 2024). By 1964, when scientific psychology was established at Nsukka, and later spread to other universities in the late 1960s and mid-1970s, the public was unaware of the utility of the discipline of psychology. In the early days, the psychology occupation was emasculated by people in other professions such as education, psychiatry, and perhaps sociology. It took a bitter struggle by a group of young psychologists to dislodge people who had no strict background training in psychology from determining the direction that psychology should go in Nigeria. The struggle gave rise to the creation of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) in 1984. The formation of NPA marks the transition of psychology into a distinct occupation. The NPA constitution has it that only graduates of psychology with at least a master’s degree from a recognized university are qualified to hold the title of psychologist in Nigeria (Mefoh, 2014b). From 1984 when NPA was formed, psychology became profession-specific in that the profession was open only to people who have earned advanced training in psychology – a master’s degree or doctorate.

But there were contributions by less qualifying ‘psychologists’ or those with only a bachelor’s degree in psychology. A large proportion of these nondescript psychologists go into general fields, such

as civil service, police, or armed forces. The professional-specific or well-trained psychologists, on the other hand, are those that are equipped with higher degree in various branches of psychology. A few of those psychologists provide mental health care services in hospitals and/or social services in other organizations, but most well-trained psychologists teach in the universities (Gire, 2004; Mefoh 2014b). Although non-profession-specific jobs deepen the psychology profession, it is psychologists with advanced training in psychology that have laid the foundation for the growth, development, and expansion of both the discipline and the profession of psychology in Nigeria. Given psychology's contributions to national development (Mefoh, 2014a, pp. 63-83), the NPA has substantially aligned with Wilensky's emergence of full-time occupation.

Establishment of Training School

The second process of Wilensky's (1964) model is tied to universities, which are meant to develop standards of study and to foster research in the profession. The goal is to achieve standardization of knowledge. Wilensky's (1964) puts establishment of training schools ahead of the formation of professional association; psychology education in Nigeria followed Wilensky's sequence. Scientific psychology began officially in Nigeria in 1964, when the first department of psychology was established at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Five years later, in 1969, the second department of psychology was opened at the University of Lagos, and much later in 1976, the third department of psychology started at the University of Jos. More departments of psychology were established at the University of Ibadan (1977), University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) (1977), and Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu (1982). These six departments of psychology were established before the creation of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) in 1984. There are presently about fifty departments of psychology in Nigerian universities that are fully accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Ezenwa et al., in press). Undergraduate training in all academic disciplines in Nigeria, including psychology, is controlled and regulated by the National Universities Commission (NUC), and so the NPA has little control over curriculum development of psychology departments.

But the NPA tries to indirectly monitor and influence what happens at various departments of psychology in Nigeria by interfacing occasionally with the NUC. The NPA's discussions with the NUC are often geared towards advising the Commission to ensure that reasonably uniform minimum standards are set for all degree awarding departments of psychology across Nigeria. Also, the NPA frequently pressures the NUC to nominate only qualified psychologists for program accreditation in departments of psychology in Nigerian universities, rather than outsourcing that responsibility to people in education. Of course, due to the long association of psychology with education in Nigeria, many people often think that education and psychology are one and the same discipline. As Eyo (2004) pointed out, many people unfortunately believe that "education can necessarily change places with psychology" (p.19), or as Okpara (1985) remarked: "... and whenever there was a department of education, it was assumed that psychology has been taken care of" (p.212). The NPA essentially encourages her members to participate in the NUC accreditation exercises and through that process, the NPA indirectly influences curriculum development or training reforms for psychology education in the country. Because the NUC utilizes the findings submitted to the Commission by accreditation teams to harmonize undergraduate curricula. The NPA, through her members who participate in accreditation exercises, ensures that undergraduate program in Nigerian universities is streamlined. Does the NPA align with the tenet of Wilensky's (1964) establishment of training schools? The answer is largely yes. The NPA collaborates with academic psychologists to promote standardization across training schools for psychologists in Nigeria.

Formation of Professional Association

The formation of professional association represents a crucial step in the Wilensky's five-stage process of professionalization. In this stage, practitioners organize professional associations to promote their collective interests, set standards, share knowledge, and protect their professional territory. The creation of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) in 1984 marked the commencement of this third stage in Wilensky's professionalization model. The NPA is a professional association that represents professional interests of psychologists in Nigeria. The NPA was formed out of

the merger between two parallel ‘psychological’ associations, namely: the Nigerian Psychological Society (NPS) and the Nigerian Association of Psychologists (NAP). These two associations disagreed on issues around professional territory. The NPS was accused of opening its doors wide to all people who have interest in psychology to join the association. But their erstwhile members opposed that. They argued that a professional association is made up of ‘only people that have received formal training in a discipline’, and not ‘all people who share academic interest in a discipline (e.g., psychology)’. The struggle for the soul of psychology by those two unincorporated associations was in fact, the earliest attempt towards professionalizing psychology in Nigeria. The merger of the two associations at the University of Benin, culminated in the formation of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) in April, 1984; its motto was ‘to understand and improve humanity.’ The NPA had remained the only professional association for all psychologists in Nigeria since 1984; by simple arithmetic, the professional association was forty years in April, 2024.

The NPA is regulated by the NPA constitution, which recognizes various categories of membership such as full member, associate member, graduate member, affiliate member and some Fellowship cadres. The constitution also provides for the formation of psychological divisions such as the Nigerian Association of Clinical Psychologists (NACP), the Nigerian Association for Social Psychologist, and other divisions, to bring professionals in various specializations of psychology in Nigeria together. Aside from professional divisions, the NPA had established regional psychological associations in all the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. Although some of the regional associations are dormant for most of the year, some are fairly active. For instance, the Nigerian Psychological Association, Southeast Region has been able to organize meetings for the zone, albeit irregularly. The NPA holds annual meetings or congresses for all Nigerian psychologists, at which academic papers are presented, and the Association’s business is conducted. Though the conference was meant to be an annual event, there were some years in which no conference or meeting was held. But since 2011, there have been renewed vibrancy in the Association (Makanju, 2017) and the NPA has been able to organize annual conferences and meetings at regular

intervals. The NPA also disseminate research information to members through the instrumentality of her two academic journals – *Nigerian Journal of Psychology* and *Nigerian Psychological Research (NPR)*. The NPA has made (and is still making) progress towards deepening professional psychology in Nigeria and these efforts align with Wilensky’s third stage. The formation of NPA aligns with Wilensky’s idea that a fully established profession involves a professional association, which provides identity, coordination, and advocacy for practitioners.

Public Recognition and Legal Support

The fourth stage of the Wilensky’s (1964) professionalization model is public recognition and legal legitimacy. Wilensky maintained that this process of professionalization is achieved when a professional association gains public recognition and legal legitimacy. In terms of the former, psychology in Nigeria is only beginning to gain public recognition (see Abikoye et al., 2023). Prior to year 2000 or thereabout, many Nigerians had believed that psychologists can read people’s mind simply by looking at an individual. No matter how well-educated people were, they feel uncomfortable around psychologists – professionals who can “read” their mind! This unreasonable fear imposed an image problem on psychology in Nigeria. But the NPA had taken rather deliberate efforts to show Nigerians what psychology is and what psychologists do through demonstrable practice. This has significantly influenced public’s perception of psychology in Nigeria. The NPA created platforms such as public enlightenment campaigns, academic conferences, and advocacy that enabled psychologists to form relevant networks that have brought psychological services closer to the people. Uzoka (in Mefoh, 2014a), a former President of NPA, was referring to one of such interventions, when he said: “we have increasing referrals to us by our former clients, and the many referrals are useful index of our efficacy and the confidence of our clients” (p.139). This assertion demonstrates that a profession can also gain legitimacy through the acknowledgment of its specialized expertise by society. The NPA has succeeded in burgeoning awareness about the relevance of the psychology profession in Nigeria, which have modified the public’s perception of the discipline and profession.

But there is still more work to be done for the

profession to attain full public recognition, as in medicine or in law, and this is in the aspect of legal support and statutory recognition. Wilensky's (1964) maintains that a professional association must possess formal legal recognition to legitimize the association's authority, protect the public from quackery and attain occupational monopoly or occupational closure. In fact, when Olomolaiye (1985) humorously declared that, "no one can just wake up one morning and go to court of law and say, 'I am a lawyer,' when in fact he is not" (p.349), he was pushing for the NPA to institute a process for the drafting of the psychology law for credentialing and for regulating the standards of the profession. The NPA had since 2012 agitated for a legal framework that would enable it to legally regulate psychological practice in Nigeria, especially the need to establish licensing and/or certification. Between 2014 and 2016, the NPA presented a bill to the National Assembly for an Act to establish the Nigerian Council for Psychologists. The bill (law) sought to empower the NPA, through its Council to moderate training, research, licensure, and all other issues related to the practice and development of psychology as a profession in Nigeria. This bill went through the whole legislative process and was passed by both chambers of the eighth National Assembly. In 2019, the bill was transmitted to the President of the country for the presidential ascent. Unfortunately, the President failed to give ascent to the bill before the end of that eighth National Assembly. The bill was reviewed and has been re-presented to the National Assembly, but it is yet to be passed into law. The non-enactment of the bill to establish the Nigerian Council for Psychologists means that the NPA lacks the legal authority to fully protect its jurisdiction and status. In strict application of Wilensky's (1964) framework therefore, the NPA has no statutory framework to exclusively regulate psychological practice in Nigeria and hence falls short of Wilensky's fourth stage of professionalization.

Formal Code of Ethics

According to Wilensky (1964), formal code of ethics emerges toward the end of the professionalization process to signify the consolidation of a profession's identity. It is at this stage that a profession develops formal ethical standards and self-regulation to ensure trust and public legitimacy. The NPA knows that having a

code of ethics is of paramount importance for the profession to gain the trust and confidence of the Nigerian society. The Association then prepared the NPA code of ethics, in 2018. The NPA's code of ethics draws substantially on the existing ethical codes of other established national psychological associations, such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). The NPA's code of ethics reflected Nigeria's culture, extant laws, and the epistemological realities of the country (Abikoye et al., 2021). The NPA's code of ethics defines the general principles of the code such as beneficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice and respect for people's rights and dignity. These principles are to ensure that psychologists in Nigeria practice responsibly and maintain public trust. But the reality is that the NPA code of conduct exists only on paper, not much of the code is meaningfully enforced. For example, the principle of disciplinary action is boldly captured in the document, but the actual visibility of enforcement (e.g., sanctions) is never applied. Abikoye et al (2021) argued that a major obstacle to the enforcement of the provisions of the NPA's code of conduct lies in absence of an enabling law to regulate the profession and practice of psychology in Nigeria. Public enforcement pathways and detailed mechanisms of the code are less readily visible, meaning that the NPA's code of conduct does not align strictly with Wilensky's idea that a formal code of ethics represents the moment when an occupation fully transitions into a self-regulating profession.

Achievements, Challenges and the Way Forward

The Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) has made some commendable progress towards achieving its set objective of championing the cause of psychology in Nigeria. The NPA's yearly professional conferences provide the arena for the voices of psychologists to be heard as professional association and their ideas applied to national development efforts. The communiqué frequently issued after each professional conference represents a major feature in advocacy by the NPA. As Uzoka (2005) mentioned, "our obligation is to forcefully portray the realities of existence of our people and to advocate appropriate change (attitude change) by the leadership and various organs of governance" (p.16). Again, the NPA promotes

psychological education by disseminating research works of psychologists through her scholarly journals, especially the *Nigerian Journal of Psychology*. In the early years of NPA, papers published in the *Nigerian Journal of Psychology* were sought after because they provided insights into advances in paradigms, methodologies, and breakthroughs, including locally developed theories.

One remarkable achievement of NPA towards the professionalization of the psychology profession that is newsworthy was the creation of a career structure and job classification. For many years, there was no identifiable path for upward mobility to which psychologists can aspire in the workplace. The NPA mounted several vigorous advocacies for the government to approve a scheme of service for psychology. The essence was to place psychologists in government and industry in positions in which they would enjoy a fair salary relative to their counterparts in other professions (Gire, 2004). Following sustained lobbying by the NPA, the government approved the career structure and job classification, known as the scheme of service for psychology in Nigeria, in November, 2020. The scheme of service recognized four major career structures in the following specialties: (i) *Education* – counseling, educational, child, developmental and school psychology; (ii) *Health* – clinical, forensic and correctional, neuropsychology, rehabilitation, psychotherapy, physiological, cognitive and health psychology; (iii) *Social service* – environmental, community, cross-cultural, political, sport, personality and experimental psychology; and (iv) *Organization* – industrial, occupational, consumer, managerial, environmental, engineering and comparative psychology. The scheme recognizes eight different cadres for practicing psychologists. The entry point for a bachelor's degree holder in psychology is Psychologist II (Grade level 08), while the highest cadre is ranked Director (Grade level 17). With the approval of the scheme of service by the federal government, psychologists now have a clear direction of their career path and hierarchy. The Directorate cadre, for example, is charged with general administration of psychological services and/or advising government on the formulation, execution and review of psychological policies and programs

As mentioned in the introduction, the NPA's forty-year trajectory chronicles so many challenges.

The NPA has neither established procedures for licensing and certification, nor does it organize any continuing education for psychologists. This is a major limitation, for example, in the United States; the American Psychological Association (APA) conducts accreditation for psychology programs to moderate standards and enhances the quality of training. Again, although the NPA has a code of conduct, the lack of a psychology bill has rendered the code of conduct unenforceable and unpopular. The NPA code of conduct seems to be caught in the transition between its initial establishment and full acceptance. In short, the NPA does not seem to have its own ethics, rules, regulations and disciplinary procedures.

But one major challenge the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) has is that the number of professional psychologists in Nigeria is grossly low, which makes the impact of psychological practice in Nigeria to remain limited. This is a fundamental problem and may explain why the NPA has not secured approval for the psychology bill. Given the small number of qualified psychologists, the viability, scope and impact of psychology on the Nigerian society is low. Akin-Ogundeji (1992) puts this in perspective when he lamented that, psychology in Nigeria “is largely a classroom research enterprise” with little practical relevance “to the problems of living in contemporary Nigerian society” (p.3). Although there has been consistent evidence of the enormous expansion of psychology in Nigeria (e.g., Makanju, 2017; Mefoh 2014b; 2019), the question is how many of these higher degree graduates are harnessed into the profession and/or registered with the NPA as members? In a valedictory address to the NPA, Afolabi (2025) mentioned that the numbers of psychologists on the NPA register “increased from 379 in 2021, to 709 in 2025.” Given that the Nigerian population is about two hundred million people, this number translates to one psychologist to 282,087 people. This ratio is worrisome; it is much worse than the previous estimations (Gire, 2004; Mefoh, 2014a). The number of professional psychologists on the NPA register does not compare favorably with their counterpart elsewhere. For instance, compare to South Africa, Louw (2002) revealed that the Professional Board for Psychology in South Africa had 4455 psychologists on its register, of which 2575 were women. Therefore, to be taken as a serious professional association, the NPA needs to prioritize

the development of the psychologists register to improve the scope of psychological practice in Nigeria. Also, a proper psychology register would help the NPA to curb the excesses of pseudo-psychologists who brand themselves as psychologists in many work settings.

In terms of prospects and the way forward, the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) needs to take a more activist-oriented disposition to promoting psychology as a discipline and profession. Uzoka (1989) was the first to call for psychology lobby when he reiterated that, “much of the influence that is exerted in presidential system such as we [now] have is dependent on the degree of effective lobby possessed by a group” (p.109). Therefore, if the NPA wants to make itself relevant in Nigeria, it must take deliberate steps to lobby the government at the national level to pass the psychology bill into law. The fate of psychology as a viable profession in Nigeria hangs on the enactment of the psychology bill. A regulatory Council provides the statutory backing for professional associations through licensing laws, certification, and other regulatory frameworks to protect both the professionals and the public. Once the Nigerian Council for Psychologists bill is legislated into law, the NPA would then have the statutory legitimacy to effectively regulate the training and practice of psychology in Nigeria. The bill would empower NPA to guide psychology to enviable heights as a recognized discipline and authoritative profession like medicine and law, which enjoys formal regulatory backings through professional councils.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) was established in 1984, to bring all psychologists in Nigeria under one professional association, and to promote the discipline and profession of psychology in the country. Over four decades of its existence, the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA) has evolved amidst a checkered history of social and institutional challenges. This research used the Wilensky (1964) professionalization model to evaluate how the NPA has fared toward the professionalization of the psychology profession in Nigeria, between 1984 and 2024. The Wilensky’s theory explains the steps or conditions which enable occupations such as psychology to evolve into a full-fledged profession.

According to the Wilensky (1964), emergence of a full-time occupation, establishment of training schools, formation of professional association, public recognition and legal support, and formal code of ethics, are what make occupations to become recognized as a profession. The Wilensky’s theory was the structured approach used in evaluating NPA’s status regarding the professionalization of psychology in Nigeria. The findings revealed that for the period under review, the NPA has shown remarkable progress on the first-three markers of the Wilensky’s professionalization model, but it has continued to struggle on the other two conditions. The application of the Wilensky’s framework to NPA shows that the NPA’s forty-year journey reflects significant progress, but it is yet to lead the psychology profession to full professionalization status.

Although lack of resources needed to run the affairs of NPA remains a huge challenge for the “voices” of psychologists in Nigeria to be heard loudly in the polity, but it is the low number of psychologists on the psychology register and/or the scarcity of professional psychologists in Nigeria, absence of a regulatory council and weak enforcement of the NPA’s code of conduct, that have continued to hinder the NPA from guiding psychology toward becoming a recognized and authoritative profession in Nigeria. For the NPA to achieve full professionalization of psychology in Nigeria in her Golden Jubilee year, the NPA must prioritize making its code of conduct functional, achieving legal recognition and complete autonomy through the enactment of the Nigerian Council of Psychology Bill. When these are achieved, the NPA would gain legal backing that would empower it to guide the psychology profession in Nigeria to the status of a fully established and mature profession, like medicine, law, the priesthood, and the military.

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