



Advancing an agenda for psychological assessment in South Africa

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Abstract

Psychological assessment has always been a core part of psychology, but like all other subdisciplines, the applicability of psychological assessments has always been debated. Typically, assessments are developed in the Global North and used in countries across the globe. The universalist assumption and the theories that underpin these assessments has in the last 30 years been challenged. There is an increasing recognition that experiences differ across cultures based on individual and community experiences as well as broader social and political conditions. However, the history of psychological assessment in South Africa is testament not only to a Western psychological import but also to its complicity in upholding an apartheid regime. The 1990s, however, saw profound shifts in psychological assessment in South Africa, but access and distributional challenges have prevailed. Most recently, experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic ensured a hasty transition to online assessments, which provided increased access but perpetuated other inequalities. Reimagining assessment's role is imperative after three decades of democracy. Drawing from peer-reviewed research and personal experiences in assessment, this article provides a historical overview of global and local assessment, highlighting South Africa's journey. It discusses current assessment challenges and progress, emphasizing inclusion, indigenization, and innovation. This article advocates for an agenda prioritizing accessibility, relevance, and responsiveness to societal needs in South African psychological assessment.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence, culture, inclusion, indigenisation, innovation, technology-enabled assessment

Psychological assessment has been a core component of psychological practice across the subdisciplines in psychology. Every field from organizational psychology through to educational psychology and clinical psychology employs assessment tools as these provide 'objective' indicators

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that allow for decision-making, whether it be to confirm a diagnosis or support job selection decisions. However, assessment tools are not always reliable, valid or fair. This is more so for tools developed in one country that are then used in another country (etic assessments). This transfer of assessments is typically unidirectional from countries collectively referred to as the Global North to those in the Majority world or Global South¹ (Bou Zeineddine et al., 2022). Oftentimes, the cross-cultural applicability of such assessments is questionable as they are developed based on theories and experiences of very different populations and are predominantly available in English (Laher et al., 2022; Nwoye, 2017; Oppong et al., 2022). These challenges aside, people in Global South countries have little access to any assessments also in part due to the lack of practitioners to administer these. Assessments are typically done face to face. However, the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic called for a rapid transition in the assessment space to online assessments. In South Africa, online assessments were previously primarily used in the organizational psychology space by companies or by private practitioners whose clients could afford them. The inequalities faced by the marginalized populations in society were always prevalent in assessment, but these were exacerbated manifold during the pandemic (August & Mashegoane, 2021). The pandemic aside, progress in the field of psychological assessment has been slow. This moment, three decades into democracy in South Africa, offers an opportunity to reflect on psychological assessment practices and the way forward given the constraints. Hence, this review presents a brief history of assessment internationally and locally, honing in to the current practice of psychological assessment in South Africa identifying strengths and core challenges in the discipline. The review concludes with recommendations prioritizing accessibility, relevance, and responsiveness to societal needs in South African psychological assessment.

International history of psychological assessment

Psychological assessment has been practised in societies over the course of documented history. By way of example, in ancient China, emperors would test workers to determine who had potential to serve as scholars and advisers using the imperial examination system, something that could be described as the precursor to modern day assessment centres (Huang & Zhou, 2022). In Persia, now Iran, Al-Razi conducted the first assessments for mental health and wrote *Al-Hawi* in the 10th century (Zaraen & Tarighat, 2022), possibly the first diagnostic system to mental health akin to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in use today (DSM, American Psychiatric Association, 2022). There is evidence of work in philosophy and physiology from the University of Sankore in Mali that shows that the early precursors of scientific psychology were likely to have been studied at the university (Oppong et al., 2022).

However, the modern history of assessment like that of psychology is traced back to Wundt's experimental psychology in Germany, Darwin and his cousin Galton in the United Kingdom (UK), and Cattell in the United States of America (USA) (Bartram, 2022). Whether in early dynasties or more recently, assessment has always been used to meet a need in society to distinguish a group of people from another for a particular reason. In ancient societies, it was used to determine who gets which jobs (particularly for more senior positions), who gets educated, and how to treat people with ailments, to name a few. In the latter part of the 19th century and early in the 20th century, it was no different. Psychometrics and psychological assessment were closely tied to Eugenics – the dominant paradigm of thought in the West at the time. Galton's eugenics project set out to demonstrate that intelligence was heritable and people not of European lineage were genetically predisposed to be less intelligent (Bartram, 2022). This school of thought was also dominant in British colonies like South Africa (Laher et al., 2022).

History of psychological assessment in South Africa

Both in the colonial and apartheid years, discrimination based on ethnicity was common in South Africa where people of non-European ancestry were regarded as inferior. This included the indigenous African population who occupied the region prior to the arrival of European settlers as well as people from Asia or other parts of Africa who arrived with the settlers as either slaves, labourers, or merchants, collectively referred to as Black South Africans (Oliver & Oliver, 2017). Early social scientists used tests normed for White (of European ancestry) children on Black children, finding lower scores with Black children. This was then used as evidence for the inferior native intellect. Similarly, tests were used with adults, particularly with Black males in the mines, to demonstrate not only an inferior intellect but also to support claims that manual labour was the preferred occupation for this group of people (Seedat & Mackenzie, 2008). It was commonplace to find academic studies that had conclusions like ‘the African makes up for his lack of speed by his liking of repetitive action. Africans are more tolerant to the monotony of machine operative work than Europeans . . .’ (De Ridder, 1961, as cited in Foster, 2008, p. 108)

There were groups of people both within and outside the discipline who openly opposed this work, and in the 1930s, a group was commissioned that formally discredited these findings. Nevertheless, the status quo persisted adding to the scientific justification for discrimination and later apartheid. Apartheid, an official system introduced by the South African government, systematically discriminated between Black and White individuals by controlling where people lived as well as their access to health care, education, and job opportunities, which always ensured that White people were well resourced and Black people were oppressed (Laher & Cockcroft, 2014). Such abuses of psychological assessment during apartheid led to a tremendous mistrust of the discipline with trade unions arguing in the early 1990s to ban assessment. After lobbying from local groups like the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), the practice of psychological assessment continued in South Africa with a special section included in the Employment Equity Act of 1998 (Government Gazette, 1998), which stipulates that psychological assessments can only be used if they are scientifically reliable, valid, and unbiased (Laher & Cockcroft, 2017).

The 1990s and immediately post this period may be described as the transformative years for psychological assessment in South Africa. There was an increasing conscientization among academics, researchers, and practitioners to increase access to psychological assessments and use assessments fairly and in line with ethical principles. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) continued to be at the forefront of this work attempting to develop and standardize tests for use across the South African population. Among these was the effort to standardize the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – Third Edition (WAIS-III, Claassen et al., 2001). Towards the new millennium, the HSRC commissioned a needs analysis for psychological assessment in South Africa – the first ever of this kind of work (see Foxcroft et al., 2004). This seminal work used mixed methods to thoroughly survey the stakeholders in the assessment landscape. The report recommended the need for a comprehensive plan to reform the use and development of psychological tests. It emphasized the importance of clarifying the definition of psychological tests, their purpose, and who can use them. Urgent steps were proposed to improve the quality and accessibility of tests, including reviewing registration requirements, expediting test classification processes, and establishing a standardized review system. In addition, the document called for the adaptation or creation of culturally appropriate tests and the development of competency standards for practitioners. It also advocated for inclusive training programmes, particularly for Black test developers, and the establishment of a Code of Practice for test development. The involvement of professional societies and the formation of a task force led by the Professional Board for Psychology were suggested to oversee the agenda’s implementation (see Foxcroft et al., 2004). This report joined the

many other calls (de la Rey & Ipser, 2004; Hayes, 2003; Macleod, 2004; Manganyi, 1991; Nicholas & Cooper, 1993) for ensuring inclusion and indigenisation (broadly defined, see Mashegoane, 1998) in the discipline as well as for a discipline that was more responsive to societal needs.

Assessing the current status of psychological assessment in South Africa

Since the turn of the century, psychological assessment has made strides in terms of inclusion. This includes ensuring the efficacy of assessments for the multitude of groups in South Africa through to the pedagogy of assessment, which ensures that more people are trained on how to use psychological assessment thereby increasing access to assessment in the population, as well as the practice of assessment where practitioners are more aware of using tests with caution. An examination of local journal volumes like the *South African Journal of Psychology* (SAJP), the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (SAJIP), as well as the regional *Journal of Psychology in Africa* (JPA) and the *African Journal of Psychological Assessment* (AJOPA), indicates many research studies dating back to the late 1990s from personality assessment through to cognitive, vocational, occupational, and educational assessments. Presentations at local conferences like the annual South African psychology congress hosted by PsySSA, as well as presentations at international conferences like those held by the International Congress of Psychology, the International Test Commission, and the International Association of Cross-cultural Psychology, demonstrate the breadth of work undertaken in psychological assessment. However, much of this work is around establishing the psychometric properties of assessments developed primarily in the Global North for use in South Africa with a smaller proportion of studies focussing on adapting etic tests for use in the country. Some South African test companies have contributed much to adapting tests, but these are only accessible to those who can afford to purchase them. Some psychological assessments have been translated into local languages with varying efficacy (see Grieve & van Eeden, 2010; Hill et al., 2021; Horn, 2000; Knoetze et al., 2005; Morgan, 2022; Munnik et al., 2021; Rabie & Naidoo, 2019; Theron et al., in press; Van Eeden & Mantsha, 2007). More recently, Shuttleworth-Edwards and Truter (2022) published a book collating norms for 83 cognitive tests from 16 different African countries.

This is not to say that there has been no emic (locally developed) test development in South Africa in the last 20 years. Morgan (2022) details the development and efficacy of the South African Career Interest Inventory, De Beer (2013) discusses the Learning Potential Computerized Adaptive Test, Taylor (2013) developed the TRAMS and the APIL, and Taylor and De Bruin (2013) developed the Basic Traits Inventory, among others. Maree (2016) and Watson and McMahon (2013) developed career assessments situated within the narrative tradition and are therefore more contextually embedded and tailored to consider the test-taker's socioeconomic and cultural background. The South African Personality Inventory (SAPI) project used personality descriptors from participants across the 11 language groups to develop the SAPI (see Hill et al., 2021). Furthermore, the use of nonverbal tests, open access resources, and familiar materials have all improved access and inclusion in psychological assessment in South Africa (Laher & Cockcroft, 2014).

Oftentimes, tests are adapted, but the underlying theories that inform the tests are accepted as universally applicable. For example, the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality is widely accepted in personality psychology with a number of personality tests designed within this framework, yet it has been consistently demonstrated that the individual traits and behaviours as included in the FFM is missing the communal context that is integral to Asian and African contexts (Laher, 2013; Laher & Dockrat, 2019). Nwoye (2017) outlines an Africentric theory of personhood that encompasses the spirituality and interpersonal relatedness dimensions missing from the FFM. In a similar

vein, Cockcroft (2022) explored the applicability of working memory models in South Africa concluding that the structure of working memory as defined in the Global North can be replicated in South Africa, but sociocultural and economic context (including variables such as bilingualism, access to resources and technology as well as educational opportunities) may influence how working memory develops and is structured. Thus, to have a more relevant psychological assessment for South Africa, there should be a focus on building southern theory (see Connell, 2007).

Foxcroft et al. (2004) recommended the need for mechanisms to ensure test quality and suggested test review mechanisms to be instituted under the Professional Board for Psychology (PBP) at the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and in partnership with the professional societies. Since then, there have been several engagements on test certification and classification in South Africa with the Psychometrics Committee of PBP only classifying a test as psychological or not and not certifying the quality of tests as of February 2019.² Thus, the PBP only pronounces on whether a test is psychological (it can only be administered by a psychologist, psychometrist or registered counsellor) or not (it can be administered by anyone with reasonable training). There was no body overseeing the quality of assessments being used in the country. Hence, PsySSA, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology in South Africa (SIOPSA), and the Association for Test Publishers in South Africa (ATP SA) collaborated to form Assessment Standards South Africa (ASSA), a nongovernmental organization that reviews tests in the country and provides certification in terms of the quality of assessment with regards to reliability, validity, bias, and efficacy of norms. The organization uses an online test review system designed for this purpose that is both quick and efficient.³

Despite this increasing body of work incorporating inclusion and indigenization in psychological assessment, the current practice of assessment faces many challenges. There is still a heavy reliance on etic tests (tests developed internationally) where the psychometric properties of these tests have not been established in the South African context. Hence, there is no body of evidence to support their use or indicate whether adaptation would be necessary. There are very few South African norms and, in cases where norms exist, they are outdated or based on small, very particular samples. Practitioners still use tests developed and normed a number of years ago on largely White populations. The language of most tests is English where English is not the first language of the majority of the population and test content is still Eurocentric. Tests are expensive as these are primarily purchased at a mark-up from local test distributors who source them internationally. In the interim, the rather worn-out phrase of 'use with caution' is still cited when reporting results for the majority of the population (Laher & Cockcroft, 2014, 2017). Constructs themselves are understood from specific epistemological and ontological positions (Laher, 2013; Oppong, 2013, 2019) and are largely suited to 'WEIRD' (White, English-speaking, normatively invisible, racially colour-evasive, socially dominant class)⁴ populations (Thomas et al., 2023). Hence, while the field has transformed much in the last 30 years making strides towards becoming more African-centred, albeit a more Western-oriented African psychology shift⁵ (Ratele, 2017), there is work to be done if we are not going to be prone to scholarly extraversion⁶ (Hountondji, 2009).

Recommendations for advancing psychological assessment in South Africa

Evaluating the current status of psychological assessment in South Africa using the previous recommendations from the report by Foxcroft et al. (2004), it is evident that progress has been made in ensuring the cultural appropriateness of tests and in ensuring the responsible use of tests and test classification. It is still very necessary for this work to continue. However, there is still much to be done in terms of ensuring cultural appropriateness, quality and accessibility improvement,

inclusive training, and professional oversight. The recommendations made in this section stem from this basis but are grounded in an ever-evolving local and international context.

Oversight of psychological assessment practice in South Africa

Foxcroft et al. (2004) recommended a comprehensive plan to reform the use and development of tests in South Africa with the PBP having oversight of this but working with professional societies. Prior to 1994, the government had vested interests in psychological assessment, using it to support the objectives of an apartheid regime. This changed post-1994 and the responsibility for ensuring ethical and fair assessment practices rested with the PBP, but this mandate was unclear leading to the current position where the PBP only classifies tests. Hence, it may be in the best interests for psychological assessment in South Africa for the PBP and ASSA to work collaboratively to formulate a comprehensive plan that prioritizes the transformation of assessment to ensure they are more inclusive and to incorporate indigenous knowledge to grow emic assessments that are of relevance to the majority of South Africans.

Training at universities

In order to have inclusive, innovative, and impactful assessments that incorporate indigenous knowledge, there needs to be a skilled cohort of individuals to undertake this work. Hence, it is necessary to consider who gets selected for postgraduate studies, what sorts of skills and knowledge are taught, and what can be done within constrained resource settings for psychological assessment to grow and become more relevant and accessible. In effect, several South African universities only really start teaching assessment at postgraduate level and some students entering master's programmes encounter it for the first time only at this level. Furthermore, far too few people are accepted into master's-level study – typically 8 to 12 students per annum per programme at each university. This is very far from what is needed in South Africa. There are 0.97 psychologists per 100,000 of the medically uninsured population (approximately 86% of the population; Docrat et al., 2019). These psychologists are often lacking in assessment skills as the number of hours dedicated to assessment training in most master's courses is minimal. There is a need for psychometrics and psychological assessment to be taught from the undergraduate levels in the psychology syllabi. University psychology departments should work collaboratively and collectively to discuss the content to be taught, the skills that graduates should have, and ways in which students can be encouraged to undertake assessment research for their postgraduate studies from the onset. Technological advances with online meeting software holds further promise for training individuals. Universities can collaborate locally and internationally with minimal cost to host online training. This will ensure a cohort of strong doctoral and postdoctoral candidates working on much needed glocal⁷ assessments (Cheung, 2012).

Developing assessments locally

There is unanimous agreement in the field that local test development should be a priority. Aside from the value this brings with regards to epistemological understandings of constructs and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge, there are also advantages in terms of accessibility for the majority of the population. Traditionally, developing local assessments is thought of along the lines of developing tests using the structure and form of tests from the Global North. Local test development should look to using methods and materials that are more familiar and more accessible to our context.

The Panga Munthu Test (PMT; Kathuria & Serpell, 1998; Matafwali & Serpell, 2014) is an excellent example that speaks to this. The PMT is a cognitive test for children developed to tap into skills fostered in rural African settings in Zambia. The researchers demonstrated that the medium of clay elicits stronger cognitive performance by African children than the media of pencil and paper or construction blocks, demonstrating that familiarity with the medium of assessment can allow for better performance on tests. Recently, Hussain (2023) compared performance and enjoyability on the Draw-a-Person test (DAP) with the PMT in a sample of preschool children between the ages of 4 and 6 years from low socioeconomic backgrounds. No differences were found in performance between the two tests, but the children reported enjoying the PMT more than the paper-and-pencil-based DAP. While the children in this sample were from more low socioeconomic status (SES) communities, they were based in an urban area and by virtue of attending an early childhood centre would have been equally familiar with both media. The experience of the PMT also demonstrates that locally available material can be used effectively in assessments. Kekae-Moletsane (2008) describes Masekitlana as a traditional indigenous South African game in which children use two stones. Players hit the one stone with the other stone several times while relating their imagined stories. This was demonstrated to be an effective projective technique. Using indigenous games as assessment offers a way of assessing in low-resource settings that will be inclusive, indigenized, and innovative.

Developing tests locally can still follow a glocal approach whereby international tests can be adapted and normed for the South African context. However, there is also room for working from the etic to the emic as in the work conducted by Machando (2020) on the Birmingham Cognitive Screen for Zimbabwe (Zim-BCoS) and the work on the Zambia Child Assessment Tool (Matafwali & Serpell, 2014). Thus, a more dualist approach to local test development will be needed where currently available etic assessments are adapted and normed for use in the South African context in line with a Western-oriented African psychology. At the same time, emic tests need to be developed that incorporate the Western and African cultural psychology approaches.

Norms are also developed in very traditional ways in South Africa. As demonstrated by Shuttleworth-Edwards and Truter (2022), there could be different ways of norming tests and of promoting the use of local, contextual norms. Ferreira-Correia and Cockcroft (2023) demonstrate how Crawford and Howell's single-case methodology in neuropsychology is ideal for investigating cases not well represented by existing norms. Bilder (2011) provided an interesting suggestion of sharing individual and/or group data in real time using open access formats to collate and develop more relevant norms. Data security and privacy concerns aside, Bilder (2011) raises an important conversation on the affordances of technology in psychological assessment. Technology-enabled assessments hold much merit and must be a core part of advancing psychological assessment in South Africa.

Incorporating technology into psychological assessment

Computerized and online assessments have long been part of assessment in South Africa, particularly in organizational contexts (see Foxcroft & De Kock, 2023; Tredoux, 2013). However, recent technological advances offer more towards assessment than being able to administer static tests online. For example, as early as 2008, Gibbons et al. (2008) cited a 95% average reduction in items administered using a computerized adaptive test relative to administering all items on the original scales.

In South Africa, dynamic assessment has consistently been suggested as a means of being more fair with assessment. Dynamic assessment is based on the principles of mediated learning and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to this approach, every person performs at a

certain level, but with appropriate assistance that same person has the potential to perform better. The area between current performance and future performance is called the ZPD. This concept is used in assessment with a test-teach-retest model to determine whether a child, for example, has the potential to perform better on a test with some intervention or a graduate with some training (Amod & Seabi, 2013). Dynamic assessment as an alternative to static assessment is effective. It offers opportunities to explore potential rather than crystallized ability, and in South Africa, given the gross inequality, this type of assessment offers much. However, dynamic assessment is time-consuming so not many institutions train students in this method in South Africa (Laher & Cockcroft, 2014, 2017). Recent developments in technology afford opportunities to use dynamic assessment strategies more effectively.

Gamifying assessments

Among this technology is the recent move towards gamification in assessment. Gamification involves adding game elements to assessments to increase their attractiveness and ease of use, thereby increasing the engagement and motivation of the individuals completing the assessment. Empirical evidence suggests that gamification enhances performance on tasks, and it does this by providing points, badges, leaderboards, levels, challenges, rewards, and so forth. In assessments that are gamified, the psychometric properties of the traditional assessment are unchanged, but the application of game elements is used to give the assessment the look and feel of a game, clothing the assessment in a more playful context (Akoodie, 2020).

Psychometrically, there is a distinction between game-based assessments (GBA) and gamified assessments. A gamified assessment presents the traditional assessment in a new format, whereas GBAs rebuild the assessment as a game. This means that in GBAs, a candidate's interactions with game elements becomes an integral part of the assessment model, allowing for a more dynamic assessment of the individual's characteristics and potential (Akoodie, 2020). While gamified and GBAs appear to have potential, they also have limitations.

In a seminar, 25 postgraduate students (21–45 years) in a psychological assessment class completed a gamified assessment, revealing varied experiences. Despite their familiarity with technology, many struggled with concentration, rapid information presentation, and anxiety. Conversely, 12 teenagers (12–17 years) adapted quickly, efficiently processing information and providing timely answers. This highlights gamification's potential benefits, such as increased engagement, enjoyment, reduced anxiety, and better standardization (Akoodie, 2020). However, the struggles faced by technologically competent postgraduate students raise concerns about the fairness of gamified assessments for South Africans with limited access to devices, emphasizing the need for contextual awareness in technological advancements. van Lill et al. (2023) found similar results using the same GBA. While there were psychometrically acceptable results, the sample struggled with some subtests. The authors cautioned that one of the subtests might not be useful for English second-language speakers and that different cut-off scores or norms tailored specifically for the South African population needed to be explored. Given that samples who are reasonably acculturated and technologically competent experienced difficulties with a gamified test, further research is warranted in terms of how this medium might be more efficaciously adapted for our context, particularly if they are used more dynamically.

Technology and access in psychological assessment practice

Going digital has often been indicated as a solution for more inclusive assessment within constrained resource settings. Assessment has had no difficulty in transitioning to the online space. A number of

tests developed internationally are based online, but these are expensive and not readily available for use in South Africa. Recently, Hassem (2021) adapted an open access depression screening tool for the South African context. The online screening tool works from the premise that going digital will solve many issues, from the lack of resources and personnel, through to improved access and inclusion. This kind of innovation has much to offer towards creating a more inclusive discipline that is relevant, responsive, and that has impact. Nevertheless, there are still barriers to access.

Using technology-enabled assessments might increase access, but only for those who can access the internet and/or who have access to apps (see Gama & Laher, 2023). The test instructions for the gamified assessment, for example, explicitly state that the assessment must be completed using a device and mouse; however, most of the South African population do not have access to such technology. Being able to access the depression screening tool requires internet access. Currently in South Africa, approximately 23% of the population have mobile internet access using smartphones, while 42.8% of the population are able to access the internet in some form (Cowling, 2024). There is also literature on the potential biases introduced by completing tests on a monitor versus a smartphone or a smartwatch (Hafiz & Bardram, 2020). Hence, the digital divide is still prevalent in the South African context and we risk perpetuating inequalities even further among the most marginalized. Technology-enabled assessment does not always equate to inclusion and access, especially since these types of assessments are more prevalent in organizational settings rather than clinical or educational settings (see Dowdeswell & Kriek, 2021).

Other questions that come to the fore with regards to this type of technology in assessment relate to the fact that literacy and language proficiency challenges will still persist. Technology does have the potential to assist with this by translating as needed, for example. Websites can be translated fairly easily, quickly, and accurately as can be seen with tools like Google Translate. Furthermore, text-to-speech technologies offer much in terms of literacy in that instructions and items can be read to people, and artificial intelligence (AI) strategies offer adaptive testing opportunities. Perhaps technology does hold enabling capacity for more culturally fair assessment and better control of response biases. However, it is very clear that merely translating verbatim does not take into account cultural nuances, nor does it necessarily reflect accurate translation in the same way that traditional forward and back translation techniques do (Gama & Laher, 2023; Laher, 2022).

Technology also reduces costs, but more research is needed on the psychometric properties of these types of assessments. These types of assessment require some technological literacy, have the possibility of inducing computer anxiety, and are biased in favour of those more familiar with technology. As was seen with the gamified assessment, there is still a lot to be done in terms of test development in this space. In addition, interaction is limited and hence very little observation of the individual's behaviour during assessment can happen. At the same time, the individual has no one to guide them or hold their anxiety.

The recent work on the online screening of depression highlighted the need for ethical guidelines in this space. Hassem and Laher (2022) used the systematic review method to identify areas that traditional ethics documents for assessment did not cover but which were vital for online assessment of mental health. Hence, it was necessary that guidelines covered maleficence, beneficence and risk, data security, feedback, and consent, among other aspects. This review was used to develop the first set of guidelines globally for online screening of mental health.

Recent developments in technology, particularly as they pertain to the availability of big data, have much to offer. For example, Kosinski et al. (2015) used people's digital information to predict personality over 100 times more accurately than their friends, family, or spouses were able to. However, the use of such pre-existing data not necessarily collected for assessment purposes raises a number of concerns around data accuracy as well as the reliability, criterion, and predictive validity of such information. The ethics of using this type of data are among the myriad of issues that

still need to be explored within this space (Iliescu & Grief, 2019). Core among the ethical issues are concerns over individual privacy, potential risk, and data security, but also around unethical collection and use of data by companies or other sources (Paxton, 2020).

These concerns apply not only to big data but also in relation to the use of AI in assessment. The use of AI in assessment organizational settings in South Africa is increasing and finding utility despite the challenges highlighted in this article (see Bronkhorst, in press). Internationally, ecological momentary assessments (EMA) are increasingly being recognized as more effective markers for clinical symptoms. This type of assessment involves continuously collecting information on people's behaviour in their normal environment in real time offering a more dynamic, holistic assessment for the individual. Traditionally, EMA was conducted using paper and pencil, but the advent of smartphones and smartwatches, along with apps, makes this sort of tracking much easier (de Vries et al., 2021; Verhagen et al., 2022). However, using virtual EMAs require a smart device with capability to do this, indicating limited utility in contexts like South Africa at the present time. Furthermore, the lack of regulation in this environment suggests some caution; however, this should not deter one from attempting to use current developments in technology ethically. It also alerts us to the urgent need to explore the utility of technology-enabled assessments in settings outside of the workplace and requires us to expand our professional practice documents to adequately guide the profession on the use of these assessment techniques.

Transcending disciplinary boundaries

While the options presented thus far provide some direction for advancing the discipline, they are limited to the boundaries of psychology. If anything, the fluid and ever-changing contexts locally and internationally indicate that disciplinary boundaries are no longer as rigid as previously indicated. The future for assessment will have to be in collaborative work. Computer scientists are working with engineers and psychologists to build apps to assess mental health, for example. Researchers in genetics, cognitive neuroscience, and psychiatry are exploring the role of biomarkers in assessing depression (Strawbridge et al., 2017). Kumar et al. (2024) developed an AI-assisted tool utilizing facial expression-based emotion recognition and electroencephalogram (EEG) analysis for the detection of depression symptoms along with their severity level assessment, which yielded effective results. These developments indicate that the future of psychological assessment is not just on scale development. Other methods from across disciplines can aid in providing and improving assessment. It is thus necessary for psychology professionals to embrace working with such teams to produce informed, ethical, and effective solutions for societal challenges.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), or closer to home the African Union's Agenda 2063 goals and the grand challenges in the National Research Foundation 10-year innovation plan, provide a good starting point to see how what is done in assessment can aid solutions towards achieving these goals. Assessment has traditionally fitted into SDG3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG4 (quality education), and SDG8 (decent work and economic growth). Yet, the knowledge base of assessment has the potential to contribute in multiple areas across the SDGs. Reliable measures are required across research in all areas of the SDGs. Barnwell's (2021) report on the psychological and mental health consequences of climate change in South Africa is but one example of the role of psychology, and by extension psychological assessment, in contributing to other SDGs.

Conclusion

Psychological assessment has always been necessary for psychology to effect its role in society. Despite its history, psychological assessment will continue to have a prominent role in all societies.

This review provided some insight into the history of psychology assessment in South Africa, current challenges faced in the field, and the necessity for assessment to evolve in much more innovative ways to meet the needs of communities in South Africa. Several recommendations prioritizing accessibility, relevance and responsiveness to societal needs were provided to advance the field going forward. Given the emphasis on sharing and the movement towards an open science, a science that is socially just and accessible, the dissemination of work and collaborations across the region and internationally are necessary to achieve impactful assessment. Knowledge transfer has traditionally been North to South. However, work that incorporates inclusion, indigenization, and innovation presents opportunities for meaningful South–North and South–South knowledge transfer and engagement. This must be actively pursued to centre African knowledge in the global village. In accordance with Malherbe and Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective (2023, p. 2), I would argue that we need an African-centring psychology in assessment where

the project is to create a general (and in the present context, an ecological and social) psychology *for and from* African realities rather than a general psychology from a Euro-American standpoint that merely produces knowledge *on or about* an African object.

There is also a strong need for psychological assessment, and psychology more broadly, to transcend the discipline to become more socially relevant and responsive. Without a doubt there is hope for psychological assessment to flourish over the next decade.

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Positionality statement

I am a South African Muslim female. My journey in psychology and psychological assessment commenced as a first-year student in 1994 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), which is also when I first joined PsySSA. I started teaching psychometrics and psychological assessment in 1996 as a student tutor at Wits and completed my master's and PhD in personality assessment. Since then, I have been a lecturer and researcher in the area and served two terms as chair of the PsySSA Psychological Assessment Standing Committee. In addition, I have served at other societies including ASSA and the PBP and I serve as either editor or editorial board member at a few journals including the *SAJP*, *AJOPA* and the *International Journal of Testing*. Hence, it must be acknowledged that while this review is partially located in literature, it is also partially autoethnographic with me drawing on my collective experience across the South African landscape to provide both a context for 30 years of assessment as well as to highlight areas in which psychological assessment in South Africa can be enhanced and can be accessed by all who require it. There is no doubt that the recommendations provided in this article are not exhaustive and may be reflective of my own biases. These recommendations are but a few among the many that can be considered particularly if individuals can be creative within the context of limited resources with the key message being that of inclusivity, indigenization, and, ultimately, innovation.

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Notes

1. The Global North is used here as a collective term to delineate primarily Euro-American countries also referred to as wealthier Western countries who benefitted as colonial powers in Africa from the 15th century, while the Global South or Majority world is used collectively to refer to countries who were former colonies primarily located in Africa (Connell, 2007, 2015; Ratele, 2017; Uskul et al., 2024)
2. See <https://www.hpcs.co.za/?contentId=0&menuSubId=52&actionName=Professional%20Boards>
3. See www.assa.co.za
4. Henrich et al. (2010) coined the acronym 'WEIRD' in reference to their research demonstrating that majority of research in psychology was conducted on samples that could be described as Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic. Thalmayer et al. (2021), building on research conducted by Arnett (2008), concluded that research in psychology is dominated by the Global North. Thomas et al. (2023) explore how scientific racism has influenced the study of cognition and in so doing redefine the WEIRD acronym. Both the Henrich et al. (2010) and Thomas et al. (2021) expansions of the WEIRD acronym hold merit even though I have included just one in the text.
5. Ratele (2017) distinguishes between four orientations in psychology, namely, (a) Western-oriented African psychology; (b) psychological and psychoanalytic African studies; (c) cultural African psychology that is more metaphysically inclined and (d) critical African psychology that is more politically inclined, arguing that much of the work in Africa aligns to a Western-oriented African psychology. This holds true for the work in the field of psychological assessment over the last 30 years.
6. Scholarly extraversion is used in line with Hountondji (1995) who defines it as an overreliance on hegemonic Western practices, approaches, and research findings.
7. The term is used here as an autonomous concept implying that local knowledge and experiences are used symbiotically with those originating in the Global North (see Roudometof, 2016) and in line with Daouk-Oyry et al. (2016) who argued that global influences need to be internalized and localized for more relevant psychological assessment practices.

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