

Short Note

Not peer-reviewed version

Psychological Insights Embedded in Local Wisdom

[Tigist Shiferaw Hunde](#) *

Posted Date: 21 September 2023

doi: 10.20944/preprints202309.1446.v1

Keywords: Local Wisdom; Psychological knowledge



Preprints.org is a free multidiscipline platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Short Note

Psychological Insights Embedded in Local Wisdom

Tigist Shiferaw Hunde

Abstract: This article aims to highlight the intricate interplay between psychological knowledge and local wisdom. Ethiopia is a diverse and multicultural country, with a rich diversity of languages, cultures, and traditions. Ethiopian local stories, proverbs, and poems have long served as vessels of wisdom, offering valuable life lessons and insights into human behavior. This article seeks to uncover the local wisdom through psychological lenses by demonstrating the psychological richness embedded within Ethiopian local stories, proverbs, and poems. Thus, valuable insights can be found by drawing connections between these traditional forms of wisdom and contemporary psychological theories. Moreover, researchers can foster a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to understanding and addressing psychological issues by bridging the gap between academic knowledge and local wisdom. This symbiotic relationship has the potential to expand the boundaries of psychological knowledge and encourage innovative ideas and principles, ultimately enriching both domains.

Keywords: local wisdom; psychological knowledge

Introduction

Local wisdom, also known as traditional knowledge or folk wisdom encompasses the accumulated understanding and practices passed down through generations within a particular culture or community [1]. It often reflects the collective experiences and observations of individuals within these societies and can offer unique insights into various aspects of life, including psychological well-being [2]. These wisdoms often contain moral lessons and portray characters facing various challenges and dilemmas, providing valuable insights into human motivations, emotions, behaviors, and cognition. Psychologists can derive concepts and approaches from Local wisdom by carefully examining and analyzing the content of poems, proverbs, stories, and other forms of traditional knowledge.

Furthermore, Contextualizing knowledge is crucial, especially in the case of psychological knowledge [3]. The field of psychology is highly dependent on understanding the context in which people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors occur. Without considering relevant contexts, it becomes challenging to accurately interpret and apply psychological knowledge [4]. Context in psychology can encompass various factors, including cultural, social, historical, and individual contexts [5,6]. By understanding these contextual elements, one can appreciate the unique factors that influence human behavior and mental processes. Therefore, these local wisdoms provide a practical framework to understand and apply psychological concepts.

Methods

In this descriptive research, a comprehensive analysis of Ethiopian local stories, proverbs, and poems is undertaken. Additionally, discussions are conducted with individuals who have knowledge regarding local wisdom. These traditional sources will be examined through a psychological lens, aiming to identify key themes and insights that can be applied to psychological knowledge.

This article aims to discuss the subtle interaction between proverbs, poems, and psychological theories.

Building upon this, we investigate the concept of unrealistic optimism, which was introduced by researchers Shelley E. Taylor and Jonathan D. Brown in their 1980 study titled "Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health." They examined the phenomenon of unrealistic optimism, which refers to individuals' tendency to believe that they are less likely to

experience negative events and more likely to experience positive events compared to others [7]. To challenge this bias, we can turn to an old adage that states "አይሆንምን ትተህ ይሆናልን ጠብቅ" which translates to "Do not be affected by unrealistic optimism." This proverb serves as a reminder not to fall into the trap of believing that everything will always go well and that negative outcomes are unlikely. It encourages us to approach life with a realistic perspective, acknowledging both the positive and negative possibilities.

Shifting our focus to another perspective, the nature vs. nurture debate in psychology is an ongoing argument regarding the relative importance of genetic factors (nature) versus environmental factors (nurture) in shaping human behavior and development. This debate can be aptly exemplified by the sayings "መወለድ ቋንቋ ነው" "የማን ዘር ጎሙን ዘር" "የዘር አንዘርዘር", "የእናት ሆድ ቸንጉርጉር" which reflect the query of whether our traits, behaviors, and abilities are predominantly influenced by genetic predispositions or by our upbringing and experiences.

Expanding upon these ideas, the notion of "የበሰበሰ ዝናብ አይፈራም" sheds light on the concept of learned helplessness and highlights the potential negative impact of prolonged exposure to uncontrollable or adverse circumstances [8]. Similarly, the saying "ያበጠ ይፈንዳ" emphasizes the power of other people's beliefs or expectations in influencing an individual's behavior. This proverb suggests that when others have negative beliefs or expectations about someone, it can ultimately shape that person's actions and confirm those negative beliefs. This highlights the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies, where individuals internalize and fulfill the expectations placed upon them by others.

On the other hand, the proverb "መባልን ሳይሆን መሆንን ፍራ" encourages individuals to challenge these negative beliefs and take proactive steps towards avoiding self-fulfilling prophecies that arise from the influence of others. In simpler terms, this proverb empowers individuals to reject negative beliefs imposed by others and take control of their own destiny. It emphasizes the importance of being proactive in shaping one's own future and not letting others' expectations define one's actions or outcomes.

Another example is the concept of "ስንዝር ሲሰጡት ክንድ", which is related to the foot-in-the-door technique. This technique is a persuasive strategy that involves making small initial requests to increase compliance with larger requests later on.

Expanding on these ideas, we can mention the saying "ንጉስ አይከሰስ ሰማይ አይታረስ" "ሲጠፋት አቤት ሲልኩት ወዴት" which highlights the power of authority and social norms in influencing individual behavior. This is aligned with Stanley Milgram's influential experiments that demonstrated the tendency of people to obey instructions from an authority figure, even if they are inappropriate or harmful.

To further illustrate the ideas discussed in this article, we can consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This theory suggests that individuals have different levels of needs that they strive to fulfill, and these needs are expressed in various proverbs in our society. For example, proverbs "ትላብሰው የላት ትከናከበዋል አማራት", "አባይ ማደሪያ የለው ግንድ ይዞ ይዞራል", "ለቂጡ ጨ ርቅ የለው ቆንጆ ያባብላል". These proverbs align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs by emphasizing the importance of fulfilling lower-level needs before moving on to higher-level needs. They serve as reminders for individuals to prioritize their needs.

On a related note, psychology has extensively studied the role of peer pressure on someone's behavior. Peers can influence their mates in both positive and negative ways. Correspondingly, the proverb "ከአህያ የዋለች ጊደር ፈስ ትማራለች", "ተመረኩ ብለህ ከተረገመ አትዋል", "ብረት ብረትን ይስላል ዳደኛ ዳደኛውን ይስላል" captures the influence of peer pressure. The poem "የክፋት ተጋብኦት" by Kebede Michale also reflects the influence of peers [9]. Along the same line, the bystander effect suggests that people are more likely to take action in an emergency situation when they are alone compared to when there are others around, assuming that someone else will intervene. This concept is also expressed in the proverb "የፋክክር ቤት ሳይዘጋ ያድራል".

Additionally, Unconventionality refers to a disposition or behavior that deviates from or challenges societal norms and expectations. While nonconformity can lead to originality, uniqueness, and a willingness to explore ideas and actions that are unconventional or outside the mainstream, it

can also come with its fair share of consequences. One consequence of nonconformity is the potential for social ostracization, as expressed through the proverb "ከማሽለ መሃል ወጣ ያለ ማሽለ አንድም ወፍ አንድም ወንጭፍ ይበላዋል." This proverb suggests that when individuals deviate from societal norms, they often face misunderstanding, judgment, and rejection from others.

Furthermore, cognitive dissonance is also evident in the proverb "ምኞት በሽ ወሬ ነፍ ተግባር ወፍ" This shows the conflict that occurs when there is a discrepancy between what a person believes or values and their actions or experiences.

Similarly, conflict of motives arises when a person is pulled in different directions by competing motivations, making it difficult for them to make a decision or take action. The proverb "ሁለት እግር አለኝ ተብሎ ሁለት ዛፍ አይወጣም" illustrates this conflicting motives and the need to resolve it.

Moreover, the proverb "ለራስ ሲቆርሱ አያሳንሱ" suggests that individuals have a natural inclination to prioritize their own well-being, desires, goals, and seek to maximize their own benefits. This implies the concept of self-bias, where individuals prefer what is good for themselves [10].

Additionally, proverbs such as "ታሞ ከመማቀቅ አስቀድሞ መጠንቀቅ", "ሳይቃጠል በቅጠል", "ምክረዉ ምክረዉ እምቢ ካለ መከራ ይምክረዉ" emphasize the importance of early detection and prevention. Incorporating these wisdoms into therapeutic sessions and health education can tap into the cultural heritage of clients, fostering a sense of connection and resonance. Moreover, "ከፍትፍቱ ፈቱ" describes the importance of a good approach or rapport. Rapport is necessary in building harmonious relationships, understanding, and mutual trust between two or more individuals, which is also important in therapeutic alliances. The proverb tells when you have a good rapport with someone, they are more likely to be receptive to your approach and engage in a positive way. Similarly, aversion therapy is a psychological technique that aims to reduce undesirable behaviors by associating them with negative stimuli. In our cultural context, we can find parallels when a mother applies the "grawa" leaf on her breast as a harmless but unpleasant stimulus to encourage her child to stop breastfeeding at the appropriate age.

Thus, these illustrations provide real-life instances of local wisdom in our society that are related to various psychological concepts. It is worth noting that a plethora of ideas, proverbs, heritages, and wisdoms exist in every language and culture of the country.

Conclusion

In our pursuit of groundbreaking psychological theories and approaches, we must not overlook the wealth of wisdom hidden in the proverbs, sayings, and poems of our own homes. To develop concepts and approaches from local wisdom effectively, psychologists should approach these sources with cultural sensitivity. They should explore each culture, language, and lifestyle in which the wisdom originated and develop approaches that align with the heritages of those particular contexts.

References

1. Sembiring, A.S., et al. (2019). Character Formation Based on North Sumatra Local Wisdom through Orchestral Learning in Music Education Study Program, Universitas Negeri Medan. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute Journal (BIRCI-Journal)* Vol 2 (4): 315-325.
2. Sumartias, S., Unde, A. A., Wibisana, I. P., & Nugraha, A. R. (2020). The Importance of Local Wisdom in Building National Character in the Industrial Age 4.0. 397(Iclique 2019), 1305-1312. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200129.159>
3. Mutamba, B. B., Kohrt, B. A., Okello, J., Nakigudde, J., Opar, B., Musisi, S., Bazeyo, W., & de Jong, J. (2018). Contextualization of psychological treatments for government health systems in low-resource settings: group interpersonal psychotherapy for caregivers of children with nodding syndrome in Uganda. *Implementation science : IS*, 13(1), 90. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-018-0785-y>
4. Ardi, Z., Eseadi, C., Yuniarti, E., Yendi, F. M., & Murni, A. W. (2023). Efficacy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy With Local Wisdom and Web-Based Counseling on Generalized Anxiety Disorders and Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders in Adolescent College Girls: Protocol for a Randomized Controlled Trial. *JMIR research protocols*, 12, e50316. <https://doi.org/10.2196/50316>
5. Serpell, Z. N., Dzokoto, V. A. A., Anum, A., & Belgrave, F. Z. (2022). Editorial: African Cultural Models in Psychology. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 844872. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.844872>

6. Oppong, S., Appiah, R., Hapunda, G., & Kheswa, J. G. (2023). Editorial: Contextualizing psychological assessment in Africa: COVID-19 and beyond. *Frontiers in psychology, 14*, 1150387. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1150387>
7. Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: a social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological bulletin, 103*(2), 193–210.
8. Martinek TJ. Fostering hope in youth: A model for explaining learned helplessness in physical activity. *Quest.* 1996;48:409–21. [Google Scholar]
9. Kebede Mikael, የክፋት ተጋብኦት, የቅኔ ዉበት 28-29
10. Cunningham, S. J., & Turk, D. J. (2017). Editorial: A review of self-processing biases in cognition. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 70*(6), 987–995. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17470218.2016.1276609>

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.