

## Educational Psychology: From Theory to Practice in Higher Education

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### Abstract :

This paper aims at examining the relationship between psychology and education and its effects on the students' behaviors in the learning context. This interplay allows the teacher to take into consideration the following elements such as the students' behaviors, the learning environment, the content and the tools and methods used in teaching. For this aim, this paper attempts to define the fundamental concepts: psychology, education and educational psychology.

**Key Words:** psychology, education, educational psychology, higher Education

### المخلص

يهدف هذه المقالة الى تشخيص العلاقة الموجودة بين علم النفس و التربية و مدى تأثيرها على سلوك المتعلم اثناء حدوث عملية التعليم في التعليم العالي. هذه العلاقة ادت الى تشكيل ما يعرف بعلم النفس التربوي و الذي يمكن للاستاذ ان ياخذ بعين الاعتبار عناصر اساسية تتمثل في سلوك المتعلم، محيط التعلم، المضمون و الوسائل و الطرق المستعملة لذلك. و عليه فان هذا المقال اعتمد اساسا على توضيح المفاهيم النظرية بشكل صحيح حتى يتسنى للمعلم تطبيقها في الميدان تطبيقا صحيحا و تكون نتائجه فعالة لتعود بالنفع على عملية التعليم في التعليم العالي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** علم النفس، التعليم، علم النفس التربوي، التعليم العالي

### Introduction

“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten”

#### --B.F Skinner--

Higher education is the shift point in the learners' studying career from adolescence to adulthood. At this level, students become responsible of their learning while teachers should know how to engage those students in situations to enhance their knowledge and competences since they are no longer young learners.

### 1. Psychology

Generally speaking, psychology refers to everything that is related to human being. It focuses on the human beings' thinking, attitudes, behaviors and beliefs. In this sense, some definitions of psychology are selected to better clarify the term psychology. Reber (1995) defines psychology in terms of “ an attempt to understand what has so far pretty much escaped understanding, and any effort to circumscribe it or box it in is to imply that something is known about the edges of our knowledge, and that must be wrong.” (p. 617).

Guilford (1946) theorizes that psychology is “The science of mental activity of living organisms, with an emphasis upon the individual as its natural unit. Mental activities are distinguished from others by the fact that they tend to unify or integrate the individual, and refer to the interplay between the individual and his/her environment.” (p.19)

Accordingly, the term ‘psychology’ can be summarized in three dimensions: 1) the scientific dimension includes the various tools and instruments that are used in collecting information about a particular subject of research. These tools are observations, experimental investigations, survey.;b) the mental dimension attributes the processes of mind including perception, cognition, reasoning, thinking, problem solving, making decisions.....and c) the behavioral dimension refers to the individuals' actions and reactions and to the individuals' knowledge, attitudes and thinking (Leagans, 1961) .

## 2. Education

For the aim to find a clear definition of the term education, it is necessary to mention the following claims:

- Good (1973) in the *Dictionary of Education*, education is viewed as the constellation of processes which enable persons to develop abilities, attitudes, behaviors and social values.
- The social process which refers to the acquired social competences and individual development from the environment to which an individual belongs.
- Another definition of Dewey (1916) by which education is viewed as “ the process of the reconstruction of experience ...and increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience ,giving it a more socialized value through the medium of increased individual efficiency" (p.89-90)
- And Peters (1956) who considers education as the process that allows the learner to acquire specific qualities and habits in an intelligent way that help in increasing the desire to learn.

Therefore, it is difficult to define education because it can change all the humans' behavior. However, Mahatma Gandhi tries to make better clear, he states that:

“I hold that true education of the intellect can come only through a proper exercise and training of the body, hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words, an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the body, and mind goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lop-sided affair.

— Mahatma Gandhi—

## 3. Educational Psychology

It is argued that psychology is the scientific study of mental process and its manifestations in social contexts related to humans or animals. From another side, education is the process by which skills and information are transmitted to develop the human beings mentally and emotionally to live better life. By the combination of the two definitions, a new term is created which is the educational psychology.

According to Woolfolk (1995), who notes that the application of psychological methods and theories is what is called the educational psychology. This means that this latter is based on both science and practice ( Shuell, 1996). Moreover, the useful explanation of the scientific methods in order to improve the learning/teaching process is the principle application of educational psychology (Coll, 1998).

The relationship between practice and theory indicates that educational psychology is the bridge that bridges the gap between teachers and students. This implies that educational psychology has great functions in the classroom.

## 4. Educational Psychology Functions

First of all, it is necessary to highlight the scope of educational psychology. In this respect, Chauhan (2009) summarises the scope of educational psychology in the following points:

- The application of psychological research findings in educational setting.
- The systematic study of individual's development in education.
- The scientific study of human beings' life stages from birth to death.
- The teachers' effective performance in the learning/teaching process.

The scope of educational psychology is mainly aimed to answer some specific matters related to two fundamental elements in this discipline. The former is the learner's incomes in terms of the nature of the learning process and the effectiveness of the used teaching strategies, while the

second is the teachers' outcomes underlying the nature of the learning content to be taught and the procedures used in evaluating and grading the learners' outcomes in the classroom.

It seems clear that the orientation of research in the field of educational psychology is absolutely towards the investigation of programmes, the methods of teaching, the tools of assessment, the learning environment, the challenges of teaching and the learning process. Also, the orientation of the research in this field indicates the function of the educational psychology which basically focuses on major aspects including the nature of teaching, the effectiveness of teaching and the exploitation of practical research findings in the target field.

Consequently, the function of educational psychology is mainly to improve the quality of teaching through the involvement of effective teaching methods to attain successful results in the learning process in general. Particularly, the teachers' effective teaching is basically the results of the teaching methods that are derived from the learner's cognitive, affective and social relations, as Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian (1978) aptly claim. In other words, educational psychology functions to create the democratic environment that helps students in shaping their personalities strongly. Also, it functions to create the social environment by which students acquire a number of abilities like self-confidence, problem solving, decision making and leadership. At last but not least, educational psychology creates solid bridges between students and teachers through guidance and counselling which allows teachers to understand their emotionally and physical development.

## 5. Educational Psychology in Higher Education

Starting from the key point of Henson and Heller (2000) that the major mission of educational psychologists in education is to understand the learners, to create teaching methods and to identify the instructional strategies used in the application of that methods. And by taking into account the basic functions of educational psychology, Ausubel et al (1978) confirm that these functions can be considered as effective learning theories that may be used in various learning contexts when they are involved in the appropriate way. So, the contribution of educational psychology in higher education appears in the different learning theories that are used by both teachers and students in order to accomplish a learning objective in its effective context.

Basically, the educational psychology is involved in higher education through the multiple learning theories used by students to be engaged in their learning community.

- The behavioral learning theory (Skinner, 1953)
- The cognitive learning theories ( Woolfolk; 2012)
- The constructivist learning theories ( Coll, 1990)
- The psychogenetic theory ( Piaget, 1999)
- The assimilation theory ( Novak, 1998)
- The strategic learning theory ( Monereo and Prozo, 2001; Mendez and Torres, 2014)
- The historical-cultural learning theory ( Coll, 2001; Hernandez Rojas, 2006)

These learning theories are meaningful and reach their main goal if they are effectively handled and when they are implemented together under the same learning objective (Coll, 1996)

## Conclusion

It has been discussed through this paper that the interplay between psychology and education contributes positively in the teaching of a foreign language in general and in higher education contexts in particular. Taking into account this respect, it is very necessary to provide teachers with insightful theoretical knowledge in order to grasp the effective and appropriate methods and techniques to apply educational psychology in the teaching/learning process. By the integration of educational psychology in the teaching process, many problems and clashes that occur between students and teachers will be avoided due to the use of psychology which allows teachers to be cognizant of the students' needs and interests. This hybrid process between psychology and education is propitious in teaching children and young learners.

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