

Educational Psychology— Meaning, Nature and Scope

CHAPTER COMPOSITION

- Educational Psychology—Meaning and Definition
- Education and Educational Psychology
- Nature of Educational Psychology
- Scope of Educational Psychology
- Functions of Educational Psychology
- Summary
- References and Suggested Readings

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY—MEANING AND DEFINITION

The subject psychology like other natural sciences has two aspects—Pure and Applied. As pure psychology, it formulates broad principles, brings out theories and suggests techniques for the study of human behaviour which finds the practical shape in its applied aspect *i.e.* branches of applied psychology like occupational psychology, clinical psychology, crime psychology, industrial psychology, educational psychology, and so on.

In its pictorial form, these pure and applied aspects of the subject psychology, alongwith their branches, can be represented as shown in Figure 2.1.

Therefore, educational psychology is nothing but one of the branches of applied psychology. It is an attempt to apply the knowledge of psychology to the field of education. It consists of the application of psychological principles and techniques to human behaviour in educational situations. In other words, educational psychology is a study of the experiences and behaviour of the learner in relation to educational environment.

From time to time, psychologists have tried to define educational psychology in their own ways. Some of these definitions are given below:

1. Skinner defines it as: “*Educational Psychology is that branch of Psychology which deals with teaching and learning.*” (1958, p. 1).

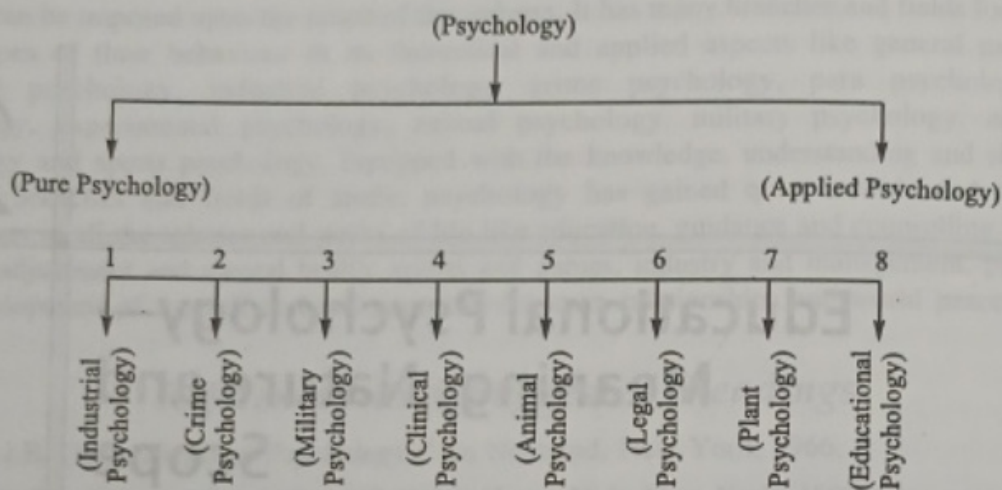


Fig. 2.1 Psychology and its branches.

2. Crow and Crow put it as: "*Educational Psychology describes and explains the learning experiences of an individual from birth through old age.*" (1973, p. 7).

Both these definitions emphasize that educational psychology is a psychology of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are the main processes of education and pupil (learner) is the key figure in this process. Therefore, it is proper to define educational psychology as the study of the behaviour and experiences of the learner in response to educational environment.

3. There is one more definition of the term educational psychology given by Peel which, in my opinion, is the shortest and the best of all the definitions suggested so far. It states: "*Educational Psychology is the science of Education.*" (1956, p. 8).

Let us analyse this branch of psychology in relation with education and see if terming educational psychology as 'science of education' is justified.

EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Education, by all means, is an attempt to mould and shape the behaviour of the students. It aims to produce desirable changes in them for the all-round development of their personalities.

The essential knowledge and skill to do this job satisfactorily is supplied by educational psychology as Peel puts it in the following words:

"Educational Psychology helps the teacher to understand the development of his pupils, the range and limits of their capacities, the processes by which they learn and their social relationships." (1956, p. 8).

In this way, the job of an educational psychologist resembles that of an engineer, who is a technical expert and supplies all the knowledge and skill essential for the satisfactory accomplishment of a job like construction of a bridge. In the same way, educational psychologist, who is a technical expert in the field of education, supplies all the information, principles and techniques essential for—

- Understanding the behaviour of the pupil in response to educational environment; and
- Desired modification in his behaviour to bring an all-round development in the student's personality.

In this way, it is quite reasonable to call educational psychology as a science and technology of education.

NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

One question that is often put forward is—What is the nature of educational psychology?

The answer to this becomes quite clear when we try to examine the meaning and definitions discussed earlier. Its nature is scientific since it has been accepted that it is a science of education. The relationship between education and educational psychology also throws light on its nature. We can summarise the nature of educational psychology in the following ways.

1. Educational psychology is an applied branch of the subject psychology. By applying the principles and techniques of psychology, it tries to study the behaviour and experiences of the pupils.
2. While psychology deals with the behaviour of all the individuals in all walks of life, educational psychology limits its study to the behaviour of the pupil (learner) in relation to educational environment.
3. It is not concerned with the 'what' and 'why' of education, it gives the necessary knowledge and skill (technical guidance) for giving education to the pupils in a satisfactory way.
4. It is not a normative science as it is not concerned with the values of education and does not concern itself with "what ought to be". It is an applied positive science.
5. Educational psychology is not a perfect science. It has its own drawbacks. The human (as well as animal) behaviour is unpredictable. It is more variable and less reliable. Therefore, educational psychology, the applied behavioural science, cannot claim objectivity, exactness and validity as claimed by natural sciences or even applied sciences like medicine and engineering.
6. It employs scientific methods and adopts scientific approach to study the behaviour of an individual in educational environment. Moreover, the controlling of the factors and prediction of the behaviour on generalized results gives educational psychology a complete scientific base. Therefore, it is proper to call its nature as scientific.

SCOPE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

When we are asked to point out the scope of a subject, following are the questions we need to answer:

1. What are the limits of its field of operation?
2. What is to be included in its study or what subject matter does it contain?

As pointed out earlier, educational psychology deals with the behaviour of the learner in educational situations (only). Therefore, it becomes imperative that educational psychology limits itself within the four walls of the teaching-learning process and educational environment. It must try to solve the problems evolving in actual teaching-learning situations and help the individuals involved in this process.

The key factors involved in an educational process may be listed as below:

1. Learner or Pupil.
2. Learning experiences.

3. Learning process.
4. Learning situations or environment.
5. Teacher.

The subject matter of education psychology, if it is at all necessary to draw its boundaries, revolves round these five pivots mentioned above.

- **Learner.** The total subject matter of educational psychology primarily revolves around this factor—learner. This section of the subject acquaints us with the need of knowing the learner and deals with the techniques of knowing him well. The topics like below may be included in this section:

The innate abilities and capacities of the individuals, individual differences and their measurements, the overt, covert, conscious as well as unconscious behaviour of the learner and characteristics of his growth and development at each stage from his childhood to adulthood.

- **Learning experiences.** This is the second area of educational psychology and though the subject does not directly connect itself with the problem of what to teach or what learning experiences to provide the learner, it has the responsibility of suggesting the techniques on acquiring learning experience. Once the task of educational philosophy to decide the aims and objectives of a piece of instruction at a particular stage is finished, the need of educational psychology is felt. At this juncture, Educational psychology helps in deciding the kinds of learning experiences desirable at different stages of growth and development of the learner so that these experiences can be acquired with a greater ease and satisfaction. In this area, educational psychology has the subject matter which facilitates the selection of the desirable experiences for the learner.
- **Learning processes.** After knowing the learner and deciding on the types of learning experiences that are to be provided, the next problem arises when helping learner properly acquires these experiences with ease and convenience. Therefore, around this pivot, educational psychology deals with the nature of learning and how it takes place and comprises topics such as laws, principles and theories of learning, remembering and forgetting, perceiving, concept formation, thinking and reasoning process, problem solving, transfer of training, ways and means of effective learning and so on.
- **Learning situation or environment.** Under this topic, educational psychology focusses on the environmental factors and learning situations which come between the learner and the teacher. Topics like classroom climate and group dynamics, techniques and aids which facilitate learning, evaluation techniques and practice and guidance and counselling which help in the smooth functioning of the teaching-learning process, come under the purview of this pivot.
- **Teacher.** Last but not the least is the teacher. He is a potent force in any scheme of teaching and learning and educational psychology can not forget this key player either. It emphasizes the need of knowing the self for a teacher to play his role properly in the process of education. It discusses his conflicts, motivation, anxiety, adjustment, level of aspiration, etc. Moreover, it throws light on the essential personality traits, interests, aptitudes, characteristics of effective teaching, etc. so as to inspire him to become a successful teacher.

Educational Psychology beyond Boundaries

The five pivots mentioned above, however, do not show the complete picture of the boundaries and limits of educational psychology. In fact, sketching the full picture is quite a difficult task because of the fact that educational psychology is a developing and fast growing science. Like any other developing branch of science, it multiplies itself every year. New ideas keep pouring in because of the result of new researches and experiments. Change is the law of the nature and education, being a dynamic subject, is changing very fast. New problems are coming in the process of education at a faster rate forcing educational psychology to try harder for solution. As new concepts, principles, and techniques are taking birth in the sphere of educational psychology therefore, it is unwise to place a hedge or boundary around the fertile ground of educational psychology by defining its scope. It will not only hamper the progress of this developing subject but also prove an obstacle in the progress of education.

Therefore, educational psychology must be left free for future expansion so as to facilitate the inclusion of all that is created to solve the problems of education and help in the smoothening of teaching-learning process.

FUNCTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Educational psychology, as defined earlier, is definitely that branch of psychology which helps the cause of teaching and learning. As a science of education, it supplies all the information, principles and techniques which may help a teacher in better teaching and a learner in his better learning. Let us now see how the knowledge of this branch helps a teacher and a learner. In other words, let us analyze and elaborate the functions served by educational psychology in the field of teaching and learning.

In Teaching

Educational psychology, with its broad coverage of the content material principles, theories, techniques and applied experiences, first analyses the tasks of the teacher's teaching and then, in its light, tries to supply the knowledge and skills needed by the teacher. Factors required by the teacher in respect to his classroom teaching and other activities for the desirable behaviour modification and all-round growth and development of the students may be outlined as below:

TO KNOW THE LEARNER

Unless the teacher has some knowledge of the potentialities of his student, he cannot go ahead with his task. Educational psychology equips the teacher with the understanding of the child in the following ways:

- (i) His interests, attitudes, aptitudes and the other acquired or innate capacities and abilities etc.
- (ii) The stage of development linked with his social; emotional, intellectual, physical and aesthetic needs.
- (iii) His level of aspiration.
- (iv) His conscious and unconscious behaviour.
- (v) His motivational behaviour.
- (vi) The aspect of his group behaviour.
- (vii) The conflicts, desires and other aspects of his mental health.

TO SELECT AND ORGANISE THE SUBJECT-MATTER OR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Once the teacher gets to know the child, the stage is ready for educating the child and following questions come in the way:

- What types of learning experiences or learning materials are to be provided?
- How should we organise or grade the materials or learning experiences?

To answer such questions, which are part of curriculum construction, one needs the knowledge of the characteristics of the learner at each stage of his development, the nature and laws of learning etc. and these questions can be answered through educational psychology.

TO SUGGEST ART AND TECHNIQUES OF LEARNING AS WELL AS TEACHING

After deciding about the learner and the learning material, the next problem of 'how to teach or learn' is also solved with the help of educational psychology. Educational psychology explains the process of learning and suggests the means for effective and enduring learning. It reveals how to maintain interest in the learning process. In this way, it acquaints the teacher with the ways of making pupils learn and thus gives birth to the suitable methodology of teaching. It also suggests that no single method or technique is suitable for all kinds of learners in different circumstances. A teacher should select a proper device or method according to the learning situations he faces.

TO ARRANGE LEARNING SITUATIONS OR ENVIRONMENT

Midway between the learner and the teacher in an educational process are the learning situations or the environment. Much depends upon the appropriateness of this midway element. The knowledge of educational psychology equips the teacher to take care of the desirable learning situations and environment. Where should individual learning or self-study be implemented and when is group learning or project work suitable, it is suggested by educational psychology. The knowledge of group dynamics and group behaviour gives the necessary art for teaching or learning in a group. In other words, the study of the impact of the learning environment (including equipment facilities and aid material etc.) on the teaching-learning process equips the teacher to take care of the appropriate learning situations or environment.

TO ACQUAINT ONESELF WITH THE MECHANISM OF HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT

The knowledge of the role played by heredity and environment in the process of growth and development of child is very essential for the teacher. Based on this he can weigh their relative importance and take a balanced decision for his work.

HELPING IN MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE

Knowledge of educational psychology helps the teacher to have a creative type of discipline as it acquaints him with the nature of the child, his strengths and weaknesses, his interests and aptitudes, etc. on one hand and the art and techniques of teaching and learning on the other. Moreover, his knowledge of the needs drives, fatigue and motivational aspects of the learner and above all, the knowledge of the behaviour pattern and personality characteristics of the children-all help him in the process of maintaining proper discipline.

RENDERING GUIDANCE SERVICES

Educational psychology helps the teacher in rendering guidance services to his pupils. He is the person who can know the children better, even more than their parents. With the knowledge of

educational psychology at his command, he is well aware of the methods of behavioural assessment and appraisal. He can better diagnose the abilities, interests and aptitudes of his pupils and consequently have an idea of the direction and speed of their development. In this way, with the help of educational psychology, a teacher can show the right direction to his pupils for their total development.

HELPING IN EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

While furthering in the teaching-learning process, one feels the need for evaluation. After imparting learning experiences to the child, the behavioural changes occurred in him need to be examined and also in the beginning the potentialities are to be known. In educational psychology, as applied behavioural science, evaluation, measurement and appraisal find its place, which make the teacher well-equipped in the task of evaluation with proper professional skill.

SOLVING CLASSROOM PROBLEMS

There are innumerable problems like backwardness, truancy, bullying, cheating in the classroom situations which are to be faced by a teacher. Educational psychology helps the teacher on this front also. The study of the characteristics of problem children, the dynamics of the group, behavioural characteristics and adjustment etc. equip the teacher to solve the actual classroom problems.

KNOWING ABOUT ONESELF

Knowledge of educational psychology helps the teacher know about himself. His own behaviour pattern, personality characteristics, likes and dislikes, motivation, anxiety, conflicts, adjustment, etc. are all revealed to him. He also learns the psychology of being a teacher and acquaints himself with the traits of a successful teacher and characteristics of effective teaching. All this knowledge helps him in growing as a successful teacher.

However, we cannot say that the above mentioned areas are all for which a teacher needs the knowledge of educational psychology. A teacher's needs and problems are too many and have so many aspects. Educational psychology being a science and technology of education, helps the teacher in all the phases of teaching and learning—whether informal or formal, curricular or co-curricular. It does not only equip him for the classroom instruction but also for the other duties assigned to him like—construction of time-table, organization of co-curricular activities, to seek parental co-operation and so on.

Educational Psychology vis-à-vis Learning

Learning is to a large extent helped and facilitated by the knowledge, principle, theories and techniques of educational psychology. In other words, educational psychology may prove quite beneficial to the learners in the realization of the learning objectives in the manner summarized below:

1. Educational psychology may help the learner in the task of knowing one's self. They may thus be acquainted with their abilities and capacities, interests and aptitudes, likings and dislikings, attitudes and dispositions etc. related to the various aspects of their curricular courses and co-curricular means. Such knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses may go a long way and adjust their level of aspiration and mode of working in getting desired success in their learning attempts.
2. The theories, principles and techniques related to motivation, ways of learning and remembering may help them well in their tasks of learning.

3. The knowledge of the processes and factors helpful in paying attention and staying away from the forces of distraction may help them in attending to their studies and learning processes as effectively as possible.
4. To what extent is it essential to remain adjusted to one's self and the environment? The knowledge and techniques helpful in seeking such harmony and better mental health can be better acquired through the applied aspect of educational psychology. It is no denying the fact that those who remain adjusted and enjoy better mental health can be better learners and successful individuals in their lives.
5. The knowledge of the facts and principle related to group dynamics and group behaviour may help them to adjust and merge their behaviour according to the needs of the group learning situations—classroom and other cooperative ways of learning.
6. Through the study of mechanism of heredity and environmental, they may get acquainted with true roles of the hereditary and environmental forces in shaping and moulding their ways of learning and behaving, growth and development, and so on. They must thus protect their self from being damaged with the rumours and incorrect information spread in the society in the name of the perpetuation of caste, creed, colour and blood theories. As a result, a child born in the deprived section of the society may also acquire enough confidence to learn whatever he decides in the course of his life.
7. A student after learning the role of favourable and unfavourable factors, conditions, situations and resources may be able to utilize or make optimum use of the better learning environment on one hand and avoiding the situation or factors that may prove detrimental to his learning success on the other.
8. The theory and mechanism related to remembering and forgetting may help the learner to learn, retain, reproduce and thus fully utilize the fruits of learning as effectively as possible.
9. The knowledge of the mechanism of transfer of learning or training may provide them desired skill for getting proper help from their past and related learning in their present learning assignment as well as utilize their present learning stock in almost all the possible ways in the learning or problem solving behaviour of the future.
10. The knowledge of educational psychology may also equip them with the facts and principles of behaviour modification and other therapeutic techniques. How to acquire desirable habits and proper ways of learning and how to break the bad habits and unlearn the improper ways and means of learning can thus be better acquired through the study and practices of educational psychology.
11. The knowledge of educational psychology makes the learner aware of the developmental stages of human life and the needs and characteristics of the learners at these specific stages of life. Accordingly, the learner may direct and structure his path of learning and learning objectives according to the needs and characteristics of his developmental stage. It may in the long run help him to make his learning attempts and situations well in tune with his developmental characteristics and thus be able to seek harmony in terms of his adjustment with self and the environment.
12. Educational psychology makes the learner realize the importance and facts related to the all-round growth and development of the personality in order to become successful in the realization of the success in the processes and products of learning. It inspires him to strive for the harmonious and progressive growth and development of his abilities and capacities instead of one-sided or lopsided development of his personality.

Thus, it can be easily concluded that while knowledge and practices of educational psychology help the teacher in their tasks related to teaching and fulfilling their obligation as a teacher in all possible ways, the help rendered by it to the learners in their tasks of learning and shaping their lives in the desired ways is also praiseworthy. There is no aspect of the teaching-learning process that can remain untouched or unaffected by the positive results, impacts and influence of the knowledge and skill acquired by the teachers and students from educational psychology. It definitely makes a learner a better learner and a teacher a better teacher and here lies the worth and contribution of the subject in the field of education.