

WHAT IS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY?

As already discussed, Educational Psychology is one of the many branches of Psychology dealing mainly with the problems, processes and products of education. It is an attempt to apply the knowledge of psychology in the field of education. Here we try to study human-behaviour, particularly the behaviour of the learner in relation to his educational environment. In other words, Educational Psychology may be defined as that branch of psychology which studies the behaviour of the learner in relation to his educational needs and his environment. Educational Psychology has been defined by various psychologists and scholars. For the sake of understanding what educational psychology is, let us analyze a few important definitions.

Skinner (1958):

Educational psychology is that branch of psychology which deals with teaching and learning.

Crow and Crow (1973):

Educational psychology describes and explains the learning experiences of an individual from birth through old age.

Peel (1956):

Educational psychology is the science of education.

The definition given by Skinner considers Educational Psychology to be the psychology of teaching and learning, i.e. psychology applied in the field of education for improving the methods and products of the teaching-learning process. Education in its applied form is centred around the process of teaching and learning and it is this which helps the teacher in better teaching and the learner in better learning.

The definition given by L.D. Crow and Alice Crow describes Educational Psychology as that subject area of the curriculum through which one can study

the development of an individual in terms of his learning achievement during his life-span. How he goes on learning as a result of interaction with his environment and how he can learn effectively is covered by Educational Psychology.

Learning, however, on account of its close association with experience, often said to be a great teacher, is never independent of teaching. Therefore, what we find in the process of development is nothing but a planned spontaneous scheme of teaching and learning. All our efforts and energies in the field of education are directed to planning and devising the appropriate means of better teaching and effective learning. Educational Psychology is mainly meant for solving the practical problems related to the field of education, especially the process of teaching and learning.

It is these considerations which led E.A. Peel to define and describe Educational Psychology as the science of education, i.e. a discipline which can be used to improve the processes and products of education in a scientific way. Let us now briefly analyse the definition given by Peel.

IS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY A SCIENCE OF EDUCATION?

Science and technology have made it possible for us to carry out all our tasks efficiently, effectively and speedily. With the help of minimum input in terms of labour, energy and time, science helps us to derive maximum output in terms of the quality and quantity of the finished products or outcomes. Science and technology have thus made our life quite comfortable.

Let us try to evaluate educational psychology against this criterion. What role can it play in the field of education? Does it help the persons connected with the task of arranging and providing education or getting the fruits of education in the same way as science and technology help those connected with other tasks in our day-to-day life? Surely it does. It helps in realizing the objectives of education in a better way. Education aims at shaping the behaviour of the students in a desirable way and bringing about all-round development in their personality. The task is carried out through the process of formal or informal teaching and learning. Educational psychology comes in here for planning the process of teaching and learning by adopting the scientific principle of minimum input for maximum output. As a result, with the help of Educational Psychology, a teacher can teach effectively by making minimum use of his energy in terms of time and labour; similarly, the students can learn effectively by spending less of their time and effort.

Educational Psychology thus helps to carry out the processes and produce the results of education. It supplies the necessary knowledge and skills, especially for the teacher, to realize the objectives of education. It equips the teacher by supplying the essential scientific skills, technological expertise and advice in moulding and shaping the behaviour of his students for the desirable all-round development of their personality much in the same way as the persons connected with the actual construction of a bridge are helped by an engineer or mechanic equipped with the essential civil, mechanical or electrical technology. Educational

Psychology thus plays the same role as other sciences or technology in helping the teachers and other persons connected with the building of the future of the youngsters in their charge. Thus we are justified in describing Educational Psychology as the science and technology of education.

NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In the foregoing discussion, we have substantiated Peel's definition of Educational Psychology as the science of education, and established beyond doubt that the nature of Educational Psychology is nothing but scientific.

Moreover, in discussing the nature of Psychology, we have clearly shown that the basic nature of the subject is scientific. Since Educational Psychology is an offshoot and part and parcel of Psychology, its nature cannot be different from the main subject. The following points further confirm the nature of Educational Psychology as scientific.

1. Educational Psychology possesses a well-organized, systematic and universally accepted body of facts supported by the relevant psychological laws and principles.
2. It is constantly in search of the truth, i.e. studying the behaviour of the learner in relation to his educational environment. Moreover, the findings of such study are never taken as absolute and permanent. The results of any study in Educational Psychology can be challenged and are modified or altered in terms of the latest explanations and findings.
3. It employs scientific methods and adopts a scientific approach for studying the learner's behaviour. Setting of hypotheses, objective observation, controlled experimentation, clinical investigation, and generalization based on adequate similar evidences provide enough reasons for its studies to be termed scientific.
4. The processes and products of these studies are sufficiently scientific as a high degree of logical viability, objectivity, reliability and validity is maintained in carrying out the study and research in the field of Educational Psychology.
5. Educational Psychology does not accept hearsay and does not take anything for granted. It emphasizes that essentially there is some definite cause linked with a behaviour and the causes of this behaviour are not related to supernatural phenomena.
6. Educational Psychology is mostly concerned with the 'what' and the 'why' of happenings in the present instead of caring for the past. Therefore, in its study, it focuses attention on problems like the present behaviour of the learner, the causes of such behaviour, and the repercussions if it were to continue unchanged.
7. It is a positive science rather than a normative science and like the sciences, it does not concern itself with values and ideals. Therefore, instead of answering questions like "what ought to be", e.g. why education should be provided and what type of education is to be provided to the children, youth or adults, it focuses attention on

providing the key to the 'how', 'when' and 'where' of education for proving its worth as a science and technology.

8. The generalizations arrived at and conclusions reached through the study of Educational Psychology are sufficiently reliable and thus like the sciences, these can be used for predictions of behaviour in similar situations. R.B. Cattell, the modern psychologist, believed so much in the predictable quality of these studies that he persisted in defining personality as the attribute which permits a prediction of what a person will do in a given situation.

This discussion shows that Educational Psychology is sufficiently scientific. As compared to the natural sciences like physics, chemistry and biology, and applied sciences like engineering and medicine, it is not so perfect and developed science. In fact, it is an applied behavioural science, which deals with the behaviour of the learner in the educational environment. Since the learner's behaviour is dynamic and unpredictable, and the methods of its study are also not absolute and objective, educational psychology cannot claim the status of a developed positive science like other natural or applied sciences. Although we accept its nature as quite scientific, yet we cannot term it as a developed positive science and have to satisfy ourselves with saying that it is a developing positive science of the learner's behaviour.

SCOPE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Educational Psychology is the science of education which mainly deals with the problems of teaching and learning and helps the teacher in his task of modifying the learner's behaviour and bringing about an all-round development of his personality. Therefore, while in psychology the scope of study and the field of operation are extended to cover the behaviour of all living organisms related to all their life activities, in Educational Psychology, the scope of such behavioural study has to be limited within the confines of the teaching-learning process, i.e. studying the behaviour of the learners in relation to their educational environment, specifically for the satisfaction of their educational needs and the all-round development of their personality. Specifically, thus, the subject matter of Educational Psychology must be centred around the process of teaching and learning for enabling the teacher and learners to do their jobs as satisfactorily as possible.

Let us first see the different issues that may be involved in an ongoing teaching-learning process. For improving the processes and products of the system related to teaching and learning, we will have to improve all the ingredients of its phenomenon. For this purpose, the basic questions involved in the teaching-learning process must be satisfactorily attended to:

Who is being taught or educated?

By whom is he to be taught or educated?

Why is education to be provided to the child or what are the values or objectives that are to be aimed at through the teaching-learning process?

What is to be taught or what learning experience is to be imparted to the learner for achieving the desired educational objectives?

How, when and where should these learning experiences be satisfactorily provided to the learner for achieving the desired educational objectives?

Educational Psychology seeks to provide satisfactory solutions and answers to all the questions raised above except the why of education as this is purely the concern of Educational Philosophy, a matter to be decided by society or the government. Therefore, all texts of Educational Psychology, are loaded with material related to the other six basic questions. Let us try to clarify and answer them.

Who is being Educated?

The individuality and personality of the learner must be known before he is taught or subjected to behaviour modification. Therefore, topics and contents like the following which are helpful in exploring the individuality of the learner are to be included in the study of Educational Psychology:

The process and pattern of growth and development during different stages of an individual's life, his instincts and other innate abilities, the learned and acquired abilities, individual differences in terms of abilities and capacities and their measures such as the extent of interests, aptitudes, attitudes, intelligence, creativity are also important for personality appraisal.

By Whom is the Learner to be Taught

In order to achieve the desired success in any teaching-learning process, the role of the teacher can never be minimized. In fact, much depends on the competency and capability of the teacher for carrying out the desired task. Not everybody can be entrusted with the crucial task of behaviour modification and personality development of a number of children studying in a class or school. One has to make oneself capable by equipping oneself for it. For this purpose, the teacher himself must be acquainted with his own self, the expectations from him in terms of personality, characteristics, role playing and work habits. Consequently, he is required to pay attention to the following aspects which have been included in a text of educational psychology:

1. Personality traits and characteristics of good teachers
2. Duties and responsibilities of a teacher
3. Measures for knowing and doing away with his own conflicts, anxiety and tension
4. Teacher's motivation, level of aspiration, adjustment and mental health.

What is to be Taught?

Whereas the aims and objectives of providing education to the children at one or the other developmental stage are decided by Educational Philosophy depending on the needs and wishes of the society or government, Educational Psychology plays its role in deciding the type of learning experiences suitable for the children at each developmental stage by keeping in view the differences in their potentialities. The subject matter of Educational psychology thus definitely covers the topics helpful in suggesting principles, methods and techniques for the

selection of the learning experiences appropriate to each developmental stage of the children. It enunciates how to organize the contents or topics gradewise for giving them the shape of a syllabus or curriculum. How to cater for the individual differences and individuality of the children in framing the syllabi or curricula is also taken care of by educational psychology. The subject tries to encompass the essential knowledge and skills for equipping the teachers to plan, select and arrange learning experiences to the children suitable for their age, grade and also meeting their specific individual potentialities.

How are the Learning Experiences to be Provided?

Who is being taught, and what is to be taught and for what purpose? After answering these questions another question which arises is, how should the child be given the learning experiences planned for different stages of his growth? In other words, what is to be done for the proper and effective communication between the teacher and the taught? What should be the appropriate methods and techniques of imparting education to the children? How can children be helped in the acquisition of useful learning experiences for the desirable modification in their behaviour and appropriate development of their personality? Educational Psychology tries to provide satisfactory solutions for all these questions by including relevant topics such as the following:

1. Nature, laws and theories of learning
2. Remembering and forgetting
3. Means of effective learning and memorization
4. Transfer of learning or training
5. Sensation and perception
6. Concept formation
7. Interest and attitude formation thinking, reasoning and problem solving behaviour etc.

When and Where are the Learning Experiences to be Provided?

Every time and place or environmental situation is not suitable for a particular piece of instruction or the sharing of a learning experience. The effectiveness of a teaching-learning programme depends largely on the suitability of the teaching-learning situations in terms of time, place and other environmental factors. Educational psychology helps the teacher and the learners to understand the suitability and appropriateness of a teaching-learning situation for the effective realization of the teaching-learning objectives. It also helps them to modify the teaching-learning situation to achieve the desired results by giving place in its study to topics such as the following:

1. Classroom climate
2. Institutional/organizational climate
3. Individual, self, supervised and group study
4. Factors affecting attention
5. Role of rewards and punishment

6. Group behaviour and group dynamics
7. Guidance and counselling.

In the discussion so far, we have tried to outline the general scope of Educational Psychology. However, the scope of a fast growing subject like Educational Psychology cannot be limited in such a way. Educational Psychology being a science of education has to supply the necessary knowledge and skills for carrying out all the tasks of education. Education cannot be static and fixed or unchanging as it has to be planned according to the changing circumstances and needs of a particular society or nation. To meet the emerging problems and demands in the field of education, Educational Psychology has to work hard to keep evolving new concepts, principles and techniques. The subject matter of Educational Psychology as also its field of operation is, therefore, expanding day by day and in view of this, it is not possible to limit the scope of this subject. It would, in fact, be unwise to do so. Such a step would not only hamper the progress of this fast growing and developing science of behaviour but would also hinder the realization of the objectives of education. Hence, it is only right not to strictly define the scope of Educational psychology so as to leave the way open for its further expansion and declare it as having no limits to effectively fulfil the aims and objectives of education.

SUMMARY

Educational psychology as one of the branches of psychology tries to study the behaviour of the learner in relation to his educational environment. It has been variously defined. Most of the definitions centre around the fact that educational psychology as a specialized branch of psychology concerns itself with suggesting ways and means of improving the processes and products of education, enabling the teachers to teach effectively and the learners to learn effectively by putting in the minimum effort. It is thus designated as the science of education. It has simplified the tasks and improved the efficiency of the teacher or all those connected with the processes and products of education by supplying them with the essential knowledge and skills in much the same way as science and technology has helped in making possible maximum output through minimum input in terms of time and labour in our day to day activities.

The nature of educational psychology is regarded as scientific because like the sciences, it possesses a well organized, systematic and universally accepted body of facts; remains constantly in search of truth through research and experimentation; employs scientific methods in its study, and the results of its study are subject to further verification and modification.

However, as it is not so perfect a science as the natural and applied sciences, it is defined as a developing positive science of the learners' behaviour.

The scope of Educational Psychology is both limited and extensive. It is limited in the sense that Educational Psychology must concern itself only with the study of the behaviour of the learner in the educational environment. It must include the topics and contents which are specifically meant for improving the processes and products of education mainly centred around the teaching-learning

process. As a result, its study has to include only those topics and subject material which help in

1. knowing the learner;
2. enabling the teacher to know his self, his strengths and limitations and to acquire essential teacher-like traits;
3. selection and organization of proper learning experiences suited to the individuality and developmental stages of the learner;
4. suggesting suitable methods and techniques for providing the desired learning experiences; and
5. in arranging proper learning situations.

However, its scope may be considered extensive in the sense that all that is needed for providing solutions to the problems and demands of our educational system must find place in the study of Educational Psychology. Since the problems and demands are unending and the process of education is dynamic, we cannot expect rigidity in terms of a strict delineation and definition of the scope of Educational Psychology. It needs to be left unfettered for the inclusion of what is needed in it for better serving the cause of education.