

## **INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN AFRICA**

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### **Abstract**

Educational psychology has had various modes of definitions that have been used by educational psychologists such as: scientific study of human behaviour as applied in the field of teaching and learning, wherever such activity occurs, with particular focus on what occurs in learning wherever such activity occurs with particular focus on what occurs in learning institutions such as early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and university education Educational psychology has a focus on certain important areas of psychology comprising thinking, learning, human development, motivation, assessment of human characteristics and others. Alexander argues that educational psychology attempts at psychology and education can be integrated in such manner that it will enhance comprehension of all students. Therefore it can be justifiably argued that for teachers to understand their students' behaviour is essential for effective and successful teaching and learning.,

**Keywords:** Educational psychology, psychology, African teachers, effective learning, effective teaching

### **Introduction to Educational Psychology**

Educational psychology has had various modes of definitions that have been used by educational psychologists such as: scientific study of human behaviour as applied in the field of teaching and learning, wherever such activity occurs, with particular focus on what occurs in learning wherever such activity occurs with particular focus on what occurs in learning institutions such as early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and university education (Mwamwenda 2019; Eloff & Swart, 2018; Lamanauskas, 2017; Tuckman & Monetti 2011 ). It is a field of study whose focus is on how humans learn in a context of education, the psychology of learning and

teaching and the social psychology of schools (Mwamwenda 2019; Wikipedia, 2011). Moreover educational psychology has interest in how students learn and develop in various dimensions, such as cognitive, physical, social, emotional and mental (Mwamwenda 2019; Eloff & Swart. 2018; Mwamwenda 2004).



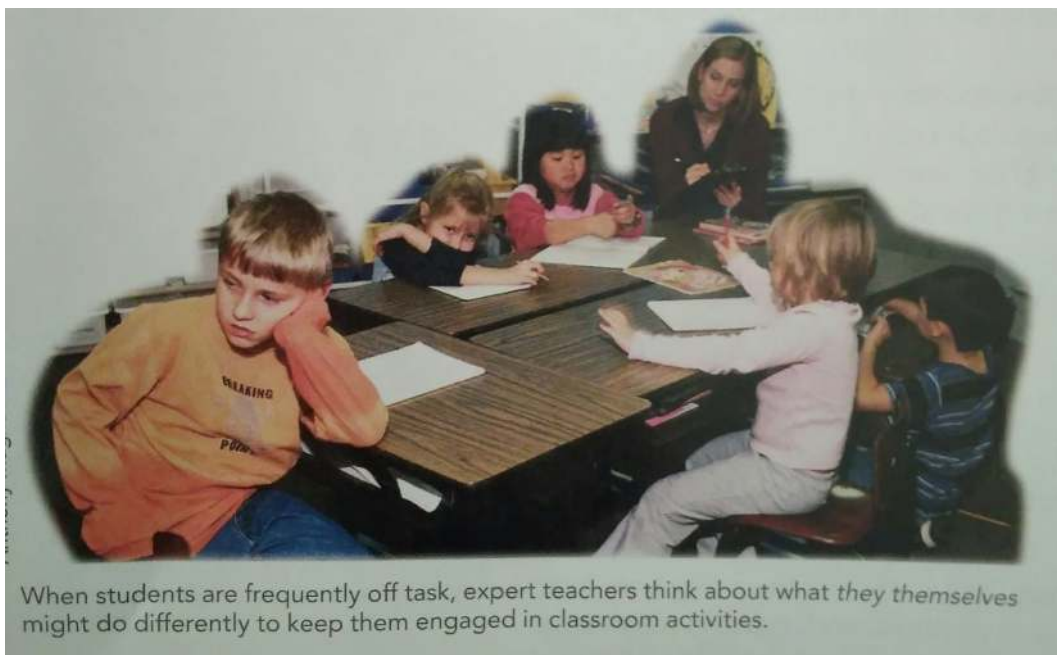
According to Ormrod (2012), Educational psychology has a focus on certain important areas of psychology comprising thinking, learning, human development, motivation, assessment of human characteristics and others. Alexander (2006) argues that educational psychology attempts at psychology and education can be integrated in such manner that it will enhance comprehension of all students. Therefore it can be justifiably argued that for teachers to understand their students' behaviour is essential for effective and successful teaching and learning. Similarly, Woolfolk (2007) expresses the view that Educational psychology has various definitions two of which state as follows: 1) A body of knowledge on human behaviour derived from the study of psychology, and applied to learning in the classroom, as the teacher interacts

with learners; 2) Using the methods used in psychology of studying human behaviour, and understand what happens in the classroom as teaching and learning occurs.

Today, Educational psychology may be described as a distinct discipline, which has command over research methods, theories problems and techniques. In the past and in the present, Educational psychology has focused on the art of teaching and learning, as well as enhancing educational practices.

As can be inferred from the preceding presentation, and the title of the book, Educational Psychology: An African Update Perspective, psychology is the home base and therefore informs Educational psychology, given that it serves as the applied aspect of psychology to an educational context at various levels of education, such as may be the case at early childhood development and education, primary, secondary, tertiary and university (Mwamwenda 2019; Tchombe, 2019; Eloff & Swart. 2018; Lamanaskaus, 2017; ).

In view of the role that psychology plays in Educational Psychology, it is relevant and important that psychology is defined. The simplest and most basic definition is that psychology is a field of study, whose principal focus centres on animal and human behaviour. More specifically, psychology is a scientific study of human behaviour that can be subjected to a process of observation and experimentation (Mwamwenda 2019; Eloff & Swart, 2018; Brown, 2018; Nicholas, 2017; John, Robins & Pervin, 2010)



Given the emphasis psychology as a science, further discussion of the rationale for such a stance is relevant and appropriate. First, psychology as a science is empirical, which means that its body of knowledge is acquired by means of observation and experimentation. We observe and experiment with certain events, or behaviour to find out whether what we observe is what holds true in reality. The observations and experiments carried out must be such, that given the instructions for procedure, another person will come up with similar results.

To use a technical term, the results must be replicable, meaning repeatable. Psychology does not base its principles on opinion, beliefs or revelations. As scientists, psychologists do not accept information without adequate supporting evidence (Mwamwenda 2019; Elof & Swart, 2018; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010; Mwamwenda, 2004). In view of the fact that psychology's primary concern is human behaviour and that, as teachers we deal with human behaviour in the process of learning and teaching, it is evident that our understanding of the major principles of psychology will contribute to our effectiveness as teachers. From this perspective, a good knowledge of and understanding of students should be a motivation or driving force in the teachers' decision as lessons to be taught are planned (Ormrod, 2011).

As Educational psychology is informed by principles and theories of psychology, it also has a relationship and informs other disciplines, such as may be the case in the study of instructional design, educational technology, curriculum development, organisational learning, inclusive education classroom management, measurement and evaluation, teaching methods in various school subjects or levels of education, in society and human development.

A brief account of the many aspects of learning covered in Educational psychology will be presented under the following subtopics: 1) Social, moral and cognitive development; 2) Learning and cognition; 3) Motivation; 4) Research methodology; 5) Applications in instructional design and technology; 6) Individual differences, etc.

**Social, Moral and Cognitive Development:** For the purpose of understanding human behaviour at various levels of human development, Educational psychology explores human characteristics during childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. In the exploration of these stages, Educational psychology pays specific attention to biological changes, developmental theories dealing with cognitive capabilities, social roles and moral reasoning. As an example for cognitive development would be Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development in which four stages are identified, namely, sensori motor, preoperational, concrete and formal operations.

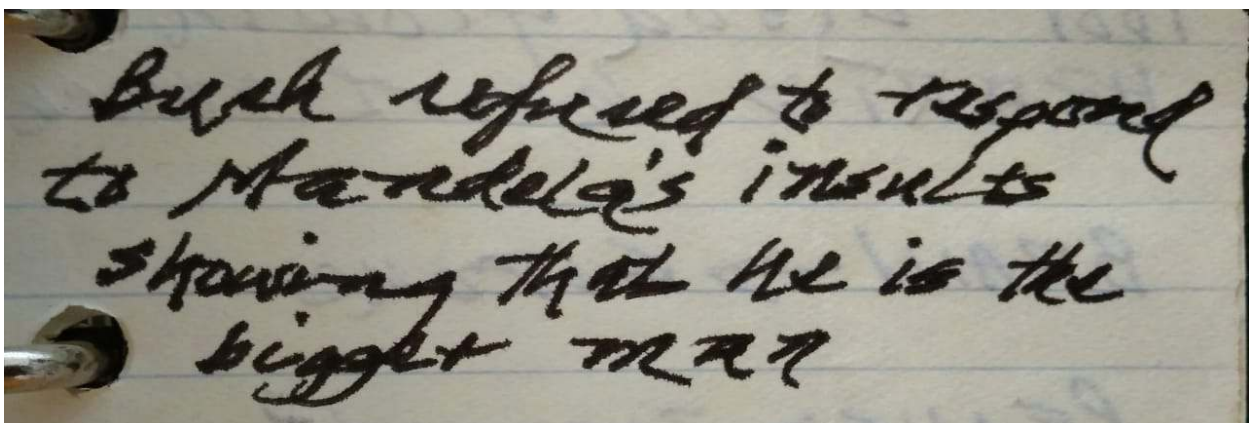
According to Piaget, children below the age of twelve years engage in what is known as concrete operations which is based on reasoning, that is aided by concrete experience, and as such cannot engage in abstract type of reasoning is based on formal operations. Based on Piaget's theory, learning and teaching must be presented in such manner that it will be in

alignment with a learner's level of cognitive development. Failure to do so, it will be difficult for learners to grasp what is being taught (Mwamwenda,2019, 2004).

**Individual Differences:** Educational psychology takes the view that, though people look alike and behave in similar manner, each person has individual profile of characteristics, abilities, interests, which may be due to a variety of factors; such as: environment, personality, upbringing, predisposition, learning, socialization and development in general. Such differences may take the form of intelligence, creativity, motivation and cognition. Other individual differences may be identified as: disabilities as observed in mental retardation, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder and learning disability. Educational psychology's interest in individual differences is the desire to see that both learning and teaching take into account in seeing that all learners benefit from learning, without being disadvantaged by their individual differences. This is based on the principle of equality and equity and natural justice (Eloff & Swart, 2018;Frederickson & Cline, 2011; Mwamwenda, 2004; UNESCO, 1994).

**Learning and Cognition:** Educational psychology operates on the perspective that learners a) acquire knowledge through learning; b) such knowledge and skills are made use of: in a school system, outside the classroom and overall society both in the present and future. In the view of Educational psychology, problem-solving is very important for learning to occur. Therefore, both learning and teaching ought to pay due attention in problem-solving, as basis of effective learning.

**Behaviourism Perspective:** In addition to learning and cognition, Educational psychology to learning theories based on behaviourism in which it is argued that on the basis of stimulus and response or stimulus and reinforcement. This can be illustrated by seeing that a desirable behaviour is followed by reinforcement/reward for such behaviour in the form of one of the following reinforcement: praise, star or token or due recognition for such behaviour. The use of reinforcement leads to the repletion and retention of the desirable behaviour on the part of the learner.



**Development Perspective:** In terms of the development aspect, perhaps it is the cognitive development, which is vitally significant.

This is based on the fact that the cognitive aspect is related to education in so far as the two converge in a number of ways. In the first instance, from cognitive development, it is possible to identify the intellectual capability of the learner, which would match the knowledge and skills that would offer such a learner, which means a knowledge of cognitive development influences the kind of education what will be made available to the learner.

This is one reason Piaget's theory of cognitive development is important in teaching various subjects in school, and particularly in the teaching of mathematics and natural sciences. In the second instance, cognitive development calls for an understanding of how cognitive development changes, and the factors that facilitate such developmental changes, enhancing better level of cognitive competence. Such changes is in agreement with education's interest in the change of cognitive, which would facilitate the transmission of knowledge and skills the learner in such way that it will be understood and further enhance further cognitive development and understanding.

**Social Cognitive Perspective (Social Cognitive Theory)** is mainly based on the work of Albert Bandura (1977), whose focus is on observational learning. In such learning, it is argued that people learn by means of observing others' behaviour with the end result or consequences which may be either positive or negative. Some of the important factors influencing the occurrence of social learning are as follows: 1) learner's developmental status; 2) perceived competence and prestige of model; 3) the relevance of the model's behaviour; 4) and consequences to the learner's goals; 5) As well as the learner's self-efficacy used in reference to the learner's belief in higher capability.

Similar to social learning is a new concept referred to as self-regulating learning, in which it is argued that effective learners are those who take an active role in their own learning. This is brought about as a result of constructing knowledge, /setting goals, analysing tasks, planning strategies and monitoring their understanding. Such approach to learning increases learner's academic achievement.

### **Educational psychology and its application to both teaching and learning**

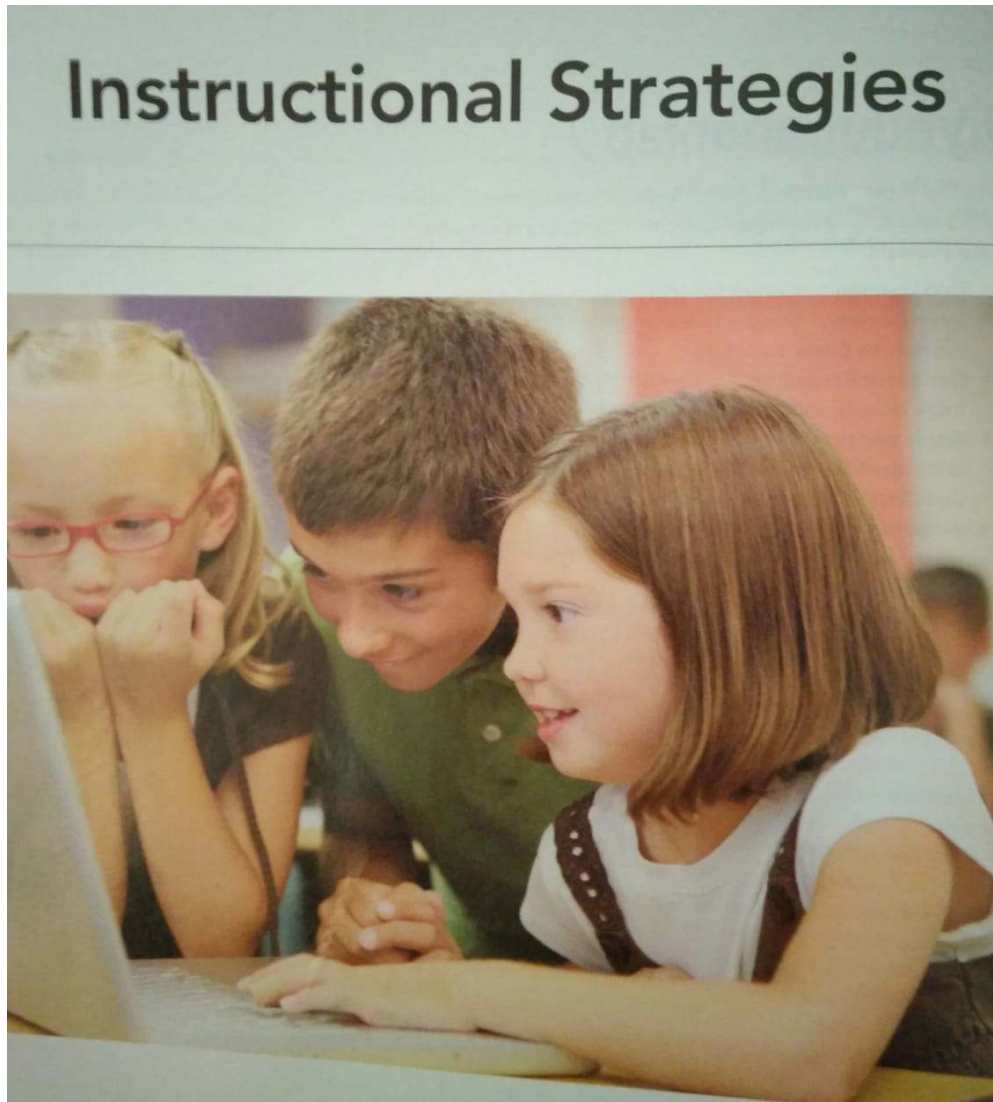
The principal reason for undertaking the course in Educational psychology is to know and be versatile in the subject to the point that your knowledge will be transferable to the way you will be able to apply such knowledge to your teaching and the learning of students, as well as positively interacting with both teachers and students. This part of the chapter briefly introduces you to the way Educational psychology plays an important role in your teaching career.

It is important to note that, there is no single inclusive definition of Educational psychology. What is more significant is that the theme of all possible definitions is similar, emphasizing the essence of Educational psychology. Nevertheless, in passing educational psychology may be further defined as the study of psychology as applied to teaching and learning in a classroom and school setting. In other words, based on what psychology says about human behaviour, how can such knowledge be specifically used to cause and improve learning in African classrooms and schools? “The scientific aspect of Educational psychology is based on the fact that teachers and learners use psychological approaches to understand, predict and control the learning opportunities that schools offer” (Zindi, Peresuh and Mpofu, 1997)

Educational psychology identifies conditions conducive to learning and how teaching can be brought about in effective learning. The major principle underlying Educational psychology is that certain strategies are likely to be effective between teachers and learners interactions. The aim is to identify these strategies for both teachers and learners for prospective and practising teachers, and show them how to use them in teaching in the teaching-learning situation. Educational psychology not only assists prospective teachers practising their profession in a technical sense, but goes further by providing them with a theory which enables them to be flexible and adaptable to the various situations, which may rise in their work, and to come up with appropriate solutions to the problems at hand (Mwamwenda 2019; Eloff & Swart, 20118; Lamanaskaus, 2017; Brown, 2018; Donald et al. 2010; Mwamwenda, 2004)

In a Teacher Education programme, Educational psychology is one of the most important courses inasmuch as, it its focus is on learners. It aims to provide teachers with information about children learning behaviour in a variety of contexts, such as the home, the school, the social context and the classroom, as well as about their modes of thinking, and the growth of social relationships and attitudes in the course of their lifespan (Mwamwenda, 2019).

As a result of studying Educational psychology, we are in a position to understand and appreciate the principles involved in the processes of learning and teaching, which are vital in a school setting. Teachers with this understanding are in a better position to apply these principles in the learning –teaching situation and thus to make their work more effective in the classroom and the society, where they happen to practise their profession and teaching career (Tchombe, 2019; Brown, 2018; Elof & Swart, 2018; Lamanavaskaus, 2017). It is clear that the application of effective teaching will, as a matter of course, facilitate learners’ comprehension of what is being taught, resulting in their personal improvement on the cognitive, social, emotional and physical levels.



Each African country has certain national objectives and goals that should be achieved by the education offered. On this basis, a curriculum is prepared (Mwamwenda, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018) Educational psychology can assist teachers to prepare instruction that will suit the age, needs and interests of the learners required to follow such a course of study, and thus maximise its benefit for both the learners and the nation as a whole.

Moreover, Educational psychology contributes to the theories of child and adolescent development in a number of ways. It enables teachers to identify the stages of growth and development and the kind of teaching that is likely to be effective at each of these stages, and to understand the roles played by heredity and environment in the development of a child or person, a topic widely misunderstood among many African ethnic groups.



Many Africans tend to attribute any abnormality in behaviour to heredity or worse to witchcraft. Little consideration is given to the contribution of environment, or to the combined effect of the two factors. A common view is that “He/she is doing this, because it is in her/his blood, his/her father or mother or one of the sibling used to do the same”. The study of Educational psychology, therefore, can assist us, as Africans to draw a difference between the role of heredity and environment in human development and behaviour. Finally, a knowledge of this area will assist teachers to interact with learners at pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary level, in a more professional way and to have the appropriate expectation for each one of the mentioned categories of learners. Learning is probably the most important reason for the establishment of a school in society, whether in Africa or elsewhere in the world (Mwamwenda 2019). The teacher’s role in this context is to facilitate the occurrence of learning. Educational psychology contributes to this important role by providing teachers with knowledge of how learning is acquired, essential circumstance that facilitates learning taking place. Teachers need such knowledge, if they are to succeed in their teaching career. Many African teachers in Africa hold the view that, the only way African children can learn is by the use of corporal punishment, to the point that though the use of corporal punishment has been banned in a number of African countries, corporal punishment in schools continues being administered on a regular basis.

However, those who have had an exposure to Educational psychology, have had reason to alter their perception of the use of corporal punishment. For example, while teaching Educational psychology at the University of Botswana, a student of mine testified that before joining university, he taught as an unqualified teacher, when he used corporal punishment as a means of controlling inappropriate behaviour among students. It was only after studying Educational psychology that he resolved that, corporal punishment was not the way to promote learning among learners (Mwamwenda 2019). As teachers, we are concerned with influencing the behaviour of learners. For this to be achieved, it is imperative that we have a good knowledge of the children we work with. Educational psychology offers insights into the dynamics of the behaviour of both teachers and learners, and also alerts teachers to the importance of psychological atmosphere prevailing in the classroom. Their teachers who conduct their classes as a battle zone, which is unlikely to promote positive relationship with learners and negatively affects effective teaching and learning. Educational psychology enables teachers to examine the causes of students’ learning problems and what might be the underlying problem to such encounter.

### **Summary**

In this chapter we have discussed psychology, educational psychology and its relevance to teaching and learning. We have shown that psychology is an important part of our lives, since it addresses human behaviour. Inasmuch as our concern as teachers is to deal with human behaviour in a school setting, psychology has a bearing on our work. In view of this,

Educational psychology has a unique and important contribution to make to the progress of African children, whose success in life is partly dependent on how well we prepare them to take their rightful places in their respective countries and way beyond.

In their most recent publication, **Understanding Educational Psychology**, Eloff & Swart (2018) have this affirmation about Educational Psychology: “Educational Psychology, as we know it today, represents the confluence between Psychology and Education. I trust that you will work to understand these fundamental developments of this exciting discipline, that will contribute substantially to unlocking your understanding of what a good teacher should be” (P18). This is further supplemented by Mampane (2018) affirming that, “The Science of teaching and learning within the Education system can be highly expanded and enriched when Educational Psychology is recognised and afforded the fundamental role it deserves” (P 20).

**From** the USA, I wish to cite the following:

Good Day Professor Tuntufye S Mwanwenda,  
My Name is ... and i am the Vice President,  
... Publishing house. I am in charge of the editing, proof  
reading, printing and the publishing of... We have almost come to the end of  
the publishing process, both online and in hard copy. I have been  
going through all the Articles that have been sent for this ... and  
I must first say it is an honor to write to you because yours has stood  
out as the most confirming , direct , precise and totally in line with  
the scope of the entire ... . Bravo sir! I salute your  
intelligence and you are in-deed an authority on educational psychology as far as Africa is  
concerned; that is my candid opinion.

Congratulations once again to you an intellectual icon. I am really  
honored.

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