

## **Attitudes of Primary School In-Service Undergraduate Student Teachers towards Educational Psychology in Zimbabwe**

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*Abstract: The study endeavoured to explore the attitudes exhibited by undergraduate in-service primary student teachers in Zimbabwe. The researchers embarked on the study after realising that primary school in-service undergraduate students had negative attitudes towards the educational psychology module that was offered as part of their in-service training. The students showed a lack of interest and did not perform well in the subject. The study was guided by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Gagne's nine events of instruction as well as Rogerian principles of instruction and motivation. The descriptive survey research design was used with questionnaires and observations as the data gathering instruments. A sample of 45 in-service undergraduate students comprising 20 males and 25 females was selected using stratified random sampling method. The data gathered through observations and questionnaires was subjected to thematic data analysis. It was established that undergraduate in-service primary student teachers harboured negative attitudes towards Educational Psychology. The students were not serious during lectures. Their participation was low and they seemed bored. They exhibited low motivation, decreased level of participation, class and lecture avoidance. The students also intimated that they did not see any value studying Educational Psychology and would rather concentrate on their areas of specialisation which they would teach once they were back at their work stations. They felt that doing psychology was just fulfilling the degree requirements and they would not put much effort in the subject. The researchers recommended that the lecturers should take their time to study the needs of the in-service students so as to adequately understand how best to help them.*

*Key Words: attitudes, educational psychology, unconditional positive regard, in-service education, empathy*

### **I. Introduction**

Generally, teachers are regarded as the core of educational development. Therefore, they need to upgrade themselves professionally so as to be in tandem with the ever changing information and technological landscape in schools. This yearning for knowledge creates the need for in-service education. Osamwonyi (2016) defines in-service education as the relevant courses and initiatives in which a serving teacher may participate to upgrade his professional knowledge, skills, and competence in the teaching profession. In-service education facilitates the acquisition of new understanding and instructional skills. Its main focus is on producing learning environments which enable teachers to develop their effectiveness in the classroom. The in-service programme is meant for practising teachers who have acquired a certificate or diploma in education from a teachers' college. These students have studied Educational Psychology during their initial teacher training programme to attain a certificate or diploma. When they enrol for the undergraduate degree programme they are supposed to study Educational Psychology again towards fulfilment of the requirements of the degree course. They also have to do their main subjects or specialisation subjects which could be English, ChiShona, Mathematics, Computer Studies and many others, as well as various Foundations Modules which include Philosophy of Education, Sociology of Education and Psychology of Education. All these subjects are timetabled and may carry equal weight as well as require equal contact hours.

Educational Psychology is the key to effective teaching and learning activities that go on in schools. Eggen (2010) posits that Educational Psychology involves the study of memory, conceptual process and individual differences in conceptualising new strategies for learning process in human beings. Woolfolk (2010) goes on to state that educational psychology is a vital ingredient in learning, because it values individual and cultural differences as a way to deal with biased stereotypes which adversely affect the development and teaching process. It is therefore, imperative for all teachers to study Educational Psychology as it assists them to navigate through the murky waters of their teaching tasks with a variety of learners with different educational

needs and demands. Nezhad and Vahedi (2011) are in agreement as they put forward that psychology gives education the theory of individual differences that every child has different mental ability and learns with different pace. The primary in-service undergraduate students may be knowledgeable in terms of content in their areas of specialisation but it is of great importance for them to appreciate and learn how that knowledge can be safely imparted to the learners. Educational Psychology enables teachers to teach learners in a classroom context according to their mental abilities. This way, learner performance as well as teacher satisfaction are guaranteed. Educational Psychology entails an understanding of learning, human development, motivation and individual differences. Therefore, Educational Psychology incorporates teaching methods, the instructional process and different learning outcomes. Farooq (2012) notes that Educational Psychology studies various factors which have impacts upon students, which may include home environment, social groupings, peer groups, his/ her emotional sentiments and mental hygiene e.t.c. Through the use of various psychological theories, the primary school teacher is in a position to assist learners in the classroom set- up. Bronfenbrenner's (1917-2005) Ecological Systems theory, among many other theories, tries to explain how everything in a child and the child's environment affects how a child grows and develops.

Educational Psychology also helps the teacher in that it guides the learning process through provision of ways in which information and knowledge can be transferred and kinds of methodologies to be employed in different cases. The knowledge of Bruner's theory of instruction will assist the primary school teacher to employ the spiral curriculum which according to Woolfolk (2013) states that any subject can be taught at any level provided the content is reduced to the level of the learners. Mcleod (2018) goes on to state Bruner's principles of sequencing which should move from enactive, iconic to symbolic. In relation to the above, the teacher is in a position to organise the learning situation that is the classroom environment and the maintenance of discipline. The use of various teaching learning aids to facilitate the teaching/ learning process is also made clear to the teacher. In all this, the aim of Educational Psychology is to help the primary school teacher to logically organise material which is to be taught to the learner.

The primary school classroom teacher is also equipped with evaluation techniques through educational psychology that is, he/ she will know the kinds of evaluation techniques to use in testing learners to find out the extent to which information and concepts have been transferred (Farooq, 2012). With the knowledge of tests and measurement, the primary school teacher is in a position to develop sound methods of objectively measuring and evaluating the learners' achievements.

Through his Cognitive Social Learning theory, Albert Bandura (1977) posits that children learn in their environment as they interact and observe others. Most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Primary school teachers armed with the knowledge of Educational Psychology will act as role models who demonstrate behaviour for children to observe and subsequently imitate. The teacher is set to guide learners properly through having knowledge of individual differences. The teacher will know how to conduct him/herself according to prevailing situations and become empathetic as advocated for by Humanist theorists.

The modern world in which the primary school teacher operates in is often riddled with various challenges from bullying, drug abuse and other various forms of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual e.t.c.). Therefore, the knowledge of Educational Psychology can help him/ her to navigate through these challenges and become an effective teacher. It was against this setting that the researchers embarked on this study.

## **II. Theoretical Framework**

The study was premised on three psychological theories namely Carl Rogers' person centred self theory, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as well as Gagne's nine events of instruction.

Sigmund Freud's (1856 –1939) psychoanalytic theory of personality argues that human behaviour is the result of the interactions among three component parts of the mind - the id, ego, and superego. Conflicts among these three structures, and our efforts to find balance among what each of them "desires," determines how we behave and approach the world. According to Freud the term 'drive' was used to explain the unconscious triggers causing the variety of human behaviour (Gillespie, 2014) in (Sager, 2017). These different drives working together with the different parts of the mind direct much of human behaviour. Shuman (2016), Cooper, (2010) go on to say that if drive appetite is not satisfied, psychopathological symptoms in manifestations linkable to childhood background may arise as a result of the ego's defence against the demands of the id.

Carl Rogers came up with the person-centred self theory which explores the tendency by humans to self actualise. According to Vinney (2019) Rogers believed that humans are primarily driven by the motivation to self-actualise or achieve their full potential. Carl Rogers' theory came up with principles such as empathy, genuineness, unconditional positive regards and freedom of expression. Kufakunesu, Ganga, Chinyoka, Hlupo, and Denhere, (2013) posit that unconditional positive regard implies the recognition, love, warmth and

acceptance which are given to someone regardless of his strengths, weaknesses, sex, age or even intellectual ability. Feldman (2009) goes on to say that only when an individual is accorded unconditional positive regard that he or she can evolve and develop cognitively and emotionally coupled with developing a stable self-concept.

Empathy simply means placing oneself into someone's shoes or seeing things from the same viewpoint. Thompson and Henderson (2007) state that empathy is merely interpreting someone else's situation after analysing it from his or her perspective.

Gagne's nine vents of instruction can be customized to fit both the content to be presented and the students' level of knowledge. These events guide the teaching/ learning process and when all the steps are fulfilled, learners are much more likely to be fully engaged (Gagne et al, 1992).

### **III. Guiding Research Questions**

The study revolved around the following guiding research questions:

- What are the attitudes of primary school in-service undergraduate student teachers towards Educational Psychology in Zimbabwe?
- To what extent do primary school in-service undergraduate student teachers value the Educational Psychology module?
- What are the reasons give by the student teachers to justify their attitudes?

### **IV. Research Methodology**

The researchers used a qualitative research design incorporating a descriptive survey that involved observing the in-service students during lectures at the University's three cohort centres at Masvingo, Bulawayo (Milton High School) and Harare (Seke Teachers' College) to collect qualitative data. According to Ader et al (2008) descriptive survey is collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) in Kufakunesu et al (2013) also recommend that the descriptive survey is very much appropriate for the exploration of perceptions and attitudes. The descriptive survey research design was employed by the researchers because it enabled them to establish the existing perceptions of primary school in-service undergraduate student teachers regarding Educational Psychology. The researchers employed the observation method as well as administered questionnaires to students to collect data. An observation is a systematic way of observing and recording observable phenomena or behaviour in a natural setting (Silverman, 2002). In the same vein, Chiromo, (2009) views observation technique as a means to ascertain what people think and do by watching them as they express themselves in various situations and activities. The researchers observed the teaching and learning activities. The teaching/ learning methods, materials used and the student's attitudes during lectures were also observed at the three cohort centres. Swartz, De la Rey, Duncan, Townsend and O' Neill (2011) state that a questionnaire is a document which contains structured items that are methodically and meticulously prepared by the researchers to solicit responses from the research informants during data collection. Open ended questionnaire were administered since the in-service students could read and write responses on their own. The researchers used stratified random sampling targeting fifteen (15) primary in-service undergraduate students from each of the Cohort Centres to make a total of forty-five (45) students. The researchers targeted 15 students from each centre, both males and females to have a cross section of all centres. Stratified random sampling is when the population is split into distinguishable layers or statuses that are quite different from each other and which together cover the population (Driscoll, 2011). The stratification was done according to gender before the equal number of respondents was selected from each cohort centre.

### **V. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The following are the major research findings which emerged after thematic data analysis:

- Students were not serious during lectures. Their participation was low and they seemed bored. Students exhibited low motivation, a decreased level of participation, class and lecture avoidance. More than half of the sampled primary in-service students indicated that to a large extent they do not like Educational Psychology as a subject. Thirty-four out of the forty-five respondents, which is 76%, responded that they disliked Educational Psychology. The bulk of the respondents had a negative attitude towards the subject.
- The respondents revealed that they do not value the Educational Psychology lectures and would rather concentrate on other subjects especially their areas of specialisation.
- The respondents gave a lot of reasons for the negative attitude as well as the lack of value in the subject.

## **VI. Discussion Of Findings**

During observations the researchers noted that the undergraduate students were not serious during the Educational Psychology lectures. 13% which is 6 out of 45 of the respondents indicated that they liked Educational Psychology, 76% were not interested and 11% were neutral. Their participation was low and they seemed bored. The students were not motivated, exhibited decreased level of participation, class and lecture avoidance. This could have been a result of negative attitudes towards the subject. Mensah et al (2013) posit that attitudes are seen as more or less positive and encompass emotions, beliefs, values and behaviour and hence, affect individual way of thinking, acting and behaving which has a lot of implications to teaching and learning. One participant even remarked that: *why should I concentrate on Educational Psychology at the expense of my main subject which I will teach when I go back to my school after my period of study?* Under these circumstances learning becomes very difficult when students do not like the subject because they will find the subject boring and not enjoyable. They would consequently fail to concentrate and will not look forward to having the lecture.

The above remark shows that the student had a negative belief and perception towards the subject and regarded the main study area as important and worth paying much attention to. Learning cannot be a success in such circumstances. According to Rogers learning is facilitated when the student participates completely in the learning process and has control over its nature and direction. The undergraduate students' perceptions and beliefs were found to influence their attitudes towards Educational Psychology. They perceived it negatively and felt doing it was a waste since they would not teach it as a subject when they went back to their work stations after their period of study. They felt that doing psychology was just fulfilling the degree requirements and they ended up not putting much effort in the subject.

The students also viewed the subject as less relevant to their immediate as well as future needs. In other words less value was given to the subject. Patterson (1977) states that significant learning takes place when the subject matter is perceived by the student as having relevance for her/ his own purposes. A person learns significantly only those things which are perceived as involving the maintenance and enhancement of the self. These students perceived that their areas of specialisation were worthwhile studying rather than doing Educational Psychology. This kind of attitude set a process of selective attention where what the student teachers learnt was determined in part by their readiness to receive new information. If the undergraduate student teachers thought that Educational Psychology was important, useful and contributed towards their success in classroom practice they would not avoid it, but instead would work hard and put a lot of effort leading to enhanced performance in the subject.

The respondents also indicated in the questionnaire that the time allocated for the Educational Psychology module was rather too long. This resulted in the students requesting the lecturers to cut short their lectures. This was also substantiated by observations made whereby the three hour lectures ended up being done in two or less hours most of the times. According to Zan et al (2006) in Langat (2015) it is important to note that students are not just cognitive individuals but also social persons with beliefs, emotions that influence their learning and achievement. The belief that educational psychology was less important in the students' scheme of things made it difficult for them to appreciate its significance.

30% of the respondents indicated that due to the large class sizes for this module some students at the back ended up doing assignments for other modules during the psychology lecture time. This is supported by Zimmerman (2000) in Langat (2015) who posits that as a result students ignore the subject and would prefer to engage in other activities that they anticipate will result in reward and that they feel doable. This also points to the fact that the students did not place Educational Psychology at the same value with other subjects. This is also in sync with Carl Rogers' principle of significant learning which states that significant learning takes place when the subject matter is relevant to the personal interests of the student. The students' reading for other subjects during Educational Psychology lectures is an indication that one has preferences for other subject areas or other activities which is an indication of lack of interest and commitment in psychology. This contributes to underachievement in the subject as a result of lack of commitment to the same where the students do not put enough effort and time.

Gagne et al (1992) state that students should be helped to make sense of new information by relating it to something they already know or something they have already experienced. Despite the fact that the undergraduate primary students had done psychology at diploma level they lacked the grasp of psychological concepts/ theories and could not apply them to practical classroom examples. Some of the students would say that,

*"It is a waste of time to know some of these psychological theories since we are also grappling with concepts and theories in our main studies/ areas of specialisation".*

The negative attitudes shown by the students made it difficult to retrieve information they had learnt before. Several research studies support the fact that students' success in a subject, depends upon the learners' attitude towards the subject as this determines their ability, willingness to learn, choice of action and response to challenges (Langat, 2015). The students failed to connect between concepts as they thought that the only way to master Educational Psychology was through cramming important facts and ideas. In his findings, Schenkel (2009) notes that student beliefs about their competences and their expectation for success in school have been directly linked to their levels of engagement as well as their emotional states that promote or interfere with their ability to be academically successful. Students may begin to assume that educational psychology is complex. They start to exert less effort resulting in poor performance in the subject. The negative feeling that the subject deals with so many theories which involve memorisation of facts and principles which may be difficult to grasp caused the students to view educational Psychology as undoable. Their belief also affected the way they performed in the subject.

The researchers also observed that assignments were poorly done. There was lack of serious research. In some instances one assignment was reproduced by about ten students with minor adjustments here and there. The students stated that in some instances they let one student research for a group while others work on other assignments. Students who like Educational Psychology are motivated to perform and would engage fully in activities and tasks that bring success in the subject. They would complete all assignments, do extra work, are attentive in class and will not miss a lesson and will always be prepared for the lectures even when the lecturers are away or not available (Langat, 2015). According to Vinney (2019), Carl Rogers believes that people have a concept of their ideal self and they want to feel and act in ways that are consistent with this ideal. However, the ideal self often does not match with the person's image of who they are, which causes a state of incongruence. Results of the current study reflect that students with higher self – concept that is, those who thought that doing well in Educational psychology was not so difficult and who valued their importance of the subject were more likely than their peers with low self – concept to attain higher in Educational Psychology.

The majority of respondents indicated that they did not perceive Educational Psychology as important since they had studied it before at college (when they were doing their certificate/ diploma studies) and they could not choose to do it if it were optional. This is in contrast to one of Gagne's view on instruction which states that for learners to retrieve information from prior learning they must be helped to make sense of new information by relating it to something they already know or something they have already experienced Gagne et al (1992). The lack of interest in the subject could have been a result of traumatic events that happened during their early learning at college. According to Freud in Mcleod (2013) when describing the unconscious mind, "at the deepest level of our minds resides a repository of the processes that drive our behaviour, including primitive and instinctual desires". The three parts of the mind that is, the id, ego and superego are always in conflict and when this conflict is too much for an individual to handle, his/ her ego may engage in some form of defence mechanism to protect the human being. This could be done through repression where the frightening or painful events are locked away in the unconscious mind. This then manifests as a dislike of Educational Psychology driven by these early experiences. Patterson (1977) goes on to say learning that involves a change in self-organisation or perception of the self is threatening and tends to be resisted. The self includes one's values, beliefs and basic attitudes and when these are questioned they are defended.

## **VII. Conclusions**

The study established that primary in-service undergraduate students have a negative attitude towards Educational Psychology. This was resultant from the fact that they consider that they had done the subject at diploma/ certificate level and it was not really worthy to study it again. The students also had a misconception were they believed that the module was less important when compared to other subjects they were doing for their course. Learning in a crowded and extremely large class also compounded the problems and resulted in the students losing interest in Educational Psychology. For teaching and learning to be effective, teachers have to be equipped with the knowledge of various psychological theories. Through learning this subject, the teachers will be informed on the teaching methods to use, the content to teach and on how to motivate the learners to be active participants in the teaching/ learning process. Quite significant is also the need for university lecturers to know how to approach the subject and prepare material that will help the in-service student teachers to accept the subject and not feel threatened by it.

## **VIII. Recommendations**

On the basis of the outcomes of the current study, the researchers made the following recommendations:

- Mass lectures for the Educational Psychology module should be done in the morning when students seem to have lots of energy and are not distracted.

- The students should be made aware of the objectives of the subject. According to Gangne et al (1992) informing learners of objectives allows them to organise their thoughts on what they will learn and help place them in a proper mind set. The lecturers and the department should expressive well on the usefulness and applicability of Educational Psychology to classroom practise in general so as to create positive minds towards the subject and subsequently strive to improve in the subject.
- Educational Psychology Lecturers should also support the students and not judge them regardless of what the students do or say. The students should be guided on how to study the subject and advised on the strategies to assist them in acquiring content and of the resources available to them.
- More activities for self initiated learning should be incorporated in the course outline as it involves the whole person of the student. The students should be motivated through persuasion, provision of learning resources, use of well designed learning approaches and timeous feedback from lecturers.

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