

Introduction to Educational Psychology

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Key concepts, theories, and applications for teachers, students, and researchers

1. What Is Educational Psychology?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The scientific study of how people learn and retain knowledge, with a focus on the psychological processes that underlie teaching and learning.
Goals	• Explain how learners acquire, process, and store information. • Identify factors that influence motivation, development, and achievement. • Provide evidence-based strategies to improve instruction and classroom climate.
Scope	• Cognitive processes (memory, attention, problem-solving). • Developmental stages (childhood, adolescence, adulthood). • Social-emotional factors (self-efficacy, anxiety, peer influence). • Individual differences (abilities, learning styles, special needs).

2. Historical Foundations

Era / Scholar	Major Contributions
19th c. – William James	Early functionalist view: learning as adaptation to the environment.
Early 1900s – John Dewey	Emphasis on experiential learning and the “learning by doing” approach.
1910s – Edward Thorndike	Law of Effect; stimulus-response learning; measurement of aptitude.
1920s – B.F. Skinner	Operant conditioning; reinforcement schedules for classroom behavior.
1930s – Jean Piaget	Stages of cognitive development; constructivist view of knowledge building.
1940s – Lev Vygotsky	Social-cultural theory; zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding.
1950s – Albert Bandura	Social learning theory; observational learning and self-efficacy.

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Era / Scholar

Major Contributions

1960s – Jerome Bruner	Discovery learning; spiral curriculum; importance of representation.
1970s – Howard Gardner	Theory of Multiple Intelligences; diversified instructional approaches.
1990s – Robert Gagné	Conditions of learning; systematic instructional design.
2000s – Carol Dweck	Mindset theory (fixed vs. growth); impact on motivation and achievement.

3. Core Theoretical Perspectives

Perspective	Central Idea	Classroom Implications
Behaviorism	Learning = change in observable behavior via reinforcement.	• Use clear expectations, immediate feedback, token economies. • Design practice drills and mastery learning. • Teach metacognitive strategies (self-questioning, summarizing).
Cognitivism	Mental processes (encoding, storage, retrieval) mediate learning.	• Use graphic organizers, chunking, dual-coding. • Encourage inquiry, problem-based learning, collaborative projects.
Constructivism	Learners actively construct knowledge based on prior experiences.	• Facilitate peer tutoring, guided participation, use of cultural artifacts.
Social/Cultural Theory	Learning is mediated by language, tools, and interaction within cultural contexts.	• Foster autonomy, relevance, supportive climate; set mastery goals.
Humanistic/Motivational Theories	Learner's needs, self-concept, and intrinsic motivation drive learning.	• Consider home-school partnerships, community resources, policy impacts.
Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner)	Development occurs within nested systems (family, school, community).	

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4. Major Areas of Study

4.1 Cognitive Processes

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