



CHAPTER 35

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING/LEARNING IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

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Introduction

Education aims at providing basic knowledge, facts and skills that help in shaping learners' behaviors for effective functioning in the society. Achieving this goal of education requires the contributions of various disciplines, including Educational Psychology which serves as the foundation to education (Nezhard and Vahedi, 2011). Educational Psychology is a field of study that focuses on the application of psychological theories and principles to teaching and learning (APA, 2022). It studies the behavior of the learner in an educational setting.

Knowledge of Educational Psychology is crucial to effective teaching and learning. It equips the teacher with the understanding of self, learner's developmental stages, learning processes and individual differences among learners (Infol 2018, Berliner, 1993 and Hoy-Woolfolk, 2000). Also, it informs on a conducive learning environment and effective teaching/ learning methods (Psychology, 2019. Shriya, n.d) and skills needed to address learning challenges facing students of varying categories, including those with or without disabilities. Consequently, teachers and students can benefit immensely from applying the principles of Educational Psychology to teaching and learning in their various disciplines, including Special Needs Education.

Special Needs Education (SNE) refers to education designed for learners in need of additional support and modified teaching methods to achieve learning objectives (UIS-UNESCO n.d). SNE provides special human and material resources to suit the needs of such learners (UIS-UNESCO, 2011). Special Needs (SN) programmes can be made available to individual learners within the regular educational programmes (Inclusive Education) or as a separate class in a regular school or Special Education centres/schools. Students who are disadvantaged in physical, intellectual, behavioral, social and emotional capacities benefit from SNE resources.

Special Needs Education is quite significant. SNE teachers teach the same concepts that regular teachers teach but the methods involved differ (based on the needs of the learners). The SNE teacher can devote quality time as a trained expert to help the child to learn by modifying the teaching methods, working on the



child's weaknesses, building on his/her strengths and weaknesses, and evaluating the child's progress in the learning process.

However, teaching SN students is not without challenges. Some challenges faced by SN teachers include learners' behavioral problems, parental issues, difficulties in preparing teaching materials, low self-esteem, lack of motivation and emotional issues. These challenges should be properly addressed to enhance effective teaching/learning. Educational Psychology principles can be utilized by the SN teacher to tackle these challenges.

Educational psychology aids the SN teacher in understanding the behavioral disposition of the child in learning, individual differences to cater for, lesson preparation and delivery that will appeal to learners living with or without disabilities; as well as creative teaching techniques needed to make learning effective. Creative teaching is concerned with using imaginative approaches in making learning effective (Akintunde and Selzing-Musa, 2016). The need for SNE teachers to utilize Educational Psychology principles, various teaching techniques and imaginative approaches to make learning easy, fun, appealing and effective is therefore paramount. It is against this backdrop that this paper focuses on the contributions of Educational Psychology to effective teaching/learning in SNE.

Therefore, the thesis statement of this chapter hinges on the need to address the challenges facing teaching/learning in SNE by utilizing Educational Psychology principles, to pave the way for effectiveness and academic success. In achieving this goal, the discussion will focus on challenges faced by SN teachers in teaching SN students; contributions of Educational Psychology to teaching/learning in SNE, creative teaching techniques that can promote teaching/learning in SNE and implications of the chapter for SN teachers and students. Thereafter, conclusions and suggestions will be stated.

Challenges Faced by Teachers of Learners with Special Needs.

Teachers of learners with Special Needs encounter challenges while teaching. Some of these challenges are behavioral problems, parental issues, difficulties in preparing teaching materials, inadequate time for teaching, lack of motivation, lack of readiness, low self-esteem, and emotional issues.

On behavioral problems, some SN learners have faulty classroom behaviors and social interaction (Ahammed, 2021). Sometimes, learners do not sit properly and are restless or inattentive. Some are not able to interact with others properly. Also, there are parental challenges. For instance, in the case of Learning disability, some parents fail to admit that their children have learning deficits but will rather over-expect results from them. They can insist that the children should have outstanding performance without lending parental support to achieve the feat.

Another challenge is difficulty in preparing teaching materials. SN teachers face the challenge of determining the kind of teaching material or lesson plan that will be of benefit to everybody in class; or developing/designing teaching materials that will cater for unique needs of SN learners. Some teachers face the challenge of



inadequate time to focus on each SN child. Sometimes, the SN teacher is unable to achieve the day's goals due to many activities to be done in instructing and monitoring the growth of each learner.

Also, lack of motivation and readiness are challenges. Sometimes, SN learners face the challenge of not being motivated to learn. This is reflected in the lack of interest, unwillingness to make progress in learning and failure to do assignments. For some, it is the challenge of readiness to adapt to lessons being taught (APTTI, 2018).

Furthermore, some SN learners have low self-esteem. Some become dejected because of their limitations in performing their assigned tasks, especially when they brood over their situation by comparing themselves with their peers without disabilities. The onus lies on the SN teacher to seek ways of boosting their self-esteem for effective teaching/learning to take place. In addition, some SN learners have emotional issues which affect their performance. Some have mood swings that interfere with their learning. Some have a need of good confidants that will give them listening ears in trying to overcome their emotional challenges.

The foregoing suggests that these challenges should be properly addressed. In achieving this, the vital contributions being made by Educational Psychology theories and principles towards improving teaching/learning in SNE cannot be downplayed.

Contributions of Educational Psychology to Teaching/Learning in SNE

Some contributions of Educational Psychology to Teaching/Learning in SNE are discussed as follows:

Educational psychology Theories and SNE

Many Educational psychology theories help to shape teaching/ learning in SNE. A wide range of theories, factors and processes underpinning educational psychology can be easily applied to various categories of learners and learning conditions (Martin, Newton and Sperling, 2020). SNE teachers and students can make use of key educational psychology ideas and principles to teach and learn effectively. Psychological theories that make an impact on SNE include Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development, Constructivist theory, Cooperative learning, Personality, Memory, Self-concept, and Self-worth theories.

These theories inform the SN teacher that education is learner-centred and active participation of learners, team-work, good study habits are quite significant in learning. Also, teachers acquire the understanding that the teacher can give information, but students need to retain and retrieve information (UTPB, 2022). Specifically, Memory and Cognitive theories can help students with dyslexia to improve in Reading; while Self-concept theories can help students with mild disabilities to relate well with their peers in inclusive classrooms (Martin, Newton and Sperling, 2020).



Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education

Educational Psychology has contributed to some great advances in SNE, such as reintegration of students with disabilities into the general classrooms (Inclusive education) (UTPB, 2022). The principles of Educational Psychology help the SN teacher to seek to provide an ideal learning environment for students with disabilities. There is a dynamic shift from focusing on impairments to individuals with the impairment. Previously, students with disabilities were segregated from their peers without disabilities. Presently, the conception is that students living with disabilities can achieve the same academic standards as their peers in the same classroom, but with extra help given to them by SN Educators. Consequently, students with disabilities are able to interact with their counterparts in the same environment and share ideas together to promote understanding and academic success.

Understanding self as a teacher

Educational Psychology informs about Principles and Stages of human Development, Personality Development, Temperament types, Adjustment techniques, among others. These concepts enable the teacher to understand himself/herself - likes, dislikes, interests, strengths, weaknesses, aptitude, temperament and personality traits (Akintunde, 2021). The SN teacher is able to do self-analysis of his/her personality traits to determine his/her capability to effectively train learners with disabilities. For instance, a hot-tempered SN teacher will need to adjust and learn to control his/her angry outbursts and be extremely patient while interacting with learners with disabilities for effective teaching/learning to take place.

Understanding the Learner

The subject matter of Educational Psychology is the learner (Parakimalil, 2012). Educational Psychology provides information about the learner. Knowledge of concepts like Individual differences, Attitude of learners to learning, Developmental stages, Personality types, Adjustment, Abnormal Psychology and Mental health issues can help the SN student to understand himself/herself and assist the SN teacher to understand the learners. For instance, a SN teacher that understands that learners have different personality traits and each learns in unique ways (Individual differences), will explore and utilize teaching techniques that will suit each SN learner.

Understanding the learning process

Educational Psychology studies the learning processes with concepts like Information processing, Memory models and Strategies, Remembering and Forgetting, Maturation, learning Readiness, Motivation, Giftedness, Transfer of Learning and Self-Regulation. Educational Psychology studies also the unique needs of special students, gifted learners and those with learning disabilities (Psychology, 2019). These can aid SN teachers in addressing the needs. Knowledge



of Learning Readiness can assist the SN teacher to understand why a SN learner is not showing progress in learning and then seek ways to address the challenges.

Also, knowledge of Memory or Information processes and Self-Regulation will aid the SN teacher to train the learners in encoding, storage and retrieval of information techniques and the need to establish good study habits. Furthermore, the teacher needs to consider the environment in which learning takes place (Shriva, n.d), the social, emotional and cognitive factors involved in learning. Consequently, A SN teacher/specialist should be well-equipped with the knowledge of Educational Psychology and can also team up with an Educational Psychology specialist to address the challenges facing children with learning disabilities or adjustment problems including using effective strategies to make them learn.

Assessment of Learning

Effectiveness of the learning process depends on evaluation. Educational Psychology is concerned with psychological tests and tools that can help the teacher to assess the learning outcomes (Thakur, 2020). There are tests for measuring intelligence, personality, interests and aptitude of learners. For instance, Binet's intelligence tests (developed by a psychologist) can be used to assess the intelligence of students living with or without disabilities. Educational statistics should also be used by SN teachers to evaluate and interpret learning outcomes.

Use of appropriate Teaching Methods/Techniques

Educational Psychologists conduct research projects on teaching methods and develop ways of improving teaching. According to Shirva (n.d), Educational Psychology is concerned with "What," "When," and "How" to teach. Educational Psychology informs about a range of interventions, therapeutic programs and resources that can help teaching/learning. For instance, bearing in mind the concept of individual differences among learners, a SN teacher can cater for this by adopting teaching techniques that will help learners to learn irrespective of their limitations. The SN teacher can adopt individualized teaching methods. He/she can be flexible, prioritize group work and plan lessons around students' strengths and weaknesses (UTPB, 2022). Infusing creativity into teaching methods and learning activities will also be beneficial.

Creative Teaching and Special Needs Education

Educational Psychology promotes creative teaching. Creativity in the classroom is crucial to academic success in the 21st century (Henriksen and Mishra, 2013). Special needs students may not learn in the conventional way. The SN teacher needs to employ creative teaching techniques to encourage SN students to learn effectively. Creative teaching involves the use of imaginative approaches to make learning effective (Akintunde and Selzing-Musa, 2016). Utilization of creative ideas by the SN teacher adds value to his/her teaching skills and effectiveness in



lesson delivery. The SN teacher can adopt various creative teaching techniques for effectiveness, as follows:

Creative lesson planning is one technique. The SN teacher should plan his/her lessons creatively by trying out new approaches, injecting elements of surprise and fun into the lesson. The lesson plan should be from simple to complex. There should be clear presentation steps. Learning activities that will stimulate the interest of SN learners should be included. The SN teacher can prepare teaching materials for different categories of learners. Also, the lesson planning should make room for learners' free expression of feelings (to boost their self-esteem and emotional development), and use of rewards or commendation/praise by teachers, to motivate learners.

Creative lesson delivery is another technique. Having a well-designed creative lesson plan is one good step, transforming that into a creative lesson delivery is another crucial step. Creative lesson delivery entails the use of clear expressions by the SN teacher, audible voice presentation with appropriate pace to suit the situation. The SN teacher should be lively, enthusiastic and excited in presenting lessons in the classroom. Use of regular conservative teaching methods may be inadequate. The SN teacher can use multiple teaching methods (even in one lesson), to suit the varying learning needs, such as, visual, auditory, kinesthetic and multi-sensory methods. Songs and drama can be used to buttress points. Individualized teaching methods may also be incorporated.

Creative Instructional aid is another technique. Instructional aids should be creatively designed (if improvised) and used appropriately. For instance, in designing charts or posters, the SN teacher should create bold, well-labeled and colorful designs that will be attractive to learners. Some instructional aids can also be accessed online for use in the classroom.

Furthermore, *creative learning activities* should be provided for SN learners. Hands-on learning materials can be used for learners. The SN teacher can get assistance from the internet, using search engines like GOOGLE SCHOLAR to access various creative activities for SN learners. These activities will aid comprehension, assimilation, retention and recall capacities of learners. Also, when SN learners are properly engaged, the challenge of behavioral problems like restlessness on the part of some learners can be curtailed.

Implications of the Chapter for Special Needs Teachers and Students

- 1) Application of Educational Psychology principles to teaching and learning in SN classes will promote effectiveness. SN learners are informed of the active roles they need to play in learning, techniques of improving memory, need for self-regulation, effective study habits and transfer of learning (how to link past to present learning). The SN teacher's lesson will be well-



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- processed by the SN student, making use of effective strategies for retaining and retrieving information from memory, thereby ensuring academic success.
- 2) Educational psychology theories and principles enable the SN teacher to understand the learner. SN teachers are equipped with skills to handle Personality types and adjustment problems of SN learners and cater for individual differences in learning among SN learners. The goals of the SN learners can then be achieved, irrespective of their limitations.
 - 3) SN teachers are empowered to acquire teaching skills that will boost the learning process, such as motivating learners, establishing learners' readiness to learn, training learners in memory strategies that will enhance retention and recall, and using effective study habits.
 - 4) SN teachers are also enabled to utilize effective teaching methods and creative teaching techniques that are suitable for varying categories of SN learners, thereby making learning fun, easy and effective. The successful SN learner will be able to function effectively in society.

Conclusion

1. SN teachers face challenges in teaching SN learners.
2. Imbibing the principles of Educational Psychology will assist the SN teacher to overcome teaching challenges and improve teaching/learning.
3. Use of creative teaching techniques can promote effective teaching/learning in SNE.

Suggestions

1. SN teachers should be deliberate in applying skills learnt in Educational Psychology courses, as pre-service teachers, to teaching/learning in SN classrooms.
2. SN teachers in Nigeria should be focused and seek additional information and teaching/learning resources (including internet resources) that will aid teaching/learning in SNE.
3. SN teachers should acquire creative skills and inject creative ideas into teaching/learning to cater for varying needs of SN learners.

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