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# UNIT 11 APPLICATION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN EDUCATION AND CLASSROOM\*

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## 11.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to,

- discuss the intrapersonal process and interpersonal processes in the context of educational setup.

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## 11.1 INTRODUCTION

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Education plays a significant role in development of an individuals and the educational set up is equally important as it contributes to formation of an individuals values, attitudes and beliefs. In an educational set up, there are various influences that can shape the thinking and behaviour of the individual. Besides parents, teachers and peers play an important role in influencing an individual. Social interactions that take place in an educational setup can also have an impact on individual behaviour. Given the relevance

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of education and educational system in our lives, it would be interesting to study how social psychology principles can be applied to education and classroom.

Educational set up can be seen as a system in itself and thus, the principles of social psychology can be used in order to not only understand the system but also to deal with the social issues and problems that may arise in this context.

Social psychology is the branch of the psychology that deals with the human behavior in the social settings. Several educational set-ups like school, colleges, university or an institution, not only impart education to the students but also provides a social setting to the students and also to the teachers and other school staff they come across. In this social setting students and teachers interact with each other and help each other to grow and learn novel things on a daily basis. A large amount of time have been spent in these social settings, therefore these social institutions contribute in a major way to our overall development. These educational set ups also contribute in the development of values (moral), ethics, beliefs and attitudes. Thus, it can be affirmed that social psychology does come in picture or one can say, social psychology does plays an important role in the educational setups like school, colleges, university or an institution.

Social psychology plays a significant role in the educational sector. It helps in enhancing the teaching techniques, learning practices, cognitive skills of students, motivation of students and improving teacher-student relationship. It helps in identifying the short comings of educational sets ups to make the environment conducive for learning. It guides how to cope with stress during exam time. Also, it tells about the methods of teaching according to the level or psyche of the learner, so that they can learn effectively.

There are several intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that operate in the educational environment that can be uncovered by the social psychologists. Intra means within, something that is going on inside one's individual. For example, academic motivation, attitude and belief about one's academic skills. Whereas inter means between, something that takes place between people- For example, interaction takes place between students and teachers that together can affect student's beliefs about their abilities and their levels of academic achievement.

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## **11.2 INTRAPERSONAL PROCESSES**

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*Let's assume, Raman, a psychology student, is worried about his performance in a Statistics course. He has a belief that he can never do well in Statistics. He just can't do it. So he does all the necessary things in order to avoid it. For example, he usually goes out with friends the night before his statistics exam. He always makes excuses for not submitting his assignments on time such as computer crashed and so on. Raman fails the Statistics exam as he has not put in efforts as were required. How would Raman feel about*

*Statistics now (post examination results)? Will Raman's belief about his ability about statistics becomes stronger because of his failure?*

Keeping the above example in mind think, can a student's belief about their academic ability be changed? Can these changes lead to better academic achievement and drive to learn? Social psychology and years of research have shown that these changes can occur. There is a high possibility that after failing in the Statistics examination, Raman's belief that he is no good at Statistics will be further confirmed.

Intrapersonal includes something that occurs within one's mind. Thus, intrapersonal processes in the educational settings involve attitudes, achievement motivation and beliefs about one's academic skills.

### **11.2.1 Attitude and Academic Achievement**

Academic achievement is the ability of the scholars to review and bear in mind facts and being able to speak his/ her information orally or in written, even during examination conditions. Students with high academic motivation are purpose-oriented and usually have positive feelings towards their school experiences, they own the traits of discipline, diligence, and resourcefulness, and they tend to dedicate much less time toward endeavour and amusement/leisure activities. It is by far essential for the students to possess positive thinking regarding their schools, instructors and educational subjects. With positive attitude, they will be capable to devote themselves whole heartedly in the direction of gaining knowledge of and generate the preferred instructional results (Maina, 2010).

In a classic review of research examining the association between attitudes and academic behavior, Wicker (1969) showed that attitudes and behavior may not always be associated. Also, Festinger's (1957) dissonance theory emphasizes the influence of behaviours on attitudes appeared to make it hard for researchers to believe that the alternative link may be robust or even stronger. For example, Raman may value statistics as it was the part of his syllabus but at the same time his behavior (that is, going out with friends rather than study) seems inconsistent with his positive attitude. In an order to address these inconsistencies the theory of planned behavior was formulated by Ajzen (1991). According to his theory, person's behavior to behave in a particular fashion is best predicted by one's intention and these intentions are in turn predicted by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

The theory of planned behavior utilises an individual's personal attitude and opinion in blend with their perceived control of the behavior and societies' subjective norms to influence their behavioural intention which will prompt the behavior or activity. Now and again, in the event that somebody has a contrary (negative) frame of mind and feel that they don't have control of this activity that will prompt the individual being less inclined to do that activity. An individual's attitude and perceived behavioural control can have a

constructive (positive) or a pessimistic (negative) effect on their expectation and the action of the behavior depending on that individual's personal views.

Using the theory of planned behaviour as a system, Sideridis and Padeliadu (2001) compared the significance of accomplishing good grades among elementary school children who were high performing readers with that who were low performing readers- Particularly the researchers needed to look at how the children's motivation to achieve good grades were related to the key components of the theory of planned behaviour:

- a) Attitudes towards high academic achievement (convictions around the results of examining and assessment of the significance of doing well in schools),
- b) Subjective norms about high academic (beliefs about the importance that other's place on the children's academic performance and how motivated the children are to comply with other's expectations),
- c) Perceived behavioural control (how simple or troublesome the children view studying to be),
- d) Behavioural intention (how determined the children are to study hard to achieve high grades),
- e) Actual academic performance in language and mathematics.

Sideridis and Padeliadu (2001) found that high and low performing readers had exceptionally diverse profiles based on the theory of planned behaviour. Compared with high performing readers, low performing readers underestimated the significance of being a good student, communicated weaker intentions to work hard to achieve, perceived weaker subjective norms about the importance of academic achievement, and illustrated poorer academic performance. It seemed that the perceived importance of doing well in school predicted attitudes about studying and beliefs about the consequences of working hard, was linked to perceived control over the ability to achieve good grades, and could also be related to the perception of subjective norms.

The theory of planned behavior has also been applied to various aspects of online learning. Irani & O'Malley (1998) utilised the theory of planned behavior to ponder cognitive innovativeness as a indicator of student attitudes and expectation in an online learning environment. Carswell & Venkatesh (2002) too investigated learners in a remote education environment, utilising the theory of planned behaviour to ponder student responses to web-based distance education. Further this theory has also been utilised in order to examine the student intentions of taking an online experimental psychology course versus a traditional face-to-face course (Robinson and Doverspike 2006).

## 11.2.2 Academic Self-concept and Performance

In educational settings, the term academic self-concept has already been a crucial educational and psychological construct, which is often used to describe a student's perception about their ability in a particular academic area (for example, biology, chemistry, history). Wigfield and Karpathian (1991) endorse that academic self-concept refers to an individual's understanding and awareness about themselves in academic achievement situations- Academic self-concept is an essential variable which in turn influences motivation and desires of the students on school tasks (Pullman and Allik 2008). It means where students have faith in their academic skills, they generally tend to invest greater attempt in completing tasks. Opposite to this, those who see themselves as having inadequate abilities generally tend to expose little patience or preference when problems are encountered. Thus, it can be said that, achievement scores may be affected by student's cognitive abilities as well as their notion of those abilities. Marsh and Hau (2003) have additionally argued that non-cognitive variables are important factors of academic achievement, while the rules associated with cognitive skills and previous learning possibilities should in no way be underestimated. Academic self-concept in particular appears to be a doubtlessly valuable construct for educators to consider in their attempt to understand individual student's level of achievement. The relationship between self-concept and achievement has been effectively documented (Caracosta and Michael, 1986)-

Rice (1987) said that a growing amount of evidence supports the theory that there's a correlation between self-concept and achievement in school- Successful students experience greater sense of personal well worth and somewhat better about themselves- One of the best thing that a school can incorporate in the child is good self-image and confidence, which can stem from his or her own ability to learn and grow. Students who have confidence in themselves are inspired to live up what they consider about themselves- On the other hand, if students have negative image about themselves impose barriers on their very own fulfilment (Backes, 1994).

## 11.2.3 Self-handicapping in the Classroom

The word self-handicap was developed and first introduced by American researchers, Berglas and Jones to the scientific community in 1978. Self handicapping can be defined as "creating barriers to successful performance prior to an achievement task" (Alexitch, 2012, page 195). Self-handicapping strategies are the strategies (excuses and behaviours) developed by an individual when performing a task that is important to them while not able to do it (Berglas & Jones, 1978; Harris, Snyder, Higgins, & Schrag 1986; Kolditz & Arkin, 1982). In many areas, such as academics, marketing and sports, self-handicapping methods can be used. The frequent use of such methods undermine efficiency and also interfere with success (Finez & Sherman, 2012; McCrea, Hirt, Hendrix, Milner, & Steele, 2008; Smith, Hrdy,

& Arkin, 2009). Self-handicapping techniques can be classified into two groups: behavioural and claimed self-handicaps (1986). The first group refers to the challenges self developed by people and put their success at risk. Symptoms in the academic context include, speaking during class, not completing the tasks assigned by the instructor and not planning for oral assignment presentation. The second group involves the arguments of students about the impediments they face in carrying out the assignment, such as the many other obligations besides college that prohibit them from studying or simply because they are too nervous to take an exam- These two groups of techniques, although similar, differ in terms of harm to academic performance and are related to external judgment (Gadbois& Sturgeon, 2011; Hirt et al 1991; Leary & Shepperd, 1986).

The actions of the students that can effectively obstruct the performance of an activity is known as Behavioural Self-handicaps (Hirt et al 1991, Leary & Shepperd 1986). For example, the night before the exam, instead of studying, student went partying, thereby could lower their possibilities to learn and acquire a good grade.

Behavioural self-handicaps and claimed self-handicaps are different from each other. In the former type, actions are observable and therefore more convincing “excuses” for failure (Hirt et al, 1991; Leary & Shepperd, 1986). Therefore, behavioural self-handicaps are more likely to be punished. If during the class, the student talks, does not complete his or her homework, and does not perform the assigned reading tasks, the instructor tends to believe the poor performance of the student is due to his or her distraction and lack of effort. Furthermore, if the student indicates, for example, that he or she is having personal problems, (claimed self-handicapping) the instructor may or may not believe the student, but he or she is likely to have more understanding and expect less from the student than the instructor might normally have.

### Check Your Progress I

- 1) What is self-handicapping?

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## 11.3 INTERPERSONAL PROCESSES

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Interpersonal denotes relationship or communication between people. Interpersonal processes in the educational settings involve teacher and student interaction and how that interaction can affect student’s beliefs about their abilities and their level of academic achievement. Besides teacher, the

students also interact with their peers and that can also have an impact on their behaviour.

### 11.3.1 Teacher Student Relationship

In educational settings, student achieves knowledge, skills or values with the help of a teacher- (Brophy, 2017). So without a good teacher they will not be able to excel in their lives, as they are under the direct supervision of their teacher (Brophy, 2017). Teacher prepares their students to face difficulties and challenges that they are going to encounter in their lives later on. They also build moral and ethical values in students so that they can become good human beings.

Students spend a considerable amount of time each day with their teachers. Therefore, it is of no surprise that academics have an unlimited quantity of influence upon students. This influence will have a significant impact on the educational environment which in turn will have an impact on the motivation and accomplishments of the learner (Boynton, 2015).

Studies have shown that teacher and student association is a significant interpreter of motivation and academic accomplishment among students- Students who view their teachers positively will have better accomplishment outcomes (Gehlbach, 2016).

The key variable in the learning environment, according to Whitaker (2014), is not the pupil, but the teacher. And teachers can play an important role in creating learning environments in the classroom. Creating learning environments that promote positive cultures and healthy partnership will inspire learners to use their strengths and desire to achieve objectives.

In the context of relationship between teachers and students we can discuss about a study that was carried out by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968 that was titled as Pygmalion in the Classroom ( For those who are not aware, Pygmalion is a play by George Bernard Shaw). The main aim of the study was to find out if high expectations regarding achievement of good students. on part of the teachers can have an influence on the academic performance of the students. The findings indicated that the high expectations that the teachers have with regard to the achievement of good students can have an impact on the academic performance of the students and this was despite of teachers treating the students equally. The study met with a lot of criticism and concerns were also raised by the teachers (Alexitch, 2012). The mechanism that may operate in the context of the study could be self-fulfilling prophecy. When an individual has expectations about another individual, how he/ she behaves with that individual is affected by the expectations and this in turn will have an effect on how the other person behaves when interacting with the individual. This is termed as self fulfilling prophecy. Thus, the person from whom you have expectations, will behave in a way that confirms your expectations. To explain with the help of an example, a teacher may have high expectations from a student, which will

lead to extra effort on behalf of the student. Noticing that the student is working hard, the teacher will feel that his/ her expectations are accurate. Thus, the teacher can have a significant influence on not only the academic self concept and achievement but will also enhance the performance of the students. A study by Madon, Jussi, and Eccles in 1997 (Alexitch, 2012) was conducted with similar objective and revealed that low achieving students were more susceptible to the perceptions and expectations of the teachers when compared with students who were high achievers.

In this context we can also discuss about stereotype threat, that is, the anxiety that is experienced by the students when they face expectations that are consistent with stereotypes about their group. For example, girls may be expected of not doing well in subjects like mathematics or engineering. Stereotype threat can negatively impact the students' academic motivation, self concept and performance in academic.

### 11.3.2 Peer Interaction

In an educational setup, the students also interact with each other and influence each others behaviours as they do so. Various skills like interpersonal skills, leadership skills, cooperation, resolution of conflict etc. are learnt by the students through interaction with their peers. Thus, peer interaction can lead to development of social competence. A positive social interaction can have a positive impact on adjustment, self concept and overall development of the student. Rejection by peer can thus have an impact on academic performance of the students and can lead to the student facing academic difficulties in future. Children who belong to certain disadvantaged groups like children with disability, children belonging to low Socio Economic Status etc. may also find it difficult to fit in and may face difficulties in school. Thus, enhancing positive peer relationship amongst the children belonging to such vulnerable group is extremely important and suitable interventions can be developed in this direction.

In this context, peer assisted learning can also be explained. Peer assisted learning can be explained as a strategy that mainly promotes one to one tutoring or tutoring in small groups amongst the students. Peer assisted learning can not only enhance academic self concept and motivation, but it also influences social behaviour of the students. It can also be effectively carried out with students belonging to vulnerable groups.

Besides the above, one of the main concerns in schools and colleges that social psychologist would be interested in are aggression and violence.

Baron (1977) described aggression as 'any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment' (Hewstone and Stroebe, 2001, page 317). Violence can be termed as "an aggression that is extreme and is also directed to seriously harm others" (Shetgovekar, 2018, page 188). In both the cases, there could be detrimental effect on not only the victims but other students as well.



Aggression and violence in school can range from bullying, verbal and physical abuse to social rejection and even shooting (Alexitch, 2012). A possible reason for why certain students behave in an aggressive or violent manner could be an interaction that takes place between the school environment and traits, skills, abilities, norms and experiences of such students (Alexitch, 2012). In order to understand violence and aggression in schools and colleges various intrapersonal and interpersonal factors need to be focused on.

Intervention in this regard thus needs to focus on prevention of violence and aggression by creating a safe and conducive environment in the educational institutions and by promoting safe practices. Awareness programme can also be carried out in this regard amongst the students, teachers and parents. Students can also be provided with counselling and psychotherapy as per requirement. Strategies that focus on acceptance and respecting diversity can also be carried out. Positive peer interaction can also be promoted. Thus, various measures can be taken in order to deal with violence and aggression and promote positive peer interaction so as to enhance overall development and wellbeing of the students

### 11.3.3 Cognitive Errors

In the context of teacher student relationship and peer interaction, we can also discuss about cognitive errors. Cognitive errors are errors related to the thought process of the individuals and they can have an impact on the interactions of the individuals. The cognitive errors are as follows:

- **Fundamental attribution errors:** Fundamental attribution error can be explained as a tendency in individuals where while the behaviour of an individual is attributed to the personal causes rather than situational causes. Thus, internal attributions are made rather than external attributions. For example, if a student is late to class because he/ she missed a bus, the teacher may attribute this behaviour to personal cause, that could be that the student lacks effective time management skills.
- **Believed perseverance:** Despite being exposed to disconfirming evidence, the individual maintains his/ her initial belief or ideas (Smith, 2012). In an educational set up, belief perseverance can affect learning of new and relevant information. For example, if a student believes that there is no difference between references and bibliography, then he/ she will hold on to that belief despite of disconfirming evidences.
- **Social categorisation:** This can be described as a tendency to classify other individuals in to categories or groups and this categorisation is based on certain social characteristics. In-groups and out-groups can basically form because of such a social categorisation. Social categorisation can lead to out-group homogeneity bias due to which the members of out group are perceived as homogeneous or lacking variability. There can also be in-group out-group bias where members of an out-groups are perceived as

unfavourable based on certain characteristics and the members of in-group are seen in a more favourable manner. These biases can have an impact of the interactions amongst the students.

Besides the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes, the atmosphere in the classroom also plays an important role in fostering curiosity and interest among students. If students feel a sense of control and security in the learning environment, they are more interested because they look to the learning with more eagerness and enthusiasm. Students become active participants in their own learning (Maulana, 2017). That's why creating and maintaining meaningful teacher and student engagement is the first priority to help a student become more inspired and engaged and thus educationally successful

According to the researcher Eschenmann (2016), along with many other researchers indicated that when teachers take the time to create relationships, they could inspire their students to learn. Further, Whitaker (2015), also states that educators must have a robust conviction/belief that building interactions are essential to the cycle of motivation. Teachers must verify that they fulfill educational and emotional needs of students.

### Check Your Progress II

- 1) List the three cognitive errors.

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## 11.4 LET US SUM UP

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To summarise, social psychology plays an important role in the educational sector such as school, colleges, and institutions. It helps in enhancing the teaching techniques, learning practices, cognitive skills of students, motivation of students and improving teacher-student relationship. It helps in identifying the various shortcomings operate in these educational sectors, helps in rectifying them and make the environment conducive for learning. Also there are several intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that operate in these educational sectors which have an impact upon the student's performance and academic achievement.

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## 11.6 KEY WORDS

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**Intrapersonal processes:** Intrapersonal processes includes something that occurs within one's mind. Intrapersonal processes in the educational settings involve attitudes, achievement motivation and beliefs about one's academic skills.

**Interpersonal processes:** Interpersonal processes meaning relationship or communication between people. Interpersonal processes in the educational settings involve teacher and student interaction and how that interaction can affect student's beliefs about their abilities and their level of academic achievement.

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## 11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress I

- 1) What is self-handicapping?

Self handicapping can be defined as “creating barriers to successful performance prior to an achievement task” (Alexitch, 2012, page 195).

### Check Your Progress II

- 1) List the three cognitive errors.

The three cognitive errors are:

- Fundamental attribution error
- Belief perseverance
- Social categorisation

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## 11.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Write a note on attitude and academic achievement.
- 2) Explain academic self-concept and performance
- 3) What are intrapersonal processes? Describe self-handicapping in the classroom.
- 4) Explain teacher student relationship in the context of interpersonal processes.
- 5) Elucidate cognitive errors.