

## Professional Enhancement or Needless Baggage: Attitudes of Undergraduate In-Service Secondary School Student Teachers towards Educational Psychology in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** The study explored the attitudes of undergraduate secondary school student teachers towards Psychology of Education modules against the backdrop that the students once studied Psychology of Education at length during their initial teacher-training. A whole array of psychological theories from the psychodynamic, behavioural, cognitive, trait and humanistic paradigms was used to anchor the study. The mixed method approach involving the descriptive survey research design and the chi square test was employed. Questionnaires, interviews and observations were used to gather data during the empirical investigation. The stratified random sampling method was used to generate a sample of 66 respondents comprising six Psychology of Education lecturers and 60 secondary school undergraduate in-service student teachers. The study established that lecturers believed that a significant proportion of secondary school undergraduate in-service student teachers seemed to treat Psychology of Education modules as comparatively inferior to their main subject modules. The student teachers themselves seemed to occur with the sentiments of the lecturers although some of them professed enjoying Psychology of Education modules. Some in-service secondary school student teachers indicated that their attitudes towards Psychology of Education modules were dampened by the fact that they studied the modules in large groups in which they could not get undivided attention from the lecturers. The researchers recommended that time needed to be taken to convince these student teachers that Psychology of Education modules remain crucial in enhancing their professional acumen regardless of their field of academic specialisation.

**Key Words:** Psychology of Education, Developmental Psychology, role model, adolescence, study habits, memory enhancing techniques, individual differences.

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### I. Introduction and Background To The Study

Among the various human attributes which individuals from different walks of life use to describe people is attitude. According to Verešová and Maláa (2016:870) an attitude is a relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols. Attitudes have affective, conative and cognitive components, that is, they involve feelings and emotions, behaviour and knowledge based beliefs respectively (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005). Fazio and Olson (2003) maintain that the affective component of an attitude designates emotional reactions, either likes or dislikes, towards a given object, event or situation. The cognitive component of an attitude constitutes a person's beliefs that the attitude object or event in question would generate desirable or undesirable outcomes (Linos & Hinojosa 2012; Mensah, Okyere & Kuranchie, 2013). On the other hand, the behaviour component of an attitude entails the noticeable and observable overt actions or responses, either verbal or non-verbal, towards the attitude objects that are exhibited by an individual (Ayob & Yasin, 2017; Fazio & Olson, 2003). According to Kufakunesu (2011:15) attitudes are relatively permanent general evaluations or judgemental sentiments about something which are closely associated with the bearer's cognitive beliefs and behaviour towards an object or a person. This implies that attitudes can influence an individual's reactions towards an item, person or phenomenon under consideration. As already implied, an attitude is laden with the bearer's biases, beliefs, prejudices and

appreciations which will impinge upon the manner in which one handles a given situation (Kufakunesu, 2015). Nayak (2004) claims that attitudes can strongly determine how an individual behaves across situations. This partially agrees with the sentiments of Kufakunesu (2011:24) who maintains that the attitudes of teachers are very important in all programmes which are delivered through the education system. According to Mensah, et al (2013) attitudes are psychological inclinations which people develop due to experiences and subsequently influence individuals' views of situations, objects, and people and how they respond to them either positively or negatively or favourably or unfavourably. It was against this backdrop that the researchers deemed it logical to scrutinise the attitudes of undergraduate in-service secondary school student teachers towards the study of Psychology of Education in Zimbabwe.

In-service student teachers are students who underwent teacher-training from colleges or universities and are already qualified to teach but are furthering their studies to attain undergraduate or postgraduate teaching qualifications. It has to be emphasised that a teacher is someone who has been trained to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes on other people (Kufakunesu & Chinyoka, 2017). This implies that teaching is not a random activity characterised by haphazard dissemination of concepts on a group of learners but is rather a methodical endeavour to ensure that learners master novel concepts under the professional guidance of an insightful, erudite and knowledgeable adult. The current study focused on undergraduate student teachers who had already attained a Diploma in Education or equivalent from teachers' colleges. Their training at teachers' colleges exposed them to Educational Foundations modules which entail Sociology of Education, Philosophy of Education and Psychology of Education among other things. During teacher training in Zimbabwe, both primary and secondary school student teachers study one or two specialisation subjects which they normally refer to as their main subjects. The issue of main subjects is a big deal for secondary school student teachers because these are the subjects which they are more likely to eventually concentrate on teaching in schools after teacher training. Such a phenomenon to some extent tempts such teachers to be emotionally attached to their areas of academic specialisation to the extent of giving step-motherly attention to any other subject or module which does not apparently seem to be part of their main subjects. It is against this background that the attitudes of secondary school undergraduate student teachers towards Psychology of Education were explored.

To make the current study more explicit and more comprehensive, the researchers deemed it expedient to take time to outline what Psychology of Education entails. To begin with, psychology is a derivative of two Greek words, *psyche* and *logos/logia*, which mean *the mind* and *the study of* respectively (Nevid, 2012). By definition, psychology can be defined as the systematic and scientific study of both overt and covert behaviour and mental processes of human beings and animals (Feldman, 2009:5). According to Kosslyn and Rosenberg (2006:04) psychology is the study of mental processes and behaviour where mental processes include what the brain does when a person stores information or has specific feelings while behaviour refers to outward observable acts of an individual alone or in a group. The main goals of psychology are describing, explaining, predicting and controlling behaviour so as to ultimately improve that the quality of life. Psychology has a long list of branches whose names are normally derived from the field on which psychological theories are applied (Feldman, 2009). The two branches of psychology which are arguably critical in the teaching fraternity are Educational Psychology and Developmental Psychology.

Psychology of Education is a specific branch of Psychology which is concerned with the study of the processes of teaching and learning especially when one is dealing with learners at different developmental stages that have different intellectual capabilities (Feldman, 2009). Snowman, McCown and Biehler (2009:2) and Santrock (2004:4) concur that Educational Psychology, which in essence is Psychology of Education, is a branch of Psychology which focuses on how psychological theories can be used to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Educational Psychology addresses issues such as teaching methods, learning styles, addressing the needs of slow and gifted learners, andragogy and pedagogy (Tuckman & Monetti, 2011:5). Psychology of Education, which is centred on the principles emanating from various psychological theories, therefore endeavours to examine the cognitive, physical, emotional, social and moral behaviours of children and adults and the variables which influence the quality and quantity of their learning experiences (Huffman, Vernoy & Vernoy, 2003). Feldman (2009:34) defines theories as broad explanations and predictions concerning phenomena of interest which offer a framework for understanding the relationships among a set of otherwise unorganised facts or principles. Ritzer and Goodman (2004) define theories as models that provide information in shreds and pieces which when put together provide a complete picture of reality. In teacher training, student teachers are exposed to the principles of various psychological theories and are subsequently schooled on how to apply the theories in teaching and learning contexts. According to Feldman (2009) and Lahey (2009) Developmental Psychology is another branch of psychology which explores how people grow and change physically, socially, personality-wise, emotionally, morally, spiritually and cognitively from conception to death.

There are many variables which can negatively impinge upon the well-being of people in modern society (Van Niekerk & Prins, 2001). People from virtually all walks of life grapple with challenges such as the

HIV and AIDS pandemic, economic recession, unfriendly weather conditions such as cyclones, homelessness, anomie, suicide, abuse, gender violence, fragmentation of the extended family network, loneliness and learned helplessness (Kufakunesu, 2011:7; Kufakunesu & Chinyoka, 2017). Secondary school learners, just like any other members of society, are also vulnerable to such challenges. According to Nayak (2004), teachers can intervene by providing counselling services to learners at their respective schools. Since formal counselling is based on psychological theories, it can be argued that the quality of counselling services which educators can offer correlates positively with their knowledge of psychological theories which are inherently an integral part of what Psychology of Education entails (Austad, 2009).

The challenges besieging secondary school learners are compounded by the fact that secondary school learners are adolescents who have to wrestle with the apparent inconveniences associated with changing from childhood to adulthood. By definition, adolescence is a developmental stage in which individual dramatic changes from childhood to adulthood (Kufakunesu, 2017). Swartz, de la Rey, Duncan, Townsend and O'Neill (2011:87) indicate that it is largely an uncontested view in practically all cultures that adolescence is turbulent and troublesome developmental stage not only for the adolescents involved but also for their families and the society in general. Adolescence was described many years ago as a period of storm and stress by a 19th century psychologist named Stanley G. Hall, who came to be known as the father of adolescent psychology (Swartz, et al, 2011:87; Dacey & Travers, 2002). Adolescents undergo the growth spurt which is characterised by significant gains in height and bodily mass together with the maturation of the reproductive system. Emotionally adolescents are known to be erratic and volatile mainly because of the hormones which are released into their systems (Kufakunesu, Ganga, Chinyoka, Hlupo & Denhere, 2013). The desire to develop an identity is another defining attribute of adolescents together with the quest to gain autonomy and independence from adult control (Meggett, 2006:163). Lahey (2009: 337) and Steinberg and Morris (2001:88) maintain that there is a significant increase in confrontations between parents and their teenage children particularly during the early adolescence. The presence of both good and bad role models coupled with peer pressure makes identity formation very dicey (Kufakunesu, 2017). It can therefore be argued that the informed guidance from adults is needed simply because some of the mistakes made during adolescents can alter a person's life trajectory in irrevocable ways (Kufakunesu and Chinyoka, 2017). Secondary school classroom practitioners remain the main adults who can have a positive impact in the lives of the adolescents. Knowledge of the nature and the needs of adolescents is usually acquired when one studies Developmental Psychology and /or Psychology of Education, hence the need for the current study.

To back the above line of thinking, it can be contended that studying Educational Psychology equips classroom practitioners with knowledge regarding the reasons why learners at different educational levels behave in particular ways. At secondary school level, teachers need to know the physiological, intellectual, emotional and social determinations of learners' behavioural tendencies. For instance, Sigmund Freud's psychosexual theory claims that secondary school learners, who are essentially adolescents, engage in patting, hugging and kissing as they grapple with the genital stage (Mwamwenda, 2004). Jean Piaget claims that it is during adolescence that people can reach the formal operational stage of cognitive functioning which is characterised by the ability to handle hypothetical concepts such as love, justice, politics and religion (Lahey, 2009). Erikson's fifth stage, which is called identity versus role confusion, claims that adolescents endeavour to establish autonomy, management of sexuality and intimacy, and making the right career choices as a way of preparing for adulthood (Meggett, 2006:163). According to Erikson (1968), adolescents normally struggle with developmental challenges revolving around the development of a sense of mastery, identity, and intimacy (Kufakunesu & Chinyoka, 2017).

Bandura's social learning theory distinguished itself from the principles of mainstream behaviourism by postulating the principle of observational learning among other principles (Kufakunesu, 2017). Observational learning, which is also called modelling or learning through imitation, is a principle which postulates that human beings learn through observation with or without reinforcement (Nevid, 2012). Research has actually verified that human beings are born preprogrammed to imitate both good and bad behaviours (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006). There are numerous role models in life who include actors, musicians, sport personalities, parents and religious ministers. In the school context, classroom practitioners remain irresistible role models (Kufakunesu, 2017). The situation is even more pronounced in a secondary school context where adolescents will be driven by an overwhelming quest for an identity (Erikson, 1968). This implies that classroom practitioners must be deliberately aware of the way they conduct themselves since they have readily available imitators. Such insights can to a large extent be properly understood and implemented when one studies Educational Psychology with a positive attitude.

It is worth noting that the individuality of human beings across the various aspects of human development has a bearing on the way classroom practitioners undertake their duties. As a result of genetic and environmental variables, each person is to a large extent unique and classroom practitioners who are aware of the individual differences of learners are more likely to be more effective than their oblivious counterparts.

Learners have different learning styles which can in turn influence how they process intellectual stimuli and subsequently perform academically. Kufakunesu (2015) defines a learning style as a combination of cognitive characteristics, affective and psychological factors that influences the way people interact and respond to learning environments. Numerous learning styles have been identified in the domain of Psychology of Education. Examples include visual, aural, reading and kinaesthetic styles. Kinaesthetic learners prefer to manipulate objects or to do hands-on exercises to enhance their understanding (Petty, 2009:149). Other examples of bipolar learning styles include impulsive versus reflective learners, serial learners versus holists and field dependent versus field independent learners. According to Snowman, *et al* (2009:139) impulsive learners rush to blurt out the first response which comes to their minds and risk giving incorrect responses since they do not take the time to meditate on their answer before providing it. Reflective learners evaluate their responses before they provide their answers. While serial learners cognitively process information in small connected chunks, holists process intellectual stimuli as single entity. Field dependent learners were implicitly defined by Snowman, *et al* (2009:140) as learners who are sensitive to background elements which can distract them while field independent learners are capable of ignoring distracters and focus on the critical elements of a situation. It can be safely argued that classroom practitioners' knowledge of such explicit individual differences among learners is usually studied under Psychology of Education. It is against such a backdrop that the current study explored the attitudes of undergraduate secondary school student teachers towards Psychology of Education.

One can argue that it is important for educators at practically all educational levels to have knowledge of how the information which learners are exposed to is mentally processed for current and subsequent use. Such knowledge is usually studied in the domain of Psychology of Education under memory and information processing. Feldman (2009:213) and Santrock (2004) maintains that memory is the process by which human beings encode, store and retrieve information. According to the Atkinson-Shiffrin information processing model, the three memory stores are the sensory register, the short-term memory and the long-term memory (Mwamwenda, 2004:212; Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006:279). It is through studying information processing from a psychological perspective that educators can become familiar with a myriad of memory enhancing techniques which can be employed to facilitate the encoding, storage and subsequent retrieval of information from the long-term memory. According to Feldman (2009:217) and Kufakunesu (2015) examples of memory enhancing techniques include chunking and mnemonics such as peg word, acronyms, method of loci and the use of rhyming words. The assorted professional experiences of the researchers showed them that classroom practitioners who are familiar with such memory enhancing techniques can also familiarise the techniques to their learners. This can help the learners to master subject matter better and be more prepared for tests and examinations. Practical pedagogy and andragogy showed the current researchers that it does not matter how knowledgeable one is in terms of content in one's subject area, one needs to be knowledgeable of how to impart the knowledge on other people using methods which have been tried and tested. This line of thinking therefore persuades one to believe that student teachers stand to benefit professionally if they are knowledgeable of various Educational Psychology concepts and principles.

Several studies revealed that Psychology of Education can also expose student teachers to various study habits which they can employ during their own studies before subsequently attempting to impart them on their learners. Yahaya (2003:221) defines study habits as a set of activities which learners can undertake in an attempt to promote effective learning. A study habit is a collection of routine procedures which include the frequency of study sessions, review of content, self-testing, rehearsal of learnt content and studying in a favourable setting (Ozsoy, Memis & Temur, 2009:156). The given definitions suggest that a study habit is the amount and kind of study routines which are regularly employed by a learner in a favourable environment to enhance content mastery (Kufakunesu, 2015; Ozsoy, *et al*, 2009:156). Many studies have confirmed that poor scholastic achievement can be attributed to lack of effective study habits which is normally evidenced by poor time management, lack of understanding and failure to find a conducive study environment (Osa-Edoh & Alutu, 2012:228; Kufakunesu, 2015; Yahaya, 2003:221). Examples of study techniques which can be studied under Psychology of Education include overlearning, distributed practice instead of massed practice, good note-taking skills, the *MURDER* approach and the *SQ4R* method. Overlearning is the act of revising content several times so as to improve the storage of the information in the long-term memory (Feldman, 2009:242).

According to Tuckman and Monetti (2011:279), distributed practice is habitually revising content in bits and pieces over a long period of time while massed practice takes place a learner revises subject matter in bulk over a short period of time. It has been established through research that distributed practice is more effective than massed practice in a number of academic disciplines (Tuckman & Monetti, 2011:279; Kufakunesu, 2015; Snowman, *et al*, 2009:228). Kufakunesu (2015) clarifies that *MURDER* is an acronym representing *Mood, Understand, Recall, Digest, Expand and Review*. While *Mood* reminds learners to assess their psychological and emotional preparedness to study, the other terms are merely verbs which suggest what learners have to do to enhance their probabilities of mastering the subject matter. *SQ3R* is another acronym denoting the verbs *Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review* (Osa-Edoh & Alutu, 2012:231). Bajwa, Gujjar,

Shaheen and Ramzan(2011:176) claim that numerous elementary psychology modules normally familiarise learners with the *SQ4R* studytechnique because it is useful when preparing for tests and examinations in virtually all academic disciplines. Consequently, it remains arguably true that studying Psychology of Education by student teachers is bound to be beneficial to the student teachers themselves and to their learners regardless of the student teachers' areas of academic specialisation.

The way educators articulate their professional duties can be influenced by the extent to which they believe in their professional abilities to cause positive transformation in the lives of the learners (Bandura, 1990; Kufakunesu &Dekeza, 2017). This is the essence of self-efficacy, one of the principles of Bandura's cognitive social learning theory. Bandura (1990:316) defines self-efficacy as people's "beliefs in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over task demands". This implies that self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her ability to engage a given activity and produce the desirable results (McLean, 2003:31; Kufakunesu &Dekeza, 2017). It can be argued that classroom practitioners can know more about the utility of self-efficacy in human functioning through studying Psychology of Education modules. Apart from making classroom practitioner more efficacious, the principle of self-efficacy can be used by educators to elevate their learners' levels of self-belief across a number of aspects including academic performance. This is backed by Schulze (2010:434) who maintains that an individual's self-efficacy can be positively influenced by coaching and positive evaluative feedback on a task one would have performed.

Apart from helping teachers to understand learners, Psychology of Education can elevate classroom practitioners' levels of self-awareness. This is backed by Shakir and Sharma (2017:25) remark, "Educational Psychology helps the teacher to know about himself/herself, own behaviour pattern, personality characteristics, likes and dislikes, motivation, anxiety, conflicts, adjustment". For instance, Erikson's sixth and seventh stages, technically called intimacy versus isolation and generativity versus stagnation respectively explain the ambitions and crises which young adults and the middle aged people grapple with. Studying personality theories such as the Big five model, Hans Eysenck's three factor personality theory and Carl Jung's analytic psychology can go a long way towards helping teachers to figure out if they are introverts or extroverts, emotionally stable or neurotic (Huffman, et al 2003). Even those who are getting psychotic, that is losing touch with reality as a mental challenge can be identified and referred to health facilities for assistance. Knowledge regarding how males and females interact and the interaction between humanity and the dual resources in the form of flora and fauna can be adequately explained in the domain of Psychology of Education. Consequently, it remains vital to examine the attitudes of undergraduate in-service secondary school student teachers towards studying Psychology of Education.

Psychology of Education has a lot to say about how the art of teaching must be meaningfully undertaken. A number of psychological theories explicitly spell out the various pedagogical and andragogic approaches which classroom practitioners can employ to yield the best outcomes (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006). For instance, it is through studying Educational Psychology that one learns about the utility of motivation as an instructional tool. Robert Mills Gagne advanced the nine events of instruction which clearly depict the nine stages which a teacher can utilise during an instructional encounter (Kufakunesu, 2015). David Ausubel's meaningful theory emphasises the importance of using advance organisers as a wait of exploiting what learners already know in the exposition of new concepts (Mwamwenda, 2010). By studying Educational psychology, one stands a chance of being familiar with Bruner's theory which has crucial principles such as discovery learning, feedback and the spiral curriculum. By definition, a spiral curriculum is one in which a concept is progressively taught across the various educational tiers so that at the highest level, the learner would have grasped the entire set of ideas surrounding a given aspect (Takaya, 2008). This means a concepts is repeatedly revisited at each educational level so that learners fully master it at the end. It is on the basis of Bruner's concept of the spiral curriculum that one can argue in favour of exposing undergraduate students to Psychology of Education even if they once studied the concepts during their initial teacher-training in teachers' colleges.

Shakir and Sharma (2017) undertook a desktop study in which they explored the importance of Educational Psychology in making teaching and learning environment congenial. The study explored the contribution and role of Educational Psychology in creating conducive teaching and learning environment in the classroom. They emphasised that Psychology of Education assists classroom practitioners to understand their learners, learning process, instructional strategies and provides basis for the choice of appropriate methods, techniques, approaches, tools to satisfy and fulfil the need of learners that results in better learning. With the help of Educational Psychology, a teacher can be able to create a positive learning environment in the classroom resulting in effective learning. The study also emphasised that Educational Psychology plays a crucial role in making learning an easy, joyful and interesting process as well as facilitating conflict management strategies in the education fraternity. However, the study by Shakir and Sharma (2017) did not include any empirical data collection from any sample thereby creating a methodological gap which the current study attempted to plug.

A study by Blake and Pope (2008) in which they infused Piaget and Vygotsky's theories into teaching strategies in elementary classrooms revealed that learners' learning is likely to increase significantly when the two theories of cognitive development are jointly used during instruction (Shakir & Sharma, 2017:21). According to Shakir and Sharma (2017:22) an allied study was undertaken by Sogunro (2015) who examined eight motivating factors for adult learners in higher education. The study investigated motivating variables which included quality of instruction, quality of curriculum, relevance and pragmatism, interactive classrooms and effective management practices, progressive assessment and timely feedback, self-directedness, conducive learning environment and effective academic advising practices. Sogunro (2015) established that these eight factors play a vital role in regulating the will power in students in higher education to engage in effective learning. It has to be acknowledged that the mentioned studies were conducted in settings which were significantly different from the situation in Zimbabwe, hence the need for the current study.

Another study was carried out by Kufakunesu, Ganga and Chinyoka (2012) examining the extent to which higher education qualified as a vehicle for vertical social mobility in Zimbabwe. The study had a psychological theoretical framework and methodologically it was qualitative in nature with phenomenology as the research design. Questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews were used to collect data from a sample of 50 university students. Among other things, the study by Kufakunesu, et al (2012) established that university students pursued higher education programmes to enrich their array of qualifications and also to satiate their quest for self-actualisation. Although the study by Kufakunesu, et al (2012) involved higher and tertiary education students, it did not explore the attitudes of undergraduate in-service student teachers towards any specific module thereby leaving a gap which the current study attempted to partially close.

## **II. Theoretical framework**

The study was grounded in the field of Psychology of Education and many psychological theories from the dominant psychological paradigms were made reference to. The researchers utilised some theories from the psychodynamic, behavioural, cognitive and humanistic paradigms and a number of theories featured in the study as effort was made to deal with a number of aspects of human development.

## **III. Guiding research questions**

1. How do Psychology of Education lecturers rate the attitudes of secondary school undergraduate in-service student teachers towards Educational Psychology?
2. What is the perceived utility of Psychology of Education from the standpoint of secondary school undergraduate in-service student teachers?
3. How do secondary school undergraduate in-service student teachers justify their attitudes towards Psychology of Education?

## **IV. Research methodology**

The study adopted mixed method approach in which one part of the research involved the interpretive research paradigm paired with the qualitative research approach in which the descriptive survey was used as the research design. The second part involved a chi-square test for independence which attempted to add a positivistic and quantitative flavour to the research methodology as a way of ensuring methodological triangulation. According to Kufakunesu (2011:31) a descriptive survey research design as an investigation technique in which the researcher focuses on describing and interpreting the existing phenomenon with regard to aspects such as effects, attitudes, processes and beliefs. This was backed by Chinyoka and Kufakunesu (2017) who maintain that a descriptive survey is a qualitative research design which endeavours to describe and interpret the existing phenomena in the form of processes, effects, attitudes and beliefs. The descriptive survey was deemed appropriate because it accorded the researchersample time and means to explore the issue under consideration. During the empirical investigation, questionnaires, interviews and observations were employed to gather data. According to Kufakunesu and Chinyoka (2017) a questionnaire is a document which contains relevant questions that the researcher intends to pose to the research participants. Therefore, a questionnaire is a list of methodically and carefully structured items prepared by the researcher to elicit responses from respondents during the empirical investigation (Swartz et al, 2011:29; Chiromo, 2006). The researchers considered it appropriate to use questionnaires because the target respondents who happened to be secondary school undergraduate in-service student teachers and lecturers were literate and therefore did not seem to have any challenges regarding interpreting and answering the questionnaire items. Face-to-face interviews were used to collect data from six Psychology of Education lecturers. The stratified random sampling method was used to generate a sample of 66 respondents constituting six Psychology of Education lecturers and 60 secondary school undergraduate in-service students. The stratification of student teachers was done according to gender, geographical location of cohorts and subject specialisation. Swartz et al (2011:29) and According to Munzara (2016:12) stratified random sampling is a sampling method in which a given population is divided into distinct

subgroups before members of each stratum are selected in proportion of the size of the layer relative to the whole population.

### **V. Research findings**

- Almost all the Psychology of Education lecturers who took part in the study concurred that a significant number of secondary school in-service undergraduate student teachers seemed to be half-hearted with regard to the study of Psychology of Education. They gave a lot of evidence to back their opinions.
- Twenty-four out of the 60 student teachers who participated in the study expressed positive attitudes towards studying Psychology of Education at university level despite being qualified teachers already by virtue of being Diploma in Education holders.
- Thirty-five percent of the student teachers who acted as research informants spoke openly about their negative attitudes towards studying Psychology of Education during their undergraduate in-service training. A myriad of reasons were given to justify their ambivalence and apathy.
- The chi-square test revealed that the attitudes of secondary school in-service student teachers towards studying Psychology of Education were independent of their areas of academic specialisation.

### **VI. Discussion of Findings**

Five out of the six Educational Psychology lecturers who participated in the study expressed the view that a substantial proportion of secondary school in-service undergraduate student teachers do not exhaust their intellectual potential with regard to the study of Psychology of Education modules. The lecturers pointed out the student teachers generally exhibited ambivalence and apathy in Psychology of Education lectures. These lecturers vehemently supported their opinions in a number of ways. Firstly, they remarked that student teachers' level of participation during lectures was habitually frustratingly low and there was evidence to back the view that the subdued participation was not due to ignorance but most probably due to attitudinal problems. Secondly, the lecturers reported that quite a good number of student teachers came late for lectures and clamour for being released before lecture time's elapse. Some students were reported to be in the habit of leaving unceremoniously before the end of Psychology of Education lectures. The researchers gathered during face-to-face interviews that one aspect which betrayed the secondary school in-service student teachers' lack of seriousness was the manner in which they wrote Psychology of Education assignments. Some of the assignments were reported to be shallow and devoid of theoretical backing, a phenomenon which could be attributed to untoward attitudes and to lack of wide reading on the part of student teachers. Nevertheless, the lecturers indicated that in a given semester, they would note that about 35% of the students would reveal a reasonable semblance of commitment in Psychology of Education modules. They attributed the transformation to their efforts in trying to motivate the student teachers as implied by Sogunro (2015). Moreover, the lecturers indicated that some students studied the module as a ritual so as to have a strong overall degree class and not because they valued the Educational Psychology modules. The views expressed by the lecturers to a large extent tallied with what the researchers gleaned through observations.

Asked to unravel the mystery behind the lack of enthusiasm to study Psychology of Education by the in-service undergraduate student teachers, the lecturers attributed the phenomenon to a number of variables. They indicated that one justification of apathy on the part of the student teachers was lack of information regarding the fundamental role of Psychology of Education in all teaching and learning endeavours. The lecturers maintained that if the student teachers were aware of how Psychology of Education would accentuate their professional worth, they were not likely to be so untoward (Blake & Pope, 2008). The lecturers also attributed the prevailing phenomenon to the somewhat hostile conditions under which the lectures were normally conducted. They clarified that Psychology of Education is normally taught as mass lectures in which more than 100 adult students would be crammed in a single room jostling for the attention of the lecturer. It was acknowledged by all the six lecturers that teaching such large classes demanded a different array of instructional techniques and there was the risk of being overwhelmed by the set-up. The lecturers concurred that one had to dig deep into one's andragogic bag to come up with a set of effective strategies to employ during such mass lectures. The findings were consistent with the sentiments of Sogunro (2015) who established through research that attempting to teach adults in an environment which is not conducive to learning is likely to trigger negative attitudes on the part of the adult students.

The information gathered from the 60 student teachers through interviews confirmed that 24 of them expressed positive attitudes towards studying Psychology of Education at university level. The 24 student teachers enthusiastically talked about the usefulness of Psychology of Education in enhancing their professional operations. Out of these 24 respondents, 16 of them made reference to how Psychology of Education could be instrumental to them when doing their research work. They singled out the utility of Educational Psychology theories through acting as the theoretical framework in research work. They pointed out that during their teacher training at college level, psychological theories assisted them to understand and analyse educational phenomena.

It was indicated by these respondents that being knowledgeable of psychological theories would go a long way towards fostering their professional identities as degreed classroom practitioners who are insightful. The rationale for the positive attitudes towards Psychology by the 24 respondents tallied with the findings by Shakir and Sharma (2017) that Psychology of Education accentuates the professional prowess of classroom practitioners. Apart from assisting them to meaning sustain fruitful relationship with people from all walks of life, the student teachers intimated that Educational Psychology stood a great probability of equipping them to tackle the multifaceted challenges inundating modern society especially through counselling. This strongly concurred with the findings of Musiiwa (2014), Nayak (2004) and Kufakunesu (2011) that knowledge of psychological theories enhances counselling which is a crucial means of alleviating the numerous problems and ills which are prevalent in today's society. Moreover, this group of respondents indicated that they did not believe that there would be a trade-off between their main subjects and Psychology of Education. If anything, they aired the view that they believed that being knowledgeable of psychological theories would enhance their instructional approaches in teaching their main subjects (Nevid, 2012; Mwamwenda, 2004). To be honest, the researchers were relieved to note that a certain proportion, though less than 50% of the student teachers, viewed educational psychology positively and had a hunch regarding how knowing psychological theories can elevate one's professional prowess as a classroom practitioner.

There was a category of respondents who had lukewarm attitudes towards studying Psychology of Education. They were neither radically against studying Psychology of Education nor fervently in favour of studying it. These respondents, who constituted 25% of the 60 student teachers who took part in the study, were cautious in the way they responded to questionnaire items. One student in this category made the following remarks:

*"We are ready to go through the paces without complaining. The fact that Psychology of Education is one of the modules we have to study kind of suggests that it is to some extent useful and relevant to the professional development of teachers. I may not know how this may come about but I will study the module anyway. After all, my performance in this module will have an ultimate bearing on my overall degree classification."*

Part of the sentiments expressed by this group of students who helplessly ritualised through Psychology of Education modules is characteristic of the diploma disease phenomenon in which individuals amass qualifications for the sake of wanting to occupy a vantage position in the job market and not necessarily because of the inherent intrinsic passion to learn (Kufakunesu, et al, 2012). However, it was interesting to gather that some of these students expressed the desire to see more being done to enhance positive and vertical transfer of learning on their part with regard to the use of psychological theories in the teaching and learning context. They indicated that they wished to see their Psychology of Education lecturers helping them to be better positioned to apply psychological theories in the teaching and learning of their areas of subject specialisation.

Twenty-one out of the 60 in-service student teachers who took part in the study blatantly expressed their negative attitudes towards studying Psychology of Education during their undergraduate in-service training. They openly proclaimed that they felt that studying Psychology of Education was like carrying an unnecessary load on their shoulders especially considering that they once studied Psychology of Education during their initial teacher-training. They expressed their shock and disbelief upon realising that they were being compelled to revisit educational foundation issues which they were exposed to at length during their college days. One in-service student teacher among these 21 wrote:

*"We prefer to have an overdose of content in our main subjects since we spend most of the time teaching our main subjects in schools. It has to be acknowledged that we are already qualified teachers"*.

Such were some of the sentiments expressed by student teachers who took part in the current study.

In defence of their opinions, these student teachers attributed part of their negative attitudes towards Educational Psychology to the way the module was taught. Firstly, these aggrieved students were quick to accuse their lecturers of being lacklustre in the way they conducted lectures. The students hinted that some Psychology of Education lecturers were not inspirational and convincing in the way they presented ideas and there was evidence to suggest questionable levels of content mastery on the part of the lecturers. Some of the students indicated that some of the lecturers solely relied on student presentations as the instructional approach, thereby violating some of the very principles encapsulated in Psychology of Education. The students expressed the wish to see lecturers taking time to teach them especially at the beginning of the semester so that they could master the hallmark and gist of Psychology of Education. It was deduced from these sentiments by the student teachers that their attitudes towards Psychology of Education were partly influenced by the experiences which they were exposed to as the semester progressed. This was consistent with the views of Mensah, et al (2013) and Nayak (2004) who maintain that people's attitudes towards any phenomenon are to some extent moulded by the attendant experiences surrounding the situation in question. There were few students who ascribed their negative attitudes towards Psychology of Education to the nature of the content which constituted the module. They claimed that they were just frustrated by the long list of theories which were to some extent difficult to



distinguish and they indicated that this was inconsistent with some of their main subjects where the content was to some extent convergent and ease to synthesise.

The researchers tabulated the views of the 60 student teachers on a contingency table with attitudes towards studying Psychology of Education heading the top row and areas of academic specialisation heading the columns. After carrying out a chi-square test, the researchers noted that the attitudes of secondary school in-service student teachers towards studying Psychology of Education were independent of the students' areas of academic specialisation. This means common sentiments were expressed by the in-service student teachers regardless of their main subjects. This implies that the sentiments expressed by the student teachers were relatively universal and needed to be considered seriously since they are bound to influence classroom practice in Zimbabwean secondary schools and even beyond.

## VII. Conclusions

The study generated a number of divergent views, a situation which did not come as a surprise to the researchers since students majoring in a wide range of areas of specialisation took part in the study. It could be deciphered from the study that there is need for Psychology of Education lecturers to expend part of their energy in motivating in-service student teachers to appreciate the benefits of being properly grounded in psychological theories. The current researchers believe that if lecturers present the Educational Psychology concepts in a methodical and convincing manner, student teachers are likely to respond positively. The need for the establishment of rapport between student teachers and lecturers was also found to be necessary. Creativity and originality need to be employed by lecturers as they try to illustrate how psychological concepts can be instrumental and pervasive in the teaching and learning of virtually any academic discipline.

## VIII. Recommendations

The researchers made the following recommendations guided by the findings of the current study:

- Psychology of Education lecturers need to deliberately attempt to motivate secondary school in-service student teachers and justify the study of educational foundations modules such as Psychology of Education.
- Efforts should be made to put student teachers in classes of reasonable sizes for them to benefit from their interaction with their lecturers. Large classes tend to be difficult to manage and lecturers may not only fail to cater for individual differences but actually get overwhelmed.
- Psychology of Education lecturers should sharpen student teachers' acumen in implementing psychological theories in the teaching and learning of their respective specialisation subjects.
- At most five modules should be studied in a given semester to ensure that student teachers do not get overwhelmed.
- Future researchers who are interested in Psychology of Education are hereby urged to replicate the current study with variations in methodology and or theoretical orientation as well as geographical context.

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