**Lecture 01: Overview of Psychology**

**1. Definition**

The word “psychology” is derived from two Greek words *'****psyche'*** and “***logos****”*. ***Psyche*** refers to mind, soul or sprit while ***logos*** means study or knowledge. Psychologists defined psychology differently based on their intentions, research findings, and background experiences. Nowadays, most of them agree on the following scientific definition of psychology “***Psychology is the scientific study of human behaviour and the underlying mental processes”.***

Using careful observation and rigorous experiments, psychologists look for the causes of various behaviours of human beings and other animal species.  Using methods of scientific research, they seek to better understand how we behave in specific situations, how and why we think the way we do, and how emotions develop and what impact they have on our interactions with others. Psychologists study, for instance, such phenomena as perception, cognition, emotion, personality, behaviour and interpersonal relationship.

**2. Importance of Psychology**

Psychology is very important because it involves questioning reality, asking such questions as “what is happening?”, “Why is it so?”, “What would happen if…?”, etc. It is also a way of thinking about how living creatures cope with their environment and interact with each other. As such, it is related to some other disciplines such as philosophy, biology, sociology, physiology, and anthropology.

Psychology is practical; it can be used to improve the quality of human life. Psychology is more than a mere description of how the mind functions, of what causes a certain action, or the effects of a given event on a person’s behaviour. It includes prescriptions for change. In other words, psychology is both an approach to gathering information about behaviour and applying such knowledge to the different spheres of human activity, including issues related to daily life such as family, education, and work. For instance, practitioners or counseling and clinical psychologists, work with individuals, couples, families, and small groups to help them feel less depressed, less anxious, become more productive or motivated, and overcome issues which prevent them from living up to their potential.

1. **Branches of Psychology**

Below are some of the branches of psychology.

* **Biopsychology** is concerned with the biological basis of behaviour.
* **Experimental psychology** studies the processes of sensing, perceiving, learning and thinking about the world.
* **Cognitive psychology** deals with the higher mental processes like thinking, language, memory, problem solving, knowing, reasoning, judging and decision making.
* **Developmental and personality psychology** consider the change and individual differences. While Developmental psychologists study how people grow and change throughout their life span, personality psychologists consider the consistency and change in an individual’s behaviour as he or she moves through different situations. It also deals with the differences that distinguish one person’s behaviour from another’s when each is placed in the same situation.
* **Health, clinical and counseling** branches of psychology aim at promoting physical and mental health. In health psychology, the focus is on the psychological factors that affect the physical disease while the focus in clinical psychology is on the diagnosis and treatment of abnormal behaviour. Counseling psychology, on the other hand, treat the educational, social and career adjustment problems.
* **Educational psychology** explores how the educational process affects students. In addition, school psychologists seek for assessing and treating the academic and emotional problems of children in elementary and secondary schools.
* **Social psychology** studies how people’s thoughts, feelings and actions are affected by other people.

1. **Goals of Studying Psychology**

Students are usually attracted to the study of psychology because they hope to gain a better understanding of people. They also hope to discover new ways of looking at oneself and of interpreting the behaviour of other people. In general, the study of psychology has five basic goals:

**1. Describing what really happens**

The first goal is to observe behaviour and describe what was observed as objectively as possible. Indeed, conclusions must be based on objective observation. And observation must be reported in such a way that others’ knowledge of what you are describing is as identical to yours as possible.

**2. Explaining what happens**

Description is not enough; we need to know not merely what happens but how two or more events are related. While descriptions come from observable data, psychologists must go beyond what is obvious and explain their observations. In other words, why did the subject do what he or she did? The quest of science is a search for patterns of regularity, for consistent relationships. The process of explanation involves finding a context in which the phenomena that have been observed make sense.

**3. Predicting what will happen**

In addition to their desire to understand nature, human beings throughout history sought to know the future – to predict and prepare for events in advance of their happening. Today, we rely mainly on science for our predictions of the future. So, once we know what happens, and why it happens, we can begin to speculate what will happen in the future. There’s an old saying, which very often holds true: "the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour." Accurate prediction helps us guide our present behaviour so as to avoid danger, pain and disappointment and gain security, pleasure, and satisfaction. Successful prediction reduces uncertainty and gives us a sense of understanding what is going around and within us.

**4. Controlling what happens**

Psychology is a practical discipline that is often concerned with “problems behaviours” or “ problem situations” and how to change or improve them. Fear, anxiety, suicide, mental illness, racism, and violence are topics or problems psychologists study with an eye toward change.

As such, once we know what happens, why it happens and what is likely to happen in the future, we can excerpt control over it. In other words, if we know you choose abusive partners because your father was abusive, we can assume you will choose another abusive partner, and can therefore intervene to change this negative behaviour.

**5. Improving the quality of life**

Not only do psychologists attempt to control behavior, they want to do so in a positive manner, they want to improve a person’s life, not make it worse. This is not always the case, but it should always be the intention. To this effect, psychologists have begun to consult with educators ways of making the new child care programme more effective. Other psychologists are collaborating with medical researchers to develop more effective ways for harried men and women to cope with their life stresses.