**Approaches to Educational Psychology**

Educational psychology has passed through a number of changes which made a

contribution to the development of this field .From these changes, several approaches have

emerged, those which are concerned with educational psychology and its issues. The most

famous approaches to educational psychology are Behaviorism, Cognitive psychology, and

Humanism, and each one of these approaches tackles the scope of educational psychology

in a different way, according to its point of view and its principles. However these

approaches are different, they have the same aim in mind which is to help persons to reach

their possible achievements, efforts, and capacities to develop their levels. (Eloff and

Ebersộhn 388)

**1. Positivism**

Psychology has grown out of philosophy which relied on abstract sciences. Its early

pioneers neglect the focus on human mental power and try to emphasize the human behavior

with a “scientific method”. Logical behaviorism is focusing on the experiment which is one

of the principles of this approach. This approach believed that knowledge and facts which

exist in the real world can be discovered by the experiment which has certain

conditions and where hypotheses are tested.

**2. Behaviorism**

Behaviorism is one of the approaches of psychology which emerged from

positivism. This approach is concerned with the role of learning and human behaviors. Also

it is a theory of learning which claimed that the learner acquire the behavior through

conditioning. This approach was developed by famous psychologists such as John B. Watson

and B.F. Skinner, Thorndike, Pavlov. Behaviorism has dominated a half of the

twentieth century and its principles and techniques are still applied to help humans learn

new skills and behaviors (Cherry).

The Russian Pavlov who dealt with dogs in his study proposed that a certain response is

generated by a certain stimulus at the same time which is known as S-R (Stimulus Response) theory or classical conditioning (Williams and Burden 8).Watson was so influenced by classical conditioning as he said that he could make from a group of adults whatever types he wants. He proposed that a wrong behavior was the result of a wrong learning rather than ego defense, and that it could be changed by reconditioning. He also emphasized the role of environment in the development of behavior.

Skinner and Thorndike were the first to create the term ‘Operant Conditioning’ or the

idea that behaviors are controlled by the consequences that follow them. “Thorndike laid

the foundations for the formulation of the ‘Law of effect’: a living organism will increase

behaviors that are followed by positive results, and vice versa-behaviors that are followed

by negative results will be decreased”. (Eloff and Ebersộhn 394)

Skinner claimed that learning was the result of environmental rather than genetic

factors. He also emphasized the importance of reinforcement. Skinner believes that

positive reinforcing behavior is an effective way to improve and create a new desired

behavior (395). Behaviorist theory thus came to explain learning in terms of operant

conditioning (Williams and Burden 9). Classical conditioning is linked to the idea of

developing involuntary behaviors, while operant conditioning refers to voluntary

behaviors” (Eloff and Ebersộhn 394). According to Sue et al, behavior is based on classical

conditioning which is controlled by stimuli, in operant conditioning reinforcement control

behaviors (qtd in Ellof and Eberộhn 394-395).

Behaviorism in its focus on the observable behavior neglects the role of the learners to

create their worlds and the importance of mental processes in the learning process

(Williams and Burden 13). In addition, this approach relies on experiments conducted on animals more than human beings. (Eloff and Ebersộhn 395)

Although, behaviorism denied the importance of the mind, it had a vital influence on

education and teaching. According to Stephen Brookfield, who is a leading adult

education theorist:

[Behaviorism] is seen most prominently in contexts where the objectives to be

attained are unambiguous, where their attainment can be judged according to

commonly agreed upon criteria of successful performance, and where a clear

imbalance exists between teachers' and learners' areas of expertise. Examples

might be learning to give an injection, learning a computer program, learning

accountancy procedures, learning to swim, or learning to operate a sophisticated

machine. . . these examples are all located primarily in the domain of taskoriented, instrumental learning, and it is this domain that fits most easily with the behaviorist approach. (qtd in Marcia)