Introduction to Psychology Notes

Developmental Psychology

- Describe some of the basic issues in developmental psychology
- Distinguish between 3 main types of research design used by developmental psychologists
- Describe physical development occurs across the lifespan and discuss its impact on psychological functioning
- Describe how perceptual and cognitive development occurs in infancy, childhood and adolescence
- Describe some of the cognitive changes associated with ageing.

Why is Developmental Psychology important?

- Understanding normal development:
  - So we can understand how we might work with someone of a particular developmental stage.
  - So we can understand when things go wrong with development ν Understanding factors that affect development
- Understanding continuity and change with development
- Understanding factors that affect development ν Understanding continuity and change with development

"Science of human development seeks to understand how and why people – all kinds of people, everywhere – change and remain the same over time" (Berger, 2008)

Issues in developmental Psychology

- **Nature and nurture:** both contribute to development, and their roles are not easily separated because environmental events often turn genes on and off.
- **Stability and change**: Involves the degree to which early traits and characteristics persist through life or change
- **Continuity and discontinuity**: The degree to which development involves either gradual, cumulative change or distinct stages

Physical Development and its psychological consequences

The prenatal period is divided into three stages: germinal period, embryonic period and foetal period.

• At birth, infants possess many adaptive ***reflexes***, such as rooting and sucking, which help ensure that the infant will get nourishment; motor development follows a universal sequence.

• Growth rates for girls and boys are roughly equal until age 10. At that point, girls begin a growth spurt that usually peaks at age 12, and boys typically follow suit about two or three years later. Physical growth is virtually complete by the end of adolescence.

• Gradual and less dramatic growth changes occur during adulthood. A gradual decline in physical abilities, including muscular strength and sensory functioning, occurs with ageing.

What is Developmental Psychology about?

What kinds of development are we interested in?

- Physical (including neural)
- Cognitive (including intellectual)
- Social (including emotional)

These are interdependent domains although changes in one likely to cause change in others

Interdependence

- Cognitive Development
- Cognition refers to mental activities associated with thinking, knowing, remembering and communicating
- Piaget - Swiss Developmental Psychologist Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Typical Age Range	Description of Stage	Developmental Phenomena
Birth to nearly 2 years	*Sensorimotor* Experiencing the world through senses and actions (looking, touching, mouthing)	•Object permanence •Stranger anxiety
About 2 to 6 years	*Preoperational* Representing things with words and images but lacking logical reasoning	•Pretend play •Egocentrism •Language development
About 7 to 11 years	*Concrete operational* Thinking logically about concrete events; grasping concrete analogies and performing arithmetical operations	•Conservation •Mathematical transformations
About 12 through adulthood	*Formal operational* Abstract reasoning	•Abstract logic •Potential for moral reasoning

Piaget viewed intelligence as the individual's way of adapting to new information about the world. He argued that children cognitively adapt to their environment through two interrelated processes; assimilation and accommodation.

Assimilation – involves interpreting actions or events in terms of one's present schemas – that is fitting into one's existing ways of understanding.

Schema – Is an organised repeatedly exercise pattern of thought or behaviour.

Accommodation – The modification of schema is to fit reality. Accommodation takes place when an infant is presented with a cup and has to modify he existing schema to drink from the new device.

Equilibrium – The balance of both Assimilation and Accommodation to adapt in the world. When a child comes across something that she doesn't understand, she finds herself in a state of cognitive disequilibrium that motivates her to try to make sense of what she encountered,

Stage 1 - Sensorimotor

Thought and action are virtually identical, as the infant explores the world with its sense and behaviours.

- Birth to 2 years
- Infant schemas are simple reflexes (e.g., sucking, grasping) and interactions with people and objects
- Circular Reactions
- Object Permanence
- Stranger Anxiety

Stage 2: Preoperational

Symbolic thought develops; object permanence is finally established. The child cannot coordinate different physical attributes of objects or consider different perspectives.

- Age 2 to 7 years
- Child begins to use mental representations but problem solving is limited
- Child can employ MENTAL SYMBOLS (e.g., symbolic/fantasy play, deferred imitation, drawing)
- Language Development
- Egocentrism

Egocentrism

- The inability of the preoperational child to take another's point of view
- The pre-school child cannot assume the role of another person or recognise that other viewpoints exist
- Often parents complain that children are being selfish. While this might be true, the child cannot help it!

Theory of Mind

- People's ideas about their own and others' mental states
- About their feelings, perceptions, and thoughts and the behaviour these might predict
- Usually develops around age 4-5 years
- Autism - a disorder marked by impaired theory of mind. Individuals with autism have difficulty understanding other people's emotions, motives, desires, etc.

Stage 3: Concrete Operations

The child is able to perform reversible mental operations on representations of objects; understanding of conservation develops; the child can apply logic to concrete situations.

- Ages 7 to 11 years
- Child performs mental operations (e.g., conservation)
- Logical thinking

Conservation Test
Conservation is the ability to recognise that a given quantity, weight or volume remains the same despite changes in shape, length, or position

Stage 4. Formal Operations

The adolescent (or adult) can apply logic more abstractly; hypothetical thinking develops.

- From 12 years on
- ABSTRACT thinking
- Imagined realities and images
- Child can use formal problem solving