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Introduction

Human beings develop experience numerous types of development throughout their life as they age and interact with various forces of the environment and society. They develop cognition, behaviour, speech and other aspects of their personality. This essay explores the development of children using two theories of development. Both theories discussed here are cognitive development theories. The theories being discussed here are that of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Recent research is cited to add more depth to the discussion on the cognitive development of children.

Jean Piaget and his theory on the development of cognition

Jean Piaget did not agree with the idea that intelligence is static. He believed that intelligence can be developed in children, and his studies and research explored the process of intellectual development in children (Piaget and Cook, 2013). His theory mainly focused on how children developmental models of the world around them into a concept he referred to as schemas.

Schemas

Schemas are the basic building blocks of cognitive models of the world that we create in our minds. These schemas help us analyze the various elements of the world around us and develop a mental model to visualize them in our minds. In Piaget's words, the schemas are a way of organizing knowledge in the mind (Piaget, 2013). A schema is, therefore, a unit or piece of knowledge that is used to identify specific objects or concepts. Schemas are interconnected inside the mind and provide a big picture of the world as a whole. A schema may also be seen as an index card containing information on how to react to specific stimuli (Wadsworth, 2004). A child is considered to be in a state of equilibrium if they can understand and analyze the world around them. Piaget stated that these schemas are very crucial to the development of a child. These schemas store critical information about the world and allow them to respond appropriately to various stimuli that they encounter daily.

Adaptation processes

In Jean Piaget's view, developing cognition is a process of adaptation. There are three actions involved in this adaptation process (Siegler et al., 2003).

Assimilation

Assimilation is the process of using knowledge and schema that the child has already developed in their minds to handle a new situation. Whenever a child is faced with a new situation, this is the first response.

Accommodation

Accommodation occurs when assimilation fails. This implies that the child was unable to identify the new stimuli as a copy of or similar to any of the existing schemas in their mind. They were unable to fit the new information into their schemas, and therefore a different approach is applied to manage the situation.

Equilibration

The state of equilibrium or balance is achieved when a child can apply the process of assimilation to deal with any new situation. disequilibrium occurs when new information cannot be processed using existing models of knowledge inside the mind. Equillibiraation is the process of overcoming the barrier to managing a new situation by being able to successfully integrate the new knowledge into the schemas formed inside the brain. Assimilation is applied again when a similar situation occurs again.

Stages of cognitive development:

Children undergoes multiple stages of cognitive development as they grow up. The development is dependent on their biological maturation and interactions with the environment.

Sensorimotor

The first stage of a child's development starts during birth and lasts up to when they reach two years of age. for a child, their main intellectual achievement during this stage is that of object permanence i.e. knowing that an object can exist even if they cannot see it. This is the first instance of a child forming a mental representation of the world.

Preoperational

children learn symbolism i.e. they learn to visualize objects in the form of symbols. This is the age when children learn abstract thinking. This period lasts between 2 and 7 years.

Concrete

this period lasts between the ages of 7 and 11. This is the stage where a child learns rational thinking. They can make logical deductions and calculations inside their mind.

Operational

this period is synonymous with adolescence. People learn to practice abstract thought and can develop and test theories and hypotheses

The following study demonstrates the principles of Piaget's theory.

Study assessing Piaget's theory

Marwaha (2017) conducted a study among 4-7year old children to examine Piaget's ideas on the intellectual characteristics of children during this period with regard to their IQ. Using various methods of experimentation, 300 children were studied to assess the prevalence of characteristics identified for their age group along with characteristics that are theorized to be

prevalent among the previous and successive age groups. Characteristics identified for this assessment included cognitive reversibility, centration and egocentrism. From the findings, it was found that the presence of perceptual egocentrism was absent and that with age came a gradual decrease in cognitive egocentrism. Lack of reversibility and centration was also perceived in the children. These traits reduced with age. Thus it can be concluded that these children demonstrate and embody the principles of Piaget.

³ The social development theory of Lev Vygotsky

The social development theory of Lev Vygotsky emphasises the importance of social interaction and relationships in the development of behaviour and cognition. He believed that the community played an important role in the process of adding meaning to everything (Vygotsky, 2015). Vygotsky further stated that social learning came first and learning came later.

¹⁰ Effects of culture

Vygotsky believed that all children are born with the tools required for intellectual development. He pointed to several mental functions accountable for cognitive development (Mcleod, 2018). These are:

- ⁹ ➤ Attention
- Sensation
- Perception
- Memory

He states that these functions interact with the wider socio-cultural environment and develop into more sophisticated mental strategies that he termed as “higher mental functions”. Vygotsky discussed the role of tools of intellectual adaptation, which are strategies used to modify or use basic mental functions more effectively and adaptively. An example of such a tool is the act of taking notes to remember important information. These tools may vary by society and culture. Therefore, beliefs and values affect how basic mental functions develop in children.

Social influences

While Vygotsky believed that children possessed the innate ability to learn something new on their own, he places particular emphasis on the role of a tutor in enabling the learning of the child. The tutor may provide verbal instructions that Vygotsky termed as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. Using the guidance provided by the tutor, the child then uses the learned knowledge to regulate their actions and complete their actions effectively.

More knowledgeable other

As the term suggests, it refers to a person with more knowledge and skills than the learner i.e. the child. Usually, this refers to a teacher or a knowledgeable adult, such as a parent. A more knowledgeable other may also refer to a peer if they have more knowledge and skill than the

child in question. A more knowledgeable other may not even need to be a person as long as they perform the required function. For example, due to the abundance of technological solutions to everyday problems in the modern-day, the role of a more knowledgeable other may also be performed by technological tools such as the internet, artificial intelligence, online-based educational programs, online video tutorials etc.

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Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

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ZPD is based on the idea that children learn better when they are guided by a knowledgeable other (Cherry, 2019). It defines the difference in learning experienced when a child is learning independently from when they are learning under the guidance of a knowledgeable adult. As a child grows, they continue to learn and develop cognitive skills. These skills allow them to solve problems and navigate their way through life. But their attained skills can only help them to a certain extent, at which point they would need assistance from others to allow them to solve problems beyond their reach. This can be achieved with the help of someone who can solve the task on their own. Vygotsky refers to this point as the zone of proximal development. With a little help and guidance from such an individual, the child can complete the task that was previously beyond their capabilities. Once the child has completed the task once, they acquire a set of skills that allow them to complete the task again singlehandedly with less difficulty. The following components are critical for the learning process in the zone of proximal development:

- A knowledgeable other must be present to guide the child in their endeavour.
- Social interactions with knowledgeable other are crucial as learning cannot occur without imitation. The knowledgeable other would provide explicit guidance by demonstrating the act themselves.
- A process is known as scaffolding that involves the knowledgeable other providing minor assistance to support the child complete the actions with more autonomy.

The following studies illustrate the concepts of Vygotsky's theory.

Study 1

Executive functions are the crucial cognitive process that facilitates goal-oriented behaviour. This study by Vandenbroucke et al. (2017) was a systematic review that combined evidence collected from multiple studies on interactions between teacher and student and their association with the cognitive development of the child. 28 studies were reviewed, among

which 23 studies were considered for the research. The results of the findings showed that teacher-student interactions were associated with improved executive functioning, working memory and inhibition. Cognitive flexibility associations were not associated with teacher-student interactions. It was also found that for studies that involved students at the early stages of elementary school level and studies including students coming from a higher socioeconomic status, these associations were stronger. A strong association was also found in studies involving a higher proportion of boys and for those that involve teacher-student interactions at a dyadic level. The findings of this study point to the conclusion that qualitative teacher-child interactions are necessary for better performance of executive functioning in children. Teachers, therefore, play an important role in promoting the cognitive processes of children by influencing their actions and behaviour in such a manner that it helps in the development of a classroom environment that is friendly, positive, emotionally impactful, and cognitively stimulating.

Study 2

A study by Cano, Perales and Baxter (2018) shows the association between father involvement in the care and upbringing of the child and the resultant cognitive development of the child. The authors wanted to examine whether increased involvement of the father in their children's life led to improved cognitive development and whether paternal education can lead to positive outcomes. This research aimed to address the gaps in the literature on paternal impact on child cognitive development as most of the existing literature focused on maternal involvement. Longitudinal data on children aged 4 to 8 years were utilized in this research. The findings revealed that father-child time was associated with very mild improvements in the cognitive functioning of the child. In the case of educational activities, increased involvement of the father was found to be associated with improved cognitive functioning of the child. The results remain largely unchanged regardless of the father's educational status. This shows that paternal engagement results in the improved cognitive development of the child. For everyday activities, the effect is very minor, but the impact is much larger and more significant for educational activities.

Conclusion

Both Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky developed ¹¹ theories of human development that focused on the process of cognition and used the concept of cognition to explain the various types of behaviour development perceived in people. Piaget's theory focused entirely on the development of cognition in children, focusing on the development of knowledge in the form of small building blocks, how the schema is developed and defined different stages of development that children undergo. Vygotsky's theory, in contrast, focused on the impact of social factors and social interaction with a more knowledgeable other to enable the process of learning and development. Vygotsky argued that the most effective approach to learning is through the help of others.

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