Chapter II: Theories of Development

Lesson 01: Piagetian Theory of Development

The term development refers to how people grow, adapt, and change over the course of their lifetimes, through physical development, personality development, socioemotional development, cognitive development (thinking), and language development. This chapter presents four major theories of human development that are widely accepted: Jean Piaget's theories of cognitive and moral development, Lev Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, Erik Erikson's theory of personal and social development.

PIAGET VIEW OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Piaget explored both why and how mental abilities change over time. For Piaget, development depends in large part on the child's manipulation of and active interaction with the environment. In Piaget's view, knowledge comes from action (see Langer & IWlen, 1998; Wadsworth, 1996). Piaget's theory of **cognitive development** proposes that a child's intellect, or cognitive abilities, progresses through four distinct stages. Each stage is characterized by the emergence of new abilities and ways of processing information.

How Development Occurs :

- **Schemes:**

    Piaget believed that all children are born with an innate tendency to interact with and make sense of their environments. He referred to the basic ways of organizing and processing information as cognitive structures. Young children demonstrate patterns of behavior or thinking, called schemes, which older children and adults also use in dealing with objects in the world.

- **Adaptation** The process of adjusting schemes in response to the environment by means of assimilation and accommodation.

- **Assimilation** , Understanding new experiences in terms of existing schemes.

- **Accommodation** Modifying existing schemes to fit new situations.
- **Equilibration** The process of restoring balance between present understanding and new experiences.

Piaget's Stages of Development

Piaget divided the cognitive development of children and adolescents into four stages:'Sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. He believed that all children pass through these stages in this order and that no child can skip a stage, although different children pass through the stages at somewhat different rates.

- **Sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years of age)**

Children experience the world through their five senses. During this stage children are very egocentric, i.e. they cannot perceive the world through others' points of view. During this stage, children move from simple reflexes to progressively developing control over their senses.

- **Preoperational stage (2 to 7 years of age)**

During this stage, motor skills are developed. Children are still egocentric, but this tendency decreases as they become older and begin to take perspective. Children's imagination is at its peak during this period but they cannot think logically, yet.

- **Concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years of age)**

During this stage, children begin to think logically if presented with practical, concrete aids. They are also able to "decenter," that is to say, to perceive the world from others' point of view. The egocentric phase disappears.

- **Formal operational stage (11 to 16 years of age and onwards)**

It is during this stage that children develop their abstract thinking and are fully capable of using logical thinking. Egocentrism has disappeared and is replaced by a feeling of belonging to groups.

Educational implications of Piaget theory

Piaget's ideas about learning and development have left an important imprint in education. His ideas became really potent during the second half of the twentieth century and spurred the "student centered" movement in Pedagogy. The following are some pedagogical implications of this theory:

1. A focus on the process of children's thinking, not just its products.

2. Recognition of the crucial role of children's self-initiated, active involvement in learning activities.

3. A de-emphasis on practices aimed at making children adult like in their thinking.

4. Acceptance of individual differences in developmental progress.