CHAPTER 4

Human Development

CBSE Class 11 · Psychology · Chapter 4

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WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

A — Define development and distinguish it from growth, maturation and evolution.

B — Explain the life-span perspective and its key features.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

TODAY'S MISSION

Today's mission

1. Define development and distinguish it from growth, maturation and evolution.
2. Explain the life-span perspective and its key features.
3. Explain how heredity and environment interact, and describe Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.
4. Name the stages of development with their developmental tasks and score 7/8 on this chapter.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Why this chapter matters

1. It gives you the vocabulary of change — every later chapter on learning, motivation and self builds on the idea of development.

2. Worth 6-8 marks of the annual paper, mostly easy pure-recall marks (definitions, systems, stages).

3. It reframes a person not as fixed but as continuously shaped by genes, context and time — a powerful, exam-friendly idea.

TOPIC

A

What is development? — the family of terms

TOPIC

Development, growth, maturation, evolution

DEVELOPMENT

Development is the pattern of progressive, orderly and relatively enduring change in the structure, thought, emotion and behaviour of a person that occurs across the ENTIRE life-span. It is both quantitative (more vocabulary, greater height) and qualitative (new ways of thinking

GROWTH

Growth refers specifically to the increase in the physical SIZE or quantity of the body or its parts — gains in height, weight, bone length or number of cells. Growth is mostly quantitative and, crucially, it STOPS once a person reaches physical maturity at a certain age. Growth is therefore only ONE component of

MATURATION

Maturation refers to the changes that unfold automatically according to the body's own genetically programmed, biological timetable, largely INDEPENDENT of practice, training or environment. Crawling before walking, the eruption of teeth in sequence, and the bodily changes of puberty are

EVOLUTION

Evolution must be kept separate from development. Evolution is the change in the inherited, biological characteristics of a whole SPECIES across MANY generations through the process of natural selection — it happens to humankind over millions of years. Development, by

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

The formal definition of development

> "Development is the pattern of progressive, orderly and relatively enduring change in the structure, thought, emotion and behaviour of an individual that occurs across the entire life-span as a result of the interaction between heredity and environment.

STATEMENT

Development is LIFELONG, multidimensional (physical, cognitive, social, emotional), both quantitative and qualitative, and arises from heredity x environment — it includes growth and

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Holding development apart from growth, maturation and evolution is what lets you answer the whole family of 'distinguish' questions and read a case study correctly — each term names a different kind of change.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Never equate development with growth, and never treat it as a childhood-only process. Drop the word 'life-span' or the 'interaction of heredity and environment' and the definition is incomplete; swap it with evolution and you lose a full mark.

TOPIC

B

The life-span perspective

TOPIC

How development is viewed today

LIFELONG & MULTIDIMENSIONAL

The life-span perspective, associated with Paul Baltes, holds first that development is LIFELONG — no single age period dominates; we keep developing from conception through old age. Second, it is MULTIDIMENSIONAL: development happens along several dimensions

MULTIDIRECTIONAL

Development is MULTIDIRECTIONAL, meaning that across the life-span there is both GAIN and LOSS, and the two can occur together. Some capacities grow while others decline at the same time: an older adult may lose speed of processing yet gain in wisdom, vocabulary and emotional regulation

PLASTIC

Development is PLASTIC, meaning it is modifiable — within limits, the course of development can be changed by experience, training and intervention at many points in life. A child's intellectual potential can be raised by an enriched environment; an older adult's memory can be improved with strategies

CONTEXTUAL

Development is CONTEXTUAL — it always occurs within, and is shaped by, a context: the family, the peer group, the school, the culture, the historical period and the events of a person's life. The same individual would develop differently in a different culture or era, because context provides the

TOPIC

C

Factors influencing development

TOPIC

Heredity and environment

HEREDITY

Heredity is the transmission of biological characteristics from parents to offspring through GENES, present from the moment of conception. Heredity sets the POTENTIAL or RANGE for many traits — for example, a genetic ceiling for height, a temperamental tendency, or a vulnerability to

ENVIRONMENT

Environment refers to everything outside the genes that influences development — nutrition and health, the family and its emotional climate, parenting, schooling, peers, culture, socio-economic conditions and life experiences. Environment determines how much of the hereditary potential is

THE INTERACTION

The modern view firmly rejects 'nature VERSUS nurture' as a contest with a single winner. Heredity and environment are in continuous INTERACTION: genes set the range, environment decides where within that range a person lands, and the two constantly influence each other across

WHY INTERACTION MATTERS

Understanding development as interaction has real consequences. It explains why two siblings with similar genes can turn out differently (different experiences, friends, schooling) and why children from harsh environments can still flourish with the right

TOPIC

D

Context — Bronfenbrenner's ecological model

WORKED EXAMPLE

The five nested systems of context

1. Bronfenbrenner pictured the developing child at the centre of a set of NESTED environmental systems, like concentric circles, each affecting the others.
2. MICROSYSTEM — the immediate settings the child is DIRECTLY part of: family, peers, school, neighbourhood. (Child IS in it.)
3. MESOSYSTEM — the CONNECTIONS between microsystems, e.g. the link between home and school, or between parents and friends.
4. EXOSYSTEM — settings the child is NOT directly in but which still affect them, e.g. a parent's workplace or the local government. (Child NOT in it, but it touches them.)
5. MACROSYSTEM — the wider CULTURE: customs, laws, values, religion and socio-economic conditions surrounding the child. CHRONOSYSTEM — the dimension of TIME and historical change (growing up before vs after smartphones).

TOPIC

Reading the systems correctly

MICRO VS MESO

The MICROSYSTEM is the layer where the child lives day to day — the people and places the child interacts with face to face: parents and siblings at home, classmates and teachers at school, friends in the neighbourhood. The MESOSYSTEM is one level out: it is not a new place but the set of

EXO VS MACRO

The EXOSYSTEM contains settings the child is NOT directly part of, yet which influence the child through someone else — a parent's workplace (long hours change family life), the local council, or a parent's social network. The MACROSYSTEM is the broadest layer: the overarching CULTURE —

THE CHRONOSYSTEM

The CHRONOSYSTEM adds the dimension of TIME to the model. It captures how development is shaped by the patterning of life events and by the historical period in which a person grows up. A child raised before the internet develops differently from one raised with smartphones;

WHY CONTEXT MATTERS

Bronfenbrenner's model makes the life-span perspective's 'contextual' feature concrete: a child can never be understood in isolation, because layers of influence — from the immediate family out to the culture and the historical era — all act on development at once, and these layers also influence one

TRY IT · SOLVE BEFORE YOU PEEK

Match the influence to Bronfenbrenner's system: (a) the child's classroom (b) the link between home and school (c) a parent's office (d) the country's culture and laws (e) growing up during a pandemic.

SOLUTION

ANSWER (a) classroom = MICROSYSTEM; (b) home-school link = MESOSYSTEM; (c) parent's office = EXOSYSTEM; (d) culture and laws = MACROSYSTEM; (e) pandemic / historical time = CHRONOSYSTEM.

TOPIC

E

Stages of development

TOPIC

Prenatal, infancy, childhood

PRENATAL STAGE

The prenatal stage runs from CONCEPTION to BIRTH — roughly nine months — and is the period of the most rapid development in the entire life-span. From a single fertilised cell (zygote) the embryo and then the foetus form all the major organs and body systems. Because

INFANCY

Infancy covers roughly the first TWO years after birth and features dramatic physical growth and motor development — the maturational sequence of lifting the head, sitting, crawling and walking. It is also when ATTACHMENT forms: the strong emotional

CHILDHOOD

Childhood, spanning roughly ages two to eleven, is a long stage of steady physical growth and enormous cognitive and social development. The child rapidly acquires LANGUAGE, learns to think more logically, masters school skills, and develops self-control and a

TOPIC

Adolescence, adulthood, old age

ADOLESCENCE & IDENTITY

Adolescence (roughly 11 to 18-19 years) begins with PUBERTY — the maturational onset of sexual maturity — and is a period of rapid physical, cognitive and social change. Cognitively, the adolescent gains the capacity for abstract reasoning; socially, the PEER GROUP

ADULTHOOD

Adulthood, the longest stage (roughly the twenties to about sixty), is itself usually divided into early and middle adulthood. Its developmental tasks centre on INTIMACY (forming close, committed relationships), establishing a career and economic independence, and, in middle

OLD AGE

Old age (roughly sixty onward) brings physical decline — reduced strength, sensory changes, slower processing — but the life-span perspective stresses that it is NOT only loss. Many older adults gain in WISDOM, emotional regulation, vocabulary and the ability to

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Developmental tasks

> "A developmental task is a skill or achievement that arises at or around a certain period of life, success at which leads to satisfaction and success with later tasks, while failure leads to difficulty with later tasks and disapproval by society.

STATEMENT

Each stage carries characteristic tasks — e.g. attachment/trust in infancy, industry in childhood, IDENTITY in adolescence, intimacy and generativity in adulthood, and integrity in old

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Developmental tasks turn the abstract idea of 'stages' into specific, examinable achievements, and they are exactly what case-study questions ask you to identify and justify.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Do not attach the wrong task to a stage. The classic error is pairing adolescence with 'trust' (which is infancy) instead of IDENTITY. Learn the stage-task pairs as a set, not in isolation.

TOPIC

Growth vs development

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Growth and development mean the same thing — both just describe a child getting bigger.

✓ **CORRECT** GROWTH is the increase in physical SIZE or quantity (height, weight) and stops at a certain age. DEVELOPMENT is a broader, qualitative AND quantitative pattern of progressive, orderly change in body, mind, emotion and behaviour that continues across the WHOLE life-span. Growth is one part of development; development includes growth but is far wider and never simply 'getting bigger'.

TOPIC

Maturation

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Maturation is just another word for learning from practice and the environment.

✓ **CORRECT** MATURATION refers to changes that unfold automatically according to the body's biological, genetically programmed timetable — walking, the sequence of teeth, puberty — and occur largely INDEPENDENT of practice or training. LEARNING, by contrast, comes from experience and practice. A child cannot be 'trained' to walk before maturation readies the muscles and nerves.

TOPIC

Development vs evolution

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Development and evolution are the same — both describe change over time.

✓ **CORRECT** DEVELOPMENT is change within a SINGLE individual across their own life-span. EVOLUTION is change in the inherited characteristics of a whole SPECIES across many generations through natural selection. Development happens to YOU in one lifetime; evolution happens to humankind over millions of years. Mixing the two costs a full mark.

TOPIC

When development ends

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Development is only about children; once you are an adult, development is over.

✓ **CORRECT** The LIFE-SPAN perspective insists development is LIFELONG — it continues through adulthood and old age, not just childhood. Adults keep developing in cognition, personality, relationships and wisdom, and even in old age there is gain alongside decline. Treating development as a 'childhood-only' process is the most common conceptual error in this chapter.

TOPIC

Heredity vs environment

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Either heredity OR environment alone decides how a person turns out — it is a 'nature versus nurture' contest with one winner.

✓ **CORRECT** Modern developmental psychology rejects 'nature VERSUS nurture'. Heredity sets the POTENTIAL or range (e.g. a genetic ceiling for height); environment (nutrition, family, culture, schooling) decides how much of that potential is realised. Development is the product of the continuous INTERACTION of the two — both are always involved, never one alone.

TOPIC

Bronfenbrenner's systems

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** In Bronfenbrenner's model the exosystem is the child's immediate family and friends.

✓ **CORRECT** The MICROSYSTEM is the immediate setting the child is directly part of (family, peers, school). The EXOSYSTEM is a setting the child is NOT directly in but which still affects them (e.g. a parent's workplace, the local government). Students routinely swap micro- and exo-; anchor: 'micro = where the child IS; exo = a place that touches the child WITHOUT the child being there'.

TOPIC

Adolescence and identity

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** According to Erikson, the central task of adolescence is developing trust.

✓ **CORRECT** Erikson placed TRUST vs mistrust in INFANCY. The central psychosocial task of ADOLESCENCE is IDENTITY vs ROLE CONFUSION — the teenager works out 'who am I?' in terms of values, career, beliefs and social role. Pairing the wrong task with adolescence is a flagged danger error; lock adolescence to IDENTITY.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

3-4 mark question: 'Define development' / 'Distinguish between growth, maturation and

1	**STATE THE DEFINITION OF DEVELOPMENT VERBATIM** 1 m	Open with the textbook definition: 'Development is the pattern of progressive, orderly and relatively enduring change in the structure, thought or behaviour of a person that occurs across the entire life-span as a result of the interaction of heredity and environment.' Stressing 'across the life-span' and 'interaction' earns the anchor mark.
2	**CONTRAST GROWTH, MATURATION AND DEVELOPMENT** 2 m	Draw the distinctions clearly: GROWTH is the increase in physical SIZE/quantity (height, weight) and stops at a certain age; MATURATION is genetically programmed, automatic change that unfolds on a biological timetable independent of practice (walking, puberty); DEVELOPMENT is the broad, lifelong pattern of qualitative AND quantitative change that INCLUDES growth and maturation but is wider than both. Give one example of each — examples convert recall into understanding marks.
3	**ADD THE DEVELOPMENT-VS-EVOLUTION CLINCHER** 1 m	Close by separating development from EVOLUTION: development is change in ONE individual across their lifetime, whereas evolution is change in a whole SPECIES across many generations. This one sentence shows full command of the family of terms and lifts a 'definition' answer to full marks.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark question: 'Describe Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development' / 'Explain the

1	**STATE THE CORE IDEA + NAME THE MODEL** 1 m	Begin with the framing: Urie BRONFENBRENNER's ECOLOGICAL (bioecological) model holds that a child develops within a set of NESTED environmental systems, each influencing the others, like a set of concentric circles around the developing person. State that there are FIVE systems — naming the model and its author carries marks.
2	**NAME AND EXPLAIN THE FIVE SYSTEMS IN ORDER** 3 m	March outward, one line each: MICROSYSTEM — the immediate settings the child is directly in (family, peers, school); MESOSYSTEM — the connections BETWEEN microsystems (e.g. home-school link); EXOSYSTEM — settings the child is NOT in but which affect them (a parent's workplace, local government); MACROSYSTEM — the wider culture, customs, laws and values; CHRONOSYSTEM — the dimension of TIME and historical change (e.g. growing up before vs after smartphones). Keep micro and exo strictly separate.
3	**END WITH WHY CONTEXT MATTERS** 1 m	Conclude that the model shows development cannot be understood by looking at the child alone — the same child develops differently in different cultural, social and historical contexts. This contextual conclusion earns the closing mark and demonstrates higher-order understanding.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

4-6 mark case-study: a person is described and the student must NAME the developmental

1	**IDENTIFY THE CORRECT STAGE FROM THE AGE CUE** 1 m	Read the stem for the age. Before birth -> PRENATAL; roughly 0-2 yrs -> INFANCY; ~2-11 yrs -> CHILDHOOD; ~11-18/19 yrs (puberty, peer focus, 'who am I') -> ADOLESCENCE; ~20-60 yrs -> ADULTHOOD; ~60+ yrs -> OLD AGE. Name the stage first and clearly.
2	**STATE THE DEVELOPMENTAL TASK + JUSTIFY WITH THE STEM** 2 m	Give the stage's key developmental task and tie it to the passage: 'Because Sneha, 15, is questioning her values and worrying about her future career and friend group, this is ADOLESCENCE, whose central task (Erikson) is IDENTITY vs role confusion — forming a stable sense of who she is.' Linking the task back to the evidence is where the application marks live.
3	**ADD THE CONTEXT / HEREDITY-ENVIRONMENT LINK** 1 m	Finish by connecting to influences: 'Her development is shaped by both heredity (the biological onset of puberty) and environment (family, peers, school — her microsystem), and by the historical context (chronosystem).' Showing context secures the final mark and demonstrates integration across the chapter.

PYQ PATTERNS

Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1	Define development. Distinguish between growth, maturation and development. (3-4 marks)	Almost every annual + SQP
#2	Explain the life-span perspective on development / list its key features (lifelong, multidimensional, plastic, contextual). (3-5 marks)	Annual + Pre-Board
#3	Describe Bronfenbrenner's ecological model OR name and explain any three of its systems. (4-6 marks)	SQP + School Annual
#4	Explain how heredity and environment influence development / their interaction. (3-4 marks)	Annual + Pre-Board
#5	Describe any stage of development with its developmental tasks OR a case-study identifying the stage and its challenges (adolescence/identity). (4-6 marks)	SQP case-study + Annual

RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

5-line revision

1. The terms — Development = lifelong, qualitative + quantitative change from heredity x environment. Growth = physical size only (stops). Maturation = genetic timetable. Evolution = species over generations.

2. Perspective & factors — Life-span view: lifelong, multidimensional, multidirectional (gain + loss), plastic, contextual. Heredity sets potential; environment realises it; they INTERACT (no nature-vs-nurture).

3. Context & stages — Bronfenbrenner: Micro -> Meso -> Exo -> Macro -> Chrono. Stages: prenatal, infancy (trust), childhood (industry), adolescence (IDENTITY), adulthood (intimacy/ generativity), old age (integrity).

WHAT'S NEXT

What's next

→ Chapter 5 — Sensory, Attentional and Perceptual Processes (how the developing mind takes in and organises information).

→ Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target >= 12/15.

→ Then the full annual-pattern Paper — 30 marks, 60 minutes, real CBSE Class 11 pattern.

You now know how a person develops across a whole life.

Lock in the terms, the systems and the stages, sit the drill, and beat the chapter.

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