

# [Is the life-span approach essential to human development](https://assignbuster.com/is-the-life-span-approach-essential-to-human-development/)

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Human development has been a subject of interest among modern researchers. The most prominent theory in human development is the life-p approach which is made up of various concepts. This essay aims to show the importance of the life-p approach by analysing some of the concepts that make up this approach, such as multi-directionality historical location and contexualism among others. This essay will critically analyse some of the assumptions of the life-p approach.

It will also examine arguments against the lifep approach as well as other theories of human development such as Freud’s psychoanalytic theory with the aim of showing that this approach is essential for understanding human development. One of the major assumptions of the life-p approach as suggested by Baites, (1987) is that development is a ‘ life-long process’ by this he meant that developmental changes occur throughout a person’s life, from the point of conception till death (Sugarman, 1986). Baltes, (1987) went on to state that development as a life-long process assumes that, no point in a person’s developmental life is more important than the other, every period of a person’s life is equally important weather it ischildhoodor aging, they are all important periods of development though this assumption is in direct contradiction to other theorists of human development such as Freud who believed that development ends at childhood and that adulthood is an extended version of childhood and that aging is more of “ loss in adaptive capacity” hence does not qualify to be put in the paradigms of development .

This has constituted the gain and loss argument (Baltes, 1987). Research on intelligence has shown that other forms of intelligence which involving reviewing of one’s life and wisdom emerge in old age and these forms of intelligence are not ‘ genetically wired from birth” as suggested by Freud and (Baltes, 1987). This goes to show that development is not restricted to certain periods of a person’s life but happens up until death; hence the life-p approach is essential in understanding human development.

With the desire to proove the importance of the life-p approach in human development This essay will look at another assumption put forward by life-p theorists which state that development is malti-directional, (Baltes, 1987). This means that human development has different forms and differs in the routes that it takes thoughout the developmental process for example the presents of degenerative and growth abilities in a person (Stenberg, Bornstein, Yandell, & Rook, 011). It has also been noted by Li & Freund, (2005) that development as viewed by the life-p theory is not a one way procces of accumulation but that some developmental aspect increase while others decline (Li & Freund, 2005). Research by (cattel and horn, 1982 ) shows that a person consits of two types of intelligance mamely fluid and crystalized intelligance.

According to this research fluid intelligance showed a declining function as compared to cristalized which showed accumulation tendancies (Baltes, 1987) This evidence shows that development is not a one way procces but takes different directions and that includes both childhood development and aiging, reafirming the point made above that aiging also qualifies to be considered as being part of development.

Also in southafrica it has been noted that due to the inaccesibility of adiquatehealthcare by children during the apartheid some children were born with birth defects while others suffered from malnutrition and became disabled showing the different varyng trajectories that human development can take (Youth hearings, 1997). Therefore the presence of malti-directionality as a life-p concept helps us to understand the various dimentions and directions taken by development throghout a person’s life hence it earns its importance in understanding human development.

The life-p approach again plays a very important role in understanding human development when looking at the assumption that ‘ development is historically embeded’ (Elder, 1998). This concept cannot be separated from the concept of contexualism hence Elder, (1998)’s work is to be viewed in light of the two concepts. According to Baites, (1987) the idea behind this assumption is that the historical location of a person together with the socio, economic and caltural experiences the individual encounter during that time has an impact on how he developes.

He went on to say that this assumption brings in history as an important factor that facilitates one’s nature of deverlopment To support this assumption it was discovered that children who faced economic hardships during the time of thegreat depressionlooked far much older than their normal age but tended to recover when the conditions got better showing again that development is a continous procces (Elder, 1998). To further support this line of thinking it must be clarified that Elder, (1998) is stressing the fact that there is continous interplay between factors such as history, timing of life transitions such as early pregnancy, shared elationships and a person’s unique ability to execise agency which has been defined by Baites, (1987) as plasticity These factors greatly influence the developmental trajectories of a person (Sugarman, 1986). To support this he turns his attention to the oakland and berkely studies done on children who experiences the second world war, the greatdepressionand the korean war. As shown by this research children born during the economic meltdown of the great depression probably laked proper parenting and this affected maturation.

He went on to mention that children who lived during the second world war and the korean war had different experienes as compared to the oakland study and their developmental gains and losses were different. In southafrica research shows that black children who lived during the apatheid era ended up in sqatter camps without any aducation, with poor sanitation no recreation facilities and high health risks, this forced some to join ganges.

Removal from their land also caused identity confusion which is a very important developmental task according to Erikson. showng that historcal context brings with it a unique experience that individuals are exposed to and this has a great impact on one’s developmet reafirming the claim tht the life-p approach is important in understanding human development. It has also been brought to attention that the research methods used by life-p researchers are to some extent unreliable and may produce inaccurate information.

As critics of this approach have noted life-p researchers mainly use introspection, questioning and obsarvation for example Elder, (1998) on his study of children of the great depression admits that they would ask the subjects on how they thought the great depression influenced their lives, Havighurst also used the same technique in his study of developmental tasks and this is problematic since subjects are most likely unware of their developmental tasks and deficits (Sugarman, 1986).

He went on to say researcher bias is also a broblem for example theorists like Erikson may have been influenced to research by their background and the results they produce may bear similarities to what they personaly feel, not the actual facts on the ground. Pllasticity is another life-p concept that t can help us understand human development. Though it has been mentioned above we now look at it in more detail. According to (Li & Freund, 2005) it is the campacity of the individual to influence his own developmen meaning a person may counciously or uconciously influence heir own developme. Biological research on cortical plasticity across the life-p by (Li & Freund, 2005) has shown that the brain of adults can change its stractural and functional organisation due to its developmental history. The research also showed the reorganisation of functions of the cortex in old age such as the use of both hemspheres to compansate for decline and this shows the importance of pasticity in human develoment.

The last charecteristic of the life-p approach to be discussed is the fact that human development is multi-disciplinary meaning that it encompasses other fields such as bbiology, sociologyand anthropology (Baltes, 1987). This assumption is further supported by Huvighurst (1972) who also suggest that developmental tasks arise from ‘ physical maturation, caltural presure and individual aspirations (Sugarman, 1986).

He gives the example that learning to read may be as a result caltural influence, one’s willingness to read and your mental or cognitive capability hence these three fields may simaltenously influence development. Though this essay aims to assert the importants of the life-p approach to development we cannot turn a blind eye on some of the weaknesses and critisisms brought forward agains this approach therefore we will start with the last concept which stated that human development is is malti-desciplinary.

Schoolars like Sugarman, (1986) have argued that much of the work presented to support the assumption remains in doupt since research done in german society may not be applicable on a Southafrican context and therefore this particular concept does not fully expain human development of all people across the world since developmental tasks such as choosing a job are calture specific (Havighurst, 1972).

Another critisism of the life-p approach is that it that some of its ideas are incontradiction with its principles for example Sugarman, (1986) notes that life-p developmental theorists offer a road map of development, Erikson’s eight stages and Havighurst’s assumption that failare to overcome a particular stage would result in unhappyness. This is in direct contradiction to the notion that development is malti-directional and does not follow a particular pattern of developmen which bergs the question as to weather this approach is really essential in understanding human development.

After closely examining the assumptions of the life-p approach and the arguments presented against it, it is evident that the approach has a lot of inconsistancies and that the research methods used to some extend are inconclusive. After aknowledging these facts it is however iumportant to note that not all of the life-p approach’s research is obtained by quationable means and that it is the only theory of human development which better explains human development in Southafrica.

The life-p approach is also to be credited for being the only thery of human development which is malti-disciplinary and it is also not deterministc in that there is always hope to overcome life; s challenges Also its methods are easily applicable therefore in conclusion it remains beyond reasonable doupt that development is a life-long procces and that the life-p approach is vital in understanding human development. ? References Baites, P. B. (1987). Theoretical propositions of life-p developmentalpsychology: On the dynamics between growth and decline.

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