

Socio-Cultural Processes and Development of Human Mind: A Literature Review

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Abstract : An individual is affected by the environment to which he/she is exposed. The effects of the environment are generally contrasted with the genetic effects and are covered under nature vs. nurture issue. The attention of researchers towards studying the impact of socio-cultural processes on the development of human mind increased after the works of Lev Vygotsky gained immense popularity all over the world. This paper reviews the various components of social and cultural context. The paper aims to integrate the various findings from the existing reviews of the literature to investigate the correlation between the socio-cultural context and the development of mind in humans. In the context of this investigation, a majority of the existing review of the literature points towards the significant impact of the socio-cultural context in mediating the development of higher mental functions in human beings. From the current review of literature, it is, therefore, concluded that development processes could not be isolated and exist integrated with various domains of socio-cultural process.

IndexTerms - Lev Vygotsky, Internalization, Socio-Cultural Context, Social Interactions, Mediating effects

I. INTRODUCTION

The social, cultural approach is based on the notion that culture and social environment of an individual plays a vital role in the development and formation of human mind [1]. The socio-cultural approach encompasses a range of variables that are primarily based on the development of an individual in the social and cultural context. For the purpose of the review, the social and cultural factors will be divided into two major themes. The first theme will cover the various variables related to social context, while the second theme will cover the variables related to the cultural context. In the concluding part of the paper, an attempt will be made to integrate the various theories to better define the influences of social and cultural context on the development of the human mind. The variables that will be reviewed under the social context theme includes social interactions and social processes. Social interactions allow for the exchange of culture, language, and also the development of human mind [2]. However, social interactions are not just passive in nature. Studies show that social interactions have the potential to affect the perception of people [3]. If you look at the social interactions taking place in your environment, one obvious deduction that follows is related to the exchange of ideas. However, limiting the social interactions to just a medium of exchange of ideas will not be sufficient to explain this complex process. A host of psychological processes can be observed in social interaction [4]. Another advantage of social interaction is that they allow for the exchange of information between individuals belonging to different cultures [5]. In the absence of social interactions, it is possible that the knowledge of a person might remain limited to himself or herself. Therefore, members might find it challenging to accommodate the views of others, particularly in enclosed communities where there are minimal social interactions [6]. In other words, social interactions allow individuals to understand the views of others and at the same time, provide a platform using which the individuals can express their own thoughts and desires.

The Rationale of the Study

The existing review of literature related to social, cultural approach focuses on various variables. Since the socio-cultural context is a multidisciplinary phenomenon [7], therefore a holistic comprehension of the existing theories is required to integrate the various variables that contribute to the development of human mind. This paper attempts to review the existing literature related to the context of the socio-cultural approach and will attempt to integrate the various theories related to this phenomenon. It is hypothesized that social environment and culture plays an essential role in the development of the human mind.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Socio-Cultural Approach

At any given time in an interacting community, host of social processes take place [4]. Such social processes can range from simple social interactions to complex symbolic interactions. Many researches have studied the various components of social processes and have supported the importance of such processes in the development of an individual [8]. For example, Vygotsky states that the development of a child takes place first on a social plane and then on the internal plane [9]. A careful analysis of the general genetic law of cultural development proposed by Vygotsky [9] reveals the importance of the social processes in the development of an individual. Another critical component of social context is related to the process of symbolic interactions [10]. Symbolic interactions provide an individual with an alternative to vocal speech. Symbolic interaction may look simple but the process of arriving at the meaning of symbolic interactions reflects the enormous complexities of the human mind [11]. For example, that waving hands to bid goodbye or bye-bye is a universal symbol, and often parents wave at infants or make them to wave at others. Vygotsky discusses that at first, the child follows or attempts to follow the gestures of his parents. With subsequent practice and experiences, the child may start associating the action of waving hands as a form of catching the attention of others and even expressing his thoughts. The probability of waving hands is further increased if reinforcements are available. Slowly, what was being performed by the child only on an external plane now comes to be performed on an intra psychological plane; what was an external gesture only has now become a private property for the child [9]. This becomes evident as the child becomes autonomous in deciding when to wave hands or not. The child can now associate various expectations before waving his hands.

Cultural Context

Cultural psychologist claimed that the study of mind and culture are inseparable [12], and one cannot expect to understand either culture or development of mind by isolating these two processes. Various tools are covered under the cultural context. To examine the cultural context, we will look at the various cultural tools and cultural practices. Of all the educational tools, language is held to be the most fundamental and essential tool [9]. Language as a tool is related to both social as well as cultural context.

Language as a Social Tool

Language acts as a social tool because it helps in the verbal and nonverbal modes of communication, expression of arts, counting systems, discursive practices, and so on [13]. The language also plays a crucial role in social interaction [13]. Studies of social interactions show how children receive and reuse the language to which they are exposed to [14]. It therefore comes as no surprise that the effects of language mediate the development processes in individuals, especially the teenagers [15]. Language is considered to be the most crucial cultural tool because a two-way relationship exists between language and culture [9]. Language influences culture and at the same time, gets influenced by the cultural processes. Hence it can be argued that as culture developed, the scope of the language developed. Again as language developed, it added to the development of culture. Hence the study of language and culture should not take place in an isolated environment [16].

Cultural Practices

A variety of cultural practices are followed all over the world in various cultures. A host of these practices are more traditional in nature. However, cultural practices can change in response to the changes in the environment of a particular cultural group [16]. It is worthwhile to note that people can have different perception [17] about various cultural processes. The orthodox group members of a particular culture might find it difficult to accommodate the views of outgroup members. The simple reason for such conflicts is related to the group dynamics in which the practices of an outgroup might not be perceived as friendly gestures by the group members [18].

The Influence of Social & Cultural Processes on the Development of Higher Mental Functions

Lev Vygotsky is considered to be a prominent theorist who advocated the idea of significant impact of social processes in the development of an individual [19]. As per Vygotsky, in order to understand an individual, one must first understand the social relations in which the individual exists. Vygotsky further argued that the social dimension of consciousness is the primary variable and the individual dimension of consciousness is derived from this primary dimension. In other words, the individual dimension of consciousness is a derivative of the social dimension of consciousness [9].

Transformation of social processes

Social processes impact the development of the human mind. Several aspects of the pattern of activities that had been performed on an external plane come to be executed on a private plane [19]. In other words, as per Vygotsky, the consciousness from the social activities performed on an external plane gets transformed into internal intra psychological plane. This process of transformation of functions executed on external inter-psychological plane to internal intra-psychological plane was termed as internalization [20]. It is essential to know that the transformation that is taking place is not just a copy and paste of activities from one dimension to another dimension. In other words, internalization as proposed by Vygotsky transforms the external process itself and changes its structure and functions [11]. Therefore the transformation from external psychological plane to an internal psychological plane can then lead to the development of an internal plane of consciousness [19]. To sum up, internalization is not a process of copying the external reality on a pre-existing plane rather internalization is a process wherein the internal plane of consciousness is formed [20]. The external reality in this context refers to the social interactional processes. The transformation process can be understood by the example of a toddler who is learning to use his hands to grab an object. At first an infant's attempt to grab a distant object is unsuccessful. When an adult interferes and gets the indicated object to the child, the situation changes in an essential way [19]. The indicatory gesture of the child becomes a gesture for signaling others. In response to the child unsuccessful grasping movement, response emerges from another human who acts as a mediator. Does the function of indication undergo a crucial change in this scenario? When a human interferes and gives an object to a child, then the child's movement gets transformed to an indication not for the object but for the human being [20]. In other words, the gesture of indication is internalized, and this leads to the development of an internal plane of consciousness [20]. Internal plane of consciousness further adds to the development of voluntary control over gestures [11].

III. CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the various influences of socio-cultural context on an individual. The paper reviewed the studies that are focussed on finding correlation between the socio-cultural context and the development of mind in humans. The theories of Lev Vygotsky are one of the most influential theories that explain the mechanism of the impact of socio-cultural context on the developmental processes. From the existing review of literature on social and cultural processes, it is concluded that the socio-cultural context of an individual influences the processes of human development of mind. Evidence shows that infants are affected by peer and social contacts [8]. As children grow, they are continuously affected by interaction with adults and peers. During such interaction processes, Vygotsky claims that a child does not just copies the action of adults; instead there is always a scope of internalization of the social processes to which a child is exposed to [9]. In other words, it is concluded that the development processes cannot be isolated and exist integrated with various domains of socio-cultural process.

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