Lesson One: Child and Adolescent Psychology

Course: English for Speech and Language Pathology III

Program: Third-Year Bachelor's in Speech and Language Pathology (Orthophonia)

Duration: 90 minutes

1. Introduction

Childhood and adolescence are critical periods of human development during which individuals undergo rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and language changes. These developmental processes shape later learning, communication, behavior, and overall well-being (Berk, 2023; Santrock, 2024).

For speech-language pathologists, understanding normal development is essential because communication disorders can only be identified by comparing an individual's abilities with expected developmental milestones (Paul et al., 2024). Knowledge of developmental psychology also supports evidence-based assessment, diagnosis, intervention, and family counseling.

2. What Is Child and Adolescent Psychology?

Definition

Child and adolescent psychology is the branch of psychology that studies the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and language development of children and adolescents from birth through adolescence (Papalia & Martorell, 2021).

It examines:

- How children grow and change.
- Why developmental changes occur.
- Individual differences in development.
- Biological and environmental influences on behavior (Santrock, 2024).

Development is generally considered both **continuous** and **stage-related**, meaning that some changes occur gradually while others emerge at particular developmental stages (Berk, 2023).

3. Development During Childhood

Childhood extends from birth to approximately 12 years of age and is characterized by remarkable developmental changes.

A. Infancy (Birth–2 Years)

Infancy is marked by rapid neurological and physical growth. During this period, infants develop attachment to caregivers, begin intentional communication, and acquire the foundations of language (Owens, 2023).

Major developmental achievements include:

- Brain maturation
- Attachment formation
- Babbling
- First words
- Walking
- Early social interaction (Papalia & Martorell, 2021)

Communication Milestones

- Crying
- Cooing
- Babbling
- First meaningful words
- Two-word combinations (Owens, 2023)

B. Early Childhood (2–6 Years)

Early childhood is characterized by rapid vocabulary growth, grammatical development, symbolic play, and increasing social interaction (Owens, 2023).

Children also develop:

- Improved speech intelligibility
- Emotional regulation
- Fine and gross motor coordination
- Imaginative play
- Self-control (Berk, 2023)

C. Middle Childhood (6–12 Years)

During middle childhood, children develop more advanced cognitive and language abilities.

Major achievements include:

- Reading and writing
- Logical thinking
- Academic learning
- Peer relationships
- Problem-solving skills
- Increased independence (Santrock, 2024)

Language becomes increasingly sophisticated, including the use of complex grammar, narratives, figurative language, and academic vocabulary (Owens, 2023).

4. Development During Adolescence

Adolescence generally spans ages 12 to 18 years and involves substantial biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes (Berk, 2023).

Physical Development

Adolescents experience:

- Puberty
- Hormonal changes
- Growth spurts
- Brain maturation (Santrock, 2024)

Cognitive Development

According to Piaget, adolescents enter the **Formal Operational Stage**, during which they develop abstract reasoning, hypothetical thinking, and advanced problem-solving abilities (Piaget, 1952, as cited in Berk, 2023).

Emotional Development

Adolescents develop:

- Identity
- Emotional regulation
- Independence
- Self-esteem
- Future orientation (Erikson, 1968; Berk, 2023)

Social Development

Peer relationships become increasingly important during adolescence.

Young people develop:

- Identity within peer groups
- Close friendships
- Romantic relationships
- Moral reasoning
- Social responsibility (Santrock, 2024)

5. Major Domains of Development

A. Physical Development

Physical development includes growth in height and weight, brain maturation, sensory development, and motor development (Papalia & Martorell, 2021).

B. Cognitive Development

Cognitive development includes:

- Attention
- Memory
- Thinking
- Learning
- Executive functioning
- Problem solving (Berk, 2023)

These abilities support successful communication and academic achievement.

C. Language Development

Language development consists of both receptive and expressive language.

Children gradually acquire:

- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Pragmatic skills
- Narrative abilities
- Literacy skills (Owens, 2023)

During adolescence, language becomes more abstract and sophisticated, supporting academic learning and social communication (Paul et al., 2024).

D. Emotional Development

Emotional development involves:

- Emotional awareness
- Emotional regulation
- Empathy
- Self-esteem
- Resilience (Santrock, 2024)

Healthy emotional development contributes to successful interpersonal communication.

E. Social Development

Social development includes learning to interact effectively with others.

Examples include:

- Attachment
- Cooperation
- Friendship
- Social communication

- Conflict resolution (Papalia & Martorell, 2021)

6. Factors Influencing Development

Human development results from the interaction between biological and environmental influences (Berk, 2023).

Biological Factors

Examples include:

- Genetics
- Brain maturation
- Prenatal health
- Nutrition
- Hormonal influences
- Medical conditions (Santrock, 2024)

Environmental Factors

Examples include:

- Family
- School
- Culture
- Language exposure
- Healthcare
- Socioeconomic status
- Peer relationships (Papalia & Martorell, 2021)

Modern developmental psychology recognizes that development results from continuous interaction between **nature and nurture** (Berk, 2023).

7. Common Developmental and Psychological Disorders

Speech-language pathologists frequently work with children affected by developmental conditions.

Disorder	Main Characteristics	Communication Impact
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Social communication deficits and restricted behaviors	Language delay, pragmatic difficulties
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	Inattention, impulsivity, hyperactivity	Reduced attention and conversational skills

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)	Persistent language difficulties	Delayed expressive and receptive language
Intellectual Disability	Reduced intellectual functioning	Delayed language and communication
Specific Learning Disorder	Reading or writing difficulties	Academic language impairment
Anxiety Disorders	Excessive fear and worry	Selective mutism, reduced participation
Depression	Persistent sadness and loss of interest	Reduced communication and social interaction

8. Importance of Child and Adolescent Psychology in Speech and Language Pathology

Knowledge of developmental psychology enables speech-language pathologists to:

- Understand normal communication development.
- Identify developmental delays.
- Differentiate developmental differences from disorders.
- Select age-appropriate assessment tools.
- Design individualized intervention plans.
- Counsel families.
- Monitor developmental progress over time (Paul et al., 2024; ASHA, 2024).

Clinical Example

A 30-month-old child produces only five spoken words.

Compared with typical developmental milestones, expressive language appears delayed (Owens, 2023). The speech-language pathologist conducts a comprehensive assessment and plans early intervention if indicated (Paul et al., 2024).

9. Essential Vocabulary

English Term	Definition
Child Psychology	Study of children's development
Adolescent Psychology	Study of psychological development during adolescence
Development	Progressive change over time
Growth	Physical increase in size
Cognition	Mental processes such as thinking and memory
Language Development	Acquisition of communication abilities
Social Development	Development of interpersonal relationships
Emotional Development	Development of emotional understanding and regulation
Attachment	Emotional bond between child and caregiver
Identity	Individual's sense of self

Self-esteem	Personal evaluation of self-worth
Resilience	Ability to adapt to adversity
Executive Function	Cognitive processes involved in planning and self-control
Developmental Disorder	Condition affecting normal development

10. Practical Activities

Activity 1 – Match the Developmental Stage

Stage	Characteristic
Infancy	_____
Early Childhood	_____
Middle Childhood	_____
Adolescence	_____

Options:

- First words
- Grammar development
- Reading and writing
- Identity formation

Activity 2 – Multiple Choice

1. During adolescence, abstract thinking develops according to:

a) Freud

b) Piaget

c) Skinner

d) Bandura

2. Which disorder primarily affects social communication?

a) Depression

b) Autism Spectrum Disorder

c) Anxiety

d) ADHD

3. Which factor is environmental?

a) Genetics

b) Hormones

c) Family environment

d) Brain maturation

Activity 3 – Fill in the Blanks

Use the following words:

- attachment
- puberty
- cognition
- vocabulary
- resilience

1. _____ is the emotional bond between a child and caregiver.
2. _____ refers to mental processes such as thinking and memory.
3. _____ is the period of biological maturation during adolescence.
4. Children rapidly increase their _____ during early childhood.
5. _____ is the ability to recover from challenges.

Activity 4 – Case Study

An 8-year-old child demonstrates limited vocabulary, difficulty following verbal instructions, poor peer relationships, and frustration during classroom activities.

Questions

1. Which developmental domains appear affected?
2. Which professionals should be involved in assessment?
3. Which communication skills require evaluation?
4. Why is knowledge of developmental psychology important in this case?

11. Summary

Child and adolescent psychology provides the scientific foundation for understanding how children and adolescents develop physically, cognitively, emotionally, socially, and linguistically. Knowledge of typical development enables speech-language pathologists to identify communication disorders, interpret developmental milestones, plan evidence-based interventions, and collaborate effectively with families and multidisciplinary teams. Integrating developmental psychology into clinical practice enhances assessment accuracy and improves therapeutic outcomes across childhood and adolescence.

12. Review Questions

1. Define child and adolescent psychology.
2. Why is child and adolescent psychology important in Speech and Language Pathology?
3. Describe the major stages of childhood development.
4. Explain the major physical changes during adolescence.
5. Name the five domains of development.
6. Distinguish between cognitive and language development.
7. Explain the interaction between biological and environmental influences.
8. Identify four developmental disorders that may affect communication.
9. How does Autism Spectrum Disorder affect communication?
10. Explain why developmental milestones are important in clinical assessment.
11. How does adolescence influence language development?
12. Why is collaboration with families important in speech-language intervention?
13. How can emotional development influence communication?
14. Describe the role of executive functioning in language learning.
15. Explain how developmental psychology supports evidence-based Speech and Language Pathology practice.