

3.1 Themes and Methods in Developmental Psychology

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 11 marks

KEY WORDS cross-sectional 横断 • cohort effect 世代效应 • sensitive period 关键期 • longitudinal 纵向
• developmental 发展

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **developmental** 发展 research design.

You must be able to:

- contrast **cross-sectional** 横断 and **longitudinal** 纵向 designs
- state what a **cohort effect** 世代效应 confounds
- describe **stability against change** and **continuity against stages**
- explain what a **critical** or **sensitive period** 关键期 is

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Two designs

A **cross-sectional** study compares different age groups at one time — fast, but the groups differ in more than age. A **longitudinal** study follows one group over years — it isolates age, but is slow and loses participants.

■ Cohort effects

People born in different decades differ in schooling, nutrition and technology as well as age. A cross-sectional age difference may therefore be a **cohort** difference, and this is the design's central weakness.

■ Two recurring questions

Stability or change: do traits persist across life? **Continuity or stages:** is development gradual, or a sequence of qualitatively different periods?

■ Critical and sensitive periods

A **critical period** is a window during which a particular input is required for normal development. A **sensitive period** is a window in which development is easiest but not exclusively possible.

2 Practice

2.1 State one advantage and one disadvantage of a longitudinal design. [2]

2.2 Explain what a cohort effect is and which design it threatens. [2]

2.3 A study finds 70-year-olds score lower on a computer task than 20-year-olds.

(a) State the design used. [1]

(b) State one alternative explanation besides ageing. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 To separate the effect of ageing from generational differences, a researcher should use a [1]

- **A** cross-sectional design
- **B** longitudinal design
- **C** case study
- **D** correlational survey

3.2 A window in which language is learned most easily but can still be learned later is a [1]

- **A** critical period
- **B** sensitive period
- **C** cohort effect
- **D** stage

3.3 A researcher must choose between following 200 children for 15 years and testing 200 children of three ages now.

(a) State one practical reason to choose the second. [1]

(b) Explain the cost of that choice. [2]

Solutions

2.1 advantage: it follows the same people, so age effects are not confounded with cohort; disadvantage: it is slow and participants drop out.

2.2 a difference caused by being born in a different era rather than by age; it threatens cross-sectional designs.

2.3 (a) cross-sectional. (b) the older group grew up without computers, so the difference may be a cohort effect.

3.1 B. following one group removes the generational confound.

3.2 B. a sensitive period makes learning easiest without making it impossible later.

3.3 (a) it delivers results now, at far lower cost and with no attrition. (b) age groups differ in generation as well as age, so any difference found cannot be attributed to ageing alone.