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## Educational Migration across Ecological System Levels: Broadening the PPCT Model to Incorporate International Students' Migration and Cross-setting Transitions

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### ABSTRACT

This article considers the implications of educational migration for the students who move. More specifically, it considers how their educational migration changes the ecological niches in which they develop following their particular developmental requirements. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model of human development, I explore how educational migration operates across multiple levels of the ecological system, from students' immediate environments - their microsystem - to their classrooms, the links between home and school and the structural inequalities that frame their educational path - the macrosystem and chronosystem. Through the case of a set of three sisters who moved from township schools in South Africa to an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School in China, I unpack how educational migration across a resource-poor and overcrowded school setting to a new setting with different affordances and constraints shapes their educational experience. I then illustrate how structural inequalities shape their educational path. In so doing, I also illustrate how the PPCT model helps to unpack the changing interactions between the ecological niches to which students move and their educational development over time. The research employs a qualitative research design. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the siblings in order that they might share their reflections on their experiences of learning, adaptation and identity formation. Interview data were then thematically organized and patterns considered in relation to the various components of the PPCT model. Through this, I explored how the affordances and constraints on their educational experience related to their microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem, and, further, how their chronosystem might have contributed to their educational experiences. The findings highlight the importance of transition out of overcrowded and resource-constrained schools with limited opportunities for pedagogical innovation to the IB setting for developing the siblings' resilience, agency, adaptability and identity.

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### 1. Introduction

Educational migration represents a particularly important setting to study, as young people move to another country to pursue education, which represents an important change to the larger environment in which their lives have thus

far unfolded. This displacement alters the setting of their development, which can in some ways disrupt but, with suitable support, also support development in a new direction. As King & Raghuram (2013) have pointed out, migration can be seen as both a disruption to development and a potential risk in novel and meaningful ways. This paper explores the educational paths of three siblings as they transition from inadequately funded schools in South Africa to an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School located in Ningbo, China.

This transformation constitutes an intriguing, albeit tragic, natural experiment in which to test the utility of indices based on Bioecological Model for explaining variation in developmental outcomes when context is shifted dramatically and abruptly torn away (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The magnitude of the investigated context difference reflects the ecological context sensitivity. The South African township school system on one hand functions in an ecosystem of systemic scarcity, consisting in run-down infrastructure and under-resourced technological and organizational challenges common among educational institutions situated within the global south (Spaull, 2013; Hayes, 2021). The Chinese IB World School on the other hand is a typical globalized, competitive school surrounded by advanced technology and driven with innovative international curricula together with abundant school resources (Resnik, 2012; Bunnell, 2019). By considering the experiences of three siblings across these two different contexts, it is possible to develop a rich depiction of the ways in which different influences (from immediate classroom-level practices [Microsystem], through national level policies [Macrosystem]) coalesce over time [Chronosystem] in the shaping of both academic participation and social-emotional growth (Tudge et al., 2009).

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The research constructs the issue of educational mobility as situating learners in radically new developmental contexts, requiring adaptation to widespread differences in resources, pedagogic approaches and cultural expectations. The ecological contrast that underlines Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to the schooling of a resource-poor South African township school to a resource-rich IB World school within China offers an educational transformation (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This model allows for consideration outside the realm of school curricula. It locates development as a nexus between the nested environmental systems from the immediate classroom level to national policies (Microsystem to Macrosystem) and through the temporal dynamics captured by the Chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

South Africa is a country with educational scarcities and system-level problems, as obvious from the quotes comparing it with how IB schools in China offer cutting-edge and technology-enhanced learning environments (Resnik, 2012; Bunnell, 2019). This environment level difference highlights how the most salient and acute changes to the development path of the siblings might happen at the level of the ecological setting.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

The use of the Bronfenbrenner's PPCT (Process-Person-Context-Time) model ensures a theoretical understanding that supersedes accounts for educational outcomes being given purely in terms of environmental features, but states that it is more so by the process of development with the focus on proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Those processes are the mechanisms that define how development unfolds. Within a school, this means that the amount and type of ordinary interaction with teachers and peers about subject matter is a more potent influence on learning than the curriculum per se. For instance, if we keep everything else constant, by providing an educational setting that promotes collaborative problem-solving and sustained high-quality teacher-student dialogue in the classroom, there should be the bettering developmental outcomes than ones where the focus is on passive-transfer of content even though both would have access to the same resources. The socially relevant difference, however, is the dynamic nature of these experiences where they conceptualized as engines of development that have a strong impact on new abilities and knowledge (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Person component of PPCT model focuses on the various types of people who mediate between proximal processes and contexts in relation to child development (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). These include demand factors (e.g., age, sex, skin colour), resource factors (e.g., skills, experience, intelligence) and force factors, for instance several components of the personality typology: temperament, motivation/ drive or persistence). Importantly, here is where we need to understand that people are not passive recipients of the force in their environment; rather, it is something about them – their dexterity or temperamental and current skillset – that actively chooses, modulates and organises these particular constellations of interactions they get swept up into.

The fact that individuals who are reared in the same home, attend the same school and experience essentially the same school environments (in so far as they interact with their peers) can grow up to resemble each other only modestly on measures of academic achievement and socio-emotional functioning is a striking empirical example of why you need Person component of PPCT model as well as an environment (Tudge et al., 2009). The comparative educational science view is a must because it means analyzing how other systems must react and do in conjunction or evolvment with those individualities. With the inclusion of factors such as context and time (Chronosystem), it becomes possible to understand education reform implementation in systemic and comparable manner across cultures (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The context here is the nested environmental settings—microsystem (classroom, family), mesosystem (relationships between microsystems), exosystem (community resources) and macrosystems (cultural values, political system)—that either enable or mitigate against those proximal processes. Within a comparative case design, similarity in resource exploitation and pedagogic aspiration across these imbricated systems (from national policy down to the level of classroom practice) might be analysed for evidence of systemic stability or failure (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The Chronosystem also with development and moving across time (e.g., adolescence), complete social historical changes and contributes an important notion of time.

Examining the extent of lag or erosion in adaptation at various levels of a system across the life span with respect to particular socio-historical settings is necessary if we are to infer whether an educational system is finely tuned to learners' everchanging developmental equipment, and even their changing ambient surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Implicit in the proposed qualitative case study design that juxtaposes two educational systems by systemic indicators of consistency, coherence is the PPCT emphasis on systemic analysis and temporal boundness of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). I suggest that focusing on mediators such as coherence in resource utilization and pedagogical ambition shows us how differences at Macrosystem (agency, societal values) and Ecosystem levels (financial resources) trickle down to affect the quality of proximal processes within the microsystem classroom. Ultimately, the end game is to get past documenting differences in educational inputs as a function of societal systems and explain why and how these ontological markers are translated into diverse developmental trajectories (of adaptation) over salient person times for individual children during development over key junctures in development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This is one powerful way to see what systemic conditions maximize the likelihood of high-quality, sustained, reciprocal interactions.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This is a qualitative case study research design of how structural inequalities affect access to education within two contrasting schooling contexts, the South African public education system and the International Baccalaureate (IB) system in China. The study is fundamentally grounded within Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, and the dynamic interaction of the individual features, lived experience and the educational environment over time. Case studies typically are characterised by thorough methodology from the research questions that confirm or reject opposing hypothetical perspectives. Both the how and what comprise the two central questions and the case study thoroughly examined all available evidence and previous theory (Yazan, 2015). There is an array of questions at stake in addressing the problem in this case study: How do the most drastic changes to setting at the level of the ecological system, with regards to education, influence the pathways of learning and the growth of students in early adolescence and beyond? How do setting transitions at earlier or later stages of development shape students' acculturation and growth profiles? How does the timing or age at transition influence the accumulation of positive experiences and the subsequent acculturation pattern and life growth path? How does the sibling as a supportive link with the contextual 'old self' help or inhibit the acculturation of the 'new self'? These questions allow for the examining of the possibilities and limitations of the 'creation of a new self' of international students and the growth-fostering and/or growth-inhibiting systems in their total developmental setting. This study does not aim to celebrate the superiority of the IB system but, rather, to ask: what roles do inequality and the support system play at the crossroads of growth paths, through the lens of international students who have experienced different educational cultures?

### **3.2 Sampling method**

It is worth emphasizing that the sample size of this study is limited and the sampling strategy is purposive and convenient. However, because participants have all experienced unique cross-setting transitions and chronic exposure to multiple educational cultures during their whole formative period, this study is well-suited to an exploratory and in-depth analysis. I do not wish that this limited sample to be representative of wider student populations in either context. Yet, this study seeks rich, contextual insights into how structural conditions may shape the lives and trajectories of individuals (Makwana et.al., 2023). Consequently, the findings are analytical and interpretive, not generalizable.

The participants are from similar backgrounds (family, exposure, mobility). As data anchors, their experiences offer a comparative perspective through varied socio-educational contexts, facilitating an investigation of how access to resources, institutional systems, and ways of learning influence development over time.

### **3.3 Biographical profiling of participants in terms of the research framework**

The three participants provide different pathways in terms of development of transnational education, where they act as a comparative analysis from which proximal, meso-, macro- and chronosystemic processes will be able to be understood in the context of school-based education. This helps explain why their voices are valuable as an anchor to data.

#### **(1<sup>st</sup> Participant - Pseudonym: A)**

Participant A is a third-year medical student who left South Africa to come to China at 15. Her mobility signals a point in late adolescence at which previously acquired dispositions were reconditioned in a new educational and cultural setting. Her participation in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme provides a case study and example for thinking about the way proximal dynamics are realised over late-entrant in a difficult academically-driven, high-inquiry classroom. In a mesosystem context, she may be negotiating the home–school relationship at a time of heightened academic expectations and a need for adjustment. Furthermore, her educational pathway into medicine is a valuable model for appreciating the intersection between macrosystemic influences, specifically: educational globalisation and career aspirations, and chronosystemic timing (i.e. migration at a time when many consider their life years as crucial).

#### **(2<sup>nd</sup> Participant - Pseudonym: B)**

Participant B is attending an IB international school in China at her last year of school. At 10 she had just migrated — a time of mid-childhood, allowing for a longer time of transition to the Chinese international school environment. As a final DP 2 student pursuing the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, her current enrolment gives her perspective on how proximal classroom practices are learned and assimilated over time within the same structure of pedagogy. By being more familiar, this perspective supports a stronger examination of mesosystemic interaction across the different domains, and above all the development of and continuity of long-term home–school relationships in cultural contexts. Coincidentally, she is avid to pursue medicine too. As such her burgeoning fascination with medicine also serves to show the connectedness of macrosystemic expectations—such as cultural, familial, educational discourses—and chronosystemic continuity, with her developmental trajectory framed through an extensive course of international curriculum.

#### **(3<sup>rd</sup> Participant - Pseudonym: C)**

Due to Participant C's migration from South Africa to China at the age of 2 years old she is considered to be a *bona fide* international student, with only minimal schooling experience in South Africa. She now studies the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme and will proceed to the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. This is considered an early-childhood immersion experience, based on her character profile, her case is suitable for examining the normalisation of proximal processes in inquiry-driven classroom contexts from early years. At the mesosystem level, she is also an embodiment of established home–school alignment patterns across a stable transnational context. Importantly, her case also highlights macrosystemic factors such as the globalised educational ideologies prompted by IB programmes and chronosystemic factors including early life migration and ongoing exposure to a single educational model.

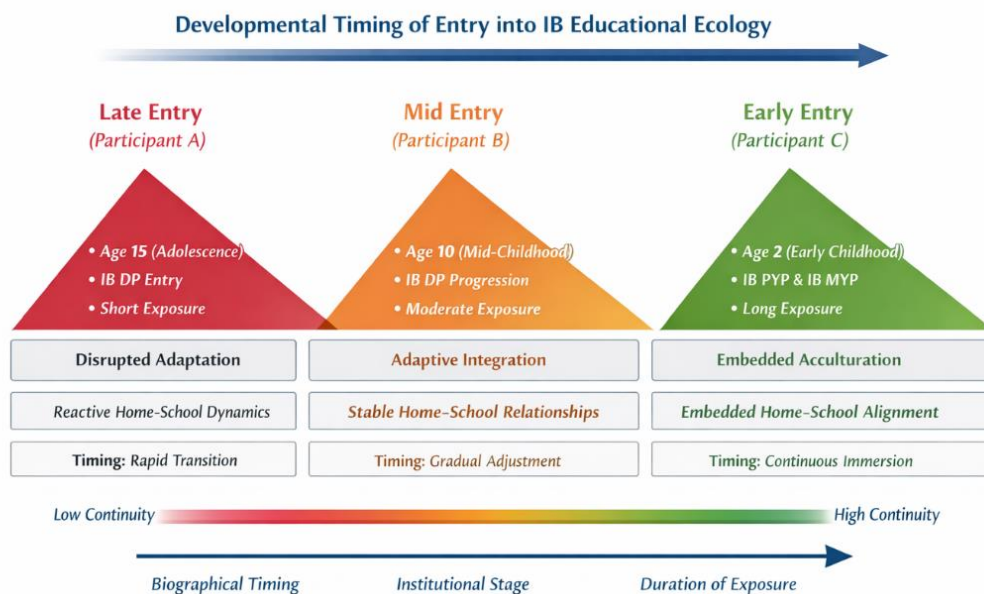
### **3.4 Analytic variable derived from the biographies:**

The variable captures the following three interrelated dimensions:

- i. Age of migration (Biographical timing)
- ii. The age at entry stage of schooling in the IB (Institutional timing)
- iii. Time period of exposure to IB education (developmental accumulation)

The integration of the three dimensions annotated above are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and the chronosystem in particular (i.e. timing) and the way it conditions all other systems of interactions. The participants sit along a continuum of developmental timing of entry to an IB educational ecology. All three siblings reside within the IB system, however I am cautious not to over-attribute outcomes to IB instead, instead I highlight transition shock by comparing degrees of immersion, not IB vs non-IB. Figure 1.1 below outline the summary of the analytic variable in the visual representation as follows:

**Figure 1: Late Entry (A) → Mid Entry (B) → Early Entry (C).**



**Source:** Own construction

The “IB Educational Ecology” diagram depicted in **Figure 1** above breaks down into three different paths, each one highlighting how the timing of one student versus another entering the classroom largely determines the trajectory of their integration in society and academia. The earlier the arrival a child takes on the system, the more embedding of the IB philosophy into their development the theory posits.

### **Early Entry (Participant C)**

As early as two years of age learners are immersed in the Primary and Middle Years Programs. This long-term exposure leads to a pattern of Embedded Acculturation, with the school values and home environment high continuities, and that there is a high level of natural alignment.

### **Mid Entry pathway (Participant B)**

This represents a transitional period where the student enters into mid-childhood, at the age of ten. This means that the adjustment process is smoother but not as late-stage and this is where Adaptive Integration can take place. Though these students experience stable connections between their home and how the IB expects them to behave in the

institution, their linkage to the 'ecology' is represented as an operational rather than an enduring trajectory rather than lifelong acculturation. They are of a moderate exposure which mediates the requirement to adapt with the rigors of the Diploma Programme.

### **Late Entry profile (Participant A)**

This one shows the difficulty associated with the entry into the system in adolescence at age 15. The experience of the student is characterized by disrupted adaptation since she gets directly involved in the intensive Diploma Programme with minimum exposure. The transition happens quickly and home-schools dynamics are frequently reactive, with the student and parents perpetually trying to keep up with the system's demands. This model is characterized by low continuity, indicating the biographical timing of adolescence creates an obstacle in the process of becoming a full member of the IB educational ecosystem.

### **Method used to collect data**

Data was gathered via semi-structured interviews (See the questions and the responses attached as **Appendix A**). The six interview questions were carefully worded in such a way that invited the participants to think critically about their learning trajectories, processes of adaptation, and changing identity development over time. As a result, the interview protocol became a focused tool for reflecting on and examining how the experiences changed over time and across settings/development, not just an exercise in reflexivity (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). Interviews were conducted by a neutral third-party interviewer, who did not have any personal or professional contact or relationship with the participants, to minimise bias resulting from the researcher having a dual role as both a parent and investigator. No consent was sought to conduct interviews because of father – children relationship between the researcher minor participants. The interview protocol involved open-ended, non-leading questions that aimed to elicit participants' true reflections about their educational experiences in both contexts (i.e. South Africa and China). This technique was designed to minimize social desirability bias, allowing room for independent expression.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed through thematic analysis using the four components of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model:

- i. Process: Patterns of interaction and learning experiences
- ii. Person: Individual dispositions, motivations, and responses
- iii. Context: Educational environments and structural conditions
- iv. Time: Transitions and longitudinal development

Themes were identified inductively and then interpreted through the lens of PPCT to explore how structural inequalities shape educational pathways. Such actions were put in place to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

## **4. Interpretations derived from the themes**

### **Theme 1: Microsystemic Disruption and Reconstitution**

#### **(Context + Process interaction)**

Data garnered from the interview clearly shows two fundamentally different microsystems:

Township schools → overcrowded, teacher-centred, resource-deprived

IB classrooms → inquiry-driven, dialogic, resource-rich

The township environment didn't just limit achievement—it structurally suppressed agency. This is not just contrast—it is a structural shift in learning affordances.

#### **Evidence from data:**

“Shared textbooks... no laboratory exposure” (**B**)

“Teachers ask us questions... we work in groups” (**A**)

### **Theme 2: Transformation of Proximal Processes**

I consider this to be the engine of development in PPCT. The siblings' transition as shown in **Figure 2** below, is not merely contextual relocation but a reconfiguration of developmental systems, where shifts in proximal processes—enabled by macrosystemic privilege and mediated through mesosystemic alignment over time—produce measurable gains in agency, resilience, adaptability and identity.

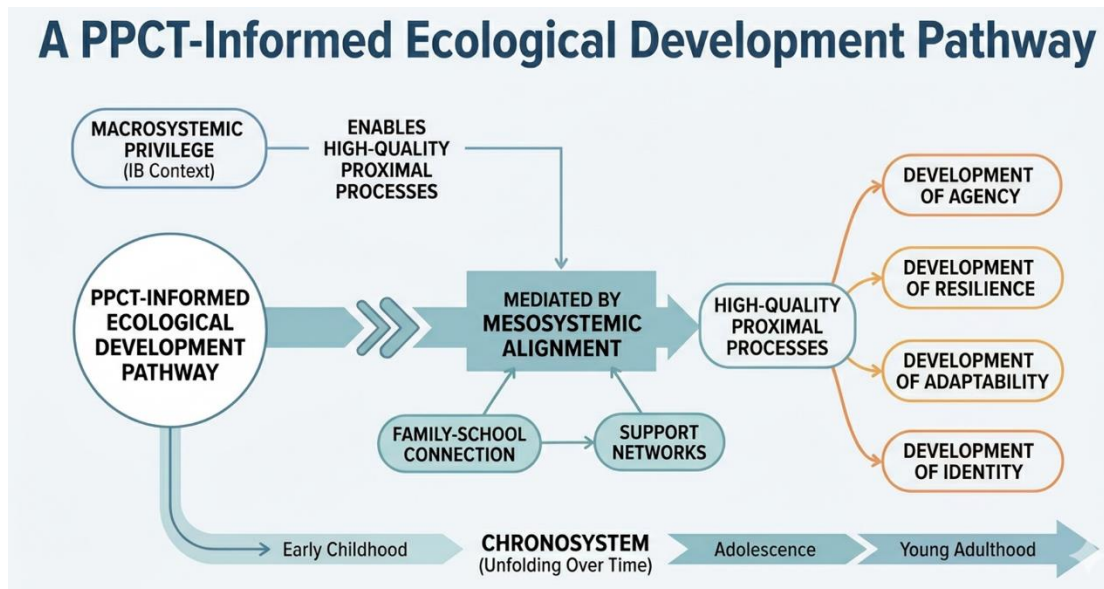
These are high-quality proximal processes, which Bronfenbrenner identifies as the primary drivers of development.

**Evidence from data:**

“Engage in discussions... conduct research... reflect” (A)

“Manage stress and workload...” (B)

**Figure 2: Ecological Development Pathway**



**Source:** <https://gemini.google.com/app>

This is a high-quality “proximal” process, one of development’s main agents, which according to Bronfenbrenner (1999), is the basis for human development.

**Theme 3: Mesosystemic coherence as a stabilising force.**

Evidence indicates the alignment among microsystems lessens the developmental friction in transition.

**Evidence from data:**

“Clear and open communication between home and school” (A)

“Felt aligned... less weight to the transition” (B)

“I feel safe and confident here” (C)

**Theme 4: Macrosystemic inequality as a structural driver.**

The successes that come from the siblings’ experience are not just based on merit; they are underpinned by a structurally privileged education system.

Contrast: South Africa township system → systemic deprivation

IB system → global capital (resources, curriculum, pathways)

**Evidence from data:** “Inequality... determines life’s success” (A)

**Theme 5: Chronosystemic Development – Identity over time.**

This is where the longitudinal strength lies. Each sibling represents a different temporal position within the study:

*Participant A* → full transition + tertiary outcome

*Participant B* → mid-transition (aspirational phase)

*Daughter 3* → early immersion (normalized IB identity)

This is an effective model of not only how adaptation happens cumulatively but also over long stretches of time.

**Evidence from data:**

“Voice for others” (B)

“Systems affect individuals” (A)

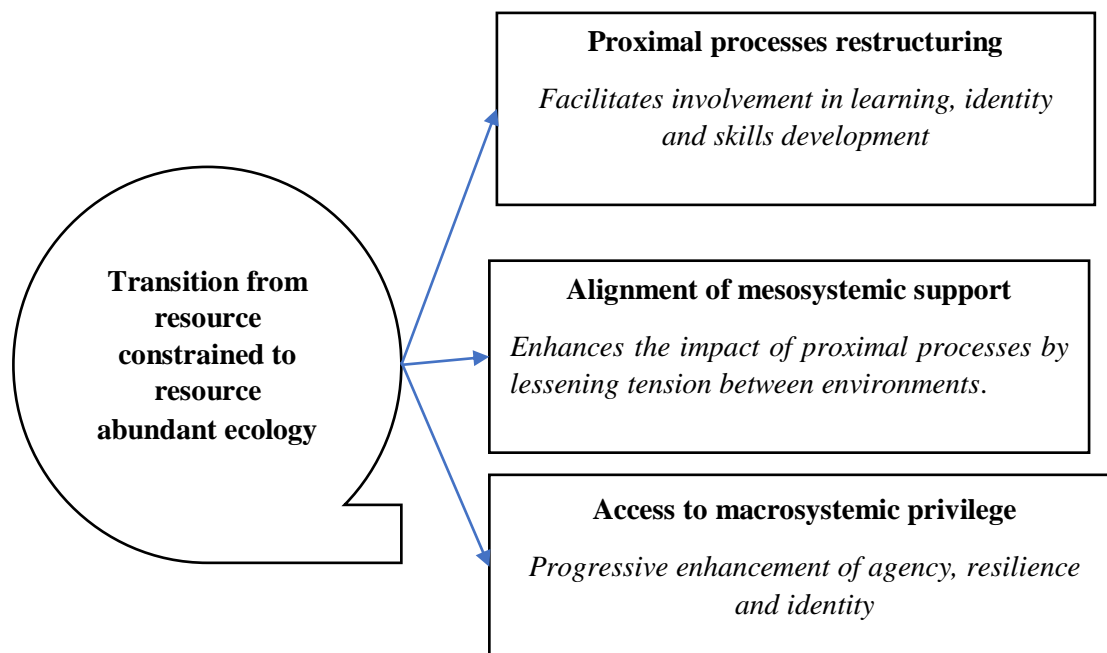
**5. Overview of the findings**

Ecological transition serves as a driver of developmental reconfiguration. With this, the transition from a resource-constrained to a resource-abundant ecology plays a crucial role as a turning-point in rearranging development paths on different ecological scales. Such change does more than simply amplifying access to the materials/resources or institutions, it sets off a domino effect of mutually-inflated changes across the PPCT system.

At the **process** level, proximal processes are restructured qualitatively. In resource-constrained environments, such interactions will be survival oriented, routine based and limited in cognitive and social complexity. After changing hands, these processes become more enduring, reciprocal and cognitively heavy thereby facilitating greater involvement in learning, identity development or the ability to develop skills. Most importantly, it is not just resources themselves that matter but the regularity, intensity and complexity of those interactions that lead to developmental outcomes.

In a **mesosystem**, the coherence and interdependence among critical contexts (e.g., home and school) become more consistent and enhanced. In constrained ecologies the mesosystemic relations are fragmented or compensatory. Post-transition, higher levels of institutional capacity and parental engagement enable stronger communication, coordinated expectations, and support networks. This alignment enhances the impact of proximal processes by lessening tension between environments.

On a **macrosystem** plane, privilege (in the form of institutional norms, cultural capital, and systemic opportunities) scales dramatically. But this access is not automatic or equally distributed; rather, it is mediated through the ability of the individual to identify, navigate, and appropriate these structures. The principle of macrosystemic privilege is therefore an enabler and a filter. These layered changes build over time (**chronosystem**) to create a trajectory of progressive empowerment, resilience, and adaptive identity building. It is however critical to note that the process is not linear. Figure 3, below summarises the findings:

**Figure 3: Summary of the findings**

**Source:** Own construction

## 6. Limitations and directions for future research

While this study promotes a systems-level view of developmental change in the context of the PPCT framework, it also has several limitations to its approach. Initially, we are unable to establish determinate causal directionality. Such a cascading process between ecological transition and developmental outcomes is only speculative: The resulting cascade could well correspond to selection effects or pre-existing individual differences. This limitation is compounded by the fact that the sample size was relatively small, which restricts generalizability and makes it difficult to rigorously examine differential conversion mechanisms across cases. Second, resource abundance is treated holistically, which may obscure the separate and interacting impacts of material, institutional, and cultural resources. Third, person-level moderators like identity, agency, and resilience are at the centre but not disaggregated enough to allow us to accurately analyse their empirical relationship. Lastly, the study is contextually bounded and temporally constrained, limiting insight into broader applicability and longitudinal dynamics. Longitudinal, multi-contextual and analytically disaggregated designs should be employed in future research to explore and elaborate the proposed mechanisms.

## 7. Conclusion

This study situates ecological transition from resource constraint to relative abundance as a catalytic condition that recasts developmental trajectories in the balance of process, person, context, and time (PPCT). The analysis avoids conceptualizing the transformation of these resource-led pathways as determinants of growth outcomes by illustrating that developmental change is shaped by reordering proximal processes, moderated by individual dispositions, and contingent on the degree of mesosystemic alignment and macrosystemic accessibility. The findings emphasize that access is not enough; it is the ability of individuals to convert opportunity into sustained, meaningful participation within evolving ecological circumstances. Simultaneously, the model foregrounds development as non-linear and uneven, and subject to feedback loops, friction, and periods of disequilibrium. By doing so, the study brings forward a theoretically generative model that advances the PPCT scholarship through the integration of systems thinking and context-sensitive conceptions of transition, and thereby opens up avenues for a more robust, longitudinal and comparative validation.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Question 1: *Early Schooling Experience (Context & Time)*.

**Question:** Do you remember learning in your township school in South Africa, and what was it like for you when you were first accepted to an IB World School in China?

**Participant A:** (22, Medical Student): My township school was overcrowded, overly teacher-driven and we were all concerned mainly with passing tests. We had extremely limited textbooks to work with and we were sometimes forced to share one textbook amongst three of us. There was virtually no exposure to laboratory and library environments, which constrained our understanding of science theories from a conceptual perspective. The school in China where me and my family moved to was an IB school. The transfer from high expectations to higher student-centred learning was a struggle, but after my high school years, everything changed. This gradual change shifted the way I perceived learning in general and gave me the confidence to question and think critically over time.

**Participant B:** (18, DP Student): In South Africa, the learning experience was a bit boring and one-dimensional as performance was often evaluated by rote learning instead of being understood. When I walked into the IB school, I

found myself lacking in confidence, due to the fact that everyone except me, looked better-equipped and fluent at their academics than anyone else. But the nature of the inquiry-based environment slowly allowed me to find my voice and accept that I now intend to pursue competitive careers such as medicine, eh... this is my intention next year. I discovered that challenge was a part of growth rather than a failure.

**Participant C:** (12, Year 6 Student): I don't know much of the years school in South Africa was like, but I think we didn't use technology or perform a lot of projects. In my school now in China, we use iPads and laptops a lot, we do projects, and we talk a lot with our teacher while we are in class. It makes learning fun, and helps me understand math better, because I can present my ideas a bit differently. It makes me more excited to go to school again every day.

**Theme:** Microsystemic contrast; Chronosystemic transition

**Interview Question 2:** *Learning Processes & Teaching Approaches (Process)*

**Question:** How did teaching methods and classroom interactions change for you after moving to an IB school, and how did this affect the way you learned?

**Participant A:** The IB approach required active participation and personal responsibility for learning. I learned to engage in class discussions, conduct research, and reflect on my understanding rather than just memorizing and regurgitating content. These skills were essential when I entered medical school during my first year. I discovered that independent learning and problem-solving are crucial at tertiary level. The IB experience prepared me for the rigour and pace of tertiary education.

**Participant B:** The emphasis on ATL skills such as research, communication, and self-management helped me academically and emotionally. Teachers encouraged us to collaborate and explain our thinking, which improved my understanding of complex concepts. I now feel prepared for university-level learning, especially in science subjects. I have also learned how to manage stress and workload more effectively.

**Participant C:** Teachers ask us questions instead of giving answers, which makes us think more. We work in groups and explain our thinking to others. This helps me feel confident and not afraid to make mistakes. I like that my ideas are valued in class.

**Theme:** *Proximal processes*

**Question 3:** Personal Agency & Identity. **Question:** How did switching from a township school in South Africa to an international school in China change the way you viewed yourself as a learner and as a person?

**Participant A:** At first, I just felt less worthy, and I was just not in that educational ecosystem. The 10 IB learner profile gradually enabled me to identify myself as competent, thoughtful, and strong. This change in identity was a big part of deciding to be a doctor once I finish IBDP.

**Participant B:** The move showed me that my background does not determine my future. Being in an international environment exposed me to different perspectives and raised standards. I gained a bit of self-esteem, and confidence in myself; was ambitious in my sights. Now I see myself as a skilled global learner.

**Participant C:** I consider me a student in a global class who is exposed to children from various countries, although there are only a few here as most are Chinese. And I like to explore new cultures and share my own experiences. I am proud to be able to communicate my ideas and learn Chinese as well. It makes me feel like I can find success anywhere.

**Theme:** *Mesosystemic alignment; Support structures*

**Question 4:** How did your family, teachers and the school work together to support your learning with this transition?

**Participant A:** My parents, being both teachers at my previous school, played a major part, instilling discipline, persistence, and high standards in me. The educators were friendly and accommodating, especially when I struggled

with my studies in the first few years. Clear and active communication between home and school meant that I was challenged through this method of identification, but it also helped to solve problems early on. This network kept giving me focus and strength.

**Participant B:** There was good, even regular, communication between home and school. Teachers knew who I was and offered academic scaffolding where necessary. Learning at home became second nature, and my parents instilled balance between academics and wellbeing. It lent less weight to the transition, because it felt aligned.

**Participant C:** My parents help me with projects and math homework, and my teachers talk to them on a regular basis through WeChat. At home as well as school, I feel supported. When I have difficulty in learning new stuff like in Chinese, there is always someone to care for me. I feel safe, and confident here.

**Theme:** *Macrosystemic inequality; Structural advantage*

**Question 5:** Looking back, how do you think the differences between the education systems in South Africa and the IB system in China affected your opportunities?

**Participant A:** Without the IB system, I doubt I would have developed the academic skills required for the rigours at the medical school. Laboratory access with qualified and skilled lab technicians, critical thinking, and global curricula were critical to my achievement. The inequality between the systems here in China and back home in South Africa is real. It determines life's success. Educational opportunities between here and home are not evenly distributed.

**Participant B:** The IB system provided opportunities that otherwise would have been hard to come by back home in South Africa. It introduced me to world standards, competitive university routes, and jobs. I learned about the impact of privilege and access on results. This realization gives me the desire to work harder and return to my country one day and make a difference.

**Participant C:** I am grateful and also aware that other children are not as lucky to study in an international school. I wish that everyone had good schools.

**Theme:** *Chronosystemic development; Aspirations and responsibility*

**Question 6:** How has your own education over time had an impact on your desires to work towards your goals and how does that help shape your responsibility to others?

**Participant A:** I'm motivated by my journey to serve underserved communities in the future. I am eager to use this training in medicine to counter inequality in health and education. My high school experiences both back home and here in China have shown me how systems affect individuals. This consciousness is informing my professional and ethical aims for the future.

**Participant B:** There is a sense of responsibility to be successful for me and to be a voice for others who are from disadvantaged backgrounds like where I come from in South Africa. I have learned resilience and perseverance on my journey. I aspire to become a doctor and, one day, to work on increasing accessibility to health care.

**Participant C:** Education I receive here makes me; I know that my cousins back in South Africa are not receiving the same. My goal is to be a good example to them by achieving more.