

Methods Of Psychology

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- Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Behaviour and mental processes are broad terms that encompass many different issues and subheadings. The range of phenomena psychology studies are spread over several levels such as individual, groups and organizational. Because psychology studies all the behaviours and mental processes related to humans and animals, its subject matter is vast and varied.
- To study these different processes a large varieties of data are required. Data are information that relate to the individual's covert or overt behavior.
- Psychologists need diverse methods to collect the variety information as no single method is appropriate for all types of psychological research processes/purposes.

- Psychologists choose one or more methods for their study depending upon the nature of study and types of data required/involved.
- Examples of these methods are Observation, Experiment, Correlation, Survey, Psychological testing and Case study.

OBSERVATION METHOD

Observation is one of the methods used for collecting research data. It involves watching a participant and recording relevant behavior for later which is mainly concerned with describing behavior. This method is deliberate and powerful.

Albert Bandura, who proposed social learning theory, can be credited for first having noted observational learning. In his famous Bobo doll experiment he used this observation method to record the behavior shown by participants and later make inferences from those recorded behaviours.

Observation is a powerful means if it is used systematically as if we observe a person or event for some time we can learn a great deal about the person or the event. A scientific observation differs from day to day observation in the sense that it is systematic and it follows predetermined sequence of steps.

STEPS OF OBSERVATION

01. SELECTION- first step is to select a particular aspect of behavior. Psychologists do not observe all the behavior that they come across. Rather, they select a particular behaviour for observation.
02. RECORDING- in scientific observation proper arrangement is made to keep an account about the observed aspect in writing or some other permanent form. A researcher can record the selected behaviour by using different means like taking notes, photographs; video recording etc.
03. ANALYSIS OF DATA- after the observations have been made, the psychologist analyses the information by using various means of analysis to put it into organized form.
04. INTERPRETATION- interpretation means to give meaning to the data by which new knowledge can be created or added to previous knowledge.

TYPES OF OBSERVATION

Observation can be classified in to four major types:

01. NATURALISTIC OBSERVATION

This technique involves studying the spontaneous behaviour of participants in natural surroundings. When observations are done in a natural setting or real life settings; it is called natural observation. In this case the observer makes no effort to control or manipulate the situation for making an observation. This type of observation is conducted in schools, hospitals, jail etc. For ex. if

we need to study life and culture of a tribe living in Andaman, we can do it only by visiting their native place and by simply recording what we see.

Naturalistic observation is mostly used as a pilot study. It is often used to generate new ideas, because it gives the researcher the opportunity to study the total situation.

02. CONTROLLED OBSERVATION

Controlled observations are generally conducted into psychological laboratories and these are often structured. Here the researcher decides where the observation will take place, at what time, in what circumstances and uses a standardized procedure.

03. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

In this method, the observer joins the group and tries to become a part of it. He takes some time to establish a rapport with the group so that they start accepting him/her as one of the group members. Here the observer is personally involved in group activities and shares their feelings and prejudices. Because he participates in group activity he gets better insight into the behaviour of target group.

04. NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Here the observer does not become a part of the group so he observes from a distance. The major danger in this type of set up is that the very fact that someone (an outsider) is sitting and observing may bring a change in the behaviour of the target group.

ADVANTAGES OF OBSERVATION METHOD:

- ❖ Biggest advantage of this method is that it allows the researcher to study people and their behaviour in natural set up.
- ❖ Observation method allows to study a whole situation, so it helps in generating new ideas for research.
- ❖ It is the simplest method of data collection. It does not require much technical knowledge. It is easier in comparison to other methods and a little training can make a person qualified.
- ❖ Observation method is often used to generate hypothesis. By observing a phenomenon, the researcher gets acquainted with the whole situation. It helps him in formulating new hypothesis.
- ❖ In other methods like interview, questionnaire etc. the researcher depends on the responses made by participants so he gets secondary data. He does not have means to verify the accuracy of this data. But in observation he can directly check the accuracy from the observed. So these data are more reliable.
- ❖ There are many situations where the researcher has observation method as only option. For ex studying infants or animals.

DISADVANTAGES OF OBSERVATION METHOD

- ❖ It is labour intensive and time consuming
- ❖ It is susceptible to the observer's bias. Observation is often influenced by observer's values and beliefs about the person or the event. Because of his biases, an observer may interpret things in a different way than what the participants actually mean.
- ❖ Results obtained by using this method may lack validity because participants may act differently when they know that they are being watched.
- ❖ Lack of control over extraneous variables make this method less reliable. Also this makes it difficult for another researcher to repeat the study in exactly the same way.
- ❖ Lack of control makes it difficult to establish cause-effect relationship between variables.
- ❖ It needs a highly trained researcher to be able to recognize aspects of a situation that are psychologically significant and worth further attention.