

# Observation Method

**Dr Archana Shukla,**

**MA, Ph D**

Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology

University of Lucknow

Lucknow

*Disclaimer: This content is solely for the purpose of e-learning by students and any commercial use is not permitted. The author does not claim originality of the content and it is based on the following references*

## Observation Method

### Objective:

One of the basic and pioneer methods in Psychology this techniques is widely used and appreciated across the globe.It emerges as one of the most powerful methods in Psychology.

### Learning outcome:

When to use this technique? How to use ?What would be the benefits of his robust technique are addressed in this content

### Observational Method

Observation is a very powerful tool of psychological enquiry. It is an effective method of describing behaviour. In our daily life, we remain busy with observing numerous things throughout the day. Many times, we do not take notice of what we are seeing or what we have seen. We see but we do not observe. We remain aware of only a few things that we see daily. Have you experienced such a thing? You may also have experienced that if you carefully observe a person or event for some time, you come to know many interesting things about the person or the event. A scientific observation differs from day-to-day observation in many respects. These are :

**(a) Selection :** Psychologists do not observe all the behaviour that they encounter. Rather, they select a particular behaviour for observation. For example, you may be interested to know how children studying in Class XI spend their time in school. Two things are possible at this stage. As a researcher, you might think that you have a fairly good idea about what happens in school. You might prepare a list of activities and go to the school with a view to finding out their occurrences. Alternatively, you might think that you do not know what happens in the school and, by your observation you would like to discover it.

**(b) Recording :** While observing, a researcher records the selected behaviour using different means, such as marking tallies for the already identified behaviour whenever they occur, taking notes describing each activity in greater detail using short hand or symbols, photographs, video recording, etc.

**(c) Analysis of Data :** After the observations have been made, psychologists analyse whatever they have recorded with a view to derive some meaning out of it.

It is important to know that making good observations is a skill. A good observer knows what s/he is looking for, whom s/he wants to observe, when and where the observation

needs to be made, in what form the observation will be recorded, and what methods will be used to analyse the observed behaviour.

## Types of Observation

Observation can be of the following types :

**(a) Naturalistic vs Controlled Observation** : When observations are done in a natural or real-life settings (in the above example, it was a school in which observation was made), it is called naturalistic 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 hospitals, homes, schools, day care centers, etc. However, many a times you might need to control certain factors that determine behaviour as they are not the focus of your study. For this reason, many of the studies in psychology are conducted in the laboratory. For example, if you read Box 2.1, you will come to know that smoke could only be introduced in a controlled laboratory situation. This type of observation, called Controlled Laboratory Observation, actually, is obtained in laboratory experiments.

**(b) Non-Participant vs Participant Observation** : Observation can be done in two ways. One, you may decide to observe the person or event from a distance. Two, the observer may become part of the group being observed. In the first case, the person being observed may not be aware that s/he is being observed. For example, you want to observe the pattern of interaction between teachers and students in a particular class. There are many ways of achieving this goal. You can install a video camera to record the classroom activities, which you can see later and analyse. Alternatively, you may decide to sit in a corner of the class without interfering or participating in their everyday activities. This type of observation is called non-participant observation.

The danger in this type of setup is that the very fact that someone (an outsider) is sitting and observing may bring a change in the behaviour of students and the teacher. In participant observation, the observer becomes a part of the school or the group of people being observed. In participant observation, the observer takes some time to establish a rapport with the group so that they start accepting her/him as one of the group members. However, the degree of involvement of the observer with the group being observed would vary depending upon the focus of the study.

The advantage of the observation method is that it enables the researcher to study people and their behaviour in a naturalistic situation, as it occurs. However, the observation method is labour intensive, time consuming, and is susceptible to the observer's bias. Our observation is influenced by our values and beliefs about the person or the event. You are familiar with the popular saying: "We see things as we are and not as things are". Because of our biases we may interpret things in a different way than what the participants may actually mean. Therefore, the observer should record the behaviour as it happens and should not interpret the behaviour at the time of observation itself.

## **Summary:**

Details of the method have been addressed in detail giving an overview of Observation method its types etc. Student need to develop a clear understanding of this powerful technique

## **References**

Singh, A.K. (2000). Uchchar Samanya Manovigyan New Delhi: Motilal Banaras

Baron, R.A. (1995). Psychology: The essential science. New York: Allyn & Bacon

Morgan, C.T., King, R.A. Weisz, J.R., Schopler, J. (2001). Introduction to Psychology, Tata McGraw and Hill.

McGeehan. (1990), Experimental Psychology (Indian edition). Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.