

Social Psychology

Paper V

B.A. III

Define Observation Method and state its Merits and Demerits.

Watson, a psychologist of behaviourist thought, is considered to be the father of observation method.

Observation is a process of 'seeing' the things or events with naked eye with or without the use of any device to unravel the complexity of any phenomena to satisfy the demands of an empirical question.

Observation is way of gathering data by watching behaviour, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural settings. Observations can be overt/controlled (where the researchers identify themselves as researchers and explain the purpose of their observations) or covert/naturalistic (where the researchers do not identify themselves and either mix in with the subjects undetected or observe from a distance).

Observation can also be either direct or indirect. Direct Observation is when you watch interactions, processes, or behaviours as they occur. For example, observing a teacher teaching a lesson from a Psychology curriculum to determine whether they are delivering it with fidelity. Indirect Observation is when you watch the results of interactions, processes, or behaviours. For example, observing the amount of plate waste left by students in a school cafeteria to determine whether a new food is acceptable to them.

Merits of Observation Method

- 1) Observation allows the researcher to study people in their natural setting/s without their behaviour being influenced by the presence of a researcher.
- 2) One of the major characteristics of observation method is that it is objective and impersonal in character.
- 3) Some methods only allows for the study of one individual at a time. Observation enables the research to study groups of people together, that is, it allows for the study of interaction between the members of a group.
- 4) An interview, for instance, only show a person's views at one time. Observation involves the study of groups or situations over time, thus, revealing changes.
- 5) The study of behaviour is done on the basis of perception and not on inference that is why it has greater reliability.
- 6) Does not rely on people's willingness or ability to provide information.

- 7) Any kind of behaviour can be studied by observation method including behaviour of young, old, dumb and illiterate etc. Due to the wide range of application, it has greater utility.

Demerits of Observation Method

- 1) Does not increase your understanding of why people behave as they do. It does not explain about cause-effect relationship because of uncontrolled conditions.
- 2) Susceptible to observer bias and observer inference. The effect of observer's attitude, prejudice, needs and aspirations can put impact upon the study.
- 3) It includes a wide range of behaviour but still some behaviour cannot be studied by this method as for instance, the study of husband-wife relationship.
- 4) Sometimes observer's low attention and lack of interest can result in unnatural behaviour.

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