

Types of Observation

(a) Naturalistic vs Controlled Observations:

When observations are done in a natural or real-life settings (eg. it was a school in which observation was made) it is called naturalistic observation.

In this case the observer no effort to control or manipulate the situation for making an observation. This type of observation is conducted in hospitals, homes, school, 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.

(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 she/he is being observed. For eg., you want to observe the pattern of interaction between teachers and students in a particular class. There are many ways of achieving this goal. We can install a video camera to record the classroom activities, which we 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 set-up is that the very fact someone (an outsider) is sitting and observing may bring a change in the behaviour of students and the teacher.

In the 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 a 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.