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PSYCHOLOGY

PAPER No. : PSY_P3:TITLE: Qualitative Methods

MODULE No. : M15:TITLE: Observation Method (Part-1)

1. Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you shall be able to

- Know about the technique of observation and its salience in psychological research, distinguish between observation and allied methods and understand the basic tenets and characteristics of this method.
- Learn about the technique of observation, the research questions appropriate to be studied by this technique, the ways of conducting research with the application of this technique and the ways collecting the data required through checklists and other means.
- Identify the fine differences between observation as a technique in research and observation as an overall research design and between different approaches to this technique.
- Evaluate each different approach to this method, including the different styles of involvement of the researcher in the setting, the different ethics involved in the method and the method of observation as a whole.
- Analyse the different types of observation, the fine details and differences in relation to other techniques and what kind of different data recording methods would suit the research question at hand.

2. Introduction to Observation Research

The term observation derives from Latin, meaning to watch, to attend to, Dictionary definitions (e.g. Oxford English Dictionary, 1989) tend to stress that it is concerned with the accurate watching and noting of phenomena as they occur in nature, with regard to cause and effect or mutual relations (note: the definition carries 'in nature' as opposed to manipulated experimental settings).

Reber (1985), however, extends the definition that 'All psychological methods involve observation, but stresses a distinction that should be made between research that is controlled by the manipulation of independent variables and research that is carried out by the use of naturalistic observation'.

C.A. Moser (1958) expressed that 'Observation can fairly be called the classic method of scientific study'.

Observation is one of the oldest and the most fundamental research method approaches. From the above definitions, it can be seen that 'observation' is the process of collecting impressions of the world using all of one's senses, especially visual and auditory, which can be used as an independent 'classic method' of scientific study and also as a part of research, supplementing other methods in an important way. However, in the layman's perception, understanding and usage of the term 'observation' is very different from the one used in the social research processes. Everyone is an observer. However, observation stops being a part of everyday lives and becomes a research method if it is systematically planned, recorded and the recordings are checked for their validity and reliability with a particular intention for such an endeavour. These factors simply distinguish between simply observing the world around you and collecting research data through observation. Observation as a research method, thus, take place when the researcher intentionally, with a specific purpose in mind, place themselves amidst certain people, locations, situations and contexts to observe a phenomenon.

For example: Observing two kids playing just for the pleasure of watching it is an example of everyday observation.

However, observing a group or a pair of kids playing in a particular context or setting, for example a park in order to observe the aggression in the play interaction of children in the age range of 6 to 11 years is an observation which is a research method. Other less important distinctions would be the seriousness, which, in a greater degree, observation as a research method entails and the importance in furthering of knowledge that observation as a research method helps in achieving.

2.2 Characteristics of Observation research

The characteristics of observation technique, in general and as a method used in the qualitative realm of research are presented as follows:

1. An intent and purpose: Observation, as a scientific study seems to provide the characteristics of objectivity, precision, specificity, systematic steps, verifiable, reliable and valid. For insuring all of the above, the first and most important consideration is *that the researcher (observer) must know clearly what is to be observed*. A scientific observation always has an intent or a purpose behind it for it to be different from the everyday observation.

Thus, for example: If a researcher wants to study a problem through observation such as "Does democratic style of teaching lead to better grades in school?" Here it is very important to measure "democratic style of teaching" by defining it in a way it can be subjected to empirical testing. Only when the researcher operationalizes the constructs or variables he wishes to measure, the scope of what to measure and the purpose of observation would become clear.

2. Naturalism and qualitative research: In a quantitative paradigm, when observation is used, it is comparatively more systematic following certain steps providing for planning, recording data and analyzing it, while being systematic is an important feature of research.

Qualitative observational research attempts to capture life as experienced by the research participants, in the field as it happens, rather than through categories that have been predetermined by the researcher. Observational research assumes behavior is purposeful, reflecting deeper values and beliefs. Although it can be conducted in contrived settings, a characteristic of observational research is that it occurs in the natural settings to capture behavior as it occurs in the real life of the participant.

3. Characteristic of contact: Another characteristic is that it usually involves direct contact between the observer and participant though indirect observations by observing video and audio tapings can also be made.

4. Exploratory research paradigm: Observational research holds the characteristic to be exploratory in nature. It seeks to uncover unexpected phenomena, ideas, causes for behaviour and the like. As said, sometimes, though the researcher has planned his observation, the field might surprise him.

5. Inductive reasoning, Idiography, Constructivism and Reflexivity:

Qualitative observational research uses *inductive reasoning* with concepts being induced from the observed behavior itself and uses an *idiographic* rather a nomothetic casual explanation.

Constructivism, that takes the view that the phenomena of the social world (including all one's knowledge of it) are not objective entities but are constructs of the mind arrived at (constructed) through social interactions (e.g. Berger and Luckman, 1967) which thus emphasizes the meaning attached to things and experiences by people, forms the base of the approach issued in *observational research*. This form of research, studies these meanings people attach to things and experiences and thus probe into their subjective reality.

Reflexivity, is the idea that research data and analysis is shaped by both the researcher and the researched. The researcher is not a neutral agent of data collection or a *blank slate*, and carries his own experiences, perspectives, assumptions to the task at hand and these contribute equally to shape the research. Observation is characterized by *reflexivity* at every step beginning from data recording as only those observations that seem to be important are recorded by the researcher; to the data analysis where the researcher adds meaning to the recorded data from his point of view also.

However, if the observation is more structured, systematic and planned; its context validity can also be checked, and it is also characterized by the chance of being replicable, but very rarely.

Thus, observational research possesses the above characteristics, typically

3. Observation and Naturalism

3.1 Tunnell's Criteria

The major reason so as to why observational research is conducted in the friendly (not so) real life settings as compared to the facilitating confines of the controlled lab settings where manipulation of variables can be seen is for the character of data collected- to be *naturalistic* which is the most valued feature of observational research.

Tunnell (1977) observed that naturalness of a research enterprise could be conceptualized in three ways ;

- (i) The criterion of naturalness could be applied to the *behaviours* being studied.
- (ii) The criterion could be the *treatment applied*, and
- (iii) The criterion could be the *setting* in which the research is conducted.

However, these three criterion may be combined in any number of ways, and these combinations would reflect the amount to which the total study can be judged as more or less naturalistic.

Tunnell (1977) proposes a continuum, at one extreme end which has *unnaturalness* under which the studies that constraint behaviour and manipulate the variables (laboratory experiments) can be placed and at the other end *naturalness* describes those studies, that does not impinge on the environment and occurs in natural settings. This classification bears consideration as *naturalness* is an extremely valued commodity among field researches including Observational Research.

Tunnell's system and the three dimensions of 'naturalness'

:

1. Natural Behaviour: The prime goal of all observational research is to study 'natural' behaviour. The inherent 'generalizability' of the findings of the study can be made with more confidence if the behaviour elicited by the individual occurs in the natural flow of events in real life settings, not instigated in response to the demands of the research or in a manipulative and controlled setting. This, in observational research, which is largely qualitative in nature, 'behaviour' is thought to be natural to an extent that it is an inherent part of the individual's response pattern (i.e., not established to meet any demands of research) and is unconscious (enacted without self-conscious awareness that he/she is being studied or observed).

There have also been instances in which, even in controlled and manipulated laboratory settings, natural behavior was used as the 'primary dependant variable'. This was done by shifting the control and manipulation of the laboratory into the natural settings and then observing the 'natural' behaviour elicited.

For example: Moriarty (1975) induced individuals at a crowded beach to feel more or less responsible for the welfare of another, by having his experimental 'accomplice' or 'confederate' ask a fellow sunbather to look at (watch) his radio while he went to the 'broadwalk' for a few minutes. Following his departure another confederate approached the empty blanket and picked up the radio, and if not stopped by the 'watchperson' ran away with it. Here, the natural behaviour of participants' responses to the apparent theft was the dependent measure.

The findings from this research were found to be more trustworthy and reliable than earlier investigations that were conducted in strict laboratory settings.

2. Natural Treatment :

Tunnell (1977) defines natural treatment as a "**naturally occurring, discrete event that the subject would have experienced ... with or without the presence of a researcher.**" This definition, however, was found to be overly limiting the phenomenon of natural treatment which is of no good to field research. However, a treatment can be considered a 'natural treatment' if

- a. It plausibly could have occurred without the researcher's intervention.
- b. The participant is unaware of the fact that there was intervention of the researcher (Crano, W.D. Brewer, 2002).

Thus Moriarty's (1975) treatment (a staged theft of a radio) qualifies as a 'natural treatment' as

- a. Thefts do happen in beaches (which could have happened without the researcher's intervention)
- b. The participant was unaware that the theft was staged.

3. Natural setting:

A naturalist observational investigation refers to, usually, a study, conducted outside the laboratory setting in the real life setting.

Cook and Diamond's (1972) definition for a naturalistic setting is 'a context that is not perceived to have been established for the sole or primary purpose of conducting research.' Thus, the definition explains that the respondent's perceptions of the setting and not the actions of the researcher, defines the naturalness of the setting. Thus, Moriarty's beach scene was a 'natural

setting as people were unaware that the beach setting had been modified to allow for a systematic study of the effects of the specification of responsibility on helping behavior, and thus in their perspective, the setting was natural which is the only requisite for a setting to be defined as a natural setting.

Thus, the three `natural` criteria can show considerable interaction and become that feature of the observational research study, that can lend it more credibility, more scope of generalizability and thus more value, importance and acceptance as a `good research method`

4. Applications in the field of psychological research

4.1 Observation as a technique:

Observational research technique is used in conjunction with other techniques or method in the process of carrying out a research. Observation may be used in traditional experimental design, as in Milgram's (1963) work on obedience where, in addition to mechanical recordings of the participant's responses, a film record was made in order to achieve or observe changes in the `emotional reactions`

Also in Bandura's (1965) `Bobo doll study` of aggression, the degree of frustration of the child just prior to observing the model was observed, the status of the role of the child and the consequences of the model's behavior were predicted using observation as a technique, using the information of which, many independent variables were manipulated and their affect on the dependent variables was observed.

Figure 1: Bandura's Bobo doll study:



In exploratory researches using any method, observation as a technique can be used to understand the context of the phenomenon and the important questions regarding the phenomena to be asked.

Observation can be used in conjunction with interviews in order to observe and record the inherent non-verbal cues of the participant and also when the interviewer possesses limited verbal skills (like children and people with learning disabilities) and the like.

Observation is used in conjunction to the analysis done in role play and simulated behaviours. In these cases observations may be made at the time when the simulated behaviours and feeling exhibited in particular role plays are filmed for subsequent analysis.

Thus, observation can be used as a technique in conjunction with many other instruments as it adds comprehensiveness, meaning and scope for generalizing the data and the findings of the research study.

4.2 Observation as an Overall research design :

An '**observational investigation**' is a study carried out only using the method of observation for collecting data and thus, analyzing it. It thus involves all the characteristics of observational method such as the presence of an intent, it being carried out in a real-life-setting, usually away from the labs and finally not involving manipulation of the variables which thus, enables the formulation of strong correlations but not cause effect relationships between the variables.

The biggest weakness of such a study only employing the observational technique for the entire process of research is that a cause ó effect relationship between the variables measured cannot be formed due to the vast dynamic interplay of variables in real ó life settings where none of the variables are manipulated. Thus, the reason for a particular phenomenon cannot be particularly found and generalized.

However, in phenomena that require an exploratory approach, seeking to know about the field no one treaded into, observational method is the only research method which positively effects the study. In these studies, as the causes of behavior or the phenomena are more unimportant than the general primary understanding of the phenomenon, observational method serves the purpose.

However, it is very rarely used as an individual method due to loss of comprehensiveness and thus loosing out on important aspects of the phenomenon.

4.3 Research questions appropriate to be studied by the technique of observation :

Observation, one of the methods of field research holds the strength of observing the phenomenon as it happens, in the field setting, to get a full understanding of it and thus a deeper insight into it.

Thus, with such purposes in mind, it can be said the observation is appropriate for research questions that appear to defy simple quantification, which show study of social processes over time and those which study attitudes and behaviours best understood within their natural setting.

The above three criteria answer the question òWhat research questions are appropriately answered by the method of observation?ö

- (i) Firstly, observation is appropriate for questions that defy including simple quantification: Observation, particularly the paradigm of qualitative research as a whole, rejects the idea that all the subjective human experiences, individual differences and many intricacies that help in better understanding of a phenomenon, cannot be quantified (always).

For example: The very subjective reaction of empathy or helping behaviour of an individual can be very rarely quantified, thus making observation an appropriate method for its study.

- (ii) Observation is appropriate for research questions which study social processes over a period of time.

While survey research and other longitudinal studies are ex-post facto researches where the study occurs after the phenomenon had already occurred, in a reconstruction of events, observation gives a picture though, from the beginning to the end of the phenomenon.

For example: Observation is very useful to examine the rumblings and final explosion of a riot as the events actually occur, rather than the afterward in a reconstruction of the events.

- (iii) Field research (observation) is especially appropriate for the study of those attitudes and behaviour; which are best understood within their natural setting.

For example: Observation best suits the studying of dynamics of conversion of religion at a revival meeting which requires a subjective experience to the data collected. However how many men and woman are more likely to convert is better studied through a statistical analysis.

- (iv) Observation is appropriate for questions that demand a rounded understanding of a phenomenon, but not generalizability to a large population.

Observation, being one the many methods in qualitative research focuses on the understanding of a phenomenon at a deeper level but not on the process of generalization to a larger group. Hence, the sampling also differs in qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Observation chooses people who are rich in information regarding that phenomenon or seem to be potential sources are treated as the 'simplex' and questions that require that kind of an approach are best suited to be observed.

For example: For investigating the research question 'what individual' would have the aim of learning about the various possible symptoms rather than generalizing this to all possible schizophrenics. For such questions, observation can be an effective method of research.

5. Historical Development of Observation as a research method

The term observation derives from Latin, meaning to watch, to attend to. Dictionary definitions (e.g. Oxford English Dictionary 1989) tend to stress that it is concerned with the accurate watching and noting of phenomena as they occur in nature; with regard to cause and effect or mutual relations as approved to an experiment. Reber (1985) extends this definition and points out all psychological methods involve observation, but stresses that a distinction should be made between research that is controlled by manipulation of the independent variables and research that is carried out using naturalistic observation. It was stressed, however, that the observational method can be successfully used in laboratory settings, the crucial distinction that needs to be made here is in terms of whether or not deliberate manipulation of variables is involved. Many of the major developments in psychology came from the initial observation of a serendipitous event, this as defined by Reber (1985) as the finding of one thing while engaged in a search for something else. He uses Parlor as an example, including skinner's search and superstitious behavior, Piaget's observation of systematic failure of children on intelligence tests which led to

his theories on cognitive development and also fraudø insights, which developed from his initial observations of links between his earlier experiences and current problems in his patients.

A more specific definition of observation is that of Marshall and Rossman (1989), who define observation as a õsystematic description of events, behaviors and artifacts in the social setting under studyö.

Thus, observation which is seen to permeate all research methods in psychology and other spheres shows a history which sets its definition and scope as a research method.

6. Approaches to Observation research

6.1 Naturalistic Observation and Observation in Contrived settings:

✚ Naturalistic Observation:

In some observational studies, researchers observe and record behaviour without intervening or affecting the behaviour in any way, in a real ó life setting, as it occurs, naturally. The participants are observed as they engage in ordinary activities in settings that have not been artificially created or set up in the aim of carrying out research.

For example: Researchers have used naturalistic observation to study behaviour during riots, crowd behavior, other mob events, littering, non-verbal behaviour, play interactions between children and so on. Such an observation in the context of naturalism, is known as ñNaturalistic observationñ

Naturalistic observation is not only used by psychologists, sociologists and other people who study the human behavior, but is also conducted by researchers who are interested in the behaviour of non-human animals in their natural habitats ó ethologists and comparative psychologists. Examples are studies of tool use by elephants, mating among iguana lizards, aggression among monkeys (for eg., cheralier ó skolnikoff & Liska, 1993). In reality, this method was inherited by psychology from the ethologists largely (Lorenz, Tinbergen).

Advantages of Naturalistic setting :

- (i) The behavior which occurs is more natural and if the target is unaware of the observer, (which is usually the case), the behavior is unaffected by anxiety or the targetø need to be socially desirable or to impress.
- (ii) The study gains the status of a real and ecologically valid study as the observations tend to more true in the real ó life and thus more valid.
- (iii) The places of phenomena where it would be unethical to experiment with or intervene or manipulates variables (eg. In the lives of children and animals), this method is extremely of use.
- (iv) When people are not ready to cooperate with interview or questionna9ire methods and when the researcher decides that full social content is necessary for the observed behavior to carry meaning ; these are the places where naturalistic observation takes on an advantage.

Disadvantages of observational research is naturalistic settings:

- (i) There is no amount of control on any extraneous variable and thus correlation between any relations between variables found through the study would be low.
- (ii) There is greater potential for observer bias, since both the extraneous variables and the observed behaviour are more unpredictable.
- (iii) It gets difficult to use and transport discretely some of the technical equipment required for good readings and recordings.
- (iv) It is sometimes difficult for the observers to remain concealed and unnoticed.
- (v) Through and accurate replication is almost impossible to achieve.
- (vi) It can vary rarely use structured data gathering systems which if used would create problems of producing `reliable but not rich data which should be the opposite for naturalistic observation.

For example: She waved him goodbye would be more meaningful than recording She raised her hand

✚ Contrived settings:

Contrived setting involves the observation of behaviour in settings that are created for specifically observing the behaviour and research purposes. Often these studies are carried out in laboratories where the extraneous factors are controlled, also manipulated and the participants know that they are being observed; even though the researchers are concealed behind a one way mirror.

In some cases, there is an amalgamation of both Naturalistic observation and contrived settings observation. This is when a contrived setting, controlling or creating some factors or variables specifically for research purposes is done in the `real world`. In these studies researchers setup situations outside the laboratory to observe people's reactions and behaviour. In such studies, people are less or completely unaware of the fact that the situation was created and there is someone observing them. These kind of studies use confederates who help in creating the situation for the research

For example: In one study, researchers in the New York City staged 103 accidents in which a research confederate staggered and collapsed on a moving subway car. Sometimes the confederate carried a case and acted as if he were injured or infirm, at other times he carried a bottle in a paper bag and pretended to be drunk. Two observers then recorded by standers' reactions to the `emergency`. The purpose of the study was to study the factors affecting helping staged in an `emergency`.

Advantages of contrived settings:

- (i) The extraneous factors are controlled and the variables identified can show a cause & effect relationship (though rarely) or a high correlation.
- (ii) There is lesser chance for observer bias as the phenomenon is anticipated to unfold and the factors are controlled accordingly.
- (iii) Structural data gathering instruments can be used as, if the instruments are exhaustive, the data can be anticipated to fall in a particular direction.
- (iv) Replication of the studies is possible as the same controlled, manipulative setting can be recreated and thus more evidence can be anticipated to fall in a particular direction.
- (v) Replication of the studies is possible as the same controlled, manipulative setting can be recreated and thus more evidence can be found for against existing evidence.

Disadvantages of contrived settings :

- (i) Since, the study is undisguised or the person being observed is aware that he/she is being observed; they tend to conform to the social norms, are more conscious of their behaviour and tend to take.
- (ii) All the phenomena cannot be studied in a contrived setting, simply because those conditions cannot be created artificially. For example: To study the behaviour of a person in the context of a natural calamity (for eg., Tsunami).
- (iii) The laboratory set up might yield results with low ecological validity, as they are artificially created.
- (iv) The control and manipulation established might be restricting many more dynamics that might have unfolded, if the variables were not controlled.
- (v) The unexpected aspects of the phenomenon, some new concepts, might be lost, due to barring them by establishing greater control.
- (vi) It might sometimes have a great number of or serious ethical impediments as interference of the researcher takes place.

Advantages of “Semi - contrived setting - contrived placed in the real world :

- (i) In this kind of study, the degree of control required can be established or the variables can be manipulated without actually the individuals being aware of it.
- (ii) There is mostly no influence of the set up and the researcher/s in this kind of study, if the individual does not recognize the contrived situation.
- (iii) The individual, not aware that he is being observed due to no interference from the researcher and also in the setting ; tends to exhibit his actual / original behaviour without the impediments of faking to conform to the societal norms.
- (iv) This study has both the advantages of a contrived setting (like replication, use of structured data collection instruments) and a naturalistic setting (ecologically valid, actual true behaviour obtained etc.).

Disadvantages of “Semi-contrived setting” :

- (i) Any mistake by the confederates may reveal the whole plan and the purpose of the research would not be fulfilled.
- (ii) It might be unethical in two ways:
 - (a) Towards the confederate: The confederate might lose his life while doing a risky act.
 - (b) Towards the participants: As they are not informed when they are observed. It might also be an intrusion into their private lives.
- (iii) It would involve a lot of risk or even mediocre amounts of it, if the situation is that to create panic or anxiety in the individual.

6.2 Disguised and Non-Disguised observation:

The next decision the researcher must take is whether to let the participants know they are being observed or not.

✚ Undisguised Observation:

Undisguised observation happens when the participant knows that he / she is being observed. This thus leads to a problem of reactivity as people, knowing that they are being observed do

not behave their natural self and try to impress or paint a favourable, socially desirable picture of themselves.

The disadvantages of undisguised observation are thus

- (i) The phenomenon of reactivity.
- (ii) Unreliable results not fit for any findings.
- (iii) Increasing source of error.
- (iv) Not measuring the phenomenon accurately, with the original behaviours,
- (v) Thus, defeating the purpose of the study. However, if in a way the participant was made believe that he / she is not being watched or that she / he is being watched by a very obvious purpose ó not at all sensitive, by limiting the revelation of the research defective, it has one very big advantage that it is õethically correctö and not õintrusion into privacy once the õinformed consentö is obtained.

✚ Disguised observation:

When the researcher does not let the participant know that they are being observed for research purposes, then the observation is known to be õdisguised observation.ö For example: Festinger and his colleagues (1956) used disguised observation when studying the doomsday group because otherwise they would not be even be allowed to observe the group otherwise.

Advantages of disguised observation :

- (i) The part of being observed by someone else is not known; which allows them to exhibit their own behaviour and reduce faking and socially desirable to the minimum.
- (ii) There is reduction of error, increase in ecological validity
- (iii) The findings would be more generalizable to the population; or through `evaluationö of the findings and explain or explore new aspects of the phenomenon.
- (iv) They, in terms of the behaviour elicited, are make appropriate or close to all the naturalistic observation.

Disadvantages of Disguised Observation:

- (i) They raise ethical issues, because of õinvasion of privacyö and violation and also violating the participantö right of informed consent.
- (ii) Will include õknowledgableö informants ó people know who the participants, in case the study becomes faith and true. It involves one extra work of training these informants or speaking to them who themselves are not proper researchers and thus stand a chance of adding to the error of the observational study.

Disguised observation can also be carried out in Laboratory settings, where the participants are highly conscious of what they are doing. Researcher William Ickes proposed an approach known as dyadic interaction paradigm which was often used to study dyadic, or two-person, social interactions etc., in which a pair of participants reporting from experiment are escorted to a waiting room and seated on a couch when the researcher excuses himself to complete preparations for the experiment and leaves them alone. Unknown to the participants, their behaviour is them recorded by a concealed videotape recorder, but this was analyzed or observed only after the participants give permission to do so. Thus, this method stands

disguised through previously was undisguised. This paradigm has been successfully used in studies of sex role behaviour, sympathy, shyness, Machiavellianism, interracial relations, social cognition and birth order disorders.

6.3 Structured and Unstructured Observation:

✚ Unstructured observation:

Researchers who decide to adopt the technique and may have a clear idea of the purpose of observation, they may not be very clear about the details of observation. This kind of observation is generally used in exploratory studies. The researcher does not use predetermined categories and classifications but makes observations in a more natural open ended way. The logic here is that categories and concepts for describing and analyzing the observational data will emerge later in the research, during the analysis, rather than brought to the research, or imposed on the data, from the start. (Punch, 2005).

As in grounded theory, the researcher postpones the definitions and structures until a pattern has been observed and then continues with the fieldwork in order to elaborate these while the data are still available for access (Bouling, 2002).

Unstructured observation can be useful to generate hypotheses and theories, but is difficult to manage. Its qualitative in nature and this can sometimes be referred to as qualitative observational research. Thus usually involves taking field notes and such unstructured means to collect data where the field holds surprises.

Advantages of unstructured observation

- (i) Not imposing any particular limit to the data on the behaviour in any way, this form of observation is more open to new concepts and ideas that may be derived from the field.
- (ii) New concepts may arise and new theories may develop which may help to further knowledge in an unrestricted manner.
- (iii) It includes bias as structured observation have certain aspects to observe outlined which depends strongly upon the researcher's subjective bias or understanding what is important and what is not.
- (iv) It helps in greater understanding of a phenomenon in a more subjective manner which is one quality of qualitative research.

Disadvantages of unstructured observation :

- (i) It is very difficult to do and requires a great deal of skill.
- (ii) It involves observer bias; as the observer notes down only the aspects of the phenomenon which he feels to be important and relevant.
- (iii) Only carrying unstructured data collecting devices may slow down the observation process and if only one observer is present to observe a large group, the notes may be incomplete as the observer may miss out on some aspects.
- (iv) Some notes may be deviating from the research topic and the analysis is also comparatively difficult.

✦ Structured Observation :

Structured observation is when the research problem has been formulated and the assistant observes have been trained and told what is to be precisely observed. However, this process systemizes the process of observation to a great deal to make it objective and less influenced by bias. This method uses recording techniques like checklists, ratings scales etc., which are more structured and systematic with respect to what is to be measured.

Advantages of structured observation :

- (i) The fact that different observers can, and do, produce different accounts of situations can be handled by using structured observation.

It is precisely this problem which is addressed by systematic (structured) observation and its use of an observation schedule. The whole purpose of the schedule is to minimize, possibly eliminate, the variations that will arise from data based on individual perceptions of events and situations. Its aim is to provide a framework of observation which all observers will use (Denscombe, 2007).

Thus, it gives objectivity to the research.

- (ii) It can be replicated to some extent exactly.
- (iii) It helps to not miss out any aspects which are of extreme importance for the study. It also helps in quicker recording of the aspects of the phenomenon.
- (iv) The observer bias is not much in the field, however while construction of the **observation schedule**, the bias enters as only those observations anticipated to be important find a place in the schedule.

Disadvantages of structured observation:

- (i) Researcher bias during construction of observation schedule
- (ii) Limited and narrow scope of studying a phenomenon
- (iii) Greater objectivity sometimes leads to missing out on major variables that affect the focus of the observation.
- (iv) The findings, rather, the recordings may not be complete, missing out on some unanticipated observations the field surprises the researcher with.
- (v) This is based on a theory but might not help in elaborating or giving a new theory.

Thus, the structuring of data or and observation can be done by structuring the data gathering techniques which are structured and systematic like check-lists, rating scales, charts etc., which will be discussed in detail later in the report.

7. Summary

Thus observation research used in the sense of a research tool as well as a research design in itself can be seen to be characterized by the features of naturalism, exploration, intent and purpose and various others. It is a method of research whose situations fulfill the Tunnell's criteria. The various types of observational research along with the history of the discipline are outlined above. The applications, advantages and disadvantages of every type of observational research had been presented for critical evaluation of the same. Thus, observation, an effective research method can be applied to appropriate research questions in order to reveal interesting patterns of human behavior.