

Observation: Participatory and Non-participatory

Prepared by
Prof. Sonika Sen
Assistant Professor
Department.Of Sociology

- Observation is the most important technique used in social research. Observation method employs vision as its main of data collection. It is accurate watching and noting the phenomena as they occur with regard to the cause and effect. Observation means watching other person's behaviour as it actually happens without controlling it.

Definition

- According to P. V. Young: “Observation is a systematic and deliberate study, through the eye, of spontaneous occurrences at the time they occur. The purpose of observation is to perceive the nature and extent of significant inter-related elements within complex social phenomena, culture patterns or human conduct.”
- According to Lindzey Gardner: “Observation is selection, provocation, recording and encoding of that set of behaviours and settings concerning organism ‘in situ’ (naturalistic settings or familiar surroundings) which are consistent with empirical aims.”

Dimensions observed in observation

1. Physical actions, e.g. Pattern of working, watch television
2. Verbal behaviour, e.g. Conversation between two people, husband wife, colleagues etc.
3. Expressive behaviour, e.g. Tone of voice, facial expression.
4. Spatial relations, e.g. Physical distance between workers in factory.
5. Temporal patterns, e.g amount of time spent in playing, watching t.v. Etc
6. Verbal records, e.g content of memoranda, slogan shouted etc

Characteristics of observation

- Observation is always direct.
- It is observed in natural surroundings.
- It tends to be less structured.
- It enables understanding significant events affecting social relations of the participants.

Significance of observation

- It captures human conduct as it actually happens.
- It provides more graphic description of social life.
- It helps in exploring important events and situations.

Types of Observation

- Participant observation
- Non-participant observation

Participant Observation

Participant observation is also known as Active observation. In this method the investigator becomes a part of the situation he is studying. He involves himself in the setting and group life of the research subjects.

Participant observation method is mostly used in anthropological research, sociology, communication studies, human geography and social psychology.

Some of the examples of studies using the method of participant observation are:

W.F.White's study of Cornville Social and athletic club.

P.V.Young's study of Molokan people.

Malinowski's study of Trobriand Island.

Merits of participant observation

- A. Observation of natural behaviour: In participant observation the natural behaviour of the respondent can be studied without making him feel conscious or uncomfortable.
- B. Closeness with the group: The observer has a close proximity with the group and can better interpret the situation.
- C. Better understanding: The researcher can better understand the feelings of the respondents than an outsider.

Limitations of Participant Observation

1. There is low degree of reliability as the study depends on personal skills of lone researcher.
2. As the groups selected in participant observation are through snowball sampling or haphazardly, there is low degree of representativeness.
3. By becoming a member of the group, the observer tends to lose his objectivity and his approach becomes subjective and sentimental.
4. The researcher may lose important issues due to much familiarity .

Non-participant Observation

In Non-participant observation, the scientist watches the events and activities from a distance without making any active participation. He makes no effort to either influence or take part in the events and activities he observes.

Advantages of non-participant observation

- a) Objectivity and neutrality: In non-participant observation the researcher is emotionally detached and thus gives objective and unbiased view.
- b) Command respect and cooperation: In non-participant observation the researcher plays an impartial role. Therefore every member of group gives him respect and co-operate with his study.
- c) Careful analysis: The researcher carefully judges the merits and demerits of each phenomena under study.
- d) More willingness of the respondent: often the respondent may disclose their secrets to stranger.

Demerits of non-participant observation

1. **Subjectivity:** In non-participant observation the observer doesn't have clarity about certain events.
2. **Inadequate observation:** The observer can observe only those events which take place in front of him.
3. **Unnatural and formal information:** In non-participant observation only formal information can be gathered.
4. **Inconvenience to the respondents:** The members of particular group may feel uncomfortable when they know that their behaviour is being watched and critically analysed by an outsider.

Conclusion

- To conclude, observation means much more than a casual glance. It means accurate watching, noting of phenomena as they occur in nature. It is the most important and general technique of making new discoveries and conducting research.

References:

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Thank You