

LESSON 2

METHODS OF PSYCHOLOGY

SUMMARY

Psychology has various methodological ways or approaches to understand and explain psychological phenomena. In order to obtain responses from individuals a number of psychological tools or instruments are used. The responses taken on those tools constitute the basic data which are analysed to study human experiences, mental processes and behaviours.

Approaches to study the Psychological Processes

Psychologists use a variety of approaches to describe, predict and control behaviour and mental processes. The main approaches are described below:

Biological Approach: it focuses on biological structures and their role in regulating feelings, memories, emotions and behaviour.

Psychoanalytic Approach: **Sigmund Freud** is the father of this approach. His focus was on unconscious libidinal energy to describe present state of a person. He gave layers of consciousness (conscious, preconscious, and unconscious). He assumed that majority of human behaviours are triggered by unconscious motivation.

Humanistic approach: father of this approach is **Carl Rogers**. It

assumes that a person is an active and self-actualizing agent and has a choice in deciding his behaviour.

Behaviorist Approach: The father of this approach is J. B. Watson. The unit of analysis for this approach is explicit, objective and overt behaviour and its relationship with environmental stimulation. Watson said that behaviour is largely governed by the association between stimulus and response and the behaviour can be shaped in a desired direction by manipulating this association.

Cognitive Approach: it focuses on the study of information processing capacity of the individual in terms of perception, remembering, thinking, language, reasoning, problem solving and decision making which are called higher mental processes.

Methods to Understand Psychological Processes

In order to understand human behaviour various scientific methods are used.

Characteristics of Psychological research

Objectivity
- free from
biases

Testable - it
can be
tested time
and again
by any
researcher

Self-
correction -
open for
correction
and
revision

Replication
- results
are verified
by similar
studies

Methods that are used in psychology to carry out scientific

research studies – observation, experimentation, case study and survey.

Observation

- Observational methods entail the observation and description of a subject's behaviour.
- It is a method of enquiry which requires systematic registering of events without any deliberate attempt to interfere with variables operating in the event which is being studied.
- This method is used in natural (**naturalistic observation**) as well as laboratory settings (**laboratory observation**).
- Based on the role of observer – it is divided into **participant observation** (observer mixes up with the event) and **non-participant observation** (observer has little impact on study).

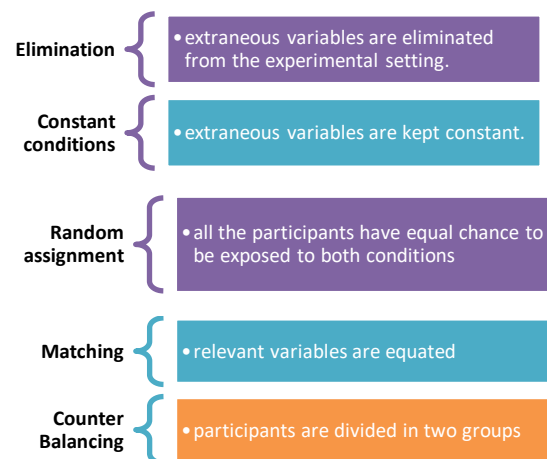
Experimentation

- Experimenter studies the effect of independent variable (IV) on the dependent variable by deliberately manipulating and controlling one variable.
- The variable which is controlled and manipulated by the experimenter is called independent variable (IV).
- The variable on which the impact of independent variable is studied is known as dependent variable (DV)
- Two groups are present in an experiment - experimental group (participants receive the

independent variable) and control group (behaviour is observed without giving the independent variable).

- Experimenter has to take care of other variables as they might confound the effect of independent variable. Such variables are called relevant variables.
- Three kinds of relevant variables – organismic, situational and sequential variables.
- Experiments are carried out in controlled setting (laboratory experiment) but some experiments are also conducted in natural life conditions. They are called **field experiments** and **quasi experiments**.

Below are some techniques to control the unwanted effect of relevant variables-



Case Study

- The method of collecting information about the person in terms of his experiences, relationships and interaction with others so as to prepare

profile of the person is called case study.

- In this method the main unit of analysis is the individual and his experiences across different contexts in life.
- To prepare a case history usually interview, observation and psychological tests are used to obtain information about the individual and data is taken from many sources for e.g., family history, educational life, medical history and social life.
- It helps to locate unique experiences of life as well as the various emotional and adjustment problems of the individual.

Survey

- Survey is used to gather information in research by asking questions to a group of people.
- It is one of the popular research methods in psychology, sociology, political science, economics and management.
- In psychology survey method is generally used to study the pattern of opinions, attitudes, beliefs and values of the people.
- It is also used to test the hypothesis about the relationship of variables especially when some incident takes place.

- It can be conducted on a single individual as well as on a group.
- In survey, research is generally conducted through questionnaire or interview (in-person, through telephone, SMS or email).

Psychological Tools

In conducting research, a variety of tools are used to collect data. These tools are in the form of paper, instruments or software. Through these tools' researcher obtain verbal, written, behavioural or physiological responses.

Some of the psychological tests used in conducting research –

Psychological Tests

- These tests are developed on the basis of a theoretical framework to assess various psychological attributes.
- They can be administered on an individual or in a group setting.
- The obtained score of the individual on the test reveals his or her position in relation to others who also respond to the same test.
- A psychological test provides an objective assessment of different qualities and limitations of the individual.
- A standardized psychological test has properties of reliability and validity.
- Depending on the nature and administration a test can be

either verbal or nonverbal (performance).

- Psychological tests are also categorized as objective and projective.

Questionnaire

- A questionnaire consists of a set of questions to which the individual is required to respond.
- The questions can be either in **closed-ended** form or in **open-ended** form.
- Instructions are written on the first page as to how to answer the items.
- The questions are written in simple and explicit language.
- All the items tap various aspects of the construct which is measured.
- The items are often arranged in the sequence from general to specific.
- Data from a large number of individuals can be taken at a time as the questionnaire can be easily administered to a group of people.

Interview

- A technique of data collection in which a face-to-face interaction occurs between two persons with a set objective.
- interviewer - person who conducts interview interviewee - person who give responses
- Interviews can also be conducted through telephone, internet and video conferencing

- The main purpose of interview is to understand various personal characteristics such as attitudes, values, interests and preferences.
- interview is used for recruitment and selection, counselling, marketing and advertising, attitude survey etc.
- Two types of interviews are –
Structured interview - questions are already framed with the possible response options.
Unstructured interview - comprises of a variety of open-ended questions and its flexible.

Characteristics of a skilled interviewer		
•S/he establishes rapport with the interviewee.	S/he has command over her/his language which helps her/him to put even difficult questions in simple and lucid way in order to probe at a deeper level.	S/he has control over her/his feelings and emotions which does not give any cue to the interviewee

Do you know?

Wilhelm Wundt, acclaimed as “the father of experimental psychology”, established the first psychological research and teaching laboratory within the Philosophy Department at Leipzig in around 1876 (Fancher, 1996).

Experimental psychologists employ human participants and animal subjects to study topics such as sensation, perception, memory, cognition, learning, motivation,

development, socio-cultural effects, biological functioning etc.

Expand Your Horizon

<https://www.onlinepsychologydegree.info/influential-psychological-experiments/>

Classic Case studies in Psychology

Author – Geoff Rolls Year–2010

Publisher- Hodder Education

Evaluate yourself

1. What are the different approaches of psychology? Explain.
2. Describe the characteristics of psychological research.
3. Explain how observation can be used as a research method.
4. What are the major differences between interview and questionnaire?