

LOCUS TRAINING PROGRAM

Approximation to social research



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- Social research
- Data collection techniques
 1. Observation – participant observation
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Social research

- Social research is a systematic process aimed at generating knowledge related to social reality and human behaviour in the present, past, and future.
- The object of study in social research is the knowledge and explanation of human behaviour and the relationships that exist within a society. It must be clearly defined and delimited, as it constitutes the central element of the research process.
- It is important to differentiate the object of study (the phenomenon to be investigated) from the research objectives, which are the goals that the researcher aims to achieve through the investigation.
- Methodological decisions based on the object of study and research objectives:
 - Approach: quantitative, qualitative, mixed
 - Scope: exploratory, descriptive, correlational, and explanatory
 - Design: experimental and non-experimental (longitudinal and cross-sectional)
 - Selection of variables: conceptual definition and operational definition)
 - Selection of the sample
 - Data collection techniques
 - Data analysis and interpretation



Data collection techniques

Observation

- **What is observation?** Observation is a data collection technique that follows specific norms and procedures. The person observing must have the skills and abilities to carry out the process effectively and with quality.
- **What is the objective of observation?** The goal of observation is to capture, as objectively as possible, what happens in the real world, whether to describe, analyse, or explain it from a scientific perspective.
 - Objectivity vs. Subjectivity? We are socially situated subjects.
 - Biases → Observer bias.
- **How do we observe?** We observe with all of our senses, not just with sight. Observation involves intention and focused attention:
 - Observation, unlike other ways of perceiving, is always intentional.
 - Focused attention: I decide what I want to observe.

In the words of Bonilla y Rodríguez (1997): *“Observing, with a sense of scientific inquiry, involves intentionally focusing attention on certain segments of the reality being studied, aiming to capture its constitutive elements and how they interact with each other, in order to inductively reconstruct the dynamics of the situation”* (p.118).



Data collection techniques

Observation

Types of Observation

- Unstructured (non-systematic) Observation: Observation is done without considering categories or indicators to guide the process. There is no temporal control, and free, global records of events are made.
- Structured (systematic) Observation: Observation is supported by specific instruments like an "observation guide" or "field diary." Predefined categories are used to obtain controlled, classified, and systematic information.

Additionally, observation can be **Participant** or **Non-participant**, depending on whether the researcher interacts with the group being observed.



Data collection techniques

Observation

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

“Technique in which the researcher immerses themselves in a specific social group...

- directly (not delegated): "The Argonauts of the Western Pacific" by Malinowski.
- for a specific period of time.
- in their natural environment ($\neq$ artificial observation).
- interacting directly with the people participating in that reality.



Data collection techniques

Observation

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

WHAT'S OUR OBJECTIVE? Understand the reality of certain social phenomena

HOW? Based on the understanding of the meanings attributed by social actors

WHY? Behaviour → intersubjective social meaning
example: silence

“To understand, describe, analyse, explain a specific phenomenon, practice, or social dynamic”

HOW?



IDENTIFICATION



INTEGRATION IN REALITY



Data collection techniques

Observation

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

INVOLVEMENT & IDENTIFICATION // POSITIVIST APPROACH



Accuracy?

- Observer bias: The tendency to interpret the behaviours of others based on the observer's own social meanings.
- The dilemma of balancing PARTICIPATION and DISTANCE.



Data collection techniques

Observation

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

During participant observation: what does the researcher do?

- Observes with all the senses
- Asks questions
- Documents and gathers information (LOOKING THE SAME ≠ SEEING THE SAME)
- "We can only see what we have learned to see" → **Blind spot**
- Records observations and experiences → **Field Journal**



Data collection techniques

Observation

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Natural observation of events	There may be a lack of mastery over the categories or indicators to observe
Obtains significant elements from a specific perspective by considering categories and indicators	Erroneous judgments can be made by not properly linking categories or indicators with reality
Access to hidden places	There are variables that are difficult to observe, which can cause confusion
Rich description in detail	There is a risk of biasing the observation
Improvised situations	There is a risk of biasing the observation
Encourages the creation of new research questions	The results of the observation cannot be generalized (context)



Data collection techniques

Survey

- Quantitative technique, whose main instrument is the **questionnaire**.
- Once we have selected the appropriate design and the suitable sample according to the approach, the next step is data collection.
- Data collection in the quantitative approach involves three linked activities:
 - Select the instrument that meets two essential requirements: validity (measures what it is intended to measure) and reliability (its application to the same subject or object produces consistent results)
 - Apply the instrument
 - Analyse the information statistically



Data collection techniques

Survey

Questionnaire:

- It consists of a set of questions regarding one or more study variables. It is a highly structured interview.
- There are validated and non-validated instruments.
- Items: clear, precise, neutral.
- Types of questions: open and closed.
- Levels of measurement of variables:
 - **Nominal** (there are categories, but no hierarchical order: male-female)
 - **Ordinal** (there are categories, but with order or hierarchy: professions)
 - **Interval** (in addition to hierarchy, there are equal intervals between measurements: Likert scale)
 - **Ratio** (there is a value of 0 as a category: years of seniority in a company, hours of training...)

