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**Level:** LMD 3

**Module:** Research Methodology

**Course Title:** Observation as a Data Collection Tool

Observation is one of the research instruments that has been a core of attention by many scholars. It actually takes from the sight as a medium of primary data recording. Those data are mainly naturally occurring behaviours and events. Indeed, observation is said to be scientific in its procedures as it must have a purpose and has to be planned. The planning has to include where, when and what to observe.

The researcher (the observer) has also to know which method the observation is going to be recorded. Globally, there are two distinct ways to record observations: field notes and checklists. Whereas the former entails from the researcher to take notes while observing and exploring the situation (on the spot), the latter requires a set of pre-prepared items to be checked (and crossed) while observing the event. Many researchers prefer the second method since it is more practical and rapid especially that check lists help focus on the event, collect faster (similar or different) data, and analyze results (descriptively and quantitatively).

Like any other research tool, observation has different types according to the researcher’s objectives. In ethnographic research, for example, the researcher can share the details of the participants by taking part in the observed context, therefore, s/he can be counted as a member of the group; this type of observation is known as participant observation. As opposed to that, the observer can be detached from the group; then s/he is exercising a non-participant observation. Other types include observation of a particular group either by introducing some conditions (controlled observation) or not (uncontrolled observation). Observation is also related to the participants’ awareness: if they are aware, it is a visible observation, if they are not aware, then the observation is hidden. Yet, it must be noted that observer should avoid bias and personal interpretation of events despite any type of observation implemented.