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OBSERVATION

Observation is a means of collecting information by watching people’s attitudes and behaviour or events and settings. Classroom observation concerns the elicitation of events and interactions happening in the classroom.

Types of observation:

a) Type of observation according to the degree of involvement of the observer:

This category includes: participant and non participant observation. Participant observation implies that the observer is involved in the situation as he takes a part in the activities or interactions under investigation. On the other hand, non participant observation means that the observer does not participate in the observed situation.

b) Types of observation depending on the organization or format of observation:

This group refers to structured and unstructured observation. Structured observation which is also called systematic observation relies on the use of an observation schedule as the researcher employs rules and techniques for observing. However, unstructured observation does not involve an observation schedule.

c) Types of observation according to research ethics:

This category includes overt and covert observation. Overt observation means that the observed persons know that they are observed. Covert observation implies the observer is concealed as the observed persons do not know that they are observed.

d) Types of observation depending on the nature of the observed situation:

This category involves uncontrolled and controlled observation. Uncontrolled observation which is also called simple observation means that the researcher does not influence the observed people and observation takes place in natural settings. On the other hand, controlled observation which is also called contrived observation implies that observation takes place according to a specific plan as the researcher influences the situation or persons.

When using observation as a research instrument, the researcher has to decide about the person(s) that should be observed, the object of observation, the time and place of observation in addition to the type of observation involved. Also, he/she has to think about the way of recording observation. The researcher may simply take notes or he may employ checklists or rating scales. He/she can opt for a combination of these instruments. Sometimes, tape recorders and videos may be utilized to record observation.

References:

- Cohen, Louis, Manion, Lawrence, and Morrison, Keith. (2007). Research Methods in Education. New York: Routledge

- Genesee, F. and Upshur, J. (1996). Classroom-Based Evaluation in Second Language Education. Cambridge: CUP.