

BASIC PSYCHOLOGY

DEFINITION OF PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology can be defined as the scientific study of human and animal behaviour.

The term “PSYCHOLOGY” has come from two Greek words viz. , PSYCHE and LOGOS. Psyche means MIND and LOGOS means Study of subject.

The term psychology is often represented by Ψ , the Greek letter Psi, (usually pronounced as Sy).

SUBJECT MATTER OF PSYCHOLOGY

The subject matter of scientific psychology is behaviour. Behaviour includes anything a person or animal does that can be observed in some way.

There are two types of behaviour. One is OVERT BEHAVIOUR and other one is COVERT BEHAVIOUR.

Behaviour which can be directly observed is called OVERT BEHAVIOUR.

The internal mental events such as cognition, memory, which can be understood with a help of observable behaviour are called COVERT BEHAVIOUR .

There are three aspects of behaviour which are

COGNITIVE ASPECT

This includes knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

AFFECTIVE ASPECT

This aspect reflects an individual’s underlying emotions, feelings or values.

CONATIVE ASPECT

This aspect describes psychomotor behaviour such as reflex movements, basic fundamental movements, perceptual abilities, physical abilities and skilled movements.

BEHAVIOUR AND MIND

There is a close association between an individual’s mind and his behaviour.

The integrative processes of the brain is called mind.

METHODS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Methods in psychology are “the ways psychologists go about making observations”.

There are several methods in Psychology. They are

- Experimental method
- Systematic observation method
- Survey method
- Test method
- Case history method.

EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

The basic steps in experimental method are

- Formulating a testable hypothesis in terms of observable events.
- Changing or varying the events which are hypothesized to have an effect.
- Keeping other conditions constant and
- Looking for an effect of change or variation on the system under observation.

The distinguishing characteristic of an experimental method is that the experimenter can carefully control conditions and take measurements in order to discover orderly relationships among variables.

A variable is something that can occur with different values.

Variables may be either independent or dependent.

An independent variable is a condition set or selected by an experimenter to see whether it will have an effect on behaviour.

A dependent variable is the behaviour of a person or animal in the experiment. It is so called because its value depends, or may depend, on the value of the independent variable.

Another very important characteristic of the experimental method is control. In an experiment, it is important that only the specified independent variables be allowed to change. Factors other than the independent variable which might affect the dependent variable must be held constant. This process is known as control.

Hypothesis should be framed for conducting the experiments.

Hypothesis may be defined as a tentative conclusion.

SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION METHOD

Using this method, psychological researchers simply make the most exciting and systematic study, they can, of naturally occurring behaviour. After making a number of observations, the psychologists can, using certain rules of logic, try to infer the causes of the behaviour being studied.

One aspect of this method is simply to describe behaviour as it occurs naturally. Without projecting one's wishes or biases. From these descriptions causes of the behaviour are identified.

SURVEY METHOD

Some problems that are difficult to study by direct observation may be studied through the use of questionnaires or interviews. An adequate survey requires carefully pretested questionnaires, a group of interviewers trained in its use, a sample carefully selected to ensure that the respondents are representatives of the population to be studied, and appropriate method of data analysis and reporting so that the results are properly interpreted.

TEST METHOD

Test is used in psychology to measure all kinds of abilities, interests, attitudes and accomplishments. Tests enable the psychologists to obtain large quantities of data from people with minimum disturbance of the living routines and without elaborate laboratory equipment.

A test presents a uniform situation to a group of people who vary in aspects relevant to the situation.

An analysis of the results then relates variations in test scores to variations among people.

Item preparation, scaling, and establishing norms are some of the steps involved in test construction.

CASE HISTORY METHOD

Scientific biographies are known as case histories and they are important sources of data for psychologists studying individuals.

Most case histories are prepared by reconstructing the biography of a person according to remembered events and records. Reconstructing is necessary because the persons earlier history often does not become a matter of interest until he develops some sort of problem. At such time understanding of the past is thought to be important to comprehension of present behaviour. The retrospective method may result in distortions of events or oversights, but it is often the only method available.

Case histories may also be biased on longitudinal study. This type of study follows an individual or group of individuals over an extended period of time, with measurements made at periodic intervals. Thus the case history is constructed from actual observations made by the investigator according to a plan. The advantage of a longitudinal study is that it does not depend on the memories of those interviewed at a later date.

MAJOR SUBFIELDS OF PSYCHOLOGY & WORK OF PSYCHOLOGISTS

Following are the some of the major sub fields of psychology

- Clinical psychology
- Counselling psychology
- School and Educational psychology
- Experimental psychology
- Industrial and organizational psychology
- Social psychology
- Developmental psychology
- Community psychology
- Physiological psychology.

1. CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

The greater number of Psychologists is engaged in clinical psychology. In clinical psychology, psychological principles are applied to the diagnosis and treatment of emotional and behavioural problems. A clinical psychologist may work in a mental hospital, a mental health clinic, an institution for the mentally retarded, a prison and may engaged in private practice.

2. COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

Counselling psychologists work with people who have milder emotional and personal problems. They are also consulted by the people for career or educational programs. In their practice counseling psychologists may make extensive use of tests to measure aptitudes, interests and personality characteristics. Besides family and marriage counselors try to help people who are having problems with family living.

3. SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In school psychology learning difficulties are diagnosed and remedied with the help of psychological principles. Using tests and information gained from consultations with student and his or her parents, the school psychologist try to pinpoint the problem and suggest action to correct it. Besides, there are school counsellors who are involved in vocational and other forms of counselling.

In educational psychology attempts are being made to increase the efficiency of learning in school by applying psychological knowledge about learning and motivation to the curriculum.

4. EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

In experimental psychology efforts are made to understand the fundamental causes of behaviour. Experimental psychologists do basic research and study learning and memory, thinking, sensation, perception, motivation, emotion and other fundamental process. Experimental psychologists study how behaviour is modified and how people retain these modification the processing of information in thinking, how human sensory systems work and the factors that urge than and give direction to behaviour.

5. INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANISATIOPNAL PSYCHOLOGY

This is a sub field of psychology in which psychological principles are applied to practical problems of work and commerce. Psychological principles are used to selecting employees, management and employee training, supervision of personnel improving communication within the organization, counselling employees, and to alleviating industrial strife.

6. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The primary focus of social psychology is on understanding how individuals are affected by other people. Perception of other people, determinants of interpersonal influences, attitudes change, stereotypes and group behaviour are some of the areas social psychology is concerned with.

Social psychologists have developed techniques for measuring attitudes and opinions.

7. DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Developmental psychology tries to understand complex behaviour by studying their beginnings and the orderly ways in which they change with time. Since the changes in behaviour occur rapidly in the early years of life, child psychology, the study of children's behaviour, comprises a large part of developmental psychology. Developmental changes also occur in adolescence, adulthood and old age. The study of these changes is also a part of developmental psychology.

8. COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

Community psychology applies psychological principles ideas, and points of view to help solve social problems and to help individuals adapt to do their work and living groups. Some community psychologists are essentially clinical psychologists. They setup programs to reach people in the community who happen to have behaviour problems.

Other community psychologists are concerned with bringing ideas from the behavioural sciences to bear on community problems. They are called the "social problem community psychologists".

9. PHYSIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Physiological psychology is concerned with the relationship of the brain and other biological activity to behaviour. Physiological psychology is also considered to be part of the broader field of neurobiology – the study of the nervous system and its functions.

PSYCHOLOGY AS A BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE:

What is Science?

A science is a body of systematized knowledge that is gathered by carefully observing and measuring events.

PSYCHOLOGY IS A SCIENCE:

Psychologists do experiments and make observations which other can repeat. They obtain data, often in the form of quantitative measurements which other can verify. Thus experiments and observations are at the core of scientific psychology.

As a science, psychology is systematic. In scientific psychology, data from experiments and observations are organized with the help of theories. Theories are important tools in organizing observed facts. Psychological theories are general principles which summarize many observations and predict what can be expected to happen in new situations.

As summaries and predictors of events, psychological theories are not concerned as “right” or “wrong” but merely as more or less useful in helping summarize what has been observed and in making predictions about what is to be expected when new observations or experiments are done. As new data are obtained, these theories are subject to modification, or they may be scrapped in favour of a new psychological theory which is better than the old one. Many of the arguments psychologists have with each other are over the modification and scrapping of theories as new data are gathered.

Another important part of the scientific psychology is measurement. Measurement may be defined as the assignment of numbers to object and events according to certain rules. Measurement in psychology is often more difficult because many of the things psychologists study cannot be measured directly by physical scales. However, psychologists have devised many ingenious tests to assign numbers to objects and events. On the other hand, physical measures of space and time can be used to measure and explain certain psychological events, for example, psychologists can count the number of times a person behaves one way in one situation and another way in another situation. Or they can measure the time taken to make a response in one situation or another.

Since psychology do experiments and make observations, it is systematic and it measure the psychological events, psychology can be called as a science.

PSYCHOLOGY IS AN ART:

Psychological principles are used to solve real life problems.

The application of knowledge to practical problems is an art; it is a skill or a knack for doing things, which is acquired by study, practice and special experience. Psychologists are all practicing the art of psychology. These psychologists have learned, through special training, the art or knack of applying psychology.

In this sense, psychology can be considered as an Art.

So psychology is both the science and an art.

EARLY SCHOOLS OF P PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology as a separate area of study split away from philosophy a little over 100 years ago. In 1879, the first psychological laboratory was established at the university of Leipzig by Wilhelm Wundt. The famous textbook of William James, The Principles of psychology, published in 1890, was paved the way to psychology become a new separate field of study.

James, Wundt and the other psychologists thought of psychology as the study of mind. Later different influential psychologists held quite different views on the nature of mind and the proper subject matter for psychology.

Schools of thought formed around these leaders as their students adopted their ideas. These schools of thought are known as the schools of psychology. They set the direction for much of the research on mind and behaviour.

1. STRUCTURALISM

This early school of psychology grew up around the ideas of Wilhelm Wundt and was established at Cornell University in the United States by his student Edward B. Titchener.

The goal of the structuralists was to find the units, or elements which make up the mind. They thought that a first step in the study of mind should be a description of the basic or elementary, units of sensation, image and emotion which compose it.

The main method used by the structuralists to discover these elementary units of mind was Introspection (which means looking within). Subjects were trained to report as objectively as possible what they experienced in connection with certain stimulus.

2. GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

This school of psychology was founded in Germany about 1912 by Max Wertheimer and his colleagues Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler.

The German word Gestalt means “form” or “Configuration”. Gestalt psychologists maintained that the mind should be thought of as resulting from the whole pattern of sensory activity and the relationships and organizations within this pattern. Mental experience depends on the patterning and organization of elements and is not due simply to the compounding of elements. According to the Gestalt psychologists, and mind is best understood in terms of the ways elements are organized .

3. FUNCTIONALISM

John Dewey, James R. Angell and Harvey Carr are the functionalists. They proposed that psychology should study “ What mind and behaviour do” According to functionalist, mind and behaviour are adaptive . They enable an individual to adjust to a changing environment. Functionalists did experiments on the ways which learning, memory problem solving, and motivation help people and animals adapt to their environments.

4. BEHAVIORISM

This school of psychology originated with John B. Watson. Watson insisted that psychology should be restricted to the study of behaviour – the observable activities of people and animals. The three important characteristics of behaviorism are

- 1) Conditioned Response - the elements or building blocks of behaviour. Watson argued that complex human and animal behaviour is entirely made up of conditioned responses.
- 2) Learned Behaviour - All behaviour are learned and there are no inborn or innate behavioural tendencies.
- 3) Focus on Animal behaviour - Watson held that there are no essential differences between human and animal behaviour. We can learn much about our own behaviour from the study of what animals do.

5. PSYCHOANALYSIS

Psychoanalysis was founded in Vienna, Austria by SIGMUND FREUD. According to him much of what we do and think results from urges, or drives, which seek expression in behaviour and thought. These urges and drives are hidden from the awareness of the individual. They are unconscious. It is the expression of the unconscious drives which shows up in behaviour and thought. The term unconscious motivation described the key idea of psychoanalysis.

MODERN PERSPECTIVES:

The new perspectives which have arisen in the last 50 years or so give psychologists a rich variety of viewpoints to choose from in their task of describing and understanding behaviour.

Examples of these newer viewpoints include the biological, cognitive, developmental, humanistic and social perspectives. Behaviourism and psychoanalysis, on the other hand, are still in modified forms among the modern perspectives.

The perspective taken depends partly on the bias of the individual psychologists and partly on what aspect of the behaviour is under study. Certain perspectives are more apt for some behaviours than others.

1. BEHAVIOURAL PERSPECTIVE

Behavioural perspective explains all human behaviour in terms of reward and punishments – organisms learn to behave in certain ways based on stimulus – response associations. If any behaviour is rewarded it will be repeated. On the other hand punishment makes the organism to give up certain behaviour.

2. BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Psychologists with this perspective try to relate behaviour to functions of the body, the nervous and glandular systems in particular. Human behaviours are explained in terms of the functions of the brain, the chemistry of the brain and the hormonal differences.

3. THE COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

The word cognition refers to perception of the world around us, some aspects of learning, memory and comprehension of our social environment. It also refers to the processing of the information that we receive through the senses. Such processing is the basis of the experience we have which we call mind. Differences in the ways we process information may lead to differences in behaviour.

This perspective explains behaviour in terms of perception of stimulus, processing of information, storage of information in memory and later retrieval from memory store.

4. THE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Social perspective try to understand normal social interactions of human beings. This perspective tries to explain behaviour with the help of the individual's cognitive framework, consistency in behaviour, attitude, the participants and social settings.

Moreover it explains how individual's behaviour affects his or her relationship with other. In particular this perspective would look for changes in the number and quality of social relationships.

5. THE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

The developmental perspective is concerned with characteristic changes that occur in people as they mature. This perspective explain human behaviour in terms of the changes taking place in behaviour as a result of natural aging process.

6. THE HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

The humanistic perspective emphasizes the person's sense of self. From this viewpoint person's behaviour might be seen as a part of his or her quest for personal competence, achievement and self-esteem. Individuals will find ways of enhancing sense of self that will not harm or deprive others.

7. THE PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

This perspective focuses on the role of feelings and impulses which are thought to be unconscious. A Key psychodynamic idea is that when these impulses are unacceptable or when they make us anxious, we use defense mechanisms to reduce anxiety. Another key idea of psychoanalytic perspective is that slips or accidents, often happen for a reason and that they reveal hidden motives. The psychoanalytic perspective digs beneath the surface of the behaviour looking for hidden process and hidden impulses.