IB Psychology - New Syllabus (First Assessment 2027)

Paper 2 Model Answers

Section A

1. Describe how you used an observation in your class practical and its aim and procedure. [4]

In our class practical we used an observation to investigate social development in children. The aim was to see how often children engaged in cooperative play compared to solitary play during break time. This relates to human development because patterns of play behaviour reflect stages of social development.

The procedure involved conducting a structured, non-participant observation of children in a school playground. We created a checklist of behaviours such as sharing, turn-taking, and group play, alongside solitary behaviours like playing alone. Each observer watched for ten minutes and tallied the behaviours seen. To increase reliability, two observers recorded at the same time, and results were later compared.

This method allowed us to collect systematic data about social behaviour. Using a structured observation with a behaviour checklist ensured that data were objective, while inter-rater comparison reduced bias. The procedure directly linked back to the aim of examining cooperative and solitary play in children's social development.

2. Explain the concept of measurement in relation to the observation in your class practical. [4]

Measurement refers to how abstract concepts are operationalised and recorded in research. In observations, this means deciding on clear, observable categories of behaviour so they can be quantified reliably. Accurate measurement is essential to make sure the data genuinely reflects the aim of the study.

In our class practical on children's social development, we measured cooperative and solitary play using a structured behaviour checklist. Categories such as sharing, turn-taking, and group play were used to represent cooperative behaviour, while playing alone was recorded as solitary play. Each occurrence was tallied, giving us quantitative data that could be compared across observers.

This shows how the concept of measurement applied in our observation. By turning abstract ideas like "social development" into specific, observable behaviours, we made the study testable and systematic. Using a checklist improved the reliability of measurement, ensuring that different observers could record the same behaviours consistently.

3. Compare and contrast the research methodology of an observation used in your class practical with the research methodology of a survey. [6]

Observations and surveys are both widely used research methodologies in psychology. They share some similarities in design and ethics, but they differ in how data is collected and the type of information they provide.

One similarity is that both methods require careful planning and clear operationalisation. In our class practical, we conducted a structured, non-participant observation of children in a playground to study social development. We operationalised “cooperative play” as sharing, turn-taking, or group activities, and “solitary play” as playing alone. This checklist gave us clear categories to tally. In a survey, researchers would also need to design clear questions, such as asking children or teachers to rate how often certain play behaviours occur. Both methods must also meet ethical standards, like gaining school permission and ensuring confidentiality.

There are also clear differences between the two methods. Our observation gathered objective data on behaviour as it happened in a natural setting, which reduced reliance on memory and increased ecological validity. By contrast, a survey relies on participants’ self-reports, which can be influenced by recall errors or social desirability bias. Observations provide the researcher’s perspective, while surveys capture the participant’s own perceptions. Another difference is data type: our observation produced quantitative frequency counts of behaviours, whereas a survey could provide both numerical ratings and richer qualitative descriptions.

In summary, both observations and surveys are useful for studying development. Observations like ours provide systematic, real-time data about behaviour, while surveys allow researchers to access participants’ perspectives and beliefs. Using them together could give a fuller picture of children’s social development.

4. Design an interview or focus group to investigate the same topic you investigated in your observation class practical. [6]

To investigate the same topic of children’s social development, an interview or focus group could be designed to explore how children themselves or their teachers understand play behaviours. This method would provide qualitative data to complement the observational data.

The procedure would involve semi-structured interviews with teachers who supervise children during break time. An interview schedule would include open-ended questions such as: “What behaviours do you notice when children play together?” or “How do you see children learning cooperation through play?” This allows for flexibility to follow up on interesting points while ensuring consistency across interviews. The interviews would be recorded with consent and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

Alternatively, a small focus group of older children could be conducted. Engagement questions would warm them up ("What games do you like to play at recess?"), exploration questions would target the topic ("When do you usually play with others? When do you play alone?"), and exit questions would summarise their views. Ethical considerations such as parental consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw would be central.

This design would allow researchers to gain rich, detailed accounts of how cooperative and solitary play are understood, providing insight into social development beyond what was observed in behaviour alone.

Section B

Sherif et al. (1954) conducted a field experiment known as the "Robbers Cave" study to investigate intergroup conflict and cooperation. Twenty-two boys aged 11–12, all from similar middle-class, Protestant, American backgrounds, were taken to a summer camp in Oklahoma. They were randomly divided into two groups, who were initially kept separate and encouraged to form group identities through activities such as hiking and games. Once group bonds were established, the researchers introduced competitive tournaments between the groups, with prizes for the winners. This stage quickly led to hostility, name-calling, and even physical aggression between groups. In the final stage, Sherif introduced "superordinate goals" such as fixing a broken water tank and pooling money to hire a movie. These cooperative tasks reduced hostility and led to friendships between the groups. The researchers concluded that intergroup conflict arises from competition over limited resources but can be reduced through cooperation towards shared goals.

5. Discuss the following study with reference to two or more of the following concepts: bias, causality, measurement, and/or responsibility. [15]

The Robbers Cave experiment by Sherif et al. (1954) provides an opportunity to examine psychological concepts such as bias, causality, measurement, and responsibility. The study aimed to investigate intergroup conflict and cooperation in a naturalistic setting by placing 22 boys in a summer camp, dividing them into two groups, and observing the effects of competition and later cooperation.

One important concept is bias. The sample consisted only of 11–12-year-old boys from Protestant, white, middle-class families in the United States. This introduces cultural and gender bias because the results may not generalise to females, children of different ages, or individuals from other cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. The bias limits the external validity of the findings. Additionally, the researchers may have held expectations about conflict emerging, which could have influenced their observations. Recognising these biases is essential to interpreting how widely the study's conclusions about intergroup conflict can be applied.

Another key concept is causality. Sherif manipulated the environment by first fostering group identity, then introducing competitive tournaments, and finally creating superordinate goals. This sequential design allowed the researchers to argue that competition led to hostility, and cooperation reduced it. However, causality is not fully established because other factors, such as the boys' personalities or pre-existing friendships, could have influenced behaviour. The naturalistic camp setting improved ecological validity but reduced control over extraneous variables, which weakens internal validity.

Measurement is also relevant. The researchers primarily relied on qualitative observations of the boys' behaviour, such as name-calling, hostility, or cooperation. While these observations provided rich detail, they could lack objectivity and reliability because they depended on the interpretation of the observers. The absence of systematic, quantitative measures means that conclusions about the level of hostility or cooperation might be subjective. The study demonstrates the challenge of operationalising complex behaviours like conflict and friendship in a consistent, replicable way.

Responsibility is another important issue. The boys were deliberately placed in situations that produced hostility and aggression, including physical fights. This raises ethical concerns about the well-being of participants. While Sherif argued that hostility was reduced during the superordinate goal phase, participants may still have experienced stress, anxiety, or harm during the conflict stages. Today, an ethics board would likely require stronger safeguards, debriefing, and possibly reject aspects of the procedure altogether. The study highlights how responsibility in research design has become a greater priority in psychology since the 1950s.

In conclusion, the Robbers Cave study is valuable in showing how sociocultural factors such as competition and cooperation influence intergroup behaviour. However, the concepts of bias, causality, measurement, and responsibility show the limits of its findings. Bias and subjective measurement reduce the study's generalisability, causality is partly undermined by limited control, and responsibility raises serious ethical questions. Taken together, these concepts demonstrate that while the study is influential, its findings must be interpreted with caution.