

Observational
learning may occur
through indirect
experiences when

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



Observational learning plays an important role in socialization and learning more generally, as a great deal of our behavior is learned through the observation of others. As infants, we have learned to imitate other people's facial expressions to express how we feel or we have modeled what we have observed from other people's experiences.

Behavior analysts have contended that observational learning can be explained through the process of learning history, intermittent reinforcement, stimulus discrimination, conditioned discrimination, and stimulus generalization (Masia & Chase, 1997). Imitative behaviors occur through our history of reinforcement and when a stimulus discrimination that has been previously reinforced is presented, we are more likely to respond under specific conditions. Observational learning may occur through indirect experiences when previously learned behaviors results in observing the consequences received by another.

In the social cognitive perspective, Bandura and his colleagues suggested that observational learning cannot be learned alone, but it also required cognitive mediation between the acquisition and performance phase (Masia & Chase, 1997). Social Cognitive Perspective In the early days, social learning theorists disagreed with the explanation of behavioral principles because there were different perspectives as to how a subject can acquire a new skill through observation. Observational learning is seeing a change in the observer's behavior after observing the model's actions. The negative and positive consequences can affect an observer's behavior known as vicarious learning. Vicarious learning is observing others receive

reinforcement or punishment that will increase or decrease the likelihood of the subject imitating the behavior in the future.

Social cognitive theorists described vicarious learning as having two parts that include an acquisition and performance phase. (Masia & Chase 1997). During the acquisition phase, this is when subjects first encounter a model showing them a new behavior that is not yet in their repertoire and their minds are memorizing (cognitive mediation) the actions they have seen. For vicarious learning to happen, during the performance phase is when subjects are remembering what they have observed previously and performing the behavior later to contact the same reinforcer. Several studies of Bandura and his colleagues have demonstrated the effects of vicarious learning and how subjects do not need to directly contact reinforcement to imitate the modeled behavior (Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963). These studies tied into the two phases of vicarious learning because children are learning and remembering novel responses through observation and subjects model the same behavior depending on if the subjects observed the model receiving reinforcement or punishment. Within the acquisition phase, social learning theorists believe that human cognition plays a role in observational learning.

The observer is associating what is modeled and its consequence as to whether the person they are observing is reinforced positively or negatively and this memory is stored in our mind to help guide us in how to respond in certain situations. For example, when a student observes another student asking politely to borrow a pencil, that student received the pencil, and this

will increase the chances of the observer asking politely to borrow an item in the future. When a student observes another student getting reprimanded for not raising their hand before speaking in class, this will decrease the chances of the observer speaking before raising their hand in the future. In conclusion, from a social cognitive perspective, social learning theorists believe that vicarious learning has two phases (acquisition and performance) and cognitive meditation occurs during the acquisition phase.

Although these evidence seem reasonable, from a behavior analytic perspective, we may question how we can measure and observe covert behaviors. This leads us to examine the behavior analytic perspective of observation learning. Behavior Analytic Perspective In a behavior analytic perspective, we have an alternative way of viewing observational learning. Behavior analysis believes that behaviors do not occur because x caused y to happen; it is through our history of reinforcement and our environment.

For example, as an infant, parents provided their child with different discriminative stimuli, when parents say, "do this" or "say, mama". Discriminative stimuli are "antecedents that trigger or set the occasion for or inhibit the occurrence of the behavior" (Mayer, Sulzer-Azaroff, & Wallace, 2014). As parents deliver a variety of discriminative stimuli or peers may serve as the discriminative stimulus, the child will learn to imitate their parents or peers based on their direct experiences, the consequence that followed their previous responses and through observing others. This is a process called conditional discrimination where the child would discriminate

between which response will receive reinforcement and which response will be put on extinction.

Children learned to generalize across different stimulus which led to the likelihood of the child imitating other people's behaviors depending on its consequence. Generalized imitation begins with matching between the modeled performance (discriminative stimulus) and the imitative operant (reinforcement). The model sets the occasion for when the subject gets reinforced and what behavior gets extinguished that results in a stimulus class of modeled actions and an imitative response class. In other words, the stimulus may be different, but it produces the same effect on the behavior and responses may be different, but it provides the same consequences. Additionally, modeling and imitation can occur in the absence of the discriminative stimulus. For example, a child might observe their parents on the phone and how they are holding the phone against their ear. Later, when the child gets a toy phone, the child brings the phone up to their ear and say "hello", and parents might say, "wow, good job for using the phone!" To put this another way, the organism can learn to imitate observed behavior when a delay is added between the offset of the stimulus and the imitative response which involves the absence of the discriminative stimulus.

In contrast, Bandura's theory, he believed the cognitive mediation was part of the observational learning process (Bandura, 1965), but from a behavior analytic perspective, it is from learned behaviors of the observer that produces the imitative behavior under similar circumstances in the future. From a behavioral analytic viewpoint, they look at environmental

contingencies that maintain or contribute to the target behavior and if these contingencies are present during the time of observation, the child is most likely to imitate the behavior because it has been previously reinforced. Behavior analysis wants to measure observable behaviors and disagrees with the idea of cognitive variables being a part of the observational learning process. To further understand vicarious learning as being a part of observational learning, we need to examine if observing others receive reinforcement will result in imitation for the observer. For example, Ollendick, Dailey, and Shapiro (1983) measured to see if vicarious reinforcement can maintain a child's behavior or would vicarious reinforcement decrease the child's performance eventually.

Results showed that children who were praised continued to perform well and children who were observing their partner being praised had a decrease in responding over time. The study incorporated an intermittent reinforcement schedule for the observing participants in the first phase of the study. Results showed that intermittent reinforcement which is not providing reinforcement for every behavior can still provide stable responses because it works as a motivating operation for the next reinforcer. In some cases, peer observations can alter the value of the reinforcer or objects that were manipulated by their peers. The behavior analytic perspective of observational learning focused on learning history, intermittent reinforcement, stimulus discrimination, conditioned discrimination, and stimulus generalization. Whereas, the social cognitive perspective focused on learning by the actions of the model. Although there have been many

studies on observational learning from the social cognitive and behavior analytic perspective, none of these studies have looked at errors.

Previous studies have not examined to see if observing errors will decrease the observer from making mistakes or shifting the observer's choice. The present study aims to explore whether more foreign language skills are learned from observing someone behave correctly on all trials while learning a foreign language compared to observing someone who makes mistakes half of the time and requires correction from the experimenter (i. e., pointing to the correct answer and saying, " no, this is the correct answer, point to this card when I say " X").