

The Cognitive Perspective

Introduction

Cognitive psychology is concerned with how people acquire, store, transform, use and communicate information. Following the influential and exciting conferences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the 1950s, there was an explosion of research into cognitive processes such as memory, language acquisition, attention, perception and problem solving. Cognitive psychologists rejected the behaviourist assumption that mental events or states were unsuitable for scientific study.

Developments in the fields of engineering, computer science and linguistics helped cognitive psychologists develop models showing how information could be efficiently represented, stored and transformed. They also provided analogies for cognitive psychologists to use when attempting to explain complex behaviours. More recently, development of brain-scanning techniques provided conceptual links between the cognitive and biological perspectives. Brain-scanning techniques have also provided psychologists with the means to actually see the physiological processes within the brain that are associated with cognition.

Cognitive psychologists recognize that using computer analogies to explain human behaviour has limitations. This recognition has led to the development of alternative models and fields of inquiry. These include research areas such as social cognition and the development of cognitive based therapies.

Learning outcomes

Students should expect questions asking them to:

1. describe and evaluate the four content topics as they relate to the cognitive perspective
2. describe and evaluate theories and empirical studies within this perspective
3. explain, where appropriate, how cultural, ethical, gender and methodological considerations may affect the interpretation of behaviour from a cognitive perspective
4. compare theories, empirical studies and the four content topics of this perspective with those from other perspectives
5. identify and explain the strengths and limitations of cognitive explanations of behaviour
6. explain the extent to which the concepts of free will and determinism relate to this perspective
7. assess the extent to which concepts and models of information processing have helped in the understanding of cognitive processes
8. assess claims that some research within this perspective lacks ecological validity, and be able to consider alternative research methods.

<u>Content</u>	<u>Suggestions for detailed study</u>
<p>Development and cultural contexts</p> <p>Historical and cultural conditions that gave rise to the cognitive perspective</p> <p>Contribution of the cognitive perspective to the scientific study of behaviour</p> <p>Framework</p> <p>Key concepts</p> <p>Assumptions on which key concepts are based</p> <p>Evaluation of assumptions</p> <p>Theoretical explanations of behaviour</p> <p>Methodologies</p> <p>Methods</p> <p>Strengths and limitations of methods</p> <p>Ethics and controversies of research</p> <p>Application</p> <p>Effectiveness (relative strengths and limitations) of the perspective in explaining psychological or social questions</p> <p>Application of theories and findings of empirical studies from the cognitive perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenges to behaviourism (such as cognitive maps) • impact of the Second World War (such as the need to understand or predict cognitive processes) • development of models and theories of cognition (such as perceptual processing) • insights into information processing (such as the working memory model) • attention, perception, memory, language • selective attention, schemas, short-term and long-term memory • mental processes can be studied scientifically • relevance of explanations of non-human behaviour to humans • comparison with other perspectives to explain strengths and limitations • empirical studies that support or challenge • cognitive dissonance or perceptual set • experiments • interviews • verbal protocols • ecological validity • use of human participants for research • use of non-human animals for research • comparison with other perspectives on questions such as aggression, gender differences or stress • contribution of the cognitive perspective to areas such as education (for example, when, how and what to teach), work (for example, the use of eyewitness testimony), treatment (for example, self-instructional training)