A psychologist used an observation to investigate pro-social behaviour in pre-school children (3-4 years old). They used a structured observation by controlling the playroom where the indoor toys were kept. A covert booth was built in the corner of the room so the children would be unaware of the psychologist. For a period of 30 minutes a small group of eight children were observed using behaviour categories focused on positive play, co-operation and sharing.

Explain how you would use the observation method to investigate pro-social behaviour in a group of pre-school children. Justify your decisions as part of your explanation.

You must refer to:

- your research hypothesis
- the sample and sampling technique
- how you would operationalise your behavioural categories
- one way you could ensure inter-rater reliability

You should use your own experience of carrying out an observation to inform your response. **(15)**

Sample Answer:

In this structured observation into pro-social behaviour in pre-school children, I would investigate gender differences. I would formulate a hypothesis which states there will be a significant difference between boys and girls and the number of prosocial behaviours they display in the 30-minute observation. This prediction expects a difference to be seen in the results, but I do not know which group will show more pro-social behaviour. This is appropriate as there is no previous research so a one-tailed prediction would not be appropriate. In my practical observation investigating the difference in healthy food choices between students and teachers, I predicted there would be a significant difference, with students selecting more unhealthy choices. This was a one-tailed prediction.

In this observation I would select a sample of 10 children from a local primary school, year 1 class. As I am investigating gender differences, I would need an equal number of boys and girls in the sample. I would use random sampling by placing all the names of the full class of year 1 boys into a hat and randomly selecting 5 participants and then repeat this process with the year 1 girls. This would ensure that all the children in year 1 had an equal chance of being selected in the final sample, which makes it a fair test. However, there is a risk that this sampling technique may not be representative of the wider population. In my practical observation, I used opportunity sampling to gather my participants by taking anyone who entered the student canteen at the time of the observation. This method was quick and easy and took people who were accessible at the time, however, could have been subject to researcher bias. My sample was divided up naturally by the nature of the person; teacher or student.

In this observation I would operationalise the behavioural categories for pro-social behaviour by preselecting the categories before the start. The tally chart would include examples such as helpful behaviour, sharing with others, being polite or being caring to others, and showing support to others. Every time one of the year 1 children display a behaviour this would be counted as one tally and recorded in the table. This method would be standardised to increase the reliability of the findings. In my practical observation I operationalised the behavioural categories by creating a tally chart which included healthy and unhealthy food sold in the student canteen. Every person who purchased items of food at the till, were recorded in the tally chart. One item of food was recorded as one tally mark. This allowed for easy replication, increasing the reliability.

In this observation I would ensure inter-rater reliability by having more than one observer record the behaviours of the year 1 children. Each observer would be given the same standardised tally chart and would use the same marking criteria for recording the behavioural categories. They would then have to agree on the criteria observed which would ensure consistency and make the results more reliable. In my practical observation, I did not have more than one observer, so my study lacked inter-rater reliability. If I were to repeat my observation in the student canteen, I would use two independent observers to ensure inter-rater reliability.