

The following sample is a response to the learning objective:
Distinguish between etic and emic concepts.

What is the question asking for?

- A clear definition of both "etic" and "emic" concepts.
- An explanation of the difference between the two terms.
- No research is required, but examples would be helpful.



Sample response

A definition of an etic approach.

An appropriate example of an etic study.

A definition of emic

An appropriate example of emic research. Clearly outlined.

The difference between the two approaches is clearly outlined.

Psychologists use both emic and etic approaches to study the role of culture on human behaviour. An etic approach is a cross-cultural approach. In an etic approach, the researchers decide what to study before arriving in the field and they apply theory that comes from their own culture. They are ethnocentric in their approach. For example, Ainsworth's strange situation experiment was replicated in 32 different countries to see if secure parent-child attachment was culturally universal.

An emic approach has the goal of studying or even helping an individual culture. Emic researchers decide what to study and how to study it after they have immersed themselves in the culture. They make use of "local experts" in order to best understand the culture. For example, Bolton carried out a study to determine what was considered "abnormal" depression after the Rwandan genocide. Working together with the local healers, he found that they were able to decide who was coping just fine, and who was suffering from depression. The goal was not to generalize to a larger community, but rather to help determine the mental health of Rwandans.

So, the key differences between emic and etic approaches are that emic looks within a culture and etic looks between cultures; etic is ethnocentric and emic makes use of local knowledge; and etic approaches have the goal of generalizing to a larger community, whereas emic approaches are focused only on the single culture.

A strong response. Prediction: full marks



What are common problems with this question?

- Examples are given, but the two approaches are not outlined in any detail.
- Students mix up emic and etic.
- The concepts are oversimplified. Etic is not simply when a behaviour is universal and emic when it is not. It is an approach to research, not a focus on the results.
- The difference between the two concepts is not clearly outlined.