
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION INCLUDING ETHNOGRAPHY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The unit deals with the basic concepts, implications and uses of qualitative research in psychology. The unit also tries to introduce and describe the meaning and essence of ‘ethnography’ in qualitative research. It provides the meaning and types of qualitative research. Comparing qualitative with quantitative research, the unit puts forward the relevance of qualitative research in the field of psychology. In this unit, the various methods of ethnographic research are presented. The ethical guidelines in qualitative research.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- define qualitative research;
- differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research;
- explain different types of qualitative research;
- describe the relevance of qualitative research in psychology; and
- explain the concept and importance of ethnography in qualitative research.

1.2 MEANING OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research can be defined as a type of scientific research that tries to bridge the gap of incomplete information, systematically collects evidence, produces findings and thereby seeks answer to a problem or question. It is widely used in collecting and understanding specific information about the behaviour, opinion, values and other social aspects of a particular community, culture or population. An example of a qualitative research can be studying the concepts of spiritual development amongst college students. David (1995) had done such a study at a fairly conservative school. He actually tried to analyse whether there is uniformity or considerable diversity in people's understanding of spiritual development or not.

Qualitative research helps in providing an in depth knowledge regarding human behaviour and tries to find out reasons behind decision making tendencies of humans.

1.3 TYPES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Attempting to understand human nature, market research purposes, current trends, changing tastes and preferences of people, there are certain approaches of qualitative research. They are:

- i) **Case study:** With the help of this method a case of an individual, group, event, institution or society is studied. It helps in providing an in depth knowledge of the nature, process or phenomena of a specific case under study. Multiple methods of data collection are often used in case study research (example, interviews, observation, documents, and questionnaires). The final report of the case study provides a rich (i.e., vivid and detailed) and holistic (i.e., describes the whole and its parts) description of the case and its context.
- ii) **Ethnography:** This approach mainly focuses on a particular community. It is more of a kind of closefield observation and basically tries to study a socio cultural phenomena. For example, judging others based on the researchers' cultural standards. Ethnography can be used for comparative analysis of cultural groups (e.g. eating habits of North Indians and South Indians), also known 'Ethnology'. Further it can also be used to analyse the cultural past of group of people (e.g. Harrapan civilisation), also known as 'Ethnohistory'.
- iii) **Historical method:** This method helps in understanding and analysing the causal relationships. With the help of this technique, the data related to the occurrence of an event is collected and evaluated in order to understand the reasons behind occurrence of such events. It helps in testing hypothesis concerning cause, effects and trends of events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future events as well.
- iv) **Grounded theory:** This approach involves an active participation of the researcher in the activities of the group, culture or the community under study. The data regarding the required information is collected with the help of observation. It is generally used in generating or developing theories. This means that the ground theorists can not only work upon generation of new theories, they can test or elaborate previously grounded theories.

Four important characteristics of a grounded theory are:

- i) Fit: It helps in analysing whether the theory corresponds to real existing community
- ii) Understanding: The theory generated by grounding is clear and understandable
- iii) Generality: The theory provides much information and scope for further analysis or generating more theories.
- iv) Control: The theory generated is valid as it has been analysed under controlled conditions.

Functions of Grounded Theory

- i) It helps in identifying anchors or codes that allow the key points of the data to be gathered
- ii) It helps in making implicit belief systems explicit with the help of researchers' questions and analysis.
- iii) It consists of a set of steps whose careful execution is thought to "guarantee" a good theory as the outcome.
- iv) Data collection and analysis continue throughout the study.
- vi) **Phenomenology:** In this method, the behavioural phenomena is explained with the help of conscious experience of events, without using any theory, calculations or assumptions from other disciplines. The concept can be best understood with the help of one of the studies that was done in which patients were asked to describe about caring and non caring nurses in hospitals Creswell, 1998. The patients explained those nurses to be caring who show their existential presence and not mere their physical presence. The existential presence of caring nurses referred to the positive response showed by them to the patient's request. The relaxation, comfort and security that the client expresses both physically and mentally are an immediate and direct result of the client's stated and unstated needs being heard and responded to by the nurse.

Self Assessment Questions

Fill in the Blanks

- i) approach involves an active participation of the researcher in the activities of the group, culture or the community under study.
- ii) method helps in understanding and analysing the causal relationships.
- iii) helps in testing hypothesis concerning cause, effects and trends of events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future events as well
- iv) Qualitative research can be defined as
- v) The behavioural phenomena is explained with the help of conscious experience of events with the help of method
- vi) Case study is one of the widely used method in (qualitative/ quantitative) research.

1.4 QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: A COMPARISON

The basic conceptual difference between both of the research techniques is that, quantitative research is based on numerical or graphical representation of data whereas; qualitative research is based on observation and experiences.

Other differences:

	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
General Framework:	Seeks to explore phenomena using some structured methods such as in depth interviews, experiences, participant observation.	Seeks to confirm hypothesis related to phenomena using highly structured methods such as, questionnaires, surveys, structured observation.
Objectives:	It aims to describe variation, explain relationships, describe behaviour, experiences and norms of individuals and groups.	It aims to quantify variation, predict causal relationships.
Questions:	The questions used for data collection are open ended ones	The questions used for data collection are close ended ones
Representation of data:	Data is represented in form of notes, recordings and video tapes.	Data is represented in form of numbers and graphs.
Research Design:	The research design allows some flexibility in certain situational aspects. The questions used for the data collection differs individually and depends upon the response of the participants.	The research design is predetermined and stable from the beginning. The questions used for data collection are structured and same for all the participants.

(Source: *Qualitative Research Method: A Data Collector's field guide*)

1.5 RELEVANCE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY

Qualitative research methods has gained much importance in the discipline of psychology leaving other human sciences far below such as sociology and nursing, with the main motive of maintaining the historical attempt to frame psychology as a natural science.

Comparatively, natural science methods use experimental means in order to examine the causal relationships, wherein, this approach uses a large number of participants and effectively captures aspects of our human nature. Qualitative research is less interested in explaining phenomena than in understanding them and that is why it has several good relevance and implications in psychology.

Qualitative research therefore, helps in attaining an in depth knowledge of human nature, attitude, behaviour and experiences.

It has several implications in the discipline of psychology, as it:

- i) Helps in textual description of experiences of people.
- ii) Helps in identifying and explaining social norms, religion, roles of gender and socio economic status.
- iii) Helps in understanding those behavioural phenomena which can not be quantified.
- iv) Helps in collecting data under more natural situations.
- v) Helps in determining those factors which are meaningful and are important to the respondents under study.

The open ended questions used in qualitative research provide a chance to unfold those facts which can not be done with the help of ‘to the point’ close ended questions.

Self Assessment Questions

Choose the correct alternative

- 1) Data is represented in form of notes, recordings and video tapes in
 - a) Qualitative research
 - b) Quantitative research
 - c) Both of the above
 - d) None of the above
- 2) Qualitative research methods has gained much importance in the discipline of
 - a) Psychology
 - b) Sociology
 - c) Anthropology
 - d) All of the above
- 3) Quantitative research is based on
 - a) Field notes
 - b) Numerical data
 - c) Case study
 - d) Recordings
- 4) Qualitative research helps in collecting data under more situations
 - a) Normal
 - b) Natural
 - c) Experimental
 - d) Artificial
- 5) The questions used for data collection in qualitative research are:
 - a) Open ended ones

- b) Closed ended ones
 - c) Structured ones
 - d) None of the above
- 6) The questions of the qualitative researchers depends upon
- a) The preplanned questions
 - b) Situations
 - c) Response of the respondents
 - d) All of the above

1.6 ETHNOGRAPHY: THE MEANING

The method is also known as ‘ethnomethodology’ or ‘methodology of people’. This type of research method basically intends to study culture through close observation and active participation. It focuses on studying socio cultural phenomena of a community. The ethnographer/ researcher collect information regarding the socio cultural phenomena from a lot of people belonging to the community under study.

On behalf of their community, the participants also identify and provide the researcher some more respondents as a representative of their community (also known as chaining process). The data is therefore collected using a chain sampling in all empirical areas of investigation. The selected samples are re- interviewed in order to elicit deeper and ambiguous responses. The ethnographer stays within the community for months in order to gain more information through chaining process and collect data in form of observational transcripts and interview recordings. The analysis of data leads to development of theories for the socio cultural phenomena under study, only on basis of the views and perspectives of its respondents.

1.7 SOME COMMON TERMS USED BY ETHNOGRAPHERS

- i) **Symbols:** Symbols refers to any tradition or material artifact of a particular culture such as art, clothing, food, technology and rituals. The ethnographer tries to understand the cultural connotations behind the symbols of a particular culture.
- ii) **Cultural patterning:** Ethnographic research believes that the meaning of symbols can not be understood until it is paired with one or more symbols. Cultural patterning refers to the study of cultural patterns formed through relationships between two or more than two symbols.
- iii) **Tacit knowledge:** It refers to those cultural beliefs which are firm in nature. They are so deeply embedded in their culture that they rarely need to be discussed by the members in an explicit way. Such knowledge can not be observed but needs to be inferred by the ethnographer e.g. the prejudices or the orthodox beliefs)
- iv) **Situational reduction:** It refers to the belief of ethnographers that social structures and social dynamism are a result of interactions of several social situations (e.g criminal acts can be due to the poor economic condition, frustration, parenthood, neighbours and peer group of the criminals)

1.8 ASSUMPTIONS IN ETHNOGRAPHY

- i) Ethnographic research assumes that the main objective of research depends upon and is affected by the interpretation of community cultural understandings. There are chances that the researcher over estimates the role of cultural perception and underestimates the role of causal reasons behind such cultural belief.
- ii) It also assumes that it is very important as well as difficult to identify the target community that requires to be studied by the researcher. Nature and size of the community as well as individuals' perception may play an important role on the subject that needs to be studied. Chances exist that the ethnographer may over estimate the role of community culture and underestimate the causal role of individual beliefs and perceptions.
- iii) Ethnography further assumes that the researcher is an expert and is thorough with the norm and mores of the culture. The researcher is also assumed to be an expert in the language spoken in the community. Chances exist that the researcher may show biasness towards his or her culture while studying the population of another community.

1.9 TYPES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

- i) **Macro ethnography:** It is the study of broadly defined cultural groupings such as – “the Indians”, “the Turkish”. The common perspectives are studied at a more larger level, which are found to be common under a more broader strata.
- ii) **Micro ethnography:** It is the study of more specific cultural groupings such as the “local government”, the “terrorists”.
- iii) **Emic perspectives:** It is the ethnographic approach under which the view points and responses of the ‘ingroup’ or the members of the culture under study are noted down.
- iv) **Etic perspective:** It is the ethnographic approach under which the view points and responses of the ‘out groups’ or the members who do not belong to the culture under study are noted down. Their viewpoints highlight the phenomena being followed under a particular culture.

1.10 PURPOSE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

It helps in cross cultural analysis.

It helps in analysing the past events or the history of the culture

It helps in studying the behaviour, experiences and attitudes of individuals in a more natural environment.

Close observation increases the chances of validity in the reports and theory formulated

1.11 STEPS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD

- 1) **Selection:** The ethnographic method begins with selection of a culture. The researcher selects the culture/ community or population according to his or her interest.

- 2) **Review of Literature:** Then the researcher reviews the literature pertaining to the culture to get a brief idea and historical sketch of the culture selected for study.
- 3) **Identification of variables:** The researcher then identifies variables which interests him or her as well as the members of the culture and needs to be explored.
- 4) **Entry:** The ethnographer then tries to enter the culture and gain the acceptance of the members of the culture.
- 5) **Cultural Immersion:** Ethnographers live in the culture for months or even years which they have chosen to study. The middle stages of the ethnographic method involve gaining informants, using them to gain yet more informants in a chaining process.
- 6) **Data Collection:** After gaining the confidence of the respondents, the researcher collects information in form of observational transcripts and interview recordings and tapings.
- 7) **Development of theory:** After analysing the data, the researcher formulates theory on the basis of interpretation of the results and reports achieved.

However, the ethnographic researcher tries best to avoid theoretical preconceptions and formulates theory on the basis of the perspectives of the members of the culture and from observation. The researcher may seek validation of induced theories by going back to members of the culture for their reaction.

1.12 ETHICAL GUIDELINES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The respondents and their responses should be respected by the researcher.

The researcher must show respect and belongingness to the community he or she is studying.

The respondents must be made aware of what is being analysed by the researcher.

Researcher must ensure and maintain the confidentialities of the researcher.

Researcher should be aware of the expected risks and benefits including the psychological and social aspects while performing the research.

Self Assessment Questions

State whether True or False.

- 1) Ethnography is also known as ‘methodology of culture’. ()
- 2) The ethnographer/ researcher collects information regarding the socio cultural phenomena from a lot of people belonging to the community under study. ()
- 3) Macro ethnography is the study of undefined cultural groupings ()
- 4) Out groups refers to the people belonging to the same group ()
- 5) The process of identifying and providing the researcher some more respondents by the earlier ones’ as a representative of their community is also known as chaining process ()

- 6) The analysis of data leads to development of theories in ethnography.
()

State whether True or False

- i) Ethnography assumes that the researcher is an expert of the culture which he or she has selected for studying. ()
- ii) The main objective of qualitative research does not depend upon interpretation of community cultural understandings by the researcher. ()
- iii) The ethnographer tries to understand the cultural connotations using the symbols of a particular culture. ()
- iv) Cultural patterning refers to the study of cultural patterns formed through relationships between the respondents ()
- v) It is the duty of the researcher to show respect and belongingness to the community they are studying. ()
- vi) Tacit knowledge refers to those cultural beliefs which are firm in nature ()

1.13 LET US SUM UP

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research which helps in collecting, analysing and interpreting the data of a group, community, culture or a market.. It helps in understanding the reasons behind the behaviour experience and attitudes of the people of the group, community, culture or market under study. It is authentic in nature because the researcher takes an active participation in the activities of the population under study. Unlike quantitative research, it does not require a preplanned framework, objective or interest. The primary interest of the researcher may change according to the community cultural understandings.

Out of the different techniques or types of qualitative research, ‘ethnographic research’ is one the most important and preferred one. Ethnography involves collection of data/ information from a number of respondents following a chain process, that is, the researcher is provided more respondents by the group of respondents who have already given their response or the required information. Data can be collected by the help of ethnography through different ways and perspectives as well.

1.14 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define qualitative research and discuss the relevance of qualitative research in psychology.
- 2) Differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research. Do you think that qualitative research is advantageous over quantitative research? Give reasons.
- 3) Elaborate the different types of qualitative research
- 4) What do you understand by the term ‘ethnography’? Describe its types and assumptions.

1.15 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

Agar, Michael (1996). *Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, Second edition. Academic Press, ISBN 0120444704 .

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Lareau, Annette & Schultz, Jeffrey, eds. (1996). *Journeys Through Ethnography: Realistic Accounts of Field Work*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Websites: <http://qualitativeresearch.ratcliffs.net/examples.pdf>

<http://www.southalabama.edu/coe/bset/johnson/lectures/lec12.htm>

Course: 5(Research Methods) Block: 4 (Qualitative Research in Psychology)