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The main purpose of this paper is to highlight and describe the process of conducting ethnographic research. The paper shares the methodology definitions, key characteristics, stages of research process which include preparation, data gathering, recording and analysis and advantages and disadvantages of conducting Ethnographic research.

Key Words: Ethnography, Methodological Issues, Field Research, Qualitative Research, and Participant Observation

Introduction: What is Ethnography Research?

A qualitative research method or process in which a researcher uses different ways to gather observations, interviews and documentary data to produce detailed and comprehensive accounts of different social phenomena is called Ethnographic Research. According to Fetterman (1998), it is an art and science which is used to describe a group or a culture. The three main founders of this research were Herodotus (435-485 BC), Beatrice Potter-Webb (1858-1943) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942).

One of the first ethnographer Herodotus wrote a book called *Historia* while traveling through the Mediterranean, living with people there, speaking with them in order to get to understand them. While Bronislaw Malinowski stayed at the Trobriand islands did his famous research on Kula trade. Ethnographic fieldwork is the method of ethnography which consists of all kinds of methods. And Beatrice Potter-Webb was the first ethnographer for sociology and did her research on sweatshops.

Ethnographers search for patterns in the lived human experiences by careful observation and participation in the lives of those under study, Angrosino (2007). That means that observation is the key element and plays a huge rule. The Ethnography researcher has to stay with a longer period of time with a group of people he or she is studying. That means, living together, working together, praying together, spending leisure time together in order to understand the people in the study.

There are some distinctive characteristics of Ethnography, firstly it is conducted in naturalistic settings meaning on-site. Secondly, it is personalized since the researcher is also a participant as well as the observer in the lives of those people who are under study. Thirdly, it allows data to be collected in multiple ways for triangulation over an extended period of time which can include an inductive, holistic and long-term commitment from the researcher. Lastly, ethnography can be termed as being dialogical since interpretations and conclusions formed through it can be given feedback from those who are under study.

Advantages:

According to Wolcott (1999), there are many advantages of conducting Ethnography research. For instance, Ethnography research can be conducted by one individual alone in almost any place and is longitudinal in nature allowing the researcher to observe and record changes over time. It focuses on working with subjects rather than treating them as objects and provides an enriching experience to the researcher. It doesn't cost much and does not require elaborate tools or equipment and draws upon the researcher's personal skills and strengths. It might give the researcher an added advantage of learning a new language or a culture, hence enhance his/her cultural diversity. Moreover, it provides the researcher exclusive domain or sole responsibility in choosing the setting or site. It also helps in studying marginalized groups of people closed to other forms of research and allows the researcher to collect data in a naturalistic setting in which people act naturally, while focusing on both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. The research signifies the role of a researcher and helps in providing insightful data, and the first-hand experience to get a view of reality which provides him/her with a thorough and rich database for further investigation and writing.

Methods of Data Collection & Conducting Ethnography Research

According to Angrosino (2007), there are namely three modes of data collection in Ethnography, which are observation, interviewing and archival research. The observation is the act of perceiving the activities and interrelationships of people in the field setting. It requires the researcher to participate in the lives of people under study while keeping a professional distance. The interview requires the researcher to converse and accord information with individuals being studied. And Archival research is the analysis of existing materials stored for research, service or other purposes both officially and unofficially according to Angrosino (2007).

There are different stages for conducting Ethnography field research according to Singleton & Straits (2005). The first stage is problem formulation which defines the main focus of the study by formulating the problem which the researcher wishes to learn about. The second stage requires a selection of research settings. The researcher has to know where and how he should initiate his research. The third stage requires a researcher to gain access and seek formal permission to conduct research. The fourth stage requires the researcher to present him/herself by adopting the role of being part of the study group. And the fifth stage requires a researcher to gather and record information using different ways.

When we talk about presenting yourself and being part of the study group to observe them you need to be ready to take in reactions of people you are going to study. Because when you are observing a natural situation you are bringing yourself in, and people might react to you in different ways based on your ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age so you should be ready to deal with those sorts of reactions as a researcher. You also need to focus on your personal skills like the foremost skill is language skill, will you able to communicate with them or you need training for that? The same goes for when you are observing different professions you need to learn their jargon. Hence, you need language skills.

Another important skill you need as an ethnographer researcher is the ability to create explicit attention. You have to train your memory to take mental notes, take written notes as well as always be a good listener in order to hear stories and learn new things. Be open to new opinions and also have an analytical imagination to try to interpret and analyze a social situation.

An ethnographer researcher can be an observing participant or a participant observant. An observing participant is someone who is relatively involved whereas participant observant is a little bit detached. So, as a researcher, you need to manage your impression management skills and act accordingly to the situations. Sometimes you have to act naive in order to get better information. According to Erving Goffman as a field worker, you sometimes have to play the donkey's ass. You have to be more stupid than you really are because of impression management.

So when we talk about observation it does not only mean watching, it also means listening, smelling, tasting and using our senses. As a researcher, you should know there lies a difference between an observation and objective observation if we use epistemology. For example, how do social scientists think and what are the observational paradigms? Adler & Adler (1964) wrote a chapter on five

observational paradigms in sociology. The first paradigm is Simmel's paradigm of formal sociology which focuses on forms of social interaction. In this paradigm, he focuses on social types and gives an example of a stranger as someone with certain connections but a certain distance towards others. The dramaturgical sociology of Goffman is the second paradigm that focuses on social life, the roles people play both at the front and backstage. He looks at how people interact and create meaningful relationships, focusing on creating meaning through interactions. The third paradigm is by Lofland (1973) which is the paradigm of the public realm. It focuses on the city and dealing with the public and private. The fourth paradigm is by Crapanzano called Auto Observation or Auto Ethnography and it focuses on one's own self, as a participating member of society. And finally, the fifth paradigm is an observational paradigm also called the Ethnomethodology paradigm which focuses on how an individual's interaction creates everyday life and social order. So these are the five main paradigms of observation.

Frans De Waal (2007) wrote in his famous book on Chimpanzee Politics that everyone can look but actually perceiving is something that has to be learned. A trained eye can see more. Focus is very important in observation. According to James Spradley (1980) focus on observation can be built in three steps. The first step is to start with the descriptive observation which is a general description of a certain group or area or whatever you study. The second step is a focused observation in which you try to answer your research questions, deepen your interest, continue on serendipitous finding and start creating taxonomies. The third step is selective observation in which you focus on comparisons and nuances looking for more evidence or contrary evidence. Look at why certain people act a certain way while others differ. You start finding examples and documentation related to previous researches and you start interview individuals or observe conversations with people. The outcomes of selective research are taxonomies, categories, and links which at this stage are tested since you have looked for contrary evidence. You do this at the end of the study. Hence, you learn two main lessons from De Waal (2007), that the trained eye can see more and Gestalt perception which is that the whole of action is more than the sum of its parts (acts).

Focus is necessary to confirm your findings. But one should be aware of confirmation bias. For example, if you are watching a video of cyclists in Amsterdam, probably you might come across a group of cyclists who are not following and rules and driving recklessly, at first glance your judgment would be that cycling in Amsterdam is dangerous because people don't follow rules. But if you watch that video again you can see that 90% of the people behind did follow the rules. So, you should be aware of intentional bias. By focusing on only those who are breaking the rules we can jump to such conclusions. Hence a researcher should be adamant about focusing the clear picture before jumping to conclusions. It is said that 'you're not looking at something you're not looking for' which means you only see what you focus on, you lose focus on other things and that is called Changed blindness.

And the last and most important skill is writing as in note-taking. You need to observe and take notes, you need to be good at writing because even if you're a great participator, you're a great observer it doesn't mean a thing if you can't write it down. So for gathering and collecting data, you need to jot down notes, write brief and long observations, record observations as soon as possible because it's not possible to write down each and everything all the time. You can also use voice recorders, cameras, and other such instruments to collect data.

There are two types of observation, structured observation, and unstructured observation. Structured observation starts with a coding system. You need this to specify types of behavior to certain specific categories. You require rules of interpretation which are required to be on your computer or your cellphone. For example, Flanders (1970) Interaction Analysis Categories is used in educational science where you can do a teacher observation and assign numbers to certain behavior which he/she is displaying in the classroom like whether she praises and encourages a student, or gives directions in classroom or uses ideas of students in the classroom. Hence to specifically observe teacher-student interaction, you use these codes.

As far as unstructured observation and note-taking are concerned LeCompte and Schensul (1999) have come up with three types of notes. The first type of field note-taking is an inscription, the second is description, and the third is transcription. In inscription the first type of note is mental note, second is jotting down pieces of information or using your phone to get images, videos, and audios as recordings. The second note-taking is description notes which are made after something occurs in the field, you jot down small notes during observation and once you are out of the field you start writing full field notes which includes minutes of meetings or conversation, description of observations, interviews. Hence, you write a reflection about what happened in the field. Thick description is the in-depth and contextual description in order to convey meaning. The third type is transcription which can be in a form of audio, video, interaction and interview transcriptions, which requires transcribing audio or video recording into written language.

For data collection, your detailed descriptive accounts and field notes should include running descriptions which should include setting, the people, individual actions and activities, group behaviors, and perspectives. You should also gather data about forgotten episodes which you remember later on. You should also jot down ideas and notes for further information related to data analysis, data collection, speculations, and plans for future observations about specific things or people. Personal impressions and feelings should also be recorded regarding subjective reactions you had while working in the field which can be later used as clues to biases. Ethnographer researchers are also encouraged to take down methodological notes which refer to ideas related to techniques used to conduct research, for example, difficulties you have in collecting data, any biases that might be introduced by data collection techniques in how you can make and record observations.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis and interpretation can be challenging for Ethnographers because they collect great quantities of data to describe the belief and behavior of people in everyday situations (Roper & Shapira, 2000). The foremost requirement of Ethnographer researcher is to understand the material which he/she has collected, by data analysis.

There are a couple of strategies that (Roper & Shapira) have suggested for ethnographic analysis. The first strategy is coding for descriptive labels, it includes the grouping of written words into meaningful categories or descriptive labels, then organizing, comparing, contrasting and identifying their patterns. In order to reduce data to a manageable size, first-level coding is done. Before beginning the coding process, it is advisable to formulate basic domains to categorize a broad range of phenomena for example relationships and social structure, perspectives, meanings, activities, events, and phrases. The second strategy is sorting for patterns, which requires the researcher to sort and group descriptive labels into smaller sets, developing themes from those groups and a sense of possible connection between the information. The third strategy includes identifying outliers, which can be cases, situations, settings, and events that don't fit with the rest of the findings. They should be kept in mind as different steps in the research process are developed. The fourth strategy is generalizing constructs and theories, which is done by reviewing the existing literature. In order to make sense of the rich and complex data collected the connected findings and patterns are related to theories. And finally, the fifth strategy is memo-ing with reflective remarks, which help the researcher to keep track of their assumptions, biases, and opinions throughout the whole research process. They help the researcher to keep track of if something needs further testing or clarification. The best solution for organizing and analyzing your research data in the 21st century is to bring data from your phone to your laptop and then use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

While maintaining quality ethnographic research the researcher should consider three main aspects which include: reactivity, reliability, and validity. The amount of your presence as a researcher influences the behavior of those who are under study which might make the act differently, which is called reactivity (Neuman, 2003). The reduction of the effect of reactivity can be achieved if a researcher familiarizes himself with the lives of others and doesn't portray unobtrusive and disruptive behavior. The question of whether you are able to collect data that are internally and externally consistent, and credible addresses the reliability in field research. If the researcher records behaviors that are consistent over time and in different social contexts that means data is internally consistent. By verifying or cross-checking data with other sources you can achieve external consistency. The credibility of the source of information needs to be assessed because most Ethnographic researchers depend on what others tell them. According to Neuman (2003), information shared could be in the forms of misinformation, evasions, lies, and omissions so reliability in field research depends upon researchers' insight, awareness, questions and looking at behaviors and events from different angles and perspectives.

According to Neuman (2003), the confidence placed in your ability to collect and analyze data accurately, while representing the lives or culture under study is the Validity in field research. Reflection of the world of those under study is Ecological Validity which is achieved by the data collected and described by the researcher. It is encouraged to check for member validation by taking the field results back to those who are under study to check for adequacy and accuracy from their perspectives (Neuman, 2003). The degree to which the study results and conclusions have relevance beyond the study itself is the pragmatic validity and transferability which the study should have.

Possible Pitfalls awareness for Conducting Ethnographic Research:

Over the years several disadvantages of ethnographic research have emerged. Since ethnographic research requires fieldwork, just like field research it faces the same limitations (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Ethnographic research is very intensive and time consuming some even go on for years at a

stretch. According to Singleton & Straits, (2005) there is always the question of "how much" time a researcher can spend as a participant and as an observer. Secondly according to Singleton & Straits (2005), balancing the requirements of observation and participation can be very difficult. A researcher can develop empathy, trust, and rapport with those under case study, and become more of a participant rather than an observer and eventually lose sight of their role as a researcher (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Thirdly, field note taking lacks the level of structure and control measure objectivity and the researcher's personal values and attitudes may lead to bias. According to Roper and Shapira, (2000), data analysis and interpretation can be extensively difficult and tiring due to the sheer volume of rich data collected during research. Fourthly, some settings can be very unsafe and the researcher has to learn the ins and outs and ways to survive with personal stress and conflicts in the field (Neuman, 2003). Finally, the researcher has to face ethical dilemmas which according to Angrisano, (2007); Neuman, (2003) include issues related to unintentional revelation of identities; deception and misrepresentation of him/her self; Issues of confidentiality and privacy; violation of his/her own basic personal moral standards, negotiations with the elite in power or authority and researcher publishing field reports that may be truthful but unflattering are all ethical issues that may arise.

Conclusion

By understanding a problem's domain, audiences, processes, context and goals, ethnographic methods allow a particularly deep insight and can be highly useful in discovering and exploring previously unknown issues. Ethnographic study solely depends upon ethnographic researcher because he/she is the one who is responsible for designing, conducting, analyzing the study's findings - hence it is very vital and essential that the researcher has excellent communication, observation and analyzing skills and experience to make sure the study is accurate, fair and representative.

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