



THE ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper, titled as “*The Ethnographic Research*” is to describe the importance of ethnographic research in cultural studies, its key characteristics, process of conducting ethnographic research, the dimensions that ethnographers must consider in order to get a comprehensive collection of data information in cultural studies and the role of ethnographic researchers to gain the better understanding of the ethnographic research. The importance of ethnographic research is that it enables its presentation as a diagnostic and microcosm of knowledge on a subject and turns this knowledge into generic and recursive knowledge, explore new facts, produce voluminous unstructured data and generate new theories. The role of the ethnographer includes; permission to access society, establish a close and ongoing relationships with research population, maintain reliable and participatory relationships with the research population and to understand phenomena they witness without influencing them at all.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnography focuses on interpretation, understanding and representation of any area studied by a researcher. The method of data collection in an ethnographic research is ‘observation’ that may be participant, direct or indirect. The ethnographic approach studies that how people interpret and relate to their culture, their beliefs and behaviors, lives and events that take place. In sociology, ethnography is one of the early qualitative approaches which study the native culture of a tribe in their natural surroundings through immersion in native population carrying out participant observation or non-participant observation. The process of immersion in the real world enables the researcher to discover and describe the complexities and shared cultural meanings of the social world, and to interpret the meaning of the phenomena under investigation. The product of the ethnographic research is that it presents the research to the public and appears as written academic work in the forms of research report, article, monograph, and book. In order to understand the daily life of a community or culture, the researcher has to join the natural environment of the subject being studying.

ETHNOGRAPHY: IMPORTANCE IN CULTURAL STUDIES

The importance of ethnographic research in cultural studies is that by becoming immersed in the stream of events and activities, by becoming part of the phenomena of study the researcher can best come to know about the subject he is investigating. Fetterman describes the ethnographer as both the story teller and scientist; the closer the reader of ethnography comes to understand the native's point of view, the better the story and the better the science. Ethnography is one of many approaches in the social science research. It is the art and science used to describe a group or culture¹. Ethnography involves a full immersion of the researcher in the day-to-day lives or culture of those under study. Ethnography as a method has certain distinctive characteristics². First it is conducted on-site or in a naturalistic setting in which real people live. Second it is personalized since the researcher is both observer and participant in the lives of those people. Ethnography also collects data in multiple ways for triangulation over an extended period of time. The process is inductive, holistic and requires a long time commitment from the researcher³. Ethnography is a methodology which comprises two research strategies: Non participant and participant observation. In the non participation observation the researcher observes the subjects from a distance and in the participation observation the researcher establishes a direct relationship with the social actors staying in their natural environment, with the purpose of observing and describing their social actions⁴.

An important ethnographic research has been done by *Malinowski* who is considered as the founder of modern social anthropological methods of field work and participant observation⁵ Malinowski insisted that the ethnographic research has three main aims:

- To describe the traditions, the institutions, the structure, the Skelton of the tribe (or what people say they do).
- To give this flesh and blood by describing how daily life is actually carried out, the imponderabilia of actual life (how they do it).
- To record typical ways of thinking and feeling associated with the institutions and culture⁶.

¹ Fetterman, 1998

² Angrosino, 2007

³ Nisarata Sangasubana, 2011.

⁴ Silverman, 2012

⁵ Macdonal, 2001

⁶ O'Reilly, 2015

Ethnography has its origins in anthropology, with the initial aim being to study exotic and unfamiliar cultures. Ethnographic research takes place in the natural setting of the everyday activities of the subjects under investigation⁷.

THE METHODS OF RESEARCH IN ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnographic research can take place in a wide variety of settings like, villages, towns, factory, offices, schools, universities, ships, farms etc. therefore no set of rules can be devised any particular research methods⁸. So Ethnographic methods are diverse and a range of approaches can be adopted; they are based on observation often complemented with interviews, and detailed analysis often at a micro level. The methods used are not exclusively to ethnography, it is the depth of fieldwork and the continuous process of engaging with participants and their natural environments that is central and adds strength to the findings of ethnographic studies⁹. In terms of data collection, ethnography usually involves the researcher participating overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said or asking questions through formal or informal interviews, collecting documents and artifacts¹⁰. There are three modes of data collection in ethnography: Observation, Interviewing and Archival research

An important method to do an ethnographic research is participant observation. Participant observation requires immersion in the setting under investigation, and observing the language, behavior and values of the participants. Interviewing is the process of directing a conversation to collect information¹¹. Archival research is the analysis of existing materials stored for research, service or other purposes officially and unofficially¹².

ROLE OF AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCHER

In ethnographic research, researchers have a key place. In order to understand the daily life of a studied culture the researcher have to join the natural environment they are investigating, remain there for some time, establish participant observations, interview people who are part of the society.

- As a first step ethnographic researcher must get permission to access a society being studied so as to collect data in the most convenient and appropriate way possible.
- Researchers must possess the interpretation capability to understand the perceptions and understanding of the world of the research subjects.
- The researcher need to learn in advance about local culture and identify its views, opinions and perceptions in order to understand it smoothly and choose what is appropriate to the purpose of their research.

⁷ Gill & Johnson, 1991

⁸ Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007

⁹ Janice Jones, Joanna Smith

¹⁰ Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007

¹¹ Angrosino, 2007

¹² ibid

- A close and ongoing relationship with the research population needed to establish so that the researcher can learn the meanings and significance of the world they attributed to their lives.
- Maintenance of a reliable image and participatory relationships with research population is also important in the field.
- The important role of a researcher is to develop a significant dialogue and to establish interpersonal relationship with sensitivity and care with the subjects being studying.
- The researcher must be known with the accurate record of what is being observed in the natural settings of the field.
- Ideas and notes for further information should be note down on a note paid. These refer to spur of the moment ideas related to data analysis, data collection, speculations about relationships, etc. These are the notes that the researcher write for himself/herself, example, plans for future observations, specific things or people to look for.
- Personal impressions or feelings may result into the biasness in the data collection. They may provide clues to biases which might be clouding the observation.

CHALLENGES THE ETHNOGRAPHER MAY FACE:

Engaging with participants in real world poses several opportunities as well as challenges:

Problem of obtaining access: Access is not simply a matter of physical presence or absence. It is far more than the granting or with holding of permission for research to be conduct.¹³ The work of Barbera-Stein (1979) also illustrates how negotiating access can generate important knowledge about the field. For her the access negotiation can be constructed as involving multiple views of what is profane and open to investigation versus what is sacred or taboo and closed to investigation under the appropriate respectful stance or distance is assumed¹⁴. Sampson & Thomas (2003) found that, in gaining access to carry out fieldwork on board ship, obtaining permission from the owner was only the first step. The captain was an even more important gatekeeper. For them, negotiating access was something of a full time occupation in a ship board context.¹⁵

Problem of impression management: personal appearance can be a salient consideration. Sometimes it may be necessary for the researcher to dress in a way that is very similar to the people to be studied¹⁶. In overt observation then, where an explicit role must be structured, forms of dress can give off the message that the ethnographer seeks to maintain the position of an acceptable marginal member.¹⁷ There can be no clear prescription for dress other than to command a high degree of awareness about self presentation. A mistake over such a simple matter can jeopardize the entire enterprise.¹⁸

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007

¹⁶ Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ Ibid.

Another problem that the ethnographer often faces in the course of field work is deciding how much self-disclosure is appropriate or fruitful. It is hard to expect honesty and frankness on the part of participants and informants.¹⁹

Another problem arise when the researcher's own religion or political attitudes differ markedly from those of the people being studied. When studying an unfamiliar setting, the ethnographer is necessarily a novice.²⁰

Difficulty in leaving the field: with all research there comes a time when the fieldwork needs to be terminated²¹. Difficulty in leaving can also sometimes reflects the quality of the relationship that have been establish with participants in the field; the more successful one has been in this respect, the harder it can be to extricate oneself from the setting.²²

CONCLUSION

The ethnography is a wider approach in itself to study a day to day life or happenings in any settings. Through this approach the researcher can understand the meanings and perspective of the social world according to the perspectives of the subjects being studied. But at the same time, there are some roles the researcher has to play and remember during his/ her field visit. The ethnographer can face many challenges and problems while working in the field. So the researcher has to carry out the field work with full of persistent, determinant and patient so that the enough and sufficient concrete data or information can be collected to fulfill the objective of the study.

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¹⁹ ibid

²⁰ ibid

²¹ ibid

²² ibid