

Introduction to Research Methods

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MGM333

Introduction to Research Methods

Lecture 5



Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the Goals of Ethnography and Action Research.
2. Identify Key Data Collection Methods
3. Differentiate Between Ethnographic and Action Research Approaches

Learning Outcomes

4. Recognize the Importance of Reflective Practice.
5. Explain the Iterative Nature of Action Research
6. Describe the Role of the Researcher

Introduction to Ethnography

Combining Insider and Outsider Perspective



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What is Ethnography?

- Ethnography aims to combine insider and outsider perspectives to describe a social setting.
- The method and output are referred to as ethnography.
- Commonly used in anthropology and social sciences to interpret behaviors or events in individuals' lives.



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Data Collection in Ethnography

- Primary technique is participant observation
- Other methods include various context based data collection methods
- Begins with no a priori assumptions, and uses theoretical frameworks as cognitive signposts.



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Ethnography vs. Case Study

- Ethnography is about the immersion in the context, describing and interpreting cultural/social groups.
- Case Study is an in-depth analysis of a single case, visited at regular intervals.
- Ethnography demands prolonged engagement (Creswell, 1998).

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Practical Challenges of Ethnography

- Difficult to engage in ethnography while holding a full-time occupation.
- True ethnography demands at least a year in the field.
- More suitable for doctoral studies or studies within the researcher's daily context.



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Ethnographic Examples

- IKEA uses ethnographic research, where researchers visit customers' homes. Researchers observe how customers live, work, play, and shop.
- This helps IKEA understand customers' lifestyles, values, challenges, and aspirations. IKEA uses this knowledge to design better products and services.
- Insights include common struggles with small and cluttered spaces, especially in urban areas.
- IKEA developed solutions like modular furniture, storage systems, and smart devices to optimize space.



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- Researchers visit Starbucks stores to observe how customers order, pay, interact, and consume their coffee.
- This research helps Starbucks understand customers' expectations, preferences, behaviors, and emotions.
- Starbucks uses this information to create a unique customer experience beyond just coffee.
- Insights include customers valuing convenience, personalization, and community.
- Starbucks introduced features like mobile ordering, customized drinks, and social spaces based on these insights.



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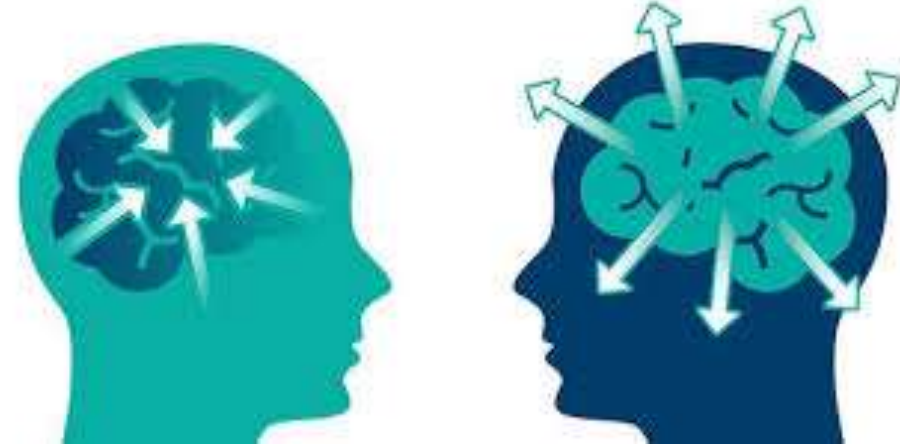
Evolution of Ethnographic Studies

- Shift from positivist studies (Malinowski, 1922; Mead, 1960) to interpretivist research.
- Acceptance of researcher biases and multiple realities (Fetterman, 1989).
- Importance of representing subjective experiences (Rossman and Rallis, 1998).

Emic and Etic Perspectives

Ethnography as a Balance of Emic (Insider) and Etic (Outsider) Perspectives

- The emic perspective refers to the insider's viewpoint, focusing on understanding the cultural and social phenomena from within the context being studied.



Ideational and Phenomenological End

- **Ideational:** This aspect emphasizes understanding the ideas, beliefs, and values that are inherent to the cultural group being studied. It involves grasping the subjective meanings and interpretations that members of the group attach to their experiences and practices.
- **Phenomenological:** This involves a deep engagement with the lived experiences of the people within the cultural context. The researcher aims to comprehend the world from the participants' perspectives, immersing themselves in their day-to-day lives to gain an authentic understanding of their reality.

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Key Points

- Focuses on the subjective experiences and interpretations of the participants.
- Researcher becomes part of the cultural context, aiming to understand it from the inside.
- Emphasizes the meanings and beliefs specific to the cultural group.

- The etic perspective refers to the outsider's viewpoint, where the researcher analyzes the cultural and social phenomena from an external, more objective standpoint.

Materialistic and Positivist End

- **Materialistic:** This aspect emphasizes tangible, observable, and measurable aspects of the culture. It involves examining the physical and economic factors that influence the cultural practices and behaviors of the group.

Positivist

- This involves a scientific approach to studying the cultural context, aiming for objectivity and generalizability.
- The researcher applies standardized methods and theories to analyze the data, often comparing it with other cultural contexts to identify patterns and correlations.

Key Points

- Focuses on objective, measurable aspects of the cultural context.
- Researcher maintains an outsider's perspective, aiming for neutrality and detachment.
- Emphasizes generalizability and the application of universal theories and methods.

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Balancing Emic and Etic Perspectives in Ethnography

Importance

- Balancing these two perspectives allows ethnographers to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the cultural context.
- By combining the rich, detailed insights from the emic perspective with the broader, comparative analyses from the etic perspective, researchers can achieve a more holistic view.

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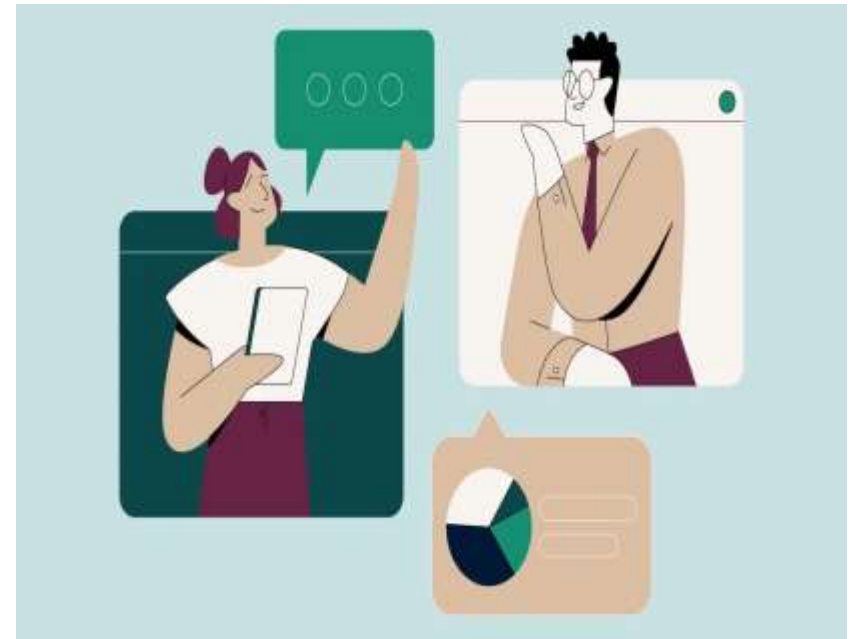
Application

- Integration: Ethnographers should strive to integrate both perspectives, using the emic insights to inform and enrich their etic analyses. This balanced approach helps in capturing the complexity of cultural phenomena.
- Reflection: Researchers need to be aware of their own biases and actively reflect on how these influence their interpretation of the data. By acknowledging and addressing these biases, they can enhance the credibility and depth of their ethnographic work.

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Key Components of Ethnographic Study

- Ethnography is not a linear process but an iterative, cyclical one.
- There are no clear lines between data collection, analysis, reflection, interpretation, and writing.
- The aim is not necessarily to generate theory, though it may result from the study.



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Key Components are:

- Extended access to the field site.
- Focus on context and pattern.
- Flexibility and adaptability in research design.



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Extended Access to the Field Site

- Prolonged and uninhibited engagement in the research setting to deeply understand the context and behaviors.
- This builds trust and rapport with participants, leading to more authentic and rich data.
- Essential for capturing the dynamic and evolving nature of social interactions.
- Allows the researcher to observe and participate in the daily lives and routines of the study population.
- Example: spending months or years in a community to fully integrate and understand its social dynamics.

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Focus on Context and Pattern

- Ethnographers aim to understand the broader cultural, social, and historical background of the community.
- Context includes everything from the physical environment to the socio-economic conditions and historical developments.
- Identifying recurring behaviors, practices, and interactions within the community.
- Patterns help in understanding the underlying norms, values, and structures that govern the social setting.

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- Understanding context and pattern provides a holistic view of the community.
- Helps in interpreting specific behaviors and events within the larger framework of the community's culture.
- In a school library study, understanding the educational policies, cultural values towards education, and historical context of the school system is crucial.
- Observing patterns in library use, student interactions, and resource utilization.

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Flexibility and Adaptability in Research Design

- Ethnographic research design is not rigid; it evolves as the researcher gains more insight into the field.
- Start with a broad interest or guiding principles rather than a fixed research question.
- Adapt research methods and focus areas based on ongoing observations and interactions.
- This allows the researcher to explore unexpected findings and new areas of interest that emerge during the study.
- Enhances the depth and richness of the research by accommodating the complexities and nuances of real-life settings.

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Importance

- Ensures the research remains relevant and closely aligned with the lived experiences of the participants.
- Prevents the study from being constrained by preconceived notions or rigid structures.

Example

- Using various data collection methods like interviews, observations, and document analysis as appropriate to the evolving study.

Researcher as Instrument

- Researcher is the primary tool for data collection and interpretation.
- Must be adaptable, reflective, and responsive to the context.
- Reflexivity: Acknowledging and managing personal biases.

Participative Engagement

- Active participation within the community.
- Importance of building trust and rapport.
- Honest and transparent interaction with participants.

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Multiple Perspectives

- Ethnography aims to understand diverse viewpoints within the context.
- Capturing multiple realities for a holistic understanding.
- Engaging with various community members to gather comprehensive insights.

Diverse Data Collection

- Uses methods like participant observation, interviews, document analysis, etc.
- Emergent design: Adapting methods as the study evolves.
- Importance of using multiple techniques for a rich dataset

Cycle of Theory Building

- Iterative process: Continuous cycle of data gathering and analysis.
- Grounded theory: Developing theories from observed data.
- Localized theory building through repeated exploration and reflection.

Narrative Storytelling in Ethnography

Combining Scientific Rigor with Narrative Storytelling

Scientific Rigor

- Ethnography employs systematic methods for data collection and analysis.
- Ensures accuracy, credibility, and reliability of the findings.
- Uses established research techniques like participant observation, interviews, and document analysis.

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Narrative Storytelling

- Presents research findings in a compelling, engaging, and accessible manner.
- Involves crafting a coherent narrative that captures the essence of the observed realities.
- Balances factual reporting with descriptive, vivid storytelling to convey the richness of the context.

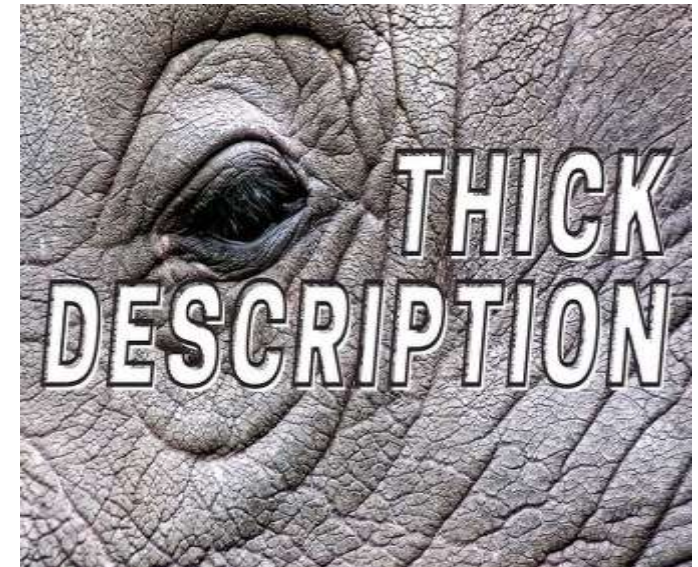


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Using 'Thick Description' to Convey Detailed Findings

- Thick description involves providing detailed, context-rich accounts of social interactions and cultural practices.
- To immerse the reader in the social setting, making them feel as though they are part of the observed environment.
- To provide enough context for the reader to understand the meaning behind actions and behaviors.



Components

- Detailed observations of people, events, and interactions.
- Inclusion of participants' voices, perspectives, and interpretations.
- Descriptions of the physical and social context in which the research takes place.

Example

- Instead of simply stating that a ritual takes place, describing the sights, sounds, emotions, and meanings associated with it.

What is

Action Research



What is Action Research?

- "Action research can be a powerfully liberating form of professional enquiry because it means that practitioners themselves investigate their practices as they find ways to live more fully in the direction of their educational values." - McNiff and Whitehead, 2011
- Practitioners actively investigate and improve their own practices.
- Encourages reflective practice and continuous improvement.

Popularity and Applications

- Increasingly used by practitioners for its practical benefits.
- Helps improve service provision and encourages reflective practice.
- For instance, if an organization is struggling with high employee turnover, they might employ Action Research to understand the root causes and then design strategies to address these issues.

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5**Characteristics of Action Research**

- **Tight Coupling of Research and Action:** Research and action occur simultaneously and are closely linked.
- **Collaborative Problem Solving:** Involves a partnership between researcher and participants to solve problems and generate knowledge.



Historical Background

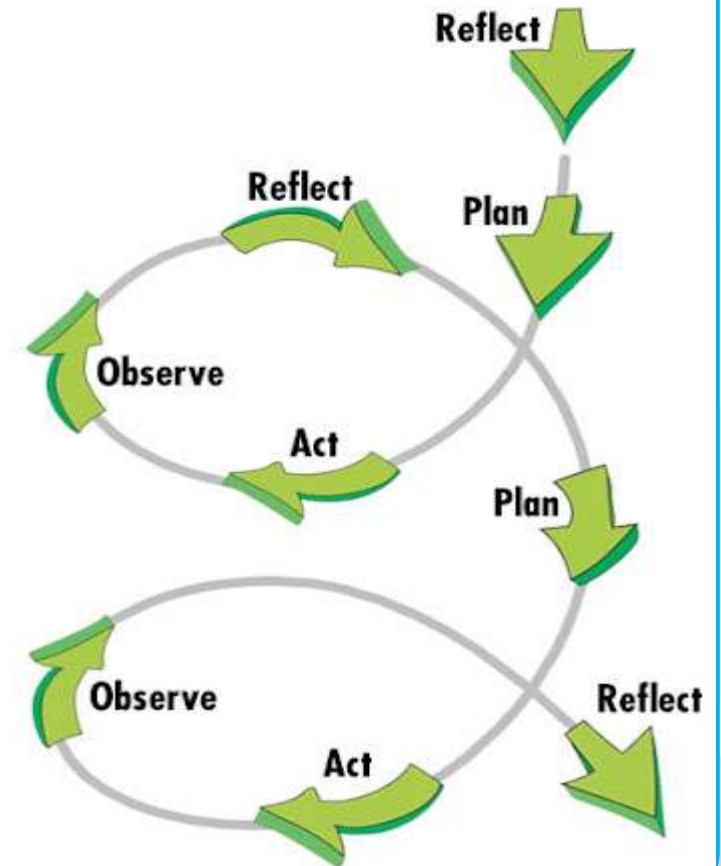
- Kurt Lewin coined the term 'action research' and emphasized embedding action in research to address social issues (Lewin, 1948).

Lewin's Action Research Cycle

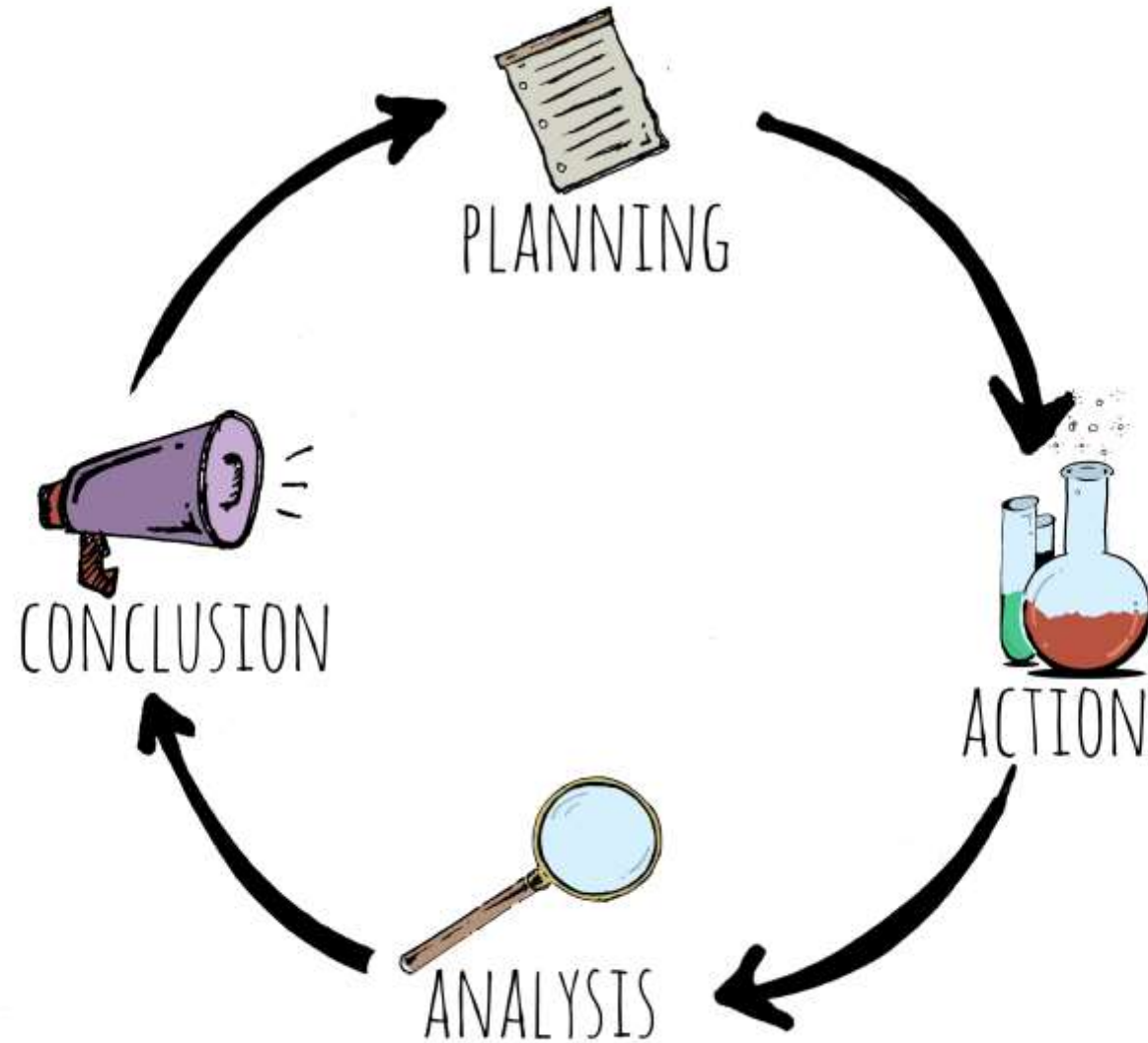
- Initial identification of a problem.
- Devise and implement an intervention.
- Evaluate the effects of the intervention.

The Action Research Cycle

- Action research is a cyclical or spiral method characterized by continuous improvement.
- Involves identifying problems, planning action, implementing interventions, evaluating outcomes, and reflecting on results



ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE



Action Planning

- Based on the data gathered, design an appropriate intervention.
- Types of Interventions: Single event (e.g., a workshop), series of events (e.g., a training program), or fixed changes.
- Use the initial data to guide the development of the intervention.
- Example: Designing a training program to improve students' communications skills.

Implementation

- Implement the intervention within the research context.
- Move from theoretical planning to practical application.
- Ensure enough time for implementation, evaluation, and reflection.
- Example: Implementing a user education program and monitoring its progress.

Evaluation

- Examine the success of the intervention using various methods.
- Questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and analysis of outputs.
- Example: Course evaluation by students to assess the effectiveness of teaching methods.

Reflection

- Reflect on the results of the intervention and evaluation.
- Go beyond what happened to understand why it happened.
- Challenge personal beliefs and perceptions to transform practice.
- Use research journals for detailed reflection and documentation.
- "Reflection is a human activity in which people purposefully 'recapture' their experience, and think about that experience in order to evaluate and make sense of it." - Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985



Thank You