RESEARCH: IN A METHODOLOGICAL FRAME

Rashmirekha Sarma,

Research Scholar, IIT Guwahati,
Assam, India.

ABSTRACT

In writing research, there are four essential key words- 'theory', 'methodology', 'method' and/or 'technique'. Getting a concise idea on these four keys is a difficult thing for the beginners in research and the researchers of tourism field are not excluded from it. Focusing the beginners in research like me, this article explores the basic design process of research based on these four key words highlighting on the qualitative research framework. Though different social scientists discuss the process of social investigation in different ways, this paper presents an integrated idea that evolves from many outlooks towards research explored by social science researchers.

Keywords: Qualitative research, research methodology, theory, techniques

INTRODUCTION:

RESEARCH: A GENERAL APPROACH:

The method of investigation is one of the most important parts in a proper study. In any research, the researcher must have ideas what he should look for or what he considers important in order to describe and or explain; and which aspects of life will be focused on a research project is usually based on researcher's subject interest, theoretical orientation or preferred method of research (Ember, Ember and Peregrine, 2008).

Different social scientists discuss the process of social investigation in different ways, still in every research writing, four key words- 'theory', 'methodology', 'method' and/or 'technique' are particularly necessary. Theory helps to explain the study and methodology helps to reach that understanding of the study through a step by step process. These key terms are defined as:

A. **Theory:** A theoretical orientation is a general attitude about how a phenomenon is to be explained. Different theoretical approaches provide different styles of explanation. Theoretical perspectives also shape choice of methodology and methods. Cargan (2008:30) defines the theory as "logically interrelated, generalized statements or propositions about empirical reality that explain or describe the interrelationship of more specific propositions".

B. **Methodology:** The systematic process of investigation in which theory finds its applications; a clear, theoretically informed approach to the production and analysis of data. A *methodology* can be defined as 'a global style of thinking used to investigate a research' (Gobo, 2008, p.18), 'a general approach to studying research topics' (Silverman, 2007, p.77), or an 'overall research strategy' (Mason, 1996, p.19).

C. **Methods/Techniques:** Some researchers have accepted the terms 'method' and 'technique' as same (Gobo, 2008; Creswell, 2003) whereas some define these two terms differently (Ellen, 1984; Cargan, 2008); though there are no firm definitive line between these two. Ellen (1984) indicates that techniques are specific ways of making particular strategy of enquiry effective, e.g., questionnaire, interview, participant or non participant observation etc. There are techniques for collecting data and there are techniques for analyzing that data.

THE METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS OF RESEARCH:

Social research based on a step by step process, though in many points, steps are cyclic and parallel. There is no fine line among the steps and more correlated sub steps are noticeable in many steps. This process of social research is:

- **First step:** Finding focused or broad area of research from where the research begins.
- **Second step:** Find out the types or purpose of research that indicate various routes of investigation.
- **Third step:** Formulating research questions or research problems based on the broad area and the purpose of research.
- **Fourth step:** Choosing the research design/approach and strategies/methodologies with the theories influencing the research.
- **Fifth step:** Selecting the methods and techniques to collect the data
- **Sixth step:** Choosing the theories and approaches to analyzing data.
- **Seventh step:** Selecting the ways that the research can be communicated or published.

Research begins with choosing the focused area or the broad area of research and gradually develops into the formulation of the research question or problem. Finding the focus involves identifying what it is that researchers want to gather information about. The ideas come from own experience of everyday life and personal values, reading different ideas and observation, from discussion with others or from media happenings and topics of current interest and concern.

Reviewing literature on the focused area is start along with the selection of the broad area of research. "No research takes place in a vacuum, and so there exists relevant literature" (Cargan, 2008, p. 19). In the beginning phase, the researcher can do his or her primary or broad literature review for researching the background, though the literature review is an ongoing process and it prolongs to the analysis of data. Review of the relevant research of previous investigators provides the depth and breadth of the information available on the subject (Cargan, 2008, p.18). It is also indicating gaps in existing research studies on the topic and unanswered questions and signifying best methods for carrying out the research. Literature review includes theoretical literature about the research topic; empirical literature about the earlier research in the field of the study or similar fields and methodological literature about how to do the research and how to use the selected methods (Flick, 2006, p.59).

After the preliminary review of relevant literature on the focused area, choosing the types or purpose of research is the next step. Research can follow various routes of investigation or enquiry: research can be used to explain, evaluate or emancipate, explore, and/or describe the received material (Cargan, 2008, p. 6-7; Robson, 2002, p. 59-60). Exploratory research includes relatively unstudied areas or new topics and generates ideas and hypothesis for future research. It evaluates phenomena in a new light and almost exclusively based on qualitative approach. Looking for an explanation of a situation or problem, explanatory research finds out the answers of *why* questions. Descriptive research defines and describes social phenomena. Both explanatory and descriptive researches are based on either qualitative or quantitative design. In evaluative research, the researcher is trying to establish how successful the implementation of a policy or a particular project is in achieving its goal (Cargan, 2008, p.7). It is connected with social action and almost exclusively based on qualitative design.

The parallel step with choosing the types or purpose of research is formulating research question(s). Based on Flick (2006), the key points of research questions are;

- Formulating clear and specific research question(s) is absolutely necessary.
- Many research questions can be arise in a research topic, but it is important to decide the primary one or two among them.
- Research questions should be answerable. It is necessary to identify already answered questions.
- Deciding the purpose or type of research will help to concretize research questions.
- Research questions are refined and reformulated as the research proceeds.

Research design is turning research question(s) into project (Robson, 2002, p.79). The framework of research design is commonly based on research questions, purpose and theories. Usually social science research design is two types, qualitative and quantitative, though John W. Creswell (2003) mentions about another approach as mixed method approach. In quantitative approach the researcher employs predetermined and fixed strategies such as experiments and surveys that help to collect statistical data. Qualitative approach includes flexible strategies based on open ended questions and observation data. The mixed method research utilizes both fixed and flexible strategies to get a more feasible analysis of research.

METHODOLOGIES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH:

Though there are three main research approaches, the present paper focuses on the methodologies of qualitative research. This is a concise effort to present the brief ideas about the main segments of the qualitative research. Qualitative research is enriched by numbers of methodologies; however, the key methodologies of qualitative research approach are case study, ethnography, grounded theory etc.

A. Case study: Case study strategy is widely applied and practiced for a long time, though the definitions are diverse. It can be defined as "a research strategy that focuses on the behavior, history, social context, symptoms, and treatment of one organization at one define point in time or a small number of individual cases that have features in common" (Cargan, 2008,p. 204) or "development of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single 'case', or of a small number of related 'cases'" (Robson, 2002, p.89). A case can be almost anything; it can be an individual, community or group, organization, event, or a situation to either explain or describe in-depth and in-detail. The case study can be useful for generating theories or for developing tentative conclusions, so it is appropriate for descriptive or exploratory studies (Cargan, 2008, p. 204). A case study design involves a number of data gathering techniques, such as in-depth interviews, participant/ non-participant observation, the documentary materials found in available data sources etc.

B. Ethnographic study: The literary meaning of the word 'ethnography' is 'writing about people'. The aim of ethnographic research is to understand local practices and notions in their full context. Creswell (2003, p.14) defined ethnographic studies as "in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational data." It observes, explores and interprets a group, organization or community's live and experience in their own world in a flexible research process and "typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

The researcher participates in people's daily lives and studied them in everyday contexts in ethnographic research. Participant observation and relatively informal conversations are usually the main sources of data, though the different kinds of documents and audio-visual materials are also the important source. Data collection is mostly unstructured because no fixed and detailed research design is specified at the start of the ethnographic research. The focus is usually on a few small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people to facilitate in-depth study. Hammersley & Atkinson mention (2007, p.3) that "the analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional

practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts". Ethnographic researches produce descriptions, explanations and theories rather than the quantification and statistical analysis. In small-scale community, researcher depends on participant observation but in large and complex societies, the researcher inevitably relate to "fiction and mass media, statistics and historical studies" (Eriksen, 2004, p.48).

C. **Grounded theory study:** The central aim is to generate theory from data collected during the study. The theory is 'grounded' in the sense of being derived from the study itself (Robson, 2003:90). Applicable to a wide variety of phenomena, it has a systematic but flexible research strategy which provides detailed directions for data analysis and theory generation.

Creswell (2003) mention two other important strategies of inquiry: phenomenological study and narrative research. Phenomenology is a philosophy as well as a method (Moustakas, 1994), which study the human phenomena within the everyday social contexts (Titchen & Hobson, 2005, p.121) and in this process, the researcher 'brackets' his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study (Nieswiadmy, 1993). In narrative research, the researcher studies the lives of individuals based on their self narrated life stories.

DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES OF RESEARCH:

To gather most of the primary data for research, maximum researcher initiates for the field work after selecting the primary research methodology for the research. Fieldwork needs (Eriksen, 2004):
- ✓ Hypotheses and/or research questions based on prior ideas about the research area,
- ✓ A framework for the planned fieldwork to what to collect or what not to collect,
- ✓ Read relevant literature from other societies to sharpen one's understanding or preparing for comparison and Prepare theoretically for fieldwork.

In the arena of research, talking on the phone to get interactive conversation for ethnographic data, visiting libraries for collecting documents are also doing fieldwork.

There are many techniques to conduct qualitative fieldwork. The major clusters of data gathering techniques are observations, interviews, audio-visual materials and different kinds of documents collection (Creswell, 2003, p.185). In observation, researchers meet informants, observe them and converse with them in their ordinary everyday contexts. In *observation* techniques researchers records unstructured or semi-structured (using some prior questions) field notes on the behavior and activities of people at the research site through participatory or non participatory ways. The observation is noted as field note, research diaries, document sheets etc.

In interviews, researchers conduct different types of interview i.e. individual interview, telephone interview, focus group interviews, depth or in-depth interview, narrative interview, ethnographic interview etc. However, there is no ultimate border line in these interview types and ethnographic or narrative interviews can also be in-depth individual or in-depth group interviews. On nature, interviews are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews have fixed and predetermined questions within a fixed set-up and generally, these are applied in fixed (quantitative) research deign. In semi-structured interviews, questions have predetermined, but question order and wording can be changed. Unstructured interviews have general area of interest, but conversation develops its own way within this area. Both these two interviews extensively exercised in qualitative research. Telephone interviews are mostly structured whereas; individual and focus or group interviews have stretched in structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The other interviews are basically unstructured and open ended interviews.

Focus groups is an efficient, time saving technique to collect data from several people and can be used as the primary technique of data collection, where interviews are "small group interviews on a specific topic" (Patton, 2002).. The depth interviews are unstructured interviews that "produce narratives on specific topics" (Cargan, 2008, p.111) through open-ended questions. Narrative interviews are primarily used in biographical research to produce long and impromptu narrative answers for narrative questions. Ethnographic interviews are in depth and unstructured interviews that are conducted on the field and part of ethnographic techniques like participant and non participant observation.

Different kinds of documents, including public documents e.g., news papers, journals, minutes of meetings, census data, official reports, archival records etc. and private documents e.g., personal diaries, letters, e-mails etc. are also collected in a qualitative research. Techniques of audio-visual materials are taking photographs, viewing and examining art objects, films and videos, collecting any forms of audio or sound and computer software.

THEORIZING THE IDEA:

Theorizing is an integral part of any research. Selection of any aspect of life for a research and explanation of that particular aspect is based on the theoretical orientation. Infinite numbers of valuable data have seen and will gather in a research project; it is the researchers' idea what they consider important in order to describe and or explain among those unlimited valuable data and to do so, a theory can help them. No theory is universal to explain human lives and different theoretical approaches provide different styles of explanation. There are two forms of theory (Flick, 2006). The first form of theory is substantial theory and the second form of theory is context theory. The first form of theory helps to conceptualize the research study through literature. The second form of theory explains the issue under study and the theoretical context of the issue(s).

MAKING SENSE OF DATA:

Data analysis is the process in which ideas are used to make sense of data, and data are used to change the ideas. Analyzing data is not a separate phase of the research. In many ways, it begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation of research problems, and continues through to the process of writing the research reports. Qualitative data is nonnumeric, including in the form of text (mostly), images, video or audio and artifacts. The process of qualitative data analysis involves making sense out of text, image and sound data. By nature, it is often large, bulky and time consuming to organize and analyze. As a conceptual process of reasoning, thinking and theorizing (Phelps, Fisher & Ellis, 2007, p.208), qualitative data analysis requires a wide range of activities, i.e., preparing or organizing the data for analysis, storing the data, conduct different analyses, moving deeper into the sense of data and making interpretations of the larger meaning of the data. Computer software techniques help to organize and analyze data. This computer software is known as 'Computer Assisted Quantitative Data Analysis Software (CAQ-DAS). Some CAQ-DAS are Atlas.ti, Ethnograph, NUD.IST etc. for textual analysis and SPSS for numerical statistical analysis.

Organizing and preparing the data for analysis is sorting & arranging the data into different categories depending on the information sources. Read the data thoroughly to acquire a general sense and overall meaning of the information and write notes on general thoughts about the data. After this process, writing the description is begun. Description involves a detailed picture of information about people, places or events in a setting. To convey the findings of the analysis, the most popular style is using a narrative passage including visuals, figures or tables with descriptive information. Interpreting the data is the final step in data analysis. This step indicates that how the description and findings will be represented in a qualitative research project. "What were the lessons learned" captures the essence of this idea (Creswell, 2003:195). These lessons could be the researchers' personal interpretation, placed in their individual understanding originated from their own culture, history and experiences. It might also be a meaning derived from a comparison of the findings with information gathered from the previous literature, that suggest that the findings either support and confirm past findings or diverge from it. It can also suggest new questions raised by the data analysis that the inquirer had not predicted earlier in the study and that need to be asked.

THE CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN:

While, no single 'right way' is available to prepare the methodological frame for a research, good research follows a systematic and comprehensive approach, without being rigid or formulaic. The conceptual structure of any research always includes these focal points;
- ✓ What is already known about this issue in particular or the area in general?
- ✓ What concept are used or disputed about?
- ✓ What has not been studied yet?
- ✓ What are the still open questions?
- ✓ Which theories are used and discussed in this area?
- ✓ What are the theoretical debates or controversies in this field?
- ✓ What are the methodological traditions and alternatives here?

REFERENCES:

[1] Barbour, Rosaline S. & John, Schostak (2005). Interviewing and Focus Groups. In Somekh, Bridget & Cathy, Lewin (eds.) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (pp. 41-48). New Delhi: Sage.
[2] Barbour Rosaline (2007). *Doing Focus Groups,* SAGE Qualitative Research Kit, London: Sage.
[3] Burton, Dawn (2000). The use of case studies in Social Science Research. In Burton, Dawn (ed.) *Research Training for Social Scientists: A Handbook for Postgraduate Researchers* (pp.215-225) London: Sage.

[4]   Cargan Leonard (2008). *Doing Social Research*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications (1st Indian reprint).

[5]   Churton, Mel (2000). *Theory and Method,* Hampshire, USA: Palgrave Macmillan

[6]   Clifford, James (1997). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century.* London: Harvard University Press.

[7]   Colleir Malcolm (2001). Approaches to Analysis in Visual Anthropology. In Leeuwen Theo Van & Garey Jewitt (eds.) *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (pp. 35-60). London: Sage.

[8]   Creswell John W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches,* London: Sage.

[9]   Ellen. R. F. (ed.) (1984). *Ethnographic Research: A guide to General Conduct*, London: Academic Press.

[10] Ember Carol R., Melvin Ember and Peter N. Peregrine (2008). *Anthropology*, New Delhi: Pearson Education.

[11] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland (2004). *What is Anthropology,* London: Pluto Press.

[12] Fliwk Uwe (2006). *An introduction to qualitative research,* London: Sage.

[13] Gobo, Giampietro (translated by Adrian Belton) (2008). *Doing Ethnography*, London: Sage.

[14] Goldbart, Juliet & David Hustler (2005). Ethnography. In Somekh, Bridget & Cathy Lewin (eds.) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences,* (pp. 16-23). New Delhi: Sage.

[15] Gibbs, Graham R. (2007). *Analyzing Qualitative Data,* SAGE Qualitative Research Kit, London: Sage.

[16] Hammersley, Martyn & Paul Atkinson (2007: 3rd edn). *Ethnography: Principle in practice,* London: Rutledge Heyl, Barbara Sherman (2007). Ethnographic Interviewing. In Atkinson Paul, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland & Lofland Lyn (eds.) *Handbook of Ethnography,* (pp. 369-383). London: Sage.

[17] Kirby, S. & K. Mckenna (1989). *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins,* Toronto: Garamond.

[18] LeCompte, M. D. & J. J. Schensul (1999). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research,* Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira

[19] Lister Martin and Liz Wells (2001). Seeing Beyond Belief: Cultural Studies as an Approach to Analyzing the Visual. In Leeuwen Theo Van & Jewitt Garey (eds.) *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (pp. 61-91). London: Sage.

[20] Madison, Soyini d. (2005) *Critical Anthropology: Method, Ethics and Performance,* London: Sage.

[21] Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative Researching,* Newbury Park: Sage.

[22] Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[23] Newman, W.L. (1994. 2nd edn.). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches,* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 47.

[24] Nieswiadomy, R. M. (1993. 2nd edn.). *Foundation of nursing research* Norwalk, CT: Appleton and Lange.

[25] Patton, M. Q. (2002. 3rd edn.). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, London: Sage.

[26] Phelps Renata, Fisher Kath & Ellis Allan (2007). *Organizing and managing your research: a practical guide to postgraduates*, London: Sage.

[27] Pink Sarah (2001). *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research,* London: Sage.

[28] Robson, Colin (2002). *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers.* Oxford: Blackwell

[29] Rose Gillian (2007. 2nd edn.). *Visual Methodologies: an Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials,* London: Sage.

[30] Rubin, H.J. & I.S. Rubin (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing: The art of Hearing Detail,* Newberry Park CA: Sage.

[31] Saukko, P. (2006). *Doing Research in Cultural Studies,* London: Sage.

[32] Silverman D. (2007). Innumerable inscrutable habits: Why unremarkable things matter. In D. Silverman, *A very Short, Fairly Interesting, Quite cheap Book about Qualitative Research* (pp.11-36). London: Sage.

[33] Somekh, Bridget & Cathy Lewin (2005). *Research Methods In The Social Sciences,* New Delhi: Sage

[34] Stark, Sheila. & Harry Torrance (2005). Case Study. In Somekh, Bridget & Cathy Lewin (eds.) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences,* (pp. 33-40). New Delhi: Sage.

[35] Titchen, Angie & Dawn Hobson (2005) Phenomenology. In Somekh, Bridget & Cathy Lewin (eds.) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences,* (pp. 121-130). New Delhi: Sage.

[36] Wolcott Harry F. (1990) *Writing up Qualitative Research,* Qualitative research Methods: Vol.20. New Delhi: Sage.