



NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

Course

Field Guide to Qualitative Research Methods

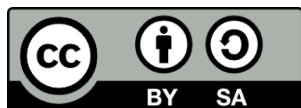
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Course: Field Guide to Qualitative Research Methods

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COURSE INTRODUCTION





Module: -I Reporting and Presentation

Unit-1: Styles of Report Writing and Presentation

Structure

- 1.1 Learning Objective
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- 1.4 Drafting A Research Problem
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1.1 Learning Objectives:

- ❖ Understand the relationship between spoken and written forms of qualitative data.
- ❖ Understand how oral narratives are transformed into textual representations.
- ❖ Develop different styles of skill to textualize the problems in ethnographic and sociological writing.
- ❖ Identify diverse career pathways that utilize qualitative research skills.
- ❖ Cultivate reflexivity in connecting fieldwork experiences to long-term professional growth.
- ❖ Develop effective verbal communication strategies for academic contexts.

If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do.

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*

1.2 Introduction:

In formal reports, lowland elites often identify the absence of literary culture as a key indicator of what they classify as “barbarism.” Among the various civilizational stigmas attached to hill communities, the lack of engagement with writing and textual traditions is emphasized most strongly. Reports on developmental policy consistently highlight that integrating preliterate groups into literacy and formal education has been a central objective of the state, underscoring literacy as both a diagnostic marker and a policy priority. When presenting orally, one might explain that for lowland elites, “barbarism” is symbolized by the absence of literary practices. Of all the stigmas associated with hill peoples, their unfamiliarity with writing and texts is most frequently cited. In presentations on development, it is important to stress that the state has long pursued the incorporation of preliterate groups into literacy and schooling, framing this mission as a cornerstone of its civilizing agenda.

Viewed from a *longue durée* perspective, many communities may not be accurately described as *preliterate* but, following Leo Alting von Geusau, as *postliterate*. In the wake of displacement, transformations in social organization, and shifts in subsistence practices, certain groups appear to have relinquished textual traditions and literacy. More radically, this abandonment of the written word may have entailed a deliberate or strategic dimension. While the evidence for such intentional nonliteracy remains largely circumstantial, the argument for its conscious preservation—or even cultivation—rests

on similar grounds. If swidden cultivation and dispersal function as subsistence strategies that resist appropriation, and if social fragmentation and acephalous organization obstruct state incorporation, then the absence of writing and textual traditions similarly affords a tactical latitude in matters of history, genealogy, and legibility that unsettles state routines. Just as shifting cultivation and egalitarian, mobile settlement embodies elusive “jellyfish” forms of economy and society, orality may be understood as a parallel fugitive variant of culture. From this perspective, orality constitutes a positionality vis-à-vis state formation and state power. In the same way that agricultural and residential practices may oscillate over extended periods to reflect strategic positioning, literacy and textuality may likewise be adopted, relinquished, and reappropriated in response to comparable considerations.

Fully aware of the stigma historically attached to their non-literary status by lowland states and colonial authorities, many upland communities preserve oral traditions that explain their lack of writing. What is striking is the remarkable similarity of these narratives, which extend beyond mainland Southeast Asia into the Malay world and even Europe. These accounts consistently revolve around a single motif: the people once possessed writing but lost it through their own negligence, or would have acquired it had they not been deceived by treachery. Such legends, much like ethnic identity itself, operate as strategic positionings in relation to other groups. It is reasonable to assume that these narratives, like identity, will be recalibrated when circumstances undergo significant change. The recurrent resemblance among these stories is likely less a product of cultural inertia than of the shared strategic situation of most stateless upland communities vis-à-vis the dominant valley kingdoms.

Narratives of treachery are as prevalent as those of negligence, and a single ethnic community may preserve both genres within its repertoire. Each variant may well be tailored to particular audiences or contexts. One Karen tradition attributes the loss of literacy to Burmese kings, who allegedly executed every literate Karen until no one remained to transmit knowledge. A Khmu (Lamet) account from Laos links the disappearance of writing to political subjugation: seven villages united to swidden on a single mountain and pledged collective resistance against their Tai overlord. Their oath was inscribed on a buffalo rib and ceremonially interred at the summit. Subsequently, however, the rib was unearthed and stolen, and from that day, as the account recalls, “we lost the knowledge of writing and have since endured the power of the lam [Tai overlord].” A Chin narrative, recorded at the turn of the twentieth century, attributes the community’s illiteracy to Burmese deceit. According to this tradition, the Chin—like other peoples—were born from 101 eggs. As the youngest, they were most beloved, yet the earth had already been apportioned, leaving them only the mountains and their animals. The Burmese guardian assigned to them defrauded them of elephants, a royal emblem, and tricked them by presenting the blank reverse of a writing slate, ensuring they never learned a single letter. The White Hmong corpus of literacy tales accommodates both negligence and treachery. In one version, during their flight from the Han, the Hmong fell asleep and their horses consumed their texts, or alternatively, the manuscripts were inadvertently cooked into a stew and eaten. A second, more foreboding account asserts that during the Han’s expulsion of the Hmong from the valleys, their texts were seized and burned. The literate members of the community retreated to the mountains, but with their eventual deaths, the tradition of writing disappeared entirely.

For certain groups, such as the Hmong and Mien, the narratives of lost literacy are closely intertwined with a broader claim to a historical identity as lowland, state-bearing peoples. Their stories implicitly assert: before displacement from the valleys, we possessed kingship, practiced irrigated rice cultivation, and maintained writing—all the attributes for which we are now stigmatized in their absence. From this perspective, the acquisition of literacy and scripts is not a novel introduction but rather the recovery of something once possessed and subsequently taken away. It is therefore unsurprising that the arrival of missionaries with bibles and vernacular scripts was often perceived as the restoration of lost cultural property—made all the more welcome because it did not originate from Burmese or Han sources.

1.3 Qualitative Research Practice and Career Opportunities:

The purpose of this unit is to cultivate a literary sensibility within qualitative research by situating ethnography as a practice that can be both read and written in diverse ways. The concerns we raise regarding the representation of society and culture are not unfamiliar within the intricate debates of contemporary literary theory. Indeed, a central trajectory of these debates has been the expansion of literary criticism into a broader form of cultural critique.

The central question for practitioners, therefore, concerns the extent to which this literary intervention should be regarded as consequential. Is it to be understood merely as an additional critical lens through which qualitative research may be appreciated—an optional perspective in the reading and writing of ethnographic accounts—or does it, more profoundly, enable a reconceptualization of sociological practice and legitimize innovative strategies that integrate fieldwork with writing? History, for instance, has long cultivated an internal discourse—historiography—that explicitly frames its method as a form of writing. Moreover, several recent contributions, most notably White (1973), have sought to imbue this discourse with a distinctly literary orientation. The potentially transformative impact of literary practice on historical scholarship has largely been circumscribed by its recognition as merely “a narrative perspective”—a legitimate but limited mode of interpreting historical writing. In contrast, the infusion of literary consciousness into qualitative research appears poised to be more consequential. This is not only because writing has never been as firmly established as a central professional activity in sociology as it has been in history, but also because this development coincides with a period of theoretical fragmentation in twentieth-century social and cultural anthropology. Within this context, disciplinary debates increasingly interrogate and problematize both the textual forms through which knowledge is articulated and the professional trajectories that produce such texts. The objective of this unit is, therefore, to examine—albeit in a schematic manner—the principal concerns surrounding the writing of qualitative research within the typical career trajectories of the contemporary professional sphere.

Irrespective of whether social scientists ultimately publish monographs—many, in fact, do not—their professional trajectories typically commence with an ethnographic research process. At every stage, this process is characterized by descriptive and interpretive writing, alongside the application of techniques designed to represent social and cultural life. Although the initial qualitative research experience functions imperfectly as a model of professional craft—one that is not necessarily replicated throughout an entire career—it nonetheless shapes the cognitive frameworks through which sociologists conceptualize and articulate their research projects. These projects are typically segmented into periods of fieldwork that culminate in ethnographic writing. The notion of working toward “an ethnography” exerts a powerful influence on how sociologists imagine and discuss their professional trajectories, even though the actual careers of writing unfold in more varied and complex ways.

Dissertation: Textualization of Field Work

Textualization lies at the core of qualitative research, both within fieldwork and in academic settings. In a fundamental sense, the practice of fieldwork is inseparable from the inscription of diverse oral contexts through field notes and recordings. Unlike historical inquiry—except in the case of oral history—qualitative research originates in orality and encounters significant challenges in its transition to written form. Much of the critique directed at dominant conventions of qualitative realism, as well as the exploration of alternatives, emerges from sustained reflection on the origins of sociological knowledge in this foundational process of textualization. Central to these debates are the tasks of inscription, the strategies employed to represent dialogue within qualitative accounts, and the broader objections raised against the very notion of representation itself.

The social scientist’s dissertation, typically conceived as a straightforward analytical and descriptive account derived from fieldwork, constitutes the principal form of qualitative research that most

practitioners are required to produce. Because the conferral of professional credentials has historically depended upon its evaluation, the dissertation has often remained a conservative exercise. It is in the transformation of the dissertation into a published monograph or a series of articles, however, that career trajectories are decisively shaped across multiple dimensions. Professional reputations and tenure, to a significant extent, depend upon writing that extends beyond the dissertation. At a more personal level of intellectual development, the transformation of the dissertation—and the textualized field materials upon which it is based—into subsequent written forms constitutes a response to the training model of qualitative research practice. Within this transformation, scholars gain greater freedom to take intellectual risks, while simultaneously becoming more deeply enmeshed in processes of intertextuality—that is, writing under the influence of, and with the aspiration to influence, other writers. Among recent generations of sociologists, the emergence of new “classics”—particular qualitative works that come to be regarded as exemplars of an idealized image of sociology—has largely derived from writing produced in reaction to the formative training experience.

Shaped by the broader intellectual climate of its period, the initial experience of producing a dissertation for professional qualification may be variously reaffirmed, subtly revised, rigorously critiqued, or even rejected in subsequent efforts to reconfigure the conservative training model of qualitative research. Given the prevailing intellectual climate of reflexivity and self-critique, dissertation conventions have become somewhat less conservative, while the legitimate range of options for producing published accounts has expanded considerably. Although the qualitative account derived from fieldwork continues to play a seminal role in inaugurating careers and fostering an ideological community of shared experience among practitioners, it can no longer be regarded simply as the definitive model of craft to be replicated throughout a professional trajectory in research.

In many professional trajectories, the texts produced—or left unwritten—after the dissertation play a formative role in shaping subsequent writing projects. These later works often diverge in significant and illuminating ways from the dissertation ethnography, particularly in the textual strategies employed to re-engage and reinterpret the corpus of field materials.

Research Monograph: Unified Scholarly Narrative

It has likely always been the case that the initial experience of ethnographic writing has been both constitutive and experimental within the context of research careers. This holds true even for the pioneering figures of modern ethnographic practice—such as Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and Firth—and certainly for subsequent generations of anthropologists, many of whom have continued to regard selected texts of these predecessors as canonical. The ethnography produced through post-dissertation efforts to rewrite field materials with a more personal imprint is, in many careers, a singular phenomenon rather than a standardized product. While some distinguished careers have been built upon the continual reworking of original field data, it is frequently observed that when sociologists embark upon a second project, they seldom recapture the freshness and intensity of the work that inaugurated their professional trajectories. Often, the most compelling writers in social sciences are those who, while continuing to invoke qualitative authority and engage deeply with ethnographic detail, resist reproducing the kind of text shaped by their initial training. Instead, they seek to explore the lessons derived from that formative experience, adopting new forms and styles of exposition to do so.

An enduring image of qualitative research is deeply instilled through initiatory training and reinforced by a professional socializing discourse that tends to speak around its subject rather than directly to it. As a result, the genuine diversity and patterned variation of sociological careers—particularly with respect to their textual outputs—has been obscured and remains largely unexamined. This enterprise has never been hermetic or naïve, as some might fear, for much contemporary literary criticism is explicitly concerned with exposing the historical and political contexts of writing—precisely those dimensions that interpretive qualitative research has long been accused of eliding or sidestepping. Beyond this critical function, however, our interrogation of realist modes of description in

contemporary social sciences directly shapes the writing strategies of social scientists who continue to draw upon the ethnographic tradition, both as a source of limitations and as a reservoir of possibilities. Through critical engagement with the terms in which qualitative research has been received, and by offering alternative readings of exemplary works, we have sought to uncover possibilities within past qualitative writing that render it pertinent to the contemporary spirit of experimentation.

Career Opportunities:

This flowchart maps how fieldwork and dissertation lead to three main career pathways—Academic, Applied, and Creative—and then to four broad career outcomes. Below it describes each labelled box and bullet in the chart, explain what it signifies in practice, and give concrete examples of activities, outputs, or roles that illustrate each point.



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Fieldwork and Dissertation: This is the starting point where immersive research in a social setting that produces the dissertation as a formal account of methods, data, and interpretation. Examples, a year of participant observation in a community health clinic that yields interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and a dissertation chapter on patient-provider interactions. Or, Ethnographic research in a factory producing a dissertation on labor practices and workplace culture.

Data Analysis and Writing: It is the stage where raw field materials are transcribed, coded, analyzed, and drafted into coherent arguments and chapters. Like, transcribing interviews, developing a coding scheme, and writing analytic memos that become journal articles. Moreover, using thematic analysis to turn fieldnotes into a chapter that links micro-interactions to broader social theory.

Ethnographic Skills: Here is the stage where the core competencies developed during fieldwork, such as participant observation, interviewing, reflexivity, ethical negotiation, and contextual interpretation. For examples, building rapport to gain access to sensitive settings; practicing reflexive notes to account for researcher influence. Additionally, Ethical consent procedures and anonymization strategies used when publishing case studies.

Academic Path: It means Careers centered on universities and research institutions where teaching, grant-funded research, and scholarly publishing are primary activities. Subpoints and Examples

- **University & Research:** Tenure-track faculty positions, postdoctoral fellowships, or research center appointments. Example: converting dissertation chapters into a monograph and securing a tenure-track job.
- **Scholarly Publishing:** Peer-reviewed articles, edited volumes, and academic monographs. Example: publishing a series of articles that build a theoretical program from ethnographic findings.

Applied Path: It means Translating qualitative methods and findings into practice within NGOs, government, industry, or consulting contexts. Examples

- **NGOs & Industry:** Program evaluation, needs assessments, or consumer ethnography. Example: an ethnographer designs and evaluates a community health intervention for an NGO.
- **Policy & Consulting:** Producing policy briefs, stakeholder interviews, and actionable recommendations. Example: advising a municipal government on housing policy using ethnographic evidence.

Creative Path: It means Using ethnographic material for public-facing, narrative, or multimedia outputs that reach broader audiences beyond academia. Examples

- **Writing & Media:** Books, long-form journalism, documentary scripts, or podcasts. Example: turning fieldnotes into a narrative nonfiction book or a radio documentary.
- **Independent Projects:** Exhibitions, community archives, or collaborative art-research projects. Example: curating a photo-text exhibit based on fieldwork with community partners.

Career Outcomes: It means the longer-term endpoints or impacts that follow from the pathways—professional recognition, influence, leadership, or innovation. Examples

- **Tenure & Promotion:** Academic advancement through publications and teaching excellence. Example: a monograph and several high-impact articles leading to promotion.
- **Policy & Impact:** Measurable changes in programs, laws, or organizational practices. Example: ethnographic recommendations adopted in a public health program.
- **Leadership Roles:** Directing research centers, leading teams, or heading applied units. Example: becoming director of a social research institute.
- **Innovative Projects:** Launching interdisciplinary initiatives, public humanities projects, or social enterprises. Example: founding a community-engaged research lab that partners with local organizations.

1.4 Drafting A Research Problem

Writing a research proposal, whether as part of a course of study or as a first professional project, requires applying the knowledge, skills, and experience gained up to that point. Producing the first proposal is therefore an important stage in professional development, as it demonstrates the ability to put learning into practice. This section outlines the process of developing a qualitative research project and preparing a proposal, a process that is closely connected to research design (O’Leary, 2014).

A research proposal brings together the research question, a plan for investigating it, and consideration of the wider context in which the study is conducted. It is a key tool for developing a project, serving as a framework to communicate the planned study to others, as well as a means of managing the research process to produce data and analysis. The proposal also acts as a template for structuring and writing up the study. The emphasis is on the practicalities of developing qualitative research that is effective—producing analysis that adds to existing knowledge, while being rigorous, relevant, and accessible to the intended audiences (O’Leary, 2014).

Research questions

All research includes four basic ingredients:

- The initial research question;
- Finding out what others have done;
- Refining the initial question;
- And answering the question (Thomas, 2013).

The research question and its development form the foundation of any project, making it essential to construct them with care. Although asking questions may seem simple, creating strong research questions requires skill. A useful way to think about their importance is to consider how experienced news interviewers frame questions to elicit meaningful responses, even from reluctant interviewees. Similarly, research questions must be critically examined to ensure they are relevant, achievable, and clear. New researchers often underestimate the value of spending time refining their questions and building proposals around them, setting this task aside in their eagerness to begin the project (Kelly, 2010).

Research questions provide direction for a study, making it important to consider how they might be answered and to refine them in relation to what the researcher wants to discover (O’Leary, 2014). This process is central to developing a strong research question. Most questions can be approached in multiple ways and may have several possible answers. For instance, a child might ask, “Why do people have wars?” and receive a simple reply such as, “Because people do not like each other.” While a child may accept this, an adult would expect a more complex explanation. As knowledge grows, questions become more focused and are framed in ways that generate responses that add meaningfully to what is already known. In practice, every question is unconsciously shaped to elicit the kind of answer the researcher seeks.

Research questions are always framed, but the process of developing them makes this framing explicit, allowing it to be critiqued and justified at a conscious level. Qualitative social research is not carried out in isolation as a personal pursuit; rather, it aims to produce findings that contribute to existing knowledge on specific topics and for diverse audiences. This requires researchers to explain clearly how they made decisions about their choice of topic and question, addressing issues such as “Why this topic?”, “Why this research question?”, “Why now?”, and “Why not other questions?” Research questions define the focus of a study and may take different forms, being referred to as research problems, research aims, or hypotheses (O’Leary, 2014).

The way a research question is asked will be influenced by the social science discipline we come from. For example, a psychologist may frame the question ‘Why do people take part in political protests?’ in terms of the social psychology of group participation. A sociologist may frame it in terms of power relationships between the public and the state. An anthropologist may frame the question in terms of the culture of political protest. The way the question is framed also implies the methodological approach to be taken. If it is framed as ‘How many people take part in political protests?’, a quantitative design will be appropriate. If it is framed as ‘Why do people take part in political protests?’, either a quantitative or a qualitative design could be appropriate. If the question is ‘What are the stories that motivate people to take part in political protests?’, a qualitative design is most likely to be suitable. Decisions to use a quantitative or qualitative approach should be influenced by the nature of the research question, with the approach chosen being appropriate to the question asked. However, most researchers will have a preference for one methodological approach or the other and this is likely to influence the way in which they formulate their research question.

Qualitative Research Problem

Qualitative research often follows an inductive approach, meaning that researchers try to avoid making assumptions about what their findings will look like before collecting and analyzing data. Because of this, some qualitative researchers may be reluctant to set out a formal research question or detailed plan at the very beginning. However, even studies that begin in a highly unstructured way eventually develop a research question, though this may only emerge during data collection. At the outset, such a question may exist only as a “foreshadowed problem.” At the very least, researchers need to define a general topic and select an initial research site to begin the study.

In most research studies, whether qualitative or quantitative, additional questions often emerge after the first stage of data analysis. Depending on the time available, these questions may either be noted as areas for future investigation or developed into new questions that build on the original focus and explored through more detailed analysis. Researchers must then decide which of these questions are worth pursuing in depth (Kelly, 2010).

Developing a Research Question

When beginning a research project, a student may already have a clear question, a general topic of interest, no ideas at all, or too many ideas to choose from. Topics for qualitative research can arise from many sources. Often, new projects grow out of earlier studies that have raised fresh questions. A researcher may also want to test whether findings from one context can be replicated in another—for example, applying a design used in one country to explore differences in political protests between India and America. Research questions can also emerge in response to social problems, practical needs, or even news stories that highlight important issues.

At the start of a project, most students have a few ideas they would like to investigate, though these may sometimes be broad topics such as *economic migration* or *body art*. One way to develop research topics is through brainstorming. This can be done by writing down ideas on a whiteboard or sheet of paper in response to the question, “What research topics interest me?” If a student has a general topic but no specific research questions, they can place the topic in a circle at the center of a page and then explore different aspects of it. They should note what they already know about the topic and what they would like to find out, making links between ideas. This process can be repeated for several topics to help refine possible research directions. After brainstorming, some ideas will naturally move into focus and begin to take shape as potential research questions. At this point, students can create concept maps of their questions, showing different ways they might be explored and the assumptions behind them. This process broadens the possible ways of framing questions and helps identify which areas of literature are most relevant. It is good practice to think widely at the beginning and then narrow down the focus. Discussing ideas with peers or supervisors can also be valuable, as their feedback may highlight new perspectives. For example, in a study of political protests, a student might initially focus on the experiences of protesters, but conversations with others could suggest exploring the views of the police as well. Considering a range of options early on strengthens the proposal.

Once a research question has been chosen, the next step is to review the existing literature to see what is already known about the topic. This process may lead to refining or further developing the question so that it addresses a specific gap in knowledge. It is also helpful to keep a record of how decisions about the research question are made, since researchers may later be asked to explain the reasoning behind their choices.

Stages in Developing Research Questions

- i. Identify possible research topics.
- ii. Identify possible questions.
- iii. Consider alternative questions.
- iv. Break down your proposed question(s).
- v. Define your terms and identify assumptions that underpin the question(s).

- vi. Check the literature to see whether the chosen question (in the form it is in) has already been answered.
- vii. Refine your question, if necessary.
- viii. Develop a project proposal around your research question.
- ix. Seek feedback on your draft proposal from supervisors and peers.
- x. If necessary, reframe the research question in the light of issues raised by constructing the proposal.
- xi. Carry out your study.
- xii. Go back to your question from time to time to check that you are still on the track you started on.

Although producing a research proposal in a set format may sometimes feel restrictive, it serves an important purpose. Writing a proposal allows the researcher to outline the study from beginning to end, ensuring that all necessary elements are considered. It also provides an opportunity to develop ideas and explore different methods, meaning that the first draft may look quite different from the final version. Putting ideas into writing often makes them clearer. Drafting a proposal helps the researcher design a study that is realistic within the limits of time, access to participants, and competence in particular methods. Proposals for quantitative research are often more straightforward, as information can be organized into standard categories. These conventions have influenced expectations for qualitative proposals, which can create difficulties for researchers planning exploratory studies. In qualitative work, it may not be helpful to pre-specify every detail at the proposal stage. Instead, researchers need to be creative and flexible in presenting their ideas, especially when the audience is accustomed to quantitative formats. The key requirement is to be clear about what the study intends to do and why.

1.5 Drafting A Dissertation

A dissertation is not a long essay, but one's own structured investigation or research into an interesting problem or topic. The topic might be chosen by you or might be set by your tutor. Writing an extended piece of work on a subject of your own choosing is usually a pleasurable and interesting process; it is also challenging and requires careful thought and planning. In doing the dissertation, you are taking charge in setting your own topic (if allowed), developing your own ideas, undertaking the relevant reading, planning and doing your research, and writing up your research. On the other hand, you should also listen and respond to the advice and guidance of your supervisor and other advisers. Both your ideas and independence and listening carefully to advice from your supervisor are important to the successful completion of a strong dissertation.

A dissertation is normally expected to demonstrate:

- Knowledge and understanding relevant to a chosen or set dissertation topic or research problem
- Skills in planning, organising, undertaking and completing an independent project
- Ability to apply knowledge and understanding in investigating the topic
- Ability to collect or produce, analyse and report on information or data relevant to the topic
- Ability to write a well-structured, organised, presented and referenced document
- Ability to conclude your analysis in relation to the initial topic or research problem.

Dissertations as being of four different kinds:

- Empirical dissertations: in which one discover, analyse and report on information that have collected, usually by researching people, texts or objects.
- Dissertations based on secondary analysis: in which analyse existing information or data sets that have been created by other researchers.

- Dissertations based on secondary sources: in which investigate a problem or topic by collecting other literature, analysing this and proposing one's own interpretation or argument.
- Theoretical dissertations: library-based dissertations in which researcher propose own independent, critical approach or argument in relation to a body of theoretical literature from own subject.

However, the requirements for undertaking and submitting a dissertation vary across universities and courses. Universities have different regulations about dissertation length, referencing, style, and whether you are required to undertake empirical research (such as interviewing people or doing a social survey). Because of these differing requirements, the first step in planning a dissertation that the researcher have to submit for assessment must be to:

- Gather information about the specific requirements of your institution or course
- Be aware of the timescale during which one have to plan, produce and submit the dissertation.

Each discipline and course will have a particular view of the academic contribution a dissertation is expected to make. The dissertation might also be assessed on the transferable or employability skills which are demonstrated within it. It may also be an essential part of the learning outcomes of the course or overall degree that able to develop and apply specific research methods and data analysis skills relevant to the discipline. As for any assessed work, not following the expected requirements can affect the final mark, sometimes seriously. Be very clear about what is required from a dissertation on the course – and accordingly plan dissertation early.

Defining a Research Problem

Students often start thinking about their dissertation by focusing on which research methods to use, together with a general idea of the research area. This is the least productive approach. The strength and quality of a dissertation is primarily determined by a fully thought-out, tightly focused research problem that directly relates to an interest of the researcher, which can sustain interest in throughout the process of doing the dissertation, and which can relate to existing debates, theories or research in literature from the discipline. Learner should consider this stage to be the most important one of the dissertations. Instead of starting off by, for example, thinking 'I am going to do some interviews to find out why people use social networking sites', push these ideas aside for the moment and consider carefully these key questions:

- ✓ What do you want to discover?
- ✓ Why is it important?
- ✓ How will you discover it?

In thinking carefully about the first question, learners are starting to define and describe clearly a focused research problem. This is an important process and should not be hurried. Here is how you can proceed to define your research problem:

- I. Consider a strong interest or curiosity you have and which you think you might want to base your dissertation around. The initial curiosity may come from your reading, a lecture, a conversation with friends, the TV, a film, a blog, a tweet, your political views or trust your own wandering thoughts. At this stage, you can think on a grand scale and you can think about grand statements.
- II. Then convert the statement into a question: it is often useful to turn your statement into a 'how' or 'why' question.
- III. This next step is very important: process and focus your general question into a research problem or question which is, in principle, researchable and which you can undertake to

investigate within the time, financial and material constraints imposed on you as a student. Examiners will be looking for how your interests in a general area have been focused down into a manageable research project.

- IV. There are various techniques that you can use to focus down your general interests, but one of the most useful is to spend a couple of undisturbed hours on 'brainstorming' your ideas and making use of visual representations, such as 'spider diagrams', flowcharts and lists. You may have to keep repeating this process until you get a sensible researchable question or topic.
- V. You may end up with a research(able) problem that is some way from your original thinking or grand idea. You may decide to repeat the process until you are satisfied that you have a researchable problem which interests you enough to sustain this interest over a lengthy period. But the key point is that you will need to transform an original, perhaps grand-scale curiosity, interest or theoretical approach into a manageable, practical research project that you can complete over the allotted timescale.
- VI. Such initial thinking processes are important in starting to help you focus your ideas into a practical, manageable project. It is as important to be convinced that this is the research problem you want to investigate. Try not to change your mind about your dissertation area halfway through the period you have in which to complete it; you may not have the time to start a new project afresh. Instead, seek the advice of your supervisor about how you can motivate yourself to make your existing project more suitable and relevant to your interests.

Ethical and practical issues

As a researcher, he has a range of ethical obligations towards the participants in the research project. In some circumstances, he might be required to submit the proposal for the dissertation to an ethics committee, either within his university or outside it, before he can proceed with the data collection plans. It is also common in many universities for students to follow a research ethics procedure (such as an ethics form or checklist) before starting any fieldwork. It is wise to consult his supervisor and any ethical guidelines produced by the professional authorities in the subject discipline. This is particularly important when:

- Research is on terrorism, political violence, the far right or religious extremism, especially if it involves interviewing people, accessing related websites, downloading related material from the internet or being in possession of such material, even if the material is available from public or official sources or appears innocuous; the legislation regarding this area is complex and varies across different countries – he should check relevant guidance and with his supervisor and institution.
- Conducting research in sensitive or potentially controversial areas
- A situation involves direct contact with the service users of hospitals, NGOs, schools or local authority, social and care services
- Research involves children or vulnerable adults
- Any kind of research is intended to be covert or semi-covert
- Research involves private information and records (such as personal diaries and documents).

Be clear about your role in emotionally charged or sensitive interview situations: you are not a counsellor or an advisor, but a social researcher. Any attempt to provide counselling to an emotional or upset person might do more harm than good. It may be best to simply listen, using your human sensitivity, rather than intervene 'directively' or provide advice. When seeking interviews with service users of any voluntary or public sector service, you should write to the director, manager or co-ordinator of the service and get their written permission to approach service users for interview. In some cases, the organisation will even arrange the interviews for you. You must always seek the informed consent of each individual person you are interviewing, even if the organisation has already given you permission. Do not use improper authority (your university's name, the organisation's permission to

approach people) to attempt to persuade people to give you interviews. Explain clearly that you are a student doing a dissertation and explain fully the nature and purpose of your research. Similar criteria apply in interviewing employees of commercial and private organisations.

Consider also providing research participants and interviewees with a clear statement that their interviews will remain confidential, that you will show them transcripts for their approval or veto, that you will destroy taped interviews after the research is over, or that they can be anonymised in your transcriptions and dissertation. It is also common practice in many universities to ask interviewees to sign consent forms before the interview.

One should also consider his own safety and security. It may not be appropriate to meet interviewees he does not know well or have never met in their private homes. It may be appropriate to be careful before accepting lifts from interviewees. Think of arranging interviews in public places and consider whether he should give people of his home address details, telephone number or Facebook or other social networking information. Particular criteria will apply for any fieldwork you are doing in another country or region, especially in areas or regions where there is political tension or conflict. He will need to seek travel advisory information from his government and discuss arrangements with his supervisor, including arrangements for maintaining contact with them when in an unfamiliar country or region.

The structure of the Dissertation

learner should see the dissertation as his project and, unless his university specifies a particular chapter or section structure, its structure can normally be decided by him, with guidance from his supervisor. It is worth thinking about each chapter of the dissertation as telling a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, and the dissertation as a whole giving its readers a bigger story.

Empirical dissertations

The vast majority of students undertake empirical dissertations and their advantage is that they enable him to explore a particular topic and a body of literature of the choosing, and to gain hands on research and data analysis experience, which is useful for future careers and employment. Empirical dissertations should normally contain the equivalent of:

1. An introduction that states clearly your research problem or topic
2. A review of the relevant literature (reading) in your dissertation area
3. A discussion of methods applied
4. An analysis of data and the reporting and discussion of results
5. A conclusion
6. References
7. Appendices

Introduction

When writing a dissertation, the introduction should clearly and concisely establish the research problem or questions, explain how they relate to relevant debates and literature in the discipline, and outline how the investigation will be carried out. It should also briefly mention the methods used and the approach to data analysis. In addition, a short description of what each chapter covers can be included, as this acts as a signpost for examiners and helps them understand the overall structure of the dissertation.

Literature review

Literature review as having some of the following aims:

- Locating and situating clearly the selected research problem in the context of the relevant literature and existing debates

- Presenting an argument, in the context of the relevant literature and debates, about why the research problem is an important one that requires investigation
- Refining the research problems, questions or hypotheses
- Demonstrating that researcher have read and understood the literature that is directly relevant to his research problem
- Highlighting areas where there is insufficient literature or debate regarding the problem he want to investigate
- Differentiating his own approach from that of the existing literature
- Providing a theoretical ‘grounding’ for the dissertation.

Methodology

In the methodology section, learners are expected to explain and justify their overall research design. This includes discussing the methodological issues related to the techniques used, outlining their strengths and weaknesses, and describing how the sample was identified and accessed. They should also explain how data were generated, noting any challenges encountered and how data collection instruments were developed. In addition, the section should detail how the data were analyzed—for example, by describing coding schemes for qualitative data or decisions about statistical techniques for quantitative analysis. Finally, issues of validity, reliability, quality, and reflexivity should be addressed to demonstrate the rigor of the study.

Data Analysis and Report Writing

These chapters or sections should report learners’ main findings. Some of the main areas to consider are:

- The characteristics of his sample – it is good practice to report basic demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, region, employment or social class) if your sample is one that involves people.
- Organising the reporting thematically rather than (for example) according to the order of questions asked in an interview – try to organise themes into major themes that could be subheadings in your data analysis chapters.
- If reporting qualitative material, consider which quotations from the data work best to illustrate themes, points and arguments – consider opposite opinions and negative instances; consider extreme viewpoints. Show short extracts that disrupt understandings as well as ones that illustrate your claims effectively.
- If reporting quantitative analysis, pay particular attention to the design of any tables so that the numbers all add up correctly and it is clear how any percentages were calculated (are they row or column percentages where is the denominator).
- Consider how much information can be conveyed by graphical means, such as histograms or pie charts.
- Conclude the data analysis chapters with brief summaries a certain amount of commentary or interpretation or policy recommendations of the significance of the findings can be discussed in the ‘results’ section of the dissertation (and some disciplines strongly encourage this), but researcher might want to save his best and ‘biggest’ points for the concluding chapter.

Conclusion

By the time researcher come to the conclusion, he might be tired of writing – or are rushing to meet a deadline – and so the conclusion can read like a quick summary, or an after-thought tagged on to the end. This is a serious mistake, as it may be the concluding chapter that an examiner looks to first when seeking to assess the overall message of the work. In planning the writing of dissertation, one must ensure adequate time for a strong, well-written conclusion. In this, he might want to:

- ✓ Revisit his original research problem in the light of his key or strong findings
- ✓ Discuss any implications for the theoretical areas he has explored
- ✓ Discuss any implications for practical programmes of action or policy
- ✓ Discuss how he might have improved on the research or changed the research design
- ✓ Highlight any unresolved areas and debates
- ✓ Point out areas for further research or debate
- ✓ Conclude his dissertation.

Citations and References

In academic writing, it is essential to use a recognized citation format to acknowledge all sources, both within the body of the dissertation and in a separate reference list or bibliography. Bibliographic software can assist by exporting references in standard formats. Within the dissertation, citations should typically follow the pattern (*Author, Year: Page number*) after a quotation. When citing more than two authors, the format (*First author et al., Year: Page number*) should be used to ensure clarity and consistency.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious academic offence because it involves presenting someone else's ideas or work as one's own. If researchers fail to cite their sources properly, they risk committing plagiarism. This includes copying or closely paraphrasing texts without full referencing or acknowledgement. Plagiarism can occur through copying the work of other students, or by using online materials such as web pages, blogs, downloaded files, or documents from online archives without proper citation. It also extends to electronic sources such as CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, electronic magazines and newspapers, journals, and e-libraries. In all cases, plagiarism undermines academic integrity and is considered a form of cheating.

Students should avoid using commercial services that sell ready-made dissertations, theses, or essays, or that claim to provide "help" through essay banks. Universities have developed sophisticated methods for detecting work that has been purchased or derived from such services, and the penalties for this type of academic misconduct can be very severe. It is therefore essential to understand clearly what constitutes plagiarism and, if uncertain, to consult a tutor for guidance.

Appendices

Resist the temptation to use appendices as a way of inflating the length of one's dissertation by including more results, analysis and so forth. Appropriate appendices would include:

- A blank questionnaire or structured observation instrument
- An interview schedule or topic guide
- A letter or email sent to research participants and (if relevant) the names of organisations approached
- Any visual images analysed in the dissertation
- Brief sections of transcripts to show the level of transcription used
- A coding scheme, perhaps accompanied by a short extract of interview material showing how the codes were applied (but not an entire interview transcript)
- A page of observation field notes to illustrate the technique of data gathering used (but not an entire diary of field notes)
- Any documents used to inform participants about the purpose of the study and to gain their informed consent.

1.6 Preparing for an Oral Presentations:

Writing a research report is never something done alone. It always involves relationships—with professors, fellow students, other researchers, editors, readers, and even research participants in the field. These connections should not be seen only as sources of difficulty, but as valuable opportunities to learn how well research skills are being practised. In fact, effective feedback from these relationships is one of the most important resources for improving research.

This section aims to help understand the nature and importance of shaping your work with an audience in mind, and learn practical skills to help you make an effective oral presentation.

Avoid the ‘awful academic talk’

Paul Edwards has described something that we have all experienced. He calls it ‘the awful academic talk’. The features of this talk are familiar to anyone who has attended an academic conference or university seminar: The speaker approaches the head of the room and sits down at the table. (You can’t see him/her through the heads in front of you.) S/he begins to read from a paper, speaking in a soft monotone. (You can hardly hear. Soon you’re nodding off.) Sentences are long, complex, and filled with argon. The speaker emphasizes complicated details. (You rapidly lose the thread of the talk.) With five minutes left in the session, the speaker suddenly looks at his/her watch. S/he announces— in apparent surprise – that s/he’ll have to omit the most important points because time is running out. S/he shuffles papers, becoming flustered and confused. (You do too, if you’re still awake.) S/he drones on. Fifteen minutes after the scheduled end of the talk, the host reminds the speaker to finish for the third time. The speaker trails off inconclusively and asks for questions. (Thin, polite applause finally rouses you from dreamland.) (Edwards, 2004: 1)

We need to know what lies behind such poor presentations. Stupidity is rarely the reason; poor presenters are unlikely to be stupid. Instead, as Edwards suggests, we need to find an answer to the puzzle of ‘why ... otherwise brilliant people give such soporific talks?’ (2004: 1). He comes up with two good answers to this question:

- Fear: reading a paper seems like offering you a suit of armour which can conceal your stage fright.
- Academic culture: which erroneously equates oral presentations with ‘giving a paper’.

Simple strategies that can help to avoid such ‘awful academic talk’:

- Remember the needs of this particular audience.
- Practise good time management.
- Never read out a talk.
- Use effective visual aids.
- Grab your audience’s attention at the outset.
- ‘Take your oral presentations as seriously as you do your writing. Speak to your audience with clarity, logic, vigour, and examples that will grab them’ (Marx, 1997: 107).

Audience needs

When you speak, tailor what you say for your audience. Recipient design should always go into your oral presentations. As Gary Marx comments, ‘Try to remember who you are talking to, and the differential stake you and your audience have in your topic. Gear your talk to your audience’ (1997: 107). Following Marx, you will clearly want to give different kinds of talks to experts in your field, participants in your research or to general but non-specialist academic audiences. For each audience, you should choose a particular focus (e.g. theory, method, substance) and an appropriate vocabulary (see Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 226–9).

Good time management

Many have had the experience of speakers who only have time to get through a small part of their material or who overrun and then use up the time for questions. Good time management is a quality possessed by effective speakers. If you think you will not have the confidence to improvise to beat the clock, then it is wise to try out your talk beforehand with a watch nearby.

The usual experience is that it takes far longer to get through your material than you expect. So, take the minimum of material in one file and, if necessary, bring a 'comfort blanket' of additional material in another file to use in the unlikely event that you need it. Bear in mind the following wise advice if time runs out: 'If you find that you are running out of time, do not speed up. The best approach is normally to abort the presentation of your findings ... and move straight to your conclusion' (Watts and White, 2000: 445).

Never reading out a talk

Having a full script can feel reassuring, since it acts like a safety net when speaking to a live audience. However, as Gary Marx points out, relying too much on the written word can make a presentation rigid and take away its natural, interactive quality. Think about the dull talks you may have heard where the speaker never looked up from the page—this is not the experience you want to give your audience. On the positive side, speaking without clinging to the script can unlock spontaneous ideas and expressions that you might not discover otherwise.

Using effective visual aids

Try to present your points through uncluttered visual aids. Where you need to provide extensive material (e.g. long transcripts or tables), then distribute handouts. Take on board the following wise suggestions (adapted from Edwards, 2004: 2) about PowerPoint slides:

- If you need more space, use more slides.
- Pictures or other images help keep your audience interested.
- Don't talk to the screen.
- Have a paper version of your talk in front of you.
- Don't just read out slides but illustrate with interesting examples.



Created by Author using Copilot (2026)

Edwards' advice is marked as provisional with the word "usually." For example, he notes that it is usually worse to read rather than talk. Yet some powerful speeches, such as those by politicians using autocues, are essentially read aloud. The difference is that these speakers are trained to deliver the text slowly, with pauses that add drama and help the audience follow along. Most academic talks that rely on reading do not use these techniques, which is why they are less effective. Similarly, the careful use of visual aids and summaries at the beginning and end of a talk can make presentations clearer and more engaging.

1.7 The Art of Presenting Research

Even excellent research can seem dull if it is not presented well. At the same time, weak research cannot be saved just by being a clever or entertaining speaker, because the quality of the work will eventually show. The real goal should be to present strong research effectively, so that both the content and the delivery work together to make a lasting impact. These are the qualities that impressed me in these 'good practice' presentations:

- liveliness
- not reading out a prepared text
- recipient design for the audience
- clarity
- effective visual aids
- humour
- explaining your agenda
- not minimising the difficulties
- good time management
- good response to questions

The following qualities concerned for the group of 'bad practice' presentations:

- lack of preparation
- too much material
- not looking at the audience
- lack of recipient design
- no agenda
- no visual aids
- poor time planning

Most presentations fell between these two extremes. The following were the good and bad news about these 'mixed' presentations:

- using visual aids but these are poorly prepared
- well organised but reading out a prepared text
- giving examples of data but not explaining what to look for
- using slides but not integrating them in the talk
- explaining the background but not explaining the concepts
- using overheads but turning away to look at them or having too much material on the screen

Feedback

Feedback can come in many forms, such as written comments on drafts, conversations where ideas are discussed, or reviews of grant proposals and journal articles. One of the most valuable sources of feedback is the reaction of audiences during an oral presentation. Presenting research is also a way to build networks and connect with people both inside and outside the university. That's why students

should take every chance to share their work—whether at informal meetings, with interested non-specialists, or at academic conferences. It is also useful to keep an eye on “calls for papers” and regularly check the sites where they are posted, as these provide opportunities to present and receive feedback.

1.8 Conclusion

In academic or professional reports, each presentation challenge is paired with a clear solution. A common difficulty is audience disengagement, which can be addressed by designing the content with the reader’s needs in mind and applying recommended techniques. Another issue is exceeding the allotted length; this is best avoided by preparing only essential material. Reports also emphasize that monotony arises when presenters rely solely on reading aloud, and therefore recommend the use of visual aids and natural delivery. Finally, reports highlight that presentations are not only about transmitting information but also about collecting feedback, which is vital for refining ideas and improving communication. When explained in a presentation, the message is that every problem has a practical fix. If the audience begins to lose interest, the speaker should adapt the talk to their needs and use strategies outlined in the chapter. To prevent running overtime, only the most important points should be prepared. To keep the session lively, presenters should avoid reading word-for-word and instead use clear visuals and speak naturally. Above all, presentations are opportunities to receive feedback, which strengthens both the ideas being shared and the way they are delivered.

1.9 Summary

Abstracts in research proposals, usually 200–300 words, are placed after the title and written last despite appearing first; they should briefly introduce the topic, state the research question, outline the methods, and indicate the potential applications of findings. Increasingly, grant applications demand both an academic abstract and a lay summary, the latter being jargon-free, accessible to non-specialists, and emphasizing the broader relevance of the study. Effective introductions begin broadly before narrowing to the specific problem, previewing the issues the research will address, and benefit from discussions with peers to gain fresh perspectives. In presentations, clarity and engagement are enhanced by using visual aids and summaries at the beginning and end, while time constraints should be managed not by rushing but by omitting detailed findings and moving directly to the conclusion. Overall, the emphasis lies on balancing precision with accessibility, ensuring that research communication remains rigorous yet understandable.

1.10 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ):

1. Qualitative research practice emphasizes:

- a) Laboratory experiments
- b) Literary sensibility in ethnography
- c) Statistical modeling
- d) Survey sampling

Answer: b

2. A dissertation in social sciences is typically:

- a) A quantitative survey report
- b) A descriptive and analytical account from fieldwork
- c) A laboratory experiment record
- d) A philosophical essay

Answer: b

3. Transformation of a dissertation into monographs or articles is crucial for:

- a) Fieldwork access
- b) Professional reputation and tenure
- c) Data collection
- d) Ethical approval

Answer: b

4. Which scholars are cited as pioneers of ethnographic practice?

- a) Durkheim, Weber, Marx

- b) Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Firth
c) Freud, Jung, Adler
d) Mead, Benedict, Parsons Answer: b
5. The Academic Path of qualitative careers includes:
a) NGO program evaluation
b) Tenure-track faculty positions
c) Documentary filmmaking
d) Community archives Answer: b
6. The Applied Path involves:
a) Peer-reviewed publishing
b) Policy briefs and consulting
c) Writing novels
d) Creating podcasts Answer: b
7. The Creative Path emphasizes:
a) Statistical analysis
b) Narrative and multimedia outputs
c) Grant writing
d) Policy evaluation Answer: b
8. Which of the following is a career outcome of qualitative research?
a) Patent registration
b) Tenure & promotion
c) Industrial production
d) Agricultural innovation Answer: b
9. Drafting a research proposal requires:
a) Laboratory experiments
b) Applying knowledge and skills gained so far
c) Avoiding literature review
d) Using only quantitative methods Answer: b
10. A foreshadowed problem in qualitative research refers to:
a) A hypothesis tested statistically
b) A general topic before formal research questions emerge
c) A finalized research design
d) A quantitative variable Answer: b

1.11 References

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Unit-2 Applications of qualitative research in different job roles

Structure

- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
 - 2.2.1 Role of Qualitative Research in Social Inquiry
- 2.3 Applications of qualitative research in various job roles/profiles
 - 2.3.1 UE (User/Consumer Experiences) Researcher
 - 2.3.2 Product Manager
 - 2.3.3 Journalist
 - 2.3.4 HR / Management
 - 2.3.5 Social Worker
 - 2.3.6 Policy Analyst
 - 2.3.7 Educator
 - 2.3.8 Marketer / Strategist
 - 2.3.9 Healthcare and Social Services
- 2.4 Self-Assessment Questions: (MCQ)
- 2.5 References:

2.1 Learning Objectives:

- Identify key job roles across domains (such as Industry, HR, Healthcare, Public Policy etc.) that rely heavily on qualitative research methods.
- Explain how qualitative tools—like open-ended interviews, focus groups, and field observations—solve practical, real-world problems in the workplace.
- Analyze qualitative text data (such as employee exit interviews, user feedback, or patient stories) to uncover hidden workplace or consumer trends.
- Evaluate when to use qualitative research instead of quantitative numbers to answer complex questions about human behavior and motivation

2.2 Introduction:

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research where in-depth responses from the people are collected about the research topic. It seeks to understand the research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population to whom it involves. Qualitative research is effective to collect rich textual information about the values, behaviour, opinions, custom, and social context of a particular population. These methods are also effective in identifying influence of some factors like ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, social norms in the research problem, which might not be obvious from survey methods. The purpose of doing qualitative study is to learn about these people, places, events, activities and generate new understanding. So we get the answer of 'why' and 'how' rather than 'what' or 'how many' in this type of study. From quantitative survey, we can gather data about how many people are smoking or what the type of smoking is. But qualitative methods help us to interpret why people do not stop smoking even after knowing the harmful effects of smoking or what are the barriers for compliance to dietary restrictions and physical exercise in the treatment of diabetes.

From the time immemorial, qualitative research methods are being used in the disciplines of social sciences, nursing, psychiatry etc. However in recent years there is a growing interest of using these methods in the field of public health and operation research. Some of the important reasons for this revival of interest are:

- a) Growing realization of unsuitability of survey research methods in the context of developing countries where population is predominantly illiterate and where The latest trend in the field of research is combined use of quantitative and qualitative research methods (mixed method design). This design helps us to understand better the reality of a given situation and provides magnitude of non-sampling errors is high in surveys
- b) Increased interdisciplinary team work and
- c) Demand of quick results from the ethnographic work.

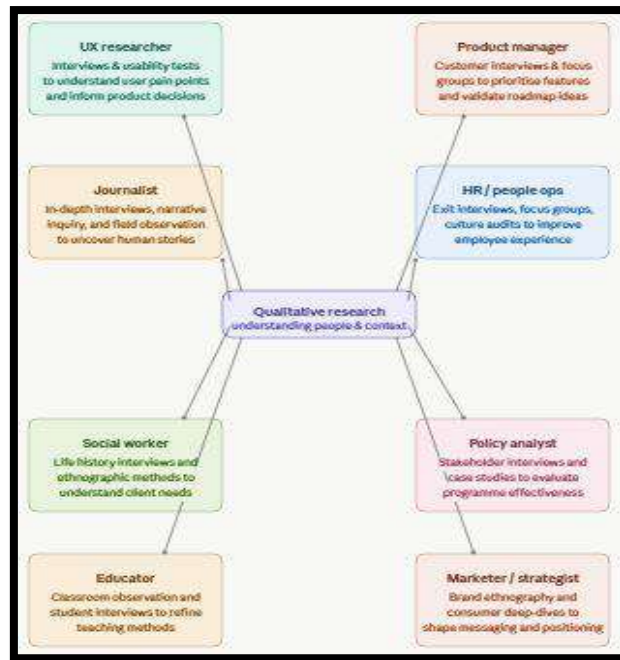
2.2.1 Role of Qualitative Research in Social Inquiry:

In social inquiry, qualitative research provides a lens for understanding the multifaceted nature of human society and culture, to recognize and construct our understanding of the social world. This methodology operates within specific research paradigms, which shape the research process and outcomes of various qualitative research approaches, such as Ethnography, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Case Study, Content Analysis, Ethnomethodology, and Narrative Research, to delve into the complexities of human experiences, cultural dynamics, and social phenomena. In these qualitative approaches, different types of qualitative studies are done by the researcher according to the research objectives, such as:

- Ethnography is based on observation and interaction within a specific community to understand its cultural practices and social norms.
- Phenomenology captures and interprets the lived experiences of individuals. It emphasizes how they perceive and make sense of their world.
- Grounded theory develops new theoretical frameworks based on observations from the real world enabling researchers to formulate theories.
- A Case Study offers a detailed examination and rich insights into a particular phenomenon and context.
- Content Analysis identifies patterns, themes, and meanings within the data to examine communication, written, visual, and spoken content.
- Ethnomethodology uncovers the everyday methods people use to construct and make sense of social order.
- Narrative research reveals how individuals derive meaning from their lives through the narrative structures. It also highlights the significance of personal stories and experiences.

2.3 Applications of qualitative research in various job roles/profiles:

Qualitative research — methods like interviews, observation, focus groups, and case studies shows up across nearly every profession that involves understanding people and the context. Qualitative research is a highly versatile tool applied across a wide range of professions to understand behaviors, motivations, and complex human experiences. Here is a detailed breakdown of how qualitative research is utilized across different job roles.



Source: <https://claude.ai/chat/dc527477-35c8-41a1-b843-bcdaaad6db25>

2.3.1 UE (User/Consumer Experiences) Researcher

Probably the most explicit user of the discipline. They run user interviews, think-aloud usability sessions, and contextual inquiry to understand how people actually behave with products, not just how they say they do. Captures user thoughts and sentiments, helping identify trends and opportunities in the market. Researcher's primary goal is to improve user engagement and interactions by observing natural human behavior. They focus on the first-hand experience of using a product, providing the "why" behind user attitudes. Their qualitative work validates the usability of a design and aids in the specific "how-to" of designing or tweaking product features.

- **Consumer Decision Making** — Qualitative research goes beyond the context of *what* people buy to understand *why*. Think-aloud protocols, where consumers narrate their thoughts while browsing or shopping, reveal the hidden interplay between emotion and logic. Researchers explore how personal liking, social pressure, past experiences, and mental shortcuts (heuristics) shape choices that consumers themselves often can't fully explain in a survey.
- **Brand Perception & Identity** — Brands exist as much in the consumer's mind as in the marketplace. Projective techniques — such as asking respondents to describe a brand as a person, an animal, or a car — bypass rational defenses and surface deep emotional associations. Focus groups explore how brand meaning is constructed socially, and why some consumers form almost tribal loyalty while others remain indifferent.
- **Customer Journey & Service Experience** — Ethnographic observation in retail stores, hospitals, banks, or restaurants reveals what actually happens at key touchpoints versus what companies assume happens. This includes moments of frustration, unexpected delight, and the emotional weight of waiting, queuing, or dealing with service failures. Journey mapping workshops with real customers uncover gaps invisible to insiders.
- **Product Development & Co-creation** — Before a product brief is written, qualitative research identifies latent needs — desires consumers have but haven't articulated. Lead-user workshops and usability sessions generate rich insights about how people actually interact with products (often very differently from intended). Crucially, researchers capture the *language* consumers use, which directly informs how products are named and marketed.
- **Advertising & Communication** — Semiotic analysis decodes how signs, symbols, colors, and narratives in ads carry cultural meaning. Copy-testing focus groups reveal whether a message

lands as intended or triggers unintended associations. This is especially valuable for cross-cultural campaigns, where a symbol that signals trust in one market can signal danger in another.

- Sustainable & Ethical Consumption — One of the most fertile areas for qualitative inquiry. Researchers study the well-documented *values-action gap* — why consumers who claim to care about the environment still choose convenience over sustainability. Phenomenological methods explore guilt, moral identity, and how people rationalize consumption. Narrative inquiry traces how individual life stories shape attitudes toward fair trade, veganism, or circular economy behaviors.

2.3.2 Product Manager

Uses qualitative insights to validate whether a problem is worth solving before investing in a solution. Customer discovery conversations, concept testing, and feedback synthesis all feed into roadmap decisions. Product managers rely on qualitative research to answer the "how?" and "why?" behind user behavior, helping them formulate hypotheses and reduce the risks of testing new ideas. They apply this research at all stages of development, from launching new products to expanding features.

- User Discovery & Needs Research — This is where product strategy begins. Before defining *what* to build, use in-depth interviews and contextual inquiry (observing users in their natural environment) to understand the *jobs* users are trying to get done. The goal is to surface needs users themselves can't always articulate — the classic "faster horse" problem. Qualitative research reveals the real pain, not just the stated request.
- Persona & Journey Mapping — Quantitative data tells you *that* users drop off at step 3; qualitative research tells you *why*. Diary studies (where users log their experiences over days or weeks) and shadowing sessions build rich, evidence-based personas grounded in actual behavior — not marketing assumptions. This gives the whole product team a shared, human picture of who they're building for.
- Concept & Prototype Testing — Testing paper prototypes or low-fidelity wireframes with 5–8 users using think-aloud protocols can surface fundamental misunderstandings before a single engineer writes code. Qualitative concept interviews probe not just *whether* someone likes an idea, but *what meaning they attach to it* and whether it fits into their life.
- Usability & UE Research — Watching a real user struggle silently with your navigation for 10 minutes is more persuasive than any stakeholder deck. Moderated usability sessions reveal mental models — how users *think* the product works — which almost always differs from how the team built it. This feeds directly into iteration cycles and design decisions.
- Competitive Intelligence & Market Positioning — Online ethnography (studying communities, forums, and reviews where users discuss competitor products) and comparative interviews give PMs unfiltered insight into how users perceive the competitive landscape, what makes them switch, and what gaps no product is currently filling.

2.3.3 Journalist

In-depth interviews, source narratives, and immersive field reporting are essentially applied qualitative research. Long-form journalism and investigative pieces lean heavily on ethnographic techniques. For journalists, interviewing is the ultimate qualitative tool for truth-seeking.

- Investigative Reporting — The backbone of investigative journalism is qualitative. Long-form source cultivation — building trust with insiders over weeks or months — yields the kind of testimony that no survey can capture. Document analysis (leaked files, court records, financial statements) is treated as a qualitative text, not just data, with journalists reading for meaning, contradiction, and pattern. Cross-referencing multiple accounts helps surface inconsistencies that point toward truth.

- Feature & Human Interest Stories — Narrative interviewing is the art of getting subjects to *tell their story*, not just answer questions. Skilled journalists use open-ended, chronological prompts ("take me back to the day it started...") that unlock memory, emotion, and detail. The goal is to capture authentic voice so readers experience the story rather than simply consume information. Immersive reporting — spending extended time with a subject — is essentially applied ethnography.
- Political & Policy Journalism — Discourse analysis gives journalists a systematic lens for examining how politicians use language to frame issues, assign blame, or construct reality. Framing analysis across outlets reveals how the same event can be presented with radically different meaning. Focus groups with voters or affected communities translate abstract policy debates into tangible human consequences — the kind of grounding that makes political reporting resonate.
- Community & Grassroots Reporting — Ethnographic embedding — living alongside a community rather than parachuting in — is what separates deep local journalism from surface coverage. It builds the trust needed to access hard-to-reach voices: undocumented workers, gang members, survivors of abuse. Participant observation allows the journalist to notice what people *do* versus what they *say*, often the most revealing gap in any story.
- Media & Audience Research — Journalists increasingly study their own audiences qualitatively. Reception analysis — exploring how different demographic groups interpret the same news story — reveals how background, identity, and prior belief shape what people take away. Focus groups on misinformation explore why false stories spread and what makes corrections stick or fail. This research directly informs editorial decisions about framing, format, and platform.
- Fact-Checking & Source Verification — Triangulation is the journalist's qualitative gold standard: no claim is accepted until confirmed by at least two independent sources, ideally from different positions or perspectives. Expert interviews provide interpretive context — not just *what* happened, but *what it means*. On-the-record verification sessions give subjects the opportunity to confirm, deny, or add nuance before publication, which is both an ethical obligation and a quality-control mechanism.

2.3.4 HR / Management

Exit interviews, engagement focus groups, and culture listening sessions help diagnose organisational problems that surveys alone miss. The "why behind the score" is always qualitative research. In HR, qualitative methods are used to improve the work environment and company culture. HR managers conduct employee interviews and focus groups to gauge staff engagement and satisfaction, yielding far richer insights than standard numerical surveys. This qualitative approach gives employees a voice, helping HR identify and address workplace issues early on to support long-term employee retention.

- Recruitment & Selection — Qualitative methods uncover *why* hiring decisions are made the way they are. Researchers use in-depth interviews with HR managers and hiring panels to study unconscious bias, interpret how candidate narratives influence decisions, and understand the structural barriers that disadvantage certain groups. Focus groups with applicants can reveal pain points in the candidate experience.
- Organizational Culture — This is perhaps the most natural home for qualitative research in management. Ethnography (observing workplaces first-hand over time) and narrative analysis help researchers understand shared meanings, unwritten rules, ritual behaviors, and how subcultures within an organization can support or undermine a company's stated values.
- Training & Development — Rather than just measuring outcomes, qualitative research asks *how and why* a program works (or doesn't). Action research and case studies examine what prevents learning from transferring to the job, how employees perceive L&D initiatives, and what makes certain interventions feel meaningful versus tick-box.
- Leadership & Management — Grounded theory and discourse analysis are used to study how leadership style is perceived by followers, how managers navigate uncertainty, and how power

is exercised through language and informal authority. This is especially valuable in studies of transformational vs. transactional leadership.

- Employee Engagement & Well-being — Phenomenological methods capture the lived experience of workers — burnout, belonging, psychological safety, and work-life balance. Diary studies and longitudinal interviews allow researchers to track how well-being changes over time in response to organizational conditions.

2.3.5 Social Worker

life history interviews and narrative methods help practitioners understand a client's full context — family, trauma, environment — rather than just presenting symptoms or case categories.

When considering qualitative research in social work, one may need to ask oneself some concerns concerning the research's reliability and validity. Qualitative research is an important tool in social work practice. Hunt (2004) recognized the relevance of qualitative research, including interpretive, naturalistic, constructivist, ethnographic, and fieldwork methodologies. While working with communities or settings, qualitative research allows researchers to engage with people by building rapport to gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and experiences. Investigating qualitative social work techniques According to Voiter (nd), qualitative approaches are already being used in three areas of social work: social work research, social worker everyday practice, and professional self-reflection. The goal of value-based social work is to find alternative solutions to a community or society's difficulties. As a result, the nature of decisive knowledge and philosophical assumptions may help improve the quality of the research base and creative research activity in social work practice. Qualitative research, like quantitative research, contains key aspects such as data collection, data processing and analysis, and report writing. As a result, social workers working in the field of qualitative research require a wide range of abilities, including observation, interviewing, fieldwork, narratives, and fact analysis, among others. According to the National Association of Social Workers, qualitative research paradigms are particularly important regarding social workers' ethical obligations and ethics. Social work research not only seeks to understand reality but also to apply constructivist perspectives to interpret it.

Regarding social science and social work, the constructivist approach is usually associated with qualitative approaches that rely on participants to interpret situations from an individual perspective based on their understanding (Creswell and Clark, 2011; Cited in Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). There are numerous interconnections between the nature of social work intervention and the nature of qualitative research. In social work, qualitative research refers to the actuality of any social phenomenon or causal link that is being examined. In this postmodern period, the qualitative research paradigm has thus become an integral domain of social work research. For instance, this will aid in the study of a society's or community's cultural variety when participant observations are highly reflective. Relevant examples of the essentials of the qualitative research paradigm in social work may be offered, which will be very useful in studying the nature of inter-linguistic and inter-community marriage in diverse communities. As a result, the question of why qualitative research would be more beneficial in social work has been answered. When it comes to empirical matters, qualitative studies in social work might include case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life study, interview, observation, historical, and other methods. Hence, a large body of literature is now being developed on the importance of qualitative research in social work. (Source: <https://www.jswep.in/index.php/jswep/article/view/1/1>)

2.3.6 Policy Analyst

Stakeholder interviews, programme case studies, and community focus groups help evaluate whether interventions are working as intended and why they succeed or fail on the ground. Evaluates how community members experience government and non-profit programs (e.g., healthcare access or nutrition schemes). Through focus groups and interviews, they capture marginalized voices and socio-

economic nuances that numbers alone miss, enabling the government to create context-sensitive policies.

Policy Formulation & Problem Definition

- a) Conducting key informant interviews with community leaders, service providers, and citizens to define the real scope of a problem
- b) Using focus groups to explore public perceptions and attitudes toward a social issue
- c) Applying narrative inquiry to document how people live with and experience a problem
- d) Performing document analysis of historical policies, legislative debates, and reports to trace how issues have been framed over time.

Stakeholder Analysis

- a) In-depth interviews with legislators, NGOs, businesses, and community groups to identify competing interests
- b) Focus groups to explore consensus and conflict among different stakeholder segments
- c) Discourse analysis of public statements, hearings, and media to understand how stakeholders frame issues
- d) Ethnographic observation of stakeholder meetings, town halls, and consultations

Policy Implementation Analysis

- a) Field observation and ethnography to see policy implementation firsthand at the street level
- b) Interviews with frontline workers (teachers, police officers, social workers) who implement policies daily
- c) Case studies of specific communities or agencies to understand local implementation variation
- d) Identifying bureaucratic bottlenecks, misaligned incentives, and resource gaps

Policy Evaluation

- a. Process evaluation using interviews and observation to assess how a program operates
- b. Outcome evaluation through narratives — asking beneficiaries how their lives have changed
- c. Comparative case studies across different regions or communities that implemented the same policy
- d. Participatory evaluation — involving communities themselves in assessing program success

Qualitative Methods Toolkit for Policy Analysts

Method	Policy Application
In-depth Interviews	Stakeholder views, beneficiary experiences, expert knowledge
Focus Groups	Public opinion, community needs, program feedback
Ethnography / Observation	Street-level implementation, institutional culture
Case Studies	Deep-dive into policy impact in specific communities
Narrative Inquiry	Life stories of those affected by policy
Discourse Analysis	How problems are framed in media, politics, and legislation
Document Analysis	Policy texts, legislative records, program reports
Participatory Action Research	Community-led policy evaluation and advocacy
Grounded Theory	Building new explanatory frameworks from field data
Content Analysis	Systematic review of policy documents and media

2.3.7 Educator

Classroom observation, student think-alouds, and peer debriefs inform pedagogical decisions. Action research (teachers studying their own classrooms) is a formalised version of this. For educators, qualitative research often takes the form of action research, which allows teachers to systematically inquire about their own teaching practices to improve student learning.

- *Understanding Student Backgrounds:* Teachers use qualitative methods—like informal classroom discussions, visual representations, and written artifacts—to uncover the true needs of their students. For example, action research helped one teacher discover that some of their Hispanic students were actually native speakers of Indigenous languages rather than Spanish, leading to more inclusive classroom management.
- *Evaluating Curriculum:* Teachers can use guided reading sessions and student feedback to evaluate the relevance of specific educational materials, such as moral and ethical education texts for newcomer English learners.

2.3.8 Marketer / Strategist

Brand ethnography, "day in the life" consumer research, and creative co-development sessions reveal what motivates people beyond demographics, shaping messaging that actually resonates. Marketers better understand user perceptions and attitudes toward a product. They explore user thinking and motivation that influence purchasing decisions. Then, they customize communication to attract potential customers and retain existing ones. Market researchers use qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to gain a deeper perspective on why customers make certain purchasing decisions.

- Unlike UX researchers who observe product usage, market researchers typically gather self-reported feedback to drive business decisions related to branding, sales, and marketing.
- Qualitative studies help market researchers explore new markets by detecting cultural or regional nuances that quantitative data might miss.

2.3.9 Healthcare and Social Services

In clinical settings, numbers tell you if a treatment works, but qualitative research tells you what it is like to live with the treatment. Helps medical professionals understand patients' conditions. They study patients' experiences with chronic illness, access to healthcare, and others. This helps develop healthcare practices and applications. Used similarly in policy development. The constructivist grounded theory approach enables the researcher to build a theoretical model that explains the data. This method involves an ongoing process of deeply analyzing and interpreting the data while considering the surrounding context. This study was carried out to examine how patients experience physical rehabilitation during and after their stay in the intensive care unit (ICU) using constructivist grounded theory. Interpretative phenomenological approach helps to explore patients' in-depth responses to their own experiences.

In situations when we want to explore a newly launched medical device or a new feature of the present product, the Ethnography approach of qualitative research method is used. Ethnography in health care can involve observing how professionals and patients use a medical device.

Patient Narratives: Researchers interview patients about their journey from diagnosis to treatment, identifying points of anxiety or miscommunication in the healthcare system.

Observational Studies: Watching how nurses navigate a hospital ward to design better, safer protocols for medication delivery.

The common thread across all these roles: qualitative research answers *why* and *how*, filling the gap that numbers alone can't explain. Tap any role card above to dive deeper into a specific one.

2.4 Self-Assessment Questions: (MCQ):

1: Qualitative research primarily seeks to answer which types of questions instead of focusing on "what" or "how many"?

- A) When and where
- B) Why and how
- C) Who and which
- D) What if and why not

Answer: B

2: Which qualitative approach relies on observation and interaction within a specific community to better understand its cultural practices and social norms?

- A) Phenomenology
- B) Grounded Theory
- C) Ethnography
- D) Content Analysis

Answer: C

3: What is cited as one of the important reasons for the growing interest in qualitative research within public health and operation research?

- A) The high sampling errors in experimental designs
- B) The demand for quick results from ethnographic work
- C) A shift away from interdisciplinary teamwork
- D) The total replacement of quantitative methods

Answer: B

4: How do User Experience (UE) Researchers primarily utilize qualitative methods like think-aloud usability sessions?

- A) To generate quantitative demographic data
- B) To understand how people actually behave with products, rather just what they say
- C) To determine exact pricing strategies
- D) To train machine learning algorithms

Answer: B

5: In product management, how are qualitative methods like diary studies and shadowing sessions utilized?

- A) To calculate the statistical probability of product failure
- B) To write technical code for engineers
- C) To build rich, evidence-based personas grounded in actual behavior
- D) To evaluate competitor financial statements

Answer: C

6: In investigative journalism, what qualitative method requires that no claim is accepted until it is confirmed by at least two independent sources?

- A) Framing analysis
- B) Triangulation
- C) Discourse analysis
- D) Reception analysis

Answer: B

7: Why are qualitative methods like exit interviews and engagement focus groups considered crucial in HR and Management?

- A) They provide numerical data for annual reports.
- B) They diagnose organizational problems and uncover the "why behind the score" that standard surveys miss.
- C) They are the only legal way to terminate employees.
- D) They replace the need for performance reviews.

Answer: B

8: According to the National Association of Social Workers, qualitative research paradigms are particularly important regarding what aspect of a social worker's profession?

- A) Clinical diagnosis
- B) Ethical obligations and ethics
- C) Financial management
- D) Quantitative evaluations

Answer: B

9: Which qualitative method in the policy analyst's toolkit is best suited for understanding street-level policy implementation and institutional culture?

- A) Narrative inquiry
- B) Content analysis
- C) Ethnography / Observation
- D) Document analysis

Answer: C

10: In healthcare research, which specific approach helps researchers explore patients' in-depth responses to their own lived experiences?

- A) Interpretative phenomenological approach
- B) Quantitative surveys
- C) Reception analysis
- D) Copy-testing focus groups

Answer: A

2.5 References

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Module: -II Introduction to Qualitative Research

Unit-3: Research Methods

Structure

- 3.1 Learning Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Understanding Research
- 3.4 Types of research
- 3.5 Significance of Research
- 3.6 Mixed Method Research
- 3.7 Ethnography as A Qualitative Research Method
- 3.8 Case-study Method
- 3.9 Conclusion
- 3.10 Summary
- 3.11 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ)
- 3.12 References

3.1 Learning Objectives

- To introduce ethnography and case-study as central qualitative research methods.
- To examine methodological debates.
- To highlight the importance of writing in ethnography and the challenges of representation.
- To critically analyze the limitations of qualitative methods
- To evaluate the scientific status of case-study research.

3.2 Introduction

Research can be understood as the search for knowledge. More formally, it is a scientific and systematic effort to gather relevant information on a particular topic. In this sense, research is both an art and a method of scientific investigation. The *Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines research as “a careful investigation or inquiry specially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge.” Similarly, Redman and Mory describe it as a “systematized effort to gain new knowledge.” Many scholars view research as a journey from the known to the unknown—a voyage of discovery. Human curiosity plays a central role here: when faced with the unknown, we wonder, question, and probe until we achieve deeper understanding. This instinct of inquisitiveness is the foundation of all knowledge, and the process we use to explore and explain the unknown is what we call research. *Research methods* are the specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyse data in a study—the concrete tools of inquiry, from running an experiment to administering a questionnaire to coding interview transcripts. They are what a researcher actually *does* to turn a question into evidence, and the choice among them shapes what kind of answer a study can produce.

3.3 Understanding Research

Research is best understood as an academic activity, and the term should be used in a precise, technical sense. Clifford Woody explains that research involves defining and redefining problems, formulating hypotheses or possible solutions, collecting and organizing data, evaluating that data, drawing conclusions, and finally testing those conclusions to see if they match the original hypothesis. In the *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, D. Slesinger and M. Stephenson describe research as “the manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalising to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or in the practice of an art.” In this way, research is not just repetition of what is already known—it is an original contribution that adds to and advances the existing stock of knowledge. Research can be described as the pursuit of truth through study, observation, comparison, and experiment. In simple terms, it is the search for knowledge using objective and systematic methods to solve a problem. A systematic approach that leads to generalisations or the development of theory is also considered research. In this sense, the term

‘research’ refers to a structured process that includes stating the problem clearly, formulating a hypothesis, collecting relevant facts or data, analysing those facts, and finally drawing conclusions. These conclusions may either provide solutions to the problem or contribute to broader theoretical understanding.

The purpose of research is to discover answers to questions by applying scientific methods. Its central aim is to uncover truth that is hidden or not yet known. While each study has its own specific goals, research objectives can generally be grouped into broad categories. In essence, research is about systematically seeking knowledge, using procedures that ensure accuracy and reliability, so that the findings contribute meaningfully to understanding and problem-solving.

- a. To gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it (studies with this object in view are termed as exploratory or formulative research studies);
- b. To portray accurately the characteristics of a particular individual, situation or a group (studies with this object in view are known as descriptive research studies);
- c. To determine the frequency with which something occurs or with which it is associated with something else (studies with this object in view are known as diagnostic research studies);
- d. To test a hypothesis of a causal relationship between variables (such as hypothesis-testing research studies).

Applications of Research

In practice, very little research is purely theoretical. That is, only a small number of scholars focus on research methodology itself. Most research is applied, meaning it is used to solve real-world problems and has wide relevance across many disciplines. Every profession—whether in science, social science, medicine, engineering, or the arts—makes use of research methods to some extent. Professionals rely on the techniques developed by research methodologists to deepen understanding in their own fields and to expand the knowledge base of their discipline. By applying research methodology, they strengthen and advance their profession. In professional practice, the procedures we follow are usually those that have been tested and refined by others over many years. To engage in this testing process effectively, one needs research skills, and developing such skills falls under the scope of pure research. In fact, the reliability of any findings depends entirely on the soundness of the research methodology used. If the methods are weak, the conclusions will lack validity; but if the methodology is strong, the results can be trusted and will contribute meaningfully to knowledge.

Research techniques, when applied in practice, serve important purposes such as strengthening professional knowledge, improving understanding, supporting development, and advancing the field. As mentioned earlier, the kinds of questions that arise in professions where services are provided—whether directly or indirectly—such as health (nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, community health, health promotion, public health), education, town planning, library studies, psychology, business studies, or social work, can be examined from four distinct perspectives. These perspectives help professionals frame their inquiries, apply appropriate methods, and connect their findings to both practical improvement and theoretical advancement.

- i. The service provider;
- ii. The service administrator, manager or planner;
- iii. The service consumer; and
- iv. The professional.

Definitions of research

There are many ways to answer professional questions. Some are informal, based on impressions or practical experience, while others follow strict scientific procedures. Research is one of the most reliable

ways to find answers. When you say you are conducting a research study, it implies three important things:

1. The study is carried out within a framework of philosophical principles.
2. It uses methods and techniques that have already been tested for validity and reliability.
3. It is designed to be unbiased and objective, ensuring that the findings are trustworthy.

A researcher's philosophical orientation is shaped by different paradigms and approaches, such as positivist, interpretive, phenomenological, action or participatory, feminist, qualitative, or quantitative traditions, as well as by the academic discipline in which they were trained. Within any of these orientations, the concept of *validity* is essential. Validity ensures that the correct procedures are applied throughout the research process so that the answers obtained are accurate and meaningful. *Reliability* refers to the consistency and accuracy of measurement procedures, meaning that results can be repeated under similar conditions. Together, validity and reliability provide the foundation for credible and trustworthy research outcomes. In research, being *unbiased and objective* means that each step is carried out fairly and every conclusion is drawn to the best of the researcher's ability, without allowing personal interests to interfere. The author distinguishes between *bias* and *subjectivity*. Subjectivity is a natural part of how individuals think, shaped by their educational background, discipline, philosophy, experience, and skills. Bias, however, is different—it is a deliberate attempt to conceal or emphasize certain aspects in order to influence outcomes. For example, a psychologist may interpret a piece of information differently from an anthropologist or a historian, but this difference reflects subjectivity rather than bias.

Adhering to the three criteria of research—working within a philosophical framework, using valid and reliable methods, and maintaining objectivity—allows a study to be recognized as true research. When a researcher undertakes a study to answer a question, it implies that the methods chosen meet these expectations. However, the extent to which these criteria are applied differs across disciplines, which means the meaning of “research” is not identical everywhere. For instance, in the physical sciences, research is expected to be strictly controlled at every stage. In contrast, in the social sciences, rigid control is often not possible and sometimes not even required, since the focus is on understanding complex human and social behavior.

Within the social sciences, the level of control expected in research varies from one discipline to another, since social scientists differ in how closely the process should meet the standard criteria of validity, reliability, and objectivity. Despite these differences, the overall approach to inquiry across disciplines remains broadly similar. The research model presented in this book is based on that shared approach. For beginners, it is important to understand that research is not always highly technical, filled with complex statistics and computer analysis. It can also be a simple activity aimed at answering straightforward questions about everyday situations. Research procedures can also be used to develop complex theories or laws that explain and govern aspects of life. The key difference between research and non-research activity lies in the way answers are obtained: for a process to be called research, it must meet certain requirements. Grinnell (1993: 4) defines research as “a structured inquiry that utilises acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and creates new knowledge that is generally applicable.” Burns (1994: 2) adds that research is “a systematic investigation to find answers to a problem.” These definitions highlight that research is not simply about gathering information, but about following a structured, scientific process that produces knowledge which can be applied beyond the immediate study. Kerlinger (1986: 10) explains that *scientific research is a systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of propositions about presumed relationships among different phenomena*. This definition emphasizes that research must be carefully structured and evidence-based. Bulmer (1977: 5) adds that *sociological research is primarily committed to establishing systematic, reliable, and valid knowledge about the social world*. Together, these perspectives highlight that

whether in the natural sciences or the social sciences, research is about building trustworthy knowledge through systematic inquiry and critical evaluation.

Characteristics of research

From these definitions, it is clear that research is a process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting information in order to answer questions. However, for any activity to qualify as research, it must meet certain characteristics. It should be controlled as far as possible, carried out with rigor, and follow a systematic plan. It must also be valid and verifiable, meaning that the procedures and results can be checked and confirmed. In addition, research must be empirical, based on observation or evidence, and critical, involving careful judgment and evaluation. These qualities together ensure that research produces trustworthy and meaningful knowledge.

- ❖ **Controlled-in real life:** In real life, many different factors influence an outcome, and rarely does a single event result from a simple one-to-one relationship. Most outcomes are shaped by the interaction of multiple relationships and variables, some of which are more complex than others. In studies that explore cause-and-effect relationships, it is important to establish clear links between causes and effects. This linkage is central to the study of causation. However, in practice—especially within the social sciences—it is extremely difficult, and often impossible, to establish such direct connections because of the complexity of human and social behavior. The concept of *control* in research means that when studying causality between two variables, the study is designed to minimize the influence of other factors that might affect the relationship. In the physical sciences, this is often achievable because much of the research is conducted in laboratory settings where external influences can be controlled. In the social sciences, however, this is far more difficult, since research deals with human beings living in society where such controls are not possible. Therefore, social scientists cannot eliminate external factors but instead attempt to measure and quantify their impact on the relationship being studied.
- ❖ **Rigorous-**In research, it is essential to be scrupulous in ensuring that the procedures used to answer questions are relevant, appropriate, and properly justified. The degree of *rigour* applied, however, varies considerably between disciplines. In the physical sciences, research is usually expected to be highly rigorous, with strict controls and precise measurements. In the social sciences, the level of rigour differs not only from the physical sciences but also within the social sciences themselves, since different fields approach inquiry with varying expectations and methods.
- ❖ **Systematic-** This means that the procedures used in an investigation must follow a logical order. The steps cannot be taken randomly or in a disorganized way. Instead, each stage of the process should build upon the previous one, with certain procedures necessarily coming before others. This sequence ensures that the research is coherent, systematic, and capable of producing valid results.
- ❖ **Valid and verifiable-** This concept means that the conclusions drawn from research findings must be correct and capable of being verified. Verification ensures that both the researcher and others can check the procedures and results to confirm their accuracy. In this way, research outcomes are not just personal opinions but are supported by evidence that can be tested and validated by others. This quality of being verifiable is what makes research trustworthy and credible.

- ❖ **Empirical**- This concept means that any conclusions drawn in research must be based on solid evidence. Such evidence comes from information collected through real-life experiences or direct observations. In other words, research findings are not simply assumptions or opinions; they are grounded in actual data that can be checked and confirmed. This reliance on evidence ensures that research outcomes are credible and meaningful.
- ❖ **Critical**-Critical scrutiny of the procedures and methods used in research is essential. Every stage of the investigation must be carefully examined to ensure that it is free from weaknesses or flaws. The process should be designed in such a way that it can withstand close and careful evaluation by others. In this way, research becomes reliable, credible, and capable of producing knowledge that can be trusted.

3.4 Types of research

Research can be classified from three main perspectives.

- ❖ First, it can be grouped according to the *application* of the study, such as whether it is pure research or applied research.
- ❖ Second, it can be classified by the *objectives* of the research, which may include descriptive, correlational, explanatory, or exploratory aims.
- ❖ Third, research can be distinguished by the *mode of inquiry* employed, such as quantitative or qualitative approaches.

These perspectives provide a structured way of understanding the different types of research and their purposes. These three classifications of research—application, objectives, and inquiry mode—are not mutually exclusive. A single study can be described from all three perspectives at once. For example, a project may be identified as *pure* or *applied* research (from the viewpoint of application), as *descriptive*, *correlational*, *explanatory*, or *exploratory* (from the viewpoint of objectives), and as *qualitative* or *quantitative* (from the viewpoint of inquiry mode). This shows that research can be understood in multiple ways depending on how it is approached and what aspects are emphasized.

The basic types of research are as follows:

(i) Descriptive vs. Analytical: Descriptive research refers to studies such as surveys and fact-finding inquiries that aim to describe the current state of affairs. Its primary purpose is to present an accurate picture of what exists at present. In social science and business research, descriptive studies are often referred to as *ex post facto* research. A key feature of this approach is that the researcher has no control over the variables being studied; they can only observe and report what has already happened or what is currently happening. Most *ex post facto* research projects are used in descriptive studies where the researcher measures items such as shopping frequency, people's preferences, or similar patterns of behavior. These studies may also attempt to identify causes, even though the researcher cannot control the variables involved. The methods commonly used in descriptive research include surveys of various kinds, along with comparative and correlational approaches. In contrast, *analytical research* requires the researcher to work with facts or information that already exist and then critically analyze this material to draw meaningful conclusions.

(ii) Applied vs. Fundamental: Research can be divided into two broad types: *applied (or action) research* and *fundamental (basic or pure) research*. Applied research focuses on finding solutions to immediate problems faced by society, industry, or business organizations. Fundamental research, on the other hand, is concerned with generalizations and the development of theories. As scholars often note, “gathering knowledge for knowledge's sake” is termed pure or basic research. Examples of fundamental research include studies of natural phenomena or pure mathematics, as well as investigations into human behavior aimed at making generalizations. By contrast, research directed toward solving a specific, practical problem in a social or business context is an example of applied

research. Applied research includes studies designed to address practical problems such as identifying social, economic, or political trends that may affect institutions, testing whether communications are understood (*copy research*), conducting marketing research, or carrying out evaluation studies. The central aim of applied research is to discover solutions for pressing, real-world issues. In contrast, *basic (or fundamental) research* is directed toward generating knowledge that has broad applications and contributes to the organized body of scientific understanding. Its purpose is not immediate problem-solving but rather the expansion of theory and general knowledge.

(iii) Quantitative vs. Qualitative: Quantitative research focuses on measuring quantity or amount and is applicable to phenomena that can be expressed numerically. Qualitative research, in contrast, deals with phenomena that involve qualities or kinds rather than numbers. For example, when researchers investigate the reasons behind human behavior—such as why people think or act in certain ways—they often employ *motivation research*, a key type of qualitative study. This approach seeks to uncover underlying motives and desires, typically using in-depth interviews to gather insights. Qualitative research employs several specialized techniques to uncover deeper insights into human behavior. These include word association tests, sentence completion tests, story completion tests, and other projective methods. Another important form is *attitude or opinion research*, which seeks to understand how people feel or what they think about a particular subject or institution. Qualitative research is especially significant in the behavioral sciences, where the goal is to discover the underlying motives that drive human actions. Through such methods, researchers can analyze the factors that influence why people behave in certain ways or why they like or dislike particular things. However, applying qualitative research in practice is relatively challenging, and researchers are advised to seek guidance from experimental psychologists when undertaking such studies.

(iv) Conceptual vs. Empirical: *Conceptual research* deals with abstract ideas or theories. It is often carried out by philosophers and thinkers who aim to develop new concepts or reinterpret existing ones. *Empirical research*, on the other hand, is based on experience or observation. It is data-driven and produces conclusions that can be verified through observation or experiment. Because of this reliance on evidence, empirical research is often referred to as the *experimental type of research*. In this type of research, it is necessary to obtain facts directly from their source and to actively engage in activities that stimulate the production of the required information. The researcher begins with a working hypothesis—essentially an informed guess about the probable results. They then collect sufficient data to either prove or disprove this hypothesis. To achieve this, the researcher designs experiments intended to manipulate the people or materials involved in such a way that the desired information is revealed. This type of research is characterized by the experimenter's control over the variables being studied and the deliberate manipulation of one variable to observe its effects. Empirical research is particularly suitable when the goal is to demonstrate that certain variables influence others in specific ways. Evidence collected through experiments or empirical studies is widely regarded today as the strongest possible support for a given hypothesis, since it provides proof that can be tested and verified.

(v) Other Types of Research: All other types of research can be seen as variations of the approaches already discussed. These variations depend on factors such as the *purpose* of the research, the *time required* to complete it, the *environment* in which it is conducted, or other similar considerations. From the perspective of time, research may be classified as either *one-time research* or *longitudinal research*. One-time research is limited to a single period of study, while longitudinal research extends across multiple time periods, allowing researchers to observe changes and developments over time. Research can also be classified according to the *environment* in which it is conducted. It may be carried out in a field setting, in a laboratory, or through simulation techniques. Another form is clinical or diagnostic research, which often uses case-study methods or in-depth approaches to uncover basic causal relationships. Such studies typically involve small samples but rely on deep probing data-collection tools to reach meaningful insights. Research may also be exploratory, where the aim is to develop hypotheses, or formalized, where the structure is substantial and specific

hypotheses are tested. Finally, historical research draws upon sources such as documents, records, and artifacts to study past events or ideas, including the philosophies of individuals or groups at different points in time. Research can also be classified as *conclusion-oriented* or *decision-oriented*. In conclusion-oriented research, the researcher has the freedom to select a problem, redesign the inquiry as it progresses, and conceptualize ideas according to their own perspective. Decision-oriented research, however, is conducted to meet the needs of a decision-maker. In this case, the researcher does not have the liberty to pursue the study based on personal inclination. A clear example of decision-oriented research is *operations research*, which provides executive departments with a scientific, quantitative basis for making decisions about operations under their control.

Paradigms of research

In the social sciences, two major paradigms form the foundation of research. The key question dividing them is whether the methodology of the physical sciences can be applied to the study of social phenomena. The paradigm rooted in the physical sciences is known as the systematic, scientific, or positivist approach, while the opposing paradigm is referred to as the qualitative, ethnographic, ecological, or naturalistic approach. Each side has developed its own values, terminology, methods, and techniques for understanding social phenomena.

Since the mid-1960s, however, there has been growing recognition that both paradigms have their place. The purpose of the research should determine the mode of inquiry and, therefore, the paradigm chosen. Applying one approach indiscriminately to all research problems can be misleading and inappropriate. Importantly, the positivist paradigm can accommodate both quantitative and qualitative research. One can conduct qualitative research within a positivist framework. The distinction lies in differentiating between qualitative data (which refers to variables measured descriptively) and qualitative research (which refers to the use of qualitative methodology).

Research Approaches

The discussion of research types makes clear that there are two fundamental approaches: the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. The quantitative approach involves generating data in numerical form, which is then subjected to rigorous, formal, and structured analysis. Within this approach, three sub-categories can be identified: inferential, experimental, and simulation research.

- The inferential approach aims to create a database from which characteristics or relationships of a population can be inferred. This usually takes the form of survey research, where a sample of the population is studied—through questioning or observation—to determine its characteristics. The findings are then generalized, with the assumption that the population shares the same characteristics as the sample.
- Within the quantitative approach, two important sub-types are the experimental and simulation approaches. The experimental approach is characterized by a high degree of control over the research environment. In this case, certain variables are deliberately manipulated to observe their effect on other variables, allowing researchers to test cause-and-effect relationships.
- The simulation approach, on the other hand, involves constructing an artificial environment in which relevant information and data can be generated. This enables observation of the dynamic behavior of a system—or its sub-systems—under controlled conditions. In business and social sciences, “simulation” refers to the operation of a numerical model that represents the structure of a dynamic process. By assigning values to initial conditions, parameters, and external variables, the simulation is run to represent the behavior of the process over time. Simulation can also be used to build models that help understand or predict future conditions.
- The qualitative approach to research focuses on the *subjective assessment* of attitudes, opinions, and behavior. In this approach, findings are shaped largely by the researcher’s insights and

impressions rather than by rigid numerical measurement. The results are typically presented in non-quantitative form or in formats that are not subjected to rigorous statistical analysis. Common techniques used in qualitative research include focus group interviews, projective techniques, and in-depth interviews, all of which aim to capture rich, detailed perspectives and meanings.

3.5 Significance of Research

Hudson's famous maxim—"All progress is born of inquiry. Doubt is often better than overconfidence, for it leads to inquiry, and inquiry leads to invention"—captures the essence of why research is significant. Progress in any field is made possible through sustained inquiry, and research provides the structured means for such inquiry. By engaging in research, individuals cultivate scientific and inductive thinking, which in turn fosters the development of logical habits of thought and organization. In this way, research not only advances knowledge but also strengthens intellectual discipline and problem-solving skills.

In modern times, the role of research in applied economics—whether in business or in the economy as a whole—has expanded significantly. The growing complexity of both business operations and government functions has heightened the importance of research as a tool for solving operational problems. Moreover, research has become increasingly valuable as an aid to economic policy, serving the needs of both government and business by providing evidence-based insights for decision-making.

Research forms the foundation of nearly all government policies within an economic system. For example, government budgets are partly based on analyzing the needs and desires of citizens and on assessing the revenues available to meet those needs. Since the costs of these needs must be balanced against probable revenues, research plays a crucial role in this process. Through research, policymakers can devise alternative policies and evaluate the potential consequences of each option, ensuring that decisions are evidence-based and sustainable.

Decision-making itself may not be a direct part of research, but research plays a crucial role in facilitating the decisions of policymakers. Governments must design programmes that address all aspects of national life, most of which are directly or indirectly linked to economic conditions. Issues such as the plight of cultivators, the challenges faced by businesses and industries (both large and small), working conditions, trade union activities, problems of distribution, and even the size and nature of defence services all require careful research. In this sense, research is indispensable for guiding the allocation of a nation's resources, ensuring that policies are grounded in evidence and responsive to real needs. Another important area where government relies on research is in collecting information about the economic and social structure of the nation. Such information reveals what is happening in the economy and what changes are taking place. Gathering this statistical information is not a routine task; it involves complex research problems. For this reason, most governments today employ large teams of research technicians and experts to carry out this work.

In the context of economic policy, research operates in three distinct phases:

1. Investigation – continual compilation of facts to understand the economic structure.
2. Diagnosis – analysis of current events and the forces underlying them.
3. Prognosis – prediction of future developments based on observed trends.

Research holds special importance in addressing operational and planning problems within business and industry. Approaches such as operations research, market research, and motivational research are considered crucial, as their findings directly support business decision-making.

- Market research involves investigating the structure and development of a market to design efficient policies for purchasing, production, and sales.

- Operations research applies mathematical, logical, and analytical techniques to solve business problems, particularly those related to cost minimization or profit maximization—often referred to as optimization problems.
- Motivational research explores consumer attitudes and behaviors to understand the psychological factors influencing purchasing decisions.

Motivational research, which seeks to understand why people behave as they do, is primarily concerned with market characteristics. In other words, it focuses on uncovering the motivations underlying consumer behavior. Such insights are invaluable for business and industry leaders responsible for making decisions. Research into demand and market factors is especially useful, as knowledge of future demand enables firms or industries to adjust their supply schedules within the limits of projected capacity.

Today, market analysis has become an integral part of business policy. Business budgeting, which ultimately produces a projected profit and loss account, is based largely on sales estimates—and these estimates depend on business research. Once sales forecasting is completed, efficient production and investment programs can be designed, around which purchasing and financing plans are organized. In this way, research replaces intuitive, guess-based business decisions with more logical and scientific ones. Research is equally vital for social scientists, as it enables the study of social relationships and provides answers to pressing social problems. It offers intellectual satisfaction by generating knowledge for its own sake, while also serving practical purposes by helping social scientists improve practices and approaches. In the social sciences, research carries a dual emphasis:

- On the one hand, its responsibility as a science is to develop a body of principles that make possible the understanding and prediction of human interactions.
- On the other hand, because of its social orientation, it is increasingly expected to provide practical guidance in solving immediate problems of human relations.

Thus, research in social sciences is concerned both with knowledge for knowledge's sake and with knowledge for practical application.

The significance of research can also be appreciated by considering how it is perceived in different contexts. For students writing a master's or Ph.D. thesis, research often represents career advancement or a pathway to higher positions in the social structure. For professionals specializing in research methodology, it serves as a source of livelihood. Philosophers and thinkers view research as an outlet for new ideas and insights, while literary men and women see it as a means for developing new styles and creative work. Analysts and intellectuals, on the other hand, regard research as a way to formulate generalizations and new theories. Research serves as the fountain of knowledge, valuable both for knowledge's sake and as a source of guidance in solving diverse business, governmental, and social problems. It functions as a form of formal training, equipping individuals with the ability to better understand new developments in their field. In this way, research not only advances knowledge but also strengthens professional competence and adaptability.

Importance of Knowing How Research is Done

The study of research methodology provides students with essential training in the practical aspects of conducting research. It equips them with skills for gathering material, organizing and indexing information, and participating in fieldwork when necessary. Students also gain training in techniques for data collection suited to specific problems, including the use of statistics, questionnaires, and controlled experimentation. Additionally, they learn how to record evidence, sort it systematically, and interpret it meaningfully. In fact, the importance of understanding research methodology—knowing *how research is done*—stems from several key considerations, which can be outlined next.

(i) For anyone preparing for a career in research, the importance of mastering research methodology and techniques is self-evident, since these constitute the very tools of the trade. Knowledge of methodology provides valuable training, especially for new researchers, enabling them to conduct better and more reliable studies. It also helps in developing disciplined thinking and cultivating a “research bent of mind” that allows one to observe the field objectively. Therefore, those aspiring to build a career in research must not only acquire technical skills but also thoroughly understand the logic and rationale behind the methods they use.

(ii) Knowledge of how to conduct research equips individuals with the ability to evaluate and apply research results with confidence. In other words, understanding research methodology is valuable across multiple fields—such as government, business administration, community development, and social work—where people are increasingly required to assess and use research findings to guide action. Thus, methodological training ensures that research outcomes are not only produced but also interpreted and applied effectively in real-world contexts.

(iii) When one understands how research is conducted, there is the intellectual satisfaction of acquiring a new tool of thought—an approach that becomes a way of looking at the world and judging everyday experiences. This knowledge enables individuals to make intelligent and informed decisions about practical problems encountered at different points in life. In essence, research methodology provides the tools to view situations objectively, moving beyond personal bias or intuition.

(iv) In today’s scientific age, everyone is in some way a consumer of research results. These results can be used intelligently only if one is able to judge the adequacy of the methods by which they were obtained. Knowledge of research methodology equips individuals with the ability to critically evaluate research findings, ensuring that they are reliable and valid. This, in turn, enables people to make rational and well-informed decisions based on evidence rather than assumption.

3.6 Mixed Method Research

Mixed-method research combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study or across a series of studies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena. This methodology is particularly valuable in social sciences, where diverse human experiences and societal patterns demand a multifaceted approach. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, researchers achieve a holistic analysis that captures both the depth and breadth of social issues (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The emphasis lies in the term *mixed*, which highlights the crucial step of data linkage or integration at appropriate stages of the research process. Purposeful integration allows researchers to examine phenomena from multiple perspectives, using diverse research lenses. In social sciences, this is especially important because the complexity of human behavior and social structures often requires complementary insights. By leveraging the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, sociologists can generate richer, more nuanced findings, offering a fuller picture than single-method studies might achieve.

In social sciences, the strength of mixed-method research lies in its ability to overcome the limitations of purely qualitative or purely quantitative approaches by combining their respective advantages. Qualitative methods—such as in-depth interviews and ethnographies—provide detailed, contextualized insights into social experiences and meanings. Quantitative methods—like surveys and statistical analyses—offer the ability to generalize findings across larger populations and to identify patterns and trends.

By integrating these methodologies, sociologists enhance the validity and reliability of their findings through triangulation. This methodological pluralism not only strengthens the robustness of research

but also allows for a more comprehensive exploration of social phenomena, capturing both the rich detail of lived experiences and the broad patterns of social life.

One of the key advantages of mixed-method research in social sciences is its flexibility and adaptability. Social realities are dynamic and constantly evolving, which requires research approaches that can respond to changing conditions and incorporate new insights. Mixed methods allow for iterative data collection and analysis, where findings from one method can guide and refine subsequent phases of the study. This adaptability ensures that research remains relevant and aligned with the shifting nature of social phenomena.

Moreover, the ability to draw on multiple data sources and methodological perspectives enhances the rigor and comprehensiveness of the research. By combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth, mixed methods provide sociologists with a powerful tool to capture the full complexity of social life.

Philosophical Foundations

Mixed-method research is grounded in pragmatic philosophy, which emphasizes practical outcomes and the use of all available tools to address research questions. Pragmatism provides the flexibility and adaptability needed to focus on what works best for understanding a research problem (Maxcy, 2003). This philosophical foundation allows researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in a way that is responsive to the demands of the study, ensuring that methodology serves the purpose of generating useful, actionable insights.

- ❖ **Pluralism:** Pluralism in mixed-method research refers to the integration of multiple perspectives and methodologies to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. It values the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study. For example, quantitative surveys can provide broad, generalizable data, while qualitative interviews can uncover deeper insights and contextual nuances. By embracing pluralism, researchers can address complex questions from multiple angles, thereby enhancing the robustness and credibility of their findings. This methodological diversity leads to richer, more nuanced conclusions that single-method approaches might overlook, ultimately supporting more informed and holistic outcomes.
- ❖ **Practicality:** Practicality in mixed-method research refers to its feasibility and effectiveness in combining qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study. It requires careful consideration of factors such as time, resources, and expertise to ensure that integration is manageable and genuinely adds value. In practice, this means designing a study that can efficiently collect and analyze both numerical and textual data, aligning with research objectives without overwhelming the process. Researchers must plan how to combine data collection methods effectively, ensure compatibility between qualitative and quantitative evidence, and address logistical challenges. When managed well, mixed methods provide a comprehensive view of social phenomena while remaining practical and achievable.
- ❖ **Adaptability:** Adaptability in mixed-method research refers to the flexibility and responsiveness of the research design to changes and new insights that emerge during the study. This quality allows researchers to modify their approach as needed—whether by adjusting data collection methods, refining research questions, or altering analysis strategies based on preliminary findings. For instance, if early qualitative results reveal unexpected trends, researchers may adapt their quantitative survey to explore these trends further. Such adaptability ensures that research remains relevant, rigorous, and aligned with the evolving nature of social phenomena. By accommodating new information while maintaining methodological integrity, mixed methods become especially effective in addressing complex research problems and producing more robust and nuanced results.

- ❖ **Real-world Orientation:** Real-world orientation in mixed-method research emphasizes the application of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to address practical, everyday problems and questions. This orientation ensures that research remains relevant and directly applicable to the contexts it seeks to study. By combining numerical data with in-depth qualitative insights, researchers can develop a holistic understanding of complex issues as they occur in real-life settings. For example, a mixed-method study on educational interventions might use quantitative measures to assess academic performance while employing qualitative interviews to explore students' experiences and perceptions. This dual approach bridges the gap between theory and practice, producing actionable insights and solutions grounded in lived realities.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Qualitative data collection in research involves methods that allow for deep, contextual exploration of social phenomena. Common approaches include:

- Interviews: Semi-structured or unstructured interviews provide opportunities to explore participants' perspectives in depth (Kvale, 2007).
- Focus Groups: Group discussions reveal collective views and highlight social dynamics (Morgan, 1997).
- Observations: Direct observation of social interactions and behaviors in natural settings offers insights into everyday practices (Creswell, 2014).
- Document Analysis: Examining textual or visual documents helps researchers understand social phenomena through existing records (Bowen, 2009).

Quantitative methods:

Quantitative data collection in research relies on structured methods designed to generate numerical evidence. Common approaches include:

- Surveys: Structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions are used to collect numerical data systematically (Groves et al., 2009).
- Experiments: Controlled studies test hypotheses and establish causal relationships by manipulating variables under defined conditions (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).
- Secondary Data Analysis: Existing datasets are re-examined to answer new research questions, allowing researchers to build on prior work efficiently (Hakim, 2000).

Qualitative Research Methods:

Qualitative data analysis involves techniques designed to identify patterns, themes, and meanings within non-numerical data. These methods help researchers interpret complex social phenomena by organizing and making sense of textual, visual, or observational material. Common techniques include:

- **Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative data analysis technique that focuses on identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In mixed-method research, thematic analysis plays a crucial role by integrating qualitative findings with quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This approach allows researchers to uncover rich, detailed insights from qualitative evidence, which can then be triangulated with numerical data to enhance both the depth and validity of the study. By combining qualitative and quantitative strands, thematic analysis enables the exploration of complex phenomena, revealing not only statistical trends but also the underlying meanings behind them. This integration offers a more

nuanced and holistic view of the research subject, making thematic analysis a powerful tool in mixed-method designs.

- **Grounded Theory:** Grounded theory in mixed-method research refers to the systematic development of theory directly from data, rather than imposing pre-existing frameworks. It involves iterative cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis, where qualitative insights are progressively refined into conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2006). When integrated with quantitative data, this approach strengthens the theoretical framework by validating emerging ideas with statistical evidence. This integration ensures that the resulting theory is both deeply rooted in real-world experiences and empirically substantiated, capturing the nuances and complexities of social phenomena. By combining qualitative richness with quantitative validation, grounded theory in mixed methods produces a robust and comprehensive understanding of the research problem, enabling the development of theory that is both practical and academically rigorous.
- **Narrative Analysis:** Narrative analysis in mixed-method research focuses on examining and interpreting the stories and personal accounts people share to uncover the meanings and experiences that shape their lives (Riessman, 2008). This approach captures the rich, contextual details of participants' lived realities, identifying themes and patterns within their narratives. When integrated with quantitative data, narrative analysis provides a powerful means to corroborate and expand statistical findings, offering a more comprehensive and humanized perspective on the research problem. By weaving together the numerical and the narrative, researchers achieve a deeper and more nuanced understanding of complex social phenomena. This integration enhances both the rigor and the relevance of the study, ensuring that findings are not only empirically sound but also grounded in human experience.
- **Content Analysis:** Content analysis in mixed-method research refers to the systematic coding and categorization of textual or visual data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Krippendorff, 2018). This method provides a structured way of analyzing large volumes of qualitative information, while also incorporating quantitative measures to enhance both the depth and breadth of the analysis. By quantifying the presence and frequency of specific themes or concepts, content analysis allows researchers to move beyond description and provide measurable evidence. When integrated with qualitative insights, this approach enables validation and triangulation, strengthening the reliability of findings. The combination of qualitative richness and quantitative precision produces results that are both comprehensive and actionable, offering a more thorough understanding of the research topic.

3.7 Ethnography as A Qualitative Research Method:

Ethnography is indeed one of the most influential and enduring qualitative research methods in social sciences. Its early adoption shaped the discipline's methodological identity, with landmark works such as Nels Anderson's *The Hobo* (1923) and William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943) offering vivid accounts of marginalized communities and urban life. These studies exemplified ethnography's strength in capturing lived experiences through immersion and participant observation. Alongside ethnography, the case study tradition also played a formative role. A classic example is *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920) by W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, which combined personal documents with sociological analysis to explore migration and cultural change. Later, Erving Goffman's *Asylums* (1961) extended case study research into institutional contexts, examining the social situation of mental patients at St. Elizabeths Psychiatric Hospital in Washington, DC.

Nine progressive periods have been mentioned by Denzin and Lincon which highlights the difficulty of characterizing 'qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). These are briefed as follows (Bryman, 2012, p. 381):

Period	Label / Phase	Key Features
1900–1950	Traditional Period	Positivist dominance; qualitative seen as anecdotal, less rigorous.
1950–1970	Modernist Phase	Emergence of qualitative methods; structured approaches; rise of symbolic interactionism.
1970–1986	Blurred Genres	Mixing of paradigms; interdisciplinary borrowing; expansion of qualitative styles.
1986–1990	Crisis of Representation	Postmodern critique; questioning objectivity, authority, and representation.
1990–2005	Postmodern Experimental Moment	Reflexive, literary, performative approaches; emphasis on voices, narratives.
2005–?	Methodologically Contested Present	Backlash against qualitative research; reassertion of traditional scientific practices; evidence-based models dominate; qualitative inquiry challenged to prove legitimacy.

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The Traditional Period: The duration of this phase ranges from early twentieth century to the Second World War. This phase is characterized by the early works of the Chicago school theorists. Reliance upon positivist philosophy was observed in this phase.

- a. Modernist Phase: This phase lasts up to early 1970's. In this phase, the researchers largely followed the path of traditionalists, but at the same time sought their own path too and reflected upon the nature of their craft.
- b. Blurred genres: This phase is ranged from 1970 to 1986. This phase is marked by an exploratory rigour to set out from the clutches of positivist tendencies and search for other epistemological, ontological and theoretical ideas.
- c. Crises of representation: This phase occurred during mid-1980's onwards. This phase is where the researchers became aware that their research works have limited scientific authority, because it is only one way of representing the study; and there can be multiple ways of representing the same study. All those representations would be different from each other and none can claim the ultimate 'truth' value.
- d. Postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing: This was in mid-1990's. Following the basic tenets of postmodernism, in this phase, researchers have tries to represent the people differently upon whom they conduct their research.
- e. Post-experimental enquiry: This is the time of 1995-2000. Denzin and Lincon described this phase with the emergence of AltaMira press for qualitative research that encouraged experimental and interdisciplinary writings.
- f. The methodologically contested present: The time frame for this phase is 2000 2004. This period is signified by disagreements and debates between researchers and research organisations about qualitative research work and its methodology. How is qualitative research possible and how the methods should be devised and applied - remained the sole topic of this debate.

- g. Now: The time mentioned by Denzin and Lincon for this phase is 2005-?. This period reasserts the traditional scientific practices through a giving a backlash to qualitative research.
- h. The Fractured Future: The authors speculated that the future holds a separation of camps among the qualitative researchers; where different camps would seek different ways to conduct their research works.

These phases do offer a useful insight in the development of qualitative research work over the decades; however, one must be cautious while reading for the fact that there are several limitations of this unfolding narration.

Understanding Ethnography

Ethnography as a way of producing knowledge has a long history that can be traced back to the colonial era, when colonizers sought to understand the cultures of the people they ruled. During the nineteenth century, Western colonial powers expanded across the world, establishing trading posts, waging wars, interfering in local politics, and ultimately imposing colonial governments. In this process, indigenous cultures were disrupted, exploited, and their wealth was extracted to enrich the colonizers, contributing to the rise of what is now called the “first world.” This domination did not occur overnight, nor was it achieved solely through brute force, since direct coercion often led to resistance. Instead, colonizers turned to other strategies. They studied the everyday lives, beliefs, rituals, and social systems of the colonized populations. By investigating and documenting these cultural practices, they were able to manipulate histories and reinterpret traditions in ways that served colonial interests. Ethnography, therefore, became one of the tools through which colonial powers both understood and controlled the societies they governed.

India remained under British colonial rule for nearly two centuries. The British soon realized that crude exploitation alone would not sustain their dominance in the subcontinent. After the Bengal famine of the 1770s—occurring just six years after the Battle of Buxar and thirteen years after Plassey—the Crown recognized that sheer force could provoke dangerous resistance. To secure long-term control, they turned to subtler strategies: manipulating history, culture, and the mentalité of the colonized. Institutions were established to serve this purpose. The Survey of India was set up in 1767 by the East India Company, followed by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1823. The Indian Museum in Kolkata was founded in 1814, while the Geological Survey of India (1851) and the Archaeological Survey of India (1861) further expanded colonial knowledge projects. All these organizations shared a common motive: to study and document life in Asia, which was constructed as the “other” to Europe. These colonial initiatives contributed to the emergence of Anthropology, tasked with studying societies outside the West, while Sociology developed as the discipline focused on modern Western society. In this way, ethnographic and institutional knowledge became instruments of colonial power, shaping both the academic disciplines and the governance of colonized lands.

To study societies outside the West, anthropologists relied on ethnography, a method that penetrates deeply into the everyday lives of the so-called “exotic other.” Over time, ethnography became the signature method of anthropology, so much so that ethnographic training was considered essential for anyone aspiring to become an anthropologist. In the nineteenth century, scholars such as E. B. Tylor, L. H. Morgan, and Franz Boas produced influential ethnographic works. In the twentieth century, figures like Bronislaw Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Margaret Mead, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Ruth Benedict further advanced the method, establishing ethnography as central to anthropological inquiry. Gradually, sociology also began to adopt ethnography in the twentieth century, as sociologists recognized its value for studying social life and cultural practices, extending the method beyond its anthropological roots. Ethnography has been described as “the art and science of describing a group or a culture” (Fetterman, 2004). In this method, the researcher enters the field—the place where the

intended group or culture lives—and becomes immersed in it. By participating in everyday life and following the practices of the people, the researcher attempts to enter their “meaningful world.” The goal is to generate a holistic insider’s perspective of what it means to live within that group or culture.

This approach contrasts with methods such as structured observation or surveys, where the researcher remains an outsider throughout the process. Studies conducted from an outsider’s position often fail to penetrate the natural setting of respondents and therefore miss the “actual” scenario of their lives. Ethnography seeks to overcome this limitation by transforming the researcher into an **insider**, allowing them to capture the natural order of social life and provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of the group under study.

Usage and Types of Ethnography

The use of ethnographic research grew out of debates against positivism and its approaches to constructing knowledge. Positivist methods often distort the “natural” order of the field by imposing standardized procedures, collecting data from this altered reality, and then presenting findings with a claim to “truth.” In contrast, ethnography seeks to capture the field in its natural order, avoiding artificial distortions.

This debate—positivism versus naturalism—raises a fundamental epistemological question: what is the right way to construct knowledge? Both sides present logical arguments. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain, positivism emphasizes the standardization of research procedures, while naturalism stresses direct contact with the social world, sometimes even requiring ethnographers to “surrender” to the cultures they study. Yet neither position is fully convincing. Standardized instruments cannot guarantee access to “real” data, since the standardized picture may not reflect the actual reality. Similarly, the “surrendered” ethnographer is not a neutral vessel who can capture uncontaminated truth. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue, both approaches fail to recognize that social researchers are themselves part of the social world they study. The sharp distinction between the knower (researcher) and the known (researched) limits both positivism and naturalism. Ethnography, therefore, grapples with these debates and seeks to provide a practical and useful method for knowledge creation, acknowledging the researcher’s embeddedness in the social world.

Over time, several distinct forms of ethnographic research have developed, each with its own focus and approach:

- Autoethnography: This is when the ethnographer studies their own life, blending ethnography with autobiography. It emphasizes personal experience as a lens for understanding broader cultural contexts.
- Virtual Ethnography: With the rapid growth of digital spaces, ethnographers began studying online communities and digital life. This approach explores how people interact, form identities, and build cultures in virtual environments.
- Institutional Ethnography: Developed by Dorothy E. Smith, this method examines how institutions shape people’s everyday lives. It highlights the ways individuals act within and are affected by multi-institutional structures.
- Sensory Ethnography: Associated with Sarah Pink, this approach focuses on how bodily senses—such as sound, smell, sight, and touch—capture the social environment. It emphasizes the experiential dimension of social life, from the noise of traffic to the atmosphere of a restaurant.

Ethnographic research can be understood from two different perspectives:

- Emic Perspective: This is the *insider’s view*. It means that the researcher studies the life of a group of people from the perspective of those people themselves. The goal is to understand the meanings, values, and practices as they are experienced within the culture.

- **Etic Perspective:** This is the *outsider's view*. Here, the researcher examines the life of a group by applying concepts, theories, or frameworks that originate outside of that group. The aim is to compare and analyze the culture using external categories of understanding.

Writing Ethnography

Ethnography is not only a method for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data—it also places strong emphasis on the process of writing. This is one of its distinctive features compared to many other social science methods. Writing ethnography is considered one of the most crucial and challenging parts of the research process. Unlike quantitative research, which often summarizes findings through statistical relations, ethnographic writing must grapple with the complex reality encountered in the field. The ethnographer faces a social world composed of multiple factors interacting simultaneously. To represent this reality, the researcher must disentangle these interplays, analyze and interpret them, and then synthesize them into a coherent ethnographic account (Hammersley, 2007). This requires a kind of engineering skill in writing, where analysis and narration are combined.

Thus, ethnography can be described as the “art of writing.” A good ethnographer must also be a skilled writer, capable of using rhetorical devices, metaphors, storytelling styles, and even irony to convey the depth of social life. These stylistic choices create the atmosphere of the text and determine the genre of ethnographic writing, making the written account as significant as the fieldwork itself.

Problems of Ethnography

Like all methods of knowledge construction, ethnography is not without its problems. Several major issues have been identified and discussed over time:

- **Ethnographer's Position:** Despite efforts to make the researcher's role appear “natural” in the field, this is never fully possible. The ethnographer's identity, training, paradigmatic orientation, and intent inevitably shape how they observe, interact, interpret, and write. As a result, the “scientific voice” often dominates over the “natural voice.”
- **Infiltration:** The very act of entering a community to study it alters everyday life. The ethnographer's presence—whether intentional or not—can influence and manipulate the behaviors of those being studied.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Immersion in the field often raises ethical dilemmas. In covert research, the ethnographer may conceal their identity and intent, which violates principles of informed consent. Even when identity is revealed later, the knower-known binary persists, making ethicality problematic.
- **Going Native:** Sometimes researchers become so immersed in the culture under study that they lose sight of their research objectives. This blurs the line between the ethnographer's persona and the people's persona, compromising analytical distance.
- **Reflexivity:** A responsible ethnographer must practice reflexivity—acknowledging their own position, training, motives, and social background. As Hammersley (2007) notes, researchers are part of the social world they study, and their accounts are not absolute “truths” but useful, contestable representations. Without reflexivity, ethnography risks overgeneralization and misrepresentation.

3.8 Case-study Method

The case-study method is an important qualitative research approach that remains widely practiced in sociology and other social sciences today. Like ethnography, it was adopted by the early Chicago School theorists, who sought alternatives to positivist methods of research. These scholars often relied on social work case records, as seen in Thomas and Znaniecki's classic study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920), which became a foundational example of case-study research (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000). Beyond sociology, case studies have also been extensively used in fields such as

medicine, psychology, and counseling, where practitioners analyze individual cases to understand broader patterns of behavior or treatment. The method's flexibility has made it applicable across disciplines. However, the question arises: can these common uses of case studies in different fields be considered a standard practice for sociology or other social sciences? This remains debated. While case studies provide rich, contextualized insights, their reliance on specific cases raises concerns about generalizability. Thus, although the method is valuable and widely used, whether it should be treated as a universal standard in sociology is still contested.

The common use of the case-study method is sometimes criticized as being less scientific when judged by the strict standards of science. Scientific inquiry emphasizes systematization, logical rigor, and methodological procedures that distinguish scientific knowledge from common-sense understanding. From this perspective, case studies may be accused of lacking such rigor. However, with growing challenges to the methodological strictness of science and its claims to "authentic" outcomes, the demand for a rigid definition of case-study research has weakened. This does not mean that case studies cannot be distinguished from other methods in the social sciences. They can be separated conceptually, but the boundaries remain "fuzzy-edged" (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000). In practice, case studies continue to provide valuable insights, even if they do not fit neatly into the rigid frameworks of scientific methodology.

What Is Case-study?

Alan Bryman (2012) explains that a case study involves the detailed exploration of a specific case, which may be a community, organization, or individual. Similarly, Robert E. Stake (1995) emphasizes that case-study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. In other words, the defining feature of case-study research is its focus on a *case*—a bounded unit of analysis that is studied in depth. This makes case studies different from other methods such as surveys or experiments. Surveys aim to collect data from large samples to identify general patterns and trends, while experiments focus on controlling variables to establish causal relationships. Case studies, by contrast, are not primarily concerned with generalization or causal testing. Instead, they provide rich, contextualized insights into the uniqueness of a particular case, highlighting its complexity and lived reality.

Case: A *case* in case-study research refers to a particular instance that naturally exists within a social setting. The researcher identifies such a case and focuses on studying it in depth. Thus, the unit of analysis in case-study research is one specific case. This differs from other methods:

- In survey research, the unit of analysis is several cases at once. The surveyor works within a strict time frame and structured design, collecting data from many respondents. The aim is not to study each respondent deeply but to generate an overview from a representative sample.
- In experimental research, the researcher actually creates a case. By controlling factors and manipulating variables, an artificial setting is constructed to observe specific conditioned responses.

By contrast, the case-study researcher does not create a case but instead chooses one that has already occurred in its natural setting and examines it thoroughly. This makes case-study research distinct in its emphasis on depth, context, and natural occurrence.

Usage and Types of Case-study

Case-study research provides a rich and detailed account of a particular case, and this depth is necessary because social life is a multi-layered reality. These layers cannot be easily penetrated by survey research, which tends to remain superficial, nor by experimental research, which manipulates the natural setting to fit its own demands. Without close attention, important aspects of social events may remain

unexplored or unknown. That is why case studies, with their thick description (Geertz, 1973), are valuable—they offer a slice of the lifeworld as people live it in their everyday social contexts.

Yin (2005, cited in Bryman, 2012) identifies five main types of cases commonly studied:

- **Critical Case:** A case chosen to test whether a theory or hypothesis holds true in specific circumstances. Example: Festinger et al.'s (1956) study of a religious cult expecting the end of the world.
- **Extreme or Unique Case:** A case that focuses on something exceptional or rare. Example: Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928).
- **Representative or Typical Case:** A case that captures everyday, commonplace situations. Example: Russell and Tyler's *Thank Heaven for Little Girls* (2002), which studied the commercial context of feminine childhood.
- **Revelatory Case:** A case that examines a phenomenon previously inaccessible to researchers. Example: William F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943).
- **Longitudinal Case:** A case studied at more than one point in time, allowing researchers to track changes and developments over a period.

3.9 Conclusion:

Qualitative research methods—including in-depth interviews, participant observation and ethnography, case studies, focus groups, narrative and life-history approaches, grounded theory, phenomenology, and discourse analysis—offer complementary ways to explore meanings, experiences, and social processes in context; each prioritizes depth, reflexivity, and interpretive rigor over numerical generalization, trading breadth for rich, situated understanding. While interviews and focus groups elicit participants' perspectives, observation and ethnography reveal practices and interactions in situ; case studies and life histories provide intensive, bounded examinations, and methods like grounded theory and discourse analysis generate theory from systematic coding of textual or conversational data. Together they demand careful attention to sampling logic, transparency in coding and analytic procedures, and strategies for credibility (triangulation, member checking, thick description) to bolster validity and trustworthiness. Researchers must also attend to ethical responsibilities and reflexivity, acknowledging how their positionality shapes data and interpretation. Used singly or in mixed designs, qualitative methods illuminate the how and why behind patterns, making them indispensable for studies that seek meaning, process, and context.

3.10 Summary:

Together, these methods demonstrate that social life is multi-layered, complex, and context-bound. They remind us that knowledge is not a fixed truth but a constructed account, shaped by the researcher's position, perspective, and writing. This unit equips learners to appreciate qualitative research as both a science and an art—rigorous yet reflexive, analytic yet narrative, deeply contextual yet open to contestation.

3.11 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ):

1. According to the Advanced Learner's Dictionary, research is defined as:
 - a) A casual inquiry into facts
 - b) A careful investigation or inquiry for new facts
 - c) A random collection of data
 - d) A philosophical debateAnswer: b
2. Redman and Mory describe research as:
 - a) A repetition of known facts
 - b) A systematized effort to gain new knowledge
 - c) A subjective interpretation of data

- d) A casual exploration of ideas Answer: b
3. Which of the following is not a broad objective of research?
 a) Exploratory
 b) Descriptive
 c) Diagnostic
 d) Entertainment Answer: d
4. Diagnostic research studies aim to:
 a) Test causal relationships
 b) Determine frequency or association of phenomena
 c) Explore new insights
 d) Portray characteristics of a group Answer: b
5. Validity in research ensures:
 a) Consistency of measurement
 b) Correct procedures are applied for accurate results
 c) Subjectivity is eliminated
 d) Bias is encouraged Answer: b
6. Reliability in research refers to:
 a) Accuracy and repeatability of results
 b) Philosophical orientation of the researcher
 c) Creativity in writing
 d) Avoidance of hypotheses Answer: a
7. Bias in research is defined as:
 a) Natural subjectivity shaped by background
 b) Deliberate attempt to conceal or emphasize outcomes
 c) Differences in disciplinary interpretation
 d) Reflexivity in qualitative methods Answer: b
8. Which of the following is a characteristic of research?
 a) Controlled, rigorous, systematic, valid, empirical, critical
 b) Random, subjective, biased, casual, unverified
 c) Creative, imaginative, speculative, philosophical
 d) None of the above Answer: a
9. In social sciences, establishing causality is difficult because:
 a) Human behavior is complex and influenced by many variables
 b) Experiments are not allowed
 c) Data cannot be collected
 d) Hypotheses are irrelevant Answer: a
10. Descriptive research is often referred to as:
 a) Ex post facto research
 b) Empirical research
 c) Conceptual research
 d) Applied research Answer: a

3.12 References

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Unit-4 Research Designs

Structure

- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Meaning of Research Design
- 4.4 Basic Concepts Relating to Research Design
- 4.5 Types of Research Designs
- 4.6 The cross-sectional study design Sample
- 4.7 Conclusion
- 4.8 Summary
- 4.9 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ)
- 4.10 References

4.1 Learning Objectives:

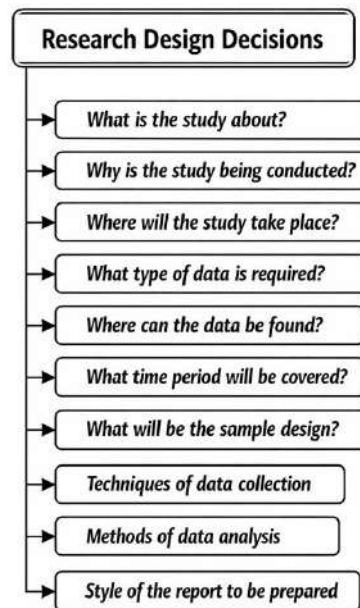
- ❖ Understand the concept, purpose, and significance of research design in qualitative research.
- ❖ Identify and explain the basic components of a research design
- ❖ Distinguish between different types of research designs
- ❖ Evaluate the criteria for selecting an appropriate design
- ❖ Apply suitable research designs to specific social problems

4.2 Introduction:

A unit on Research Design begins by emphasizing that the choice of design must be made before data collection and analysis, taking into account the type of universe, research objectives, available resources, and desired accuracy. The progression of designs illustrates increasing control and complexity: the Completely Randomized Design (CR Design) relies solely on randomization; the Randomized Block Design (RB Design) adds local control by grouping subjects into homogeneous blocks; the Latin Square Design (LS Design) controls two extraneous factors simultaneously by arranging treatments across rows and columns; and Factorial Designs allow the study of multiple variables at once, distinguishing between simple factorial designs with two factors and complex factorial designs with three or more. Through lectures, case studies, diagrams, group work, and statistical exercises, learners develop the ability to classify designs, construct frameworks, compute main and interaction effects, and critically evaluate strengths and limitations.

4.3 Meaning of Research Design:

After defining the research problem, the next major challenge is preparing the design of the research project, often called the *research design*. This design involves making decisions about what will be studied, where and when the study will take place, how much information is needed, and by what means it will be collected. As explained, “A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure.” In simple terms, the research design provides the conceptual framework or blueprint for carrying out the study. It guides the researcher from formulating the hypothesis and its practical implications to the final stage of data analysis. More specifically, design decisions include:



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In this way, the research design ensures that the study is systematically planned and executed, linking the purpose of the research with practical procedures. Keeping in mind the decisions involved in designing a study, the overall research design can be divided into four main parts.

- First, the *sampling design* explains how the items or participants to be observed in the study are selected.
- Second, the *observational design* sets out the conditions under which the observations will take place.
- Third, the *statistical design* deals with how many items will be studied and how the collected information will be analysed.
- Finally, the *operational design* describes the techniques and procedures that make it possible to carry out the sampling, statistical, and observational plans.

The important features of a research design can be summarized as follows. First, it acts as a plan that identifies the sources and types of information relevant to the research problem. Second, it provides a strategy that specifies the approach to be used for collecting and analysing the data. Third, it also takes into account practical constraints such as time and cost, since most studies must be carried out within these limits.

In brief, a research design must include certain basic elements. It should begin with a clear statement of the research problem so that the purpose of the study is well defined. Next, it must outline the procedures and techniques that will be used to gather information. It should also specify the population that will be studied, making clear who or what is being observed. Finally, it must describe the methods that will be applied to process and analyse the collected data.

Need For Research Design:

Research design is essential because it helps the research process run smoothly and efficiently, ensuring that maximum information is obtained with minimum effort, time, and cost. Just as building a house requires a carefully prepared blueprint by an architect, a research project requires a well-planned design before data collection and analysis begin. In this sense, research design represents advance planning of the methods for gathering relevant data and the techniques for analysing them, while keeping in mind

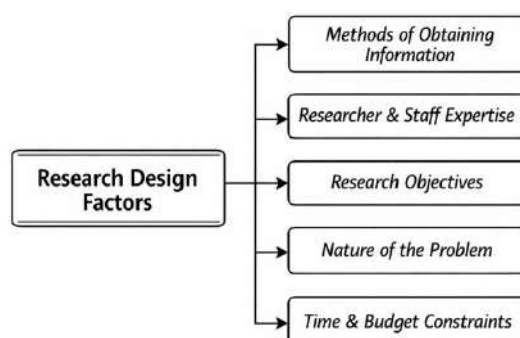
the objectives of the study and the available resources such as staff, time, and money. Preparation of the design must be done with great care, since any mistake can affect the entire project. The reliability of the results depends heavily on the quality of the design, making it the solid foundation on which the whole structure of research work rests.

Many researchers fail to realize the need for a carefully prepared research design, and as a result, the importance it deserves is often overlooked. When this happens, studies may not achieve their intended purpose and can even lead to misleading conclusions. If the design is created without proper thought, the entire research effort may become ineffective. Therefore, it is essential to prepare an efficient and appropriate design before beginning research operations. A good design helps the researcher organize ideas clearly, making it easier to identify flaws or weaknesses. Such a design can also be shared with others for comments and critical evaluation. Without this step, it becomes difficult for reviewers or critics to provide a thorough assessment of the proposed study.

Features of A Good Design

A good research design is usually described with words such as flexible, appropriate, efficient, and economical. In general, a design that reduces bias and increases the reliability of the data collected and analysed is considered strong. In many investigations, the best design is the one that produces the smallest experimental error. Likewise, a design that provides maximum information and allows the researcher to examine different aspects of a problem is regarded as most suitable and efficient.

The idea of a “good design” is always linked to the purpose and objectives of the research, as well as the nature of the problem being studied. A design that works well in one study may not be appropriate in another. Therefore, no single design can serve the needs of all types of research problems. A research design that suits a particular problem usually requires careful consideration of several factors. First, it must specify the means by which information will be obtained. Second, it should take into account the availability and skills of the researcher and any supporting staff. Third, the design must reflect the objectives of the study, making clear what the research aims to achieve. Fourth, it should consider the nature of the problem being studied, since different problems call for different approaches. Finally, the design must be realistic about the resources available, especially the time and money that can be devoted to the research work.



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When a research study is exploratory or formulative, the main goal is to discover new ideas and insights. For this reason, the research design must be flexible, allowing the researcher to consider many different aspects of the phenomenon under study. In contrast, when the purpose of a study is to provide an accurate description of a situation or to examine the association between variables (commonly called descriptive studies), accuracy becomes the most important concern. A good design here is one that minimizes bias and maximizes the reliability of the evidence collected. Finally, studies that aim to test

a hypothesis about causal relationships between variables require a design that not only reduces bias and ensures reliability but also allows the researcher to make valid inferences about causality.

In practice, it is often difficult to place a research study neatly into one category. A single study may contain elements of exploratory, descriptive, and hypothesis-testing functions. Therefore, a study is classified mainly on the basis of its primary purpose—whether it is exploratory, descriptive, or causal—and the research design is chosen accordingly. At the same time, practical considerations must also be taken into account. The availability of time, financial resources, skills of the research staff, and means of obtaining information all play a crucial role in shaping the details of the research design. These details may include the choice of experimental design, survey design, sample design, and other related aspects.

4.4 Basic Concepts Relating to Research Design

Before describing the different types of research designs, it is important to first explain the basic concepts related to design. This step ensures that learners can understand the designs more clearly and easily. By grasping the underlying ideas—such as what a design means, why it is needed, and how it functions—students will be better prepared to appreciate the distinctions among exploratory, descriptive, and causal designs, as well as the practical considerations that shape them.

1. Dependent and independent variables: A variable is a concept that can take on different quantitative values. For example, weight, height, and income are all variables because they can be measured in numbers. Qualitative phenomena, or attributes, can also be treated as variables when they are quantified based on the presence or absence of a particular characteristic. Variables can be of two main types:

- **Continuous Variables:** These can take on values that vary even in decimal points. For instance, height can be measured as 165.5 cm or 165.75 cm.
- **Discrete Variables:** Not all variables are continuous. If a variable can only be expressed in whole numbers (integers), it is called a discrete variable. In statistical language, these are “non-continuous variables.” For example, the number of children in a family must be a whole number.

Age can be taken as an example of a continuous variable, since it can be measured in years, months, or even fractions of years. By contrast, the number of children is a non-continuous (discrete) variable, because it can only be expressed in whole numbers. When one variable depends on another, it is called a dependent variable, while the variable that influences or precedes it is called an independent variable. For example, if we say that height depends on age, then height is the dependent variable and age is the independent variable. If height also depends on sex, then height remains the dependent variable, while age and sex are independent variables. Similarly, in teaching situations, readymade films and lectures can be treated as independent variables, while the behavioral changes that occur as a result of these environmental inputs are dependent variables.

2. Extraneous variable: Independent variables that are not directly related to the purpose of a study but may still influence the dependent variable are called extraneous variables. For example, if a researcher wants to test the hypothesis that children’s gains in social studies achievement are related to their self-concept, then self-concept is the independent variable and social studies achievement is the dependent variable. However, intelligence may also affect achievement, even though it is not part of the study’s focus. In this case, intelligence would be considered an extraneous variable. Any effect that an extraneous variable has on the dependent variable is technically referred to as experimental error. Therefore, a study must be designed in such a way that the changes observed in the dependent variable can be attributed entirely to the independent variable(s), and not to extraneous influences.

3. Control: One important feature of a good research design is that it should minimize the influence of extraneous variables. In technical terms, this process is called control. Control means that the

researcher designs the study in such a way that the effects of variables not related to the purpose of the study are reduced or eliminated. In experimental research, the term “control” specifically refers to the practice of restraining experimental conditions so that the outcomes observed can be attributed only to the independent variables being studied. By exercising control, researchers ensure that the dependent variable is affected by the intended factors, rather than by outside influences.

4. Confounded relationship: When the dependent variable is influenced by factors outside the main study, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is said to be confounded by extraneous variables. In other words, the effect of the independent variable cannot be clearly separated from the effect of these outside influences. This makes it difficult to know whether the changes in the dependent variable are truly caused by the independent variable or by the extraneous ones.

5. Research hypothesis: When a researcher wants to test a prediction or a proposed relationship using scientific methods, this is called a research hypothesis. A research hypothesis is a predictive statement that connects an independent variable with a dependent variable. In most cases, a proper research hypothesis must include at least one independent variable and one dependent variable. However, predictive statements that are not meant to be tested objectively, or relationships that are assumed without verification, are not considered research hypotheses. Only those statements that can be scientifically examined and verified fall into this category.

6. Experimental and non-experimental hypothesis-testing research: When the purpose of research is to test a research hypothesis, the study is called hypothesis-testing research. Such research can be carried out using either an experimental design or a non-experimental design.

- In experimental hypothesis-testing research, the independent variable is manipulated by the researcher.
- In non-experimental hypothesis-testing research, the independent variable is not manipulated; instead, relationships are studied as they naturally occur.

For example, if a researcher wants to study whether intelligence affects reading ability, and selects 50 students to test both their intelligence and reading ability, then calculates the correlation between the two sets of scores, this is non-experimental hypothesis-testing research because intelligence is not manipulated.

On the other hand, if the researcher selects 50 students enrolled in a statistics course, divides them randomly into two groups—Group A with the usual programme and Group B with a special programme—and then compares their performance after the course, this is experimental hypothesis-testing research. Here, the independent variable (type of training programme) is deliberately manipulated to observe its effect on the dependent variable (student performance).

7. Experimental and control groups: In an experimental hypothesis-testing study, when one group is exposed to the usual or standard conditions, it is called a control group. The group that is exposed to some new or special condition is called an experimental group. For example, in the earlier illustration, Group A (usual programme) would be the control group, while Group B (special programme) would be the experimental group. If both groups were exposed to special programmes, then both would be considered experimental groups. It is possible to design studies that include only experimental groups, or studies that include both experimental and control groups, depending on the purpose of the research.

8. Treatments: The different conditions under which control and experimental groups are placed are called treatments. For example, in the earlier illustration, the two treatments were the usual studies programme and the special studies programme. Similarly, if a researcher wants to compare the impact of three different fertilizers on wheat yield, then the three fertilizer varieties would be considered three separate treatments.

9. Experiment: The process of checking whether a statistical hypothesis is true in relation to a research problem is called an experiment. For example, an experiment can be conducted to test the usefulness of a newly developed drug. Experiments are of two main types:

- **Absolute Experiment:** This is when the researcher studies the impact of a single factor. For instance, testing the effect of one fertilizer on crop yield is an absolute experiment.
- **Comparative Experiment:** This is when the researcher compares the impact of two or more factors. For example, testing the effect of one fertilizer against another fertilizer on crop yield is a comparative experiment.

In practice, researchers often use comparative experiments when they design studies, because these allow them to evaluate differences between treatments more clearly.

10. Experimental unit(s): The plots or blocks where different treatments are applied in an experiment are called experimental units. These units serve as the basic setting in which the researcher observes the effects of treatments. It is very important that experimental units are carefully selected and clearly defined, because the accuracy and reliability of the results depend on how well these units represent the conditions being studied.

4.5 Types of Research Designs

Different research designs can be conveniently described if we categorize them as:

- (1) Research design in case of exploratory research studies;
- (2) Research design in case of descriptive and diagnostic research studies, and
- (3) Research design in case of hypothesis-testing research studies.

1. Research design in case of exploratory research studies: Exploratory research studies, also called formulative research studies, are mainly conducted to define a problem more precisely or to develop working hypotheses that can be tested later. The key focus in such studies is on the discovery of new ideas and insights. Because the research problem is usually broad at the beginning and becomes more clearly defined as the study progresses, the research design must be flexible. This flexibility allows the researcher to adjust procedures for collecting data as the problem takes on a more precise meaning. Generally, three methods are commonly used in exploratory research design:

1. Survey of related literature – reviewing existing studies and writings to gain insights.
2. Experience survey – collecting views and experiences from people who are familiar with the problem area.
3. Analysis of ‘insight-stimulating’ examples

The survey of related literature is considered the simplest and most effective method for clearly formulating a research problem or developing hypotheses. By reviewing the hypotheses proposed by earlier researchers, one can evaluate their usefulness as a foundation for further study. Sometimes, previously stated hypotheses may even suggest new ones. In this way, the researcher builds upon the work already done by others. In cases where no hypotheses have yet been formulated, the researcher’s task is to carefully review the available material and derive relevant hypotheses from it. Thus, the literature survey serves both as a way to refine existing ideas and as a source for generating new hypotheses.

Apart from bibliographical surveys of studies already conducted in one’s area of interest, a researcher should also try to apply concepts and theories developed in other contexts to the area in which they are working. Sometimes even the works of creative writers can provide fertile ground for generating hypotheses and should not be overlooked. Another important method is the experience survey, which involves collecting insights from people who have practical experience with the problem under study. The purpose of such a survey is to gain understanding of the relationships between variables and to

generate new ideas about the research problem. For this, respondents must be carefully selected—they should be competent and able to contribute fresh perspectives, representing different types of experience. The researcher usually prepares an interview schedule to guide systematic questioning, but the interview must remain flexible, allowing respondents to raise issues the researcher may not have considered. These interviews are often lengthy, sometimes lasting several hours. Therefore, it is considered useful to send a copy of the questions to respondents in advance, giving them time to reflect on the issues so they can contribute more effectively during the interview. In this way, an experience survey helps the researcher to:

- Define the problem more precisely.
- Formulate relevant hypotheses.
- Assess the practical possibilities of conducting different types of research.

Another useful method for generating hypotheses is the analysis of ‘insight-stimulating’ examples. This approach is especially valuable in areas where there is little prior research or practical experience to guide the study. It involves conducting an intensive study of selected instances of the phenomenon of interest. To do this, the researcher may examine existing records, conduct unstructured interviews, or adopt other exploratory approaches. The effectiveness of this method depends largely on:

- The attitude of the investigator (open-minded and curious).
- The intensity of the study (how deeply the case is examined).
- The ability of the researcher to synthesize diverse information into a unified interpretation.

These features make the method particularly appropriate for evoking new insights and suggesting hypotheses in unexplored areas. When using the method of insight-stimulating examples, the question naturally arises: *what kinds of cases should be selected for study?* There is no fixed answer, but experience shows that certain types of instances are more useful than others for particular problems. Examples include:

- The reactions of strangers.
- The reactions of marginal individuals (those on the edges of social groups).
- The study of individuals in transition from one stage of life to another.
- The reactions of individuals from different social strata.

In general, cases that provide sharp contrasts or have striking features are considered especially valuable for generating insights. Thus, in exploratory or formulative research, which aims only to produce insights or hypotheses, whichever method is adopted—literature survey, experience survey, or analysis of examples—the essential requirement is that the research design must remain flexible. This flexibility allows the researcher to consider many different facets of the problem as they arise during the study.

2. Research design in case of descriptive and diagnostic research studies: Descriptive research studies focus on describing the characteristics of an individual, group, or situation. They involve narration of facts, observations, and specific predictions about the subject under study. Most social research falls into this category because it seeks to portray social realities as they exist. Diagnostic research studies, on the other hand, aim to determine the frequency of occurrence of a phenomenon or to identify its association with other variables. For example, studies that ask whether certain variables are related are diagnostic in nature. From the perspective of research design, both descriptive and diagnostic studies share similar requirements—such as careful sampling, reliable data collection, and systematic analysis. Therefore, they are often grouped together when discussing research design. In both descriptive and diagnostic research studies, the researcher must clearly define what is to be measured and select appropriate methods for measuring it. Alongside this, there must be a precise definition of the population under study. Since the goal of these studies is to obtain complete and accurate information, the procedures must be carefully planned in advance.

The research design should also:

- Provide safeguards against bias.
- Maximize the reliability of the findings.
- Ensure the study is completed in an economical manner, balancing accuracy with efficiency.

In descriptive and diagnostic studies, the research design must be rigid rather than flexible. This is because the aim is to obtain complete, accurate, and reliable information. The design should therefore focus on the following steps:

1. Formulating the objective of the study – clearly state what the study is about and why it is being conducted.
2. Designing the methods of data collection – decide which techniques will be used to gather data.
3. Selecting the sample – determine how much material or how many respondents will be needed.
4. Collecting the data – identify where the required data can be found and specify the time period to which the data should relate.
5. Processing and analysing the data – organize, examine, and interpret the collected information systematically.
6. Reporting the findings – present the results in a clear and structured manner.



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In a descriptive/diagnostic study the first step is to specify the objectives with sufficient precision to ensure that the data collected are relevant. If this is not done carefully, the study may not provide the desired information. After defining the objectives of the study, the next step is to select suitable methods for obtaining data. In other words, the researcher must decide on the techniques for collecting information. Several methods—such as observation, questionnaires, interviews, and examination of records—are available, each with its own merits and limitations. The researcher may use one or more of these methods depending on the nature of the study. While designing the data-collection procedure, it is essential to ensure adequate safeguards against bias and unreliability. Whatever method is chosen, the questions should be clearly worded and unambiguous; interviewers must avoid expressing personal

opinions; and observers should be properly trained to record behaviour uniformly. It is always advisable to pre-test the data-collection instruments before using them in the actual study. In this way, the researcher ensures that the tools are reliable and effective. Such carefully prepared tools are known as structured instruments.

In most descriptive or diagnostic studies, the researcher selects one or more samples and then makes statements about the population based on the analysis of those samples. Usually, the sample itself must be carefully designed so that it provides accurate information with the least possible research effort. Different types of sample designs—especially probability or random sampling—are commonly used for this purpose. To ensure that the data collected are free from errors, the researcher must closely supervise field workers during data collection and recording. Proper checks should be established to confirm that the data-collecting staff perform their duties honestly and without bias. As data are gathered, they should be examined for completeness, clarity, consistency, and reliability. This careful supervision and verification help maintain the quality and accuracy of the research findings.

Once the data have been collected, they must be processed and analysed. This involves several steps such as coding interview replies and observations, tabulating the data, and carrying out statistical computations. To save time and effort, the researcher should plan the processing and analysis procedures in detail before starting the actual work. This prevents unnecessary labour, like preparing tables that later prove useless or having to redo tables because important data were left out. Coding must be done carefully to avoid errors, and the reliability of coders should be checked. Similarly, the accuracy of tabulation can be verified by re-doing a sample of the tables. In mechanical tabulation, data are entered on cards (often by punching holes corresponding to codes), and the accuracy of punching must be ensured. Finally, statistical computations such as averages, percentages, and coefficients are worked out. Probability and sampling analysis may also be applied. Appropriate statistical operations, along with suitable tests of significance, should be used to ensure that the conclusions drawn from the study are valid and reliable.

The final step in research is reporting the findings. This means communicating the results to others in a clear and efficient way. The layout of the report should be carefully planned so that all aspects of the study are presented in a simple and effective style. Thus, in the case of descriptive or diagnostic studies, the research design is essentially a comparative design. It must be prepared with the study's objectives and available resources in mind, while ensuring that bias is minimized and reliability of evidence is maximized. Because it covers all the steps involved in a survey of a phenomenon, this design is often referred to as a survey design.

The difference between research designs in respect of the above two types of research studies can be conveniently summarised in tabular form as under:

3. Research design in case of hypothesis-testing research studies: Hypothesis-testing research studies, often called experimental studies, are designed to test hypotheses about causal relationships between variables. Such studies require procedures that not only reduce bias and increase reliability but also allow researchers to draw valid inferences about causality. This is why experiments are usually the preferred method in these cases, and when we talk about research design here, we often mean the design of experiments.

The development of experimental designs is closely associated with Professor R.A. Fisher, who began this work while at the Rothamsted Experimental Station in England, a center for agricultural research. Fisher discovered that by dividing agricultural fields into different blocks and conducting experiments within each block, the information collected and the inferences drawn became more reliable. This insight led him to develop systematic experimental designs for testing scientific hypotheses. Although experimental designs originated in agricultural research, they are now widely used across many

disciplines. Interestingly, because of their agricultural roots, several technical terms from farming—such as treatment, yield, plot, and block—are still used in the language of experimental design today.

Basic Principles of Experimental Designs

Professor R.A. Fisher outlined three fundamental principles of experimental design that make research more reliable and valid:

1. Principle of Replication – repeating the experiment on multiple units or subjects to estimate variability and improve the accuracy of results.
2. Principle of Randomization – assigning treatments to experimental units randomly to eliminate bias and ensure that differences observed are due to the treatment itself.
3. Principle of Local Control – arranging experimental units into blocks or groups so that known sources of variation are controlled, thereby increasing precision in measuring treatment effects.

According to the Principle of Replication, an experiment should be repeated more than once. This means that each treatment is applied to many experimental units instead of just one. By doing so, the statistical accuracy of the experiment increases. For example, if we want to compare the yield of two varieties of rice, we might divide a field into two parts—growing one variety in one part and the other variety in the other. But if we apply replication, we divide the field into several parts, grow one variety in half of them and the other variety in the remaining half. We then compare the yields across all plots, which makes the results more reliable than a single comparison. The experiment can even be repeated multiple times for greater precision. Conceptually, replication is simple, but computationally it can be complex. For instance, if an experiment requires a two-way analysis of variance, replication may add another dimension, requiring a three-way analysis since replication itself introduces variation. The key point is that replication is introduced to increase the precision of a study—that is, to improve the accuracy with which the main effects and interactions can be estimated.

The Principle of Randomization protects an experiment against the influence of extraneous factors. It means that the experiment should be designed so that variations caused by outside factors are treated as chance variations rather than systematic bias. For example, if one variety of rice is grown in the first half of a field and another variety in the second half, differences in soil fertility between the two halves could distort the results. To avoid this, the researcher can use random sampling techniques to assign the varieties to different plots. By applying randomization, the effect of soil fertility differences (or other extraneous factors) is minimized, and the researcher gains a more accurate estimate of the experimental error.

The Principle of Local Control is another key principle of experimental design. It deals with extraneous factors—those known sources of variability that can affect results. Under this principle, the researcher deliberately allows the extraneous factor to vary across a wide enough range so that its effect can be measured and separated from the experimental error. In practice, this means planning the experiment so that a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) can be performed. The total variability in the data is then divided into three parts:

1. Variability due to treatments (e.g., different rice varieties).
2. Variability due to the extraneous factor (e.g., soil fertility).
3. Experimental error.

To achieve this, the field is first divided into homogeneous parts called blocks. Each block is then split into smaller plots equal to the number of treatments, and treatments are randomly assigned within each block. This process is known as blocking. In short, blocking allows the researcher to hold the extraneous factor constant within each block, measure its contribution to variability, and eliminate its effect from the experimental error.

Important Experimental Designs:

An experimental design is the framework or structure of an experiment, and there are several types. Broadly, these can be classified into informal experimental designs and formal experimental designs.

Informal experimental designs use simpler methods of analysis, often based on differences in magnitudes rather than advanced statistical techniques. Examples include:

1. Before-and-after without control design
2. After-only with control design
3. Before-and-after with control design

Formal experimental designs provide greater control and rely on precise statistical procedures. Important types include:

1. Completely randomized design (CR Design)
2. Randomized block design (RB Design)
3. Latin square design (LS Design)
4. Factorial designs

We may briefly deal with each of the above stated informal as well as formal experimental designs.

1. Before-and-after without control design: In the before-and-after design without control, a single test group or area is chosen. The researcher first measures the dependent variable before introducing the treatment. Then, after the treatment is applied, the dependent variable is measured again. The effect of the treatment is calculated as the difference between the level of the phenomenon after treatment and the level before treatment.

2. After-only with control design: In the after-only with control design, two groups or areas are selected: a test area and a control area. The treatment is introduced only in the test area, while the control area remains unchanged. After this, the dependent variable is measured in both areas at the same time. The impact of the treatment is then assessed by subtracting the value of the dependent variable in the control area from its value in the test area. This can be exhibited in the following form: In the after-only with control design, the basic assumption is that the test area and control area are identical in how they respond to the phenomenon being studied. If this assumption does not hold true, then extraneous variation may enter into the treatment effect, reducing accuracy. However, this design has an advantage: data can be collected without problems caused by the passage of time, since measurements are taken only once, after the treatment. In this respect, it is superior to the before-and-after without control design, which may suffer from time-related influences.

3. Before-and-after with control design: In the before-and-after with control design, two areas are selected: a test area and a control area. The dependent variable is measured in both areas for the same time period before the treatment. Then, the treatment is introduced only in the test area, and the dependent variable is again measured in both areas for the same time period after the treatment. The treatment effect is determined by comparing the changes in both areas. Specifically, it is calculated as: $\text{Treatment Effect} = (\text{Change in Test Area}) - (\text{Change in Control Area})$.

This design is considered superior to the other two informal designs because it avoids extraneous variation that may arise both from the passage of time and from the non-comparability of test and control areas. In other words, it provides a more reliable basis for assessing treatment effects. However, in some situations—such as when historical data are unavailable, when there is limited time, or when a comparable control area cannot be found—researchers may need to rely on one of the first two informal designs instead.

4. Completely randomized design (C.R. design): The Completely Randomized Design (CR Design) is the simplest type of experimental design. It involves only two principles: replication and randomization. Its procedure of analysis is straightforward, making it easy to use. The essential feature of this design is that subjects are randomly assigned to treatments (or treatments to subjects). For example, if there are 10 subjects and we want to test 5 under treatment A and 5 under treatment B, randomization ensures that every possible group of 5 subjects has an equal chance of being assigned to either treatment. The data from such a design are usually analysed using one-way analysis of variance. Even unequal replications can be accommodated in this design.

A major advantage of CR Design is that it provides the maximum number of degrees of freedom for error, which strengthens statistical testing. It is generally used when the experimental areas are homogeneous, meaning there are no major differences in conditions across units. Technically, when all variations due to uncontrolled extraneous factors are treated as chance variation, the design is referred to as a Completely Randomized Design.

(i) Two-group simple randomized design: In a two-group simple randomized design, the process begins by clearly defining the population. From this population, a sample is selected randomly. The next requirement is that the items in this sample, once selected, must be randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the control group. This random assignment of items to groups is the practical application of the principle of randomization. As a result, the design produces two groups that serve as representatives of the population—one receiving the treatment (experimental group) and the other not (control group). This structure helps ensure that the comparison between the two groups is fair and unbiased. In a diagram form this design can be shown in this way:

In the sample randomized design, the elements of the sample are randomly drawn from the same population and then randomly assigned to the experimental group and the control group. Because of this, conclusions drawn from the sample can be applied to the population. The two groups are exposed to different treatments of the independent variable. This design is widely used in behavioural sciences because it is simple and effectively randomizes differences among the sample items. Its main advantage is simplicity and fairness in group assignment. However, its limitation is that it does not eliminate individual differences among those conducting the treatments. In other words, it does not fully control extraneous variables, which may distort the results.

For example, suppose a researcher wants to compare two groups of students. The students are randomly selected and randomly assigned to two groups. One group receives usual training, while the other receives specialised training. The researcher hypothesises that the specialised training group will show greater gains. To test this, both groups are measured before and after training, and the gains are compared. This illustrates the two-group randomized design, where individual differences among students are randomized. However, the extraneous variable—differences among those conducting the training—remains uncontrolled, which may affect the accuracy of the findings.

(ii) Random replications design: The limitation of the two-group randomized design—namely, its inability to control extraneous variables such as differences among those conducting the treatments—is usually overcome in the random replications design. In the earlier example, teacher differences affecting the dependent variable were ignored. But in a random replications design, these effects are minimized by repeating each treatment multiple times. Each repetition is called a replication. This design serves two important purposes:

1. It provides control over the differential effects of extraneous independent variables (like teacher differences).
2. It randomizes individual differences among those administering the treatments, thereby reducing bias.

In the random replication design, there are essentially two populations involved. First, a sample is randomly drawn from the population under study and then randomly assigned to several experimental and control groups—for example, four experimental and four control groups. Second, a sample is also drawn randomly from the population of individuals who will conduct the experiments (since eight groups require eight experimenters), and these individuals are randomly assigned to the groups. Typically, each group is kept of equal size so that group size does not influence the results. The assumption is that variables relating to both populations (the subjects and the experimenters) are randomly distributed across the groups. Thus, the random replication design is essentially an extension of the two-group simple randomized design, but with multiple replications. By doing so, it strengthens control over extraneous variables and increases the reliability of the findings.

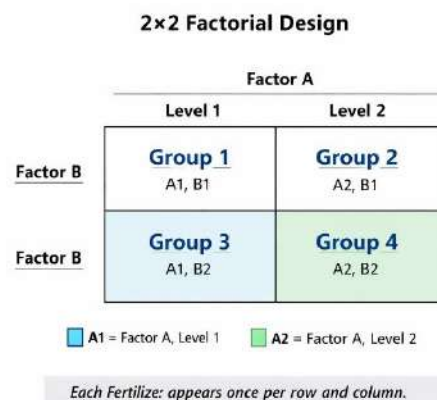
5. The Randomized Block Design (RB Design) is an improvement over the Completely Randomized Design (CR Design) because it incorporates the principle of local control along with replication and randomization. In this design, subjects are first divided into groups called blocks, where each block is relatively homogeneous with respect to a selected variable. This variable is chosen because it is believed to be related to the dependent variable being measured. Within each block, the number of subjects equals the number of treatments, and one subject in each block is randomly assigned to each treatment. In this way, blocks serve as levels of the extraneous factor, holding it constant so that its contribution to variability can be measured.

6. Factorial designs: Factorial designs are used when researchers want to study the effects of more than one factor at the same time. They are especially valuable in economic and social research, where multiple variables often interact to influence a problem. Factorial designs are of two main types:

- i. Simple factorial designs → involve a smaller number of factors, usually two, studied simultaneously.
- ii. Complex factorial designs → involve three or more factors, allowing researchers to examine not only the main effects of each factor but also their interactions.

(i) Simple factorial designs: In a simple factorial design, researchers study the effects of two factors on a dependent variable. This is why it is also called a two-factor factorial design. When more than two factors are included, the design becomes a complex factorial design, also known as a multi-factor factorial design. A simple factorial design can take different forms depending on the number of levels of each factor. For example:

- 2×2 design → two factors, each with two levels.
- 3×4 design → two factors, one with three levels and the other with four levels.
- 5×3 design → two factors, one with five levels and the other with three levels.

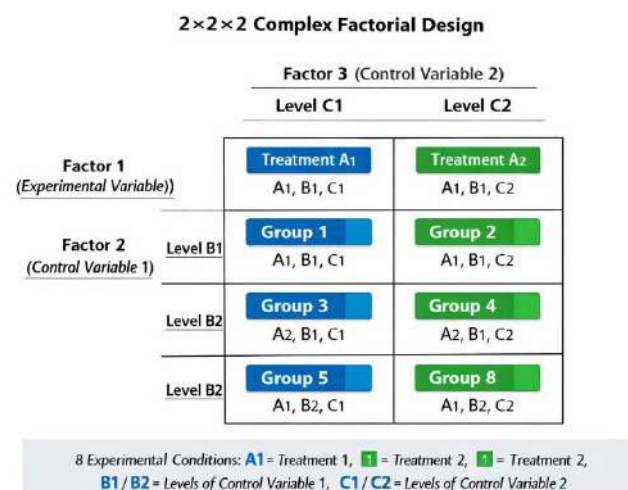


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In this two-factor factorial design, the extraneous variable that is controlled through homogeneity is called the control variable, while the independent variable that is deliberately manipulated is called the experimental variable. Since there are two treatments of the experimental variable and two levels of the control variable, the sample is divided into four cells, each representing one unique combination of treatment and level — that is, one experimental condition. Subjects are randomly assigned to each treatment, just as in a randomized group design. For analysis, the cell means represent the mean scores of the dependent variable, while the column means show the main effects of treatments, ignoring any influence of the control variable. Similarly, the row means show the main effects of levels, without considering treatment differences.

This design allows researchers to study both main effects (of treatments and levels) and the interaction effect between them — that is, whether the treatment and control variables act independently or influence each other.

(ii) Complex factorial designs: When an experiment involves more than two factors at a time, it uses a complex factorial design. Such a design considers three or more independent variables simultaneously, allowing researchers to study not only the main effects of each variable but also their interactions. For instance, if an experiment includes three factors—one experimental variable with two treatments, and two control variables, each with two levels—the design is called a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ complex factorial design. This means there are eight experimental conditions ($2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$), each representing a unique combination of treatments and levels.



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Factorial designs are preferred in experimental research because they offer two major advantages:

1. Economy and efficiency → They provide the same level of accuracy as experiments involving only one factor but require less labour and fewer resources. In a single experiment, researchers can determine the main effects of two factors (in simple factorial designs) or more factors (in complex factorial designs).
2. Richness of comparison → They allow for additional comparisons beyond single-factor experiments. Specifically, factorial designs make it possible to study interaction effects—that is, how two or more variables influence each other's impact on the dependent variable. These interactions cannot be detected when only one factor is studied at a time.



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4.6 The cross-sectional study design Sample (Ranjit Kumar: 2005)

Cross-sectional studies, also known as one-shot or status studies, are the most commonly used design in the social sciences. This design is best suited to studies aimed at finding out the prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, problem, attitude or issue, by taking a cross-section of the population. They are useful in obtaining an overall 'picture' as it stands at the time of the study. They are 'designed to study some phenomenon by taking a cross-section of it at one time' (Babbie 1989: 89). Such studies are cross-sectional with regard to both the study population and the time of investigation.

A cross-sectional study is extremely simple in design. You decide what you want to find out, identify the study population, select a sample (if you need to) and contact your respondents to find out the required information. For example, a cross-sectional design would be the most appropriate for a study of the following topics:

- The attitude of the study population towards uranium mining in Australia.
- The socioeconomic-demographic characteristics of immigrants in Western Australia.
- The incidence of HIV-positive cases in Australia.
- The reasons for homelessness among young people.
- The quality assurance of a service provided by an organisation.
- The impact of unemployment on street crime (this could also be a before-and-after study).
- The relationship between the home environment and the academic performance of a child at school.
- The attitude of the community towards equity issues.
- The extent of unemployment in a city.
- Consumer satisfaction with a product.
- The effectiveness of random breath testing in preventing road accidents (this could also be a before-and-after study).
- The health needs of a community.
- The attitudes of students towards the facilities available in their library.

As these studies involve only one contact with the study population, they are comparatively cheap to undertake and easy to analyse. However, their biggest disadvantage is that they cannot measure change.

To measure change it is necessary to have at least two data collection points—that is, at least two cross-sectional studies, at two points in time, on the same population.

4.7 Conclusion

In qualitative inquiry, the selection of a research design must be determined prior to data collection and analysis to ensure that the study unfolds in a coherent, trustworthy, and methodologically sound manner. This decision is shaped by several foundational considerations: the nature of the social world or universe under study, the specific objectives of the investigation, the resources and access available to the researcher, and the standards of rigor and credibility sought. Within this framework, designs can be understood as progressing in terms of methodological sophistication and control. A basic exploratory design emphasizes openness and flexibility, relying primarily on purposive sampling and emergent insights. A comparative case design introduces local control by grouping participants or contexts into analytically meaningful categories. A cross-contextual or matrix design extends this by systematically balancing multiple dimensions—such as setting and participant characteristics—so that each factor is represented across the study. Finally, multi-factorial or integrative designs allow the researcher to examine several variables or perspectives simultaneously, distinguishing between simpler two-factor comparisons and more complex, multi-layered analyses.

Thus, the researcher's initial appraisal of the field, objectives, resources, and standards of rigor guides the choice of design. The progression—from exploratory to comparative, to cross-contextual, and finally to integrative frameworks—illustrates how qualitative designs build upon one another to enhance depth, credibility, and analytical richness.

4.8 Summary

Research design serves as the structural framework of any scientific investigation, guiding how data are collected, measured, and analyzed to ensure accuracy and relevance. It defines the purpose, scope, and methodology of a study, helping researchers maintain systematic control over variables. Among the major types, the Randomized Block Design (R.B. Design) improves upon the Completely Randomized Design by applying the principle of local control, grouping subjects into homogeneous blocks to minimize extraneous variation. The Latin Square Design (L.S. Design) extends this logic further by controlling two major extraneous factors simultaneously—such as soil fertility and seed variation—through a square arrangement where each treatment appears once per row and column. Its analysis resembles a two-way ANOVA, though it assumes no interaction between treatments and blocking factors and is most effective for designs of order 5×5 to 9×9 .

The Factorial Design represents a more advanced stage, used when multiple factors influence a dependent variable. It is divided into simple factorial designs, which study two factors (e.g., 2×2 or 3×4), and complex factorial designs, which involve three or more factors (e.g., $2 \times 2 \times 2$). These designs allow researchers to examine both main effects and interaction effects, providing richer insights than single-factor experiments. Factorial designs are valued for their efficiency—they achieve equivalent accuracy with less labour—and for their ability to reveal how variables interact to influence outcomes.

Overall, research designs progress in complexity and control: the Completely Randomized Design relies solely on randomization; the Randomized Block Design adds local control; the Latin Square Design manages two extraneous factors simultaneously; and the Factorial Design enables the study of multiple variables and their interactions. Together, they form a continuum of methodological sophistication that enhances precision, interpretability, and the scientific value of experimental research.

4.9 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ):

1. Research design serves as the:
 - a) Data collection tool

- b) Blueprint of the study
c) Sampling method
d) Statistical test
Answer: b)
2. The choice of research design must be made:
a) After data collection
b) During analysis
c) Before data collection and analysis
d) After report writing
Answer: c)
3. In a Completely Randomized Design (CR Design), the main principle used is:
a) Local control
b) Randomization
c) Replication
d) Blocking
Answer: b)
4. The Randomized Block Design (RB Design) improves upon CR Design by adding:
a) Stratification
b) Local control
c) Random sampling
d) Interaction analysis
Answer: b)
5. In Latin Square Design (LS Design), each treatment appears:
a) Twice per row
b) Once per row and column
c) Randomly in all cells
d) Only in one column
Answer: b)
6. Factorial designs are used when:
a) Only one factor affects the outcome
b) Two or more factors affect the outcome
c) No factors are controlled
d) Randomization is not possible
Answer: b)
7. A simple factorial design involves:
a) One factor
b) Two factors
c) Three factors
d) Four factors
Answer: b)
8. A complex factorial design involves:
a) Two factors
b) Three or more factors
c) One factor
d) No factors
Answer: b)
9. A 2×2 factorial design produces:
a) Two experimental conditions
b) Four experimental conditions
c) Six experimental conditions
d) Eight experimental conditions
Answer: b)
10. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ complex factorial design produces:
a) Four conditions
b) Six conditions
c) Eight conditions
d) Ten conditions
Answer: c)

4.10 References

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Module: -III Method of Data Collection

Unit 5: Tools of Data Collection

Structure

- 5.1. Learning Objective
- 5.2. Introduction
- 5.3. Tools of Data Collection
 - 5.3.1 Observation checklists / field notes
 - 5.3.2 Interview Schedule
 - 5.3.3 Questionnaire
 - 5.3.4 Case study protocols
 - 5.3.5 Focus Group Guides
 - 5.3.6 Audio visual recordings
 - 5.3.7 Documents and archives
 - 5.3.8 Technology in Data Collection
- 5.4. Conclusion
- 5.5. Summary
- 5.6. Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ)
- 5.7. References
- 5.8. Endnotes

5.1 Learning Objectives

- To introduce the meaning and importance of data collection in social research.
- To familiarize learners with different tools of data collection, both qualitative and quantitative.
- To explain the strengths, limitations, and contexts of each tool.
- To provide practical examples from social sciences.
- To highlight ethical considerations in data collection.

5.2 Introduction

Imagine a young researcher walking into a village in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, to study the role of self-help groups (SHGs) in women's empowerment. She notices a group of women gathered under a banyan tree, discussing savings, loans, and household decisions. The researcher wonders:

How should I capture this reality?

- Should she sit quietly and observe the group's interactions, noting who speaks and who remains silent?
- Should she conduct interviews to hear individual life stories of struggle and resilience?
- Or should she distribute questionnaires to record measurable data such as income changes, literacy levels, and decision-making power?

Each choice leads to a different kind of knowledge. Observation would reveal the subtle dynamics of power and solidarity within the group. Interviews would uncover personal narratives of transformation, how joining an SHG gave one woman the courage to resist domestic violence or another the confidence to send her daughter to school. Questionnaires, on

the other hand, would provide quantifiable evidence of economic improvement, such as increased household savings or reduced dependence on moneylenders.

This simple scenario illustrates why data collection is the backbone of research. Without reliable data, even the most sophisticated analysis loses meaning. In social work, data collection is not just about numbers; it is about capturing lived experiences, community dynamics, and institutional processes. It is about listening to voices that are often marginalized, observing behaviours that reveal social patterns, and documenting facts that can influence policy. The choice of tool whether observation, interview, questionnaire, or interview schedule, is therefore both methodological and ethical. Methodological, because it determines the kind of knowledge produced, mainly, qualitative depth, quantitative breadth, or a mix of both. Ethical, because it shapes the researcher's relationship with participants by respecting confidentiality, ensuring informed consent, and avoiding harm.

The credibility of findings in social research depends not only on how data is analyzed but also on how it is collected. A well-chosen tool becomes a connection between theory and reality, allowing researchers to translate abstract concepts like empowerment, inequality, or social justice into concrete evidence.

5.3 Tools of Data Collection

Tools of data collection are not merely instruments, they connect theory and practice, more precisely abstract concepts and concrete evidence. As mentioned earlier, choosing the right tool is both a methodological decision (what kind of knowledge we seek) and an ethical responsibility (how we respect participants and their contexts).

5.3.1 Observation checklists / field notes

Observation is one of the oldest and most direct tools of data collection. It involves watching and recording behaviours, events, or situations in their natural settings. Unlike interviews or questionnaires, which rely on what people *say*, observation captures what people *do*. It allows the researcher to see social reality unfold in real time, making it especially valuable in social work where human interactions, group dynamics, and institutional processes are central. For example, a social scientist studying children in a welfare home may observe how they interact during playtime; who takes leadership, who withdraws, and how conflicts are resolved. Such insights often reveal aspects of behaviour that respondents themselves may not articulate.

Observation checklists are structured instruments used to record predefined behaviours, events, or environmental features during observation. Field notes are the researcher's detailed, often narrative, records of what is seen, heard, felt, and thought in the field. Together they convert lived, oral, and visual experience into usable qualitative data.

Purpose of Checklist:

Checklists: Best when you need consistent, comparable records across multiple observations or observers (e.g., presence/absence of behaviours, seating arrangements, physical features).

Field notes: Best for capturing context, nuance, interactional detail, researcher reflections, and unexpected phenomena that a checklist cannot anticipate.

Components and structure

- Observation checklist (typical elements)
- Header: date, time, location, observer name, session ID.
- Context fields: setting description (room, event type), participant group (approx. numbers, roles).
- Items/indicators: short, observable statements (e.g., “teacher asks open question”; “participant uses mobile phone”).
- Response format: tick boxes (yes/no), frequency counts, Likert scales, short notes column.
- Priority/weight: optional column to mark critical items.
- Space for exceptions: brief free-text line for anything unusual.
- Field notes (typical sections)
- Descriptive notes: objective, moment by moment description of events and interactions.
- Direct quotes: verbatim snippets of speech when possible (with time stamps).
- Analytic/memo notes: emerging interpretations, hypotheses, codes to follow up.
- Reflexive notes: researcher’s feelings, positionality, access issues, and how these may shape data.
- Logistics: permissions, technical problems, people met, follow up actions.

Designing effective checklists and field notes

Designing checklists

- Operationalize behaviours: write items as observable actions, not inferred motives.
- Keep items concise and mutually exclusive where possible.
- Pilot and revise: test in a small number of sessions to remove ambiguity.
- Balance structure and flexibility: include a free-text cell so observers can record unexpected events.
- Inter observer clarity: provide a short codebook or definitions so different observers interpret items the same way.

Writing field notes

- Write soon and often: record immediately after or during observation (if unobtrusive) to preserve detail.
- Use time stamps for key events and quotes.
- Separate descriptive from interpretive: label what is observed vs. what you think it means.
- Be concrete: describe gestures, tone, spatial arrangements, and sequences rather than summarizing.
- Include sensory detail: sights, sounds, smells, and physical layout enrich later analysis.

Practical tips for reliability and quality

- Training observers on checklist items and note-taking conventions.
- Use multiple observers and compare checklists to assess inter rater reliability.
- Triangulate checklist counts with field-note narratives to validate findings.

- Digitize promptly: transcribe handwritten notes and upload checklists to a secure digital repository.
- Version control: date and label all files; keep raw notes separate from analytic memos.

Ethical and practical considerations

- Consent and transparency: ensure participants know they may be observed; follow local ethics approvals.
- Anonymization: remove or code identifying details in notes before sharing.
- Sensitivity: avoid recording highly personal or harmful details that could endanger participants.
- Storage and security: encrypt audio/video and store field notes on secure drives with access controls.

From notes to analysis

- Coding: convert checklist items into quantitative tallies or categorical variables; code field-note themes inductively.
- Memoing: use analytic memos to link observations to emerging theory.
- Integration: use checklists for pattern detection and field notes for thick description and explanation.
- Audit trail: keep raw checklists and original field notes to document analytic decisions and support credibility.

Quick checklist for observers

- Before: prepare checklist, review codebook, check equipment.
- During: note time, record observable items, capture short quotes, mark anything unusual.
- After: expand notes, write reflexive memo, digitize and back up.

FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Header
 Date / Time: _____
 Location: _____
 Observer: _____ Session ID: _____

Descriptive Notes (Objective)
 • Chronological description of events & actions.
 • Spatial layout & nonverbal cues.
 • Use time stamps for key moments.

Direct Quotes
 Time: _____ Speaker: _____

Analytic Memos (Interpretive)
 • Emerging themes & possible codes:
 • Questions for follow-up:

Reflexive Notes (Researcher Position)
 • Researcher feelings / influence:
 • Access issues & ethical concerns:

Logistics & Follow-Up
 • Permissions obtained: ☐ Yes ☐ No
 • Equipment issues: _____
 • Next steps: _____

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5.3.2 Interview Schedules

An interview is a purposeful conversation between a researcher and a respondent, designed to obtain information directly. Unlike observation, which captures behaviour, interviews allow participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own words. In social

science, interviews are particularly important because they give voice to individuals and communities whose perspectives may otherwise remain unheard. For example, a social researcher studying domestic violence may interview survivors to understand not only the incidents but also the emotional impact, coping strategies, and support systems available to them.

Types of Interviews

1. Structured Interview: A structured interview is highly standardized. The researcher prepares a fixed set of questions in advance and asks them in the same order to every respondent. This ensures uniformity and comparability of responses. It resembles a questionnaire but is conducted face-to-face or over the phone. For example, in a survey on awareness of government welfare schemes where each participant is asked identical questions such as “Do you know about the MGNREGA scheme? Yes/No.” Structured interview best for large-scale studies where the goal is to collect quantifiable data that can be statistically analyzed.

Advantages:

- Ensures consistency across respondents.
- Easy to compare and analyze.
- Reduces interviewer bias.

Disadvantages:

- Inflexible; cannot probe deeper.
- May miss important insights if respondents want to elaborate.

2. Unstructured Interview: An unstructured interview is open-ended and conversational. The researcher does not follow a rigid format but allows the respondent to guide the discussion. It is exploratory in nature and aims to uncover rich, detailed narratives. For example, a life history interview with a recovering addict, where the respondent narrates experiences freely, and the researcher listens and records without interrupting.

Unstructured interview is ideal for case studies, ethnographic research, or when the researcher wants to understand personal experiences, emotions, and meanings.

Advantages:

- Provides depth and detail.
- Allows respondents to express themselves fully.
- Can uncover unexpected themes.

Disadvantages:

- Difficult to analyze systematically.
- Time-consuming.
- Prone to interviewer bias.

3. Semi-Structured Interview: A semi-structured interview balances structure with flexibility. The researcher prepares a set of guiding questions but allows room for probing and elaboration. It combines the strengths of both structured and unstructured formats. For example: while interviewing NGO staff about programme challenges, with standard questions like “What services do you provide?” but also follow-up questions such as “Can you describe

a specific difficulty you faced?” Semi-structured interview is useful when the researcher wants both comparability across respondents and depth of understanding.

Advantages:

- Flexible yet systematic.
- Allows probing and clarification.
- Generates both quantitative and qualitative data.

Disadvantages:

- Requires skilled interviewers.
- Analysis can be complex.

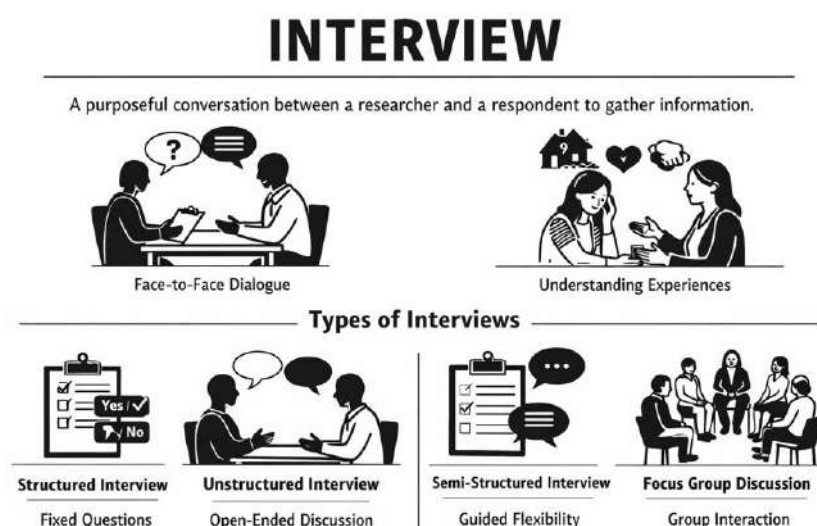
4. Focused Group Interview (Focus Group Discussion): A focused group interview involves several participants discussing a specific theme under the guidance of a facilitator. It is interactive and captures collective perceptions, attitudes, and group dynamics. For example, adolescent girls in a rural community discussing menstrual hygiene practices, sharing both personal experiences and cultural beliefs. Focused group interview is best for exploring community attitudes, testing new ideas, or understanding group norms.

Advantages:

- Generates diverse perspectives.
- Encourages interaction and idea generation.
- Efficient for gathering multiple views at once.

Disadvantages:

- Dominance of vocal participants may skew results.
- Confidentiality issues in group settings.
- Harder to analyze individual responses.



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Key Informant Interviews:

Key informant interviews (KIIs) are in-depth, qualitative interviews conducted with individuals who possess specialized knowledge, experience, or insight about a particular topic,

community, or phenomenon. These informants are selected because of their expertise, position, or role rather than as representatives of a population sample.

Purpose

- To gain context-rich, insider perspectives on social, cultural, or institutional processes.
- To explore complex issues that may not be easily captured through surveys or group discussions.
- To validate or complement data from other qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups, observations).
- To identify emerging themes, challenges, and opportunities within a research area.

Steps in Conducting KIIs

1. Selection of Informants

- ☐ Choose individuals with relevant experience or authority (e.g., community leaders, administrators, subject experts).
- ☐ Ensure diversity of perspectives if multiple informants are interviewed.

2. Preparation of Interview Guide

- ☐ Develop open-ended questions aligned with research objectives.
- ☐ Include prompts for clarification and elaboration.

3. Conducting the Interview

- ☐ Establish rapport and explain confidentiality.
- ☐ Use active listening and probing techniques.
- ☐ Record responses (audio or notes) with consent.

4. Data Management and Analysis

- ☐ Transcribe interviews verbatim.
- ☐ Code and categorize responses thematically.
- ☐ Compare across informants to identify patterns and contrasts.

Advantages

- Provides deep insights into institutional or community dynamics.
- Allows flexibility to explore unexpected themes.
- Useful for triangulation with other data sources.
- Builds trust and collaboration with stakeholders.

Limitations

- Time-intensive and requires skilled interviewers.
- Risk of bias if informants dominate or withhold information.

- Findings may not be generalizable to larger populations.
- Requires careful ethical handling of sensitive information.

5.3.3 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a systematic instrument consisting of a set of written questions designed to collect information from respondents. It is one of the most widely used tools in social research, especially when large samples are involved. Unlike interviews, which depend on verbal interaction, questionnaires rely on respondents reading and writing their answers. The strength of a questionnaire lies in its ability to standardize responses, making them easy to compare and analyze statistically. At the same time, it can be adapted to capture qualitative insights if open-ended questions are included. For example, a social researcher studying awareness of disability rights among urban youth may distribute questionnaires in colleges, asking factual questions (e.g., “Do you know about the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016?”) and opinion questions (e.g., “How effective do you think disability policies are in practice?”).

Types of Questionnaires

Based on the nature of the questions and the format of responses allowed or in other words, the basis is the degree of structure and standardization built into the questionnaire design, below is the classification of questionnaire-

1. Structured Questionnaire: It contains pre-determined, standardized questions with fixed response options. Designed to generate quantifiable data. For example, a survey on household income where respondents tick boxes for income ranges.

Structured questionnaire is best for large-scale surveys requiring comparability and statistical analysis.

- Advantages: Easy to administer, responses are uniform, suitable for quantitative analysis.
- Disadvantages: Inflexible, may not capture nuanced opinions.

2. Unstructured Questionnaire: This type of questionnaire uses open-ended questions, allowing respondents to answer in their own words. This type of questionnaire is exploratory and qualitative in nature. For example, asking SHG members, “Describe how joining the group has changed your life.” This type of questionnaire is ideal for exploratory studies, case studies, or when detailed narratives are needed.

- Advantages: Provides depth, captures emotions and meanings, uncovers unexpected insights.
- Disadvantages: Difficult to analyze systematically, time-consuming, requires literacy and comprehension.

3. Mixed (Semi-Structured) Questionnaire: This type of questionnaire combines both closed and open-ended questions. It balances the need for standardized data with flexibility to capture detailed responses. For example, a health survey asking “Do you have health insurance? Yes/No” followed by “If yes, what challenges do you face in using it?” Mixed/ semi-structured questionnaire is useful when both quantitative comparability and qualitative depth are needed.

- Advantages: Flexible, generates richer data, allows triangulation.
- Disadvantages: More complex to design and analyze, requires careful structuring.

Based on the type of response the questionnaire allows from the respondent, essentially, the freedom of expression versus restriction to predefined choices, questionnaire are of the following types-

1. Open-Ended Questions: Here the questions that allow respondents to answer in their own words, without restrictions. For example, “What challenges do you face in accessing healthcare?” It is best used for exploratory research, case studies, or when the researcher wants to capture detailed narratives, emotions, and meanings.

- Advantages: Provides depth, uncovers unexpected insights, captures personal experiences.
- Disadvantages: Difficult to code and analyze, time-consuming, requires literacy and comprehension.

Closed-Ended Questions: These questions with fixed response options, such as Yes/No, multiple choice, or rating scales. For example, asking “Do you have health insurance? Yes/No.” or “Rate your satisfaction with healthcare services: Very Satisfied / Satisfied / Neutral / Dissatisfied.” Closed-Ended Questions is best for large-scale surveys where standardized, comparable data is required.

- Advantages: Easy to administer, responses are uniform, suitable for statistical analysis.
- Disadvantages: Limits depth, may not capture nuanced opinions, risk of forcing respondents into categories that don’t fully reflect their views.

To wrap up the discussion on all types of questionnaires, in general the advantages and disadvantages are as follows-

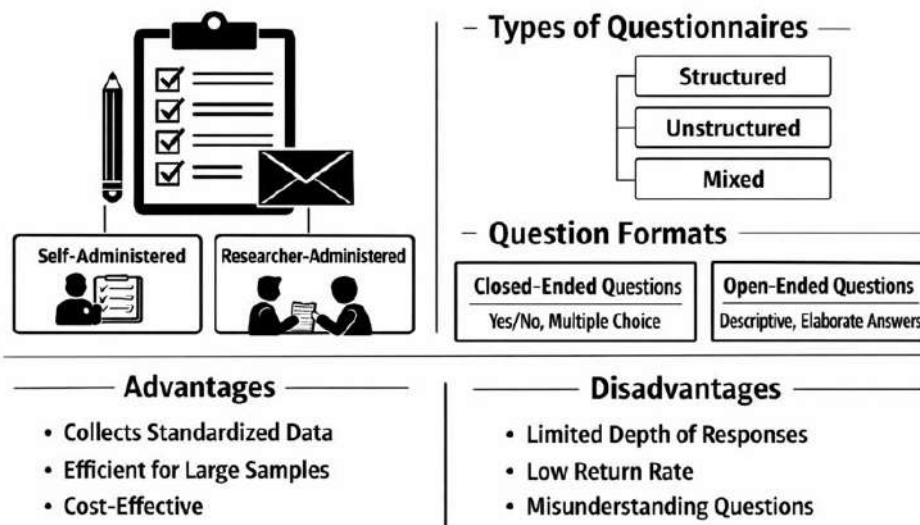
Advantages of Questionnaires

- Economical and easy to administer to large groups.
- Ensures anonymity, which may encourage honest responses.
- Standardized format allows statistical analysis.
- Can be distributed physically or digitally, increasing reach.

Disadvantages of Questionnaires

- Low response rates are common, especially in self-administered formats.
- Limited depth compared to interviews.
- Relies on literacy and comprehension of respondents.
- Risk of misinterpretation if questions are unclear.

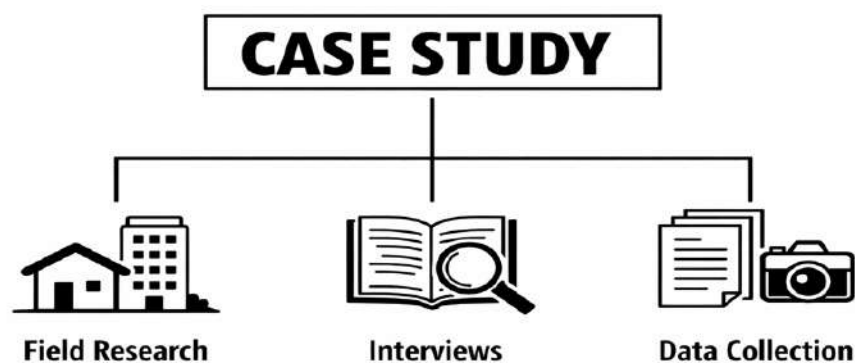
QUESTIONNAIRE



Source: Source: Generated by the Author using ChatGPT (2026)

5.3.4 Case study protocols

A case study protocol is a structured guide that documents how a case study will be conducted, ensuring consistency, transparency, and methodological rigor. It defines the case boundaries, data sources, field procedures, analysis plan, ethical safeguards, and reporting format so the study can be executed and evaluated reliably.



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Core Components of a Case Study Protocol

- **Project Title and Overview** — concise purpose, rationale, and theoretical framing.
- **Research Questions and Objectives** — primary and secondary questions that the case will address.
- **Case Definition and Boundaries** — what constitutes the case; inclusion and exclusion criteria; temporal and spatial limits.
- **Field Procedures and Access** — permissions, gatekeepers, recruitment strategy, scheduling, and site logistics.
- **Data Sources and Collection Plan** — list of evidence types and how each will be collected.
- **Instruments and Tools** — interview guides, observation checklists, document review templates, recording devices.

- Data Management and Storage — transcription, coding, file naming, backups, anonymization, and access controls.
- Analysis Strategy — coding approach, pattern matching, explanation building, triangulation, software to be used.
- Reporting Format — structure of the final case report and dissemination plan.
- Ethics and Consent — consent procedures, confidentiality measures, risk mitigation, and IRB approvals.
- Quality Assurance — validity checks, triangulation methods, member checking, peer debriefing, audit trail.
- Timeline and Resources — milestones, deliverables, personnel roles, and budget estimates.

Practical Case Study Protocol Template

1 Project Title

2 Overview and Rationale

3 Research Questions

4 Case Definition and Boundaries

5 Field Procedures and Access

- Gatekeepers and contacts
- Recruitment and sampling approach
- Schedule and visit plan

6 Data Sources and Collection Plan

- Interviews: target informants, sample size, interview guide summary
- Observations: settings, frequency, checklist items
- Documents: types, access procedures
- Artifacts and media: photos, recordings, archives

7 Instruments and Tools

- Attach interview guides, observation checklists, document review forms, consent forms

8 Data Management

- Transcription standards and timestamps
- File naming convention and folder structure
- Storage and backup plan; encryption and access control
- Anonymization and de-identification procedures

9 Analysis Strategy

- Coding approach (inductive, deductive, hybrid)
- Software and versions (e.g., NVivo, Atlas.ti)

- Triangulation and cross-case comparison methods
- Criteria for drawing conclusions

10 Reporting and Dissemination

- Report outline and length expectations
- Stakeholder briefings, academic outputs, public summaries

11 Ethics and Consent

- Consent script and documentation
- Confidentiality safeguards and data retention policy
- Potential harms and mitigation strategies

12 Quality Assurance

- Member checking plan and timing
- Intercoder reliability checks and procedures
- Peer debriefing schedule
- Audit trail documentation

13 Timeline and Resources

- Gantt-style milestones: preparation, fieldwork, transcription, analysis, reporting
- Roles and responsibilities
- Budget summary

5.3.5 Focus Group Guides

Focus group guides are structured moderator scripts that steer small-group discussions to generate rich, contextual insights; use 6–10 participants for 45–90 minutes, run 3–4 groups to reach saturation, and always pilot the guide and obtain informed consent.

A focus group is a small group of six to ten people led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out.

The focus group moderator nurtures disclosure in an open and spontaneous format. The moderator's goal is to generate a maximum number of different ideas and opinions from as many different people in the time allotted.

The ideal amount of time to set aside for a focus group is anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes. Beyond that most groups are not productive and it becomes an imposition on participant time.

Focus groups are structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions – usually no more than 10 – but the discussion is free-flowing. Ideally, participant comments will stimulate and influence the thinking and sharing of others. Some people even find themselves changing their thoughts and opinions during the group.

A homogeneous group of strangers comprise the focus group. Homogeneity levels the playing field and reduces inhibitions among people who will probably never see each other again. It

takes more than one focus group on any one topic to produce valid results – usually three or four. You'll know you've conducted enough groups (with the same set of questions) when you're not hearing anything new anymore, i.e. you've reached a point of saturation.

Designing focus group questions

Twelve is the maximum number of questions for any one group. Ten is better, and eight is ideal. Focus group participants won't have a chance to see the questions they are being asked. So, to make sure they understand and can fully respond to the questions posed, questions should be:

- Short and to the point
- Focused on one dimension each
- Unambiguously worded
- Open-ended or sentence completion types
- non-threatening or embarrassing
- Worded in a way that they cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” answer (use “why” and “how” instead)

Recruiting and preparing for participants

In an ideal focus group, all the participants are very comfortable with each other but none of them know each other. Homogeneity is key to maximizing disclosure among focus group participants. Consider the following in establishing selection criteria for individual groups:

- Gender – Will both men and women feel comfortable discussing the topic in a mixed gender group?
- Age – How intimidating would it be for a young person to be included in a group of older adults? Or vice versa?
- Power – Would a teacher be likely to make candid remarks in a group where his/her principal is also a participant?
- Cliques – How influential might three cheerleaders be in a group of high school peers?

Participant inclusion/exclusion criteria should be established up front and based on the purpose of the study. Use the criteria as a basis to screen all potential applicants. Focus groups participants can be recruited in any one of a number of ways. Some of the most popular include:

- Nomination – Key individuals nominate people they think would make good participants. Nominees are familiar with the topic, known for their ability to respectfully share their opinions, and willing to volunteer about 2 hours of their time.
- Random selection – If participants will come from a large but defined group (e.g. an entire high school) with many eager participants, names can be randomly drawn from a hat until the desired number of verified participants is achieved.
- All members of the same group – Sometimes an already existing group serves as an ideal pool from which to invite participants (e.g. Kiwanis Club, PTO, Chamber of Commerce).
- Same role/job title – Depending on the topic, the pool might be defined by position, title or condition (e.g. , young MBA's, old writers, community health nurses, parents of teen-age boys).

- **Volunteers** – When selection criteria is broad, participants can be recruited with flyers and newspaper ads.

Once a group of viable recruits has been established, call each one to confirm interest and availability. Give them times and locations of the focus groups and secure verbal confirmation. Tell them you will mail (or email) them a written confirmation and call to remind them two days before the scheduled group.

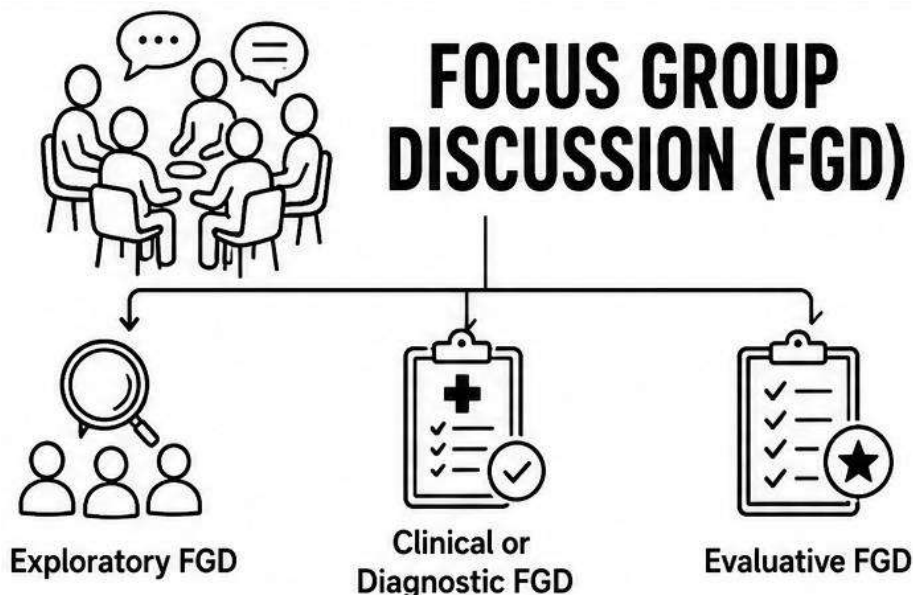
Types of FGDs

1. Exploratory FGD: This type is conducted at the beginning of a study to explore broad themes and generate hypotheses. It helps researchers understand community perceptions before designing surveys or interventions. For example, an exploratory FGD with parents to identify concerns about online education during the pandemic. It is usually used at the early stages of research, programme planning, or needs assessment.

2. Clinical or Diagnostic FGD: This type focuses on identifying specific problems, barriers, or needs within a community or institution. It is more problem-oriented than exploratory FGDs. For example, a diagnostic FGD with women in rural areas to identify barriers to accessing maternal healthcare services.

The clinical or diagnostic FGD is used when the goal is to diagnose issues and design targeted interventions.

3. Evaluative FGD: This type is conducted after a programme or intervention to assess its impact and gather feedback. It helps measure effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. For example, an evaluative FGD with beneficiaries of a microfinance programme to assess changes in income, empowerment, and community participation. The evaluative FGD is used at the end of projects or during mid-term reviews to evaluate outcomes.



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To wrap up the discussion on all types of FGDs, in general the advantages and disadvantages are as follows-

Advantages of FGDs

- Generates diverse perspectives in a short time.
- Encourages interaction and idea generation.
- Provides insights into group norms and collective attitudes.
- Efficient for gathering multiple views simultaneously.

Disadvantages of FGDs

- Dominance of vocal participants may skew results.
- Confidentiality issues in group settings.
- Harder to analyze individual responses.
- Requires skilled moderation to balance participation.

5.3.6 Audio visual recordings

Audio-visual recordings (audio, video, photographs) are powerful qualitative data tools for capturing rich, contextual evidence—especially useful in field settings like Cooch Behar-II where visual and spoken detail matter—but they require explicit consent, careful file management, and strong security to protect participants.

Definition and purpose

Audio-visual recordings are systematic captures of spoken words, interactions, gestures, and visual context using voice recorders, video cameras, and photographs. They serve to preserve raw data for later transcription, close analysis, and illustration of findings. Recordings are used when verbatim speech, nonverbal cues, spatial layout, or visual artifacts are central to research questions.

- Interviews and key informant interviews where exact wording matters.
- Focus groups to capture group dynamics and overlapping talk.
- Participant observation to document interactions, gestures, and settings.
- Documenting artifacts or environments (e.g., clinics, classrooms, community events).

Strengths

- Richness: preserve tone, pauses, emphasis, and nonverbal signals.
- Verifiability: allow others to audit interpretations against original recordings.
- Illustration: provide compelling evidence for reports, presentations, and training.

Limitations and risks

- Privacy risk: recordings often contain identifiable information; anonymity can be difficult.
- Resource demands: high-quality capture, transcription, storage, and secure backups require time and budget.
- Ethical complexity: consent must cover future use, archiving, and sharing.

Practical workflow (concise steps)

- i. Consent first: obtain written/verbal consent specifying audio, video, and photo use, storage, retention, and sharing.
- ii. Slate metadata: start each recording with a spoken slate (project, session ID, date, location, participant codes).
- iii. Capture best practice: use external mics for audio; tripod and stable framing for video/photos; test sound and light; record backups when possible.
- iv. File naming & logs: adopt a consistent scheme (Project_Session_Date_Loc_Device) and keep a field log with consent status and interruptions.
- v. Transcription & anonymization: transcribe verbatim with timestamps; pseudonymize or redact identifiers during transcription.
- vi. Storage & backup: follow a 3-2-1 rule (3 copies; 2 media types; 1 off-site/cloud); encrypt sensitive files and restrict access.

5.3.7 Documents and archives

Documents and archives are systematic, pre-existing textual or visual records (official records, diaries, letters, reports, minutes, photographs, web pages) used as qualitative data sources to reconstruct events, trace meanings over time, and triangulate findings; they are especially valuable in local studies where institutional records and personal papers can reveal historical context and community practices.

Definition and purpose

Documents and archives are primary or secondary records created for purposes other than the research (administrative reports, meeting minutes, letters, diaries, newspapers, organizational files, photographs, digital archives) that researchers analyze to answer questions about processes, decisions, and meanings. They provide historical depth, corroboration of interview/observation data, and access to otherwise inaccessible events or institutional practices.

- Historical or longitudinal questions (policy change, program evolution).
- Contextualizing interviews/observations (confirm dates, roles, or official positions).
- Triangulation to strengthen validity by comparing multiple evidence types.

Strengths

- Nonreactive: not influenced by researcher presence.
- Rich contextual detail: formal decisions, budgets, correspondence, and timelines.
- Cost-effective: existing materials can reduce fieldwork time.
- Enables secondary analysis and archival reuse for new questions.

Limitations

- Selective survival and bias: archives reflect what was preserved; marginalized voices may be absent.
- Context loss: documents may lack production context (who wrote, why, for whom).
- Access and legal constraints: some records are restricted or require permissions.
- Interpretive risk: texts require careful contextual reading to avoid anachronistic or decontextualized conclusions.

Practical steps for using documents and archives

- Map sources: list likely repositories (local government offices, school records, NGO files, newspapers, personal collections in Cooch Behar-II).
- Create a document log: record title, date, author, provenance, physical/digital location, access conditions, and a short summary.
- Assess authenticity and bias: note purpose, audience, and omissions.
- Extract metadata: dates, names, institutional stamps, and cross-reference with interviews/observations.

Analysis approaches

- Content analysis for frequency and patterns.
- Discourse or narrative analysis for meanings, framing, and rhetoric.
- Comparative case or longitudinal analysis across documents to trace change.

5.3.8 Technology in Data Collection

With the rapid growth of digital platforms, technology has become an indispensable part of modern research. Technology in data collection refers to the use of digital tools, software, and online platforms to gather, store, and analyze information. It enhances efficiency, expands reach, and allows researchers to capture both quantitative and qualitative data in innovative ways.

In social research, technology is particularly valuable because it enables researchers to connect with diverse populations, including those spread across large geographical areas, and to collect data quickly while maintaining accuracy.

Types of Technology-Based Tools

1. Online Surveys: Online surveys are digital questionnaires distributed through platforms such as Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, or Microsoft Forms. Respondents fill them out using computers or smartphones. For example, a researcher studying youth attitudes toward climate change circulates a Google Form across universities. Online surveys are best for large samples, geographically dispersed populations, and standardized data collection.

- Advantages: Cost-effective, fast distribution, automatic data compilation.
- Disadvantages: Excludes populations without internet access; risk of low response rates.

2. Digital Interviews (Video/Audio Platforms): Interviews conducted through video conferencing tools (Zoom, Microsoft Teams) or audio calls. They replicate face-to-face

interviews in a virtual environment. For example, a social researcher interviewing migrant workers via Zoom to understand challenges during lockdown. Digital interviews are useful when face-to-face meetings are impractical due to distance or restrictions.

- Advantages: Saves travel time, allows recording for accuracy, connects dispersed participants.
- Disadvantages: Requires stable internet; may reduce rapport compared to in-person interviews.

3. Mobile Data Collection Apps: Specialized apps (e.g., KoboToolbox, ODK Collect) allow enumerators to record responses directly on mobile devices during fieldwork. For example, a health survey in rural villages where enumerators use tablets to record household data. Mobile data collection apps are best for field surveys requiring real-time data entry and monitoring.

- Advantages: Reduces paperwork, minimizes errors, allows GPS tagging.
- Disadvantages: Requires training and devices; technical glitches may occur.

4. Social Media Analytics: Analyzing posts, comments, hashtags, and trends on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram to understand public opinion. For example, while studying online discourse around disability rights using hashtag analysis. Social media analytics are suitable for research on public attitudes, campaigns, or social movements.

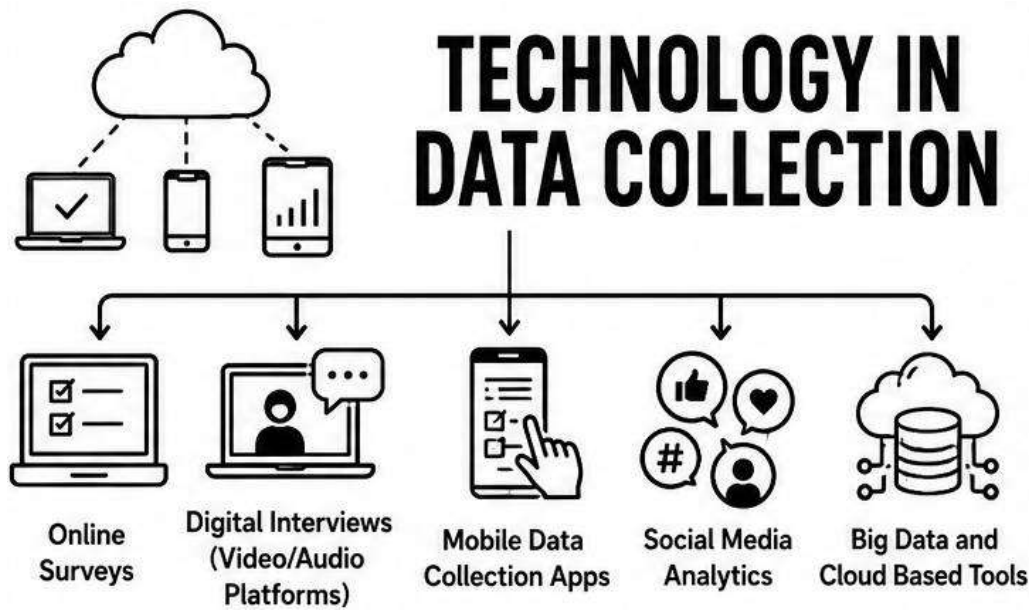
- Advantages: Captures spontaneous, large-scale data; useful for trend analysis.
- Disadvantages: Data may be unrepresentative; ethical concerns about privacy.

5. Big Data and Cloud-Based Tools: Using large datasets from institutions, government portals, or cloud storage systems to analyze social trends. For example, while analyzing census data stored in government databases to study urban migration.

Big data and cloud-based tools are best for macro-level studies requiring large datasets.

- Advantages: Provides comprehensive insights; supports predictive analysis.

- Disadvantages: Requires advanced technical skills; data access may be restricted.



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To wrap up the discussion on all types of technology-based tools, in general the advantages and disadvantages are as follows-

Advantages of Technology in Data Collection

- Expands reach to geographically dispersed populations.
- Saves time and resources.
- Allows real-time monitoring and analysis.
- Facilitates storage and retrieval of large datasets.
- Enhances accuracy by reducing manual errors.

Disadvantages of Technology in Data Collection

- Excludes populations without digital access (digital divide).
- Risk of data privacy breaches.
- Requires technical training and infrastructure.
- May reduce personal rapport in sensitive studies.

5.4 Conclusion

In social research, the choice of data collection tools is fundamental to the credibility and richness of findings. Whether through observation, interviews, questionnaires, schedules, case studies, focus group discussions, content analysis, or technological innovations, each method provides a distinct lens for understanding human behaviour and social phenomena. Triangulation further strengthens research by combining multiple approaches, ensuring validity and depth. Ultimately, the careful selection and ethical application of these tools allow researchers to move beyond abstract theory, generating evidence that informs policy, guides practice, and deepens our understanding of society.

Ethics in data collection is the cornerstone of credible social research. Researchers must ensure that participants are treated with dignity, that their privacy and confidentiality are protected, and that informed consent is always obtained. Beyond procedural safeguards, ethical responsibility also means being sensitive to cultural contexts, avoiding exploitation, and ensuring that findings are used to benefit communities rather than harm them. Transparency in methods, honesty in reporting, and respect for participants' autonomy strengthen the trustworthiness of research. Ultimately, ethical data collection is not just about following rules, it is about upholding the integrity of social inquiry and honouring the voices of those whose lives form the basis of knowledge.

5.5 Summary

Data collection lies at the heart of any research project, and researchers draw on a range of tools—observation, interviews, questionnaires, schedules, case studies, focus group discussions, and content analysis—to gather evidence suited to their questions. Each method brings particular strengths and limitations, so choices should be guided by the study's aims, context, and practical constraints. While digital technologies can greatly increase efficiency and reach, they also demand careful attention to privacy, consent, and data security. Employing triangulation—combining multiple methods or sources—further strengthens credibility by cross-validating findings and deepening understanding.

5.6 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ):

1. The primary purpose of data collection in social research is to:
 - a) Prove a hypothesis
 - b) Gather empirical evidence**
 - c) Formulate theories
 - d) Publish results
2. Observation is most useful when the researcher wants to study:
 - a) Attitudes
 - b) Actual behaviour in natural settings**
 - c) Opinions
 - d) Historical records
3. In participant observation, the researcher:
 - a) Actively takes part in the group's activities**
 - b) Observes from a distance
 - c) Uses questionnaires
 - d) Conducts experiments
4. A structured interview is characterized by:
 - a) Pre-determined questions asked in the same order**
 - b) Open-ended discussion
 - c) No fixed format
 - d) Group interaction
5. The main advantage of an unstructured interview is:
 - a) Depth and flexibility of responses**
 - b) Ease of statistical analysis
 - c) Uniformity of data
 - d) Time efficiency

6. A semi-structured interview combines:
 - a) **Fixed questions with scope for probing**
 - b) Observation and experiment
 - c) Quantitative and historical data
 - d) Closed and coded responses
7. A questionnaire differs from an interview because it:
 - a) **Is self-administered by respondents**
 - b) Requires face-to-face interaction
 - c) Is always open-ended
 - d) Cannot be standardized
8. Closed-ended questions are best suited for:
 - a) **Quantitative analysis**
 - b) Narrative description
 - c) Case studies
 - d) Ethnographic research
9. Open-ended questions are used when the researcher wants:
 - a) **Detailed, descriptive answers**
 - b) Yes/No responses
 - c) Statistical summaries
 - d) Controlled experiments
10. A schedule is filled in by:
 - a) **The researcher during direct interaction**
 - b) The respondent independently
 - c) A computer system
 - d) A third-party analyst
11. The main advantage of using a schedule over a questionnaire is:
 - a) **Higher accuracy and response rate**
 - b) Lower cost
 - c) Greater anonymity
 - d) Less interviewer involvement
12. A case study aims to:
 - a) **Provide an in-depth understanding of a single unit**
 - b) Compare multiple samples statistically
 - c) Test laboratory hypotheses
 - d) Collect large-scale data
13. Focus Group Discussions are useful for studying:
 - a) **Collective perceptions and group dynamics**
 - b) Individual psychological traits
 - c) Historical documents
 - d) Controlled experiments
14. In an FGD, the facilitator's role is to:
 - a) **Guide discussion and ensure balanced participation**
 - b) Record data silently
 - c) Provide answers
 - d) Avoid interaction

15. Content analysis is primarily used to study:
 - a) **Written, spoken, or visual communication**
 - b) Laboratory samples
 - c) Economic data
 - d) Experimental results
16. Quantitative content analysis focuses on:
 - a) **Counting frequency of words or themes**
 - b) Interpreting meanings
 - c) Observing behavior
 - d) Conducting interviews
17. Qualitative content analysis emphasizes:
 - a) **Interpretation of meanings and themes**
 - b) Numerical measurement
 - c) Coding frequency
 - d) Statistical correlation
18. Technology-based data collection enhances research by:
 - a) **Increasing efficiency and reach**
 - b) Eliminating ethical concerns
 - c) Reducing accuracy
 - d) Limiting sample size
19. Triangulation in social research means:
 - a) **Using multiple methods or sources to validate findings**
 - b) Collecting data from one source only
 - c) Applying mathematical formulas
 - d) Conducting random sampling
20. The ethical principle most crucial in data collection is:
 - a) **Informed consent and confidentiality**
 - b) Speed of data collection
 - c) Researcher convenience
 - d) Publicity of results

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5.8 Endnotes

1. Ethical data collection requires informed consent and confidentiality.
2. Triangulation enhances validity by combining multiple tools.
3. Technology should complement, not replace, human interaction.
4. Reflexivity helps researchers recognize their own biases.

Unit-6: Techniques of data collection

Structure

- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Techniques of Data Collection
 - 6.3.1 Observation
 - 6.3.2 The interview
 - 6.3.3 Questionnaire
 - 6.3.4 Content Analysis
- 6.4 The Sampling Technique in Qualitative Research
- 6.5 Conclusion
- 6.6 Summary
- 6.7 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ)
- 6.8 References

6.1 Learning Objectives

- Understand the concept, scope, and significance of data collection
- Distinguish between primary and secondary data
- Examine various techniques of primary data collection
- Develop skills to design and administer questionnaires
- Apply appropriate question formats to suit research objectives

6.2 Introduction:

The process of collecting data starts only after a research problem has been clearly defined and a research plan has been prepared. At this stage, the researcher must decide which method of data collection will be most suitable. In doing so, it is important to remember that there are two types of data: primary and secondary.

- Primary data are those collected directly for the first time, making them original in nature.
- Secondary data are those already collected by someone else and usually processed statistically.

The researcher must choose whether to use primary or secondary data for the study, and accordingly select the appropriate method of collection. Since primary data are gathered firsthand, their collection involves original fieldwork. In contrast, secondary data collection is mainly a matter of compiling information from existing sources. Thus, different methods are used for primary and secondary data, each with its own advantages and limitations. Researchers study these methods carefully before deciding which one best suits their investigation (Ranjit Kumar, 2005).

6.3 Techniques of Data Collection

There are two main ways to gather information about a situation, person, problem, or phenomenon. Sometimes the needed information is already available and only has to be extracted. At other times, the information must be collected directly. Based on these two broad approaches, data are classified into:

- **Secondary data** – information that already exists and has been collected by others.
- **Primary data** – information collected firsthand by the researcher for the study.

When information is taken from sources that already exist, it is called secondary data. In contrast, when information is collected directly by the researcher, it is known as primary data. Examples of secondary sources include census reports that show the age and sex structure of a population, hospital records that reveal patterns of illness and death, organizational records that describe activities, and published

materials such as articles, journals, magazines, books, and periodicals that provide historical or other information. Examples of primary sources include gathering first-hand opinions from a community about health services, identifying the health needs of a population, evaluating a social program, studying job satisfaction among employees, or assessing the quality of services provided by a worker.

In short, primary sources give direct, first-hand information, while secondary sources provide information that has already been collected and processed by others.

Collecting data using primary sources

There are several ways to collect primary data, and the choice of method depends on the purpose of the study, the resources available, and the skills of the researcher. Sometimes, even if a particular method is most suitable, it cannot be used because of limitations such as lack of funds or expertise. In such cases, the researcher must be aware that these constraints can affect the quality of the data. When selecting a method, it is also important to consider the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the study population, such as education level, age, social status, and cultural background. Knowing the population's interest in and attitude toward participating in the study is equally important. For example, some groups may feel uncomfortable being interviewed or may hesitate to express opinions in a questionnaire. Similarly, people with limited education may respond differently compared to those with higher education.

In short, the choice of a primary data collection method should be guided not only by the study's objectives and available resources but also by the characteristics and comfort level of the population being studied (Ranjit Kumar, 2005).

Another factor that affects the quality of data is how clearly the purpose and importance of the study are explained to the people who are asked to participate. Whatever method is used, respondents should fully understand why the study is being conducted and why their input matters. This is especially important when using a questionnaire, because unlike an interview, the researcher cannot clarify doubts or answer questions directly. In interviews, participants can ask for explanations, but in questionnaires this opportunity is missing. Therefore, the way the study is introduced to respondents plays a key role in ensuring that the data collected is meaningful and reliable. In the following sections, each method of data collection is discussed in terms of when it is most useful, along with the problems and limitations it may involve.

6.3.1 Observation:

Observation is one of the main ways to collect primary data. It is a planned, systematic, and selective process of watching and listening to interactions or events as they happen. This method is especially useful in situations such as studying how people interact in a group, understanding the dietary habits of a community, examining the tasks performed by a worker, or analyzing the behaviour and personality traits of individuals. Observation is also appropriate when accurate information cannot be obtained through direct questioning. This may happen if respondents are uncooperative, unaware of the answers, or too involved in the activity to explain it objectively.

In short, when the focus is on actual behaviour rather than personal opinions or perceptions, observation becomes the most effective way to collect reliable information.

Types of observation

There are two types of observation:

- A. participant observation;**
- B. non-participant observation.**

Participant observation is a method in which the researcher takes part in the activities of the group being studied, behaving in the same way as its members. The group may or may not be aware that they are being observed. For example, to study how people react to individuals in wheelchairs, the researcher might sit in a wheelchair and experience those reactions directly. Similarly, to understand prison life, the researcher might pretend to be a prisoner and live among them. In this way, participant observation allows the researcher to gain insights by sharing the experiences of the group from within.

Non-participant observation is a method in which the researcher does not take part in the activities of the group being studied. Instead, the researcher remains a passive observer, simply watching and listening to what happens and then drawing conclusions. For example, to study the duties performed by nurses in a hospital, the researcher may observe, follow, and record their activities as they occur. After making several observations, conclusions can be drawn about the functions nurses carry out. This approach can be applied to any occupational group in any setting, allowing the researcher to understand what people do without directly joining their activities.

Limitation of observation as a technique of data collection

Using observation as a method of data collection can face certain problems, though these may not occur in every situation. A beginner should still be aware of them.

- One common issue is that when people realize they are being observed, they may change their behaviour. This change can be positive or negative—for example, their productivity might increase or decrease. Such changes happen for different reasons, but when behaviour is altered simply because people know they are being watched, it is called the Hawthorne effect. In these cases, the data collected may not reflect their normal behaviour, leading to distortion.
- Observation as a method of data collection can face several challenges. One common issue is observer bias. If the observer has personal bias, it can easily influence what is recorded, and there is often no simple way to verify the accuracy of those observations or the conclusions drawn from them.
- Another limitation is that interpretations may differ from one observer to another. Different observers might watch the same situation but draw different conclusions, which affects consistency.
- There is also the risk of incomplete observation or recording. For example, an observer may focus too much on watching carefully but fail to take detailed notes. On the other hand, if the observer concentrates on writing detailed notes, they may miss parts of the interaction. Both situations can reduce the reliability of the data collected

Situations in which observations can be made

Observations can be made under two conditions:

- **Natural**
- **Controlled**

Observation can take place under two different conditions. When a group is studied in its natural setting, without any interference, it is called natural observation. In this case, the researcher simply watches the group as it normally functions.

On the other hand, when the researcher deliberately introduces a stimulus to see how the group reacts, it is known as controlled observation. Here, the researcher creates a situation and then observes the response to it.

6.3.2 The Interview:

Interviewing is one of the most common ways to collect information directly from people. In everyday life, information is often gathered through different forms of interaction, and in research this is formalized as an interview. An interview is any person-to-person interaction between two or more individuals carried out with a specific purpose. Interviews can be flexible, where the interviewer has the freedom to ask questions as they arise during the discussion, or they can be inflexible, where the interviewer must strictly follow a set of predetermined questions. Based on this degree of flexibility, interviews are classified into different types.

A. Unstructured Interviews

The main strength of **unstructured interviews** is the high level of freedom they provide. The researcher can decide the order of questions, choose the wording, and explain them in any way that suits the situation. Questions and issues can even be raised spontaneously during the discussion, depending on how the conversation develops.

There are several types of unstructured interviews, including:

- a. In-depth interviews – repeated face-to-face interactions to understand a person's experiences and perspectives.
- b. Focus group interviews – discussions with a group of people who share common experiences about a situation or event.
- c. Narratives – personal stories told by individuals about incidents or experiences in their lives.
- d. Oral histories – accounts of past events, cultural practices, or traditions passed down through generations.

Unstructured interviews are therefore flexible and allow rich, detailed information to emerge directly from participants

a. In-depth interviews

The idea of in-depth interviewing comes from the interpretive tradition in research. Taylor and Bogdan (1984: 77) describe it as “repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed towards understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words.”

This definition highlights two important points:

- i. In-depth interviewing involves repeated, face-to-face interactions between the researcher and the informant(s).
- ii. Its purpose is to understand the informant's own perspective.

Because the researcher spends more time with the informant through repeated meetings, trust and rapport usually grow stronger. This mutual confidence helps the researcher gain deeper, more accurate, and more meaningful information

b. Focus group interviews

The main difference between a focus group interview and an in-depth interview is that the former is conducted with a group, while the latter is carried out with an individual. In a focus group interview, the researcher explores the shared perceptions, experiences, and understandings of a group of people who have something in common regarding a situation or event. For example, focus group interviews may be used to discuss issues such as domestic violence, physical disability, or the

experiences of refugees. By bringing together people with similar backgrounds, the researcher can gain insights into how the group collectively views and responds to these issues.

In focus group interviews, broad topics for discussion are usually prepared in advance, either by the researcher or by the group itself. These topics provide a general framework, while the specific points of discussion emerge naturally during the conversation. Members of the group share their opinions as they talk about these issues. It is important that everything expressed in the discussion is recorded accurately. The researcher can choose the recording method that works best—such as using a tape recorder, asking someone else to take notes, or writing them down personally after each session. If the researcher takes notes during the discussion, care must be taken not to miss important details because of being too involved in the conversation. At the same time, the researcher must avoid letting their involvement create bias.

After each session, the researcher should review the notes carefully and, if possible, return them to the group for verification and confirmation to ensure accuracy

c. Narratives

The **narrative technique** of collecting information is even less structured than a focus group interview. In this method, there are almost no predetermined questions. The researcher simply listens to the personal story of an individual about an incident or situation in their life. The person tells their story freely, while the researcher listens passively. At times, the researcher may use active listening techniques—such as saying “uh huh,” “mmm,” “yeah,” or nodding—to encourage the person to continue speaking. The key is to let the individual talk openly without interruption, so that their experiences and perspectives emerge naturally.

Narratives are a very powerful method of data collection, especially in situations that are sensitive in nature. For example, to understand the impact of child sexual abuse, researchers may ask survivors to narrate their experiences and explain how they have been affected. Narratives can sometimes have a therapeutic effect—simply telling one’s story may help a person feel more at ease with the event. In fact, some therapists specialize in narrative therapy, though here the focus is on narratives as a research tool. As with focus group interviews, the researcher must choose a suitable recording method. After completing narrative sessions, it is important to write detailed notes and then return them to the respondent for accuracy checks and confirmation

d. Oral histories

Oral histories are similar to narratives in that they involve both passive and active listening. However, they are mainly used to learn about historical events, cultural practices, customs, or stories that have been passed down through generations. While narratives focus on a person’s individual experiences, oral histories deal with broader social, cultural, or historical contexts.

For example, to understand life in a regional town of Western Australia after World War II, or to study the living conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the 1950s, the researcher would talk to people who lived during that time and ask them to share their memories and experiences. In this way, oral histories provide valuable insights into the past and into traditions that shape communities

B. Structured interviews

In a structured interview, the researcher asks a fixed set of questions, using the same wording and order as written in the interview schedule. An interview schedule is a prepared list of questions—either open-ended or closed-ended—designed for use in person-to-person interaction. This interaction may take place face-to-face, over the telephone, or through electronic media. It is important to note that the interview schedule is a research tool for collecting data, while interviewing itself is the method of data collection.

One of the main advantages of structured interviews is that they provide uniform information, which makes it easier to compare data across respondents. Another benefit is that structured interviewing requires fewer skills from the interviewer compared to unstructured interviewing.

6.3.3 Questionnaire:

A questionnaire is a written list of questions to which respondents record their own answers. In this method, respondents read the questions, interpret what is being asked, and then write down their responses. The only difference between a questionnaire and an interview schedule is in who records the answers. In an interview schedule, the interviewer asks the questions (and explains them if necessary) and writes down the replies. In a questionnaire, the respondents themselves record their answers. This distinction is important because it explains the strengths and weaknesses of each method. The interview schedule allows clarification and ensures responses are captured, while the questionnaire relies on the respondent's own interpretation and recording.

When using a questionnaire, it is important that the questions are clear and easy to understand, since there is no one present to explain them to respondents. The layout should also be simple, easy to read, and visually pleasant, with a logical sequence of questions that respondents can follow smoothly. A questionnaire should be written in an interactive style, so that respondents feel as though someone is speaking directly to them. For sensitive questions, or those that respondents may hesitate to answer, it is helpful to add a short introductory statement explaining why the question is relevant. To make these statements stand out, they can be printed in a different font from the actual questions. This approach helps respondents feel more comfortable and engaged while completing the questionnaire.

Interview schedule and Questionnaire

The choice between using a questionnaire or an interview schedule is very important, because the strengths and weaknesses of each method can affect the validity of the findings. This decision should be made carefully, taking into account the nature of the investigation and the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the study population. In other words, the selection between the two methods should be guided by clear criteria—such as the type of information needed, the background of respondents, and the conditions under which data will be collected.

- The nature of the investigation— When the study deals with sensitive issues that respondents may feel uncomfortable discussing directly with an investigator, a questionnaire can be the better choice because it ensures anonymity. This is often the case in studies on topics such as drug use, sexuality, criminal behavior, or personal finances. However, there are situations where more reliable information about sensitive issues can actually be obtained through interviews. The effectiveness of either method depends on the nature of the study population and the skills of the interviewer. A skilled interviewer may be able to build trust and encourage respondents to share information more openly than they would in a questionnaire.
- The geographical distribution of the study population— If potential respondents are spread across a wide geographical area, the use of a questionnaire becomes the most practical option. Conducting interviews in such circumstances would be extremely costly and difficult to manage. Questionnaires allow researchers to reach large, scattered populations more efficiently and at a lower expense.
- The type of study population—if the study population is illiterate, very young or very old, or handicapped, there may be no option but to interview respondents.

Different ways of administering a questionnaire

A questionnaire can be administered in different ways.

- **The mailed questionnaire** — The most common way of collecting information through a questionnaire is to send it to respondents by mail. This method assumes that the researcher has access to the respondents' addresses. To improve the chances of getting replies, it is usually helpful to include a prepaid, self-addressed envelope along with the questionnaire. A mailed questionnaire should always be accompanied by a covering letter that explains the purpose of the study and encourages participation. One of the major challenges with mailed questionnaires is the low response rate. If very few people respond, the findings cannot be applied reliably to the wider population being studied.
- **Collective administration** — One of the most effective ways to administer a questionnaire is to use a captive audience—such as students in a classroom, people attending a function, participants in a program, or any group assembled in one place. This approach ensures a very high response rate, since very few people refuse to participate when they are already present. Another advantage is that the researcher has direct personal contact with the study population. This allows the researcher to explain the purpose, relevance, and importance of the study and to clarify any questions respondents may have. The author advises that if a captive audience is available, researchers should not miss the opportunity. It is the quickest way to collect data, it guarantees a high response rate, and it saves money that would otherwise be spent on postage.
- **Administration in a public place** — Sometimes a questionnaire can be administered in a public place such as a shopping centre, health centre, hospital, school, or pub. The suitability of this method depends on the type of study population and where they are most likely to be found. In this approach, the researcher usually explains the purpose of the study to potential respondents as they are approached and requests their participation. Although this method can be slightly more time-consuming, it shares the same advantages as administering a questionnaire to a captive audience—such as personal contact, the ability to clarify questions, and generally higher response rates

The contents of the covering letter

It is essential that you write a covering letter with your mailed questionnaire. It should very briefly:

- Introduce you and the institution you are representing;
- Describe in two or three sentences the main objectives of the study;
- Explain the relevance of the study;
- Convey any general instructions;
- Indicate that participation in the study is voluntary — if recipients do not want to respond to the questionnaire, they have the right not to;
- Assure respondents of the anonymity of the information provided by them;
- Provide a contact number in case they have any questions;
- Give a return address for the questionnaire and a deadline for its return;
- Thank them for their participation in the study.

Advantages of a Questionnaire:

- It is less expensive: Since respondents complete the questionnaire themselves, there is no need for interviewers. This saves time, effort, and financial resources. When questionnaires are administered collectively to a group, they become one of the most economical methods of data collection.
- It offers greater anonymity: Because there is no face-to-face interaction between the respondent and the researcher, questionnaires provide a higher level of anonymity. This is especially useful when dealing with sensitive topics, as respondents may feel more comfortable giving honest answers. In such cases, anonymity increases the likelihood of obtaining accurate information

Disadvantages of a questionnaire

Although questionnaires have many advantages, they also come with certain disadvantages. Not all studies face these problems, but researchers should be aware of them because they can affect the quality of data.

- Limited application: Questionnaires can only be used with populations that can read and write. They are unsuitable for illiterate groups, very young children, very old people, or those with certain disabilities.
- Low response rate: Many people fail to return questionnaires, which reduces the sample size. Response rates depend on factors such as the topic's relevance, the questionnaire's layout and length, the quality of the covering letter, and the method of delivery. A 50% response rate is considered good, but sometimes it may be as low as 20%. This problem is less serious when questionnaires are administered collectively.
- Self-selecting bias: Those who return questionnaires may differ in attitudes or motivations from those who do not, which can make findings less representative.
- No opportunity to clarify: If respondents misunderstand a question, there is no chance to explain. Different interpretations can reduce the accuracy of data.
- No spontaneous responses: Mailed questionnaires are unsuitable when immediate, spontaneous answers are needed, since respondents have time to reflect before replying.
- Influence of other questions: Because respondents can read all questions before answering, their response to one question may be influenced by others.
- Possibility of consulting others: Respondents may ask others for help before answering, which can distort findings if the study aims to capture only their personal opinions.
- Cannot be supplemented: Unlike interviews, questionnaires cannot be combined with other methods such as observation to enrich the data.

Advantages of the interview

Interviews have several important advantages as a method of data collection:

- Best for complex situations: Interviews are especially suitable for studying complex or sensitive topics. The interviewer can prepare respondents before asking sensitive questions and explain complicated ones directly.
- Useful for in-depth information: Interviews allow the researcher to probe further, making it possible to collect detailed and in-depth information.
- Information can be supplemented: In addition to verbal responses, the interviewer can observe non-verbal reactions, which adds valuable insights.
- Questions can be clarified: If respondents misunderstand a question, the interviewer can repeat or rephrase it to ensure clarity.
- Wider application: Interviews can be used with almost any type of population, including children, illiterate individuals, the elderly, or people with disabilities

Disadvantages of the interview

Although interviews have many strengths, they also present several disadvantages that researchers should consider:

- Time-consuming and expensive: Interviews take more time and resources, especially when respondents are spread across a wide geographical area. However, if respondents are already gathered in places like offices, hospitals, or agencies, interviewing them there can be more efficient.
- Quality depends on interaction: The quality of information depends heavily on the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Since each interview is unique, responses may vary significantly.

- Quality depends on the interviewer: The skills, experience, and commitment of the interviewer directly affect the quality of data collected.
- Variation with multiple interviewers: When several interviewers are involved, differences in style and ability can magnify problems of inconsistency and uneven data quality.
- Risk of researcher bias: The way questions are framed and responses interpreted may reflect the researcher's own bias.
- Risk of interviewer bias: If interviews are conducted by assistants or volunteers, they may also introduce bias in how they interpret responses, select categories, or summarize opinions

Ideal Forms of Question

The form and wording of questions in a research instrument are extremely important because they directly affect the type and quality of information collected. Therefore, questions must be appropriate, relevant, and free from common problems discussed earlier in the section on formulating questions.

In social science research, two main types of questions are commonly used in an interview schedule or a questionnaire:

- **Open-ended questions**
- **Closed-ended questions**

These two formats are central to designing effective research tools, as each has its own strengths and limitations

In an open-ended question, the possible responses are not provided in advance. Respondents are free to answer in their own words.

- In a questionnaire, the respondent writes down the answer in his or her own words.
- In an interview schedule, the interviewer records the answer—either word-for-word (verbatim) or as a summary that captures the respondent's meaning.

This format allows for more detailed and personalized responses, but it also requires careful recording and interpretation

Paired Comparison of Open-Ended and Closed-Ended Qualitative Research Questions	
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS	CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS
Exploratory & Descriptive	Structured & Specific
EDUCATION & LEARNING - How do students describe their experiences of online learning compared to classroom settings? - In what ways do teachers adapt their teaching styles to accommodate diverse learning needs?	EDUCATION & LEARNING - Is online learning more flexible than classroom learning? (Yes / No) - Have teachers adapted their methods for diverse learners? (Likert Scale)
HEALTH & WELL-BEING - How do patients perceive the role of family support during long-term illness? - What meanings do individuals attach to their daily health-	HEALTH & WELL-BEING - Does family support help with recovery? (Agreement Scale) - Is daily exercise important for well-being? (Yes / No)
SOCIETY & CULTURE - How do members of tribal communities articulate changes in cultural traditions? - What stories do urban migrants tell about their sense of belonging in a new city?	SOCIETY & CULTURE - Has your community experienced cultural shifts? (Yes / No) - Do you feel welcomed in your new city? (Yes / No)
WORK & ORGANIZATIONS - How do employees describe their experiences of workplace inclusion? - What narratives do professionals construct about their career transitions?	WORK & ORGANIZATIONS - Are diversity programs effective in your workplace? (Likert Scale) - Is work-life balance achievable? (Yes / No)
MEDIA & POLITICS How do citizens explain their trust or distrust in news sources?	MEDIA & POLITICS - Do you trust mainstream news sources? (Yes / No) - Are political protests worthwhile? (Opinion Scale)

Source: Created by Author using Copilot (2026)

In a closed-ended question, the possible answers are already listed in the questionnaire or interview schedule. The respondent—or the interviewer—selects the category that best represents the respondent's answer. To make sure all possible responses are covered, it is usually wise to include an option such as "Other/please explain."

The same question can also be asked in an open-ended form, but the choice between open-ended and closed-ended depends on how the researcher plans to use the information. This is important because the way a question is framed determines the unit of measurement, which in turn affects the statistical procedures that can be applied and the way the data can be analysed and presented

Advantages and disadvantages of open-ended questions

Open-ended questions have both strengths and weaknesses:

- Advantages:
 - In interviews, experienced interviewers can use open-ended questions to obtain in-depth information by probing further.
 - In questionnaires, they allow respondents to express their opinions freely, producing a wide variety of information.
 - Respondents are not restricted to pre-set categories, so their answers are more natural and less "conditioned."
 - Because respondents choose their own words, open-ended questions reduce investigator bias that can occur when fixed response options are provided.
- Disadvantages:
 - Analysing open-ended responses is more difficult. Researchers often need to use content analysis to classify and interpret the data.
 - Some respondents may struggle to express themselves clearly, especially in questionnaires, which can lead to loss of information.
 - In interviews, open-ended questions may increase the risk of interviewer bias, since the interviewer's probing or recording style can influence the responses.

Advantages and disadvantages of closed-ended questions

Closed-ended questions also have both strengths and weaknesses:

- Advantages:
 - They provide ready-made categories, which ensures that the researcher obtains the specific information needed.
 - Because responses are already categorised, the data is easy to analyse and can be processed quickly.
 - They are simple for respondents to answer, which makes them convenient in large surveys.
- Disadvantages:
 - The information obtained often lacks depth and variety, since respondents are restricted to pre-set options.
 - There is a greater risk of investigator bias, as the researcher decides which response categories to include. Even with an "Other/please explain" option, most respondents tend to choose from the listed categories.

- In questionnaires, the given response patterns may condition respondents' thinking, so answers may reflect agreement or disagreement with the researcher's framing rather than their true opinions.
- The ease of ticking boxes may lead some respondents or interviewers to answer without fully considering the issue.

Techniques of Formulating questions

The wording and tone of questions are very important because the quality of information largely depends on them. Researchers must be careful when formulating questions and keep the following points in mind:

- Use simple, everyday language: Respondents may not be highly educated, and even educated people may not understand technical jargon.
- Avoid ambiguous questions: Ambiguous questions have more than one meaning and can be interpreted differently, leading to inconsistent answers. *Example:* "Is your work made difficult because you are expecting a baby?" can be understood in different ways.
- Avoid double-barrelled questions: These ask two things at once, making it unclear which part the respondent is answering. *Example:* "How often and how much time do you spend on each visit?" mixes frequency and duration.
- Avoid leading questions: These push respondents toward a particular answer and may make them feel there is a "right" response. *Example:* "Unemployment is increasing, isn't it?" or "Smoking is bad, isn't it?"
- Avoid presumptive questions: These assume respondents belong to a certain category without checking first. *Example:* "How many cigarettes do you smoke in a day?" assumes the respondent is a smoker.

By avoiding these problems, researchers can ensure that their questions are clear, fair, and capable of producing valid information (Moser & Kalton, 1989).

Collecting data using secondary sources

Sometimes researchers do not need to collect data themselves because the information has already been gathered by others. In such cases, they only need to extract the required information for their study. These are called secondary sources of data, and they can be grouped into several categories:

- Government or semi-government publications: Many official agencies regularly collect and publish data, such as census reports, vital statistics, labour force surveys, health reports, economic forecasts, and demographic information.
- Earlier research: Previous studies conducted by other researchers can provide valuable information for new investigations.
- Personal records: Historical or personal documents written by individuals may contain useful data.
- Mass media: Newspapers, magazines, and similar outlets often publish reports that can serve as secondary data sources.

Limitations of secondary data:

- Validity and reliability: The accuracy of information varies across sources. For example, census data is generally more reliable than personal diaries.
- Personal bias: Sources like diaries, newspapers, and magazines may reflect the writer's opinions rather than objective facts.
- Availability of data: Researchers should not assume that the required data will always be available. It is important to check availability before proceeding.

- Format issues: Data may not always be presented in the categories or structure needed for analysis. For instance, age groups in a source may be divided differently from the categories required for a study.

6.3.4 Content Analysis:

Content analysis is a systematic method used to study documents, texts, media, or communication in order to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. It involves breaking down written, spoken, or visual material into categories and then analyzing them to understand social attitudes, cultural trends, or institutional practices. Unlike interviews or observation, which collect primary data, content analysis often deals with secondary data—materials that already exist, such as newspapers, reports, advertisements, or social media posts. For example, a researcher studying disability rights might analyze newspaper articles to see:

- How often disability issues are covered,
- What kind of language is used, and
- Whether the coverage is sympathetic or stereotypical.

This method helps researchers systematically examine communication to reveal underlying social meanings and biases.

Types of Content Analysis

1. Quantitative Content Analysis: This type focuses on counting and measuring the frequency of specific words, phrases, or themes in a text. It is statistical in nature and helps identify trends across large volumes of material. For example, counting how many times the term “women’s empowerment” appears in government reports over a decade. Quantitative content analysis is utilized best when the goal is to measure frequency, intensity, or visibility of certain issues in communication.

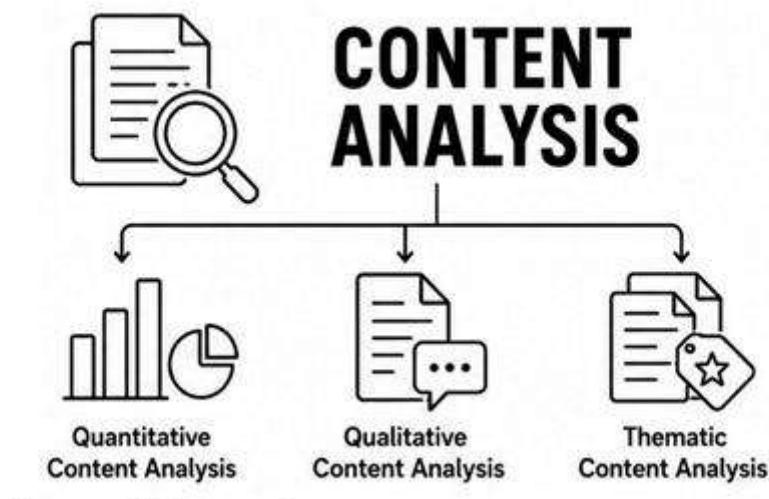
Advantages: Produces objective, measurable data; useful for large datasets. Disadvantages: May overlook deeper meanings or context behind words.

2. Qualitative Content Analysis: This type emphasizes interpretation and meaning rather than numbers. It involves categorizing themes, analyzing tone, and understanding the underlying messages in texts. For example, while studying the portrayal of domestic violence survivors in films to understand cultural attitudes toward gender and victimhood. Qualitative content analysis is best suitable for exploring values, ideologies, and social meanings embedded in communication.

Advantages: Provides depth and insight into cultural or social contexts. Disadvantages: Subjective; prone to researcher bias; harder to generalize.

3. Thematic Content Analysis: This type organizes material into recurring themes or categories, often combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. For example, while analyzing NGO reports to identify recurring themes such as “community participation,” “policy advocacy,” and “capacity building.” Qualitative content analysis is useful when the researcher wants both frequency counts and interpretive insights.

Advantages: Balances measurement with meaning; flexible across disciplines. Disadvantages: Requires careful coding and categorization; time-consuming.



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To wrap up the discussion on all types of content analysis, in general the advantages and disadvantages are as follows-

Advantages of Content Analysis

- Non-intrusive; uses existing material without disturbing participants.
- Cost-effective compared to field surveys.
- Useful for historical research and media studies.
- Can combine quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Disadvantages of Content Analysis

- Interpretation bias possible, especially in qualitative analysis.
- Limited to available content; may not reflect lived experiences.
- Time-consuming coding and categorization process.
- Requires careful methodological rigor to ensure reliability.

6.4 The Sampling Technique in Qualitative Research:

In qualitative research, sampling is less significant than in quantitative studies because the main aim is to explore or describe diversity in a situation, phenomenon, or issue. Qualitative research does not attempt to measure or quantify this diversity.

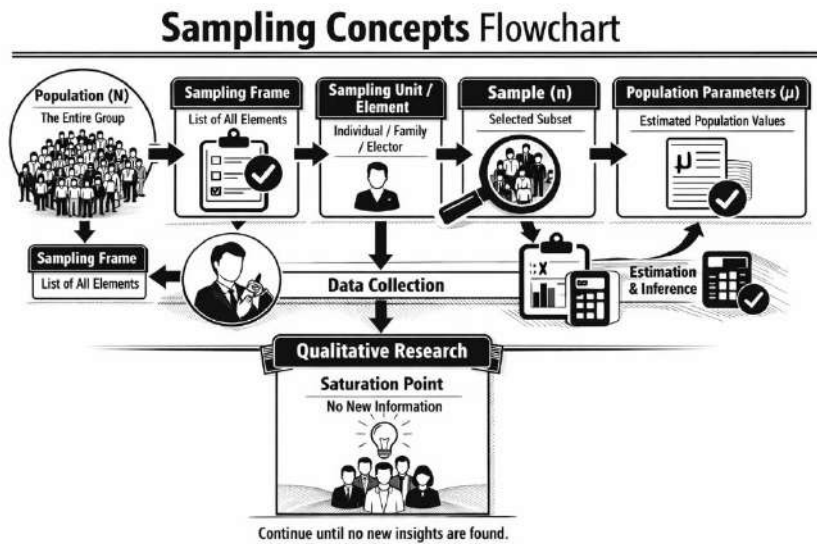
- Even a study based on one individual, one event, or one situation can be valid if it meets the research aim.
- The key principle is to continue collecting data until reaching saturation point—the stage at which no new information is emerging, or new findings are minimal.
- Some researchers use non-probability sampling designs and collect data until saturation is achieved.
- It is important to note that saturation point is a subjective judgement made by the researcher, based on their assessment of when sufficient diversity has been captured.

Sampling terminology

When researchers want to find out things like the average age of a class, the average income of families in a city, or the likely election outcome, they often study only a part of the population rather than everyone. This involves several key concepts:

- **Population (N):** The entire group from which information is needed, such as all students in a class, all families in a city, or all voters in a state.
- **Sample:** A smaller group selected from the population to provide the required information.
- **Sample size (n):** The number of individuals, families, or voters included in the sample.
- **Sampling design/strategy:** The method used to select the sample.
- **Sampling unit/element:** Each individual, family, or voter that could be chosen for the sample.
- **Sampling frame:** A list of all elements in the population. If such a list does not exist, a sampling frame cannot be prepared.
- **Sample statistics:** The findings based on the sample, such as the average age of the selected students, the average income of the chosen families, or the predicted election outcome. These statistics are used to estimate characteristics of the whole population.
- **Population parameters:** The actual values in the population (e.g., the true average age of the class or the real election result). Researchers use sample statistics to estimate these parameters.

In qualitative research, instead of focusing on numbers, researchers collect information until they reach saturation point—the stage when no new data is emerging or new findings are minimal.



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Factors affecting the inferences drawn from a sample

Two major factors influence how certain a researcher can be about the inferences drawn from a sample:

1. Sample Size:

- Larger samples provide greater certainty and more accurate findings.
- As a general rule, the larger the sample, the smaller the margin of error and the higher the reliability of results.

2. Variation in the Population:

- The degree of variation (differences among individuals) in the population also affects certainty.
- When variation is high, uncertainty increases because the sample may not represent all differences accurately.

- In technical terms, a greater standard deviation leads to a higher standard error for a given sample size.
- If the population is homogeneous (similar in characteristics), even a small sample can yield reliable estimates.
- If the population is heterogeneous (diverse), a larger sample is needed to achieve the same level of accuracy.
- In an extreme case, if all elements in a population are identical, even one observation can give a perfectly accurate estimate.

Types of sampling

The various sampling strategies can be categorised as follows

- Random/probability sampling designs;
- Non-random/non-probability sampling designs;
- 'Mixed' sampling designs.

Random/probability sampling designs

For a sampling design to be considered random or probability-based, every element in the population must have an equal and independent chance of being selected.

- Equal chance means that each element has the same probability of selection. The choice of one element is not influenced by personal preferences or other factors.
- Independent chance means that the selection of one element does not affect the selection of another. The inclusion or exclusion of one unit has no bearing on others.

To illustrate, consider a class of students: If every student's name is placed in a box and one is drawn at random, each student has an equal and independent chance of being selected. This process ensures that the sample is unbiased and representative of the population

For a sample to be truly random (probability sample), every element in the population must have an equal and independent chance of being selected.

- If some individuals refuse to participate, their views are excluded, and the sample no longer represents the entire population. *Example:* In a class of 80 students, if 20 refuse to participate, the sample of 60 cannot reflect the opinions of all 80.
- Similarly, in a community study, if some residents cannot be identified or refuse to participate, then not all elements have an equal chance of selection. This makes the sample less representative of the total community.

Because of these challenges, researchers rely on random sampling designs to minimize bias. There are three commonly used types of random sampling design:

1. Simple Random Sampling – each element has an equal chance of selection.
2. Systematic Sampling – elements are chosen at regular intervals from a list.
3. Stratified Random Sampling – the population is divided into subgroups (strata), and random samples are drawn from each subgroup.

Simple random sampling (SRS)— The most commonly used method of selecting a probability sample is simple random sampling. In line with the principle of randomisation, each element in the population must have an equal and independent chance of being selected. The process involves three steps:

1. Identify all elements in the population by assigning them numbers.
2. Decide the sample size (n).
3. Select the sample using one of the following methods:

- Fishbowl draw (lottery method)
- Table of random numbers
- Computer program

Example: In a class of 80 students, each student is numbered from 1 to 80. If the researcher decides to select a sample of 20, they can use any of the above methods to randomly choose 20 students. These 20 students then form the basis of the study.

Stratified random sampling— The accuracy of estimates depends on how much variation (heterogeneity) exists in the study population. If this variation can be reduced, greater accuracy can be achieved with the same sample size. Stratified random sampling is based on this principle.

- In this method, the researcher divides the population into strata (subgroups) so that each stratum is homogeneous with respect to the characteristic used for stratification.
- The characteristic chosen must be clearly identifiable in the population and should be related to the main variable being studied. Example: It is easier to stratify by gender than by age, income, or attitude.
- Once the population is divided into non-overlapping strata, the researcher selects the required number of elements from each stratum using simple random sampling.

There are two types of stratified sampling:

1. **Proportionate Stratified Sampling** – the number of elements selected from each stratum is proportional to its size in the total population.
2. **Disproportionate Stratified Sampling** – the number of elements selected from each stratum does not depend on its size in the population.

Cluster sampling— When the population is very large (such as a city, state, or country), it becomes difficult and expensive to identify every individual element. In such cases, cluster sampling is more practical.

- Cluster sampling involves dividing the population into groups called clusters and then selecting clusters for study.
- Within each selected cluster, further sampling can be carried out.

Steps in cluster sampling:

1. Identify all elements in the population.
2. Decide the strata or groups (clusters) into which the population will be divided.
3. Place each element into the appropriate cluster.
4. Number each element within each cluster.
5. Decide the total sample size (n).
6. Choose whether to use proportionate or disproportionate stratified sampling within clusters.

Example:

- At the first level, clusters could be states or territories.
- Within each selected state, institutions (universities, colleges, TAFE colleges) could be chosen randomly.
- Within each institution, specific academic programs could be selected.
- Finally, within each program, students from a particular year could be sampled.

This step-by-step process of selecting samples at different levels is called multi-stage cluster sampling.

Non-random/non-probability sampling designs

Unlike probability sampling, non-probability sampling designs do not give each element in the population an equal and independent chance of selection. These designs are used when the number of elements in a population is unknown or when individuals cannot be individually identified. In such cases, the choice of elements depends on other considerations.

The four commonly used non-random sampling designs are:

1. **Quota Sampling** – Elements are selected to meet a pre-set quota (e.g., equal numbers of men and women).
2. **Accidental Sampling** – Also called convenience sampling; elements are chosen because they are easily available.
3. **Judgemental or Purposive Sampling** – The researcher deliberately selects elements considered most appropriate for the study.
4. **Snowball Sampling**– Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which researchers begin with a small number of initial informants or “seeds” who meet the study’s eligibility criteria; those seeds then refer or recruit acquaintances, peers, or contacts who also qualify, and the process repeats so the sample “grows like a snowball.” This approach is especially useful in qualitative research when the target population is hidden, stigmatized, or difficult to enumerate—for example, people engaged in illegal activities, members of tightly knit subcultures, or groups with limited public visibility—because referrals from trusted insiders can increase access and willingness to participate. Variants include linear chains (one referral at a time) and exponential chains (each participant provides multiple referrals), and researchers may apply discriminative selection rules to manage which referrals are enrolled. The method’s main strengths are practicality and efficiency for reaching otherwise inaccessible respondents and the potential to build rapport through social networks; its principal weaknesses are selection bias (people with larger networks are more likely to be recruited), homophily (participants tend to refer similar others), and the inability to produce a statistically representative sample without additional adjustments.

To mitigate these limitations, researchers often diversify initial seeds, limit the number of referrals per participant, carefully document recruitment chains, and apply analytic caution when generalizing findings; a formalized variant called respondent-driven sampling (RDS) introduces weighting and recruitment controls that can, under certain assumptions, produce less biased population estimates. Ethically, snowball sampling requires heightened attention to confidentiality and informed consent, since referrals can expose participants’ connections and sensitive statuses; researchers should explain referral risks, obtain consent for contact, and use procedures that protect anonymity where needed.

Quota sampling:

Quota sampling is guided mainly by the researcher’s ease of access to participants and by some visible characteristic of interest (such as gender or race).

- The researcher selects respondents from a convenient location.
 - Whenever someone with the required characteristic is seen, they are asked to participate.
 - This continues until the researcher reaches the quota (the required number of respondents).
- Examples:
- To study the average age of male students, the researcher may stand at the classroom entrance and ask the age of each male student until 20 responses are collected.
 - To study the attitudes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students toward university facilities, the researcher may stand at a convenient location and collect information whenever such students are encountered.

Advantages:

- Least expensive method.
- No need for a sampling frame or detailed information about the population.
- Ensures inclusion of the type of people required.

Disadvantages:

- Since it is not a probability sample, findings cannot be generalized to the entire population.
- The most accessible individuals may have unique characteristics, making the sample less representative.

Accidental sampling

Accidental sampling (also called convenience sampling) is based purely on ease of access to participants. Unlike quota sampling, it does not attempt to include people with any specific visible characteristic.

- The researcher simply collects information from whoever is easiest to reach.
- This method is commonly used in market research and by newspaper reporters who need quick responses.

Advantages:

- Very inexpensive and easy to conduct.
- No need for a sampling frame or detailed population information.

Disadvantages:

- Findings cannot be generalized to the entire population.
- Since no characteristic guides selection, some respondents may not have the required information.

Judgemental or purposive sampling

In purposive sampling, the researcher relies on their own judgement to decide who can provide the most useful information for the study.

- Only those individuals who are likely to have the required knowledge and are willing to share it are approached.
- This method is especially valuable when the aim is to:
 - Construct a historical reality,
 - Describe a specific phenomenon, or
 - Explore areas where little prior information exists.

Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is a technique that relies on networks of people to build the sample.

- The researcher begins with a few individuals in a group or organisation and collects information from them.
- These individuals are then asked to identify others in the group.
- The newly identified people are included in the sample, and they in turn suggest more participants.
- This process continues until the required sample size is reached or until a saturation point is achieved (no new information emerges).

Usefulness:

- Snowball sampling is especially helpful when little is known about the group being studied.
- It is often used to study communication patterns, decision-making processes, or knowledge diffusion within a group.

Limitations:

- The choice of the sample depends heavily on the first individuals selected. If they belong to a particular faction or hold strong biases, the study may be biased.
- It becomes difficult to manage when the sample grows large.

'Mixed' sampling designs

Systematic sampling is considered a mixed method because it combines features of both random and non-random sampling.

- First, the sampling frame (list of all elements) is divided into equal segments called intervals.
- From the first interval, one element is chosen using simple random sampling (SRS).
- The same order element is then selected from each subsequent interval.

Example: If the 5th element is chosen in the first interval, the 5th element of every other interval will also be selected. This makes the first choice random, but the subsequent choices depend on the first, so the design is not fully random.

Steps in systematic sampling:

1. Prepare a list of all elements in the population (N).
2. Decide on the sample size (n).
3. Calculate the interval width (k) = Total population $\div$ Sample size.
4. Select one element randomly from the first interval.
5. Select the same order element from each subsequent interval.

6.5 Conclusion

A well-crafted qualitative research design anchors inquiry in the research questions, context, and ethical commitments, guiding decisions about sampling, data collection, and analysis so the study yields credible, meaningful insights. By foregrounding reflexivity, purposive sampling, and iterative data collection, qualitative designs prioritize depth, nuance, and the voices of participants while using strategies such as triangulation, thick description, and member checking to enhance trustworthiness. Practical constraints—access, time, and resources—shape feasible design choices, but methodological rigor is maintained through transparent documentation of decisions and analytic procedures. Ultimately, a thoughtful qualitative design balances flexibility with systematic practice, enabling researchers to produce rich, contextually grounded findings that advance understanding and inform theory, policy, and practice.

6.6 Summary

Qualitative research uses sampling methods that prioritize depth and information richness over statistical generalizability. Non-probability designs are most common, especially purposive sampling where the researcher deliberately selects participants who can best inform the study, and snowball sampling which uses participant networks to reach hidden or hard-to-access groups. Other approaches include quota sampling based on visible characteristics and convenience, and accidental sampling which relies purely on ease of access. While probability-based designs like stratified or multi-stage cluster sampling are sometimes adapted for structure across sites, and systematic sampling is considered 'mixed', they are less central to purely qualitative work.

6.7 Self-Assessment Questions (MCQ):

1. The process of data collection begins after:
a) Hypothesis formulation
b) Research design is prepared
c) Data analysis
d) Report writing
Answer: b
2. Primary data are those which are:
a) Collected from published sources
b) Already processed statistically
c) Collected afresh for the first time
d) Derived from secondary compilations
Answer: c
3. Secondary data differ from primary data because they:
a) Are collected through interviews
b) Require field observation
c) Have already been collected and processed
d) Are always quantitative
Answer: c
4. Observation is most suitable when:
a) Respondents are unwilling or unaware of answers
b) The study requires numerical data
c) The researcher wants opinions only
d) The population is scattered
Answer: a
5. Participant observation involves:
a) Passive watching of activities
b) Researcher joining the group being studied
c) Using questionnaires for data
d) Controlled laboratory experiments
Answer: b
6. The Hawthorne effect refers to:
a) Bias introduced by the researcher's expectations
b) Change in behaviour due to being observed
c) Random error in sampling
d) Incomplete recording of data
Answer: b
7. Non-participant observation means the researcher:
a) Becomes part of the group
b) Observes without involvement
c) Conducts interviews
d) Manipulates variables
Answer: b
8. Controlled observation differs from natural observation because:
a) It uses a stimulus to provoke reaction
b) It is always unstructured
c) It avoids observer bias
d) It is conducted in natural settings
Answer: a
9. An interview is defined as:
a) A written list of questions
b) Any person-to-person interaction with a specific purpose
c) A mailed questionnaire
d) A group discussion without structure
Answer: b
10. Unstructured interviews are characterized by:
a) Predetermined questions and order
b) Complete freedom in content and sequence
c) Fixed response categories

d) Use of closed-ended questions only

Answer: b

6.8 References

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