

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHOD

What is ethnographic research method?

Ethnography is a qualitative **research method** in which a researcher—an **ethnographer**—studies a particular social/cultural group with the aim to better understand it. ...

Ethnography is the systematic study of people and their cultures. It refers both to the process that is used to study people as well as the outcome of this process. The term “ethnography” comes from the Greek words “ethnos” (which means “people” or “nation”) and “grapho” (which means “I write”).

Ethnography is a type of **qualitative research** that gathers observations, interviews and documentary data to produce detailed and comprehensive accounts of different social phenomena. ... It is also aimed at those interested in considering the use of **ethnographic** methods in their own **research** work

Definitions according to several authors

Arnal, Del Rincón and Latorre-

According to Arnal, Del Rincón and Latorre, "ethnographic research is the most popular method to analyze and emphasize the descriptive and interpretative questions of a specific sociocultural environment. It has been widely used in studies of social anthropology and education, so much so that it can be considered one of the most relevant research methods in humanistic-interpretative research."

Rodríguez Gómez-

According to Rodríguez Gómez is the "research method by which you learn the way of life of a specific social unit, which can be a family, a class, a faculty or a school."

The concept of ethnography of Giddens goes deeper into the development of this science, since it affirms that it is "the direct study of people and groups during a certain period, using participant observation or interviews to know their social behavior".

Key Characteristics of Ethnographic Studies

- They frequently involve working with previously unstudied phenomena
- They place an emphasis on exploring social phenomena rather than testing predetermined hypotheses
- They concentrate on describing the culture of a group in a very detailed and complex manner
- The professional must be involved in the group to study to get their acceptance and trust.
- They involve extensive fieldwork where data collection is primarily through interviews, symbols, artefacts, observations, and many other sources

AG_ ETHNOGRPHIC RESEARCH METHOD_ M.ED 214

- Ethnographic procedures tend to overlap and occur simultaneously. The data collected and its explanations work to collect more and more new information.
- The experience and the exploration are the tools to know a social scenario at first hand through the participant observation. From this strategy, information is obtained that generates conceptual categories.

Stages of Collection

- **Informal stage:** Collection of data; insights used to modify data collection and refine research questions
- **Formal stage:** sorting, organizing, and reducing the volume of the data
- **“Thick Description”:** identifying patterns, interpreting causes, consequences, and relationships to understand and provide explanation
- Description should be sufficiently realistic for others to see the implications

ASSUMPTIONS IN ETHNOGRAPHY :

- i) Ethnographic research assumes that the main objective of research depends upon and is affected by the interpretation of community cultural understandings.
- ii) It also assumes that it is very important as well as difficult to identify the target community that requires to be studied by the researcher.
- iii) Ethnography further assumes that that the researcher is an expert and is thorough with the norm and mores of the culture.
- iv) The researcher is also assumed to be an expert in the language spoken in the community.

The underlying assumption in ethnography' s commitment to being there is an assumption that certain types of information are only obtainable through firsthand research. A researcher can obtain a great deal of information about a particular place or group of people without engaging in ethnography.

Ethnographic method

In this type of research you should use inductive and deductive methods.

They are two opposed approaches: the first part of the observed facts to formulate theories, and the second one studies the theses to deduce phenomena.

In short, the inductive method goes from the particular to the general, and the deductive is absolutely the opposite, part of the general to reach the peculiarity of each case.

Among the main steps that should be followed in a study of this type, the following stand out:

- **The participant observation.**

- **Making maps.** Within a group there are specific places to carry out each activity. The professional must do a mapping of the place, indicating the public, private, religious areas, among others.
- **Kinship maps.** It refers to establishing power figures, genealogical trees and elements that help to understand the relationship of individuals in certain groups.
- Carry out informal / formal interviews
- Organize discussion groups
- Collect life stories: autobiographies, personality interviews.
- Document stories. There are communities where myths and legends are fundamental. In addition, they provide data on the culture, beliefs and values of the society analyzed.
- Take photos and, if possible, videos.
- Consult censuses. There are cases in which this data is not available. If possible, the investigation can make its own census.
- Sort and archive the data.

1.11 STEPS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD

- 1) **Selection:** The ethnographic method begins with selection of a culture. The researcher selects the culture/ community or population according to his or her interest.
- 2) **Review of Literature:** Then the researcher reviews the literature pertaining to the culture to get a brief idea and historical sketch of the culture selected for study.
- 3) **Identification of variables:** The researcher then identifies variables which interests him or her as well as the members of the culture and needs to be explored.
- 4) **Entry:** The ethnographer then tries to enter the culture and gain the acceptance of the members of the culture.
- 5) **Cultural Immersion:** Ethnographers live in the culture for months or even years which they have chosen to study. The middle stages of the ethnographic method involve gaining informants, using them to gain yet more informants in a chaining process.
- 6) **Data Collection:** After gaining the confidence of the respondents, the researcher collects information in form of observational transcripts and interview recordings and tapings.
- 7) **Development of theory:** After analysing the data, the researcher formulates theory on the basis of interpretation of the results and reports achieved. However, the ethnographic researcher tries best to avoid theoretical preconceptions and formulates theory on the basis of the perspectives of the members of the culture and from observation. The researcher may seek validation of induced theories by going back to members of the culture for their reaction.

Advantages of Ethnography

1. It helps people know more about other cultures.
2. It helps businesses learn more about their target market.
3. It helps increase scientists' understanding of human behavior.
4. It can easily evolve and discover new things

Limitations of Ethnography:

1. It can be difficult to choose a representative sample.
2. It takes a lot of time.
3. It depends on the ethnographer's relationship with his subjects.
4. It depends on people's openness and honesty.
5. It can lead to cultural bias.
6. Issues of data sample size can also arise with ethnographic research.