

# Ethnographic methods in qualitative research



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Firstly, this essay outlines a definition of both qualitative and ethnography methods. It will then explain how four articles of qualitative research have used the ethnographic method. It will discuss each article then compare and contrast them. Finally, the essay will look at a critical analysis of ethnography by linking the articles to the data written. They are as follows: *Impact of financial incentives on clinical autonomy and internal motivation in primary care: ethnographic study* is article one; *Assessing the promise of user involvement in health service development: ethnographic study* is article two; *Receptionist input to quality and safety in repeat prescribing in UK general practice: ethnographic case study* is article three ; and *Role of ethnographic research for assessing behavior of employees during cleaning and sanitation in food preparation areas* is article four . And finally, it will look at different perspectives on ethnography such as feminist and postmodernist.

Qualitative research collects data that usually diary accounts, open-ended questionnaires, unstructured interviews and unstructured observations (Jamshed, 2004). This kind of research is hard to measure. It includes things such as eye colour or characteristics of something that are obtained by in-depth research through collecting rich data. Therefore, qualitative research can be described, rather than measurable data (quantitative) (Patton and Cochran, 2002).

Ethnography is used to represent the study of realism through knowledge and experiences, and the understanding of human behaviour, and in addition It consists of debates on the emergence of today's society. Max Weber definition embraces the explanation and understanding by using the

interpretive understanding of social action, where interpretivism is subjective meaning to social action. Schutz (1962) suggest it is observation on the experiences of everyday lives (Schutz, 1962, p. 59 cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 16). Ethnography is a study of observation and interviews, and developing an understanding of the society and individuals' behaviour. According to Sarsby (1984) “ every field is different and it is being at the right place at the right time” (Bryman, 2008, p. 401) and building a relationship with participants.

Article one is a study that was done using observations and interviews. The research explores the attitudes and patterns of behaviour of the staff. The researchers had interviews that were both formal and informal conversations with most of the staff. To get the details it was requested that the participants described their job roles. They were asked what their views were on how it affected their jobs with new contracts (MacDonald, 2007). The methods they used were interviews and observations of involvement within the practice. They stated that the data of these methods helped to compare the behaviour of the staff (MacDonald, 2007).

With the interviews, they transcribed and coded to recognise the developing areas. They conversed with the research team frequently to assess expectations and also to categorise ways for more study (MacDonald, 2007). There are limitations to this study, as the researchers conducted insignificant samples and there were no views from the staff within the practices. Besides that, they found that they could not observe the motivation of the staff. This is because it might delay observations of their behaviour and the writing up of their findings (MacDonald, 2007). The research shows the early stages and there is a need for further research (MacDonald, 2007). The outline of the <https://assignbuster.com/ethnographic-methods-in-qualitative-research/>

study where the structural deviations linked with the implementation of the quality and outcomes has shown the ways that doctors and staff relate to each other. In addition, it shows the difficulty in predicting “ the long-term costs” of the changes (MacDonald, 2007).

Article two used participants’ observations and interviews, and collections of documentary evidence. It was led by professionals that determined the areas that needed improvement where participants users could take part (Fudge, 2008). It was hard to identify the effect on the services. Indeed, the study highlighted there was further knowledge of the personal gains for the staff who were involved (Fudge, 2008). By doing this research it gave increased knowledge about strokes and the services available for patients and specialists, and administrative staff (Fudge, 2008). There was not much evidence of direct user involvement of improving quality of services. In addition, there a lack of skilled staff was noticed (Fudge, 2008). The study has limitations because the programme is not directly generalisable to modernisation. Another limitation was that the study was only carried out two years of the three years that was predicted. It only provided part of the study where the user involvement continues to progress (Fudge, 2008). One strength of this research is that, by using the ethnography method, they are able to include participant observations. They can see what the staff actually do instead of what they say (Fudge, 2008).

The objective of the research in article three was to describe, explore and to compare organisational routines for repeat prescriptions in doctors’ surgeries. (Swinglehurst, 2011). The investigation involved mapping the prescribing service by building on a rich description of the organisational

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doctors' surgeries, and also connecting them through combination reports on the repeat prescriptions (Swinglehurst, 2011). The research showed that the receptionists and administrative staff regarded themselves responsible to the patients when repeating prescriptions. It requires a "high degree" of modifying and the decision of receptionists where there is a need for an updated study for patient protection (Swinglehurst, 2011). It was found by researchers that the doctors were oblivious of the input of their receptionists and administrative staff, indeed, within the article there was no information in the policy documents and previous research. However, the staff were occasionally criticised for not getting work done and their indirect ways of safeguarding patients (Swinglehurst, 2011). The research discovered the relationship and pressures of the work they do daily, and to find ways of the issues within the surgeries, and to find a better way for the procedure of repeat prescriptions. They found their research was bigger than any other UK practice. Furthermore, the willingness of the staff being observed could have replicated features of the practice. This is common when observing, as using electronic patient records are combined with pharmacy systems (Swinglehurst, 2011).

Article four is a study that observes and undertakes interviews in the workplace. This is to see how they understand and explore practices of food handling and provide measures for the effectiveness of workplace training. The research shows that the results help to identify areas of improvement, by allowing the progress of training with the right tools. This is where the training is inputted from "primary production through to food handling by the consumer" (Crandell et al., 2015). This study used an ethnography

method to collect the data of employees who did the cleaning and sanitation jobs (Crandell et al., 2015). Many tasks were identified while doing an observation interview procedure (Crandell et al., 2015). The study showed that there was a need for improvement and “ to provide training and materials”, and also to regulate “ whether the SOP and SSOP procedures were being followed as written and if not, why not?” (Crandell et al., 2015). The research found that there is a need for new and modified work flow, and with new tools and training (Crandell et al., 2015). The researchers used interviews with open-ended questions to fill the gaps that observations cannot pick up.

However, there are limitations with open-ended questions that can give diverse information; the answer could be irrelevant to the research, and also the question can be too complex and the interviewee could lose their way in the interview. Another problem is that the person who is being interviewed could be intimidated by the questions. It can be time consuming and the interviews take a long time to transcribe and code. Strengths of open-ended questions interviews include that they can allow for unlimited possible answers and can be answered in detail. Some findings could be gained that the interviewer had not thought of using before.

This essay will now use critical analysis of the ethnography method, and it will discuss the findings within the study. An example of ethnography is the Chicago School of Social Research. Robert Park encouraged students to study and observe the continuous changes of social occurrences of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s. The research was extensive in areas such as “ crime and deviance, race relations and urbanism” (May, 2001, p. 147; Bulmer, <https://assignbuster.com/ethnographic-methods-in-qualitative-research/>

1984a; Kurtz, 1984). It is claimed that the researcher was part of the study in order to get an understanding of changes by participating and recording their experiences (May, 2001, p. 148).

However, it can be argued that individuals act on principles from their environments. This is because they can understand the actions of individuals who occupy and produce cultures, defined as symbolic and learned aspects of human behaviour. Becker (1979) states that there is a need to recognise the difficulties and concepts in order to determine the information within the study (May, 2001, p148). Ethnography leads to an empathetic understanding of a social setting. Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that it should be related to the behaviour of the study. As the researcher is exposed to each social setting it acts as a control on reaching rushed conclusions (May, 2001, pp. 150-151). It is possible that researchers will omit a whole range of data in order to confirm their own pre-established beliefs, leaving the method open to the charge of bias. Furthermore, the observation of small-scale setting leaves it open to the charge that its findings are local, specific and not generalisable. It therefore lacks external validity. This may be challenged by arguing that the observed social setting is “ typical”, by adopting the perspective of realism and examining the generative mechanisms of human interaction (May, 2001, pp. 170 – 171, Porter, 1993), or using a variety of data sources (May, 2001, p. 171).

This essay will now compare the four articles. All articles used an ethnography method with interviews and observations. Article one and two did a small amount of research. It is clear if the study was done over a longer term it would have been more accurate. This is because the researchers

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would have rich and more detailed data. Article two is an example of this statement. It was smaller than the researchers predicted • they only researched for two years instead of the three years they predicted. Article one had no mention of the views from the staff and in article three the doctors were unaware of what administrative staff do within the practice. However, they were often asked what they have done within the day. Article four used open-ended questions to fill in the gaps that observation could not identify. However, it can be argued that the questions can be complex and all the answers are not recorded. The first research only used a small group of researchers; the study does not show the views and the outcomes of observation in the study. There were many consequences and it was difficult to recognise the impact of the services. The research found that there is a lack of technical knowledge. However, other studies have shown it helps with the running of the surgery. The third undertook an investigation by charting the services to build a rich description. It showed it is essential for quality and services on repeat prescriptions. Also, it highlights the work that the receptionists and administrative staff do in the background. Indeed, teamwork is essential for patient safety. Finally, the fourth study identifies areas of improvement and training with the right tools. The study evaluates the cleaning process of working with food. Documents were observed and identified the need for improvements in employee training with the right tools, and training for improvement.

This kind of research has proved to be first-rate and it seems to be an ideal way to study. Even though there are differences among areas of study, it has delivered an in-depth collection of data. It also often determines more



research that needs to be done. There are limitations too; time is an issue for ethnographic studies and there are costs with doing full in-depth research. Another example would be funding – to do an in-depth research will cost money to do. It will be cheaper to do a survey than an investigation over a long time.

However, the main challenge would be acceptance from the people they are studying. They need to be accepted in the area of a study to get the best results. The progress is important to find out the key informants to conduct this kind of research. This is because they would undertake regular reviews and the researchers need to have a good rapport with them. When conducting research participant observation involves looking and listening. The objective is to see individuals in their usual background; the investigator should not interrupt the setting. Blending into the background is usually recommended. However, it can be impossible, for example, when observing in a classroom will be out of place. This can result in an artificial setting (Taylor et al., 1995, p621). However, it can be difficult to observe sometimes a participant observer and interviewers are unclear because researchers usually write up the day's findings on the day while they are still fresh in their minds. However, even doing it on the same day information can be left out due to the fact that the researcher cannot remember everything that has been spoken in the interview.

Feminist approach suggests that issues concerning women are often overlooked. Looking through the feminist lens they believe that it is how we think, such as what is the truth and what is false, (epistemology) and it is the reflection of the researcher's understanding of what is fact (ontology).

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According to Marcus (1992) “realist ethnographers believe in coherence, community, historical determination and structure” (Skeggs, Nd, p. 431). In addition, “there is a reality out there which can be discovered and identified.” (Skeggs, Nd, p. 431). Marcus also suggest that it is “the question of who or what controls and defines the identity of individuals, social groups, nations and cultures (Skeggs, Nd, p. 431).

<http://reinhardmeyers.uni-muenster.de/docs/Postmodernism5.htm>

Postmodernists ethnographers focuses on the pressures of issues of globalisation, and the movement of people, and the everyday relations of the world (Weiss and Wesley, Nd). Therefore, different perspectives see ethnography in a different way, and also do their study in various differences of their research. They argue that the “nature of knowledge has changed to a new radical” theories. The theory of knowledge (epistemology) claims that the truth can be discovered by the use of the correct techniques. In addition, it used to evaluate what is true and what is not, however, postmodernist believe it is possible to rule out the knowledge as being untrue (har & Hol, yr, pp. 904/5).

In conclusion, this essay has looked at how qualitative research and ethnography methods are used in four different articles. It has sought to identify similarities and differences of using ethnography within research. All four used ethnography with observation and interviews. In the studies, they all highlighted that there is a need for further research and training is needed in all areas of these works of research. Each work of research was done in different areas; however, they have similar aspects in what they

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covered. However, they have used the study in different ways. It has shown that, when using the qualitative research and ethnographic method, there are strengths and weaknesses. Before starting the research, these have to be examined before deciding on what method to use. By looking at different views on ethnography, it highlights that they look at it in different perspectives of the work of ethnography method.