

4.3 METHODS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

As the concept of qualitative research is now clear, we will discuss about its methods.

Case study

With the help of this method a case of an individual, group, event, institution or society is studied. It helps in providing an in-depth knowledge of the nature, process or phenomena of a specific case under study. Multiple methods of data collection are often used in case study research (example, interviews, observation, documents, and questionnaires). The final report of the case study provides a rich (that is, vivid and detailed) and holistic (that is, describes the whole and its parts) description of the case and its context. A case study method can be used to study a peculiar event or a person suffering from a rare disorder or disease, for example. It can also be used to study certain institutions. Since case study is in-depth it requires not only time but apt attention as well from the researcher. With the help of case study a lot of information can be gathered. Certain case studies are also longitudinal in nature where the study is carried out over a period of time. Some of the drawbacks of case study include, only few events/ individuals can be studied (the sample is small or constitutes only one participant) and as an outcome of this the results obtained cannot be generalised. Further, it is also time consuming method that requires certain expertise on the part of the researcher.

Ethnography

This approach mainly focuses on the study of a particular community. It is more of a kind of close field observation and basically tries to study a socio cultural phenomena. This method mainly involves study of participants in their naturalistic environment. Observation is widely used in ethnography and it is also less structured in nature. The researcher also plays an active role and more often than not participant observation is used. Various other methods like interview, using documental sources are also employed in ethnography besides observation. One of the main advantages of ethnography is that primary data is collected first hand and thus its validity is higher. Though its disadvantages include, lack of generalisation, inability to study cause and effect relationship, ineffective description of what is observed and some ethical issues (for instance, when deception is used by the researcher) may also crop up while using this method. Further, employing ethnography is also complex, as the researcher may find it difficult to decide what to study and why to study it. Further, when the problem and objectives of the study have been decided, the researcher may find it difficult to get a smooth entry in to that particular community/ group and form a positive rapport with the members of that community group. Exiting the community/ group can again pose a challenge due to deep relationship and bond that the researcher may develop with members of the community/group. Ethnography does demand expertise on part of the researcher and is a time consuming method.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory was proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. This qualitative method focuses on 'discovering' and studies the relationship between an empirical investigation and theory. Thus, the data collection is carried out with an aim to promote development of theory from the data collected. Grounded, theory and

discovery are the three main concepts of grounded theory besides 'constant comparison'. Constant comparison denotes that data analysis in grounded theory is initiated the moment data is collected and a comparison is carried out between the units of data or between the data units and probable explanations. In grounded theory, the data collected is analysed systematically and interpreted in order to generate a report, that can then lead to development of a theory. The steps involved in grounded theory include memoring, sorting and writing.

Focus group

In this method of qualitative research, certain questions or issues are discussed by a group of participants. Focus groups can be structured or unstructured and the group could be heterogeneous or homogeneous in nature. It may involve experts (referred to as Delphi group) who discuss certain important issues (for instance, health educators could discuss about certain health related issues of a certain community) or could be individuals from certain community/ area discussing about certain issue (like women empowerment). The size of the group will depend on the objective(s) of the research (though an ideal size would be twelve and for Delphi groups it could be around four participants) and the participants may or may not know each other. One of the main advantages of this method is that a lot of information is gathered. Though, there are disadvantages as well, as there could be issues related to encouraging the participants to contribute equally and actively. And though this method in a way gives more control to the participants, ethical issue of confidentiality cannot be maintained. Besides, there is also the problem of social desirability on part of the participants that can impact the outcome of the study. The researcher needs to play a role of coordinator in order to facilitate and promote effective discussion and also to avoid any conflict between the participants. He/ she also needs to develop suitable rapport with the participants and provide proper information and instructions. Audio and visual aids can also be used to record the whole discussion that can later be analysed.

Phenomenology

In this method, the behavioural phenomena is explained with the help of conscious experience of events, without using any theory, calculations or assumptions from other disciplines. The concept can be best understood with the help of one of the studies that was done in which patients were asked to describe about caring and non caring nurses in hospitals (Creswell, 1998). The patients explained those nurses to be caring who show their existential presence and not mere their physical presence. The existential presence of caring nurses referred to the positive response showed by them to the patient's request. The relaxation, comfort and security that the client expresses both physically and mentally are an immediate and direct result of the client's stated and unstated needs being heard and responded to by the nurse.

Content Analysis

As the name suggests here, the content is analysed. Krippendorff (2004, page 3) defined content analysis as "a systematic reading of texts and symbolic matter not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective". It can also be termed as technique that involves description of manifested content communication that is carried out in objective, systematic and quantitative manner (Berelson, 1952). Content analysis thus can be used in order to examine the varied issues ranging from social to cultural, values and events and so on from text, news,

advertisements and other such sources. It can also be used in order to study and gain meaningful insights from various texts and documents. It involves a systematic evaluation of the texts and documents where the qualitative data is converted in to quantitative data with the help of coding and thus valid interpretations can be made.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis can be termed as a study that focuses on use of written and spoken language between individuals. Thus, it mainly involves analysis of interactions between individuals, texts, practices that are social in nature, face to face interactions, images, documents and so on. Though, discourse analysis will not only focus on the communication but also the context in which the communication takes place. The main steps in discourse analysis include identification of target, examination of significance and value of the data collected, analyses, summarisation and interpretations of data. Though relevant information can be gained with the help of this method, it lacks reliability and validity. Further, subjectivity may also creep in.

Check Your Progress II

Fill in the Blanks

- 1) Multiple methods of.....are often used in case study research (example, interviews, observation, documents, and questionnaires).
- 2) mainly involves study of participants in their naturalistic environment.
- 3) Grounded theory was proposed by..... in 1967.
- 4) Focus groups can be or unstructured and the group could be heterogeneous or homogeneous in nature.
- 5) In, the behavioural phenomena is explained with the help of conscious experience of events, without using any theory, calculations or assumptions from other disciplines.

4.4 MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

The trend of mixed approach method of research has recently gained much importance among research scholars. It refers to the integration of both quantitative and qualitative method in a single research. It provides a better understanding of viewpoints from the findings of both the research method.

4.4.1 Characteristics of Mixed Methods Research

The characteristics of mixed methods research are mentioned as follows:

- It involves a rigorous procedure of collecting and analysing data through quantitative as well as qualitative research.
- It is an integrated method which involves collection of data by both close-ended and open-ended questions.
- The method helps to understand a process, behavior or phenomena from various perspectives. For example, in order to understand the quality of service of an organization, the researcher needs to take the viewpoints of employees, clients, suppliers, owners and the end users.