
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ethnography in Qualitative Research: A Critical Review of Methods and Applications

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| ABSTRACT

This article provides a critical review of ethnography, as a qualitative research method, with a focus on its utility, flexibility, and methodological challenges. Ethnography allows one to study people and cultures within their natural contexts, documenting the meanings, behaviors, and social discussions that make up human experience. Using insights from fifteen key pieces of research, this article points to the power of ethnography in providing rich, contextualized, and holistic views of social life. The article also mentions reliability and validity as issues deriving from its naturalistic and interpretive quality. Despite reliability and validity issues that may arise, ethnography persists as an important and under-utilized method of studying complex social phenomena and demonstrates a capacity to provide richer insight into culture, identity, and lived experience with observation, participation, and interpretation of social actors.

| KEYWORDS

Ethnography, natural setting, approach, features, reliability and validity perspectives, interview, non-participant

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Ethnography is intrinsically linked to occurrences and processes happening in society. It is an attempt to gain insight into social phenomena by studying and interpreting people in their natural surroundings. Wiersma (1986) defines ethnography as who people are, how they relate to others, and what causes them to act or behave the way they do. Ethnography aims to understand the alternative meanings and social realities that occur in human life. In the last decade or so, ethnography has gained more interest from and recognition by linguists and social scientists who want to research human behavior in social and cultural contexts (Nurani, 2008).

Ethnography also studies the realities of people from "the ground" through an experience of being in the area. Ethnographers depend on fieldwork undertaken in connection with people's everyday lives or experiences, often over a prolonged period of time. The classic ethnographic studies are Rexford Hersey's (1932) year-long exploration of workers on the Pennsylvania Railway System and Germain's (1979) ethnographic study that tracked nurses and doctors in an oncology unit over a twelve-month time period. These two examples highlight ethnographic research and the ability to document and understand the lives, cultural practices, and social interactions of people and groups in situ.

Through this methodological stance, researchers seek to examine and critically analyze not just what people do, but why they take those actions and how they ascribe meaning to their actions. Ethnography, as such, is a means of negotiating how our understanding of human experience is understood through a community's social fabric: how culture, communication, and identities shape understanding in socio-constructionist frames. As a result, ethnography is an important methodology in and field study, particularly when attempting to understand complex social issues that cannot be reduced to a better understanding of measurements, numbers, and/or statistical analyses. Ethnography captures and brings to light behavior, relations, and belief systems that evolve naturally over time in a social context, studying meaning. Ethnography allows researchers to understand a context or phenomenon from the participants' viewpoints.

Generally speaking, ethnography begins like most other research methodologies: with a meaningful or important question informing the eventual research design decisions (Zickar & Carter, 2010). Ethnography is an approach grounded in anthropology and sociology that studies human beings and their cultures (Joerges, 1992). Ethnography requires direct involvement and engagement in the field of study, which is often described as "getting one's hands dirty" (Hobbs and May, 1993). In other words, the researchers are not just distant observers; they are considered a part of the social world that is being studied, learning and interpreting the events in the field as they happen.

Ethnography's greatest strength is that it accounts for deep, contextually embedded understandings of social realities. However, Gille and Riain (2002) raise an important consideration regarding the access to local social contexts being problematic under globalization, where social relations are increasingly shaped by global processes. And with that, ethnographic work becomes more complicated and more important, bridging local and global aspects of human experiences.

Even though many scholars used ethnography as a research method, few provided a systematic, critical review of the method. For example, Nurani (2008) reviewed the ethnographic approaches critically, considering aspects of reliability, validity, and usefulness of the method qualitatively. Gille and Riain (2002) reviewed ethnography globally, examining how social phenomena connect across borders; Katz and Csordas (2003) discuss phenomenological ethnography from a sociology and anthropology point of view to demonstrate how ethnography can be interpreted to divine cultural and social realities. Similarly, Zickar and Carter (2010) conducted a historical review of ethnography, tracing the evolution of ethnography as a method.

In short, and as the above perspective highlights, even with the current favorable developments on ethnography, there are still gaps in understanding how ethnography can systematically be applied in educational and social research, what type of ethnographies are suitable, and the indeterminate reliability and validity. This review borders upon these gaps and examines ethnography as more than a method of fieldwork and as a method of inquiry with a methodological, epistemological, and practical significance.

Objectives of the Study

The principal intention of this review is to specifically examine ethnographic research as a methodology, and to gauge its value, application, and future in qualitative research. More specifically, this paper aims:

1. To examine the purpose and usefulness of ethnographic research as a methodology
2. To analyze the implications and possibilities of ethnographic development

These aims are to underpin a comprehensive and critical analysis of the use of ethnographic research methodologies, drawing on existing studies in the field to evaluate methodological standards and to determine the challenges and opportunities for ethnography as a mode of inquiry.

2. Methodology

The method section of this study describes the procedures and systematic process that the article underwent to conduct a systematic review of ethnographic research methods. MacDonald (2000) states that a systematic review consists of a well-defined series of techniques that are designed to reduce bias and error. Again, this is accomplished using explicit protocols that first specify the criteria to guide the review process, including search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, standards of methodological adequacy, and procedures for estimating the findings in an objective manner. Following the methodological criteria, this review was conducted to ensure transparency, validity, and reliability in each stage of the research process.

In order to direct the inquiry, the process began with explicit research questions focusing on (1) how ethnography is being utilized as a research practice, (2) the main features of ethnography, and (3) the overall reliability and validity of ethnography across contexts. The literature review began with the identification and collection of literature from academic databases and repositories. Key terms for the literature search included: ethnography, ethnographic method, qualitative research, participant observation, non-participant observation, and cultural analysis. The search also covered books, peer-reviewed articles, and digital libraries, in order to achieve a broad representation of relevant literature. Following Evans and Benefield's (2001) approach toward comprehensive searching, both published and unpublished literature were considered whenever possible.

In total, we downloaded and examined twenty (20) articles for relevance to the topic of ethnographic research. Each article was carefully read, examining its methodological approach, theoretical grounding, and contribution to understanding ethnographic practice. Of the twenty articles, we found fifteen (15) to be more relevant to the research aims, so they were saved for a fuller review. Five articles were excluded because they did not sufficiently explore the methodological aspects of ethnography, or they were tangential to the topic of the study. In all the reviews maintained focus on studies of good quality, thematically relevant to the study, and which contributed a direct understanding of ethnography's usefulness, reliability, and validity for research.

The studies included in this review were subject to some implicit criteria. Studies were included if they a) explicitly discussed ethnographic methodology, b) evidenced the use of ethnography in qualitative research, or c) informed conceptual and theoretical understanding of ethnographic practice. Studies were excluded if the authors had little methodological, conceptual, or theoretical rigor in their research or if they were predominantly quantitative or primarily utilized mixed-method approaches, and the ethnography had a minor focus. In addition to reviewing research articles, books, and reference materials related to ethnographic and qualitative research, such as Wiersma (1986), Burns (1994), and Tuckman (1999), to support theoretical understanding and situate the findings.

Once the relevant studies were identified, they were thematically and reflexively analyzed in order to identify patterns (similarities and differences) in how ethnography is defined, enacted, and interpreted across disciplines and cultural contexts. The thematic analysis facilitated the researcher's development of a holistic understanding of ethnographic research's underlying principles, including research in natural settings, participant observation, and the interpretive process of data generation. The analysis process was reflective and iterative, meaning that the articles were continually returned to in order to evaluate topical consistency in interpretation and ensure the researcher's biases were offset.

Four main phases were adhered to during the study: Identification of studies; screening on the basis of their inclusion/exclusion criteria; critical appraisal of the methodological quality; and synthesis of the findings. During the synthesis phase of the study, data from included articles were contrasted and compared to demonstrate common themes regarding ethnographic research strengths, challenges, and opportunities. The phase of synthesis also served to note both theoretical and practical gaps within the existing literature regarding reliability and validity within ethnography as a qualitative inquiry.

In conclusion, the process was both rigorous and credible thanks to a systematic and transparent review methodology. A more complete understanding of ethnography as a research methodology was generated with the combinatory theoretical, empirical, and methodological review. The methods used to search, select, and analyze the data not only reduced potential bias but also enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings that are ultimately shared in this review. Thus, this methodological framework serves as the foundation for the discussion and analysis that follow, ultimately ensuring any conclusions drawn are based on substantial and critically evaluated data.

Table 1: Ethnography Method across Contexts.

Author(s) and Year	Thematic Concentration	Context
1. Roehl (2012)	Disassembling the classroom – an ethnographic approach to the materiality of education	France
2. Pound et al. (2011)	Evaluating meta-ethnography: systematic analysis and synthesis of qualitative research	United Kingdom
3. Marcus (1995)	Ethnography in/of the world system: the Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography	United States of America (USA)
4. Hymes (1974)	Foundations In Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach	USA
5. Wiley and Sons (2013)	Ethnographic Approaches to ESP Research	USA
6. Albbasi (2019)	Ethnographic method: the anthropologist’s strategy in the field Research in cultural anthropology	Saudi Arabia
7. Iribarne (1996)	The Usefulness of an Ethnographic Approach to the International Comparison of Organizations	France
8. Mariampolski (1999)	The Power of Ethnography	USA
9. Zicker and Carter (2010)	Reconnecting With the Spirit of Workplace Ethnography	USA
10. Katz and Csordas (2003)	Phenomenological ethnography in sociology and anthropology	India
11. Becker et al. (2004)	On the Value of Ethnography: Sociology and Public Policy	USA
12. Prasad (1997)	Systems of Meaning: Ethnography as a Methodology for the Study of Information Technologies	Canada
13. Smith and Jones (2017)	Ethnography: challenges and opportunities	United Kingdom
14. Poveda et al. (2021)	Ethnographic "Experimental Collaborations" As Practitioner Methodology	Spain
15. Balan (2007)	ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH	Romania

3. Findings

In this section, we have incorporated five major themes with relevant sub-themes: (1) features of the ethnographic approach; (2) reliability and validity of ethnographic research, including internal validity and external validity; (3) usefulness of ethnography in research; (4) research question in ethnography; and (5) perspectives of the ethnographic method in research.

Features of the Ethnographic Approach

Flexibility, naturalistic investigation, and a regard for the social and cultural context for understanding human behavior are hallmarks of the ethnographic method. Ethnography does not require procedural rigor, nor does it require the researcher to have a premise for inquiry; instead, it unfolds organically, as the researcher completes fieldwork and investigates how individuals understand and interpret their experiences. Two foundational characteristics of ethnography noted by Wilson (1977) are that ideas are generated through observations in natural settings and that the researcher strives to understand how individuals perceive and interpret events in a specific community or culture.

Ethnography is a field-based inquiry, meaning that the investigator examines events that occur naturally in real-life situations rather than in controlled environments. In turn, an ethnographer's capacity to observe lived behavior, interaction, and social patterns without manipulating external variables separates the ethnographer's approach from typical research methods. The obligation of an ethnographer is to examine, interpret, and accurately depict the social world as life occurs. As Tuckman (1999) notes, ethnography is based on observation and interviews rather than testing or surveys because it focuses on creating descriptions of human behavior in context, rather than abstracting it into numbers or categories.

One essential element of ethnography is "making the familiar strange" (Gall et al., 2005). This phrase expresses how the ethnographer seeks to understand participants' world from their perspective (the insider perspective), but also enables enough analytic distance to interpret the world as an outsider. This dual position provides ethnographers the opportunity to illuminate hidden meanings within the everyday and to interrogate assumptions that may otherwise be overlooked.

Another crucial element of ethnography concerns the many contexts of data collection and analysis. In fact, Wiersma (1986) points out that all behaviors and interactions observed by an ethnographer will be examined within the social, cultural, and situational contexts from which the data emerged, and that each context should be factored into the data interpretation. Context mitigates possible misinterpretation of the data by recognizing that the meanings of data are relative to the cultural context, relationships, and the world in which the behaviors and interactions happen. Nurani (2002) supports the contextual importance of ethnographic data collection and that data is always constructed and interpreted with local meanings and circumstances in mind.

The ethnographic approach is also holistic, treating social phenomena as integrated wholes, not as separate events. Wiersma (1986) and Tuckman (1999) offer some insight by stating that with a holistic perspective, the researcher is able to examine issues of culture - beliefs, language, behavior, rituals, and relationships - to see how they connect together and affect one another. This holistic landscape allows the ethnographer to receive a rich comprehension of the patterns and logic of social life.

Another feature of the ethnographic approach is its inductive reasoning. In contrast to quantitative research that establishes hypotheses and tests variables against the data, ethnographic research generally attempts not establish hypotheses prior to gathering data. Wiersma (1986), Gay and Airison (1992), and Tuckman (1999) suggest that ethnographers allow hypotheses and theories to develop as patterns and meanings are determined in the field. This organization maintains investigator bias that comes from preconceived ideas, and it grounds the interpretation in the experience of participants rather than a theoretical expectation.

Another distinguishing feature of ethnography is its descriptive character; the goal of ethnography is to provide rich, thick, detailed descriptions of a social world, representing interactions and meanings of social settings, not statistical generalization. Nurani (2008) describes the ethnographer's task as creating a rich account of the social world, or in other words, to present as closely as possible to the reader how the participants lived their lives. Thick descriptions, as they are sometimes referred to, seek to encapsulate cultural patterns, relationships between people and their environment, while being both empathetic and analytically rigorous.

Ethnographic qualitative research is characterized by attributes of flexibility, naturalistic inquiry, contextualization, holism, and inductive analysis. Ethnography invites researchers to engage deeply with people and their culture in order to discover how people attribute meaning to their social behavior. Ethnography presents an ontological and epistemological stance, rejecting imaginative and rigid hypothesis testing - ethnography welcomes being immersed, descriptive, and reflexive, and finds a more relevant and powerful methodological approach to interpret the complexity of human life lived in the contexts of real life.

Reliability and Validity of Ethnographic Research

Reliability refers to the belief in a product in how good it is. It is a constant belief in something. Similarly, in the ethnographic research, how effectively the methods and contents are arranged, how the data are analyzed, and what tools a researcher uses in the research are mostly important to ensure reliability. Burns (1994) indicates that reliability is based on two assumptions. Firstly, the study can be repeated by using the same procedures as the original research. Secondly, researchers can have a consistent interpretation by using the same procedures. The former is considered to be external reliability, and the latter is internal reliability.

The problem with ethnographic research is that it provides facts and consistency in the data; this is because it happens in the natural setting. The data previously collected and the data recently collected are likely to be different in the same research because the characteristics of research are such that it should meet the participants in society for data. It may not be exactly as before. That's why there is a little bit of doubt on its reliability. To reduce the issue, the methodology should be described as comprehensively as possible.

Another issue with the ethnographic research is that replication of the findings is based on researchers' agreement, so that the findings can be similar or copied. Wiersma (1986) and Burns (1994) claim that it is difficult to replicate the findings because ethnographic research requires an accurate description of the phenomena under study. Despite that, the mindset of one researcher regarding the method and interpretation of the data may vary. One may describe or interpret the data more thinly, and another may interpret it a bit thicker.

Validity refers to what things generally should have in a particular matter. Whether whose things are universal or not. Furthermore, the purpose of validation is to test the quality of the system at each stage and not only at the end, as validation activities include checks on production materials, operating procedure, training of the persons involved, and monitoring of the system during production (Sarvani et al., 2013). If there is insufficiency in the research procedure, then there is a lack of internal validity. In addition, if the result is suitable across groups or does not generalize, then the paper is believed not have external validity. Nevertheless, in another research where the researcher can maximally control external variables, the ethnographic research does not have this facility because the research is carried out in a natural setting (Wiersma 1986), and due to the long time period of observation.

In contrast, the longevity of the observation provides positive effects because a researcher gets time to interpret and analyze the data in-depth with a lot of confidence. In this regard, Burns (1994), it will allow researchers to analyze and compare the data continuously and to ensure the match between scientific categories and reality. Whatever we discuss, it won't be artistic; rather, it reflects naturalness as it happens in the natural setting.

Internal Validity

In addressing the limitation of internal validity, triangulation is used (Wiersma, 1986 and Burns, 1994). In fact, triangulation involves the verification and validation of qualitative analysis. It aids in assessing the sufficiency of the data. The triangulation is conducted in ethnographic research to ensure the factual interpretation of the data from different sources.

External validity

The external validity in research deals with the generalization. However, the result of the ethnographic research relies on the context. So, it is significant to specify the conditions of the setting so that the comparison and

generalization can be made. To strengthen the external validity, "multi-site studies" can be conducted (Wiersma 1986).

Nurani (2008) states

If a circumstance is going to be consistent across a plethora of studies, then the "generalizability" is enlarged, while if there is inconsistency in the phenomenon, then there is a limitation of the generalizations or special plight of generalization. Moreover, he advises that the external validity can also be intensified by embedding distinctions of the research context in the same study, for example if a language maintenance in the Maltese immigrant in Melbourne is being studied, including two or more states where the Maltese immigrants live will enhance the external validity.

Usefulness of Ethnography in Research

We have thematized the data into various topics below, which discuss the usefulness of the ethnographic approach/method in research education.

Ethnographic Research Method

Ethnography is a qualitative research method that aims to provide an in-depth understanding of people with respect to their cultural practices, social interactions, and lived experiences in their social context. In the words of Nurani (2008), the ethnographic research process often follows a process beginning with data collection, then data analysis, and finally concludes with interpretation and representation. All parts of the process require the researcher to be engaged with the social setting and active participants, so the researcher can reconstruct the meanings that shape human behavior.

The data collection process of ethnographic research is an ongoing, participatory, and context-relevant process of gathering data and typically involves the use of observation, interviews, and document analysis as means of collecting rich, descriptive data about people's daily lives. Observation is the key and most critical feature of ethnographic research to observe and transcribe social events and interactions in their natural form. As carefully as possible, the ethnographer should document all relevant information about the social phenomena and record observations that include both verbal and non-verbal indicators to show the nuance of social behavior. According to Woods (1986) and Burns (1999), there are two main types of observation in ethnography: participant observation and non-participant observation.

In participant observation, the researcher actually becomes part of the group or community under study, taking part in the activities of daily life in order to understand the perspectives of the people being studied. This gives the researcher an emic view of the culture and also allows the researcher to experience values, routines, and patterns of communication. Woods (1986) states that in this kind of research, the investigator has the opportunity to "enter the experiences of others within a group or institution" and can ascertain how these influence the participants' thinking about those experiences. This method, however, serves to balance personal involvement with a degree of objectivity. If the researcher becomes too involved, then they can appreciate personal biases when they begin to take on the vague perspective of the participants and become prisoners to their assumptions about experience and space.

In contrast, non-participant observation entails observing and documenting behavior without taking part in the activities of the group. Burns (1999) indicates this can be conducted through video recordings, cameras, or direct observation while not being physically involved or engaged. This is useful as it is non-time-consuming and provides a neutral standpoint, but Woods (1986) states the limitation of this type of data collection is the inability to gain a profound understanding of the meaning, emotions, and feelings related to the behavior of participants. The observer may, through the lack of shared engagement, limit the richness of data obtained from non-participant observations.

In addition to observations, interviewing is the other main method of data collection in ethnography. Wiersma (1986) proposed that interviews could take place informally, as in a casual chat, or formally, using questions that have been structured. In interviews, the researcher attempts to access the participants' personal experiences, beliefs, and interpretations of events. As a rule, ethnographic interviews tend to be open-ended and conversational in style, increasing the opportunity for participants to articulate their own thoughts freely and naturally. The pairing of the observations with interviews offers the ethnographer the opportunity to cross-check interpretations, ensuring the findings reflect the participants' accounts or realities rather than the researcher's assumptions.

After collecting data, we then enter the analytic phase. Ethnographic analysis can be described as a continual, iterative process that unfolds rather than a singular event at the end of fieldwork. The researcher organizes, categorizes, and analyzes the data for patterns, themes, and meanings that emerge as they relate to the social phenomenon being studied. Burns (1999) emphasizes that the researcher must keep extensive field notes, focusing not only on objective (i.e., literal) description but also on his or her own subjective reflections, referring to her or his presence, assumptions, and emotions that are relevant to the research process. The researcher's reflective practice is referred to as reflexivity. In this iterative, integrative process of combining sociocultural factors and reflexivity, ethnography allows a grounded framework for researchers to consider judgments and interpretations.

In addition, ethnographic analysis often includes thick description—a term that gained popularity through Clifford Geertz—as a way to include and convey the cultural context, significance, and even the emotions inherent in human action. The central aim of ethnographic analysis is not to generalize from the data statistically, but to seek to interpret social behavior and descriptions to generate a thick, holistic picture of the participants' world.

To conclude, the ethnographic research method is a comprehensive, interpretive, and adaptable research methodology that allows researchers to become immersed in the daily lives of other participants. Ethnographic research methodology takes into consideration participant observation, engagement, interview data collection, immersive learning experience, and reflective analysis, and immerses the researcher in the fullness of human experience in context. By its very nature, it takes time, patience, and sensitivity, but no research method is likely to yield more useful insights into how individuals and groups make meaning in their social worlds.

Research Question in Ethnography

In conducting ethnographic research, the process of developing the research question is different from that in experimental or quantitative studies. Nurani (2008) notes that research questions in ethnography do not tend to be specific, nor do they normally represent a cause-and-effect relationship such as “the effect of X on Y.” Instead, they are open-ended and exploratory, inviting a study of human interactions and meanings in a cultural or social context. For example, rather than asking “What is the effect of teacher feedback on student motivation?” A study might ask “How do teachers and students negotiate meaning when they give and receive feedback?” This open-ended question allows the researcher to study the phenomenon from an open and explorative stance rather than pre-determined assumptions or hypotheses.

According to Wiersma (1986), this lack of specificity reflects the unanticipated and flexible nature of ethnographic research. Because ethnography occurs in natural settings, the researcher cannot totally predict what will happen during fieldwork. Social life is multifaceted, fluid, and dynamic in response to social context; hence, the responsibility of the researcher is to be prepared and open to revealing meaning as opposed to testing pre-conceived variables. If the researcher poses questions too specifically, there is a risk of confining the possibilities of interpreting their data and inadvertently biasing their research, moving toward anticipated findings rather than meanings revealed in the social context.

Also, ethnographic research questions are more concerned with process than with their outcome. In other words, the inquiry process seeks to understand how people act, interact, and make meaning of their social lived experiences as opposed to why or to what extent some variable influenced others. This orientation creates the

space for ethnographers to reveal social processes, cultural patterns, and lived experiences when they grapple with a community's way of life. It also helps in documenting subtle cultural norms and a symbolic framework of meanings, which are often overlooked with quantitative methods.

In this way, questions for ethnographic research are considered guiding directional rather than fixed hypotheses. Questions develop and change as new insights, interactions, and patterns evolve from the field. This iterative and reflexive process permits the researcher to deepen their understanding of the social world they are studying, so that the final interpretation represents the "real" voices and experiences of the participants.

Perspective of Ethnographic Method in Research

Etic method originated from anthropology, where it has for long been used to investigate truths about people situated within their social and cultural environments. It is one of the most robust qualitative research methods because it offers the researcher an opportunity to entrust their ideal and embed themselves in the life of the participant in order to understand their ideas, actions, and relationships. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) addressed ethnography as a set of flexible methods used to obtain and analyze data about people's daily lives in the context of a long-term commitment in the field - observing the event, listening to the conversations, asking questions, and collecting any and every type of data relevant to the issue being researched. It extracts the people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions- in fact, collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: p. 4)

Experiencing ethnography as a method is actually not a strict length to rigorously comply with for research to be termed ethnography, as much as it is a flexible, adaptable process. It provides a broad methodological framework, but not a strict formula for collecting or analyzing data (Abbai, 2019). A benefit of not having the tools strictly defined is that researchers can adapt, truthfully, in-the-moment, to the continually shifting, responsive situations that are inherent in a social interaction. The ethnographer usually engages with the group/community for longer lengths of time than with other qualitative designs because ethnography proceeds to a more thick, holistic understanding of the group's social reality.

As Wolcott (1999) outlines, ethnography will consist of three procedures:

1. A detailed description of the culture-sharing group being studied.
2. The data being analyzed for thematic, meaning, and perspective on the group's behavior and beliefs.
3. Interpretations of the data are made for a more broadly generalized implication about human social life and cultural practices.

Ethnography is a methodologically more aligned with qualitative research designs that privilege presenting the data in rich stories rather than numerical statistics. Ethnography provides a detailed account of lived experience through stories, considerations, and reflection. In favor of the principles of ethnography of naturalistic inquiry, ethnography takes place in real-world settings situated in social practices and cultural interaction, allowing for an authentic social interaction and cultural meanings that may not emerge from a more experimental or survey-based social inquiry.

Although it offers powerful insight, ethnography has its own challenges — including reliability and validity, since social behavior and social context may change over time. Nevertheless, researchers can boost the credibility of findings by graduate trigger triangulation or conducting studies in multiple sites. In essence, the 'ethnographic' method seeks to 'make the familiar strange'; enabling the researcher to see everyday practices from an insider perspective, and from an outsider perspective. It is ultimately this triangulation of observation, participation, and reflection that makes ethnography such a powerful approach to understanding the complexities of relationships and meaning to understand social life.

4. Discussion

The results presented in this review illustrate that ethnography remains a significant and applicable methodology in qualitative inquiry, especially for examining human behavior, social relations, and cultural meanings in situ. Ethnographies allow researchers to embed themselves into the lives of study participants to observe how they communicate with one another, interact, and make meaning in their sociocultural contexts. Across the studies reviewed, ethnography continued to be a flexible, interpretive, and contextual approach that emphasized participants' perspectives and experience rather than being confined by pre-determined variables or strict designs.

One of the greatest strengths of ethnographic research is the reliance on naturalistic observation and situational understanding. As was noted in this review, ethnographic inquiry occurs in natural contexts where events occur, and data is generated through sustained fieldwork and observations (Wiersma, 1986; Tuckman, 1999). This fieldwork allows researchers to get a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of social life that other methods often do not capture. In other words, research allows researchers to "make the familiar strange" (Gall et al., 2005) through critical observation of the ordinary and to provide meanings that may be invisible to outsiders.

Additionally, the review highlighted that the descriptive and interpretive features of ethnography allow researchers to provide "thick descriptions" — rich, detailed narratives that provide connections between human behaviors and the broader cultural and social systems in which they occur (Nurani, 2008). These descriptions are the basis for understanding how individuals enact and interpret their worlds. Ethnographic researchers create an endless loop of reflection, interpretation, and reinterpretation through their use of observation and interviews, which results in a complete understanding of the topic.

On the other hand, the review indicated that methodological questions about reliability and validity come up on a continuous basis. Ethnography studies take place in each of the natural and uncontrolled environments, thus data collection can be susceptible to various situational and contextual factors and can also change over time (Burns, 1994). This means you can never find two that are the same, which raises a question regarding the external reliability of ethnography. In addition, as noted, ethnography studies depend on the researcher's interpretation, which may be subjectively biased and reflect on internal validity. To overcome certain validity issues, ethnographers employ triangulation, which is the use of multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives to validate the interpretation and trustworthiness of findings (Wiersma, 1986; Burns, 1994).

Another key finding pertains to the role of participant and non-participant observation. These studies come together to show that ethnography works best where the researcher can find an equilibrium between involvement and estrangement. Participant observation allows researchers to gain access to insiders' perspectives and sense-making based on their experience, while non-participant observation allows the researcher to maintain an objective stance and distance needed for sound analysis. The combination of both provides a suitable balance of implications that brings greater richness and greater accuracy to the analysis.

Although the limitations of ethnography are present, they do not undermine the contribution of ethnography to qualitative inquiry. This review shows ethnography clearly captures social processes, relationships, and meanings that quantitative analysis will always miss (or deem invisible). In our globalized world, ethnography also offers a means to see how local practices connect to broader social systems by demonstrating the interplay between individual experiences and collective culture (Gille & Riain, 2002). In the end, ethnography offers not only an approach that is methodologically open but also one that recognizes the complexity and authenticity of understanding the human experience.

5. Conclusion

This review finds that ethnography is an essential qualitative research method. Ethnography is distinctive because it can effectively document and examine the lived experiences of individuals in their natural social contexts. Ethnography is flexible and interpretive, and it can capture the meanings that underpin human behavior and social

practices. Ethnography also allows researchers to examine a person's human experience holistically while considering cultural beliefs, values, and practices as interrelated elements of social life.

Nevertheless, ethnography has methodological limitations. Ethnography is contextualized and takes place in uncontrolled natural settings, so it is not as reliable and generalizable as a quantitative approach. The researcher's interpretive involvement may challenge internal validity, and quantitative social research is limited by its contextual depth; however, denying ethnography these methodological limitations, as Burns (1994) and Wiersma (1986) deliberated, does not detract from the quality of the research itself, as it considers important aspects of ethnographic research, such as transparency, triangulation, and reflexivity.

Consideration of ethnography's narrative and interpretive perspective lends itself particularly well to qualitative research in education, sociology, linguistics, and anthropology. Ethnography is appropriate for researchers who want to examine how individuals make meaning in their social worlds and how culture and communication mediate identity and behavior. In contrast to purely experimental or statistical studies, ethnographic research produces findings that are rich and authentic and grounded in the realities of the lives of participants.

To sum up, while ethnography does not provide unqualified validity or generalizability, it still provides depth, authenticity, and contextual validity. Its commitment to the study of life as it is lived enables ethnography to be one of the most powerful tools researchers can use to examine the social world in all its complexity.

Implication of the Study

The ramifications of this review reach both theoretical and practical dimensions of qualitative research. Theoretically, it solidifies ethnography's place as a primary schema for conceptualizing culture, communication, and identity in naturalistic contexts. Ethnography asks scholars to consider social life not as a fixed set of variables but as a fluid, evolving process of human interpretation and interaction. This theoretical framework matters a lot in education, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies, where meaning and context are paramount.

Practically, this review suggests ethnographic methodology is quite well-suited to current research spaces that require deep engagement with participants and context sensitivity. For example, those conducting research taking on an ethnographic approach need to consider prolonged engagement, keeping notes of what is observed, and consideration for reflexivity in recognizing the implications of themselves on the current research. Furthermore, triangulation, member checking, or multisite research are important considerations for increasing credibility and external validity.

For new researchers, this review indicates that ethnography provides not only a methodology but a mentality—an interpretive view toward understanding people in their social worlds. Ethnography's versatility means it can be employed across a range of disciplines and social contexts, particularly appropriate for studies of multicultural education settings and linguistics.

In conclusion, the article argues that the future of ethnographic research depends on its capacity to embrace a turbid, changing social reality, including globalization and digital communication. By engaging both existing and traditional ethnographical principles in new contexts and sites, such as digital contexts and transnational identities, ethnography will continue to endure as a tool for researchers to understand complexity.

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