

Understanding the essence of phenomenology and ethnography as the models of qualitative research on the basis of natural context: A literacy study

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Abstract

This qualitative research is grounded by the phenomenon found on the field developed by using deep and natural understanding while involving the whole parts of the context and the collected data from the participant. Phenomenology and ethnography are realized as the models of qualitative study. These are designed based on the context of the phenomena experienced directly by the subject of the research.

Keywords: Qualitative research, phenomenology, ethnography, subject of research

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is conducted to holistically convey the phenomena (phenomenology) of what the subject has experienced such as attitude, perception, motivation, and action; using the words and language description on a naturally special context; and by executing many kinds of natural methods. In other words, this kind of research is sourced from the objective paradigm of phenomenology determined by the formulation of certain situation as reflected by an individual or certain social group that is relevant to research objective.

Qualitative research has the characteristics as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1985: 33-34) and Spradley (1980), that is (1) natural background. It is due to the fact that a qualitative researcher conducts the study in a natural background and context, because the natural ontology demands facts as the integrity that should be understood inseparably to its context; (2) man as the research instrument. It means that a researcher is the main instrument of data collection (participation observation); (3) qualitative method, kinds of research using observation and interview; (4) Inductive data analysis. The research that moves from the general to the specific ones with the condition that inductive research is able to find out and reason the plural facts found out from the data and it more builds an explicit relationship between the researcher and respondents; (5) Grounded theory, or bottom-up theory; (6) descriptive,

the collected data are in the form of words and figures; (7) emphasizing more on the process than the result of the research; (8) there is a limitation determined by research focus; (9) there is the criteria of data validity; (10) temporary research design; (11) the research findings is collectively negotiated and agreed. Based on the characteristics, qualitative research is rooted by phenomenology. Whereas, culture, symbolic theory, and ethnomethodology could become additional basis of ground theories of qualitative research.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that qualitative research is based on the phenomena figured out from the field of research, that an understanding toward those phenomena is then developed with a deep and natural reflection while engaging in the whole context and the collected data from the participant. Figuring out the theory, the writer, with a simple literacy approach, raises up to the surface the nature of two models of qualitative research, namely phenomenology and ethnography. These two models have their own properties in term of field application, so that they are said to be different research types and methods.

Phenomenology

Qualitative research is essentially on the basis of

phenomenology. It is that a researcher observes directly and naturally the phenomena within the field. It is in the case of the focus of research makes phenomenology differs with other kinds qualitative studies. It deals with whether the research focuses on a culture, a phenomenon, or a case. The phenomenology research was firstly proposed by a German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). He confirms that phenomenology (a) is related to one's subjective and phenomenological experience and (b) is a study about consciousness of one's core perspective. This is to say that phenomenology research refers to one's thinking concept that stresses out man's experiences and the way of their interpretation.

Viewed from the nature of human experience, everyone sees the reality in different way, in different context and time, as well. For instance, one's feeling on this morning would be different with his feeling on the next ones. If we conduct an interview to someone on that day, the result of it would be different on another one. Thus, the distance, time, relationship, and the dwelling influence everyone's experience. Therefore, the methods in phenomenology accentuate the extent to which someone elucidates his experience. The term phenomenology is used as common opinion to refer to subjective experience of many types and kinds of subjects. Specifically, this term refers to an inter discipline research of one's perspective about consciousness.

There are some main phenomenology characteristics that should be served by a phenomenologist in conducting his research (Moleong, 2007: 8) that is, (a) referring to a fact in terms of clear consciousness of a thing or a case, (b) understanding an event and its interrelationship to people who experience it, and (c) starting in a silence. Phenomenologists assume that consciousness is not accidentally constructed by other conditions out of itself. Thus, in daily experiences, a person has no control to the structural consciousness. An analysis of a phenomenology study is an effort to convey and extricate the characteristics of its world, such as the organized rules and which rules should be served to interrelate certain objects and events. These rules are actually not independent rules but are shaped by the values of consciousness that we experience as a separated thing from us.

Phenomenologist strive for comprehending the meaning of an event and its relationship toward the people who are involving in certain situations. A phenomenological inquiry starts in a silence. Silence is an act to seize the meaning of something to be researched. In this case, the subjectivity of people's behavior is one to be emphasized. It means that *researchers try to sneak into the conceptual world of the research subject in such a way that they can figure out what and how such understanding be developed around their daily events.* Phenomenologists also believe that

through interacting with others, human possess many ways to interpret an experience. Fact, then, is shaped by our understanding of experiences.

As previously stated, the first step of phenomenology is to study the phenomena being developed. Further, the researcher develops the research question by considering much on two conditions (a) whether the important unsure comes from experiences or feelings and (b) whether the existence of experiences determines the essence of mankind. The data is collected by using direct interview, video directed observation, and field note. The collected data, gather from the result of deep interview between the researcher and the informant (research subject). To exemplify, on who conducts a phenomenology study in a school may see on teaching learning process in that school, what kind, how, and why such process is run either by teachers, students, and the like.

Hence, phenomenology research is a study observing phenomena that occur in human's life. Researchers try to come inside the conceptual world of the research subject in such a way that they can understand how they develop the concept around their daily life.

Ethnography

Smith (1989) explains that the term *ethnos* in Greek means people, race, or culture of a group of people (Denzin, 1994: 25). *Ethnographic* is a combination of two roots *ethno* and *graphic* meaning a discipline that studies a culture of a certain group of people. Ethnography research is originally from anthropological research that observes a culture. It was firstly conducted around 20th century by its first researcher like Taylor, Frazer, Morgan.

For a nonanthropological researcher, ethnography may be a strange term. It is simply a study of certain ethnics commonly written by an anthropologist. Such writing is not merely as a journalist writes a feature, but an ethnographer's writing that needs time and needs a certain way of research in a real field. In anthropology, ethnographic writing has its unique style so that it is development as an accepted research method.

There are many well-known ethnographic writing, like Malinowski's writing of Trobriand, Evans-Pritchard's of Nuer, Geertz's of Javanese Islam, or Spradley's writing that is more contemporary. At first, this method was widely used by European and American who went to many countries in Asia and Africa so that it tends to discern on ethnography as colonials' writing of their subjugated people. It was all about their surprise of traditional societies they found.

Nevertheless, ethnography has been developing rapidly in the worldwide to be a research method under the field of anthropology. The main characteristic of this method lays on the nature of its deep, qualitative, and holistic-integrative analysis. The main technique of data

collection in ethnography is observation which is held in a quite long time and opened and depth interview. As the consequence, an ethnographer does not only conduct a conceptual study but also truly understands way of thinking, attitudes, and the culture of a society. It is not sufficient for an ethnographer to meet his research subject once or twice as what commonly views on quantitative studies that only use a list of questions as the instrument. An ethnographer is a researcher that needs to behave and involve in the society he is going to research.

As a method, ethnography has been gradually developed. First conducted by the missionaries and colonialists, ethnography research was well-introduced by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. It was around 1915. At this time, ethnography had no more view on the researched society as those who are underdeveloped. In this phase, people were seen as those who lived in the same nature as those who were 'treated' as being more modern. The process of engaging in the reality of the society being researched is the important development of ethnography at this time.

Subsequently, ethnography became more advanced and modern when anthropologists argued about the real modern society, so that the role of an ethnographer is to delve into people's thought. Therefore, ethnography did not delimitate its study only on the traditional environments as in Asia and Africa. It then disclosed to other aspects, like life style. Ethnography at this time gave no differences between modern and traditional society; only the fact that they owned distinctive cultures.

This research focuses only on the cultural development in a society. Furthermore, the research kept emerging. Racliffe-Brown and Malinowski developed ethnography researcher that accentuated more on the present way of life of a certain society. Ethnography also described and constructed the structure of socio-cultural of a society and compared it to understand about basic principles of society. In modern ethnography, social and cultural form of society was constructed and described by a researcher's analysis and reasoning. The described structure of the culture was a social and cultural structure of a society according to the researcher's interpretation.

Furthermore, in 1960s, ethnography research developed to what people knew as new ethnography. This was developed by Spradley. It was more to find out how people organized their culture in their mind and how they used it for their living. So, the social and cultural construction on the view of this new ethnography is the organization existing in the mind of members of society and the role of a researcher is to dig it out from their mind. The culture of a society consists of anything the members should know and believe in order that they can behave in appropriate way as accepted and legalized by the society. Culture is not only material phenomena such as properties, man, attitude, or emotion. Ethnography, then, has a role to figure out and describe the

organization of thought. Thus, learning a language becomes the main road to understand a culture.

Accordingly, ethnographic research is a work of describing a culture of a society. It is to understand life sight from the view of native members of society. It is as proposed by Malinowsky (Spradley, 1997: 3) that the objective of ethnography is to appreciate the members of society's view, the relationships of such view to their life to negotiate their understanding with the world they are living in. *In other words, ethnography is to study about society as well as to study from the society.*

Culture as the object of ethnographic research is a behavioral pattern that relates to a particular group of society as their custom or way of living. It conveys a meaning that behavioral pattern, tradition, and way of thinking of a group of people can be defined through the process of interpretation and be described from many perspectives. It means that an understanding of culture would be different between people in different cultures. For instance, the degree of people's willingness to help somebody will get different meaning due to different cultures they possess. Hence, ethnographic research concerns on studying behavior and more on investigating the meaning laid behind that perceived behavior.

Culture is seen as a system of meaningful symbol. A theory, then, tries to explain man's behavior in its relation to symbolic interactionism meaning. Blummer (Spradley, 1997: 7) offers three main premises that bases the theory of ethnography, namely (a) Man does anything on the basis of meaning interpretation of things around them. For example, people interact to others for certain purposes and meaning of that interaction for themselves; while, location, time, behavior, and properties are the symbols which own their specific meaning; (b) The meaning of anything comes from social interaction of one to another; and (c) The meaning is modified through a process of interpretation that people use to engage in anything they confront.

Whereas Spradley tenders the solution of culture from three main sources (a) from what people say, (b) from what people act, and (c) from the artefacts people use (washing hands before eating, no swimming after meal, etc.). This cultural knowledge can be transferred either explicitly or implicitly (Spradley, 1997: 10). The meaning of a culture is explicitly transferred by directly interpreting it in the interaction with the people in a culture through their language. While it is implicitly transferred by a researcher's observation, interview, and repeated note taking.

There are many things an ethnographic researcher should attend to (a) language used in collecting the data from the informants because the first step of ethnographic research is to study about the language of a society that is going to research; (b) the criteria of informants that should fit to the research focus; (c) research setting of place; and (d) the development of research sequence. Based on the development of

research sequence, Spradley affirms the steps of research, that is identifying the culture that is going to research, identifying possible things emerging in that culture, theoretical review, field study, organizing the culture, gathering the informants, collecting the data, analyzing the data, describing the culture, and developing the theory.

Spradley also proposes two basic concepts of cultural approach, emic and etic. Emic is a research that elaborates the behavior of a culture as an insider, while etic is a research that elaborates concepts and ideas as an outsider of a culture and compares the similarities and differences of the cultures. The data collection techniques can be in the form of interview and participation-observation.

The objective of conducting ethnographic research is to understand the cluster of a cultural society by which the information about cultural interrelationship theories, the grounded theory, the complicated connection of society, and attitudes could be presented. The next glorious objective is to serve man. There is another assumption that ethnographers always cheat to their research object without giving their contribution to the society from their research. In other words, after gathering the data from members of a society, an ethnographic research could merely leave them behind. To avoid such opinion, an ethnographic research should be able to synchronize those two things for his research has a positive contribution to his informants. It can be concluded that an ethnographic research is a study about and from a cultural society while understanding the essence of meaning articulated by such culture. This can be found from the study of language attitudes, and the like.

Closing

Phenomenology and ethnography are the studies that essentially ground their ideas from the phenomena in the field. The difference between them is found in term of their own focus of research. Phenomenology focuses more on the phenomena; while ethnography is more on the culture in a society. Phenomenology accentuates on the phenomena and the symptoms perceived explicitly in the real-life context of a society. Ethnography on the other side concerns on the culture of a group of people in a society.

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