

Participant Observation as Research Methodology: Assessing the Defects of Qualitative Observational Data as Research Tools

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Abstract: This paper surveys the defects of qualitative observational research methods, with special reference to participant observation. It aims at showing that participant observation is inherently limited in some regards and that the advantages of this methodology though numerous; which beholds on the researchers that it should not be discountenanced as a defect form of scientific inquiry. Observational research methodology is best described as a research method by which the researcher encounters his or her sample population through a passive position, precisely through observing the interactions of the sample while remaining apart from the behavioural decisions made by the individual or the group. Nevertheless, the observer is purposefully monitoring the sample population and is seeking to identify the frequency of specific behaviours or outcomes. It is hereby established that a researcher who is engaged in observational methodologies cannot simultaneously realize an unbiased observational outcome while also using his or her own subjective powers of observation to watch the desired behaviours and interactions to take. This thus resolved the long time “unresolved identity crisis” within the literature in qualitative analysis.

Keywords: qualitative participant observation, behavioral decision, research methodology, subjective powers of observation

1. INTRODUCTION

Social science research is a systematic inquiry of finding solutions to problem by which its exact prediction is difficult to fathom as it is not a science. According to Young as cited in Omoitobor (2020), social research is a scientific understanding by means of logical methods, aims to discover new facts or old facts and to analyze their sequences, interrelationships, casual explanations and natural laws which govern them.

Research methodology is the foremost consideration when creating study. The data collection process needs to be identified and described in a way that justifies the results Kothari and Garg(2020): This should not suggest that the methods or processes will intentionally yield a desirable set of data but rather, the methods have been selected in a way that ensure the resulting data sets are inherently authentic Ijeoma et al (2018). Research methodology construction is challenging in two distinctive ways and different ways, as it is critical to not only identify the means through which data shall be acquired but to establish an inquiry process that is without bias with acceptable frame of reason.

Participant observation has been viewed by various authors as a qualitative research methodology in which the researcher studies a group not only through observation, but also by fully indulging in its activities. In this qualitative observation methodology, the researcher immerses himself in the daily activities of the participants

in order to record the behaviour in as many scenarios as possible. The researchers can observe the daily life of the people: their exchanges with each other, their formal and informal conversations, habits, etc. It offers researchers the opportunity to collect honest and intimate information about people. However, this information is filtered through the perspective of researchers who, by using this method, run the risk of losing their objectivity and altering with their presence the behaviour of the groups they study.

The qualitative research methods are usually called into question in terms of their overall legitimacy due to the need for serious research interpretation of findings. Quantitative research methodologies are themselves challenging in terms of reduction of participant or researcher's bias, nevertheless qualitative research frequently draws upon data collected directly from psycho-social interactions with the target population. In this aspect, this qualitative data can take many forms, such as interviews or retrospective analysis of certain environmental conditions, but ultimately all forms of qualitative research shares the common point that these research processes are in some way subjective in nature. This subjectivity can manifest not in the sample population's participation and information gathered therein, but also can be embedded within the researcher's interpretation of the data. It follows that both qualitative and quantitative data analysis may be subjected to potential influences caused by researcher bias which supported many views in some quarters that no research enterprise is totally free from this bias. In essence, this paper undertook the participant observation as research methodology: with special reference to assessing the authenticity of participant Observational data as research tool

1.1 Literature Review

Allen (2017) sees participant observation as the process of entering a group of people with a shared identity to gain an understanding of their community. This process includes by gaining knowledge and a deeper understanding of the actors, interaction, scene, and events that take place at the research site. Through the experience of spending time with a group of people and closely monitoring their actions, speech patterns, and norms, researchers can gain an understanding of the group.

Kothari and Garg (2020), noted that Observation method is the most commonly used method especially in studies relating to behavioural sciences. Under participant observation, the information is sought by way of the researcher's own direct participation and observation in the activities of the group being studied.

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993), see participant observation as a method of collecting data that enables the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing a "written photograph" of the situation under study. Demunck and Sobo (1998) describe participant observation as the primary method used by anthropologists doing fieldwork. Fieldwork involves "active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps most importantly, patience" DeWalt and Dewalt, (2002) viewed the context of participant observation as a means for development of sampling guidelines and interview guides. Similarly, Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) see participant observation as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting".

Bernard (1994) asserts that participant observation requires a certain amount of deception and impression management. He suggested that most anthropologists need to maintain a sense of objectivity through distance. He sees participant observation as the process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally; and thereby removing oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on and be able to write about it. Nweke and Nwoba as described in Okolie and Ajene (2019), asserted that participant observation has been the hallmark of social science studies and it refers to the participation of the researcher on the activities of any group relevant to the nature and situation of the study to elicit information from the respondents. It serves as a method of gathering data; approach for inquiry and to a great extent, an essential element of all qualitative research. Participant observation seems to be the easiest approach as opposed to other methods in the world to use because it is found everywhere and we can all already do it. From the moment we are born, we are in various ways, observing the world around us and trying to participate in it. Children, acquiring language for the first time, have always listen and watch what, when

and how their parents are doing what they are doing. They observe greetings and have greetings directed at them, and attempt to participate by, at first, looking and, later, waving and making sounds that approximate, and eventually are, hellos and goodbyes. It is, of course, not just children who use this method to acquire skills it applies to air traffic controllers who spend a great deal of time observing air traffic control as they are gradually entered into the practical demands of directing planes and are fully participating air traffic controllers. International migrants, finding themselves in foreign countries, have the massive task of observing a multitude of activities and exactly how they are done in order to participate in new cultures (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998). Amongst other background knowledge they have to acquire the locals' taken-for-granted ways of getting everyday things done, such as greetings, ordering coffee, queuing for buses, making small talk, paying their taxes and so on.

In undertaking participant observation, the researcher begins to collect what things are relevant to study for the situation we are participating in. He/she can explain to other researchers why those things are significant to the group or practice that he/she has been participating in. Most important of all, the researcher can provide descriptions of how those ordinary and extraordinary things are accomplished by the people he/she is studying; with the equipment they have for living, situated in the varied environments that they inhabit (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998). In total, participant observation has capability in describing the local processes, practices, norms, values, reasoning, and technologies and so on that constitutes social and cultural life worlds. As a result we therefore view participant observation as a method for engaging with familiar and unfamiliar environments with respect to a trajectory from one perspective to another which is most conspicuous in unfamiliar environments, such as a place, community, workplace or institution that you have not been part of before.

This paper therefore, aims at Studies that relate variables such as position, power, leadership and behaviours associated with such phenomena, the relationships occurring therefore with subordinates and members of the public who are the ultimate clients to the establishment which can better be studied by participant observation rather than interviews, questionnaires administration and focus group discussion. We synchronize our thoughts in line with ideas in Mustapha (2018) which incorporate such variables such as occupational and associational groupings, cliques, gangs, secret cults and informal groups within formal organizations and how they function and influence organizational goals either positively or otherwise through participant observations .

The remaining part in the paper is arranged as follows: In section2, we describe the qualitative analysis of participant observation research methodology. Biases of participant observation methodology are highlighted. It is pointed out that in a situation where researcher's bias is present, there is the possibility that the researcher will consciously or unconsciously influence the results of the data gathering process, and this will undoubtedly render the data sets that are used in the compilation of the study results as a reflection of this bias in the outcome. Section 3 gives the process of conducting observation, deciding what and where to observe, gaining entry and establishing rapport with a host community. In section4 analysis of participant observation method in practice is detailed. We conclude the paper in section 5 based on the strength of our findings.

2. Participant Observation Research Methodology

Qualitative analysis takes many forms, one of these is found in participant observation methods. This type of methodology is described by O' Connor (2000) as "the process of immersing yourself in the study of people you are not too different from". This says that the role of the researcher in participant observation tends to be passive, as the researcher will not intentionally interact with the target population with the intention of specifically acquiring or otherwise shaping the behaviours of the group. Nevertheless, this passive observation process does not specifically indicate that the researcher is not physically active within the group itself, for while participant observation is "almost always done covertly, with the researcher never revealing their true purpose or identity." The researcher can however engage in the normal processes that the group would otherwise perform where the researcher not physically present, O' Connor (2000). " If it's a group you already

know a lot about, you need to step back and take the perspective of a “Martian”, as if you were from a different planet and seeing things in a fresh light. If it’s a group you know nothing about, you need to become a “convert” and really get committed and involved. The more secretive and amorphous the group, the more you need participation. The more localized and turf-conscious the group, the more you need observation”.

The rationale for participant observation is embedded in the belief that natural behaviours are more likely to be representative of certain traits within the group, such as shared perceptions or beliefs. For example, if a participant observer engaged in a religious ceremony, he or she could witness the faith-based rationale that is used to substantiate the various practices and interactions found within the community. Doing so allows the participants to engage in the practices that they would engage in under normal conditions (indeed, participant observation functions because it is believed that the participants assume that all conditions are in fact normal) and is intentionally undirected by the researcher. O’Connor (2005) therefore identified four specific roles for the participant observer:

- Complete participation-the researcher participates in deviant or illegal activities and goes on to actively influence the direction of the group.
- Participant as observer - the researcher participates in deviant or illegal activities but does not attempt to influence the direction of the group.
- observer as participant- the researcher participates in a onetime deviant or illegal activity but then takes a back seat to any further activities,
- Complete observation-the researcher is a member of the group but does not participate in any deviant or illegal activities.

These roles are adapted by the participant observer with the purpose of identifying the practices and behaviours of those who are native to a given setting. It is theorized that the engagement within this setting will reveal a series of phenomenon which can then be identified as common within the general context of the behaviours found within the sample population. These phenomena were best described by Severyn Bruyn in 1996 in his classic treatise, *The Human Perspective in Sociology*. In this book, Bruyn (1996) stressed that the expression of phenomenon by a sample population could only be studied by persons who were part of the phenomenon as these could only be fully understood through experiencing them in context. Indeed, he suggested that the question of researcher bias was in fact a moot point when using participant observation, as the phenomenon as expressed by persons within the sample population could not be understood without a context. This Bruyn (1996) argued it was only through outright participation as a member of the group that the cause of the phenomenon could be fully understood. Spradley (1997) finds that the modern rationale for participant observation methodologies is more profound as a means of promoting an initial stage of inquiry. He argues that the majority of sociological issues are at their essential nature caused by inequity and notes that racial, economic, and educational disparities are frequently addressed through other forms of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, but these methods seem to miss the source of the issues embedded within these problems. The result is a broad macro-level portrayal of these problems and hints as to theory overall impact at the micro level, but the synthesis of the phenomenon involved is generally not taken to a level in which assessment yields an appropriate portrayal of the problems and subsequent outcomes involved.

Due to limitations placed upon the researcher by participant observation- namely, the question of whether the research effort is inherently valid- the structure of any study or research project utilizing participant observation methodology needs to be painstakingly constructed and executed. Sanghera (2001) states that there are a series of factors that must be integrated into research process; these factors govern the method and are believed to enhance both the construction of the research process and help ensure that the outcome of same is justifiable. These six factors are: time, place, social circumstances, language, intimacy, social consensus.

Through utilizing these factors within the research setting, it is likely that the participant observation method will be enhanced through providing a highly structured series of documents helping to identify the processes used by the researcher to achieve results. The participant observational methodology is also identified as a

natural extension of normal human relationships. As such, the data collected through this method reflects the various phenomena expressed by the persons in the sample population. And, as human beings constantly change their minds and behaviours, this in turn means that the data compiled from the participant observational methodology is likely to reflect these changing states; data collected from participant observation methods are suggestive as opposed to concrete, dynamic as opposed to remaining in an on-going state of permanency. These data are ultimately a snapshot of certain conditions expressed within the sample population and therefore may not be applicable in other conditions; the same population studied under the same circumstances three years later may yield a different state of results.

Finally, the study of participant observation is often scrutinized through an ethical lens. The nature of participant research entails the objective of engaging with the target population in a manner that reduces the focus on the researcher: usually in which participant observation research is used, this means that the researcher is never directly recognized as an outsider but is instead accepted as part of the community. This process is questionable in terms of the ethical obligation of the researcher to the subjects. It is considered appropriate scientific methodology when engaged in the study of human interactions (e.g. physiology, psychology or forms of social interaction) to provide disclosure to the subject(s) being studied. The disclosure process helps to communicate to the subjects that they are under observation, even if the terms of observation are not discussed. The subject or sample population will therefore know that they are engaged in a research study and must willingly concede to participate in it otherwise their rights to privacy are violated. The researcher does not have to disclose the full scope of the study. Indeed, many studies are intentionally designed to take advantage of the disclosure process.

Participant observation, however, tends to differ greatly in approach as a result of most participant observations do rely on the subjects' assumption portraying that the researcher is merely another member of their own community. Changing these expectations would result in recognizing the participant observer as an outsider attempting to blend into the general environment, and this would likely result in distrust or aversion to the researcher among the community members. This albeit would force the community to recognize that their behaviours were under scrutiny and would trigger impact of natural expression of such behaviours or needs. Thus, the need for anonymity and objectivity in participant observation is in direct conflict with practices used in the participant observation methods. There appears yet to be no resolution of this debate in literature as it has in fact been deemed the "unresolved identity crisis" within the literature in qualitative analysis: if these points cannot be appropriately reconciled then it is highly probable that the outcome of the participant observation research studies cannot be justified due to the ethical conflicts they present (Jarvie, 1969; 505). Some sources adamantly maintain that the controversial ethical demands embedded into the very processes of participant observation make it untenable, while others indicate that the participant observation process is not a violation of an expectation of privacy as it is merely the practice of witnessing behaviours or interactions that would have occurred between community members regardless of the presence or intervention of the researcher.

2.1 Biasness of Researcher in Qualitative Research Methodologies

Participant bias is found in all forms of research processes and data inquiries. The presence of bias is not necessarily a negativism; Borg (1997) notes that the researcher is engaging in the scientific method specifically to identify a problem and to most likely use the results of the study in order to make effective, targeted reform that reduces the impact of the problem. As such, the researcher's commitment to the problem at hand may in fact act as a motivational influence that helps the researcher overcome existing limitations that may have daunted other persons with only a passing interest in these same areas.

Besides zealotry, researcher bias tends to be viewed as a taboo within all desirable methodology processes. In situation where researcher bias is present, there is the possibility that the researcher will consciously or unconsciously influence the results of the data gathering process, and then the data sets that are used in the compilation of the study results will therefore reflect this bias in the outcome. This is a large contributing factor as to why studies that are believed to be inherently valid are double blind in methodology,

where neither the participants nor the researchers are aware of the control of the experimental population and thus all outcomes are done without the conscious or subconscious influence of the researcher.

The problems of bias are manifest and the discussion of same is the subject of many lengthy debates about whether research can in fact be an unbiased process at any point. Singer (1987) suggests that unbiased research can never be effectively realized because the research process itself is inherently governed by a series of assumptions and premises embedded in the study methodology. To remedy this, Singer (1987) then suggested that method used to develop a research study is based upon certain expectations, and these expectations can be self-validating or self-authentic within the course of the research process. Clearly speaking, a researcher seeking to engage in research of perception will assume that certain perceptions occur and that these perceptions can be reported within a percentage of the study population. As such, the manifestation of these perceptions can be used to characterize certain outcomes, suggesting that the subjects of the inquiry are themselves not represented in a way that reflects their essential nature. For the purpose of clarification, a researcher seeking to assess the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies within a classroom would enter into the research process through looking at the pedagogical approach used in the classroom, assessing the effectiveness of a specific strategy used in that classroom, and providing data based upon comparison to other results, such as comparing the new strategy against the previous one used in the same setting. The very presence of these premises, Singer argues that research cannot be unbiased for it is seeking to prove outcome and thus is dependent upon concepts and a subsequent framework to deliver this outcome.

Bias within certain forms of qualitative research is believed to be more likely to occur than in quantitative research in general or more restrictive forms of qualitative research. This is due to the proximity between the researcher and the subject, or the researcher and the sample population. Reporting on a given sample population is extremely difficult in terms of eliminating bias if the researcher is directly involved with the population; proximity and interaction are noted as potential factors affecting the perceptions of the researcher. Investigation into organizations such as cults or closed organizations in which the researcher needs to become a member is referred to as participant observation research methodologies, and these have a strong likelihood of influencing the researcher due to encouraging connectivity with the members. Connectivity and participation in the community are thus believed to impact the overall objectivity of the researcher, creating a setting in which the researcher is unstable to subconsciously separate himself or herself from the subjects.

The result is the possible emergence of bias within the research process, an outcome that will not only skew the overall results but may in fact be embedded so deeply within the researcher's experiences that he or she is not even aware of how these bias influence the collection of data or the analysis of same.

2.2 Application of Participant Observation in the Social Sciences

Whyte (1979) notes that, while there is no one way that is best for conducting research using participant observation, the most effective work is done by researchers who view informants as collaborators; to do otherwise, he adds, is a waste of human resources. His emphasis is on the relationship between the researcher and informants as collaborative researchers who, through building solid relationships, improve the research process and improve the skills of the researcher to conduct research.

Conducting observations involves a variety of activities and considerations for the researcher, which include ethics, establishing rapport, selecting key informants, the processes for conducting observations, deciding what and when to observe, keeping field notes, and writing up one's findings. These aspects of the research activities are discussed below:

Ethics

A primary consideration in any research study is to conduct the research in an ethical manner, letting the community know that one's purpose for observing is to document their activities. While there may be instances where covert observation methods might be appropriate, these situations are few and are suspect. DeWalt, B. R. (2002) advice the participant observer to take some of the field notes publicly to reinforce that what the researcher is doing is collecting data for research purposes. When the researcher meets community

members for the first time, he or she should be sure to inform them of the purpose for being there, sharing sufficient information with them about the research topic that their questions about the research and the researcher's presence there are put to rest. This means that one is constantly introducing oneself as a researcher.

Another ethical responsibility is to preserve the anonymity of the participants in the final write-up and in field notes to prevent their identification, should the field notes be subpoenaed for inspection. Individual identities must be described in ways that community members will not be able to identify the participants.

DeWalt and DeWalt (1998) also point out that there is an ethical concern regarding the relationships established by the researcher when conducting participant observation; the researcher needs to develop close relationships, yet those relationships are difficult to maintain, when the researcher returns to his/her home at a distant location. It is typical for researchers who spend an extended period of time in a community to establish friendships or other relationships, some of which may extend over a lifetime; others are transient and extend only for the duration of the research study. Particularly when conducting cross-cultural research, it is necessary to have an understanding of cultural norms that exist. As Marshall and Batten (2004) note, one must address issues, such as potential exploitation and inaccuracy of findings, or other actions which may cause damage to the community. They suggest that the researcher take a participatory approach to research by including community members in the research process, beginning with obtaining culturally appropriate permission to conduct research and ensuring that the research addresses issues of importance to the community. They further suggest that the research findings be shared with the community to ensure accuracy of findings.

In many situations, social scientists are faced with a conflict between two rights: the right of the scientist to conduct research and acquire knowledge and the right of the individual within the study population to privacy, self-determination and dignity (Frankfort, Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).

According to Mustapha (2018), there are situations where a reasonable research cannot be carried out with the researcher revealing his identity: where it would be unethical to do so, he viewed the ethics of social research as being one-sided in this regard. It is good that ethical standards in social research insulate the study population from hazards. But it would have been better if the researcher himself is insulated when it is necessary to do so. The researcher's own insulation would be to violate the principles of informed consent and the disclosure of the identity of the researcher when the safety of the researcher is doubtful. Researches into the activities of cult groups, gangs, corrupt politicians, ritualists, etc fall into this group of researches.

Mustapha (2018) advocates for the cost and benefit analysis of any research endeavour that falls under peculiar circumstances such as these should be done. He also advocated that the researcher should be insulated from danger and other forms of hazards just as the study population is insulated. When a researcher is operating in potentially hazardous terrain where bodily harm can be done to him if his identity is divulged, concealment of his identity should find accommodation within the ethical standards.

Access to entrance and building rapport

Gaining access to the field some criteria must be met. These include choosing a site/community, gaining permission, selecting key informants, and familiarizing oneself with the setting or culture (Bernard, 1994). In this process, one must choose a site that will facilitate easy access to the data. The objective is to collect data that will help answer the research questions.

To assist in gaining permission from the community to conduct the research an introduction Letter by the researcher may have to be submitted to the Community or other information that will ease entry. This should include such information about one's affiliation, funding sources, and planned duration of time in the field. One may need to meet with the community leaders. For example, when one wishes to conduct research in a school, permission must be granted by the school principal and, possibly, by the district school superintendent. For research conducted in indigenous communities, it may be necessary to gain permission from the tribal leader or council.

One should use personal contacts to ease entry; these would include key informants who serve as gatekeepers, but Bernard (1994) cautions against choosing a gatekeeper who represents one side of warring factions, as the researcher may be seen as affiliated with that faction. A word of caution is that, when using highly placed individuals as gatekeepers, the researcher may be expected to serve as a spy. To buttress this fact, Agar (1980) suggests that the researcher be careful of accepting the first people he/she encounters in the research setting as key informants, as they may be "deviants" or "professional stranger handlers." The former may be people who live on the fringe of the group being studied, and association with them may provide the researcher with erroneous views of the group or may alienate the researcher from others who might better inform the study. The "professional stranger handlers" are those people who take upon themselves the job of finding out what it is the researcher is after and how it may affect members of the group being observed. Agar (1980) suggests finding a key informant to sponsor the participant observer to facilitate his or her meeting those people who can provide the needed information. These key informants must be people who are respected by other group members and who are viewed to be neutral, to enable the researcher to meet informants in all of the various factions found in the group or community

The researcher may as well adopt techniques of "Hanging out" with the key informants: a process through which the researcher gains trust and establishes rapport with participants (Bernard, 1994). DeMunck and Sobo (1998) state that, "only through hanging out do a majority of the group or community being observed get an opportunity to watch, meet, and get to know the participant observer outside his/her 'professional' role". This process of hanging out involves meeting and conversing with people to develop relationships over an extended period of time. There is more to participant observation than just hanging out. It sometimes involves the researcher's working with and participating in everyday activities beside participants in their daily lives. It also involves taking field notes of observations and interpretations. Included in this fieldwork is persistent observation and intermittent questioning to gain clarification of meaning of activities.

Rapport according to Angrosino (2008) is built over time and involves establishing a trusting relationship with the group/community, so that the group/community members feel secure in sharing sensitive information with the researcher to the extent that they feel assured that the information gathered and reported will be presented accurately and dependably. Rapport-building involves active listening, demonstrating respect and showing empathy, speaking the truth, and demonstrating commitments to the well-being of the community or individual all in a bid to establish trust on the minds of the host community. Rapport is also related to the issue of reciprocity, the giving back of something in return for their sharing their lives with the researcher. The group members are sharing information with the researcher, making him/her welcome in the community, inviting him or her to participate in and report on their activities. The researcher has the responsibility for giving something back, whether it is monetary remuneration, gifts or material goods, physical labour, time, or research results. Confidentiality is also a part of the reciprocal trust established with the group/community under study (Mazzei and Erin, 2009). They must be assured that they can share personal information without their identity being exposed to others.

Bernard (1994), states that fluency in the native language of the group/community helps gain access to sensitive information and increases rapport with participants. Learn about local dialects, he suggests, but refrain from trying to mimic local pronunciations, which may be misinterpreted as ridicule. Learning to speak the language shows that the researcher has a vested interest in the group/community, that the interest is not transient, and helps the researcher to understand the nuances of conversation, particularly what constitutes humour.

Meanwhile, we shall deal on the following heretofore: processes of conducting observations, ethics, accessibility to the entrance and rapport building by the researcher.

The processes of conducting observations

Werner and Schoepfle (1987, as cited in Angrosino & dePerez, 2000) focused on the process of conducting observations and described three types of processes:

1. The first is descriptive observation, in which one observes anything and everything, assuming that he/she knows nothing; the disadvantage of this type is that it can lead to the collection of details that may or may not be relevant to the study.
2. The second type, focused observation, emphasizes observation supported by interviews, in which the participants' insights guide the researcher's decisions about what to observe.
3. The third type of observation, considered by Angrosino and DePerez (2000) to be the most systematic, is selective observation, in which the researcher focuses on different types of activities to help delineate the differences in those activities.

Deciding What and When to Observe

Merriam (1998) suggests that the most important factor in determining what a researcher should observe is the researcher's purpose for conducting the study in the first place. "Where to begin looking depends on the research question, but where to focus or stop action cannot be determined ahead of time".

To help the researcher know what to observe, DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) suggest that he/she study what is happening and why; sort out the regular from the irregular activities; look for variation to view the event in its entirety from a variety of viewpoints; look for the negative cases or exceptions; and, when behaviours exemplify the theoretical purposes for the observation, seek similar opportunities for observation and plan systematic observations of those events/behaviours. Over time, such events may change, with the season, for example, so persistent observation of activities or events that one has already observed may be necessary.

Similarly, Wolcott (2001) asserts that fieldworkers ask themselves if they are making good use of the opportunity to learn what it is they want to know. He further advises that fieldworkers ask themselves if what they want to learn makes the best use of the opportunity presented.

Keeping Field notes and Writing up One's Findings

According to Kutsche (1998), the researcher should draw a physical map of the setting, using as much detail as possible. The researcher visits the setting under study at different times of the day to see how it is used differently at different times of the day/night. He/she should describe without judgment and avoid using meaningless adjectives, such as "older" (older than what/whom?). The process of mapping involves describing the relationship between the sociocultural behaviour one observes and the physical environment.

Field notes are the primary way of capturing the data that is collected from participant observations. Notes taken to capture this data include records of what is observed, including informal conversations with participants, records of activities and ceremonies, during which the researcher is unable to question participants about their activities, and journal notes that are kept on a daily basis. Field notes are both data and analysis, as the notes provide an accurate description of what is observed and are the product of the observation process. As they note, observations are not data unless they are recorded into field notes.

DeMunck and Sobo (1998) advocate using two notebooks for keeping field notes, one with questions to be answered, the other with more personal observations that may not fit the topics covered in the first notebook. They do this to alleviate the clutter of extraneous information that can occur when taking. Field notes in the first notebook should include jottings, maps, diagrams, interview notes, and observations. In the second notebook, they suggest keeping memos, casual "mullings, questions, comments, quirky notes, and diary type entries". One can find information in the notes easily by indexing and cross-referencing information from both notebooks by noting on index cards such information as "conflicts, gender, jokes, religion, marriage, kinship, men's activities, women's activities, and so on". They summarize each day's notes and index them by notebook, page number, and a short identifying description.

Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) note that a good field note should:

- (i) use exact quotes when possible; (ii) use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality; (iii) describe activities in the order in which they occur;• provide descriptions without inferring meaning;
- (iv) include relevant background information to situate the event; (v) separate one's own thoughts and assumptions from what one actually observes; (vi) record the date, time, place, and name of researcher on each set of notes.

3. Biasness of Researcher in Qualitative Research Methodologies

Participant bias is found in all forms of research processes and data inquiries. The presence of bias is not necessarily a negativism; Borg (1997) notes that the researcher is engaging in the scientific method specifically to identify a problem and to most likely use the results of the study in order to make effective, targeted reform that reduces the impact of the problem. As such, the researcher's commitment to the problem at hand may in fact act as a motivational influence that helps the researcher overcome existing limitations that may have daunted other persons with only a passing interest in these same areas.

Besides zealousness, researcher bias tends to be viewed as a taboo within all desirable methodology processes. In situation where researcher's bias is present, there is the possibility that the researcher will consciously or unconsciously influence the results of the data gathering process, and then the data sets that are used in the compilation of the study results will therefore reflect this bias in the outcome.

3.1 Strengths of Participant Observation

Participant Observation provides researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and checks for how much time is spent on various activities (Schmuck, 1997).

Participant observation allows researchers to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be impolitic, impolite, or insensitive, and observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

DeMunck and Sobo (1998) states that participant observation affords access to the "backstage culture"; it allows for richly detailed description, which means one's goal of describing behaviours, intentions, situations, and events as understood by one's informants is highlighted; and it provides opportunities for viewing or participating in unscheduled events.

Information obtained through participant observation relate to what is currently happening, it is not complicated by either the past behaviour or of future intentions or attitudes.

Participant observation method is independent of respondents' willingness to respond and as such is relatively less demanding of active cooperation on the part of respondents as happens to be the case in the interview, the questionnaire or focus group discussion (Kothari and Garg, 2020).

DeWalt and DeWalt (2002), add that it improves the quality of data collection and interpretation and facilitates the development of new research questions or hypotheses.

3.2 Weaknesses of Participant Observation

DeMunck and Sobo (1998) state that among the advantages of using participation as a method, is the fact that the researcher may not be interested in what happens out of the public eye and that one must rely on the use of key informants. Problems related to representation of events and the subsequent interpretations may occur when researchers select key informants who are similar to them or when the informants are group/community leaders or marginal participants.

Johnson and Sackett (1998) assert that participant observation is a source of erroneous description in behavioural research. They note that the information collected by participant observers is most times based on the researcher's individual interest in a setting or behaviour, rather than being representative of what actually happens in a group/community. For example, they report that more data has been collected about political/religious activities than about eating/sleeping activities, because the political/religious activities are more interesting to researchers than eating/sleeping activities; yet, the amount of time the cultural members spent on political/religious activities was less than 3%, while the amount of time they spent eating/sleeping was greater than 60%.

DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) note that the issue of gender, one's appearance, ethnicity, age and class have affected researcher's access to different information, as they have access to different people, settings, and

bodies of knowledge. It thus beholds on us to note that participant observation is conducted by a biased human who acts as the purveyor for data collection. This led Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) to view participant observation as meaning almost total immersion in an unfamiliar culture to study others' lives through the researcher's participation as a full-time resident or member, though most observers are not full participants in a community life.

4. Analysis of Participant Observation Method in Practice

In their research article "Evaluating classroom practices using qualitative research methods: Defining and refining the process," authors Fasse and Kolodner (2000) indicates that the participant observation methodology is an invaluable strategy in which to approach the classroom setting and identify certain patterns expressed among the students found therein. The authors state that "prolonged engagement and extensive observation are central to gaining an in-depth understanding of a classroom" due to the myriad variables that are embedded within a classroom setting by the engagement and interaction of its many participants. The researchers utilized Learning by Design curriculum within their classroom and, over multiple semesters, utilized different formants of qualitative research methods as a means of best exploring the different circumstances that occurred within normal and unusual classroom activities. The Learning by Design (LBD) curriculum was a format used by Fasse and Kolodner (2000) in the classroom and thus was the control variable in the study, where it was assumed that the use of a single set of environmental conditions-specifically, the researchers used a science curriculum that was approached by the students through a predefined strategy-and assessed the participation of the students in the curriculum through a set of distinctive methods. The researchers isolated two means of assessment and sought to identify whether the case study design or the participant observation design was better suited to the study of the students' interaction with the LBD curriculum.

The study was poorly constructed. The researchers had a stated goal of evaluating whether the case design or the participant observation design would be more useful within the classroom setting, while using the LBD curriculum as a control. Despite this, the researchers instead appeared to shift priorities within the study to focus specifically on the effectiveness of LBD as opposed to assessing which methodology was better suited to the classroom. As a result, this skewed the focus of the study from identifying assessment strategies to "what allows teachers to be successful LBD implementers".

The paper was being confused furthermore where the researcher frequently referred to both practices within the same paragraph, noting at times that "in one of the case study components, two students of ethnographers were visiting physical science classrooms twice a week to understand the experience of LBD through the eyes of two groups of students. What do they experience as students? How do their understanding progress? How successfully are they collaborating and what kind of additional assistance do they need to collaborate effectively?" Fasse and Kolodner (2000). It simply suggests that the stated processes that are fundamental in participant observation methodology were abandoned outright and replaced with those of the researchers' making. We can see them in the following ways

Firstly, we developed two observation instruments to assist observers focus their observations in all of the classrooms. While this flies in the face of qualitative methodology, we do have a practice need to make sure that our untrained observers include the taken-for-granted world in their notes"

Secondly, we interleave think description from our observations with description derived from video documentary."

Thirdly, we meet every two weeks for the purpose of triangulation."

Fourthly, we meet our teachers in focus group every six weeks to learn what works and what does not work in their classrooms and to let them share their experiences with each other."

All these traits are in many ways contradictory to the stated processes of making an effective participant observation methodology. With exception of engaging in triangulation as a means of helping to identify phenomenon common to all classroom experiences, the study appears to be heavily reliant upon a short term

data collection process by untrained observers who are themselves not limited in terms of awareness of bias or appropriate engagement with the subjects. Nor is videotaping a classroom an effective means of facilitating participant observation; the process of a camera creates an awareness of the review process, as well as reduces the socialization contact necessary to the participant observation method.

These flaws alone make their entire research effort untenable, but Fasse and Kolodner (2000) continue to provide shoddy research through failing to provide accessible information. The reader is not fully aware of how many students comprise Observers per classroom, nor how many students overall are found in each classroom. Nor do the researchers state the length of the experiment, or detail the phenomenon collected in either the case study or the participant observation processes: as to this last point, there appears to be significant blurring of the two research methodologies until it becomes difficult to determine whether the researchers are using either the case study method or a participant observation method, and at times the reader cannot help but wonder if they themselves know the difference between the two. This information can be collected from the study, but it is a hunt-and-peck process. foreexample, the researchers do isolate the phenomenon that will be explore but they do so in the confusing sentence: "Attempts to address the design challenge are interleaved with investigative activities, allowing students to refine their understanding of key concepts, their ability to carry out important science process, their ability to be playful which the reader should note is not actually a word, communicative, collaborative, and reflective, and their solutions to the design challenge, all at the same time" Fasse and Kolodner (2000).

In summary, it is very difficult to imagine a participative observation study that was worse suited to either address specified research goals or to create an example of an effective research process using participative observation. Yet as it is important to identify failures of science as a means of avoiding making these same mistakes in the future, the study by Fasse and Kolodner (2000) is exceptional in this regard.

4.1 Potential for Future Research Using the Participative Observation Method

While the document released by Fasse and Kolodner (2000) is a horrific example of the participative observation methodology, their failure to use this research strategy effectively does not mean that future research should avoid its use altogether. In order to develop an appropriate research study using participative observation, it is necessary to consider that participative observation requires long term commitment and detailed planning and procedures. After all, the reader should recall that the participative observation process is only as valid as the steps taken to implement it, for these are a self-justifying process when phenomenon are isolated and researcher bias is minimized to the utmost extent possible.

The classroom setting does appear to be an appropriate environment for a researcher seeking to identify certain patterns of behaviour using participative observation methods. The teacher is inherently part of the classroom setting and thus his or her intrusion within the classroom is expected. The disastrous example of Fasse and Kolodner (2000) aside, the researchers were correct in suggesting that observing the classroom processes is a necessary step in identifying appropriate classroom procedures.

4.2 Recommendations

To alleviate bias in selecting key informants, researchers should pre-test informants or select participants who are competent in the topic being studied.

Thus the paper aims at reducing to the barest minimum the problem of participant observers mostly collecting data based on the researcher's individual interest in a setting or behaviour, rather than being representative of what actually happens in a group/community. To this end, it is recommended that researchers use systematic observation procedures to incorporate rigorous techniques for sampling and recording behaviour that keep researchers from neglecting certain aspects of the group or community being observed.

The issue of gender in question relating to one's appearance, ethnicity, age and class biasness in participant observation, it is recommended that the researcher must understand how his/her gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and theoretical approach may affect observation, analysis, and interpretation.

To resolve the issue of objectivity and subjectivity it is hereby recommended that the researcher should reflect on his/hers biases, he/she can then recognize those biases that may distort understanding and replace them with those that help him/her to be more objective. In this way, the researcher is being respectful of the participants by using a variety of methods to ensure that what he/she thinks is being said, in fact, matches the understanding of the participant.

5. Conclusion

This paper assessed participant observation method of data collection in the social sciences as a better option to other qualitative methods such as interview, questionnaire, focus group discussion and content analysis. Participant observation involves the researcher's involvement in a variety of activities over an extended period of time that enables him/her to observe the cultural members in their daily lives and to participate in their activities to facilitate a better understanding of those behaviours and activities. The process of conducting this type of field work involves gaining entry into the community, selecting gatekeepers and key informants, participating in as many different activities as are allowable by the community members, clarifying one's findings through member checks, formal interviews, and informal conversations, and keeping organized, structured field notes to facilitate the development of a narrative that explains various cultural aspects to the reader. Participant observation is used as a mainstay in field work in a variety of disciplines, and, as such, has proven to be a beneficial tool for producing studies that provide accurate representation of a human behaviours and activities. The study concludes that the participant observation method of data collection will provide the real nature of a situation to the researcher since the researcher is participating in the group's activities.

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