

Block

# 5

## **QUALITATIVE METHODS**

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### **UNIT 18**

#### **Participatory Method**

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**5**

### **UNIT 19**

#### **Content Analysis**

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**21**

### **UNIT 20**

#### **Action Research**

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**37**

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## BLOCK 5 QUALITATIVE METHODS

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As explained in Block 1 of this course, the major difference between the quantitative approach and qualitative approach is not the type of data used or preferred but is much broader and deeper. The quantitative research is associated with positivist and post-positivist paradigm whereas qualitative research is associated with interpretative paradigm and critical theory paradigm.

Notwithstanding with the debate about quantitative research vs. qualitative research, a researcher may use either quantitative methods or qualitative methods or mixed methods blending the techniques of the two. In Block 3 and 4 we have covered various quantitative methods of data analysis. In this block you will find the qualitative methods exclusively associated with interpretative paradigm and critical theory paradigm. This block comprises of 3 units.

**Unit 18 on Participatory Method** throwing light on the limitations of the methods to collect quantitative data either through primary survey or secondary sources covers the various tools and techniques used in collection and analysis of qualitative data under participatory method and its advantages.

**Unit 19 on Content Analysis** deals with the conceptual and methodological issues related to content analysis as a research method to undertake research studies in social sciences in general and in economics in particular.

**Unit 20** entitled **Action Research** throws light on Action Research as an offshoot to emancipatory method associated with critical theory paradigm wherein knowledge is generated in the process of knowing through doing rather through conceptualization and theorizing. This unit covers the various models of action research and the different steps involved in conducting action research.



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# UNIT 18 PARTICIPATORY METHOD

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## Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 What is Participatory Research?
- 18.3 Methods of Participatory Research: Observation Method
  - 18.3.1 Participant Observation
  - 18.3.2 Non-Participant Observation
  - 18.3.3 Quasi-participant Observation
- 18.4 Focused Interview
- 18.5 Oral Histories
- 18.6 Life History
- 18.7 Case Study Method
- 18.8 Narratives
- 18.9 Focus Group Discussion
- 18.10 Grounded Theory
  - 18.10.1 Data Sources and Sampling
  - 18.10.2 Subjectivity
  - 18.10.3 Transcription
- 18.11 Analysis of Qualitative Data
- 18.12 Report Writing
- 18.13 Criticism of Participatory Methods
- 18.14 Advantages of Participatory Research
- 18.15 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.16 Key Words
- 18.17 Some Useful Books/Readings
- 18.18 Answers or Hints to Check Your Progress Exercises

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## 18.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- state the concept of participatory research;
- state the distinction between data collection and data generation;
- explain the various tools of participatory research;
- discuss the grounded theory as a method of inductive theorising;
- identify the various steps involved in the analysis of qualitative data;
- pinpoint the major criticisms against participatory methods; and
- draw the lessons for participatory researchers.

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## 18.1 INTRODUCTION

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As discussed in Unit 6, traditionally two approaches – quantitative research associated with post positivist paradigm and qualitative research associated with interpretative paradigm have been followed in undertaking research in social sciences. The researchers working in the area of economics (both in micro and macro) generally rely upon the inferences drawn from the large pool of data. The data for these studies are collected either by the data compiling agencies or by the individuals hired for data collection without involvement of individual researchers in the field. The results of such quantitative research are insensitive to context and ignore the people's voices or their views about which studies have been undertaken. Instead researcher's opinion is imposed on what people say and want. The collection of quantitative data through sampling survey and its analysis involving several steps is time consuming. In the situation of natural calamities and disasters like tsunami, we cannot wait for the outcome of quantitative research. Further, quantitative research has not been very effective in evaluation of poverty alleviation schemes and programmes. In such situation, alternative method i.e. participatory method is increasingly being used in social sciences to generate and analyse the data.

Hence, in this unit, we shall take up the various issues related to participatory methods like concept of participatory research, the various tools to collect qualitative data, analysis of qualitative data, advantages, limitations and important lessons for participatory research etc. Let us begin with explanation of the concept of participatory research.

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## 18.2 WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH?

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The fundamental premise of participatory research involves the direct participation of researcher in the process of data generation. Important distinction is made here between data collection and data generation. When data is collected by an agency on large sample populations, standardizations are made with the assumption that all those being interviewed will understand and respond to the questions in the manner in which the primary researcher has conceptualized it. In the field situation this may or may not be the case. Each field researcher asking those questions may convey a different meaning and the respondent may give answer that may not fit into any of the standard categories, but the field researcher will reduce the answer and fit it in any of the given categories in a structured schedule. Hence, the results obtained may not necessarily reflect the market sentiments or the opinion of the people involved in the study. It is for this reason that this process of procuring data using survey method and questionnaire is called data collection.

In participatory research, the primary researcher is always in contact with the respondent and has a face-to-face interaction. If the researcher thinks that the respondent has not understood the query, he has the freedom to change the language or reconstruct his probe question or collect information from other indirect source. In this approach called **data generation**, the researcher has the flexibility to generate multiple answers to a single query and then use his/her interpretative skills to draw inference or meaning out of it to arrive at a generalization. In participatory method of data generation, the process of data

collection and analysis proceeds simultaneously, making it more reliable and presenting plurality of responses and possibilities. It is this flexibility and its ability to generate reliable generalizations that participatory methods of research have acquired importance in research methodology being used by present day economists.

Let us first try and understand what participatory research is and how and where it began? Methods of participatory research first find mention in anthropological empirical research commonly known as ethnography. Ethnography is defined as a method used to generate qualitative data from an insider's perspective known as **EMIC view**. In simple terms it implies that the people about whom we are writing, must tell their stories and the researcher simply interprets them as “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). People's voices are critical to research instead of researcher's imposition of his opinion on what people say and want.

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## 18.3 METHODS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH: OBSERVATION METHOD

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Bronislaw Malinowski is regarded as the founding father of this methodology. He described this method as “participant observation”. He stayed for more than three years among the “Trobriand Islanders” and described their lifeway's in a classic ethnographic work titled *Argonauts of Western Pacific* first published in 1922. Methods of participatory research in the last ninety years or more have been defined and redefined in many different ways. Malinowski's method of participant observations demands the researcher's stay in the field area for prolonged periods and become a part of the society that he/she is researching. Later researchers realized that it was always not possible to stay for extended duration (from three months to three years and in some cases even longer) in the field and some problems can require immediate and urgent interventions. Another critique of participant observation is that an interviewer is always an outsider and even when he lives at a particular field site for long periods, there is no guarantee that the community will view him as an insider and share every aspect of their private lives with the researcher.

Nonetheless, none of these limitations influenced the importance of using observations as one of the most important tools of participatory researches. Balki (2009:206) calls it as “qualitative method par excellence”. Bryman (1998, 47-9) puts forward a case for method of observation by saying that it is not a single method but can combine several ways of doing observations. Given the significance of method of observation, the techniques went in for some modifications. There are three important ways of doing observations that are now recognized: (i) Participant Observations, (ii) Quasi-Participant Observations, (iii) Non-Participant Observations.

### 18.3.1 Participant Observations

Uncontrolled Participant observation is defined by Goode & Hatt (1981: 121) as a procedure in which “the investigator can so disguise himself as to be accepted as a member of the group”. When researchers live at a field site for long duration, the assumption is that they are regarded as member of the community or the group. A researcher wanting to study consumer behaviour may not disclose his identity as a researcher and pretend to be a consumer, sharing their experiences

and concerns. While doing participant research, researchers often assume insider identity. Sometimes researchers take neutral positions without disclosing the real purpose of their being there.

### **Advantages of Participant Observation Method**

Researcher can record all the information relevant for his work without disturbing the community and intruding upfront into their privacy. Instead of sitting in a corner in the market, an organization or any other work or field situation writing notes, the researcher participates in these activities. In doing so, he collects relevant information without disturbing the normal activities and records his observations in a work diary. Thereafter, he makes a mental note of it and returns to his/her workplace and records these observations immediately. The community or people may not be aware that they are being researched. This helps obtain unhindered and unbiased information.

Participant observation helps to obtain detailed information without any subject bias. Many researchers regard it as a better tool for data gathering vis-à-vis questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

### **Drawbacks of Participant Observation Method**

One of the major drawbacks of participant observation is its inability to develop procedures for standardization. Researcher doing participant observation acquires a specific position in the community and observes from this vantage point. His recordings are personal or individual specific. Another observer observing the same situation may not be able to view it with the same perspective.

In participant observation method, the researcher may get emotionally involved with the issues and tends to lose his/her objectivity. This often happens on issues of dowry, bride burning, female foeticide, student agitations, price rise, public-private partnership, trade union activities etc.

To overcome some of these drawbacks, researchers proposed method of non-participant observations.

## **18.3.2 Non-Participant Observation**

The qualitative researchers innovate in several ways to do non-participant observations. Many of them would participate in some activities and observe others from the outside. Some others would use video- recordings and analyse these recordings later for generalizations. While doing so, it was possible to take into account people's gestures and non-verbal movements for detailed scrutiny. However, critics of the method thought that as one is not fully participating in this situation, he/she is not in a position to attribute right meaning to these observations.

Sometimes, researchers use hidden cameras and record individual observations separately. But there are several problems with this method of observations too. Many regard use of hidden camera for research unethical. Participating in some activities and not in others amounted to what researchers later called as Quasi-participant observation.

### 18.3.3 Quasi- Participant Observation

Most researchers these days prefer to use quasi-participant method of observations. In this method, the researcher can follow the dual entry system. For instance, if you are trying to examine labour management relations, it is imperative that you obtain permission from the management and also establish rapport with the trade union leaders to have access to the union meetings. Many a times, one has to conduct interviews in different locations. In one such study in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, we found that the workers preferred to talk to the researcher outside the factory. The researcher would talk to the managers and supervisors in the factory and had lunch in the workers canteen. Appointments were fixed with the workers while having lunch and then researcher went to their houses, often spent hours there and after completing the interviews with the supervisors and managers hired a small room in the same slum area, where most of the workers lived and shared their daily experiences.

In addition to the important research tool of observations, qualitative researchers often use Focused interview, in-depth interviews, narratives and oral /Life case histories, Focus group discussion/interviews', and content analysis. These tools have been discussed in next sections.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is the distinction between data collection and data generation?

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- 2) What do you mean by the term EMIC view?

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- 3) How is participant observation method different from non-participant observation method?

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## 18.4 FOCUSED INTERVIEW

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In a focused interview, the researcher and the respondent are engaged in face-to-face or one to one conversation in which the researcher poses questions and the respondent provides detailed or precise answers. Talking to people or a specified group of people selected randomly, using an interview schedule, interview guide or a structured questionnaire is standard method of data collection. For qualitative

research, focused interviews are often unstructured and questions are invariably open ended. This gives the respondent liberty to provide extensive answers.

It is important to remember that interview is “fundamentally a process of social interaction” and involves developing a social relationship. In an interview situation it is not only the interviewer but also the interviewee who makes an opinion about the researcher. Respondent’s responses can be determined by what he thinks what the researcher may expect from him and also the amount of trust and faith he invests in the researcher. We will repeatedly stress the importance of confidentiality and researcher’s ability to convey the same as hallmarks of participatory research.

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## **18.5 ORAL HISTORIES**

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Uninterrupted long interviews giving space to the respondents to express his opinion or experiences at length is the preferred method by several qualitative researchers. The interviewee is encouraged to share his life experiences, to express his opinion, to recollect and recount their antecedents or lives of their contemporaries, “and to discuss their perceptions of the processes involved and the changes they have seen”(Balki, 2010:207). Collecting oral histories or narratives requires skill of being a good listener. Many a times, you may assume that the information provided by the respondent is not directly related to the area of your focused interest. But that subsidiary information can provide certain reference for a better understanding of the problem, issues or question that you are exploring. In oral histories, one may pose probing questions in the beginning and then occasionally intervene to ask a lead question for seeking any detailed answer to specific query.

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## **18.6 LIFE HISTORY**

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Another important tool that ethnographic and qualitative researchers have in their kit is called the life history method. In this method life histories of individuals are reconstructed to understand the historical events of that period. Many a times researchers would use diaries and autobiographies to construct chronology of events of that period. Recording experiences of individuals facilitates understanding of how and what happened in certain circumstances. Life history approach is largely dependent on the ability of the respondent to recall and share that memory with the researcher. With the help of the respondent, researcher gradually determines the social processes. In the context of economics, rise and fall of a particular model is determined by prevalent social processes of that period, e.g. popularity and weakening of models of conservative and liberal economics in the last fifty years. It also helps to understand different perspectives based on gender and class. While recollecting their life history, many a times respondents may fall silent. This silence also provides data as it tells the researcher, how that particular event may have caused anxiety, anguish or an intense emotional experience to the respondent.

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## **18.7 CASE STUDY METHOD**

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To study firms and organization’s behaviour, Business economists use the case study method. The researcher can focus on one company or organization and

collect a detailed case history of the organization. Yin (1984:23) defines case study research method “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. In an organization, there are multiple players and a detailed case study will take into account perspective of each stakeholder there. You can use more than one method to collect evidence from different stakeholders e.g. the supervisors, workers etc. A schedule or a questionnaire can be used to talk to the workers. The interview method can be used, to collect history of the organization and organogram depicting position and functions of each member of the organization. Content analysis can be done by examining available records of the organization. This provides a holistic picture of the organization. Case study as an approach is **holistic**, **inductive** and **idiographic**. It takes complete account of the organization from all perspectives; theorizing moves from general to specific and individual cases are located in their particular context. Case study can take cross-sectional or longitudinal data.

The researcher must remember that generalizations drawn for one organization are not necessarily applicable to the other. Each organization is a distinct unit. Six important steps are involved in conducting a study by using case study method:

- Determine and define the research question
- Select the cases and determine data gathering and analysis techniques
- Prepare to collect the data
- Collect data in the field
- Evaluate and analyse the data
- Prepare the report

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## 18.8 NARRATIVES

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Social science research in anthropology, sociology, political science, history and now economics is moving from the positivist position of research to narrative approach. The positivist position also popularly known as scientific approach was the tradition in which researchers from 50's to 80's were generally trained. The standardized tools of survey research, questionnaire approach or even interviews with a standardized set of questions was expected to produce if not same, similar responses. Narrative research emphasizes that this is not true. Different respondents may interpret each question asked in the same words differently. In structured interviews both meaning and plurality of responses are lost. Researcher-using method of narrative understands that there can be standardized questions but there are no 'standardized meanings'.

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## 18.9 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

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One of the methods of qualitative research that found ready acceptance by economists was that of focus group. It is frequently used in market surveys for quick appraisal of response to an economic programme, for evaluation studies and for media and health research. In focus group discussion, a small group of six to eight (market researchers prefer groups of 10-12 participants in each group) targeted audiences is gathered at a suitable location. They are encouraged to

have a frank discussion on a given topic and a recorder sitting outside the group will either audio record or take notes on the discussion. The researcher acts as a prompter posing questions on the subject of inquiry. Kruger (1988: 18) defines focus group as a “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment”.

Bloor et al. (2001) cautions that ‘focus groups are the method of choice only when the purpose of the research is ‘to study group norms, group meanings and group processes’ (cf. Barbour, 2008:133)

### Steps for focus group

- Topic for focus group should be of general interest to all the participants in the group.
- Number of participants can vary depending on the requirements of your research. Sampling is the key to data generation.
- ‘Stimulus material’ for initiating the discussion should be brief and encourage a free flowing conversation. Use of video clips, leaflets, cartoons, brief recollection of event or topic being discussed etc.
- Moderator must manage the discussion in a manner that without sounding intrusive, long extensive talks are avoided.
- Barbour (2008) suggests ‘anticipate the analysis through attentive moderating’.
- Locate themes visible in the form of repetitive patterning of the responses.
- Second stage sampling could be considered to further explore any emerging theories, paradigms or even trends from the data.

These are some of the tools that participatory researchers frequently use to gather primary data. In this brief discussion, there are two more important steps that a participatory researcher must remember. First is **Grounded Theory** and second is **Data Sources and Sampling** procedure. We shall discuss these steps in next sections.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Make a distinction between focused interview and focused group discussion.

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- 2) State the uses of Case Study Method.

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## 18.10 GROUNDED THEORY

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Quantitative researchers are familiar with the procedure of preparing a research design that lists various steps of research including hypothesis and sample selection. Average participatory researcher will first go to the field, explore various research questions that he/she may have problematized and engage in casual conversations with the people on the ground. A research design is generally not prepared before empirically exploring the field situation. The research problem is then structured keeping in view the perspective, people's priorities and that of the researcher.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed grounded theory as a method of inductive theorizing. In their opinion, theories are not to be tested but to be generated as research proceeds. They were of the opinion that “‘good theory’ is systematically discovered from and verified with the data of social research”. Researchers further clarified ‘generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research’ (cf. Blaikie 2010:141). In this kind of analysis, comparative analysis is continuously generated along with theory building. Two kinds of theories are generated namely *substantive* and *formal*. Substantive theories are located in a specific context and are related to a specific process. Formal theories are generated at a higher level of generalization and can apply to number of substantive areas. Blaikie sums it brilliantly “research conducted from a grounded theory point of view is not a pre-planned linear process of testing hypotheses, but rather an evolving process in which what has been ‘discovered’ at any point will determine what happens next. An understanding of any phenomenon is seen as a developing process involving the collection of variety of data, by a variety of methods’. In simple terms, it suggests that you do not have to go to the field with a pre-decided hypothesis with the intent of verifying it but evolve your theory from the empirical evidence that was collected.

### 18.10.1 Data Sources and Sampling

Three types of data sources are recognised:

**Primary Data** – Data collected by researcher or researchers working on the project and they are responsible for collecting/generating, analysis and reporting. Majority of participatory researchers work with primary data.

**Secondary Data** – Data that is already collected by some other researchers, agencies, individuals (raw data) and is available in the public domain e.g. Census, National Sample Survey, NCAER Data, Economic Survey Data etc.

**Tertiary Data** – Analysed data either by the researcher or other researchers, institutions, agencies and its results are available for comparisons or reinterpretation.

Data for research can come from number of sources: (i) Individuals, (ii) Populations.

### Samples from populations

Once data source is identified and it happens to be a population, it is not always possible to cover the entire population. In these situations a representative sample is identified. There are several methods of sampling. Probability and nonprobability sampling are commonly used. A sample is expected to contain one or more elements of the population/universe of study. Sampling frame using probability sampling is able to ensure elements of representation but that may not be possible in nonprobability sampling. Probability samples are selected using simple random and systematic random sampling. Non-probability sampling methods frequently used by participatory researchers are:

- **Accidental or Convenience sampling** – interviewing any individual, any where at any time without keeping research population in focus. This method is to be used only when no other method is feasible. This is often used in market research for quick feedback or for consumer surveys.
- **Quota sampling** – frequently used after selecting certain criterion to be explored in the research study. Quota is taken to represent the population and problem being researched. For doing an evaluation study for a product to be launched target the population e.g. for the launch of a new video game-target audience can be adolescents in the age group of 15-20 that come to a video store enquiring about new video games.
- **Judgemental or purposive sampling** – is another popular non-probability sampling method used for studying previously identified sub-set of population e.g. to analyse models for successful organizational management, a sample is selected from organizations that have shown successful management background.
- **Snowball method** – as the term suggests, this method of sampling works on the principle of networks, chain referral or reputational sampling. Researcher identifies an individual or a key respondent and he/ she may lead him to others having similar interests – the focus of the research. Internet networks, members of mac-book or Mercedes clubs etc. are few illustrative examples.

Participatory researchers are often criticized for using these sampling procedures arguing that these are not necessarily representative, as the sample is not objectively selected. One must remember that qualitative participatory research is invariably resource intensive and requires smaller samples as compared to large quantitative surveys.

### 18.10.2 Subjectivity

Qualitative researchers are not shy of admitting that there is always an element of subjectivity in research. Hollway and Jefferson (2000:3) draw attention to this important element of research: “As researchers, we cannot be detached but must examine our subjective involvement because it will help us to shape the way in which we interpret interview data”.

### 18.10.3 Transcription

One of the important components of qualitative method of research or participatory approaches is rewriting the data procured from the field. The data is usually recorded in memory or sometimes on paper, and if circumstances permit it can be recorded using an audio or wherever possible a video recording. The data has to be transcribed for the purpose of analysis. This is one of the most difficult steps that many qualitative researchers have to learn to deal with.

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## 18.11 ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

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The findings collected with the help of qualitative tools involve a continuous process of data generation and analysis. ‘It is iterative rather than being linear’ (Barbour, 2008:189). Unlike quantitative methods in which first data is collected and subjected to statistical tool to obtain results and analysis follows the outcomes, in qualitative data, we do not generate results but detail ‘findings’. While talking to people either in focused or in-depth interviews or in focus group discussions and case studies, people provide the answers through the process of reconstruction of these narratives. Qualitative data analysis uses ‘**constant comparative method**’. It involves constant comparing and contrasting of notes meaning thereby that the researcher must focus on ‘who is saying what and in what context’ (ibid: 217).

### Steps for doing analysis of qualitative data:

- Compilations of field notes and observations recorded in the field diary.
- Some scholars prefer to have complete verbatim account of data transcribed but others opt to use ‘indexed recordings and notes’ (ibid: 192).
- Interrogation of the data and diligence shown by the researcher is the key to producing good transcripts and reliable generalizations.
- Codes and themes have to be developed to capture meaning.
- Grounded theory that uses concepts developed in the field by the respondent is an important way of theorizing and analysing in qualitative research.
- Both computer and Manual analysis can be done.
- NUD\*IST, ATLAS/TI are some of the Computer software used for qualitative analysis.

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## 18.12 REPORT WRITING

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Richardson (2000: 923) refers to writing as “a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic”. A “personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 741). Writing research differs in style depending on whether one is writing for a project agency for a journal or a dissertation/ thesis. Standard format comprises of **introduction/ background, methods, sample, results, discussion, and conclusion/ recommendations**. In qualitative research writing discussion is a challenge because the data collected is iterative or repetitive. Many qualitative researchers

prefer to use subtitle ‘findings’ to combine discussion and conclusions. As young researcher, you can always evolve your own style of writing but remember that when you are writing for an indexed journal, you are expected to conform to the writing style and referencing style of that particular journal which is always given at the back of the journal as instructions to the authors.

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### 18.13 CRITICISM OF PARTICIPATORY METHODS

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Opinions on the efficacy of participatory methods are widely divided. There is a growing demand for bringing in participatory methods of research in disciplines like economics, political science, management studies and law because standard methods of quantitative research have not yielded the desired results. There are others opposing reliance on participatory research arguing that there is every possibility of personal bias impacting the objectivity of research. It is restricted to a very small area and generalizations arrived on the basis of data generated by it may not be applicable to other areas. The methods of participatory research are slow. Many others call these studies impressionistic and unreliable and call it a ‘soft’ method of doing research.

To overcome some of the limitations of participatory research mentioned above, many researchers prefer to use a mixed methods approach. Let us remember that the details on mixed methods research have already been covered in Unit 6.

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### 18.14 ADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

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One of the important advantages of qualitative method of research is that it is “reflexive, flexible and iterative” (Cornwell & Jewkes: 1668; Chambers 1992). Diane Watt (2007:82) rightly points out that “since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is deemed essential”—this is a position supported by almost all researchers using participatory methods. Reflexive means that the researcher can take stock of his/her own reservations, prejudices and resolve them before recording responses obtained from the field. In simpler terms, it implies that in participatory research, we deal with other human beings that look like us but may have differently acquired social values. The answer that they may give to an enquiry posed by us may be very different from the response that we expect or believe is the correct answer. Reflexivity in participatory research methods helps to distinguish qualitative research methods from quantitative methods of research. It teaches us to delineate **subjectivity** from **objectivity**. One of the strongest planks of **quantitative** researchers and **scientific (positivist)** methods of research was their claim that the results derived by these methods are ‘objective’. Qualitative researchers accepted the charge of being ‘subjectively objective’ arguing that when a researcher interacts in the field with his respondents, he always carries a sense of subjectivity with him/her but in quantitative researches it is not admitted and dismissed by counting in sampling error. It was thus considered imperative to admit that bias by the qualitative researchers. They accepted that one must recognise it in terms of one’s **reflexivity**. Qualitative/Participatory researchers have recognised the limitations and persistence practice that is required in recognising, admitting and becoming aware of this bias, particularly while writing their research report (Borochowitz, 2005; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Harding, 1991).

We discussed ‘reflexivity’ and ‘flexibility’ given in Cornwell and Jewkes statement describing advantages of participatory research. We now examine the third attribute of participatory research ‘iterative’ that means ‘ability to repeat’ – this can be inferred in several ways. One can repeatedly seek answers to the same query by enquiring about it in different ways to establish the validity of the response. Detailed narratives generated from the respondents may have responses that are repetitive of the statements made by other respondents and the common thread running through these conversations provides the window to ascertain the public opinion. It facilitates “ ‘bottom up’ approach with a focus on locally defined priorities and local priorities”(Cornwell & Jewkes, 1995:1667).

Prior to the popularity and acceptance of participatory approaches, most planning was based on the philosophy of ‘trickle down effect’ – implying that the experts plan and enrich the upper crust and its impact will automatically get transferred to the lower stratum of the society. Felt needs of the people were not taken into consideration and the planning was top heavy. Many intervention projects with large funding failed because they failed to meet the immediate requirements of the local people. For example – several housing projects for the *adivasi* in remote parts of tribal heartland remained unutilized or underutilized, as the houses were not built in accordance with the tribal worldview and customary lifestyle. Participatory approach first explores people’s immediate needs as perceived by the ‘local people’ and then suggests policies for meeting those needs.

Participatory researchers argue, “that the key element of participatory research lies not in methods but in the attitudes of researchers, which, in turn, determine how, by and for whom research is conceptualized and conducted” (ibid) If the researcher is not able to establish rapport with the respondent, he will not be able to generate good data. It is also important in participatory researches that the researcher takes keen interest in the problems that are addressed in his research query.

It is important to remember that you cannot become a good participatory researcher by learning these methods only through a formal lesson in a classroom. It requires personal experience in the field and repeated interactions with a large number of individuals to master the craft of participatory research. A lesson on participatory research empowers you with tools like the necessity to respect confidentiality of your respondents, to refrain from encroaching on their privacy, to respect their distinct traditions and cultural values, to conduct your interviews without offending or getting into an argument with them, respecting their opinion and recording it objectively and being **ethical** at all times. Your honesty in data generation and data analysis will give the necessary quality weightage to your research. In this context, it is worth to remember that one may encroach on the respondent’s time and privacy. While writing your research never disclose the name and location of your respondents. Seeking their consent for interviewing and writing about them is equally important.

#### **Participatory Research: An Illustration**

You enquire from an individual in the market about the price of onions in the month of July 2014, when the market sentiment suggests, that the price of onions is very high. Contrary to the assumed answer the respondent suggests that “no, it is not as high as last year because last year in the same month, I

bought onions for Rupees ninety a kilogram but this year it is much cheaper, as I have paid only rupees forty per kilogram”. His response is relative to his experience in the past and similarly other responses may differ depending on the experiences of different individuals. But when you ask standardized question in a yes or no format and ask a direct question with only two options of ‘yes’ or ‘no’, your results will not reflect ‘actual sentiments’ in the market. In the participatory approach, you will have flexibility of questioning as also response. On the contrary in the non-participatory approach you will get only two kinds of responses either saying ‘the price of onions is very high’ or some saying ‘no it is not high’. Thus there is inbuilt flexibility in the participatory approaches. They provide a better understanding of the real market situation, giving more options for planning and interventions.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Enlist the various methods of sampling used in participatory research.

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- 2) What is inductive theorizing?

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- 3) State the steps involved in analysis of qualitative data.

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### 18.15 LET US SUM UP

In participatory research, data is generated from an insider’s perspective known as EMIC view. Unlike quantitative research, in this approach, people provide answers through the process of reconstruction of the narrations. The tools used in data collection are – participation observation, non-participation observation, quasi participation observation, in-depth interview, oral and life histories, narratives, case study method and focus group discussion etc. Qualitative researchers use various non-random sampling techniques, these include – convenience sampling, quota sampling purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. The qualitative data is analysed by ‘constant comparative method’. The personal bias is the important criticism levelled against this method. Reflexivity, flexibility and iterative are the key advantages of this method and hence, participatory research by using mixed methods approach is increasingly being used to address complex issues in social science research.

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## 18.16 KEY WORDS

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- Focus Group Discussion** : It is a technique for a eliciting descriptive information/data from specific population subgroups (a group of 8 to 12 persons).
- Reflexivity** : Reflexivity refers to a situation where an individual becomes a self by being able to take the attitude of others and thereby reflect on his or her own behaviour.
- Snowball Sampling** : A technique for gathering subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of other actors.
- Quota Sampling** : A method of selecting respondents for service by assigning quotas to the interviewers that define groups of respondents by using a few key demographic characteristics.
- Iteration** : It is an act of repeating a process with the aim of approaching a desired goal, target or result.

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## 18.17 SOME USEFUL BOOKS/READINGS

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Borochowitz, Dalit Yassour. (2005). “*Teaching a Qualitative Research Seminar on Sensitive Issues*”. *Qualitative Social Work* 4:347-62.

Bogdan, R.C. and Taylor, S.J. (1975). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Phenomenological Approach to the Social Sciences*. New York: John Wiley.

Barbour, Rosaline. (2008). *Introducing Qualitative Research: A Student Guide to the Craft of Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Denzin, Norman. K. & Lincon, Yvonna. S. (eds) (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2005). “*Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research.*” Pp. 1-33 in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* edited by Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, California: Sage Publications.

Harding, Sandra. (1991). *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Watt, Daine. (2007). *On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher: The Value of Reflexivity. The Qualitative Report*. Volume 12 Number 1 March 2007. Pp 82-101.

Yin, R.K. (1984) *Case Study Research: Design and Method*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Websites:

<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR>

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## **18.18 HINTS/ANSWERS OR HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

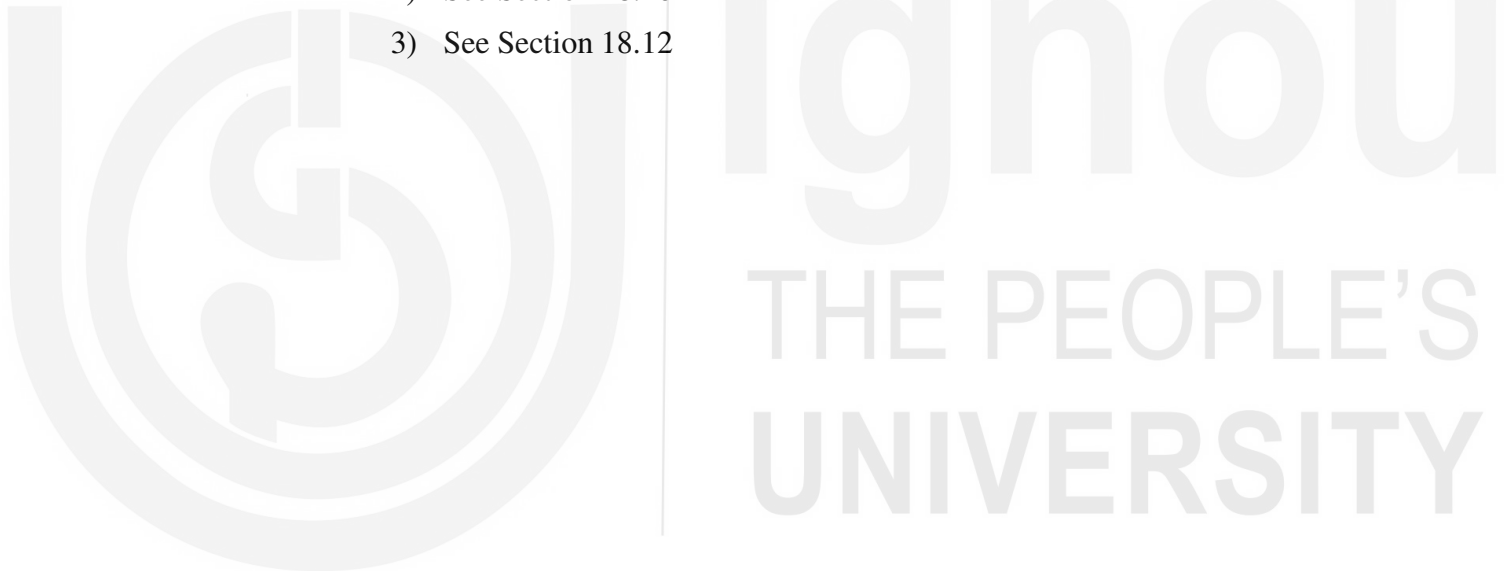
- 1) See Section 18.2
- 2) See Section 18.2
- 3) See Section 18.3

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) See Section 18.4 and 18.9
- 2) See Section 18.7
- 3) See Section 18.9

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) See Sub-section 18.10.1
- 2) See Section 18.10
- 3) See Section 18.12



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# UNIT 19 CONTENT ANALYSIS

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## Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Historical Background of Content Analysis
- 19.3 Content Analysis: Concept and Meaning
- 19.4 Terms Used in Content Analysis
- 19.5 Approaches of Content Analysis
  - 19.5.1 Conceptual Content Analysis
  - 19.5.2 Relational Content Analysis
- 19.6 Procedure Involved in Content Analysis
  - 19.6.1 Formulation of Research Question
  - 19.6.2 Determining Materials to be Included
  - 19.6.3 Developing Content Categories
  - 19.6.4 Selecting Units of Analysis
  - 19.6.5 Code the Materials
  - 19.6.6 Analyze and Interpret the Results
- 19.7 Uses of Content Analysis
- 19.8 Advantages and Disadvantages of Content Analysis
  - 19.8.1 Advantages
  - 19.8.2 Disadvantages
- 19.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.10 Key Words
- 19.11 References and Suggested Books
- 19.12 Answers or Hints to Check Your Progress Exercises

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## 19.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept and meaning of the content analysis;
- identify the areas of research in social sciences wherein content analysis can be used;
- discuss the various types of content analysis;
- state the various approaches of content analysis;
- describe the various steps involved in using the content analysis;
- enable you to analyse and interpret the results; and
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the content analysis.

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## 19.1 INTRODUCTION

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Many research Scholars take up historical overviews of economics as an area of research. They probe the research questions like how the different streams of

economics like institutional economics, Neo-classical economics, behavioural economics etc. have evolved over a period of time and how researcher's focus had shifted from one area to another isolating a particular paradigm change. Sometimes a researcher aims to lay concepts and meanings from the social actors' account of realities related to his identified research problem. They use the sources like recorded interviews, letters, journals, newspaper stories and verbal materials. In such situations, content analysis as data (information) analysis technique is used by the social scientists. Much of the subject matter of social sciences including consumer studies is in the form of verbal and nonverbal behaviour. The exchange process in the market place and the communication of the values of the exchange depends upon the written or spoken words. Much of consumer research has concentrated on the characteristics, opinion, or behaviour of the interpreter of communication messages. In media economics, issues like monopolistic competition in TV channels, competition and diversity in newspaper industry, effects of group ownership on daily newspaper content etc. can be probed by content analysis alongwith other statistical techniques. Similarly content analysis can also be used to analyse the cultural issues in cultural economics to capture pattern form of explanation. Hence, in this unit, we will discuss the concept of content analysis, its various types and approaches, the procedures involved in its application, and its advantages and disadvantages. Let us begin with historical background of content analysis followed by describing its concept and meaning.

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## 19.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

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We find different approaches to analysis and comparison of texts in hermeneutic contexts (e.g. bible interpretations) like newspaper analysis, graphological procedures, content analysis, and the dream analysis by Freud etc. The basis of quantitative content analysis had been laid by Lazarsfield and Lasswell in the USA during 1920's and 30's. Historically, content analysis was a time consuming process. Analysis was done either manually, or by slow mainframe computers to analyze punch cards containing data punched by human coders. Single study could employ thousands of these cards. Human error and time constraints made this method impractical for large texts. However, despite its impracticality, content analysis was utilized as research method by 1940's. Although initially limited to studies that examined texts for the frequency of the occurrence of identified terms (word counts), by mid-1950's researchers started to consider the need for more sophisticated methods of analysis, focusing on concepts rather than simply words, and on semantic relationships rather than just presence. The first textbook about this method was published by Berelson in 1952. In the sixties of 20th century, content analysis found its way into linguistics, psychology, sociology, history, arts etc. The procedures involved in content analysis were refined by incorporating models of communication; analysis of non-verbal aspects, contingency analysis, computer applications. Since the middle of 20th century objections had been raised against a superficial analysis without respecting latent contents and contexts, working with simplifying and distorting quantification (Kracauer, 1952). Subsequently qualitative approaches to content analysis had been developed. Today, the use of modern computers makes content analysis much simpler and the data less vulnerable to human error.

## 19.3 CONTENT ANALYSIS: CONCEPT AND MEANING

Content analysis is a set of procedures for collecting and organizing information in a standardized format that allows analysts to make inferences about the characteristics and meaning of written and other recorded materials.

Content analysis is a multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating a broad spectrum of problems in which the content of communication serves as the basis of inference. Content analysis covers both the content of the material and its structure. Content refers to the specific topics or themes in the material. Structure refers to form. Whether an article is prominently featured on the first page of a newspaper or buried in the middle section is a structural question. Careful reading of the written materials is necessary for all kinds of researches in social sciences. But content analysis is something different from careful reading of written materials in many ways.

According to **Berelson**, content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. The term content analysis is used here to mean the scientific analysis of communication messages. The method being “scientific” catholic in nature, requires that the analysis be rigorous and systematic. According to **Paisley**, content analysis is a phase of information processing in which communication content is transformed through objective and systematic application of categorization rules into data that can be summarized and compared.

This definition underlines the point that content analysis is a systematic technique for analyzing message content and message handling. It is a tool for observing and analyzing the overt communication behaviour of selected communicators.

Content analysis, while certainly a method of analysis, is more than that, it is a method of observation. Instead of observing people’s behaviour directly, or asking them to respond to scales or interviewing them, the investigator takes the communications that people have produced and asks questions of the communication (Kerlinger, 1968, p.544).

Content analysis refers to any procedure for answering the relative extent to which specified references, attitudes or themes permeate a given message or document (Stone, 1964).

Neuendorf defines content analysis as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics”.

Based on the above definitions, the following characteristics of content analysis emerge: objectivity, systematic and generality.

**Objectivity:** To have objectivity, the analysis must be carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules which will enable two or more investigators to obtain the same results from the same documents. This requirement of objectivity gives scientific standing to content analysis and differentiates it from literary criticism.

**Systematic:** In a systematic analysis, the inclusion and exclusion of content or categories is done according to consistently applied criteria of selection. This

requirement is meant to eliminate elements in the content which do not fit in the analyst's thesis.

**Generality:** By generality, we mean that the findings must have theoretical relevance, purely descriptive information about content, unrelated to other attributes of content or to the characteristics of communicator or recipient of the message, is of little scientific value.

Thus, content analysis can be defined as a research technique for collecting and organizing information in a standardized format for making inference systematically and objectively about the characteristics of message.

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## 19.4 TERMS USED IN CONTENT ANALYSIS

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The following concepts and terms are frequently used in content analysis. Let us understand these terms.

**Manifest Content Analysis:** It involves simply counting words, phrases, or "surface" features of the text itself. It provides reliable quantitative data that can easily be analyzed using inferential statistics.

**Latent Content Analysis:** It involves interpreting the underlying meaning of the text. Latent analysis is different to manifest analysis because researcher must have a clearly stated idea about what is being measured. The value of the latent content analysis actually depends upon the researcher's ability to expose previously marked themes, messages and cultural values within the text. This analysis is widely used in qualitative content analysis.

**Content Units:** There are two types of content units i.e. the unit of analysis and unit of observation. The unit of analysis concerns the general idea or phenomenon being studied. The unit of observation concerns the specific item measured at an individual level.

**Coding:** Coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics. There are two methods of coding: (i) deductive measurement, (ii) inductive measurement.

**Deductive Measurement:** It requires the development of specific coding categories before a researcher starts a content analysis. Deductive measurement is useful with an established set of coding categories or if a clear hypothesis or research question exists at the outset of the analysis.

**Inductive Measurement:** This method supports the practice of emergent coding, which means that the basic research question or hypothesis for a formal content analysis emerges from the units of observation. It entails creating coding categories during the analysis process. Emergent coding is useful in exploratory content analysis.

**Coding Scheme:** Every analysis begins with an existing coding scheme. Coding scheme is another phrase of coding categories and coding book, within which all instances of the content are analyzed or noted. Every coding scheme consist of the following statements.

**Master Code Book:** It provides the coders with explicit instructions and defines each word/ phrase/ aspect to be analyzed. It explains how to use code sheet.

**Code Sheet:** Code sheet provides the coders with a form on which they note every instance of every word/ phrase/ aspect being analyzed. The code sheet lists all the coding categories.

**Coding Dictionary:** It is used with computer based content analysis. A set of words/ phrases, part of speech .... That is used as the basis for a search text.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Identify the areas of research in economics wherein content analysis can be used.

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- 2) What is the distinction between manifest content analysis and latent content analysis?

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## 19.5 APPROACHES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Instead of being a single technique, content analysis is a collection of different approaches to the analysis of texts or more generally of messages of any kind. Important approaches frequently used in Social Sciences are discussed below:

### 19.5.1 Conceptual Content Analysis

Traditionally, content analysis has most often been thought in terms of conceptual analysis. In conceptual analysis, a concept is chosen for examination and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying its presence. It is also known as thematic analysis. The focus here is on looking at the occurrence of selected terms within a text or texts, although the terms may be implicit as well as explicit. While explicit terms obviously are easy to identify, coding for implicit terms and deciding their level of implication is complicated by the need to base judgments on a somewhat subjective system.

### 19.5.2 Relational Content Analysis

Relational content analysis, like conceptual analysis, begins with the act of identifying concepts present in a given text or set of texts. However, relational analysis seeks to go beyond presence by exploring the relationships between the concepts identified. Relational analysis has also been termed semantic analysis.

In other words, the focus of relational analysis is to look for semantic, or meaningful relationships. Individual concepts, in and of themselves, are viewed as having no inherent meaning. Carley (1992) asserts that concepts are ‘ideational kernels.’ These kernels can be thought of as symbols which acquire meaning through their connections to other symbol. Relational content analysis approach can be of three types:

- i) **Affect extraction:** This approach provides an emotional evaluation of concepts explicit in a text. It is problematic because emotion may vary across time and populations. Nevertheless, when extended, it can be a potent means of exploring the emotional/psychological state of the speaker and/or writer.
- ii) **Proximity analysis:** This approach, on the other hand, is concerned with the co-occurrence of explicit concepts in the text. In this procedure, the text is defined as a string of words. A given length of words, called a *window*, is determined. The window is then scanned across a text to check for the co-occurrence of concepts. The result is the creation of a concept determined by the *concept matrix*. In other words, a matrix, or a group of interrelated, co-occurring concepts, might suggest a certain overall meaning.
- iii) **Cognitive mapping:** This approach is one that allows for further analysis of the results from the two previous approaches. It attempts to take the above processes one step further by representing these relationships visually for comparison. Whereas affective and proximal analysis function primarily within the preserved order of the text, cognitive mapping attempts to create a model of the overall meaning of the text. This can be represented as a graphic map that represents the relationship between concepts. In this manner, cognitive mapping lends itself to the comparison of semantic connections across texts. This is known as map analysis which allows for comparisons to explore “how meanings and definitions shift across people and time”.

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## 19.6 PROCEDURE INVOLVED IN CONTENT ANALYSIS

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The various steps involved in content analysis are: (i) Formulation of research questions, (ii) Determining materials to be included, (iii) Developing content categories, (iv) Selecting and Finalizing units of analysis, (v) Code the materials, (vi) Analyze and interpret the results. These are discussed below:

### 19.6.1 Formulation of Research Questions

Content analysis begins with a specific statement of the objectives or research questions. The objective of content analysis is to convert recorded “raw” phenomenon into data, which can be treated essentially in a scientific manner so that body of knowledge may be built up. Objectives are precisely worded questions that investigator/s is/are trying to answer. By making a clear statement of the research question, the researcher can ensure that the analysis focuses on those aspects of content which are relevant for the research. The question should be based on a clear understanding of research needs and the available data. Therefore, the selection of the topic should be such that can be answered by analyzing the appropriate communication content.

In general content analysis can be used to answer “What” but not “Why” question. It helps analysts to describe or summarize the content of written material, the attitudes or perceptions of its writers, or its effects on the audience. For example, if analysts want to assess the effects of different women empowerment programmes on the lives of younger and middle aged women in rural and urban area. Content analysis of open-ended interview / responses could be used to identify their outlook, attitudes and security about their life.

### 19.6.2 Determining Materials to be Included

The next step of content analysis is to decide relevant communication content to answer the research question and to determine the time period to be covered. Content analysis can be used to study any recorded materials as long as the information is available to be reanalyzed for reliability checks. It is used most frequently to analyze written materials to study any recorded communication including TV programmes, movies, photographs, regulations, other public documents, workplaces, case studies, reports, answer to survey questions, newspapers, news release, books, Journals article, letters etc. Speeches and discussions can also be analyzed.

**Sampling:** Sampling is necessary if the population is too extensive to be analyzed. Thus a sample should be selected from the population in order to make valid conclusion and generalization about a population. Simple random sampling, interval sampling, cluster sampling and multistage sampling techniques are used in content analysis.

### 19.6.3 Developing Content Categories

Content analysis is no better than its categories., since they reflect the formulated thinking, hypotheses, and the purpose of the study. Categories provide structure for grouping and recording units. Developing the category system to classify the text is the heart of content analysis. Berelson (1952) has emphasized the importance of formulating coding categories by quoting that “content analysis stands or falls by its categories. Particular studies have been productive to the extent that categories were clearly formulated and well adequate to the problem and to the content”.

To be useful, every content category must be thoroughly defined, indicating what type of material be and not to be included. Chadwick et.al. (1984) have also emphasized the following three characteristics of content categories i.e. (i) Categories should be exhaustive so that all relevant items in the material being studied can be placed within a category. (ii) It should be mutually exclusive so that no item can be coded in more than one category. (iii) Thirdly categories should be independent so that recording of unit's category assignment is not affected by the category assignment of other recording units.

**Category format:** Categories can be conceptualized in many ways. Some common category formats are grouping, scales, and matrices. Structured category format increase coding efficiency especially when the number of categories are large. Scales provide the rank ordering information. Matrices are useful formats when analysts seek more information about issues than simply whether they are present or absent.

### 19.6.4 Selecting Units of Analysis

Once the categories have been identified, the analyst would be interested in determining the unit of content for classification under the content categories and the system of enumeration for the same. The unit of analysis is the smallest unit of content that is coded under the content category. The unit of analysis vary with the nature and objective of the analysis. Thus, the unit of analysis might be a single word, a theme, a letter, a symbol, a news story, a short story, a character or an entire article etc. There are two kinds of unit of analysis : *Recording unit and Context unit*.

**The Recording Unit** is the specific segment of content in which the occurrence of a referene /fact is counted or the unit can be broken down so that reference/ facts can be placed in different categories.

**The Context Unit** is the larger body of the content that may be searched to characterize the recording unit. Context units set limits on the portion of written material that is to be examined for categories of words or statements. A recording unit is the specific segment of context unit in written material that is placed in a category. For example, if the coding unit is the word, then the context unit may be the sentence or the paragraph in which the word appears and characterizes the recording unit.

**Word:** The smallest unit generally used in the content analysis as a unit is a word. Lasswell(1952) calls word as a symbol and may include word compounds e,g, phrases as well as single word. In this type of research one might study the relative occurrence of key symbols or value laden terms until the content has been systematically examined relevant to the hypotheses of the study.

**Theme:** The theme is a single assertion about a subject. The theme is among the most useful units of content analysis because issues, values, beliefs, and attitudes are usually discussed in this form.

**Character:** Character may be defined as a use of fictional or historical character as the recording unit is also employed.

**Item:** The item is the whole natural unit employed by procedures of symbolic material. It may be the entire speech, radio programme, letter to the editors, or news story.

**Space and Time Measures:** Some studies have classified content by physical division such as column inch, the line or paragraph, the minutes or the foot film.

**Finalizing units of analysis:** In content analysis, the counting or quantification of the units is performed by using three methods of enumeration : 1) Frequency, 2) Intensity or Direction, and Space/ Time.

**Frequency:** Frequency simply means counting whether or not something occurs and how often (how many times).

**Direction:** Direction is nothing but the direction of messages in the content along some continuam e,g, positive, negative, supporting or opposed.

**Intensity:** Intensity is the strength or power of a message in a direction. For example, the characteristic of forgetfulness can be minor (e.g. not remembering to take the keys when leaving home, taking time to recall the name of someone whom you have not seen in years) or major (e.g. not remembering your name, not recognizing your children).

**Space:** A researcher can record the size of the text messages or the amount of space or volume allocated to it. Space in written text is measured by counting words, sentences, paragraphs, or space on a page (e.g. square inches) for video or audio text. Space can also be measured by the amount of time allotted.

To explain the differences among the above described quantification levels and how they relate to constructing categories, let us give a hypothetical example of 'Importance of FDI in public sector organizations'. The analyst has a major source of information as newspaper, articles, public documents, transcripts of interview with political leaders, and public officials. For each issue of each newspaper in the sample, the analysts add together number of column inches from all news articles/editorials to find the total number of space for each position in addition to the coding, the name, location, and date of each newspaper. The analyst who use this level of quantification have to assure that the differences they find in amounts of space are valid indicators of relative emphasis or importance. At the next level of quantification, the analyst can code the frequency of recording units by tallying the number of times each issues or statements occurs in the text. At the third level of quantification, analyst provide code for intensity. Frequencies are counted but each coded statement or issues is also adjusted by a weight that measures related intensity.

### 19.6.5 Code the Materials

Coding the unit of analysis into content category is called coding. Defining categories and preparing coding schedule for analysis and coding of the content are almost simultaneous steps. Material can be coded either manually or by computers, depending on the sources available and format of the material. After deciding how the material will be coded, the analyst writes the instructions for coding. According to Krippendorff (1980), the guidelines for coding instructions include definition of recording units and procedures for identifying theme, descriptions of variables and categories, outline of cognitive procedures used in placing data in categories, and instructions for using and administering data sheets.

**Pre-testing:** Pretesting is an important step before actual coding begins. It involves coding a small portion of the material to be analyzed. A pretest enables the analyst to determine whether (1) the categories are clearly specified and meet the necessary requirement, (2) the coding instructions are adequate and, (3) the coders are suitable for coding. These are determined on the basis of reliability among coders and consistency in individual coding decision. If analyst find that material can be coded with high reliability then actual coding begins.

### 19.6.6 Analyzing and Interpreting the Results

The main objective of content analysis is to analyze the collected information with regard to the proposed objective of the analysis. The analysis involves summarizing the coded data, discovering patterns and relationships within the data, testing hypotheses about the patterns and relationship to assess the validity of the analysis.

The absolute and relative frequencies are most commonly used for summarizing the data. Absolute frequency might be the number of times statements or issues are found in the sample. A relative frequency might be represented by a percentage of the sample size.

Another way of analyzing content analysis is to examine relations among variables by cross tabulating the cooccurrence of variables. Other techniques for discovering patterns of relationship in data include contingency analysis, cluster analysis and factor analysis.

One important development in analyzing content analysis of the data is the use of computer. Computer programme like “General Inquirer” can identify within a body of text, those words and phrases that belong to specified categories (Stone et.al., 1996). Other computer programme like SPSS, Atlas titi, Minitab etc. are also very useful in both quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

Whatever the technique used, a final and important task is to assess the validity of the result by relating them to other data that are known to reasonably valid. The inference a researcher can or cannot make on the basis of research is critical in content analysis. Content analysis describes what is in the text. It cannot reveal the intentions of those who created the text or the effects that messages in the text have on those who receive them.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) State the different sources of content analysis.

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- 2) Which methods are used to quantify the units of analysis?

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- 3) Briefly describes the different steps involved in the process of content analysis.

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## 19.7 USES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis is a scientific, objective, systematic, quantitative and generalizable description of the communication content. This method can be used to understand a wide range of themes such as social change, cultural symbols, changing trends in the theoretical content of different disciplines, changes in mass media content, nature of news coverage of social issues, election issues as reflected in mass media. Content analysis can be used to examine anything that you see around you.

It is used in several mass media and literature to cultural studies, psychology, economics, political science, gender, age issues, as well as many other fields where inquiry is made. Written documents, pictures, videos, can also be used for content analysis.

In consumer behaviour and marketing, content analysis has been used to study the following questions (Cited in Kassarian, 1977).

- 1) What are product and company images of selected consumer goods as reflected in the mass media. ( Stone, Dunphy & Bernstein, 1966).
- 2) Which of the several decision making models ,for example compensatory, lexicographic, risk etc. are used by magazine and television advertisers (Wright and Barbour, 1975).
- 3) What is the ease of readability of various marketing, advertising and consumer research Journals. ( Lacho, Stearns, & Villere, 1975).
- 4) What are the changing values in society as reflected in the analysis of mass periodical fiction (Johns-Heine, & Gerth, 1949)

The above example indicates the wide applicability of content analysis. Many researchers have explored changes in women's role, sexual behaviour and health and violence by analyzing the content in television and movies messages (Olson, 1994).

### **Application of Content Analysis: An Illustration**

**A Research Study entitled “Gandhi’s Constructive Programme: A Study of Its Contemporary Relevance”: Undertaken by Ms. Raunak Ahmad, Research Scholar, (Gandhi and Peace Studies) IGNOU, New Delhi for award of the Ph.D Degree.**

The main objectives of the study were to:

- (i) find out the gaps in the value and principles of social work profession and its applicability in the Indian social setup, (ii) examine the perception of social work students in India towards Gandhian principles of Constructive Programme, (iii) study the relevance of principles of Gandhian Constructive Programme from the perspective of students of social work discipline in India and (iv) to pin point the importance of Gandhian Constructive Programme to strengthen the indigenous base of contemporary social work education.

**Research Methodology:** Keeping in view the objectives and issues to be probed in the study, the method of content analysis was considered appropriate to conduct the study. The study was undertaken for an in-depth and systematic analysis into the convolution of the phenomenon of Gandhi's Constructive Programme and its contemporary relevance.

In order to interrogate the values and principles of social work profession and its subsequent applicability in Indian social setup, a detailed study of the comprehensive MSW (Master of Social Work) syllabus of seven central universities was undertaken. These seven universities were: University of Delhi, Jamia Millia Islamia, Pondicherry University, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Banaras Hindu University, Central University of Rajasthan and Maulana Azad National Urdu University. Through conceptual content analysis, the occurrence of the selected terms in the current social work curriculum was studied. The text in the curriculum was carefully examined and was classified under these categories: foundation of social work, theory and practice of group work, working with communities, social work research, social group work, social casework and counseling, history and philosophy of social work etc. These categories were further subcategorized for deeper analysis. Texts depicting similar meaning were put under single category and none of the category was repeated. The process of content analysis further went into detail when the common foreign scholars work and common Indian scholars works prescribed under the curriculum of universities were created as two separate categories. It helped to present a comparative picture. Categories were then coded and the coded data were summarized and analyzed.

### **Main Results**

- 1) Methods of social work such as community work, casework, group work, social welfare management have been covered in the curriculum of all the seven universities.
- 2) Majority of universities in the list are also offering social work history and foundation as well as social work research.
- 3) The social action and social policy and planning being development oriented are more meaningful in Indian context but are offered by minimum number of universities.
- 4) The Gandhian ideology of social work is marginally touched in social work curriculum of most of the universities under study.
- 5) 67 per cent of the suggested readings recommended in the curriculum are of foreign scholars work.
- 6) The books on Gandhi, Gandhian ideology of social work written by Gandhi are barely included in the suggested reading list of the curriculum of these universities.

Apart from above, this study also made use of the method of content analysis in studying the Gandhian principles of Constructive Programme. For this purpose, the various documents introduced by Gandhi in the form of vows, pledges, principles etc. were used. In this manner, the method helped to draw the final set of principles of Constructive Programme which can further be studied in the context of its relevance in social work education.

## 19.8 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

### 19.8.1 Advantages

The Advantages of content analysis as a research technique can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The greatest advantage of content analysis is its economy in terms of time and money. There is no requirement for a large research staff. No special equipment is needed.
- 2) The methods allows the correction of errors. In content analysis, it is usually easier to repeat a portion of the study than it is in other research method.
- 3) Content analysis permits the study of processes occurring over a long time.
- 4) Content analysis has the advantage of all unobtrusive measures that it has any effect on the subject being studied.
- 5) It can present an objective account of events, themes, issues, and so forth, that may not be immediately apparent to a reader or viewer .
- 6) It deals with large volume of data. Processing may be laborious but of late computer has made it easy.

### 19.8.2 Disadvantages

- 1) It is limited to the examination of recorded communication. Such communication may be oral, written, or graphic, but they must be in some fashion which permits analysis.
- 2) Content analysis may not be as objective as it claims since the researcher must select and record data accurately. In some instances the researcher must make choices about how to interpret particular form of behaviour.
- 3) It has both advantages and disadvantages in terms of reliability and validity. Problems of validity is unlikely unless researcher happen to be studying communication process itself.
- 4) It describes, rather explains people's behaviour. It does not tell us what behaviour means to those involved and those watching.
- 5) By attempting to quantify behaviour, this method may not tell us very much about the quality of people's relationship,

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What are the different areas where the content analysis can be used as a research technique?

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- 2) Do you think that the technique of content analysis maintain objectivity? Give reasons.

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## 19.9 LET US SUM UP

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Content analysis is a multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating a broad spectrum of problems in which the content of communication serves as the basis of inference. Content analysis is a set of procedures for collecting and organizing information in a standardized format that allows analysts to make inferences about the characteristics and meaning of written and other recorded materials. Broadly content analysis is observed in two forms – manifested content analysis and latent content analysis. Mainly two approaches are followed in application of content analysis: conceptual analysis and Relational analysis. In conceptual analysis, a concept is chosen for examination, and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying its presence. Relational analysis also termed as semantic analysis too begins with the act of identifying concepts present in a given text or set of texts. However, relational analysis seeks to go beyond presence by exploring the relationships between the concepts identified. The various steps involved in content analysis include: objective or formulation of research question, determining materials to be included developing content categories, selecting and finalizing units of analysis, code the materials, and analyze and interpret the results. Content analysis can be used to understand a wide range of themes such as social change, cultural symbols, changing trends in the theoretical content of different disciplines, election issues as reflected in mass media. It can be used to examine anything that you see around you. Content analysis has several advantages and limitations.

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## 19.10 KEY WORDS

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- Objectivity** : To have objectivity, the analysis must be carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules which will enable two or more investigators to obtain the same results from the same documents.
- Systematic** : In a systematic analysis the inclusion and exclusion of content or categories is done according to consistently applied criteria of selection.
- Generality** : By generality, we mean that the findings must have theoretical relevance unrelated to other attributes of content or to the characteristics of communicator or recipient of the message.
- Manifest Content Analysis:** It involves simply counting words, phrases, or “surface” features of the text itself.

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Latent Content Analysis</b> | : It involves interpreting the underlying meaning of the text.                                                                                                          |
| <b>Unit of Analysis</b>        | : The unit of analysis concerns the general idea or phenomenon being studies.                                                                                           |
| <b>Unit of Observation</b>     | : Unit of observation concerns the specific item measured at an individual level.                                                                                       |
| <b>Word</b>                    | : The smallest unit generally used in the content analysis as a unit.                                                                                                   |
| <b>Theme</b>                   | : The theme is a single assertion about a subject.                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Character</b>               | : Character may be defined as a use of fictional or historical character.                                                                                               |
| <b>Coding</b>                  | : Coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics. |
| <b>Coding Scheme</b>           | : Coding scheme is another phrase of coding categories and coding book, within which all instances of the content being analyzed or noted.                              |
| <b>Master Code Book</b>        | : It provides the coders with explicit instructions and defines each word/ phrase/ aspect to be analyzed.                                                               |
| <b>Code Sheet</b>              | : Code sheet provides the coders with a form on which they note every instance of every word/ phrase/ aspect being analyzed.                                            |

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## 19.12 ANSWERS OR HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 19.1 and Section 19.7
- 2) See Section 19.4

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Written materials, recorded communications including TV programmes, movies, photographs, regulations & other public documents, work places, case studies, reports, newspapers, new press releases, books, journals, articles, letters etc.
- 2) See Sub-section 19.6.4
- 3) See Sub-section 19.6.5 and 19.6.6

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 19.7
- 2) See Sub-section 19.8.2

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## UNIT 20 ACTION RESEARCH

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### Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Historical Background of Action Research
- 20.3 Definition of Action Research
- 20.4 Principles of Action Research
- 20.5 Characteristics of Action Research
- 20.6 Models of Action Research
  - 20.6.1 Kenmis and McTaggart's Spiral Model
  - 20.6.2 Elliot's Action Research Model
  - 20.6.3 O' Leary's Cycles' of Action Research Model
  - 20.6.4 Stringer's Interacting Spiral Action Model
  - 20.6.5 Kurt Lewin's Action Research Spiral Model
  - 20.6.6 Calhoun's Action Research Cycle Model
  - 20.6.7 Bachman's Action Research Spiral Model
  - 20.6.8 Riel's Progressive Problem Solving Model
  - 20.6.9 Hendricks's Action Research Model
- 20.7 Steps Involved in Action Research
- 20.8 Advantages and Disadvantages of Action Research
  - 20.8.1 Advantages
  - 20.8.2 Disadvantages
- 20.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.10 Key Words
- 20.11 References
- 20.12 Answers or Hints to Check Your Progress Exercises

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### 20.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- state the meaning, type and importance of action research;
- describe the principles guiding the action research;
- explain the various models of action research;
- learn the steps involved in action research; and
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of action research.

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### 20.1 INTRODUCTION

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We have learned in Unit 1, 5, and 6 that two approaches – quantitative research associated with dominant post positivist paradigm and qualitative research associated with interpretative paradigm and critical theory paradigm have been followed in undertaking research in Social Sciences. Under critical theory paradigm, research and practice are integrated activities and both (researcher

and practitioner) guide each other. With emergence of critical theory approach as an alternative to positivism and post positivism, participatory method and emancipatory methods are also used to conduct the research studies in economics. You have already studied participatory method in Unit 18. Emancipatory method relies upon the **process of knowing through doing** rather than generation of knowledge through conceptualization and theorizing. This strategy of knowledge generation is termed as **action research** wherein it is believed that theory is only really useful if it is put in service of a practice focusing on achieving social change.

Action research is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level. Kurt Lewin's, one of the pioneer person for action research, work was intended to change the life of disadvantaged groups in terms of housing, employment and their working conditions. Action research is essentially research through action. It is usually a collaborative activity which involves input from people who are likely to be affected by the research. It involves deep inquiry into one's professional action. The researchers examine their work and look for opportunities to improve. They work with others to propose a new course of action to help their community, improve its work practices. They seek evidence from multiple sources to help them, analyze reactions to the action taken. They recognize their own view as subjective and seek to develop their understanding of the event from multiple perspectives. The researcher uses data collection to characterize the forces in ways that can be shared with practitioner. This leads to a new plan for action.

Thus, action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social sciences simultaneously. There is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction. Accomplishing this twin goal requires the active collaboration of researchers and client and thus it stresses the importance of co-learning as a primary aspect of the research process.

Hence, in this unit, we shall discuss the concept and type of action research, its various models, steps involved in action research, its uses, advantages and disadvantages. Let us start with the historical evolution of action research.

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## 20.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ACTION RESEARCH

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It is not certain who invented action research. Origin of Action research is considered to begin from the work **Kurt Lewin in 1940's**. He was strong exponent of research action in its concern with power relations between researcher and researched and the rights of the individuals. He was concerned with the social problems and focused on participative group process for addressing conflict, crises and change within organization. Lewin first coined the term action research in 1946 in his paper "Action Research and Minority Problems". He characterized action research as: "A comparative research on the conditions and effect of various forms of social action and research leading to social action, using a process of a spiral steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact – finding about the result of the action".

**Eric Trist** was another major contributor to the field. He was a social psychiatrist. Both, Lewin and Trist applied their research to systematic change in and between organizations. They emphasized direct professional – client collaboration and affirmed the role of group relations as basis for problem solving. Both were strong proponents of the principle that decisions are best implemented by those who help them. Alternatively, **Deshler and Ewart (1995)** suggested that action research was first used by John Collier to improve race relations at the community level when he was the Commissioner of Indian Affairs prior to and during the Second World War, and Cooke (undated) appears to provide strong support for this. It is, therefore, unlikely that we will ever know when or where the method originated, simply because people have always investigated their practice in order to make better or improve. **Rogers' (2002) account of John Dewey's (1933)** notion of reflection, for instance, shows that it is very similar, and one could also point to the ancient Greek empiricists as using an action research cycle. Action research is difficult to define for two linked reasons: first, it is such a natural process that it comes in many different guises, and second, it has been developed differently for different applications. Almost immediately upon Lewin's coining of the term in the literature, action research was seen as a general term for four different processes: diagnostic, participant, empirical and experimental.

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## 20.3 DEFINITION OF ACTION RESEARCH

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According to **Frost (2002)** 'Action research is a process of systematic reflection, enquiry and action carried out by individuals about their own professional practice'. **Hopkins (1985)** suggests that action research is the combination of action and research rendering action as a form of disciplined inquiry, in which a personal attempt is made to understand, improve and reform practice. **Ebbutt (1985)**, too, regards action research as a systematic study that combines action and reflection with the intention of improving practice.

**Corey (1953)** views action research as a process in which practitioners study problems *scientifically* so that they can evaluate, improve and steer decision-making and practice. 'Action research is a term used to describe professionals studying their own practice in order to improve it'. **Kemmis and McTaggart (1992)** also argued that 'to do action research is to plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life'. 'Action research is ... usually described as cyclic, with action and critical reflection taking place in turn. 'Action research is a flexible spiral process which allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time' (Dick, 2002). **Cohen and Manion (1980)** described it as "essentially on the spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problems located in an immediate situation. This means that a step by step process is constantly monitored over varying periods of time and by a variety of techniques ..... diaries, interviews, case studies, etc., so that ensuing feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustments, directional changes, redefinitions as necessary".

A more philosophical stance on action research is taken by Carr and Kemmis, who regard it as a form of 'self-reflective enquiry' by participants, which is undertaken in order to improve their understanding of their practices in context with a view to maximizing social justice... **Kemmis and McTaggart (1992)** suggest that: Action research is concerned equally with changing *individuals*, on

the one hand, and, on the other, the *culture* of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong. Action research is designed to bridge the gap between research and practice (Somekh 1995) thereby striving to overcome the perceived persistent failure of research practice.

Thus, Action research combines diagnosis, action and reflection, focusing on practical issues that have been identified by participants and which are somehow both problematic yet capable of being changed. Over the last decade, action research has begun to capture the attention of teachers, administrators, and policymakers around the country. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) defined it very effectively by encompassing the different definitions of action research.

Action research is a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of the own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. . . . The approach is only action research when it is *collaborative*, though it is important to realize that the action research of the group is achieved through the *critically examined action* of individual group members.

(Kemmis and McTaggart 1988)

Most simply put, action research (AR) implies a process of research where the purpose of the research is not only to study the existing reality but to engage in an effort to transform it. In this model, research assumes a catalytic role and produces both a new dynamic and concrete, suitable changes in the reality that can then be actively inducted into the process of knowledge creation. A requirement of AR is that the separation between “researcher and researchee” is dissolved—so as to avoid the weakness of conventional methods which view “affected persons and groups” as being passive and incapable of analysing their own situation and identifying solutions to their own problems. (Mukherjee, 2006.)

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How action research is distinct from pure and simple applied research?

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- 2) What are the aims of action research?

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- 3) State the concept of action research coined by Kurt Lewin.

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- 4) Do you think that action research play a catalysist role? Give reasons for your answer in two sentences.

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## 20.4 PRINCIPLES OF ACTION RESEARCH

A set of six principles according to winter guide an action research. These principles are discussed below:

### 1) **Reflective Critical Analysis**

It is the process of becoming aware of our own perceptual biases. For example, description or narration of a situation in any notes, transcripts, or official documents imply that it is factional and true. It claims to be reliable and authentic. But truth in any social setting or social reality is in relative to the teller. The principle of reflective critical analysis ensures people to reflect on issues and practices and make explicit interpretations, biases, assumptions and concern upon which judgments are made. In this way, practical description can give rise to theoretical considerations.

### 2) **Dialectical Critical Analysis**

It is a way of understanding the relationships between the elements that make up various phenomena in our context. Social reality is validated or shared through language. Phenomena are conceptualized in dialogue. Therefore a dialectical critical analysis is required to understand a set of relationship both between the phenomenon and its context, and between the elements constituting the phenomenon. The important point is to focus attention on those constituent elements that are unstable or opposing one another simply because these elements are most likely to create changes.

### 3) **Collaborative Resource**

The principles of collaborative resources presuppose that each person's ideas are equally significant as potential resources for creating interpretive categories of analysis, which are negotiated among the participants. It makes possible the insight gathered between many viewpoint and within a single viewpoint. Hence everyone's view is taken as a contribution to understand the situation. Participants in action research are co-researchers.

### 4) **Risk**

It is an understanding of our own taken-for-granted processes and willingness to submit them to critique. Normally, the change process is considered a threat to all previously established ways of doing things, thus creating

psychiatric fears among the participants. One of the most prominent fears emanates from the risk of ego generation from open discussion of one's interpretations, ideas and judgment. Initiator of action research will use this principle to reduce other's fears and invite participation by assuring that they, too, will be the subject to the same process and that whatever be the outcome, learning will take place.

### 5) Plural Structure

It involves developing various accounts and critiques, rather than a single authoritative interpretation. The action research comprises of a multiplicity of views, Commentaries and critical analysis which lead to multiple possible actions and interpretation. This inquiry requires much texts for reporting. Thus, there will be many explanations made clear and range of options for action presented. A report, therefore, acts as a support for ongoing discussion among collaborators rather than a final conclusion of fact.

### 6) Theory, Practice and Transformation

Theory and practice are considered two inter-dependent yet complementary phases of the change process. For action researchers, theory informs practice and practice refines theory in a continuous transformation. In any setting, people's actions are based on implicitly held assumptions, theories and hypotheses. With every observed result, theoretical knowledge is enhanced. Thus, a single change process has two intertwined aspects. It is up to the researchers to make the theoretical justifications explicit for action, and to question the basis of that justification. The ensuring practical applications as a follow up are subjected to further analysis in five cycles that continuously alternates emphasis between theory and practice.

## 20.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Action research has the following characteristics:

- 1) **It is collaborative, i.e.** everyone's view is taken as a contribution in understanding the situation. Moreover, if a problem is faced by a practitioner in a particular situation (say a school), action research can be collaborative where practitioners facing similar problems in nearby schools can collaborate to find solutions of a problem.
- 2) **Action research helps in systems planning and restructuring.** For example, if a primary teacher finds that in his/her class the students are not able to concentrate, the teacher starts finding the reasons for the same. After analyzing the situation, the teacher finds that most of the children often observe other children playing in the playground because of opening of classroom window towards playground. They, therefore, are not able to concentrate in their studies in the class. Now, what do you think a teacher should do? Well, in such a case a teacher can change the seating plan of the classroom. This is the way a teacher gets involved in restructuring the class.
- 3) **Action research is a small-scale intervention.** Its objective is to bring out changes in the functioning of the practitioner himself/herself. It may or may not have applicability for others. Action research is a narrowly focused research undertaken by teachers and other practitioners in a given specific situation and context.

- 4) **Contextual nature** is an important characteristics of action research. For example, a teacher of a particular school may face a particular problem in the form of errors committed by fifth grade students in English comprehension in a school but the same problem may not be observed by him/her in other schools.
- 5) **It enhances the *competencies of the practitioners***. Action research enables practitioners to have a clear vision of the problematic situation. This becomes helpful in identifying ways and means to tackle the problem.
- 6) **Action research seeks to *improve the quality of human relationships***.
- 7) **Action research seeks to understand particular complex** social situations whether it is a class, school or community.
- 8) **Action research allows us to identify remedial measures for improvement**. It is specific in nature, i.e. specific to a particular class, school or situation. Therefore, results cannot be generalized.
- 9) ***It is a systematic and scientific process*** but not very rigorous.
- 10) Action research is *participatory*: it is research through which people work towards the improvement of *their own practices*.
- 11) Action research makes use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- 12) Action research is open-minded about what counts as evidence (or data) – it involves not only *keeping records* which describe what is happening as accurately as possible . . . but also *collecting and analysing our own judgements, reactions and impressions* about what is going on.
- 13) Action research is a *political process* because it involves us in making changes that will affect others.
- 14) It is a *systematic learning process* wherein people act deliberately, but remaining open to surprises and responsive to opportunities.
- 15) Action research allows us to build *records* of our improvements and changing *activities and practices*. It records the changes in the *language and discourse* we describe, explain and justify our practices. It also documents changes in the *social relationships and forms of organization* which characterize and constrain our practices.

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## 20.6 MODELS OF ACTION RESEARCH

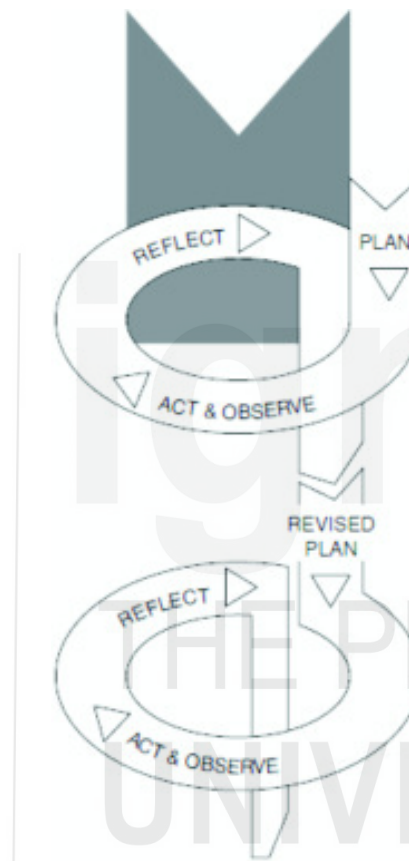
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Numerous authors and researchers have proposed models for undertaking the action research. Because the process involved in action research is somewhat dynamic, various models look a bit different from one another but possess numerous common elements. Starting with a central problem or topic, action research models involve some observation or monitoring of current practice, followed by the collection and synthesis of information and data. Finally, some sort of action is taken, which serves as the basis for next stage of action research. Some models are simple in their design, while others appear relatively complex. Let us discuss some models of action research as an illustration.

### 20.6.1 Kemmis and McTaggart's Spiral Model

These two authors describe this model as participatory research. In this model, action research involves a spiral of self-reflective cycles of:

- Planning a change.
- Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change.
- Reflecting on these processes and consequences and then re-planning.
- Acting and observing.
- Reflecting, etc.

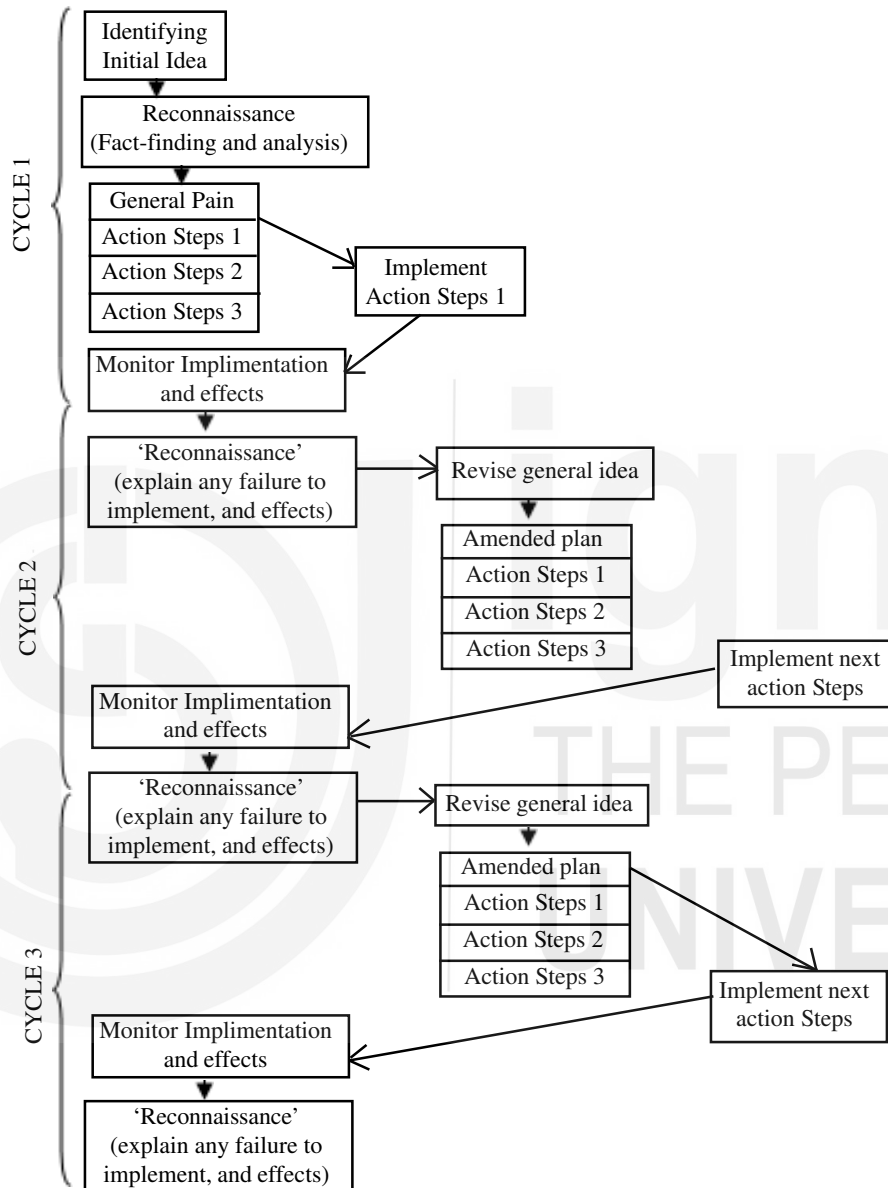


**Fig. 20.1: Kemmis and McTaggart's Action Research Spiral**

Kemmis and McTaggart's (2000) do not recommend to use it as a rigid structure. They maintain that in reality the process may not be as neat as the spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting suggests. These stages, they maintain, will *overlap*, and initial plans will quickly become obsolete in the light of learning from experience. In reality the process is likely to be more fluid, open, and responsive.

We find the spiral model appealing because it gives an opportunity to visit a phenomenon at a higher level each time and so to progress towards a greater overall understanding. By carrying out action research using this model, you can understand a particular issue within a healthcare context and make informed decisions with an enhanced understanding. It is therefore about empowerment. However, Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) point out that the spiral model may suggest that even the basic process may take a long time to complete.

The model employed by Elliot (1991) shares many of the features of that of Kemmis and McTaggart and is based on Lewin's work of the 1940s. It includes identifying a general idea, reconnaissance or fact-finding, planning, action, evaluation, amending plan and taking second action step, and so on, as can be seen in Figure 20.2.



**Fig. 20.2: Elliot's Action Research Model**

Source: Elliot, J. Action Research for Educational Change

### 20.6.3 O'Leary's Cycles of Action Research Model

Cycles of action research shown in Figure 20.3, portray action research as a cyclic process which takes shape as knowledge emerges. In this model, it is stressed that 'cycles converge towards better understanding of situation and improved action implementation. Cycle of actions are based in evaluative practice that alters between action and critical reflection'. O'Leary sees action research as an experiential learning approach to change, where the goal is to continually

refine the methods, data, and interpretation in the light of understanding developed in each earlier cycle.

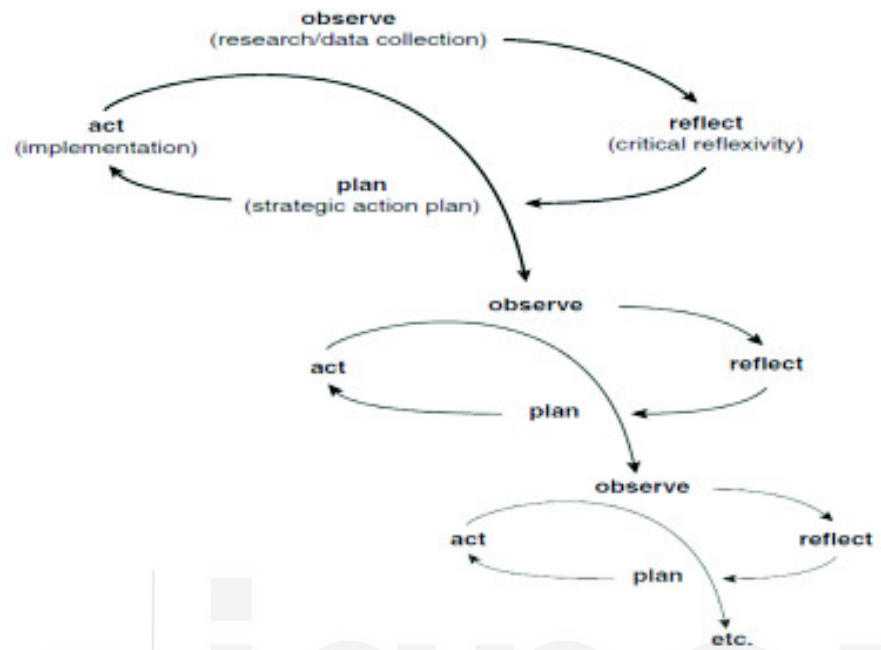


Fig. 20.3: O'Leary's Cycles of Research

#### 20.6.4 Stringer's Interacting Spiral Action Research Model

"Simple, yet powerful framework" consisting of a "look, think, and act" routine. During each stage, participants observe, reflect, and then take some sort of action. This action leads them into the next stage (see Figure 20.4).

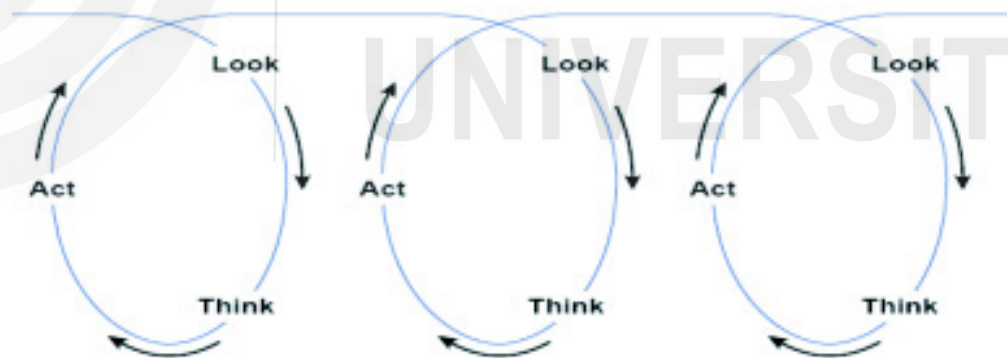


Fig. 20.4: Stringer's Interacting Spiral Action Research Model

#### 20.6.5 Kurt Lewin's Action Research Spiral Model

Stringer propounded interacting spiral model and viewed that "action research"—also depicts an action research spiral, which includes fact finding, planning, taking action, evaluating, and amending the plan, before moving into a second action step (see Figure 20.5)

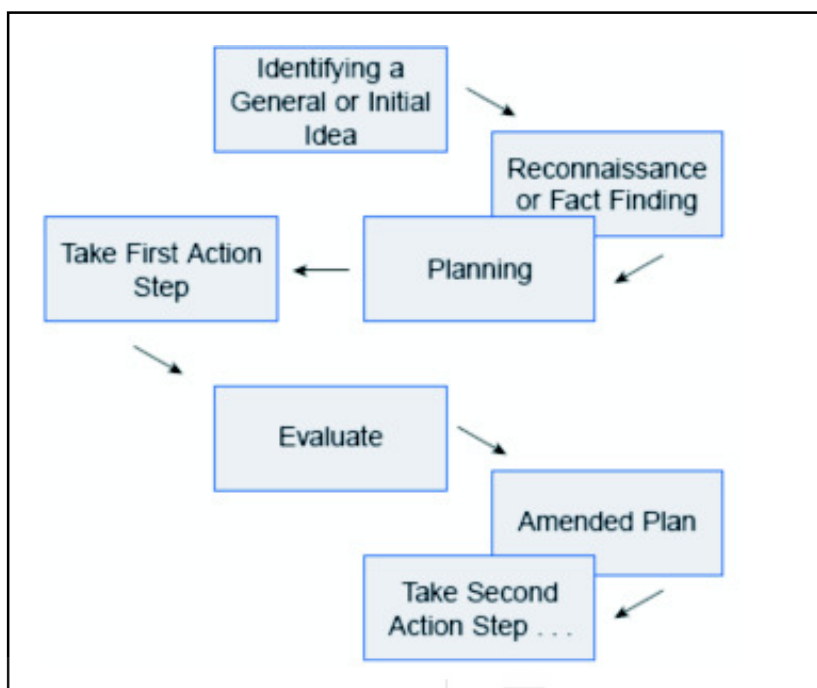


Fig. 20.5: Lewin's Action Research Spiral

Source: Adapted from *Encyclopedia of Informal Education*. ([www.infed.org](http://www.infed.org)).

### 20.6.6 Calhoun's Action Research Cycle Model

While not appearing as a “spiral,” still represents a process that is built around a cyclical notion. As she describes, the solid lines indicate the primary direction of the action research cycle through the phases in numerical order. The dotted lines indicate backward and forward movement within the cycle as refinement or clarification of information is warranted (see Figure 20.6).

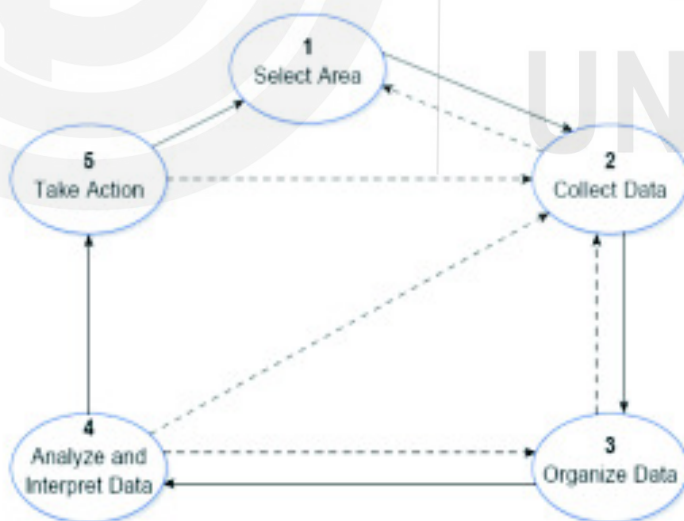


Fig. 20.6: Calhoun's Action Research Cycle

### 20.6.7 Bachman's Action Research Spiral Model

Action research spiral continues this notion of the cyclical nature of action research (see Figure 20.7). His downward spiral suggests that participants gather information, plan actions, observe and evaluate those actions, and then reflect and plan for a new cycle of the spiral, based on the insights that were gained in the previous cycle.

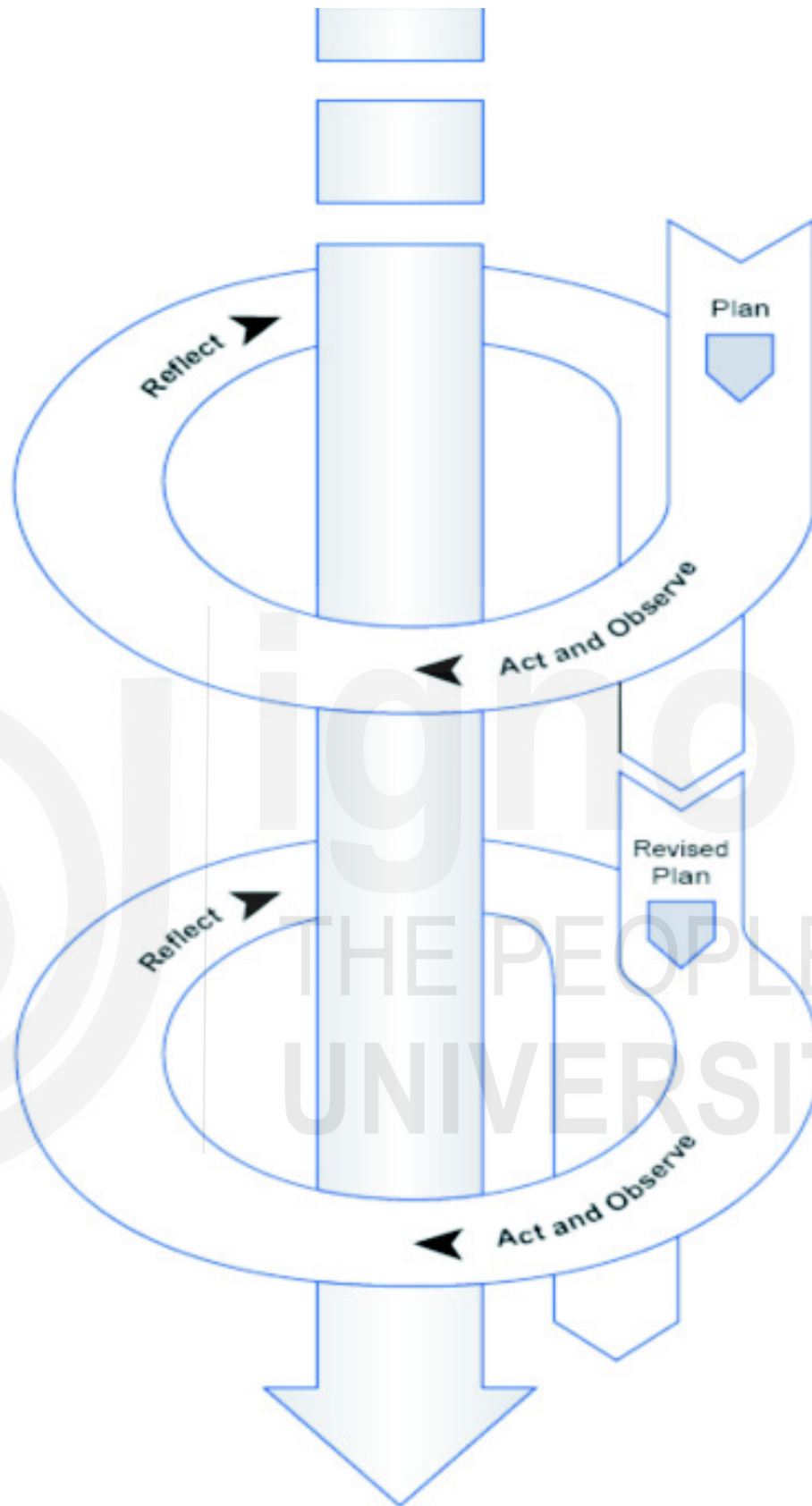
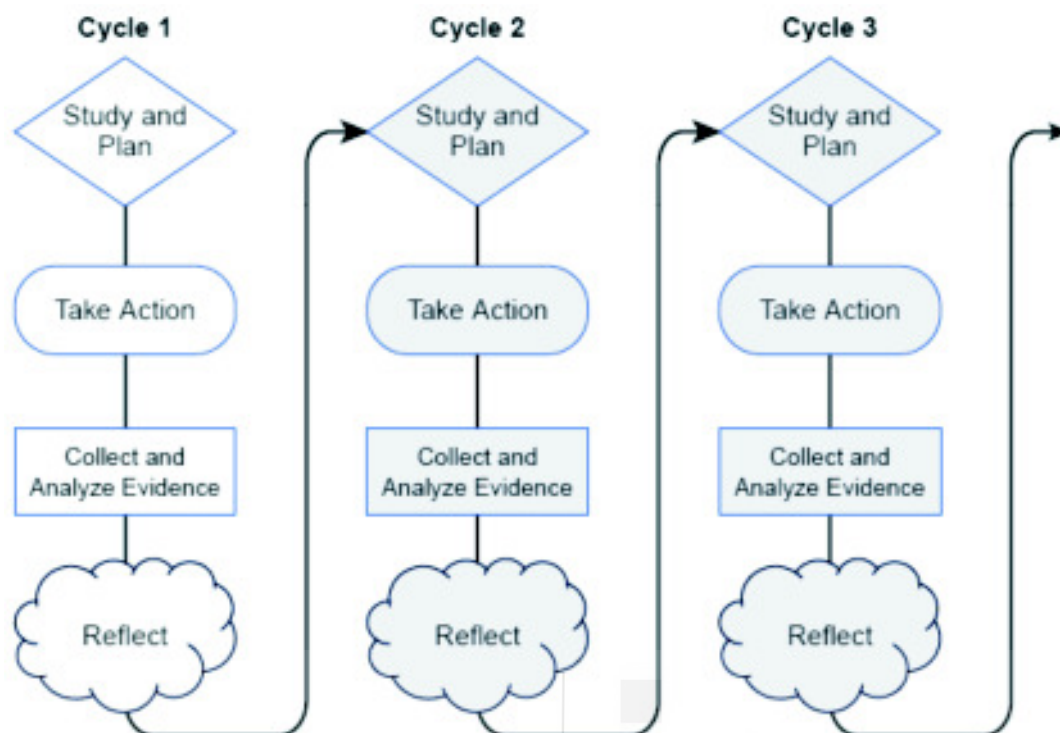


Fig. 20.7: Bachman's Action Research Spiral Model

### 20.6.8 Riel's Progressive Problem Solving Model

Through action research model takes the participants through four steps in each cycle: planning, taking action, collecting evidence, and reflecting (see Figure 20.8).



**Progressive Problem Solving With Action Research**

**Fig. 20.8: Riel's Action Research Model**

### 20.6.9 Hendricks's Action Research Model

It is shown in Figure 20.9. In her model, which she has placed in a school-based context, focuses on acting, evaluating, and reflecting.



**Fig. 20.9: Hendricks's Action Research Process**

**Source:** Adapted from *Improving Schools Through Action Research: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators*, by Cher Hendricks, 2009, Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

From the above different models of action research, it can be inferred that the following four stages are essential features of the model. However, this does not mean that this is how all action research projects will work. The flexibility of action research based on constant evaluation and reflection means that the cycles may be truncated as new ways to proceed further.

i) **Planning**

Identifying the issue to be changed looking elsewhere for information. Similar projects may be useful, for developing the questions and research methods to be used to develop a plan related to the specific environment. In the school setting this could involve personnel, budgets and the use of outside agencies.

ii) **Acting**

Trialling the change following your plan, collecting and compiling evidence, questioning the process and making changes as required.

iii) **Observing**

Analysing the evidence and collating the findings, discussing the findings with co-researchers and /or colleagues for interpretation, writing the report, sharing your findings with stakeholders and peers.

iv) **Reflecting**

Evaluating the first cycle of the process, implementing the findings or new strategy, revisiting the process.

These features might be represented diagrammatically as given below



Fig. 20.10

While working through action research remember that:

- It is cyclical and progress is made in small chunks,
- It is heavily based on critical reflection you can use.

- A wide range of methods for collecting data but it may be advisable to limit these to a manageable number,
- Participants should have meaningful roles in the collection and presentation of data because of the flexibility of the process and the constant reflection,
- Not every cycle will be complete.
- There may be times when it is advisable to stop mid stream and start a new cycle.

### Check Your Progress 2

1) What do you understand by dialectical critical analysis?

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2) How do multiplicity of views are accommodated in action research?

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3) Match the followings:

- |                          |                                    |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1) Kemmis and Mc Taggart | a) Cycles of Action Research Model |
| 2) Stringer              | b) Action Research Cycle Model     |
| 3) Kurt Lewin            | c) Spiral Model                    |
| 4) Rial                  | d) Intracting Spiral Action Model  |

4) Enlist the features of flexibility of action research.

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## 20.7 STEPS INVOLVED IN CONDUCTIONING ACTION RESEARCH

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Action research is a systematic process for finding the solution of the problem. It can be conducted either individually or in collaboration with others. Different models of action research have envisioned different stages. In general, following steps are involved in conducting action research:



Fig. 20.11

### 1) Identification of the Problem Area and Developing a Focus

Suppose a teacher may have several questions or problems to encounter such as poor reading ability among his/her students, pronunciation problem among students, effective monitoring of the various programs and many more. Therefore, the focus of action research is on what students are experiencing or have experienced? For example, a teacher can study how to improve problem-solving skills in mathematics among the students or increase reading ability among students and so on. It is therefore crucial to choose the problem which is meaningful so that it can be solved in the stipulated time.

The need for action research arises because of perceived dissatisfaction with an existing situation. It is followed with the idea of bringing out improvement in the situation. The focus is on the following: (i) what is the cause of problem? (ii) Why is it happening? (iii) As a practitioner or a researcher, what can I do about it? (iv) Which steps can I take to solve the problem? The answers to all such questions are helpful in perceiving a problem as it exists which is a pre-requisite for undertaking any action research problem.

### 2) Formulating the Problem

Once, the problem is identified, the next step is to formulate it. The researcher tries to find causes underlying the problem along with various issues that are related to causes. These probable causes need to be stated in concise and unambiguous terms.

### 3) Stating the Research Questions and Development of Propositions

After formulating the problem, the researcher needs to state the research questions and develop a tentative theory in the form of propositions keeping in view the genesis of the problem. It is necessary to develop a conceptual and functional relationship, tentatively to understand and explain the given situation.

### 4) Data Collection

The collection of data is the most important step in deciding what action is needed for solving the problem. For example, in the school, there could be

multiple sources of data, which a practitioner can use to identify causes and developing, and implementing remedial measures. These include.

- Videotapes and audio tapes,
- Report cards,
- Attendance, samples of student work, projects, performances,
- Interviews with the parents, students etc.,
- Cumulative records and Anecdotal records,
- School Diaries,
- Photos,
- Questionnaires,
- Focus groups discussions,
- Checklists,
- Observation schedules.

Select the data that are most appropriate for the study. After collecting the data, these are arranged on the basis of gender, classroom, grade level, school, etc. The practitioner may use purposive samples of students or teachers from each grade level in case of larger groups.

#### 5) **Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

After the data has been gathered, the next step is to analyze the data in order to identify trends and themes. The qualitative data obtained can be reviewed to take out the common elements or themes and may be summarized in the suitable table formats. The quantitative data can be analyzed with the use of simple statistics such as percentages, simple frequency tables, or by calculating simple, descriptive statistics.

At this step, the data is turned into information, which can help the practitioner or the researcher in making decisions. Therefore, this stage requires maximum time. After the analysis, it becomes clear what important points do these data reveal and which important patterns or trends are emerging.

#### 6) **Discussion and Evaluating Actions**

After the careful analysis of the data, review of current literature is done for taking decisions and necessary actions. Following points need be kept in mind while conducting the literature review:

- i) Identifying topics that relate to the area of the study and would most likely yield useful information.
- ii) Gather or collect research reports, research books and videotapes relating to the problem.
- iii) Organise these materials for drawing inferences in the light of result of the action research study.

Suggesting a plan of action will allow the practitioner to make a change. This is well informed decision-making. It is advisable to suggest one action at a time and then observe its outcome in improving the situation.

## 20.8 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ACTION RESEARCH

### 20.8.1 Advantages

- 1) Action research lends itself to use in work or community situations. Practitioners, people who work as agents of change, can use it *as part of their normal activities*. Mainstream research paradigms in some field situations can be more difficult to use. Action research offers such people a chance to make more use of their practice as a research opportunity.
- 2) When practitioners use action research, it has the potential to increase the amount they learn consciously from their experience. The action research cycle can also be regarded as a learning cycle. Systematic reflection is an effective way for practitioners to learn.
- 3) Action research is usually participative. This implies a partnership between you and your clients. You may find this more ethically satisfying. For some purposes it may also be more occupationally relevant.
- 4) Action research is helpful in determining policy related to the problem.

### 20.8.2 Disadvantages

- 1) Executing an action research project is more difficult than conventional research. Here a researcher takes responsibilities for change as well as for research. In addition, as with other field of research, it involves you as a researcher in more work to set it up, and you don't get any credit for that.
- 2) It doesn't accord with the expectations of some examiners. Deliberately and for good reasons it ignores some requirements which have become part of the ideology of some conventional research. In that sense, it is counter-cultural.
- 3) As a researcher, one is not exposed much about action research. Action research methodology is something that a learner has to learn almost from scratch.
- 4) The library work for action research is more demanding. In conventional research you know ahead of time what literature is relevant. In most forms of action research, the relevant literature is defined by the data you collect and interpret. That means that you begin collecting data first, and then go to the literature to challenge your findings.
- 5) Action research is more difficult to report, at least for thesis purposes. If you stay close to the research mainstream, you don't have to take the same pains to justify what you do. For action research, you are obliged to justify your overall approach.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What does motivate you to undertake action research?

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- 2) How do research questions enable to formulate the problem?

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- 3) Identify the possible sources of data for an action researcher.

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- 4) What are the advantages of action research over conventional research?

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- 5) Do you think that action research is a tough challenge before a conventional researcher? Give two reasons in support of your answer.

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## 20.9 LET US SUM UP

Action Research is associated with emancipatory method of critical theory paradigm approach wherein knowledge is generated in the process of knowing through doing rather through conceptualization and theorizing. In this process, it becomes difficult to make a distinction between researcher and practitioner as their activities become integrated.

Action research is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level. Researcher in action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social sciences simultaneously.

Origin of Action research is traced in the work Kurt Lewin in 1940's. He was strong exponent of research action in its concern with power relations between researcher and researched and the rights of the individuals. Action research is a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations to improve the conditions of researched.

A set of six principles guide action research. These include: reflective critical analysis, dialectical critical analysis, collaborative resource, risk, plural structure, theory, practice and transformation. Different models of action research discussed in this unit are: Kemmis and McTaggart action research model, *Elliot's Action Research Model: O'Leary's Cycles of Research (2004)*, Stringer's model (2007), Lewin's Action Research Spiral, Calhoun's Action Research Cycle, Bachman's

Action Research Spiral, Riel's Action Research Model and Hendricks's Action Research Process.

The steps followed in action research include: Identification of the Problem Area and Developing a Focus, Formulating the problem, Stating the Research Questions and Development of Propositions, Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation of Data, Discussions and Evaluating Actions. Action research has several advantages over conventional research. However, it has several limitations as well.

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## 20.10 KEY WORDS

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|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Action Research</b>               | : <i>Learning by doing.</i> A group of people identifies a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their effects were and if not satisfied, try again. |
| <b>Reflective Critical Analysis</b>  | : It is the process of becoming aware of our own perceptual biases.                                                                                                    |
| <b>Dialectical Critical Analysis</b> | : It is a way of understanding the relationships between the elements that make up various phenomena in our context.                                                   |
| <b>Collaborative Resource</b>        | : Which is intended to mean that everyone's view is taken as a contribution to understand the situation.                                                               |
| <b>Risk</b>                          | : It is an understanding of our own taken-for-granted processes and willingness to submit them to critique.                                                            |
| <b>Plural Structure</b>              | : It involves developing various accounts and critiques, rather than a single authoritative interpretation.                                                            |
| <b>Collaborative</b>                 | : Everyone's view is taken as a contribution in understanding the situation.                                                                                           |
| <b>Reconnaissance</b>                | : Fact finding and explanation.                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Planning</b>                      | : Identifying the issue to be changed, developing the questions and research methods to be used developing a plan related to the specific environment.                 |
| <b>Acting</b>                        | : Trialling the change following your plan, collecting and compiling evidence.                                                                                         |
| <b>Observing</b>                     | : Analysing the evidence and collating the findings, discussing the findings with co-researchers and/or colleagues for the interpretation.                             |
| <b>Reflecting</b>                    | : Evaluating the first cycle of the process, implementing the findings or new strategy, revisiting the process.                                                        |

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## 20.12 ANSWERS OR HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 20.1
- 2) See Section 20.1
- 3) See Section 20.2
- 4) See Section 20.3

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-section 20.4.2
- 2) See Sub-section 20.4.5
- 3) See Section 20.6
- 4) See Sub-section 20.6.4

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 20.7
- 2) See Section 20.7
- 3) See Section 20.7
- 4) See Sub-section 20.8.1
- 5) See Sub-section 20.8.2