

Understanding Ethnographic Research and Cross-Cultural Differences

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Introduction: Individuals from different countries who have various backgrounds might encounter barriers when communicating with each other. Ethnographic research is suitable for analyzing interpersonal conflicts from the perspectives of history, customs, language, and culture. The researcher will illustrate her experiences when the researcher was in China and the United States separately in order to set an example for people to understand the cultural differences between the two countries. Also, the researcher will discuss what ethnographic research is and how to utilize this research method in discussing the cultural differences. Ethnographic research will help people understand a social phenomenon by analyzing people's ideologies and preferences (Willis, 2007). The researcher will explain why mutual understanding and trust are important when communicating. By sharing knowledge and building mutual understanding, people will have a better opportunity for promoting long-term friendships.

Keywords: Ethnographic research, cultural conflict, cross-cultural communication

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Qualitative ethnographic research is creative and interpretive (Willis, 2007). Ethnographic research allows people to choose flexible approaches in a natural setting (Willis, 2007). The aim of using this research method is to understand social structures, individual activities, and cultural differences (Willis, 2007). Ethnographic research requires the researcher to focus on observing individual's behaviors, emotions, and thoughts (Willis, 2007). Ethnographic research generates solutions and explores phenomena (Angrosino, 2005). In order to find what the differences between the Americans and Chinese are, the researcher needs to gather information and understand people's experiences (Willis, 2007).

The ethnographic research method can be applied to people's lived experiences and help the researcher observe human situations, assess data, and write scientific reports (Kirner & Mills, 2020). Ethnographic research requires the researcher to scientifically critique and provide in-depth explanations of a phenomenon (Willis, 2007). The researcher must keep objective and critically think in order to make sure that the observation is scientific and logical (Willis, 2007). In addition, ethnographic research is a science with a body of knowledge and a process (Kirner & Mills, 2020). Science explores facts and uncovers the doubts of people (Kirner & Mills, 2020). This research method will help to explain the impact of human activities and provide deep meanings of individual cases (Kirner & Mills, 2020). In order to successfully conduct the ethnographic research, the researcher needs to be trained in observation, interviewing, and drafting questionnaires. In addition, the researcher must be sensitive to the needs of people and focus on promoting understanding (Willis, 2007).

Understanding the ethnographic research method will help the researcher observe participants' behaviors and understand their cultures (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Ethnographic research provides a variety of ways of illustrating data for comparing different contexts (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The advantages of ethnographic research include allowing changes and letting people guide their decisions (Willis, 2007). Ethnographic research will help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of human relations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Sharing understanding is an important process when conducting emancipatory research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Under the emancipatory research paradigm, the researcher will be able to explore people's experiences and emotions, as well as disclose their feelings and innermost thoughts (Mauthner, 2012).

Ethnographic research would help the researcher understand the cultural differences between different societies and countries (Kirner & Mills, 2020). For instance, when analyzing Chinese and American cross-cultural conflicts, ethnographic research can be applied in describing and critiquing differences in beliefs and individual experiences (Mauthner, 2012). In order to study the customs, the researcher needs to understand the deep meanings and unique behaviors between individuals, and why cultural differences would cause interpersonal conflict when communicating (Willis, 2007).

In China, there are many ethnic groups and each group has different languages and customs. When the researcher visited China, she observed that Chinese people respect their local customs. In China, when the leaders in schools or workplaces speak, the

audiences and other people prefer to be quiet. They neither interrupt the leaders nor disagree with their comments. However, when the researcher was in the United States, other people would comfortably argue with the leaders and liked to share their different opinions. Also, the American students argued, “why does China have the right to build islands in the South China Sea and ignore other countries’ interests and rights?” “Why does China build railways and roads in African countries? Does China want to impose its power there?” The researcher once heard an announcer on TV say, “Trump threatens to stop U.S. trade with China, and China is a military threat to the U.S.” However, when the researcher was in the Chinese mainland, the Chinese news indicated that “there is a phenomenon in the rise of incivility and bullying in America,” and “how does America now threaten China?” People from different countries would view things differently. Before judging each other, it is better to live in that country and understand what people in that country believe. Analyzing a phenomenon from the perspectives of both conflicting parties will make ethnographic research objective and convincing. Continuous learning and experiencing will broaden a person’s views and decrease misunderstanding.

People should know not to impose their views on others and seek common ground while reserving differences. Understanding individuals’ personalities and backgrounds will be useful in analyzing different cultures. Chinese culture advocates for collective thinking more than individualism. However, the American people might show more independence and creativity. Arguments and discussions are necessary when conducting research. The Chinese might focus more on maintaining a long-term relationship with each other, but the Americans might believe that interests and needs should be considered, and they are more important than building a long-term relationship. In addition, when doing business, the Chinese people might prefer to complete a deal in order to make themselves look generous. However, the American people would prefer to save face by showing the outcomes they gain. When analyzing the cultures between countries, the researcher needs to respect cultural differences and choose the best alternatives for resolving cultural conflicts.

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