

# Chapter 6

## The Power of Immersion: Ethnography's Unique Contribution to Qualitative Research

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter advocates for the distinctive role of ethnography in qualitative research. It contends that the immersive nature of ethnography provides valuable insights into human behavior and social dynamics, surpassing other research methods. Ethnography's strong theoretical foundation, combined with deep community involvement, allows researchers to access nuanced aspects of social life that are often left unsaid. The research challenges the simplified perception of ethnography as purely sociological and demonstrates its diverse applications across fields such as education and business. A case study from Morocco illustrates ethnography reveals employee experiences within private institutions by capturing authentic and context-specific data. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the ethical complexities associated with ethnographic work and emphasizes the importance of balancing subjectivity with rigor. Finally, it explores the future potential of integrating digital tools to enhance data collection and engagement in ethnographic research.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The field of qualitative research is replete with methods, but one that holds a special position within this spectrum is ethnography. It finds its home in social and cultural anthropology, where it was born. Still, in the last half-century or so, ethnography has managed to free itself considerably from its parent discipline. This means that it is now available as a tool to serve the kinds of social investigations that people across a wide range of academic and non-academic research specialties may wish to undertake (Hockey & Forsey, 2020).

Ethnography is essentially the world's oldest way of doing social science, but it is also a method that has emerged in recent decades as a valuable technique in the study of humanity. It is a variation on the theme of the fieldwork method used by anthropologists, and the ethnographic approach to fieldwork has spread to numerous other disciplines, with an especially strong presence in what could be called the “applied humanities” (Sangaramoorthy & Kroeger, 2020).

The range and diversity of the theories that supply the context for ethnographic work are truly astounding. They stretch all the way back to the armchair anthropologists—those early pioneers of our field who helped lay the groundwork and establish the defining features of the ethnographic project—while continuing through the present-day panoply of scholars who revise, reshape, and help re-vision ethnographic work.

The argument advanced in this research is that the deep and extended field immersion associated with ethnography contributes uniquely to qualitative research, especially in comparison with other methods. This point forms the quintessential argument of the exploration. Ethnography, like the other methods, produces answers to questions about the understudied—and as-yet still—but it also produces a much richer and more nuanced understanding of “why” social behavior occurs in communal living that is not coterminous with other ways of gathering, as well as subtlety and nuance in understanding “what” is happening.

When it comes to assessing the value of ethnographic methods, this research gives them full credit for their potential to reach the inner workings of societies and cultures. As ethnographic research stretches from education to the business world, and any number of realms in between, it carries with it not just the often-accessible set of neophyte experiences but the voices likely to remain unheard under any set of ordinary circumstances. And, using their methodological tool kit, it brings us closer to the routine experiences and happenings, the more taken for granted the better, that really make up the life of a community.

This chapter is structured to take the reader through a critical analysis of ethnographic methodology, from its historical roots to current applications, and from its theoretical underpinnings to the ethical concerns inherent in such immersive work.

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