

## An Emergence and Paradigm Shift of Biographical Research in Electronic Era

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### Abstract

The present era which is called the Research century has raised and diversified the elements of research in many different aspects, categories and subcategories. This research paper has first developed the theme for clearing the mirror of biographical research. The biographical research is based on an individual life and it revolves around aspects of life. This research owns the diamond shape because it includes method, experience, ethnography, oral history, life story, history, autobiography, life, personal history, ethnography story, epiphany, life history, case, and biography, self-story, narrator, writing presence, personal experience story, discourse and fiction. The core concept of this research is to draw the clear picture of biographical research by analyzing common and agreed techniques from different researchers and practitioners. The biographical research revolves around the human life and it observes it how a person's acts, behave, react and understand towards a particular condition or event. Furthermore, researcher of a biographical research interprets in such a way that the reader feels himself as the part of that particular event and is able to conclude and learn from the experiences.

**Keywords:** Biographical research, Life story, Life history, Paradigms

### 1. Introduction

Biographical research is one of qualitative research method which is fast catching on. In the basic sense qualitative researchers tends to combine to theory and empirical investigation. This fusion may be during or at the end of fieldwork (Bryman, 1988, p. 81). One of the main reasons of rapid emergence of this research methodology is its ability to observe the things very critically. The biographical researchers inquire about the changing outlooks and experiences in daily life of individual. Biographical researcher seeks to perceive individual life and highlight the things which are important. The biographical researcher seeks to provide the interpretations in his records by viewing their past, analyzing present experience and forecasting about the future. According to Roberts (2002, p.3), a leading authority on biographical research methodology interpreted it as a specific type of qualitative research which uses stories of individuals and other personal materials to understand the individual life within its social context. There are many wrinkles which are yet to be ironed out in this research methodology but as further studies have been carried; many questions have been answered about its scope, functional areas, techniques, methodologies and measuring instruments. Generally speaking, biographical research shares a familiar stance with qualitative research and also it has its own particular dilemma. One of the problems in biographical research is the differing use of terms such as oral history, personal narrative, biography and autobiography and their interchangeable use (Reinharz, 1992). Bryman (1988) another significant contributor describes biographical research as unstructured, relatively open concepts in which advance fieldwork may impose a potentially unfamiliar framework on subjects (Bryman, 1988, p.6-81).

Denzin, has provided and highlighted the scope by combining different words and nurturing it such a shape that they sounds and give meaning to biographical research. He combined the method, experience, ethnography, oral history, life story, history. Also many researchers had worked this in the field of quantitative research as well and according to Plummer (1983) the personal documents and a document of life which narrates the story about the life of an individual is included. Furthermore, it also includes the diaries, letters, memoranda, autobiographic, biographic and other material used for collecting the data (Denzin, 1989).

As a lot of research has been done in this particular field and due to which the literature is becoming complex so to reduce the complexity researchers has divided the biographical research into various disciplinary and widen its scope. The main theme behind dividing this in sub-disciplinary approaches is to dig out biographical research methods were developed and what are the contradictions of these methods within such approaches.

There is sign of gleam which is recognized that theoretical and methodological issues have cross disciplinary ramifications and some similarities of influence also. According to some research studies, the common lines of these cross disciplinary are from the feminist research. As matter of fact, the biographical researchers has limited their scope of research in these areas but also penetrated to other disciplines as well.

## 1.1 Key Concepts

The two main key points or concepts of biographical research are life story and life history. Many research studies have been successful in making the distinction between the life story and life history. Life story is defined as the story of a person that how he has spent his life, what he had done which means that he himself shares about his life. It is like flashback of memories what he remembered; he truly and honestly shared it. In other words it can be understood as what he wants to tell to others about his life experience he could share that only.

In other simple words a life story is based on honesty and fairly complete narration of one's life experience. He just draws the picture of his life and highlighting the most important aspect which he has passed (Atkinson, 1998, p.8).

Whereas in case of life history, it is defined as the collection and interpretation on the life i.e. life history method which are stated as a story or as a combination or constellation of past experiences from different sources which are related (Denzin, 1994, p.219–59; Fischer & Rosenthal, 1997, p.9). Life history is also referred as the interpretation and report writing of one's life history in which all the sources are incorporated and are related to individual past experience.

Thus, the term life story is practical to narrative story about the person own life as being the author while the life history part is referred to the later stage in which interpretation of past experiences is done .

Biographical research study reflects the vision of individuals as they create the meaning of their everyday lives. An individual has the ability and tendency to do and act as according to meaning through which they makes impact on the social sciences extensively. Also on other people who know about their presence, acknowledge their meaning of life and value them in the social existence.

The story narrators may be the only witnesses about the happening but there account can be checked when any other authors narrates the same or relevant happening, in shape of visual or oral accounts. The life story events are mostly formulated in shape how they happened and then narrated and recorded chronologically and placed according to the understanding of individual life.

As the study of lives has been found on the track of growth where it has become much more accepted and practiced commonly. But its popularity has also given birth to many questions which reflects the levels of concerning the adequacy or quality of data and information which is being accounted about the key concepts.

## 2. Two approaches of biographical research

According to Denzin (1989) the two commonly known approaches of biographical research are Traditional and Interpretive.

*Traditional consists of*

- Life Histories Chicago School)
- Objective Natural History Approach
- Accepted norms related to validity, reliability, truth and falsity.

*Interpretive consists of*

- Objective Hermeneutics (Schutze, 1983, Oevermann, 1979).
- Rejected traditional norms of evaluation.
- Biographical materials within a literary, fictional framework.

## 3. Purpose of Biographical Research

The main purpose of the biographical research is

- To collect the relative information and interpret the lives of others for understanding of others human understanding (Roberts, 2002, p.15).
- Emphasizes the core area of importance for the subjective experience view while looking at historical aspect as well as the social contexts.
- Highlights the process in which human negotiates with each other on their identity and their interpretation and linkage with norms.
- Facilitates the researcher in analysis the problematic experience while capturing, rendering and probing for narrating the close to actual experience as possible (Denzin,1989, p.69).

## 4. Field of Application

Biographical research is the branch which is practice under the lines of qualitative methods. The theme of the qualitative researcher's is to grasp the opportunity in which both empirical and theoretical investigation are involved (Bryman, 1988, p.81).

Biographical research has been found in the category of complex concepts. After its introduction and recognition of biographical research many concepts, statements, model, theories, and definitions have been developed to explain the theme and basic circumstances and how it functions on different elements, what does it

covers, how effective and reliable this type of research is. The biographical research is based on the individual life and it revolves around the individual life. This research owns the diamond shape because biographical research includes method, experience, ethnography, oral history, life story, history, autobiography, life, personal history, ethnography story, epiphany, life history, case, and biography, self-story, narrator, writing presence, personal experience story, discourse, fiction and narrator (Denzin, 1989, p.27).

### **5. Theory of biographical analysis**

The beauty of biographical research is that it is not only one single theory which you are restricted to but there are many other theories which are used to analyze the biographical research. Major portion of empirical study in biographical research belongs to the roots which are emerged from the tradition of phenomenological narrations and hermeneutics (Apitzsch, 1990, Lanfranchi, 1993, Schroter, 1997, Ricker, 2000, Gultekin, 2003 & Dabagzi, 2004,).

In recent years one more method is being used to construct the hermeneutic or biographical cases and these methods are being followed by the Fischer Rosenthal and Rosenthal (1997) and are part of Migration studies. The major portion of migration study is based on the methods in which narration analysis and objective hermeneutics are pooled with Aaron Gurwitsch's theory of 'Gestalt' (*Gestalttheorie*).

In biographical research, analysis is based on the case reconstruction procedures. The procedures are further based on common assumptions, but in general key principles are (1) abduction, (2) sequence, (3) reconstruction and (4) reflexivity. In depth analysis, they all are aimed and focused on a single analysis and by keeping the base of this single analysis they refer to generalization and interpretation of data.

The other part of which is subsumtion which comes from (Subsumtions logik) i.e. the logic of reconstruction of linkage is followed by Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of abduction. The meaning of abduction is specific form of syllogism which forms in the reaction of argument; abductive reasoning means when a researcher logically put a methodologically controlled hypothesis. The third element is grounded theory. The difference which emerged to classical studies in tradition of Grounded theory is that, there is a need for single case analysis. But when it comes for open coding, it is also used for analysis of biographical research and for narrative interview which is followed by the one of the key principles of sequentuality.

The principle of sequentuality gives the permission and allows the processes to be done in the social context way as it was started from the very first stage of assumptions. Every activity or decision which an individual makes from his choice indicates difference of importance over the alternatives available for the certain situations.

Action sequences, that are presented in the box in form of text are reported activities and are selected for future processes. Narrative perspective is also involved independently and which results in certain catalyst actions that may overcome the errors (Rosenthal, 1993, p.66).

### **6. Theoretical approaches**

Qualitative research studies have a classified type of biographical research which are based on various and diverse theoretical approaches. These various and diverse theoretical approaches are conversational analysis, symbolic interactions, discourse theory, ethno-methodology, narrative analysis and phenomenology (Silverman, 1993, Atkinson & Hammersley 1994, p.257–8, Bryman & Burgess, 1999, Denzin & Lincoln 1994, Feldman, 1995). Apart of these traditional studies, other studies includes classical ethnography and life story work, which are practiced on the descriptive or interpretive approach.

The most famous commonly used and discussed approach came from Miller (2000). Miller (2000) established three approaches. The first approach of Miller was the realist approach in which he used the *induction*, grounded theory and interviews types such as unfocused interviews and emphasis was put on the level of reliability. The second approach was *neo-positivist* approach which is deductive in nature and base on focused interview, places and theory testing and importance was given on validity. Last approach is the *narrative approach* which was based on the exploration of the ongoing construction of individual abilities, real stories, life events and experiences (Miller, 2000, p.10–14).

### **7. The philosophy of biographical research**

Stanley stated that studying the lives and practice of biographical research is clicking the central epistemological which create the political use which later forms and generate many inquires and praxis (Stanley, 1994, p. 89). There are many questions rose which targeted the explanation, understanding and interpretation of one's individual actions and activities. The explanation and creation of self-illustration of one's life is autobiography and it is not a new term which has been raised in this century but its roots are even present; when the history was written and when the phenomena of cultural practice were developed (Mascuch, 1997).

The appeal of biographical research is, it makes its impact on diverse areas and also has a diverse set of methodologies and interpretive methods. Biographical research has the ability to deal with important issues and understanding major social shifts to get the relevant information about reasons behind the social shifts. These

shifts include new experiences which further include interpretation and processes of transformation of one into other such their families, their groups and institutions. In this regard, the better and effective way is to gain the information of biographical research in the field of human sciences and also to outline the serious predictive changes that have been seen or unseen in quantitative research. During the last span, this practice has highlighted the major shifts and the reasons for these shifts are the biographical researcher transfer to new paradigm shifts which could analyze the impact on families, groups and institutions.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000) has provided and recognized five moments of qualitative research. Every single fieldwork works on different division of time. The crisis comes in the biographical research when the difference between the presenter and the legislator emerged. The presenter presents only one side, which he or she wants to highlight and neglect the other aspect which they do not have the interest. Sometimes, biographical research is the victim of continuous criticism because some researchers has used it in manipulating different things according to their interests and own benefits.

## 8. Methods

Methodologically the biographical research defined the pragmatic orientation and mostly relies on the similar approaches and procedures which are used for the qualitative research (Miller, 2000, p.18). Recent developments in the field of biographical research are given more importance and are more constant to data analysis. Bryman and Burgess (1999, p.3–6) defined that in biographical research text there are two main strategies which are used and discussed which are

- Analytic induction
- Grounded theory

Starting with the analytical induction, this is based on a close analysis and evaluation of cases, their methods, formulations, impacts, approaches. While examining the new cases all these things are analyzed for similarity and differences with the existing cases.

Second strategy is based on procedure for relating research and theory generation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For Charmaz (1995), this method and strategies can be used and are compatible with both methods of positivism assumptions which are interpretive and traditional. With this strategy, a research study can discover and record the maximum reality of the event (Charmaz, 1995, p.30).

## 9. Data Collection

For collection of data unstructured interview question are developed with 3-4 follow-up questions. Also in pairs, it can be done in which one interviews about life events leading to learning qualitative research. Also interviewer can note any dates and times mentioned in the sequence of events.

### 9.1. Data Analysis

Following are the steps given by great researcher Denzin which are

- Select research problem, subject, and site
- Record subject's objective events pertinent to research problem
- Triangulate events by source and point of view
- Obtain subject's interpretations in chronological order
- Analyze reports in terms of internal/external validity and internal/external criticism
- Resolve validity of above, establish priority for testing hypotheses
- Test hypotheses and look for negative evidence
- Organize the life history and submit to subject for reactions
- Rework report in its natural sequence based on reactions
- Author writes self into biography, interpreting subject's meaning

## 10. Methodological issues or Problems

The main problem which biographical research has faced is the complexity of using the relevant and correct measurement techniques. The methodological issues, such as life stories didn't provide the solid finding and conclusion on which the sociological researchers are required to obtain for the research and later analysis for key finding (Becker, 1970). Moreover, the biographical research has the question about criteria of reliability and validity. Lives stories gives and provides the information about the insights and is possible form to develop the hypothesis at the time of formulation of real objectives of research. In some cases, the more importance is given to validity rather than reliability (Kirk & Miller, 1986, Perakyla, 1998).

While the roots of biographical research shares a common linkage with qualitative research as well but it has to face its own definite challenges and problems as well. The main and common impediment which comes in conducting the biographical research is the different use of terms for conducting and carrying out different results such as oral history, biography, personal narrative and autobiography. These all terms are interchangeable

and are used for different reasons, make different impact and carried out different meaning according to the usage (Reinharz, 1992, p.129).

Many researchers have discussed the dilemma of biographical research, that how far the life story research will be practiced and followed the same guidelines of methodological standards of qualitative research or does the biographical research will apply its own qualitative principles with reliability and validity. For example, Hatch and Wisniewski discussed that truth and related epistemological issues can be the part of standards that goes beyond the standardized notions which circulates around the generalizability, reliability and validity.

### 11. Limitations

There can be multiple limitations of biographical research but most common among them are the limited empowerment for respondents (Bornat & Walmsley, 2008). This is the common issue that the participants are having little empowerment. Another limitation is the researcher biased ness or will that only good reminiscences are remembered and the bad are forgotten so at time of writing and interpreting the bad ones are completely overlooked. Due to which more positive results are seen because of positive memories. Also the source of data and accuracy problem is main because to check the validity and reliability of the data there is no source through which it can be sorted that either its accurate or not. Last but not the least are the narrations that can be manipulated easily.

### 12. Conclusion:

Biographical research is one of qualitative research method which is fast catching on and is having the basic sense of qualitative research which tends to combine theory and empirical investigation. It gives us the picture to study the social realities which are narrated by social actors. It also gives subjective experience that can be taken in account for the contribution of participants. A biographical method enables and enlightens the people to retain document of their memories as well as engage in identity and provide a brief record and account for those who wants to read and especially for dear ones. Also it provides the basic guidelines and interpretations about the experiences which further help the researcher and educators in the community.

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