PRIA
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Certificate Programme

International Perspectives in Participatory Research

Unit 1

Understanding Social Research

Units of Certificate in International Perspectives in Participatory Research

Unit 1: Understanding Social Research

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- Dominant Social Research Paradigms
- Issues in Knowledge Production and Knowledge Utilization Underlying Social Research Paradigms
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1.1 Introduction

Unit 1 is about understanding social research.

Sections 1.3 and 1.4 will familiarise you with the concepts of research and social research. Section 1.4 will explain the dominant social research paradigms.

Section 1.5 explains the issues in knowledge production and the utilisation underlying dominant social research paradigms.

You will also be exposed to critiques of dominant social research paradigms in Section 1.6.

1.2 Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

* *understand* the concepts of research and social research;

* *explain* the dominant social research paradigms;

* *grasp* the issues in knowledge production and utilisation underlying conventional social science research paradigm; and

* *appraise* the critiques of the conventional social science research paradigms.

1.3 Meaning of Research

Research is a search for knowledge. The term 'research' comprises of two syllables, *re* and *search. Re* is a prefix meaning again, anew or over again. *Search* is a verb meaning to examine closely and carefully, to test and try, or to probe. Together the term connotes a careful, systematic, study and investigation in some field of knowledge, to discover and establish new facts, reach new conclusions or revise facts, theories and applications.

Any search for knowledge, just based on personal experience and subjectivity of the researcher, would not only lead to selective observations, but also to inaccurate observations and over generalisations. A systematic and organised search for knowledge, on the contrary, is more a planned procedure, focused and limited to a specific scope. There is a structure or method in doing research. A definite set of procedures and steps through organised scientific process are followed.

Research has been defined differently by different people. It can perhaps be best understood through a clear description of its key characteristics. A few definitions delineated in the Note Bank below reveal some of the key characteristics of research.

NOTE BANK: DEFINITIONS

Research is a *careful investigation or inquiry especially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge.* (The advance learner's dictionary of current English)

Research is a *systematic, formal, rigorous and precise process employed to gain solutions to problems or to discover and interpret new facts and relationships* (Waltz & Bausell, 1981).

Research *is the systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena* (Kerlinger, 1973).

Research *is the pursuit of truth through objective and systematic method of finding solutions to a problem* (Kothari, 2004). (Nyanjui, 2013)

1.3.1 Social Research

Social science research is the systematic understanding of social facts or phenomena. It gathers information about the social world, interpreting it in order to make decisions on a course of actions and/or to develop new knowledge. It attempts to discover cause-and-effect relationships between social problems and answer or solve social problems.

NOTE BANK: DEFINITIONS

C.A. Moser defines, "*Social research as a systematized investigation to gain new knowledge about social phenomenon and problems.*" (1985)

P.V. Young characterises, "*Social research as a scientific undertaking which by means of logical methods, aims to discover new facts or old facts and to analyse their sequences, interrelationships, casual explanations and natural laws which govern them.*" (1966)

1.3.2 Objectives of Social Research

The aim of social research, like research in natural sciences, is to discover new facts or verify and test old social facts. It tries to understand human behaviour and its interaction with the environment and social institutions. It tries to find out the causal connection between human activities and natural laws governing them. It also aims to develop new scientific tools, concepts and theories, which would facilitate the reliable and valid study of human behaviour and social life.

Social research follows the norms and tools of natural science, which emphasises validity, reliability and verifiability of the phenomenon studied. The scientific rigour in social science research implies objectivity, neutrality and empirically produced evidence. Empiricism comprises of the observation, collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

Social research refers to research conducted by social scientists from various disciplines dealing with human life, human behaviour, social groups and social institutions. They consist of Anthropology, Behaviour Science, Commerce, Demography, Economics, Education, Geography, History, Law, Linguistics, Management, Political Science, Psychology, Public Administration, Sociology, and Social Work. These disciplines have their own values, terminology, methods and techniques to understand social phenomena. Every group of social phenomena, every phase of human life, and every stage of past and present development are fields of inquiry for social scientists.

The objectives of social research are enumerated below.

- **Development of Knowledge:** As we know 'science' is the systematic body of knowledge which is recorded and preserved. The main object of any research is to add to the knowledge. Similarly social research is an organised and scientific effort to acquire further knowledge about the problem in question. It helps us to obtain and add to the knowledge of social phenomena. This is one of the most important objectives of social research.

- **Scientific Study of Social Life:** Social research is an attempt to acquire knowledge about the social phenomena. Women and men, being a part of society, social research studies a human being as an individual, examines human behaviour and collects data about various aspects of a human's social life and formulates laws in this regard. Once the law is formulated, the scientific study tries to establish the interrelationship between these facts. Thus, the scientific study of social life is the second objective of social research.

- **Welfare of humanity:** The ultimate objective of a social science study is often and always to enhance the welfare of humanity.

- **Classification of facts:** Social research aims to clarify facts. The classification of facts plays an important role in any scientific research.

- **Social control and prediction:** The ultimate object of any research undertaking is to predict the behaviour of particular types of individuals under specified conditions. In social research we generally study the social phenomena and events, as well as the factors that govern and guide them.

1.3.3 Types of Social Research

Any attempt to classify social research in separate typologies is purely arbitrary. The purpose of classification is primarily to broaden our understanding of the different categories of research, as most research has elements of all the categories. Thus, we can base the classification on the

a)   Nature of the data (qualitative or quantitative)

b)   Purpose of the research (applied or basic)

c)   Process/approach of research (idiographic or nomothetic, deductive or inductive)

d)   Focus of research (theoretical or empirical)

e)   Type of analysis that will be carried out (descriptive or analytical, probabilistic or causal)

- **Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

Qualitative research deals with design techniques and measures that do not produce discrete or distinct numerical data. It involves extensive narrative data in order to gain insights into phenomena.

Data analysis includes the coding of the data and production of verbal synthesis (inductive process/approach). Examples include historical research, ethnographic research, participant observational research and the case study.

Quantitative research includes designs, techniques and measures that produce discrete and distinct, numerical or quantifiable data. Data analysis is mainly statistical (deductive process/approach).

- **Descriptive and Analytical research**

Descriptive research attempts to determine, describe, or identify what is or what exists. It uses description, classification, measurement and comparison to describe a situation. The term *ex-post facto* (Latin for "after the fact") is usually used for descriptive research studies in social sciences, since both the effect and the alleged cause have already occurred and must be studied in retrospect.

Analytical research attempts to explain why and how. It usually concerns itself with cause–effect relationships among variables. The researcher attempts to analyse the situation and make a critical evaluation. Examples include

a)   correlation studies, which discover or establish the existence of a relationship/ interdependence between two or more aspects of a situation;

b)   explanatory studies, which clarify why and how there is a relationship between two or more aspects of a situation or phenomenon; and

c)   exploratory studies, which explore an area where little is known and/or to investigate the possibilities of undertaking a particular research study (feasibility study/ pilot study).

- **Basic and Applied Research**

Basic research is also called fundamental research. It is undertaken to improve our understanding of certain problems that commonly occur in social settings and how to solve them. It is undertaken for the sole purpose of adding to our knowledge that is fundamental and general. This type of research may have no immediate or planned application. It contributes to theory formation.

This research which is conducted by professors, scholars and other researchers devoted to generating new knowledge in a particular area of interest, can be called fundamental research. Basic research is essentially positive and is an intellectual

exercise. It explains the phenomena as they are and not as they should be and may verify or establish a new phenomenon.

Applied research is undertaken in response to a social problem, which requires a solution. Its major purpose is to answer practical and useful questions. The results are applied practically to solve immediate problems and involve normative prescription. Applied research is concerned with knowledge that has immediate application and is also known as decisional research. Research as an aid to policy and planning has gained importance, both in government and business and it provides the basis for nearly all government policies in our economic system. In this context, research becomes a tool for policy decision making.

- **Theoretical and Empirical Research**

Social research is *theoretical* when it is concerned with developing, exploring or testing the theories or ideas that social researchers have about how the world operates. It is *empirical* when research is based on observations and measurements of reality - on what we perceive of the world around us. Social research attempts to create or validate theories through data (facts) collection and data analysis. Its goal is exploration, description and explanation.

- **Idiographic and Nomothetic Research**

Idiographic social research seeks to provide all possible explanations of a particular case. Case studies, informal interviews, unstructured observation and other qualitative methods are idiographic.

Nomothetic research tends to be more general, with researchers trying to identify a few causal factors that impact a wide class of conditions or events. Experiments, correlation, psychometric testing and other quantitative methods are favoured from a nomothetic point of view.

- **Deductive and Inductive Research**

In *deductive research* specific expectations of hypothesis are developed on the basis of general principles (i.e. social scientists start from an existing theory, and then search for evidence). In *inductive social research* (also known as grounded research) general principles (theories) are developed from specific observations.

For example, in inductive research, if a researcher finds that some specific religious minorities tend to favour a specific political view, she/he may then extrapolate this to the hypothesis that all religious minorities tend to have the same political views. However, in deductive research it is the opposite and a researcher would start from a hypothesis that religious affiliation influenced political views and then begin observations to prove or disprove this hypothesis.

- *Probabilistic and Causal Research*

Much contemporary social research tends to be *probabilistic*, or based on probabilities. The inferences in social research have probabilities associated with them - they are seldom meant to cover laws that pertain to all cases. Statistics in social research allows the researcher to estimate probabilities for the situations under study.

Social research is at some point interested in looking at cause-effect relationships. Social research is undertaken with a view to change the world; improve it and address some of its major issues in an organised, scientific way. The analysis of causal relationships will help to understand how causes (e.g., programmes, treatments) affect the outcomes of interest.

1.3.4 Steps in Social Research

Social research consists of a series of steps to carry out research efficiently, on any social phenomena. The steps refer to scientific research process. There are nine steps of social research, which have been enumerated below.

- **Sensing or realising the problem**: The first step is observing the situation and sensing the problem, as new problems keep emerging in the social environment. At this stage, one may not know exactly what is happening, but one can definitely sense that things are not going as smoothly as they should be.

- **Problem identification:** Once one becomes aware of what is happening in the environment, she/he would then focus on the problem. The researcher singles out the problem for the study, i.e. what exactly are the problems in the situation. It is thus, the problem-defining stage. A research problem should be specific, as without a focused definition of the problem, data tends to be irrelevant, expensive and confusing.

- **Theoretical framework:** Once the problem is identified, the researcher carefully examines the earlier studies, to see if any are similar to the study in hand. It helps to integrate information locally, so that reason for the problem can be conceptualised. This helps to develop a theoretical framework. This step essentially involves a review of related literature. It familiarises the researcher with what is already known and considers what is still unknown and untested.

- **Hypothesis formulation:** After developing a theoretical framework, the researcher develops a hypothesis, which is drawn from the theoretical framework. A hypothesis is a tentative answer to a question. It is an educated guess and is generally based upon prior research. It is subjected to the process of verification or disconfirmation. The hypothesis is a conjectured relationship between two or more variables, expressed in the form of testable statements.

- **Research design:** It is the plan, structure and strategy for conducting research. It describes the general framework for collecting, analysing and evaluating data. It helps to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance. It enables the researcher to answer research questions about validity, as objectively, accurately and economically as possible. Design should be carefully worked out to yield dependable and valid answers to the research questions.

- **Collection of data:** At this stage, the researcher has to collect data as expected. Data can be obtained from a primary source or secondary source. Questionnaires, interviews, observations are major instruments used to collect data. This step is also called fieldwork because the researcher has to visit the field for administering the research instruments used to collect data.

- **Data analysis:** It is the statistical analysis of data that has been collected, edited, coded and tabulated. In other words, data analysis means the categorising, ordering, manipulating and summarising of data, to obtain answers to the research questions. Its purpose is to reduce data to an intelligible and interpretable form, so that the relations of the research problem can be studied and tested. Different statistical techniques are used at this stage.

- **Interpretation and generalisation:** Interpretation takes the result of data analysis, makes inferences pertinent to the research relations studied and draws conclusions about the relations. Generalisation is the act of giving a general form to these conclusions.

- **Report preparation**: Finally the researcher prepares the report of the research conducted. Its objective is to tell readers the problems investigated, the method used to solve problems, results of the investigation and the conclusions drawn from the result.

1.4   Dominant Social Research Paradigms

As social scientists began adapting and applying scientific methods to the study of social systems, new paradigms of social science research emerged. Social research paradigms are essentially a worldview, a whole framework of beliefs, values and methods, within which social research takes place. It is this world view within which the researchers work. A description of dominant forms of social research paradigms with its characteristics are delineated in the following sections.

1.4.1 Quantitative Social Research Paradigms

 In the early 19th century, social sciences were struggling to establish themselves as "positivists". *Positivism* states that the only authentic knowledge is scientific knowledge, and that such knowledge can only come through strict scientific methods of the natural sciences in studying social phenomena. Therefore, to acquire the character and status of natural science, early promoters of social science adopted both the norms and the tools of natural sciences, which emphasised the validity, reliability and verifiability of the phenomena studied. In this, they followed and adopted the cardinal principles of natural sciences:

a)   Social science research is the study of observable social phenomenon.

b)   Tools of data collection and data analysis are logical and rational and focus on empirically produced evidence. The methods of research are objective and in order to develop general laws about socially accepted truths, the researchers generally remain neutral, objective and value-free in their data collection and analysis.

c)   Observations and conceptualisations are the main mode of knowing. Research in its pursuit of social facts has been organised in several thematic or sectoral disciplines as sociology, political science, and economics etc. These discipline-based organisations are method bound.

The purpose of research is the collection and generation of knowledge about a given subject. The knowledge generated is used to develop general laws about various phenomena. Once approved by other experts in the field, this knowledge then adds to an existing body of knowledge.

d)   Communication of the findings adds to the existing body of knowledge. Papers, books, journals, seminars, and conferences are recognised as legitimate modes of dissemination of knowledge. The 'truth' about the nature of phenomena is established through scholarly publications as papers, books and journals, which may be shared at seminars and conferences and is taught to new generations of students.   (PRIA, 2005)

The quantitative social research paradigm reflects a *deterministic* philosophy in which causes determine effects or outcomes. It is also *reductionist* in that ideas are reduced to small discrete sets of ideas, to test issues such as the variables that constitute hypothesis and research questions. The "empirical" aspect of this paradigm refers to the goals of inquiry, as being the definition, prediction, control, and explanation of physical phenomena, as revealed through experience (induction) and experiments (deduction). The "quantitative" aspect of the paradigm stems from a reliance on measuring variables and analysing the relationships among them with descriptive and inferential statistics. Detachment from the phenomena under study is preferred, to maintain objectivity. Mathematical analysis and statistical significance are held in the highest regard. The "positivist" aspect represents the faith in scientific methods.

The social researchers seek to test a theory for scientific prediction, or the explanation of any given social phenomenon. By theory we mean a set of variables, definitions and hypotheses that presents a systematic view of any given social phenomena. The method of inquiry is based on the underlying positivist assumption that reality is composed of unambiguous facts, which can be observed. A fact is an observed phenomenon.

Variables are logical sets of attributes, with people being the 'carriers' of those variables (for example, gender can be a variable with two attributes: male and female). Variables are also divided into independent variables (data) that influence the dependent variables (which scientists are trying to explain). For example, if we are studying the effects of a new educational programme on student achievement, the programme is the independent variable and measures of achievement are the dependent variables.

The methods in this paradigm are derived from experimental and statistical methods in natural science. The main tools are surveys, which are analysed using statistical techniques. Surveys include cross-sectional and longitudinal studies[1] using questionnaires, or structured interviews for data collection with the intent of generalising from a sample to a population (Cresswell, 2003).

1.4.2 Qualitative Social Research Paradigms

This paradigm has its own tools of investigation and methods of analysis. It differs from quantitative social research paradigms in that it does not precisely aim at the exact measurement of predetermined hypotheses, but at a holistic understanding of complex realities and processes; it is a model where even the questions and hypotheses emerge cumulatively as the investigation progresses.   The researcher's intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings that others have about the world. Rather than starting with a theory (as in quantitative social research paradigms), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning (Desai & Potter, 2006).

Since the 1990s, several qualitative social research approaches have dominated development studies. It spans a wide spectrum of approaches, of which nine major categories are summarised below.

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[1] Longitudinal studies involve the observation of same variables over a long period of time (may be even decades). A cross-sectional study, on the other hand, consists of data collection for one specific period of time.

NOTE BANK: EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Discourse analysis	Focuses on many dimensions of text, talk, and their cognitive, social, cultural context by the use of linguistic and other methods.
Ethno methodology	Focuses on common sense every day rules of social interaction.
Phenomenology	Focuses on the way people experience their world, what it is like for them and how best to understand them. The researcher identifies the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. In this process, the researcher brackets her or his experiences, in order to understand those of the participants in the study.
Grounded theory	Through empirical coding, continuous comparisons, theoretical sampling and conceptual linkages, which match the data, are generated during the research process. The researcher attempts to derive a general abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of the participants in the study. This process involves using multiple stages of data collection and refinement and inter-relationship categories of information.
Hermeneutic research	Focuses on meaning of text, actions through analysis of relations between parts and totality/ totality and parts. A singular event is understood with reference to whatever it is a part of.
Content analysis	Focuses on the analysis of texts. The multiplicity of words in texts is classified into fewer categories.
Life history studies	Focuses on biographical ethnography, which incorporates chronological events.
Case study	The researcher explores in depth a programme, an event, an activity, or a process, or one or more individuals. The cases are

	bound by time and activity. The researcher collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures, over a sustained period of time.
Narrative research	In narrative research, the researcher studies the lives of the people and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then retold or restudied by the researcher, in narrative chronology. In the end, the narrative combines views from the participants' life with those of the researchers' life in a collaborative narrative.
Structural ethnography	Focuses on the meaningful systems of cultural groups and subgroups, on shared systems of meanings. The researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting, over a prolonged period of time by primarily collecting observational data.
Symbolic interactionism	Focuses on the fact that people live in a symbolic environment, as well as a physical environment and they act in response to symbols, as well as physical stimuli.
(Mikkelsen, 2005; Cresswell, 2003)	

Qualitative social research paradigm focuses on compiling a selection of micro level case studies, which are investigated using a combination of informal interviews, participant observation and, more recently developed visual media like photography and video. The questions are broad and open, which can be changed and developed over time, to fill gaps in different accounts of reality, sorting out which may be said to be true, specific and subjective.

Different sampling methods are combined, depending upon a particular dimension of the issue being considered; different purposive sampling techniques, identification of

key informants who possess the particular knowledge sought, random encounters to cross check information, and / or highlight yet more differing perspectives on the problems. Causality and attribution are directly investigated through questioning, as well as the qualitative data of analysis. Qualitative social research requires skilled researchers who engage in the reflexive process of data collection and analysis. The researchers do not critique the subject matter but only interpret it. The research is deemed value free and realistic (Desai & Potter, 2006).

The distinctive features of different forms of social research are delineated neatly in the Table below:

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Underlying disciplines	Natural Science, Economics	Social Science Anthropology, Sociology, Geography and History
Type of data	Numerical data; how many things are happening to how many people?	Holistic understanding of complex processes
Research process and methods	Large scale surveys based on individual questionnaires	Micro case studies based on informal interviews, participant observation and visual media
Research questions and indicators	Hypotheses and measurable indicators (variables), determined at the start of investigation.	Open ended and cumulative formulations of research and scope
Sampling and	Large random, stratified	Small purposive samples; key

representation	samples with control groups	informants; contingent sampling in chance encounters
Causal analysis and attribution	Deductive statistical analysis before and after and /or comparison of main sample with control group	Inductive causal inference from detailed statistical analysis of patterns of difference and similarity, between various accounts and case studies
Relevance	Clear focus on research questions and hypotheses	Holistic understanding of complex issues; flexibility and cumulative understanding; captures meanings, unexpected and sensitive issues
Reliability	Objectivity of measurement	Captures subjectivity; in depth longitudinal studies decrease the likelihood of falsification
Credibility and analysis	Objectivity of analysis	Uncovers processes and causality
Ethics	Collection of hard data to convince policy makers	Empathy and understanding
Implementation	Skilled research designers/ analysts assisted by local enumerators	Individual and skilled researchers

(Desai & Potter, 2006)

Due to the complexities and multi-faceted nature of social phenomena, the emerging consensus is on multidisciplinary approaches to research, emphasising the use of a variety of methods. *Eclectic-mixed methods-pragmatic paradigm,* acknowledges that there is a weakness in all tools of inquiry; hence, both quantitative and qualitative methods of investigating social realities are required. The focus of this approach is on practical problems. The eclectic-mixed methods-pragmatic paradigms borrow methods of both the paradigms, to collect information to provide practical solutions to a given social phenomena. Multiple perspectives help to "triangulate" or "bracket" information and conclusions regarding complex phenomena.

1.5 Issues in Knowledge Production and Knowledge Utilisation Underlying Social Research Paradigms

Today the knowledge production, use and dissemination of new knowledge through social research are a major modern enterprise. Most social science research fulfils either of two purposes:

a) **First,** to enable administrators and policy makers to frame policies for the marginalised and the 'have-nots'. The researchers' viz., professional experts and consultants, generally conduct policy research for the government, donor agencies, and policy institutions. Knowledge generated by various disciplines of social sciences, on a wide range of social systems and phenomena are utilised in the development and social welfare policies of the State to solve the practical problems of society.

b) **Second**, to fulfil the researchers' own economic professional and intellectual needs, academic research is conducted at and by academic institutions and universities. Researchers are generally students and the subject experts. Research is conducted to fulfil an academic requirement, for example as a partial fulfilment for the award of a doctorate degree, or to generate new theories, confirm existing ones or disprove them and/ or to contribute to the systematisation of knowledge. Summarising and packaging the findings in journals, books, seminars, and international conferences helps in greater access to research funding and also to the researcher's career advancement.

By and large, much of the social science research conducted to generate new insights and theories, remain in the domain of professionals, experts and their institutions, because the production of knowledge is perceived to be a specialised profession. Those trained in this profession can legitimately produce it and it is this educated human resource or *knowledge elite*, which monopolises knowledge in both the abstract and applied forms. Information, knowledge and corresponding knowledge productions are the key resources of power, in much the same way as capital. The knowledge elite, subtly and powerfully regulate the modern knowledge industry.

The knowledge elite, researching the problems of the community utilise the new knowledge to maintain their status quo. The so-called professional experts, reporting on community practice/knowledge, often tend to distil it into a product in order to make it fit the predetermined external data requirements. Thus, the danger is that the community's knowledge is used as a tool of the modern knowledge system, rather than using a complementary approach to resource management. For instance, the wisdom of environment and ecology, shared by community members, is translated into facts and figures that biologists can use. For the local community, the crisis of knowledge can be seen as fragmentation of their practical wisdom, distortions of the same in the local, regional, and national ecosystems and economies, and arising tensions related to cultural revitalisation and reclamation.

The community's priorities are not addressed through this new body of knowledge and the ordinary people are systematically deprived from participating in the process of knowledge production and distribution.

The new communication and information technology is further enabling the knowledge elite to record as well as disseminate knowledge at a rapid speed. There are millions of Internet users in Europe, East Asia and North America; while a substantial number of citizens in Africa and South Asia have not even made a telephone call. Such disparity and structural inequalities further reinforce the hegemony of the knowledge elite as they have worldwide connectivity. Access to knowledge also supports the global networks of the knowledge elite. The powerless remain disconnected from those knowledge networks and information flows. Unequal relations of knowledge result when those having greater access to and control over these sources of power, exert *power over* those having little or no access (Tandon, 2005).

The process of knowledge production, use and dissemination sets in three important social processes.

The *first* major process is the dismissal of popular knowledge and alternative systems of knowledge production. The cult of expertise, supported by institutions of research, over

the years has neglected the actors in the situation as sources of knowledge, as well as its legitimate owners. Consequently, the experiential and intuitive insights of popular knowledge have been devalued.

The *second* related process is the undermining of the capacities of ordinary people to engage in serious inquiry about their problems and issues of daily concern. Professionally trained researchers are seen as legitimate producers of knowledge, whereas ordinary people and the have-nots are seen as lacking the capacities, as well as the tools for the production of knowledge. They are systematically deprived from accessing either the knowledge produced by the experts, or controlling the means of production of that knowledge.

For instance, experts by accessing and controlling the new communication and information technology have been able to control the minds of ordinary people. The control has been so successfully exercised that ordinary people have been made to feel incapable of creating their own knowledge for solving their problems.

The *third* related social process has been the erosion of the traditional and popular forms of knowledge dissemination. The emphasis on written and printed words has cast aside the alternate systems of sharing and understanding knowledge. Knowledge developed through practice and experience (popular knowledge) is communicated and transferred through oral traditions, which are not necessarily captured in the printed word. Common sense and intuitive knowledge of people is depreciated and subordinated and they become a silent society. A knowledge system that subordinates the knowledge of ordinary people also subordinates them (Tandon, 2005).

1.6 Critique of the Dominant Social Research Paradigms

Over the years there has come about a continuous debate between those supporting dominant social research paradigms and those advocating such modes of alternative methods of research, which promote the idea of active engagement with social causes. The alternative approaches to social science research have critiqued the dominant social research paradigms. We can look at the critique of the conventional research paradigm in the following four categories.

Absolute critique

In conventional social research, knowledge-generation, not action is the key purpose. There is a wide gap between available knowledge and its utilisation. This lack of utilisation of generated knowledge, leads to research that cannot be used to improve our social, economic, and political systems. Further, influenced by the research paradigm of natural sciences, social science research has also assumed that there is one truth about social phenomena. It is difficult to present a realistic representation of any social phenomenon by believing in one truth alone.

Purist Critique

Under the guise of achieving objectivity, rigour is maintained by the researcher's control over the focus and methods of inquiry. Professional researchers know all and they control the entire process of research. However, this attempt to achieve objectivity by maintaining a strict separation between the researcher and the subjects is problematic. Firstly, researchers share essential humanity with their subjects; they are, therefore, subject to the same laws that they are attempting to understand. Secondly, the sheer presence of another person has an impact over the research 'subjects', or the people under study. Therefore, despite the researchers' best efforts to be objective, controlled social reality is always a distortion.

Rationalist Critique

The rationalist critique, questions the excessive reliance on thinking, observing and conceptualising as the main modes of knowing and researching. The overemphasis on thinking and conceptualisation in the dominant research paradigm is intended to reduce subjectivity, but as a result, the feeling and acting processes have been largely neglected. It is possible to engage in entire faculties of thinking, feeling and acting in the research process.

The critique is also relevant from the adult learning perspective. Research implies knowing and knowing comes from learning. Therefore, theories of adult learning can illuminate approaches to research. The dominant research paradigm only supports two of the four types of adult learning processes:

a) Reflective observation and **b) abstract conceptualisation**

The other two modes of learning, **concrete experience** and **active experimentation**, are de-emphasised. This limitation constrains the classical research paradigm in two ways. Firstly, those persons who are not comfortable in the observation and conceptualisation modes of learning do not easily enter the research profession. Secondly, even those who are strong in these two modes and engaged in research, lose some of their insights, by denying or neglecting the other two modes.

Elitist Critique

The final critique of the dominant research paradigm is aimed at its elite control over the methods and outcomes of research. The techniques of research are presently available only to a body of professionals who enjoy elite status. Similarly, since most research findings are communicated in the written form, it is researchers, journal editors, and publishers who essentially control the outcome of research. Those who assist the research process as respondents or subjects, that is, those who are researched, have no control over the research and its outcome.

In social research paradigms, prevailing power relations between the researcher and the research subjects are often taken for granted, and the impact they may have on the research goes unexamined. Research serves the needs of those in power, simply because they are better positioned economically, politically, and socially to determine what questions are asked, as well as to utilise the findings of research. The providers of information are denied any control over it.

In spite of the above critiques, it is important for us to remember that dominant conventional social research paradigms per se are not a problem. In fact, they are usually useful as they summarise social information in a form which is convenient and is readily transferred and disseminated. Accurate statistics around poverty levels, or illiteracy rates, for example, provide important information for people to gather knowledge about their own communities. Yet, it is equally important to be concerned with more fundamental questions around the process of knowledge creation, knowledge generation and the utilisation of knowledge such as. Who has the right to create knowledge? Who controls the knowledge generated? Who will benefit from the research? How is that knowledge used?

Think Tank

Identify any community related issue, apply and analyse any social research paradigms in the context of questions given in the format below.

Problem: What is the basis of the selection of the problem? Who identifies it?
Methods: What are the methods? Who does the data collection?
Interpretation and analysis: Who analyses and interprets the data?
Presentation and action on findings: Who presents the findings and takes action on the findings?
Outcomes: What are the outcomes? Who utilises the results?

1.7 Summary

A quick summary of what has been covered in this unit:

- You have learnt the meaning of research and social research

- You were introduced to the issues in knowledge production and the utilisation of the underlying conventional social research paradigms

- You analysed the critiques of dominant social research paradigms

1.8 Required Reading

- Tandon Rajesh (Ed) 2005, *Participatory Research Revisiting the Roots*, New Delhi, Mosaic Books

1.9 Recommended for Further Reading

- Creswell, John W, 2003, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, New Delhi, Sage Publications

1.10 References

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