

# A Convergence Analysis of the Ethnographic Method for Doctoral Dissertations in Korea : Focused on Research Participants, Data Collection Methods, and Trustworthiness Criteria

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## 국내 박사학위 논문의 문화 기술적 연구방법에 대한 융복합적 분석 -연구 참여자, 자료 수집방법, 신뢰성 준거를 중심으로-

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**Abstract** Ethnography is concerned about specifically-based behavior and belief and the learned pattern of language and aims to describe and interpret them. Therefore, it is a classical form of qualitative research that was developed by anthropologists who spent for long time in conducting fieldworks within the cultural group. The results of analyzing ethnographic research methods of doctoral dissertations in Korea are as follows. First, the number of research participants in data collection methods was 1-10(32 dissertations, 44.4%), 11-20(18, 25%), 21-30(13, 18.1%), 31-40(2, 2.7%), and others(7, 9.8%). Second, data collection methods were in-depth interview(71, 98.6%), participant observation(70, 97.2%), document data(38, 52.7%), engineering device(12, 16.6%), and others(8, 11.1%). Data collection periods were 3-5 months(7 dissertation, 9.8%), 6-8 months(15, 20.8%), 9-11 months(14, 19.6%), 12-14 months(13, 18.1%), more than 15 months(17, 23.6%), and unrepresented(4, 5.4%). Third, trustworthiness criteria were triangulation(46 dissertation, 63.9%), research participants' evaluation of study results 44(61.1%), peer researchers' advice and indication(33, 45.8%), follow-up(25, 34.7%), use of reference(20, 27.8%), reflexive subjectivity(17, 23.6%), intensive observation for a sufficient period(10, 13.9%), in-depth description(7, 9.8%), and others(7, 9.8%).

• Key Words : ethnography, doctoral dissertation, research methods, data collection methods, convergence

**요약** 문화기술지 연구는 다양한 학문 분야에서 연구되고 있다. 본 연구에서는 문화기술지 연구방법을 사용한 박사학위 논문을 분석하였다. 일반적으로 문화기술지는 연구 대상이 되는 집단의 행동과 신념 및 학습된 언어의 패턴에 관심을 가지고 이를 기술하고, 해석하는데 목적이 있다. 이러한 문화기술지는 문화적 집단 내에서 현장연구를 수행하는 인류학자들에 의해서 발전된 질적 연구의 고전적 형태의 하나이다. 본 연구 결과는 다음과 같다. 첫째, 연구 참여자 수는 10명 이내 32편(44.4%), 11-20명 18편(25%), 21-30명 13편(18.1%), 31-40명 2편(2.7%), 기타 7편(9.8%)으로 나타났다. 둘째, 자료수집 방법은 심층면접 71편(98.6%), 참여관찰 70편(97.2%), 문서자료 38편(52.7%) 공학적 도구 12편(16.6%) 기타 8편(11.1%)으로 나타났으며, 자료수집 기간은 3-5개월 7편(9.8%), 6-8개월 15편(20.8%), 9-11개월 14편(19.6%), 12-14개월 13편(18.1%), 15개월 이상 17편(23.6%), 미 제시 4편(5.4%)으로 나타났다. 셋째, 신뢰성 준거 제시 방법은 트라이앵글레이션 46편(63.9%), 연구 참여자에 의한 연구 결과의 평가 작업 44편(61.1%), 동료 연구자의 조언과 지적 33편(45.8%), 추적 감사 25편(34.7%), 참조 자료의 사용 20편(27.8%), 반성적 주관성 17편(23.6%), 충분한 기간 집중적인 관찰 10편(13.9%), 심층적 기술 7편(9.8%), 기타 7편(9.8%) 순으로 나타났다.

이상과 같이 국내 박사학위 논문에서 사용되고 있는 문화기술지 연구방법, 즉 참여자 수, 자료수집 방법 및 기간, 신뢰성 준거 방법 등은 매우 다양한 방법이 사용되고 있는 것으로 나타났다.

• 주제어 : 문화기술지, 박사학위논문, 연구방법, 자료수집 방법, 융합

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## I. Introduction

### 1.1 Needs of study

Ethnography originated from socialists and anthropologists in the early 20th century such as Boas, Malinowsk, Mead, etc. Ethnography is concerned about specifically-based behavior and belief and the learned pattern of language and aims to describe and interpret them[1,2]. It is, therefore, a classical form of qualitative research that was developed by anthropologists who spent for long time in conducting fieldworks within the cultural group[3]. But, modern ethnographers often study microscopic situations such as sub-culture, community, or classroom[4]. In particular, the ethnographic research in the educational field plays a role in reflecting things that cannot be said as well as invisible dynamics of the inside of school[5].

Also, the ethnographic research is a representative research method in Human & Social Sciences including education, nursing, and physical education[6,7]. This study analyzed the ethnographic research methods of doctoral dissertations in Korea. Research questions are as follows.

### 1.2 Research questions

This study established the following research questions to conduct the study.

First, how is the number of research participants in the ethnographic research methods in doctoral dissertations in Korea?

Second, how is the methods and periods of data collection in the ethnographic research methods in doctoral dissertations in Korea?

Third, how is trustworthiness criteria in the ethnographic research methods in doctoral dissertations in Korea?

## II. Methodology

### 2.1 Analysis object

The analysis **object** of the study was doctoral

dissertations related with ethnographic research in Korea until March 1, 2017. Data collection was conducted from 'Research Information Sharing Service(RISS)(<http://www.riss.kr>)' provided by Korea Education and Research Information Service(KERIS). The criteria of search word in the website were having the word of 'ethnography' in the title of doctoral dissertations in Korea.

As a result, a total of 87 doctoral dissertations were collected. 1 ethnography and 14 dissertations which did not open the original were excluded and finally 72 dissertations were analyzed.

### 2.2 Description and criteria of analysis

The analysis criteria of doctoral dissertations related with an ethnographic research were as follows. In the qualitative research, research participants are intentionally selected by a researcher using purposeful sampling. As the purpose of the quantitative research is to collect and generalize large amounts of data, including a number of research participants is necessary for a good research. However, there are no such criteria in the qualitative research. Rather, analysis of many research participants should be subtled in the aspects of the qualitative research.

This study analyzed research participants in the unit of 10 persons. The maximum was set to 40 participants. In particular, when there were two groups of a main informant and a sub-informant, this study included only main informant in the research participant.

To classify the methods and periods of data collection, the methods frequently used in the ethnographic research were included such as in-depth interview, participant observation, and document data. The area of engineering device(photograph, camera, videotape, cassette tape, etc.) was separately divided.

As the data collection of the qualitative research is conducted in various methods even for one research, frequency processing was set up to reflect all data collection methods.

In trustworthiness criteria, the trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba first theorized the example of research work that qualitative researchers should at least satisfy to assert that their results are valid. Thus, theirs were most generalized in the qualitative research field. The trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba consist of intensive observation for a sufficient period, triangulation, in-depth description, use of reference, peer researchers' advice and indication, follow-up, research participants' evaluation of study results, and reflexive subjectivity. This study applied and analyzed them.

Trustworthiness criteria were also processed to reflect all methods in frequency as multiple methods are used even in one research rather than a single method.

<Table 1> Description and criteria of analysis

Analysis Area	Analysis Criteria
Number of research participants	①1-10, ②11-20, ③21-30, ④31-40, ⑤others
Data collection methods	①in-depth interview, ②participant observation, ③document data, ④engineering device, ⑤ others
Data collection periods	①3-5 months, ②6-8 months, ③9-11 months, ④12-14 months, ⑤more than 15 months, ⑥ unrepresented, ⑦others
Trustworthiness criteria	①intensive observation for a sufficient period, ②triangulation, ③in-depth description, use of reference, ④peer researchers' advice and indication, ⑤follow-up, ⑥research participants' evaluation of study results, ⑦reflexive subjectivity, ⑧others

### III. Study Results

#### 3.1 The analysis of the number of research participants

The number of research participants was 1-10(32 dissertations, 44.4%), 11-20(18, 25%), 21-30(13, 18.1%), 31-40(2, 2.7%) and others(7, 9.8%), as shown in <Table 2>.

As culture is strongly characterized by sharing by one group, the ethnographic research tends to sample a specifically limited group rather than fix research

participants. Thus, the number of research participants was variously distributed.

<Table 2> The analysis of the number of research participants

The number of research participants	Frequency(%)
1-10	32(44.4)
11-20	18(25)
21-30	13(18.1)
31-40	2(2.7)
Others	7(9.8)
Total	72(100)

#### 3.2 The analysis of methods and periods of data collection

Data collection methods were in-depth interview(71, 98.6%), participant observation(70, 97.2%), document data(38, 52.7%), engineering device(12, 16.6%), and others(8, 11.1%). As mentioned earlier, several data collection methods are often used in one research, as shown in <Table 3>. Thus, this study reflected all results. 199 data collection methods for 72 doctoral dissertations suggest that one dissertation used more than two methods on average.

Others included 'mini website', 'community meeting', 'questionnaire survey', 'experience sampling', 'narrative', 'episode interview', 'in-depth interview', and 'group interview'.

<Table 3> The analysis of methods and periods of data collection

Data collection methods	Frequency(%)
In-depth interview	71(98.6)
Participant observation	70(97.2)
Document data	38(52.7)
Engineering device(photo, audio, video)	12(16.6)
Others	8(11.1)
Total	199

Data collection periods were 3-5 months(7 dissertation, 9.8%), 6-8 months(15, 20.8%), 9-11 months(14, 19.6%), 12-14 months(13, 18.1%), more than

15 months(17, 23.6%), and unrepresented(4, 5.4%), as shown in <Table 4>.

Data collection periods may vary with the types of culture-sharing group considering the nature of ethnographic research.

<Table 4> The analysis of methods and periods of data collection

Data collection periods(Month)	Frequency(%)
3-5	7(9.8)
6-8	15(20.8)
9-11	14(19.6)
12-14	13(18.1)
15-	17(23.6)
Unrepresented	4(5.4)
Others	2(2.7)
Total	72(100)

### 3.3 Trustworthiness criteria

Third, the analysis of trustworthiness criteria, that is, research validity was triangulation(46 dissertation, 63.9%), research participants' evaluation of study results 44(61.1%), peer researchers' advice and indication(33, 45.8%), follow-up(25, 34.7%), use of reference(20, 27.8%), reflexive subjectivity(17, 23.6%), intensive observation for a sufficient period(10, 13.9%), in-depth description(7, 9.8%), and others(7, 9.8%), as shown in <Table 5>.

Others included multiple technique approach, rapport formation, recording all processes, exactly citing research participants' expression, input of all materials, and reflecting practical adaptation experience. In particular, frequency was calculated in connection with the engineering device of data collection items to use reference. It was because reference means objective data which support researches and the process mainly receives the help of engineering devices[8].

<Table 5> Trust worthiness criteria

Trustworthiness criteria	Frequency(%)
intensive observation for a sufficient period	10(13.9)
triangulation	46(63.9)

in-depth description	7(9.8)
use of reference	20(27.8)
peer researchers' advice and indication	33(45.8)
follow-up	25(34.7)
research participants' evaluation of study results	44(6.1)
reflexive subjectivity	17(23.6)
others	7(9.8)
Total	209

## IV. Summary and Discussion

The results of analyzing ethnographic research methods of doctoral dissertations in Korea are as follows.

First, the number of research participants in data collection methods was 1-10(32 dissertations, 44.4%), 11-20(18, 25%), 21-30(13, 18.1%), 31-40(2, 2.7%), and others(7, 9.8%). The number of research participants has the biggest difference between quantitative research and qualitative research. Whereas the quantitative research aims to obtain a large sample, the qualitative research focused on a relatively smaller sample than the quantitative research. As the ethnographic research focuses on the ethnography of a specific group in various forms of qualitative research, the number of research participants is relatively high. Second, data collection methods were in-depth interview(71, 98.6%), participant observation(70, 97.2%), document data(38, 52.7%), engineering device(12, 16.6%), and others(8, 11.1%). Data collection periods were 3-5 months(7 dissertation, 9.8%), 6-8 months(15, 20.8%), 9-11 months(14, 19.6%), 12-14 months(13, 18.1%), more than 15 months(17, 23.6%), and unrepresented(4, 5.4%). The in-depth interview is often defined that an interviewer directly and continuously talk with and meet interviewees to understand their life, experience, and situations in their language and view[9]. It is an important element to form a relationship with participants and obtain their

information in the ethnographic research[10]. The participant observation means field activity that participates in research participants' life but maintains professional distance as an observer. It does not simply mean being together in a physical place, but looking at and experience invisible things in the body[11]. Therefore, in-depth interview and participant observation is the most important data collection device in the ethnographic research[12]. Specifically, 'an engineering device' is important in qualitative research along with data collection methods to improve the trustworthiness of research. Most qualitative researchers use notebooks in the field or rely on memory to recall and record the situation at that time, which can be distorted or oblivious according to the characteristics of human memory. Therefore, data collection using an engineering device can complement it and can influence the trustworthiness of research because it helps to collect objective data. Third, trustworthiness criteria were triangulation(46 dissertation, 63.9%), research participants' evaluation of study results 44(61.1%), peer researchers' advice and indication(33, 45.8%), follow-up(25, 34.7%), use of reference(20, 27.8%), reflexive subjectivity(17, 23.6%), intensive observation for a sufficient period(10, 13.9%), in-depth description(7, 9.8%), and others(7, 9.8%). Triangulation is one of the ways to improve the trustworthiness and quality of research because it is widely used as the way to verify trustworthiness in the ethnographic research. Good ethnographic research is characterized by collecting data in various, flexible, and mixed ways and long-term collection during the data collection period. In the ethnographic research, triangulation is useful to reveal knowledge or various viewpoints on specific issues of research. Moreover, it can improve the trustworthiness of the ethnographic research and the quality of dissertation[13].

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research design that describes and interprets the value, behavior, belief, and the shared and learned pattern of language of culture-sharing group. Therefore, it is very important

to comply with research ethics in the process of selecting research participants and collecting data. The research should obtain the approval of research ethics from each institution before the proceeding. The ethnographic research should strictly observe the ethics of participants. We should learn from the warning of Lincoln and Guba that false myths reinforced in previous quantitative studies produced an implicit belief that ethical boundaries could be ignored for research among researchers in order to conduct the qualitative research[14].

This study analyzed research participants, data collection methods, and trustworthiness criteria in the research methods of ethnography. To attain the objective of ethnographic research, it is necessary to clarify a culture-sharing group as the criteria of methods to analyze ethnography, embody a cultural subject, specifically describe a cultural group, and understand a cultural group, the system of how a cultural-sharing group works, and self-exposure and reflection on the position of a researcher him(her)self[15]. The ultimate aim of ethnographic research is to communicate with specific audience and not to present research. Further research should be conducted on more precise research method for ethnography that reflects the unique characteristic of ethnographic research[16]. However, it is not desirable to ignore original research methods of ethnographic research and emphasize the excessive rigor of the research methods pursued by the quantitative research. The more flexible approach to research methods pursued by the qualitative research is also important.

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