

Chapter 2: Dimensions of Research

- II. Dimensions of Social Research
 - a. The Purpose of the Study
 - i. Exploration
 - 1. Exploratory research is often the first step in a sequence of studies analyzing a social phenomenon that is largely unknown. Exploratory research most often addresses the “what” question. Exploratory researchers frequently use qualitative techniques to keenly observe and collect data for analysis.
 - ii. Descriptive
 - 1. Descriptive research requires a more developed idea about a social phenomenon. Here, researchers engage in clearly describing or detailing a social setting or relationship. Descriptive research focuses on “how” and “who” questions.
 - iii. Explanation
 - 1. When researchers engage in explanation, they are actively attempting to explain and answer the “why” question. Thus, explanation builds on already existing knowledge collected about a social phenomenon as a result of more basic exploratory and descriptive studies.
 - b. Idiographic and Nomothetic Explanations
 - i. Idiographic
 - 1. “Idio-” in this context means unique, separate, peculiar, or distinct, as in the word “idiosyncrasy.” When we have completed an idiographic explanation, we feel that we fully understand the many causes of what happened in a particular instance. At the same time our scope of explanation is limited to the case at hand. While parts of the idiographic explanation might apply to other situations, our intention is to explain fully one case.
 - ii. Nomothetic
 - 1. Seeks to explain a class of situations or events rather than a single one. Moreover, it seeks to explain “efficiently,” using only one or just a few explanatory factors. Finally, it settles for partial rather than full explanation of a type of situation.
 - c. The Use of Research
 - i. Basic Research
 - 1. Basic research advances fundamental knowledge about the social world. It attempts to address the fundamental questions surrounding a discipline. Occasionally, researchers make significant findings that have great impact on the direction or development of existing schools of thought. Basic research is often criticized as wasteful and useless despite the fact that it is the source of most new scientific ideas and ways of thinking about the world.
 - ii. Applied Research
 - 1. In contrast to basic research, applied researchers argue that funding should only be spent on scientific projects that aim to solve a specific policy, social or environmental issue. Applied researchers are numerous in type and number.
 - a. Types of Applied Research
 - i. Action Research
 - 1. Is applied research that treats knowledge as a form of power and attempts to abolish the line between research and social action. In

other words, the goals of the researcher are often motivated based upon an unequal distribution of social, political, and financial power. For example, research focuses on power with a goal of empowerment; research seeks to raise consciousness or increase awareness; and research is tied directly to political action.

- b. Social Impact Assessment
 - i. Its purpose is to measure the likely consequences of a planned change. Areas assessed in impact studies include:
 1. Community Service
 2. Social Conditions
 3. Economic Impact
 4. Demographic Consequences
 5. Environment
 6. Health Outcomes
 7. Psychological Well Being
- c. Evaluation Research
 - i. Is a widely used type of applied research that addresses the question, “Did it work?” In other words, evaluation researchers actively engage in assessing the success or failure of a social program, organization, etc. There exist two types of evaluation research. Both of which are usually used in conjunction with each other.
 1. Types of Evaluation Research
 - a. Formative Evaluation
 - i. Consist of built-in monitoring or continuous feedback on a program used for program management.
 - b. Summative Evaluation
 - i. Looks only at the final outcome.
- d. The Time Dimension in Research
 - i. Cross-Sectional Research
 1. In this type of study, researchers observe at one point in time. Cross-sectional studies are simpler and less costly than longitudinal studies.
 - ii. Longitudinal Research
 1. Longitudinal researchers examine features of people or other units at more than one point in time. Longitudinal studies can be very costly and complex.
 - a. Types of Longitudinal Studies
 - i. Time Series
 1. A longitudinal study in which the same type of information is collected on a group of people or other units across multiple time periods.
 - ii. Panel Study
 1. The researcher observes exactly the same people, group, or organization across several time periods. This type of research is very costly and many times may be impossible due to its potential price tag.
 - iii. Cohort Analysis

1. A longitudinal study that studies a category of people who share a similar life experience within a specified time period.
- iv. Case Study
1. A special type of longitudinal study in which a researcher examines in depth many features of a few cases over a long duration of time. Often times the data collected includes very detailed and personal information about a person, organization, etc.