Chapter 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the significance of choosing qualitative as the methodological paradigm. Further, I will focus on discussing sample of the study, and methods of data collection. Within this section of methods of data collection, I will highlight on data collection procedures, gaining the access and approaches of data collection, place and duration of study. I also discuss data analysis procedure, explaining how Miles and Huberman’s (1994) model of data analysis used in the study. Lastly, I report ethical concerns throughout the study.

3.1. Research Design

The research study is qualitative in nature. I decided to undertake qualitative research for the fact that it provides the framework to undertake research in natural settings, and there are also high chances of getting access to valuable data, which are inherent in the participant’s social world. Further, qualitative research has the potential to study participant’s knowledge and practices (Flick, 2009). Regarding the promise of qualitative research in education, Luttrell (2010) argues,

“Qualitative research is mainly committed to participants using their own words to make sense of their lives; it places importance on context; it rests on the dialectic between inductive and deductive reasoning, and uses iterative strategies to comprehend the relationship between social life and individual subjectivities. It also has the potential to look at people, places and events through multiple and critical lenses.”

The qualitative approach of studying social phenomena is often referred to as naturalistic field research mainly helps in empathetic understanding participants' subjective perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Magoon, 1977; Rist, 1977).

My engagement with qualitative research in the field site was mostly focused on exploring how the children’s identity is shaped by belonging to their social group and how it affects their participation in the schooling process.

3.2. Sample of the Study

Underlying the stated objectives, the study employed purposive sampling. Such an approach helped to broaden the scope of situations investigated in detail and thus,
widen the scope of exploring the phenomena under study. Participants in this study were students belonging to the cohorts of 2004-14 and 2005-15 cohorts. A cohort is a group of students who start Class I in a given year and are tracked over time to the point of completing or dropping out of high school. In this study, I examine those students who completed Class X in the 2014 and 2015 cohorts. Students from these cohorts started their Class I in the years 2004 and 2005. The drop-outs included those students who dropped out in any of the school classes (1-10) between 2004-14 and 2005-15. This study included 12 drop-outs and 13 children who completed Class X\(^5\). Their parents and guardians were also interviewed.

The sample was not large enough to represent large samples of tribal and non-tribal children participation in the process of schooling. However, the results do help to understand the educational trajectories of children belonging to different groups in a specific way and also understanding academic and familial support provided to them. The qualitative research sample has the advantage for the researcher to choose the sample deliberately based on the criteria that have relevance to the research question. Patton (1990) cites that unlike quantitative research, information richness is the most significant factor in the selection of sample in qualitative research.

For the better understanding of the schooling process, the children belonging to the ‘Kendukhori’ village those who are currently studying in primary school, upper primary and secondary level were also studied. Name change was of the village and respondents were done to keep confidentiality. 24 such children those who are studying in primary, upper primary and secondary level and their parents and guardians were also interviewed. I concentrated primarily on students of the sample village 6 studying in Class X in batch 2014-15 and interviewed at various crucial stages: just after entering Class X, in the mid-session and before the final examination. This was done to probe more deeply about how they prepare themselves for educational challenges they face. The parents and the teachers particularly teaching in the Primary school were also interviewed. I talked with many of the respondents, who fit to my criterion, deliberately provoke them to elicit responses and record them for data analysis. The observation sites were also chosen keeping the specific research questions and situations in focus.

\(^5\) Many of the boys and girls, who were part of these cohorts and are not currently staying in the village, and were not available during fieldwork. Hence, they are not included in the study.

\(^6\)The students studying in Primary and Upper Primary Schools are mostly belonging to the village. On the other hand, in high school from Class VIII-X, Majority students are from outside the village and most of them are boys belong to tribal communities and are staying in the hostel.
3.3. Methods of Data Collection

Research sites in the school are chosen depending on the context and situations. In this qualitative study, multiple methods were used to help produce a more comprehensive set of findings. Both observation and semi-structured interview along with the relevant set of documentary data were used by applying triangulation method to explore the discursive practices in the social and educational field. Triangulation involves the use of two or more methods of data collection to improve data trustworthiness (Burns, 1997).

Towards strengthening the trustworthiness of the data, I used interviews and observation by applying triangulation methods. Towards understanding the multiple realities in the field, I use semi-structured and unstructured interviewing- what was considered as one of the ways to conduct the trustworthy inquiry in a world of complex and interwoven constructed realities (Bradley, 1993). Semi-structured interviews are defined as ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984). It starts from pre-determined questions and after that, a flexible approach is adopted for discussion with the interviewee (Hemming, 2008). Kvale argues that “the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to un-cover their lived world”.

Participant observation was used as a tool of data collection during research process. Many a time if the teachers are absent, I got the opportunity to teach in the class. As a result of teaching in school, I got the chance to collect data through participant observation.

Interviews with children, parents and teachers were conducted to make sense of their individual practice and experience where they mostly confide me in revealing how they act within the existing cultural and educational practices. I was flexible in using the interview schedule starting with unstructured questions first and introduce increased structuring only later during the interview to prevent interviewer frames of reference being imposed on the interviewee, what Merton and Kendall (1946) calls the non-directive style of conversation. The early questions were mainly asked to know their social and educational background, which are primarily designed to enable the interviewees to relax and feel confident in the confidentiality of the proceedings. Precautions are always taken to ask right questions at right moments:
“Problems may arise if questions are asked at the wrong moments and interviewers are thus, prevented from, rather supported in, presenting their views, or if the wrong type of questions is used at the wrong time” (Flick, 2009).

During the process of interview, the criterion of specificity was used to understand how particular events are leading to dropping out, absenteeism or better performance in schools. The criterion of specificity broadly means that interview is bringing out the particular element during the interview process, which determines the impact or meaning of an event for the interviews from remaining on the level of general statements. Towards increasing specificity, the attempt was made to encourage ‘retrospective inspection’. The participants were given the chance to recall the specific events in a detailed manner by providing them with a link between some vital information given by the respondents at some point of time and similar questions.

Interview started with broad and general questions- what Spradley (1979) called grand tour questions followed by specific questions. Usually, one interview went on for 45 minutes to one and half hours. Some of the children studying in Class X and belonged to the village were interviewed three times: the first time when they were at the last stage of Class IX, the second time when they are in Class X and lastly; when they were preparing themselves for the Class X terminal examination.

In order to explore the influence of social class composition in the village on the education of the children, I was involved in ‘Village Census’. I covered 171 households in the village and tried to interview the head of the household and in their absence; next head of the household was interviewed. Further, towards understanding the historicity and culture of various social groups of the village, I interviewed with the elder members of different social groups in the village. Scanning of school records was undertaken to capture data on school participation from the year 2004-2015 to trace the drop-outs and students those who completed Class X in 2014 and 2015.

3.3.1. Approach and Duration of study

Fieldwork was conducted for a longer period from October 2013 to November 2015 with frequent visits. However, an ‘intermittent approach was followed for data collection in the field (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). The intermittent approach is one where the length of time spent doing the research is longer, for example, from three months to two years, but with a flexible approach to the frequency of site visits. My fieldwork of approximately three months has been interspersed over a period from
October 2013 to November 2015. The frequency depends on the researcher selecting particular foci as the research develops and selecting the relevant events. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue the dominant criterion of intermittent approach is the depth of study, entailing progressive focusing for a sustained period. I visited seven times to the field site with focused intention. My preliminary visits were made to gain the broad familiarisation about the schooling and community practices where children, parents and teachers are part of the study. The subsequent three visits were made keeping research questions in focus. The fourth visit was made to understand how the children participate in the education and schooling practices during the times of festivals. The fifth visit aimed to explore how children of different social groups respond to the challenges of preparing themselves just before the final examination. The sixth visit was made during the period when the people in the village are intensively engaged in agriculture related work and to understand how children were participating in the schooling processes during these periods.

Adopting the intermittent approach of data collection also gave me access to some respondents, who were part of my sample but they are no longer part of the village. These respondents were girls, who were drop-out but got married elsewhere and occasionally visit their native village. For example, on my second visit, I was planning to have an interaction with a drop-out girl, who married at a very young age, but was unsuccessful to take interview of her since she is staying at her husband’s place. However, during the next visit, I got the opportunity for an in-depth interaction with the young woman as she had come to visit her father’s home.

In an 'intermittent' approach, the researcher is continually selective about the place and the people with whom they spend time. In a similar manner, research site was visited depending on the context and situations between school and communities. Many a time, I visited the classroom and took classes of the absentee teachers. I always took this opportunity so that I can interact more with the children and understand the dynamics of interaction between students of different groups and their level of educational attainment. Throughout the research process, I tried to spend the considerable duration of the morning time in community setting, interacting with parents since most of them remain busy during the day. They attend agriculture related work and other works in the day time. They spend the remaining time in schools.
An intermittent approach has also the advantage of getting the attention of respondents, and they come voluntarily to discuss the relevant issues with the researcher. I found the difference in the attitude of the children between my first two visits and last visits. Children who were initially hesitant to reveal their experiences, came to me in my last visit and were open to discuss their issues with me. So, I had easy access to stories of children and parents through frequent visits to the village although some of the visits were not for longer duration.

As my fieldwork progressed, I got the confidence that I was being accepted in the school and community. Teachers gradually accepted me as part of their community and in doing so I was able to maintain Malinowski’s (1992) sense of ‘naturalness.’ Parents and family members warmly greeted me and shared their experiences how teachers in the school perform their role in everyday schooling practices. Some of the families consider me as their own family member, and they share the stories about their family, their children and neighbours without any hesitation. One of the Sounti women shares with me how she had struggled to raise her children after losing her husband, who was working in the Indian Army. She sought advice for the career path of her children, who are studying in private school.

3.3.2 Entering the Field

Entering the field and familiarisation with the research contexts has been widely discussed in the tradition of qualitative research over the years ((Malinowski, 1922; Schensul et al., 1999; Berg, 2009). Entering the field is considered as the first logical step in conducting qualitative research and the researcher has to be very active and careful about art and logic of rapport building with the research participants. Schensl et al. (1999) state that ethnographers need to be acquainted with four elements: ‘mapping the setting’, becoming acquainted with the norms, beliefs, rules, rituals and ‘language’ of the field location; learning how to locate and build relationships, and unobtrusively collecting and recording data.

In the research process, the role of gatekeepers, who act as intermediaries between the researcher and participants, are often important in facilitating access to the field for the purpose of research (Clark, 2011, De Laine, 2000). They often introduced me to the research participants and provide necessary information for the contacts to be made. No doubt, I have the advantage that I have already decided to choose Kendujhar district as my field of research due to my prior experience of working in theis area. I
was working in an NGO called PECUC (People’s Cultural Centre), Bhubaneswar, and Odisha in 2007 and Kendujhar was one of the field offices of PECUC. I often came to this area for documenting best practices in the field. However, I had the feeling that choosing a proto-type field setting match to my research would be a challenging task to me. I took the help of Field Officer of NGO PECUC, who turned out as a great support. He has not only assisted me in getting a prototype field site and also bridging the gap between research participants and me.

Apart from the role of solving the problems of contacting the research participants, the gatekeeper also acts as means of developing more productive research relationships with the research participants. In my case, the gatekeeper has strong bonding with some of the headmen of the village and one of the projects of the NGO was also operating in the village. The local functionary of the NGO working in the village also has good rapport in the village. The importance of gatekeeper remains throughout the data collection process. Sometimes, there were also some misunderstanding between the researcher and research participants, but the gate keeper played a vital role by mediating between them. Even though consent had been granted and sometimes, teachers did not permit me to enter inside the school. In my pilot study, I checked the school data and found the characteristics of the school and community setting, is a match to my sampling frame. The teachers both in High School and Primary School agreed to assist me in my data collection. In my second visit to school, I went empty handed without any supporting documents as I had the feeling that the School Teacher had already given permission for the main study during pilot study. Finally, I was given access to primary school after I show them valid proof and also the authentication letter of data collection.

Gaining permission to a particular site demands negotiation between the researcher and the participant. The researcher mostly encounters negotiation issues such as timings, access and use of results. In the initial stages of data collection, I was struggling to have the interview with the children and teachers. Towards managing the time, when I find there are fewer scopes to interact with teachers and children in school premises, I visited the village to interact with parents and other respondents to manage time. Mostly, I got the opportunities to interact with the children and teachers in the recess hours, during late afternoon and game period. However, as I became familiar with the teachers, I got the opportunities to interview the teachers whenever I find them sitting in the staff common room. After first two phases of visit, I had the feeling as I
am the insider and part of their common room discussion. There is also the common perception among the children that I have joined school as one of their new teachers in the school.

3.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative research mainly aimed to uncover the larger picture by using the data to explain the phenomenon under the study. Although there is no one-size fit approach to data analysis, this study uses Miles and Huberman’s (1994) model of data analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) outline that qualitative data involves three distinct phases: data reduction, Data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction refers to the process whereby the mass of qualitative data collected through field notes or interview transcriptions is selected, reduced and organised. Data reduction often influences choices about which aspects of the collected data should be selected, focused and transformed to answer the research questions. It is more reasonable to transcribe as much and only as exactly the data as it is required by the research questions (Strauss, 1987). Data reduction is a part of analysis that refines, specifies, focuses, discards and organises data in such a manner that final conclusions can be drawn and verified.

Data display refers to the efficient means of organizing and displaying information involving the wide use of graphs, diagrams, charts, and networks and they also have a part to play in the data collection phase. The data display is beneficial to understand what is happening and to conduct further analysis or to take action based on that understanding. The better displays are considered as a major avenue to valid qualitative analysis. The third stream of analysis activity is ‘Conclusion-drawing and verification’. The process of drawing conclusion and verification involves drawing meanings from the displayed and reduced data, noting regularities, patterns, and explanations. These three streams of data analysis: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification are cyclical in nature in the process of research and complement each other.

It must be acknowledged that transcription is central to the qualitative mode of inquiry. The transcription processes can be thought of presenting in different modes: naturalism, in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible, and de-naturalism, in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., Stutters, pauses, involuntary vocalisations) are removed. These two positions correspond to certain
views about the representation of language (Oliver et. al., 2005). Apart from naturalism and de-naturalism, Oliver et al. (2005) proposes reflection as another mode where transcriptions are made in relation to the research questions. It is mainly done to answer the question(s) being asked. With regard to using of transcriptions, Kvale (2007) prescribes that sampling in the transcriptions of interviews are also desirable to select the data to present the findings appropriate to the research questions:

“Sampling in interview studies does not only concern selection of subjects; transcription involves samplings of which of the multiple dimensions of oral interview conversations are to be selected for written transcriptions” (Kvale, 2007,).

For this study, transcriptions were done by myself. Although time consumes, it is advantageous for the researcher to be involved in the process of transcription because the researcher can identify what is said by the respondents and where it fits to the research question and thus can construct what Ellis (1995) calls a meaningful story out of the large-scale data. In this study, the transcript was developed by moving back and forth between recordings and transcripts (Ashmore & Reed, 2000; Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997). The data generated through transcripts were classified and re-classified under various themes. The transcripts were often read and re-read because some of the themes are closely interconnected to each other, and there is need to establish a close familiarity with the identified themes.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are an important subject of debate in qualitative research. In such kind of research practices, the researcher often tries to develop the empathetic understanding with research participants and therefore, they use the method of prolonged observation and the semi-structured interview. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument and hence, trustworthiness needs to be maintained between researcher and research participant in the field. Therefore, it is desirable that the researcher should uncover his identity and also the purpose of the research to the participants. During the on-going process of my research, I frequently encountered ethical problems, particularly when I was asked about my identity when people asked me whether I am in any job or not. No doubt, I was introducing myself as a researcher, but as I was bound by the larger role of research, I was not able to disclose my other role as an employee in a Central Government organisation. I suspected that this would
make teachers and other respondents much more careful in their approach in revealing their true opinion, or restrict entry to the school.

In ethical social science research practices, gaining informed consent from research participants is considered highly desirable. The concept of ‘informed consent’ assumes the transparency of a social and psychological reality that enables researchers to provide full and accurate information about the research to autonomous subjects who can make rational and informed choices (Halse and Honey, 2010).

To begin with my field work, I had got consent from the school and also from the people in the village. The permission was taken from each respondent whenever they were approached for interview for the first time. The letter from the authorities of Tata Institute of Social Sciences helped to access the field site in a great way. The letter was a great support, which conveys “the information collected will be kept confidential and will be used for academic purposes only”. I introduced my role as a researcher in the field setting and also conveyed them that this will be used for academic purposes only. However, some of the people in the village setting harboured suspicions that perhaps I was from a government body.

Some of the research participants have believed that my fieldwork was a beneficiary survey and may be used for befitting them from government schemes and programmes. Some of them believed that this is a Below Poverty Line (BPL) Survey and may help in identifying BPL and non-BPL families. Once I went to one of the Munda families to interview a child with physical disability, studying in Class X to understand how the child is studying and also to explore the basic socio-economic status of the family. I was waiting my turn to interview the child. However, the mother of the child made me wait for an hour and went to call her husband who was working in the fields, half a kilometre far from his house. Instead of answering my questions, he started explaining me the logic of constructing a new house, of which, one-fourth of the construction had been completed. He felt that since they are constructing a new house, it would get noted in my ‘survey’ and he would then lose government benefits. One woman requested me to report her alcoholic husband to the police, else he would spoil the career of his children. I tried to convince her that I was there to play the role of a researcher. However, I counselled both the couples to educate their children so that the child will benefit from various schemes and programmes offered by the government.
Data collection took place under the different condition with challenges concerning both time and space. The utilitarian ethical perspective advocates that the sum of potential benefits to a subject and the importance of the knowledge gained should outweigh the risk of harm to a subject and thus warrant a decision to carry out the study (Guidelines, 1992, p15). It was very challenging to enter into conversations with the teachers or do observation in the primary school considering that only three teachers were managing five classes in the school or keep observed the classroom situation. I had to constantly remind myself that I was taking the time of teachers and this should not affect the teaching learning process.

My role as interviewer and researcher was more challenging when I interviewed a female teacher, about her experience in the school, academic qualification and overall involvement in teaching learning process in the school. Having listened to the response of many of the research participants in the village settings and also from her colleagues in the school, my field notes have mention of many complaints related to the role performance of the female teacher. No doubt, there were also claims related to the overall functioning of school. However, I started my interview afresh with neutrality to the pre-conceived notion, by taking the lead right from the start, introducing the theme important to her and then by reflecting and rephrasing my question. In the process of interview, the attempt was always made to ensure that it should not turn into a therapeutic situation.

In the process of research, confidentiality and anonymity imply that private data identifying the subjects or privacy of the subjects will not be reported. When I started engaging with research participants for data collection, I indicated that all responses would be confidential. There are moments during interviews when the research participants have shared information and told me that these are ‘just between ourselves’ or ‘in confidence.’ Some of the teachers also revealed that they confide in me and shared, and if I would share, it may create a situation of misunderstanding between them. Many a time, teachers were also interested to know other teachers’ responses. Such situations proved challenging in the field and had to be navigated with sensitivity and caution.

3.6. **Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed the rationale of choosing qualitative approaches to research. I have also reflected upon methods and techniques used in the collection of data. To understand the social and economic characteristics of the village and
communities, household census was carried out by the researcher. Further, to look at participation in, and non-completion of, schooling, attempt was made for: Scanning of school records for data on participation; Observation of classrooms, school and children in other social spaces of the village; Semi-structured interviews of parents, teachers, students (currently attending, completed and dropouts) and Informal interaction with community members.

This chapter also attempted to explore to discuss the process of gaining access to the field and procedure of data analysis. I have also discussed ethical considerations in the field.

In next chapter, the socio-cultural and economic characteristics of different communities in the village will be discussed. The political participation, socialisation and parenting strategies adopted by different communities will also be explored in the next chapter. It also deals with discussion on school and nature of educational facilities in the village.