Qualitative Research Methods in Ethnic Communities: A Framework for Studying Language and Cultural Preservation

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Abstract: Research methodologies have diversified significantly in recent decades, offering researchers various options for structuring their studies. This study explores the role of qualitative research methods in examining ethnic language and culture preservation within ethnic communities in host societies. It begins by defining ethnic communities within the context of ethnic community studies, emphasizing the significance of language maintenance and cultural preservation. The study examines the ongoing academic debate surrounding quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches, along with community-based participatory research frameworks. Since the study focuses on qualitative research, particular attention is paid to data collection methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The research also investigates the methodological integration of different qualitative approaches to comprehensively understand how to examine linguistic and ethnic minority groups' ethnic language and cultural practices in host societies. In addition, it explores how researchers navigate dual roles when studying their own ethnic communities in host societies, examining the balance between community membership and scholarly objectivity. Special attention is given to online qualitative surveys as contemporary research tools, highlighting their flexibility and effectiveness in addressing diverse social research questions. This paper contributes to the field by providing practical and philosophical guidance for conducting qualitative research in ethnic communities within host societies.
Keywords: Research methodology, qualitative research, ethnic community, language, culture, methodological choice, methodological combination, online qualitative surveys

Over the past few decades, the ways researchers conduct their studies have expanded considerably, providing them with multiple approaches to design their research (e.g., Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin et al., 2023). The main objective of this study is to examine how qualitative research methods can be used to study how ethnic groups maintain their native language and cultural practices while living in their adopted countries.

This study begins by defining the concept of an ethnic community within the context of ethnic community studies, emphasizing the critical role of language and culture in language preservation and culture maintenance. Considering the growing cultural and linguistic diversity in host societies, understanding the dynamics of ethnic communities is essential for developing effective policies and interventions that support language and cultural preservation.

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Next, the study outlines the primary research objectives and key questions, setting the foundation for an in-depth examination of methodological approaches in studying ethnic communities within host societies. It engages with the long-standing academic debate regarding the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, considering their respective strengths and limitations. While quantitative approaches offer measurable, generalizable data, qualitative research provides a deeper, context-rich understanding of individuals' lived experiences, cultural practices, and language use (e.g., Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin et al., 2023). Considering the complexity of studying ethnic language and culture preservation, the study also explores the potential benefits of mixed methods research and the community-based participatory research (CBPR) framework, which emphasizes collaboration with community members as co-researchers (Fleming et al., 2024; Israel et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2022). These frameworks provide a more holistic perspective on ethnic community dynamics, addressing both statistical trends and the nuanced, qualitative realities of language and cultural maintenance.

The methodological framework forms the core of this study, detailing the application of various research approaches, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and CBPR in ethnic community research. Since the primary focus of this study is on qualitative methods, particular attention is given to their significance in understanding language and culture preservation within ethnic communities. Data collection methods are thoroughly examined, including participant observation, interviews with adults and children, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. These methods are particularly valuable for capturing the complexities of intergenerational language transmission, cultural adaptation, and identity formation among linguistic and ethnic minority groups in host societies.

Furthermore, the study explores the implications of integrating various methodological approaches within qualitative research, addressing the methodological flexibility needed to study how ethnic and linguistic minority groups sustain their language and cultural practices across different generations. The discussion also highlights best practices for conducting research in ethnic communities considering researcher positionality.

Due to the increasing influence of digital communication, particular attention is paid to the growing role of online qualitative research methods, with an emphasis on online qualitative surveys. The potential value of online qualitative surveys, which are increasingly recognized as either an alternative or complementary tool to traditional qualitative interviews (Braun et al., 2021), is thoroughly reviewed. As advancements in digital communication technology have made online qualitative surveys more feasible and accessible, researchers should consider their advantages in employing online qualitative surveys in their research within ethnic communities.

Finally, the study concludes by synthesizing key findings and methodological contributions, emphasizing their practical applications and implications for future research. By examining the intersection of qualitative methods, digital tools, and ethnic community engagement, this study provides a comprehensive roadmap for researchers interested in exploring language and culture preservation within ethnic communities in host societies. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on ethnic language maintenance and cultural sustainability, offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance for conducting qualitative research in ethnic communities within host societies.

Defining Ethnic Community for Research

The concept of ethnicity within the Social Sciences is complex due to its dynamic nature and varied interpretations across contexts (Akova & Kantar, 2021). Akova and Kantar (2021) state that ethnic groups are characterized by shared attributes such as language, religion, ancestry, and cultural connections, which create distinct identities differentiating

them from others. In addition, ethnicity is a cultural, not biological, concept, highlighting differences in lifestyle and cultural values in contrast to dominant groups. As a cultural phenomenon, it encompasses diverse elements such as language, heritage, religion, traditions, and lifestyles (Akova & Kantar, 2021). The concept of ethnicity has been applied to diverse groups throughout history, with ethnic communities being formed to serve three key purposes: building unity within larger group structures, rationalizing social disparities based on heritage, and fulfilling people's fundamental desire to belong (Bös, 2015). While social scientists recognize that ethnicity is shaped by social and historical factors rather than being fixed or natural, they increasingly acknowledge that many individuals view their ethnicity as a core, unchangeable aspect of who they are (Bös, 2015). Before conducting research within ethnic communities, it is essential to establish a clear definition of an ethnic community within multi-ethnic societies. With regard to the concept of an ethnic community, Tosi (1999) acknowledges the complexity of defining ethnic communities in multi-ethnic societies due to their diverse nature. He notes that traditionally, an ethnic community has been viewed as a group residing in an ethnic enclave with shared social objectives. However, Tosi argues that beyond geographical proximity and common purposes, additional factors should be considered. He proposes that for a group to be considered an ethnic community, its members should share a comprehensive set of beliefs and attitudes about daily life and participate to some extent in ethnic community institutions. This expanded definition recognizes the multifaceted nature of ethnic communities, encompassing shared geography, purpose, culture, language, beliefs, and organizational participation.

In this regard, the term ethnic community or ethnic groups should be understood as a biologically self-maintaining group of people that share cultural values, a way of communication, and identification as members. For young people, in particular, feelings of belonging can manifest in multiple cultural, social, and civic ways both to their ethnic community and to the broader society (Takle & Ødegård, 2016). While young members may integrate into their current country through educational, professional, social, and institutional channels, they may simultaneously maintain strong cultural and social connections to their ethnic communities. These ethnic communities often maintain strong links to their members' ancestral homelands, viewing these countries as central to their identity. Even when individual members do not physically travel between countries, their ethnic communities may structure their cultural, social, civic, and political engagement across multiple national contexts. This transnational dimension can be seen in how these ethnic communities work to preserve and promote their members' ethnic culture within their current country of residence (Takle & Ødegård, 2016). In a similar vein, Tian and Li (2024) mention that social relationships motivate ethnic interaction, as communities assist members in reconstructing networks to promote cultural exchange through sociable engagements. Shared cultural activities encourage communication during leisure, fostering trust and broadening interpersonal connections across ethnic groups (Tian & Li, 2024).

Overall, ethnic communities can be defined as groups of people with a shared sense of identity based on common cultural heritage, language, ancestry, or traditions. These shared elements may include customs, values, and practices that distinguish them from other groups. Often rooted in a shared history, members of an ethnic community experience a sense of belonging and unity. Within larger, more diverse societies, these communities can coexist, maintaining their unique cultural practices while also adapting and integrating into the broader social fabric.

Considering the Selection of Research Approaches within Ethnic Community Studies

Contemporary researchers have multiple research approaches for designing their studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Concerning multiple research approaches, the relative merits of quantitative versus qualitative research have been intensely debated in academic circles for decades (e.g., Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, in recent decades, mixed-methods research has emerged as a third paradigm in educational and social research, aiming to combine the strengths while minimizing the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

To begin with, quantitative methodology, also known as a natural science approach or positivism/post-positivism, emphasizes objective, empirical investigation from an outsider's perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin et al., 2023). This approach is characterized by its focus on deductive reasoning, hypothesis testing, and statistical analysis within a value-free framework (Denzin et al., 2023). Researchers are expected to maintain emotional distance and use impersonal language to eliminate bias (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While quantitative research offers advantages such as efficient data collection and analysis and credible numerical results, its main limitation lies in producing generalized findings that may not adequately reflect specific local contexts or individual experiences (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Unlike quantitative methodology, qualitative research, known variously as naturalistic field research, ethnographic, interpretive, or constructivist research, is grounded in phenomenology and focuses on understanding people's lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach emphasizes close researcher involvement with participants and their contexts, aiming to understand participants' behaviors and interpretations of the world through an insider's perspective. Qualitative methodology also acknowledges the socially constructed nature of reality and the inherently value-laden nature of inquiry. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), this context-sensitive approach to uncovering meaning in complex social environments contributes essential knowledge to our understanding of the social world. However, its limitations include limited generalizability, potential researcher bias, and the time-intensive nature of data collection and analysis. Key features of qualitative research include an inductive approach, flexibility in data collection processes, and the use of interactive methods like open-ended observations and interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative methods, guided by pragmatic knowledge claims (Denzin et al., 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This approach is inclusive, complementary, and expansive rather than restrictive (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Common strategies in mixed-methods research include sequential, concurrent, and transformative procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). By integrating the strengths of both methodologies, mixed-methods research addresses limitations inherent in single-method studies (Berkovic, 2023). The deliberate combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows researchers to address questions beyond the scope of either method alone, while integrating the strengths of both methodologies to facilitate examination of various viewpoints and connections between these two distinct data types (Berkovic, 2023). In other words, it incorporates quantitative data to add context and identify broader patterns while emphasizing qualitative methods. For example, statistical trends on language and culture preservation in ethnic communities could complement the rich insights gained from interviews and participant observation. This integration allows researchers to validate findings through multiple data sources, combining statistical analysis with detailed personal narratives.

Concerning the adoption of CBPR approaches within ethnic communities, it has been claimed that the emancipatory roots that underlie this approach draw from the epistemic traditions of oppressed communities of color and Indigenous communities across the globe

that have sought to facilitate community empowerment and agency (P. J. Fleming et al., 2024; Israel et al., 2019). CBPR is a collaborative research approach that balances academic expertise with community knowledge. Its core principles include equal partnership with communities, addressing power dynamics and social inequities, and combining research with practical action. The method promotes mutual learning and emphasizes sustainable, culturally sensitive solutions while maintaining scientific rigor and community relevance (P. J. Fleming et al., 2024; Israel et al., 2019). Therefore, CBPR could be considered an alternative approach in ethnic community-based research, as it actively involves ethnic communities in the research process. Instead of viewing participants as subjects, this method allows them to co-create knowledge, ensuring their voices shape the research direction. This approach could be particularly relevant for studying language and culture preservation, as it empowers communities to articulate their own strategies and challenges.

Overall, when selecting a research approach, it is emphasized that no single approach is inherently superior. Instead, the choice of an appropriate research method should be guided by the specific research problems and the context in which the study is conducted (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).While research can be conducted through quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, or community-based participatory research approaches, this paper concentrates on the implications of methodological choices within qualitative research, specifically in the context of ethnic community-based studies. The focus is on examining how different qualitative methodologies can be selected and combined when studying language and culture in ethnic communities within host societies. It also explores the unique position of researchers who study their own ethnic communities, considering their dual role as both researchers and community members. Furthermore, it discusses the benefits of incorporating online surveys as a qualitative research tool within ethnic community studies.

Selecting Qualitative Methods for Research in Ethnic Community-Based Research

Qualitative methodology differs from quantitative methodology in several key aspects (Denzin et al., 2023). According to Denzin et al. (2023), qualitative researchers believe that reality cannot be fully revealed but can only be approximated. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding participants' viewpoints and their daily experiences. It prioritizes detailed accounts of social events and commonly employs first-person narratives and ethnographic approaches. Qualitative research commonly employs strategies such as ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research, and narrative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Its strengths lie in providing deep insights into lived experiences and rich descriptions of local contexts in natural settings (R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

When studying specific ethnic community issues, researchers can combine qualitative and ethnographic approaches while still utilizing traditional sociological survey methods, particularly in language and cultural preservation research. Ayton (2023a) emphasizes that ethnographic studies aim to understand the meanings and behaviors associated with belonging to groups, teams, organizations, and communities. Therefore, ethnographic research focuses on how groups of people live within their culture, examining belief systems, religious frameworks, worldviews, and the structures that constitute the social environment. This aligns with the view that qualitative approaches are more suitable than quantitative methods for examining complex social phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this regard, the following section explores the effects and advantages of employing these methodological approaches in research within ethnic communities focusing on language and culture while also examining the general characteristics of methods commonly used in qualitative studies.

Qualitative Observation

Participant observation emerged as a qualitative research method in anthropology, where researchers sought to understand cultures and lifestyles by immersing themselves in natural environments. This method later spread to sociology and education research (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The approach is particularly valued in qualitative research because it provides deeper, richer insights compared to surveys, which tend to yield more superficial data about social phenomena (Ayton, 2023b). In ethnographic research, participant observation is considered essential since researchers integrate themselves into the community they are studying, observing and participating in daily activities, ceremonies, and social interactions while maintaining their role as observers and researchers (Ayton, 2023b). Ayton (2023b) claims that participant observation encompasses multiple data collection methods, including direct observation, different types of interviews, and gathering various documentary evidence like photos and personal journals. In addition, participant observation often serves as an initial research phase that helps researchers familiarize themselves with the research environment and its participants by providing a comprehensive view of the studied phenomena, thereby guiding the formation of research questions and informing the structure of subsequent data collection methods, particularly more formal interviews (Ayton, 2023b). In this sense, this methodology is particularly valuable when researchers aim to comprehend group dynamics, cultural aspects, behavioral patterns, and lived experiences within specific contexts, making participant observation highly useful in community-based research that aims to gain perspectives on language and culture preservation among linguistic and ethnic minorities in the host society.

Qualitative and quantitative observations differ fundamentally in their approach. Qualitative observation employs open-ended instruments to explain phenomena in natural settings, while quantitative observation uses closed-ended instruments to test hypotheses. According to R. B. Johnson and Christensen (2024), there are four distinct types of qualitative observation based on the researcher's role (i.e., complete participant, complete observer, participant as an observer, observer as a participant). Each role offers different advantages. For example, participant observers gain deeper insider understanding through extensive involvement, while observer participants maintain more objectivity but may miss deeper insights due to limited interaction (R. B. Johnson & Christensen, 2024; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, these roles are not fixed and may shift throughout a study depending on circumstances.

According to Uwamusi and Ajisebiyawo (2023), participant observation offers several key advantages as a research method. It enables researchers to observe non-verbal cues, social interactions, and time allocation patterns that might not be captured through other methods. The approach allows researchers to verify interview data by comparing participants' stated behaviors with their actual actions and to witness events that subjects might be reluctant to discuss directly. Researchers can access underlying dynamics and collect rich, detailed descriptions of events and behaviors in their natural context. A significant strength is that the method captures real-time data, unaffected by participants' memories or future intentions. Unlike interviews, focus groups, or surveys, participant observation does not rely heavily on participants' active participation, making it less susceptible to response bias. In addition, a key strength of participant observation is its ability to capture phenomena as they naturally occur, minimizing distortion in data collection (Ayton, 2023b; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method is particularly valuable in research settings where direct observation is possible and where immediate, vivid perspectives are essential for understanding the subject matter. Thus, participant observation can be useful in understanding ethnic community members' unsaid beliefs about language and culture maintenance, as well as their attitudes toward host

societies. Overall, this comprehensive approach enhances both data collection and interpretation while potentially generating new research questions.

However, there are also cautions that researchers who rely solely on participant observation risk losing critical and objective perspectives, as they may become overly immersed in the role of a participant (Atkinson & Coffey, 2002). This method has faced criticism for potential subjectivity and unreliability due to human nature's inherent biases. Researchers highlight several key limitations of participant observation as a research method (see Atkinson & Coffey, 2002; Uwamusi & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). The primary concerns include potential bias from relying on key informants, researchers' tendency to focus on interesting but infrequent activities while neglecting common daily activities, and access limitations due to researchers' demographic characteristics. To address these limitations, they recommend complete cultural immersion, though this is rarely feasible in practice.

It is clear that participant observation allows researchers to interpret observations directly through their firsthand experience, offering an advantage over interviews that rely on secondhand accounts. Thus, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasize the importance of proper training for researchers in observation techniques, with a specific focus on what and how to observe across different research contexts, along with active collaboration with other methods, including interviews, focus groups, and online qualitative surveys.

Interviews

Qualitative interviewing is one of the most widely used methods for understanding human experiences through language (Denzin et al., 2023; Warren, 2002). Rather than being a simple tool for collecting data, it is an active, interpretive process where meaning is created through conversation between researchers and participants (Berkovic, 2023). Through participants' words and stories, researchers can gain deep insights into their experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). While researchers prepare specific questions in advance due to practical constraints like time and access, the interview process should remain flexible and open-ended. This allows researchers to explore diverse meanings and find common patterns in participants' cultural and social experiences. The goal is to interpret and understand participants' responses within their cultural context, not just passively gather information (Warren, 2002).

However, it is worth noting that this traditional method, despite its widespread use, has inherent biases, particularly regarding accessibility for people with certain disabilities. The method assumes a basic back-and-forth verbal exchange between researcher and participant (Denzin et al., 2023). To be effective, researchers must balance maintaining flexibility and openness with practical considerations such as time constraints, financial resources, emotional costs, and participant availability (Warren, 2002).

Since interviews rely entirely on what participants choose to share, researchers cannot verify if the responses are truthful (Coleman, 2022). This limitation is why many researchers combine interviews with other methods, particularly ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation, to get a more complete picture. This combination of methods will be discussed in more detail later. Overall, qualitative interviews are valuable in research within ethnic communities, as they allow researchers to capture participants' personal feelings, interests, opinions, and inner voices regarding language, culture, and ethnicity.

With regard to interviewing with young children, it provides unique insights into their lives and experiences, offering perspectives that may not be accessible through adult interpretations or in public settings (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). However, this process requires careful consideration of the power dynamics between adult researchers and child participants. Researchers must be aware of and work to minimize this power imbalance by creating natural,

informal interview contexts (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Tammivaara & Enright, 1986). Thus, group interviews or focus groups are recommended as they allow children to feel more comfortable and clarify their thoughts through peer interactions (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Empowering child interviewees can also be achieved through reciprocity, where researchers share and check their interpretations with the children during the interview process (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). To elicit authentic responses, researchers should create a natural, flexible, and non-judgmental research setting. It is crucial to maintain children's own terms and language when interpreting their responses to ensure their voices are fully reflected without adult marginalization, leading to a deeper understanding of their daily experiences and perspectives (Eder & Fingerson, 2002) since research in language and culture often deals with younger generations.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviewing is an intimate interpersonal interaction between the researcher and the participant, as it involves a profound process of mutual understanding and reciprocity. Osborne and Grant-Smith (2021) highlight that the primary purpose of in-depth interviewing is to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences and lives, rather than simply seeking answers or testing hypotheses. Similarly, J. M. Johnson and Rowlands (2012) assert that in-depth interviewing is often an ideal method for qualitative research, particularly in life story research, collecting personal narratives and oral histories, and applying grounded theory to analyze individual experiences within a social context.

Concerning the process of conducting in-depth interviews, Osborne and Grant-Smith (2021) emphasize the importance of follow-up interviews with the same participants in many qualitative studies. These subsequent interviews allow researchers to explore key topics that emerge from earlier conversations in greater depth (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). They recommend that in-depth interviews focus on sensitive probing using follow-up questions to explore responses deeply and elicit richer insights. Preparing probing questions in advance and anticipating areas for further exploration can significantly enhance the interview process, particularly in early encounters (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021).

In-depth interviewing, however, is rarely used as a standalone method for data collection. It is commonly combined with other qualitative research methods, such as participant observation and additional forms of qualitative interviewing, to verify and clarify findings obtained through other approaches. The discussion below explores how combining different methods can enhance the validity and reliability of data through additive and integrative methodological triangulation.

In-depth interviews are valued for their adaptability and capacity to delve deeply into subjects (Lim 2024). They excel at revealing the intricacies and unique aspects of human cognition and experiences. This approach is particularly effective when examining sensitive issues that require comprehensive understanding and contextual insights into personal accounts. The one-on-one nature of in-depth interviews enables a thorough exploration of individual narratives, allowing researchers to uncover not only participants' thoughts but also their underlying reasoning. Consequently, this method can be particularly beneficial for studying how linguistic and ethnic minority groups maintain their language and culture within ethnic communities in host societies, as it provides a platform for their often-marginalized personal stories to be heard and understood.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a qualitative research method that gathers participants' experiences and perspectives through guided discussions in small groups, typically consisting of 5 to 10 people. This approach is particularly effective for exploring attitudes, ideas, and reactions in a social context, as the interactive nature of group discussions allows participants to build on one another's perspectives and articulate thoughts that might not emerge in isolation (Lim, 2024).

Focus groups excel at uncovering how social interactions influence people's views and actions, providing valuable insights into cultural patterns, collective experiences, and how groups make decisions together. However, challenges such as groupthink, dominant participants overshadowing others, and the potential influence of the moderator can limit their effectiveness. To address these issues, skilled facilitation is crucial to ensure balanced participation and manage group dynamics. Careful participant selection, structured interview guides, and triangulation with other methods can also enhance the reliability and depth of insights gained from focus groups (Lim, 2024). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that group discussions, defined as purposeful group conversations, can complement focus groups. These discussions allow participants to refine their ideas through collaborative exchange in an informal setting.

Lim (2024) claims that qualitative research adopts an open and flexible approach, using methods like open-ended questions, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation to thoroughly explore the subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings individuals assign to their social world.

Thus, focus groups and group discussions can be valuable for examining language and culture preservation within ethnic communities by analyzing participants' interactions, participant-moderator dynamics, and their language use and behavior. In addition, participants can have the opportunity to refine and develop their ideas more clearly by sharing and building on each other's thoughts during these discussions.

Document Analysis

Personal documents (e.g., journals, diaries, letters, autobiographies, & email exchanges) serve as valuable data sources in qualitative research. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) emphasize their importance in understanding participants' experiences across psychology, education, and social science fields, while Creswell and Creswell (2017) note how these documents provide access to participants' authentic language and perspectives. Public documents like newspapers, reports, and policy manuals can also be valuable research sources. Document analysis offers practical advantages, such as eliminating transcription needs and enabling research that might otherwise be impractical due to resource constraints.

Morgan (2022) outlines several key advantages of document analysis, including fewer ethical concerns, cost-effectiveness, and expanded research opportunities. However, the method also has limitations, such as potentially incomplete information, difficulty in verifying bias, and possibly insufficient data for comprehensive research. Despite these limitations, document analysis remains a valuable tool, particularly when combined with other qualitative methods in research within ethnic communities.

Overall, the study highlights that qualitative research is essential for understanding how ethnic communities maintain their language and culture in host societies. Through in-depth analyses of sociocultural dynamics and community experiences, this approach helps researchers examine how language intertwines with cultural identity among linguistic minorities.

Combining Qualitative Research Methods in Ethnic Community-Based Research

While researchers commonly use interviews, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and surveys, they could benefit from exploring and incorporating a broader range of qualitative methods, either alone or in combination with these traditional approaches (Denzin et al., 2023). Since human experiences are complex, researchers often pair qualitative interviews with other methods, particularly observation, to capture nonverbal cues and meanings that interviews alone might miss (Ayton, 2023b; Eder & Fingerson, 2003)

Qualitative interviews are traditionally paired with ethnographic observation in research (Seeberg & Goździak, 2016; Warren, 2002). While interviews capture verbal responses, observation focuses on lived experiences. Though historically, some researchers favored observation as more complete (e.g., Becker & Geer, 1970), current trends emphasize integrating both methods equally (e.g., Atkinson & Coffey, 2002; Seeberg & Goździak, 2016). This complementary approach enables researchers to understand participants' experiences from multiple angles, enhancing research credibility through methodological triangulation.

The combined use of participant observation and qualitative interviewing in a single study can help researchers understand participants' diverse lived experiences, deep insights, different perspectives, and actual behaviors. This approach employs supplementary and complementary methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of research results.

Furthermore, research on linguistic minority children's maintenance of language, culture, and identity within their ethnic communities in host societies benefits significantly from combining various qualitative methods, particularly given the varying durations of researcher-participant interactions. As Seeberg and Goździak note in their 2016 book, researchers' opportunities for engagement with young participants can range from multiple interviews over extended periods to single, limited interactions. In this research context, participant observation becomes especially valuable. The anthropological concept of immersive informal participation in cultural and social experiences, termed "deep hanging out" (Geertz, 1998, p. 69), often provides the most meaningful research insights. This approach differs from traditional short-form interviews or behavioral observations by emphasizing extended presence and participation in community life, whether physical or virtual. The value of this comprehensive qualitative approach is particularly evident in community-based research involving young ethnic community members, where multiple methodological approaches can provide a richer, more nuanced understanding. The study also demonstrates that the use of qualitative methods and the combination of qualitative methods enable researchers to explore complex sociocultural environments and community attitudes toward cultural preservation (Nina & Trofimovich, 2023).

Overall, methodological approaches are not mutually exclusive, and intentionally combining different methods is not only permissible but often beneficial (Marques & Mateiro, 2024). Thus, researchers should carefully select methods that complement one another based on the specific needs of their research. However, it is crucial for researchers to fully understand the principles, assumptions, and potential impacts of each method before integrating them. This ensures the research design remains cohesive and rigorous, avoiding confusion or inconsistency.

Navigating Insider-Outsider Dynamics in Ethnic Community-Based Research

Qualitative research is inherently interpretive, meaning that researchers' personal beliefs and values can shape their understanding of human behavior (Lim, 2024). This interpretive nature becomes particularly significant when researchers study their own ethnic communities, creating a complex insider-outsider dynamic that influences the research process. The complexity of this positionality varies depending on the research context (Lim,

2024) and requires careful navigation to balance the benefits of cultural intimacy with the need for analytical distance.

The Outsider Perspective: Etic Approach

The outsider perspective emphasizes objectivity, focusing on neutral observation and structured data interpretation (R. B. Johnson & Christensen, 2024). Traditional perspectives suggest that outsider researchers can effectively analyze social phenomena by maintaining distance, which helps them notice details that insiders may overlook due to familiarity (Denzin et al., 2023). However, this detachment can also lead to an incomplete understanding or misinterpretation of cultural nuances.

The Insider Perspective: Emic Approach

In contrast, the insider perspective offers researchers a deeper connection with participants due to shared cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Chavez (2008) argues that insider researchers can better grasp participants' cognitive, emotional, and psychological viewpoints, as well as contextual knowledge of the community. This positionality facilitates trust-building, fosters equitable researcher-participant relationships, and allows for more nuanced observation of behaviors and perceptions. Insiders are also more adept at identifying discrepancies between participants' authentic and performed selves and understanding the linguistic, cognitive, and emotional factors influencing their responses.

Integration of Perspectives

R. B. Johnson and Christensen (2024) advocate for integrating both insider and outsider perspectives to achieve a balance between objectivity and in-depth cultural insight. This integrated approach acknowledges that both perspectives offer valuable contributions to understanding social phenomena within ethnic communities.

Challenges and Potential Biases in Insider Research

Despite its advantages, insider research poses several methodological and ethical challenges (Chavez, 2008; Collet, 2008; Greene, 2014; Naaeke et al., 2011). A major concern is finding the right balance in research since becoming too close to the community might cause researchers to unconsciously see their own experiences in participants or miss important patterns because things seem too familiar. This familiarity can create blind spots in the research process, where important phenomena go unnoticed simply because they seem ordinary to the insider researcher. Selection bias and assumed knowledge also constitute another challenge. Insider researchers might focus too much on specific groups within the community, or they might assume that everyone shares the same knowledge. This can cause them to overlook key details in their study. In addition, assuming researchers and participants share the same understanding can lead to not enough questioning and incomplete data, as researchers may skip over familiar topics. Boundary issues and role confusion are also challenges in insider research. When the researcher is also a community member, it can be hard to maintain professional distance as a researcher, leading to ethical problems. Participants might have expectations based on the researcher's established role within the ethnic community, which can interfere with maintaining consistency in the research process.

Therefore, Greene (2014) stresses the need for insider researchers to remain cautious against these biases and actively work to maintain analytical distance, while Kerstetter (2012)

recommends ongoing reflection on how researchers' identities influence different stages of the research process. By being aware of these challenges, insider researchers can avoid bias and use their valuable insider knowledge.

Strategies for Reducing Bias and Enhancing Trustworthiness of the Research

To address these challenges while maximizing the benefits of insider research, several methodological strategies have been proposed (J. Fleming, 2018; Greene, 2014; Unluer, 2012). First of all, continuous self-examination of assumptions, experiences, and values helps researchers acknowledge how their positionality shapes their interpretations. This self-awareness fosters a more objective approach by enabling researchers to critically assess their own biases. Next, using multiple data sources and methods to cross-check information develops a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. This triangulation process ensures that findings are well-supported and not solely influenced by the researcher's perspective. Involving participants in reviewing and verifying interpretations through member checking also confirms that findings accurately represent participants' perspectives and lived experiences. Lastly, employing in-depth interviews with open-ended questions encourages participants to elaborate on topics that might otherwise be assumed to be mutually understood, reducing the risk of overlooking critical insights.

By applying these methodological strategies, insider researchers can control their unique position while minimizing bias and ethical concerns. Unluer (2012) emphasizes the need for researchers to adopt a fresh perspective on familiar contexts, urging them to critically reassess their assumptions and consider alternative interpretations.

The Dynamic and Fluid Nature of Insider-Outsider Positionality

The insider-outsider distinction is not static. Researchers navigate multiple identities throughout the research process (Yvonne & Collins, 2024). Kerstetter (2012) points out that researchers' identities change throughout the research process, and this affects their work. For instance, having a shared ethnicity helps build trust and gain access to the community in the early stages. Later on, research skills become more important for analyzing and interpreting the data objectively. Being aware of these shifts helps researchers improve their methods and stay consistent. This requires ongoing self-reflection to effectively use their positionality at each stage.

Furthermore, researchers working within their own ethnic communities in host societies face the added complexity of navigating interactions with both the majority culture and the ethnic community under study. Enos (2001) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging these intersecting identities to avoid bias. Researchers must remain conscious of their roles as insiders, outsiders, or mediators, engaging in continuous self-reflection to critically assess their perspectives and assumptions.

Overall, conducting qualitative research within one's own ethnic community places researchers in a complex insider-outsider position that presents both advantages and challenges. While insider research offers valuable advantages, it is not always the best approach and can demand significant emotional effort and awareness from the researcher (Yvonne & Collins, 2024). Ademolu (2024) also claims that simply sharing an ethnicity with research participants does not guarantee better research outcomes. While critical self-reflection helps researchers address methodological and ethical challenges, ethnic similarity alone is not always beneficial and may not lead to ideal research results. Therefore, when researchers actively and critically reflect on their role and use bias-reduction strategies, they can conduct meaningful and ethical research that uses their unique perspective. It is important to balance a deep understanding of the culture with an objective, analytical approach to get

trustworthy results. In this regard, when conducting research within one's own ethnic group, the quality of the qualitative study depends on how well researchers understand their own position and biases, combined with their adherence to ethical guidelines and proper research methods. Researchers need to stay aware of their personal perspectives while maintaining strong research standards to ensure their findings are trustworthy.

Employing Online Qualitative Surveys in Ethnic Community-Based Research

Nowadays, the potential value of online qualitative surveys is increasingly recognized as an alternative or complementary tool to qualitative interviews. The demand for online qualitative surveys has also grown due to advancements in online technology (Braun et al., 2021).

In general, surveys are among the most popular research methods because they are easy to use and provide wider access to large groups of participants. Qualitative surveys are defined as research tools that utilize a series of open-ended questions on a specific topic, allowing participants to respond in their own words as comprehensively as possible. As such, surveys are often compared with interviews, as both are common data collection methods in research (Jain, 2021). Interviews, as noted above, are particularly effective for gaining deeper and more comprehensive insights into research contexts, participants, and research questions. This is especially true in qualitative studies, where researchers aim to understand why and how certain events occur and explore the interests, feelings, and opinions of participants within the research context.

However, due to the unquestioned dominance of interviews over surveys in qualitative research, qualitative surveys are treated as secondary or innovative rather than being fully integrated into research practices, and there has been very limited literature on the use of surveys in qualitative studies (Braun et al., 2021). A major drawback of surveys, online qualitative surveys in particular, as noted by many in the field of qualitative researchers, is their inability to capture the same level of nuanced data as interviews (Braun et al., 2021). In a similar vein, there have been two common misconceptions about online qualitative surveys, according to Thomas et al. (2024). First, these surveys have been viewed as capable of gathering only superficial text-based data, lacking the flexibility for researchers to probe deeper through follow-up questions or collaborate with participants to generate comprehensive insights. Second, researchers have traditionally expected that the large sample sizes in online qualitative surveys should allow for numerical analysis despite the growing recognition that quantifying qualitative data is generally counterproductive and unsuitable. Overall, Bielska et al. (2024) outline several key drawbacks of online qualitative surveys. Unlike interviews, these surveys do not allow researchers to seek clarification or probe deeper through additional questions, which limits meaningful engagement. They also highlight potential sampling issues, as people without reliable internet access, often from disadvantaged populations, may be excluded from participation. The researchers note that when surveys are too lengthy, respondents may become tired and either leave questions unanswered or abandon the survey entirely. They also point out that when participants are asked to remember past events, their recollections may be inaccurate. Finally, the researchers warn that participants might provide shallow or cursory answers, potentially diminishing the overall quality of the data. Online qualitative surveys face several practical constraints as well. Participants must possess not only basic reading and writing abilities but also digital competency to effectively navigate the survey technology. Moreover, since these surveys are completed independently by participants without direct researcher supervision or assistance, they are inherently self-directed and rely heavily on the participant's own initiative and understanding.

While acknowledging these limitations, the researchers emphasize that online qualitative surveys can be highly effective when properly designed and used in conjunction with other research methods to overcome their inherent constraints (e.g., Bielska et al., 2024; Braun et al., 2021; Dunn, 2002; Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021; Terry & Braun, 2017). The researchers point out that online qualitative surveys strike an effective balance between structured questioning that enables easy comparison and open-ended responses that yield detailed information (Bielska et al., 2024). With regard to the strengths of online qualitative surveys, Braun et al. (2021) demonstrate that qualitative surveys can yield rich, reflective, and deep data. The advancement of technology has made online surveys increasingly common in qualitative research, with researchers recognizing their advantages over traditional interviews (Braun et al., 2021; Dunn, 2002; Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Without time and space constraints, participants can take more time considering and providing thoughtful responses compared to face-to-face interviews (Braun et al., 2021). These surveys put participants' needs first by letting participants respond when they choose and elaborate as much as they wish.

In terms of the use of online surveys in qualitative research, Braun et al. (2021) provide the following advantages. First, qualitative surveys can offer a broad perspective or provide a "wide-angle lens" (p. 3) on the research topic, especially when the research deals with a large, diverse, or unknown population of interest. Next, online qualitative surveys reduce the pressure on individual participants from minority groups to act as representatives for their entire community. These surveys can also encourage disclosure and active participation when dealing with sensitive topics, as they offer flexibility in addressing a wide range of research questions focused on people's experiences, views, opinions, motivations, feelings, and meaning-making practices (Braun et al., 2021). In addition, the anonymous nature of online surveys makes participants from minority groups or those uncomfortable with face-to-face interviews more likely to participate and share openly. The anonymous nature of online platforms makes participants more likely to share sensitive information (Bielska et al., 2024). Online qualitative surveys offer practical benefits for both participants and researchers. They eliminate travel costs and remove constraints on time, place, duration, and completion methods (Terry & Braun, 2017). This flexibility aligns with the participant-centered nature of online qualitative research. The method is both cost-efficient and time-saving while reaching participants across different geographical locations, including those who might be difficult to access otherwise, such as certain minority groups. Participants can also take time to consider their answers, they often provide more considered and insightful responses that prove valuable for subsequent research phases (Bielska et al., 2024). Furthermore, online qualitative surveys eliminate the need for transcription, saving time and reducing potential transcription errors. Therefore, the design of surveys is crucial for the success of qualitative online research, including careful selection of clear and appropriate questions, consideration of online environments, assessment of participants' literacy and digital literacy skills, and selection of topics of interest.

Although qualitative surveys are recognized as useful tools, they remain an underutilized and relatively new method in qualitative research methodology. However, this research shows that online qualitative surveys have proven particularly valuable, offering flexibility for both researchers and participants in social research. Online qualitative surveys can provide various benefits to both participants and researchers due to their flexibility and capacity to address diverse research questions in social research. As Karmova et al. (2023) note, in particular, the influence of technology extends beyond mere devices, shaping human interactions and cultural norms through the exchange of information. Therefore, this research suggests that future research should examine how digital platforms and social media can promote ethnic language preservation and culture maintenance in host societies while also

evaluating the effectiveness of online surveys as complementary tools to qualitative interviews in social research.

Conclusion and Implications

In this study, the first significant finding emphasizes the fundamental importance of establishing precise definitions of ethnic communities within multi-ethnic host societies. This definitional clarity is crucial when conducting research within ethnic communities that examines the role of language and culture in ethnic community formation. Language serves as more than just a communication tool. It acts as a bridge for human relationships and facilitates various social activities within these communities. A clear conceptual framework of what constitutes an ethnic community enables researchers to better understand the complicated relationships between language preservation and culture maintenance.

The second finding underscores the irreplaceable value of qualitative methodology in research in ethnic communities. This approach acknowledges that reality cannot be fully captured but can be approximated through careful study and observation. Qualitative research's strength lies in its ability to prioritize participants' perspectives and their daily lived experiences. By employing qualitative methods, researchers can gather detailed accounts of social events and community dynamics. The methodology's emphasis on rich descriptions of local contexts in natural settings provides deep insights that might be missed through other research approaches. The strategic combination of various qualitative methods proves particularly valuable in studying how language and cultural practices are preserved within ethnic communities in host societies.

The third finding addresses the unique challenges faced by researchers working within their own ethnic communities in host societies. These researchers must navigate complex multiple identities, as highlighted by Enos (2001). This finding emphasizes the critical importance of continuous self-reflection regarding their positions as insiders, outsiders, or those occupying the space in between. Researchers must maintain ongoing awareness of how their perceptions are shaped through interactions with the host society, majority culture, and research participants within their ethnic community. This self-awareness and critical examination help minimize bias and enhance the quality of research outcomes.

The fourth finding highlights the emerging significance of online qualitative surveys as a valuable research tool. These surveys are increasingly recognized as either an alternative or complementary approach to traditional qualitative interviews. Their value lies in their flexibility and capacity to address diverse research questions in research within ethnic communities. Online surveys offer numerous advantages to both participants and researchers, including increased accessibility, reduced geographical constraints, and the ability to reach broader segments of the community. This digital approach provides new opportunities for data collection while maintaining the depth and richness characteristic of qualitative research methods.

Based on these findings, the study makes significant contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical methodological approaches in studying linguistic and cultural minorities within ethnic communities in host societies. The research particularly illuminates the complex interplay between qualitative methodological choices and the nuanced realities of research in ethnic communities. Through examining researcher positionality, methodological flexibility, and the importance of definitional clarity, this study offers a comprehensive framework for future researchers exploring language maintenance and cultural preservation within minority ethnic communities in host societies. Furthermore, by highlighting the emerging role of digital research tools alongside traditional qualitative methods, this research paves the way for more inclusive and adaptable approaches to studying ethnic communities in

increasingly diverse host societies. These insights not only advance our theoretical understanding but also provide practical guidance for researchers navigating the complexities of research within ethnic communities in contemporary multicultural contexts.

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