

Interperative Phenomenological Methodology for Traditional Knowledge Practices and Systems in Assuring Environmental Sustainability

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ABSTRACT: Phenomenology studies concentrates on the consciousness and lived experiences of an object but these studies have widely been criticized in academic studies of traditional systems learning in Sub Saharan continents due to its inbuilt limitations (Mutema, G. 2009). Edmund Husserl established phenomenology (Edmund Husserl 1910), as a scientific method of qualitative research through which we can learn from others lived experiences (Brian E. Neubauer, 2019). The main aim of phenomenology is to understand what experienced and how experienced (Teherani A 2015). Traditional knowledge systems are still used by African indigenous communities for experimenting, experiencing, and adapting to environmental changes for survivability and sustainability due to lack of natural resources. Ethiopian knowledge systems are used for indigenous farming systems and its promotion and protection like domestication of crops Teff and coffee. (T, Fenta 2000). Traditional knowledge encompasses “the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and worldviews of local people, including specific beliefs, rules and taboos that are part of the customary law of a specific group (Magni, 2016). The lived experiences of the participants and demonstrating the essence of the respondents’ perspective improves accuracy in representing an insight into the way how the local community perceive and understand the concept of environment and environmental sustainability and to what extent traditional knowledge accelerate the achievement of environmental sustainability throughout the emergent process. Deliberating and deciding on diverse methodologies useful for an ethno-ecology of environmental sustainability will most probably broaden the perspectives of this still emerging and increasingly important field of enquiry (Onrubia, 2015).

KEYWORDS: Phenomenology, Traditional knowledge systems, indigenous communities

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Many issues have been raised regarding the use of phenomenological research methods and data collection in research methodology but studies have been carried out to evaluate the scientific perspective for number of participants and data collection procedures. (Englander, M. 2012). In this regard as Manen, (1984) states that phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it. Phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences.

Phenomenology is generally based on phenomenological tradition from Edmund Husserl purpose to better understand human basics like time, intent, color, and number (Mohajan, 2018; Padilla-Díaz, 2015; Creswell, 2014; and Groenewald, 2004). As philosophical stances provide the assumptions in research methods, different philosophical stances produce different methods. Traditional knowledge systems are facing grave threat because, in most cases, the disseminated information is not properly appraised or documented; leading to a potential loss of knowledge (Mafongoya and Ajayi, 2017). This knowledge has been recently recognized worldwide in climate change and various adaptation strategies. Perceptions and opinions of human beings can be understood at a deeper level and broadens thinking approach by learning the lived experiences of the people. (Qutoshi, 2018). Ethiopian community in African continent is considered ethnic and indigenous community, as indicated by (Nakashima, et al., 2012) traditional knowledge is an institutionalized knowledge that has been built up on and passed on from one generation to another and develops within a certain culture or ethnic group and strives to meet subsistence goals in a particular ecological setting. For this specific proposed study, the best way to define and measure sustainability in the environmental viewpoint is to focus on natural resource depletion and whether the current rates of resource use could be sustained into the distant future (Collins, Jurgen & Michael, 2008). Environmental sustainability refers to the long-term maintenance of valued environmental resources in an evolving human context (Gagan, 2018). Among the activities recognized by traditional peoples as viable and sustainable economic practices there are rotational farming, shifting cultivation (sometimes called

also swidden agriculture), pastoralism, fishing, agroforestry, hunting and gathering. Additionally, traditional populations rely on multiple resources and on a high diversity of crops to carry out more sustainable and resilient ways of living. Through the centuries, in fact, indigenous populations have developed specific techniques and technologies to carry out their activities in environmentally friendly and cost-effective ways that ensure food security while conserving the diversity of wild and domestic plant (Dutse, Abdullah, Bolong, and Asnarulkhadi, 2015). In the case of Africa, while the local communities possess their own education systems grounded in particular cultural contexts which have enabled them to survive for millenniums, they have also advocated for greater recognition and inclusion of those systems which incorporate their perspectives, cultures, beliefs, values and languages. For the local community, their right to education is a holistic concept that encompasses the mental, physical, spiritual, cultural and environmental dimensions (Chanza, 2014; Painemilla, Rylands, Woofter, and Hughes, 2010; and Stevenson, 1996).

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

SPECIFIC RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design focuses on the outcome and all the steps in the process to achieve that outcome. In this sense, it is viewed as the functional plan in which the study links together to acquire a reliable and valid body of data for empirically grounded analyses, conclusions and recommendation formulation (Khan, 2014).

For this study, the research design is phenomenological qualitative research design because this phenomenological research design helps to understand any phenomenon in its complexity, or one that has been dismissed by other research methods because of the difficulties to study it, or that has been discarded as irrelevant, or that has been studied as if only one point of view about it was real (Ospina, 2004). In addition to this solving environmental problem requires integration of expertise in some academic disciplines. This challenge stems from the essence of environmental sciences because these fields have an interdisciplinary nature (Roudgarmi, 2011) and this needs a study to see things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qutoshi, (2018) mentioned phenomenology as the term very difficult to stand along with one fixed, final and acceptable for all definition. However, the term "phenomenology" is used in various ways without the definition being given, such as phenomenological approach, phenomenological method, phenomenological research, etc. The term "phenomenology" is sometimes uses as a paradigm and it is sometimes even viewed as synonymous with qualitative methods. As a result, the term "phenomenology" leads to conceptual confusions in qualitative research methods. But as described by Groenewald, (2004); the aim of phenomenology is the return to the concrete and Bliss, (2016) in his article gave phenomenological inquiries as typically undertaken to clarify the nuanced essence of people's lived experiences of the phenomenon. This clarification is based on studying, describing, and interpreting people's perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and memories about their experiences.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Given the extent and purpose of this research, standardized open-ended interviews, non-participant observation and document review (content analysis) will be used to collect the data from the selected participants and area of the study.

Interviews (open-ended surveys)

The interview is a social relationship designed to exchange information between the participant and the researcher. The goal of any qualitative research interview is therefore to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewees, and to understand why they have a particular perspective (Englander, 2012). This is why this tool is selected for this study. In addition to this, the general characteristics of a qualitative research interview are the reason for its selection that are a low degree of structure imposed by the interviewer; a preponderance of open questions; a focus on specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewee as opposed to mere abstractions and general opinions (Creswell, 2014). It widely disseminates the meaning of environmental sustainability to the participants, record their individual perspectives of historical accounts for the development of traditional knowledge systems. In addition to that how sustainable environment can be ensured through the practice of traditional knowledge systems.

Non-participant observation

This data collection method is selected for the general assessment of the socio-economic situation (status) of the community; physical location (settings) and surroundings; the environmental condition of the area; and the on-ground situation of the area. The purpose of the observation is to provide a brief account of the context of the source of the data; in order to facilitate an understanding of the setting and condition in which the respondents live; and to provide information about the life style of the locals and environment in which the interview took place (Creswell, 2013).

Document review (content analysis)

The content analysis is used for the systematic analysis of the content of a text (e.g., who says what, to whom, why, and to what extent and with what effect) in qualitative manner. Content analysis typically conducted to analyze texts (e.g., different reports, study results and books) (Walliman, 2011).

III. PROCEDURE

The strategies of inquiry for this study is a qualitative phenomenology understanding a unique aspect of human phenomena (experience) in regarding to traditional knowledge in assuring environmental sustainability. The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. In the human sphere this normally translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews and non-participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s) (Papis, 2015 and Groenewald, 2004). Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasis the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such they are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the confusion of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom (Creswell, 2014).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study provides details into patterns traditional knowledge and its application for the achievement of sustainable environment. The core questions of this study is to assess and understand the synergy and conceptual understanding of the local community towards environmental sustainability, to identify threats for environmental sustainability, to identify and assess the knowledge, experiences, skills and practices of the locals, and to assess how traditional knowledge influences/guides the community's effort to assure environmental sustainability. The phenomenological finding needs to be done transparently if it is to have validity to arrive at final interpretations (Qutoshi, 2018)

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