DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH METHODS

Week 1, Lesson 2: Types, Forms and Processes of Development Studies Research

Development Research Methods
Prof. Rajshree Bedamatta
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
IIT Guwahati

Rajshree Bedamatta, PhD
Department of Humanities &
Social Sciences
IIT Guwahati
rajshree@iitg.ac.in

What we will cover in today's lecture

I. What are the different types, its characteristics and forms of Development Studies?

II. What are the purpose, goals and focus of research in Development Studies?

III. What are the Research Methods and Possible Combinations in Development Studies?

IV. Research Process and Research Plan.

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Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
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I. Types and Forms of Development Studies

Development Studies, in the current context, deal with international development cooperation from a social science perspective, and involve collection of primary data and field studies in different cultural settings.

- Practitioners from many disciplines-geographers, economists, sociologists, etc. are involved in development studies.

- Influence of ethnography is evident.

- A set of concerns which prompt the need for development studies and research:

1. The nature and causes of global and local inequity, and conditions and contexts which influence mitigation development interventions (external factors)
2. Pre-conditions pertaining to development cooperation and interventions (internal factors).
3. The consequences, effects and impact of development cooperation.

- Development work is concerned with applied research, i.e., studies aimed at producing knowledge on which decisions can be made.

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Types of Development Studies

1. **Descriptive Studies**: Characterised simply as the attempt to determine, describe or identify *what is*. Example: government sponsored research including the population census, the collection of a wide range of social indicators and economic information.

2. **Explanatory Studies**: focuses on *why* questions. Answering the 'why' questions involve developing causal explanations.

3. **Interpretative Studies**: Interpretative researchers believe that the reality consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world. Interpretivism focuses on exploring the complexity of social phenomena with a view to gaining understanding.

4. **Action-oriented Studies**: Action Research is the super ordinate term for a set of approaches which, at the same time, systematically investigate a given social situation and promote democratic change and collaborative participation. *Participatory Action Research, Critical Action Research, action learning, participant inquiry and cooperative inquiry* are the terms broadly underpinned by the assumptions and approaches embodies in AR.

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Typical questions for different study types could be:

Descriptive studies:

1. How does malnutrition vary with age and sex?
2. How are gender relations reflected in reproductive health and rights and in specific practices in urban and rural areas in country X?

Explanatory studies:

1. Which dietary practices, diseases and other possible factors cause malnutrition in different age groups?
2. Can reproductive health practices explain the different maternal health rates in urban and rural areas in country X?

Interpretative studies:

1. How do different groups – by age and sex – characterize malnutrition, and what are people's perceptions of causes and remedies?
2. What characterizes the maternal health situation in urban and rural areas in country X according to the perceptions of local people, and how do different groups perceive the causes of maternal death rates?

Action-oriented studies:

1. Can maternal health be improved by involving local women and men in raising awareness about the HIV/AIDS pandemic and reproductive health practices? Who will be involved? What shall the messages be? And which methods of communication will be effective?

TABULATED CHARACTERIZATION

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- It is important for the development researcher and practitioner to be conscious of and critical about which types of studies they engage in.

- Paradigm: 'the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways'.

- Behind any study and process of inquiry are meta-science questions:

✓ **The ontological question**: What exists? What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?

✓ **The epistemological question**: What is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge about what exists - 'what can be known'?

✓ **The methodological question**: How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

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Forms of Studies and Typical Research Questions

Forms of studies are:

- Short-or long term
- Longitudinal, inter-generational studies
- Hypothetical deductive studies
- Analytical inductive studies
- Comparative studies
- Forward-oriented, projective studies
- Baseline and impact studies
- Backward-oriented tracer studies
- Experiments
- Case studies
- Life histories
- Pilot studies

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continued

In terms of methods, the applied development studies encompass a multitude of approaches:

- Documentary studies
- Qualitative studies, participant observation and participatory studies, semi-structured interviews.
- Quantitative studies, sample surveys, empirical, statistical studies
- The comparative method-moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies?
- Culturally-adapted development market research.

Project related studies make use of qualitative, and often participatory methods while policy related studies tend to make use of quantitative research methods, expert interviews and statistical methods.

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Studies applied in different project cycle stage

Studies applied in the different project cycle stages took prominence with the streamlining and phasing of development aid projects from the 1980s. Studies relating to sector programmes follow a cycle:

- Identification studies
- Design and pre-appraisal studies
- Feasibility studies
- Appraisal studies
- Review studies
- Monitoring studies
- Evaluation and impact studies
- Baseline studies
- Participatory development studies
- Advocacy studies

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II. Research Purpose, Goals and Focus

- Objective of academic research is to try to find answers to theoretical questions within their respective fields. In contrast, the objective of applied social research is to use data so that decisions can be made.
- A large share of development studies and much development research belong in the category ‘applied research’.
- Action research is applied research that treats knowledge as a form of power and abolishes the line between research and social action.

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A Typology of Research Types, Purposes, Focus and Desired Results

Types of Research	Purpose	Focus of Research	Desired Results
1. Basic Research	Knowledge as an end in itself; discover truth	Questions deemed important by one's discipline or personal intellectual interest	Contribution to the theory
2. Applied Research	Understand the nature and sources of human and social problems	Questions deemed important by society	Contributions to theories that can be used to formulate problem solving programmes and interventions
3. Summative evaluation	Determine effectiveness of human interventions and actions (programmes and policies)	Goals of the intervention	Judgements and generalizations about effective types of interventions, and the conditions under which those efforts are effective
4. Formative evaluation	Improving an intervention; a programme, policy, organization, or product	Strengths and weaknesses of the specific programme, policy, product.	Recommendations for improvements
5. Action research	Solve problems in a programme, organization, or community	Organization and community problems	Immediate action; solving problems as quickly as possible

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- Basic research is necessary to develop and question concepts and theories and to bring new perspectives into the development discourse.
- Applied and strategic development research aims to provide knowledge on which the best decisions can be made.
- Summative evaluation research is retrospective, summing up the experience of certain interventions.
- Formative evaluation research is formative in suggesting how to improve interventions.
- Action research is applied research that treats knowledge as a form of power and abolishes the line between research and social action.

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Purpose and Types of Research Questions illustrated with an example

Basic Research	What are the variations in types of community groups and what functions do the variations serve?
Applied Research	What is the participation rate among different kinds of community groups in non-agricultural income generating activities? What explains the different rates of participation among the different groups?
Summative Research (Effectiveness)	What is the effectiveness of a national-or donor-aided training programme on small enterprise management for different community groups?
Formative Research (Performance)	How can the training programme on small enterprise management be improved and adjusted to the benefit of different community groups?
Action Research	To determine how community groups can start and organize themselves around small enterprise activities, a process involving the start-up of concrete activities would be studied.

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Research Goals and Focus

- The most common academic ‘position’ in the social sciences- referred to as ‘meta-science positions’ are- positivism, interpretivism and critical realism.
- Positivism- Is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond.
- Interpretivism- Is an epistemological position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.
- Critical realism- Is a realist epistemology which asserts that the study of the social world should be concerned with the identification of the structures that generate that world.

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III. Research Methods and Possible Combinations

Q. How does one determine the appropriate research strategy to focus a particular study?

- In development studies the ‘choice’ is often between establishing trends or averages from which generalizations can be drawn.
- Besides the methodological considerations, a research strategy combines different methods.
- A distinction can be made between research methods, techniques and tools.

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Quantitative Qualitative Style Research

- The complexity and the purpose of specific development studies generally warrant tailor made research designs.
- Qualitative methods are identified with interpretative and critical research and quantitative methods with positivism.
- Moving beyond the quantitative and qualitative strategies is the focus of the comparative methods.
- It has been argued that qualitative research has expanded greatly and is rapidly displacing quantitative style research.
- Qualitative style research dominates in development studies. The best development research often combines features of each. For example, understanding and measuring poverty.
- While the 'mix of quantitative and qualitative methods' is becoming the norm rather than the exception in development studies, there are still many challenges relating to constraints to participation at the country level, within agencies and different meta-science points of departure.

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Methodological Pluralism

- Argument for methodological pluralism from the perspective of meta-science and pragmatic considerations.

- Methodological pluralism views the sciences more as a fabric of related enterprises than as a single unitary activity defined by the 'scientific method'.

- A combination of methods normally brings about better results.

- Possible Method Mixes- Ex. A possible choice of methods and techniques in a study on rural employment:

✓ Organize periods of participant observation and interviews with key informants in collecting meaningful data on informal work.

✓ Arrange regular, repeated surveys recording the activities of all workers.

- The research strategy and concrete research plan depends on the purpose of the study and the methods must be chosen according to the information needed.

- A large number of development studies are undertaken as requested studies by a donor or other agent which are bound by time constraints.

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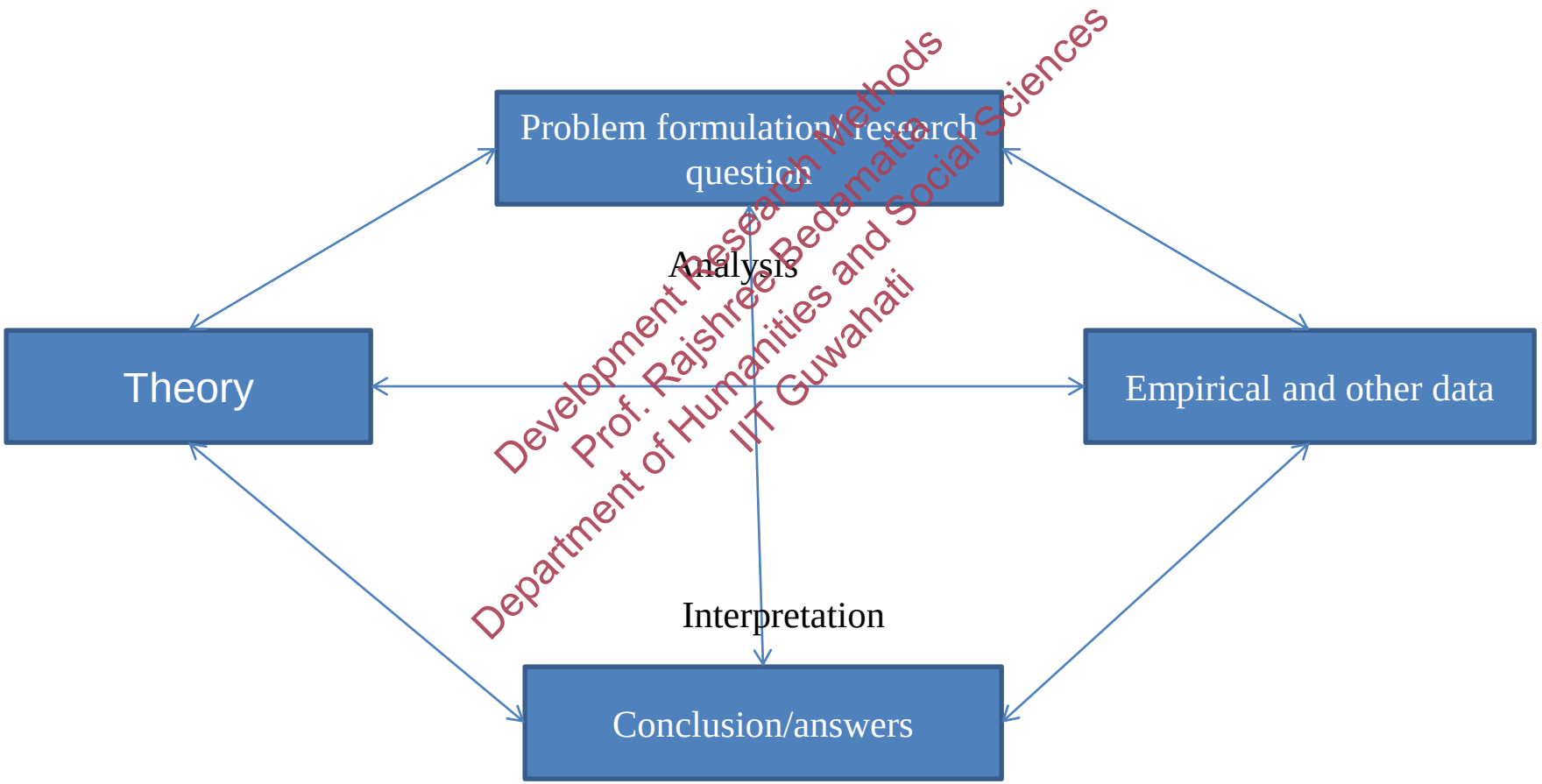
Interdisciplinary Perspectives

- Development concerns have given rise to a variety of demands for interdisciplinary perspectives.
- In the context of development project, team members from different disciplines work with their respective discipline orientation rather than working as an integrated team.
- Distinction between multi-disciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity. The former, which is required in planning and policy making, means working together in parallel. The latter means working through a confrontation between different disciplines leading to new ideas confronting methodological issues, which is necessary for good research.
- The cross-disciplinary perspective and skill in development work needs to come from altered curricula within the disciplines.
- Need for a sensitized approach and perspectives towards other's work and other disciplines.

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IV. Research Process and Research Plan

Main Elements in the Research Process



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- The arrows in the illustrated research process indicate that the links between the elements are various analysis, interpretations and synthesis.

- Research problem formulation: It basically consist of

a. defining a problem
b. statement of the problem
c. operationalisation of variables
d. evaluation of the problem

- Theoretical framework refers to the underlying theoretical approach that you adopt to underpin your study.

- Data collection: what data to collect and how to collect it.

- Conclusions/answers: analyze and evaluate the information.

- Development Studies pose a special challenge as they often include professionals from different disciplines.

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Methodological and Logic Considerations in the Research Process

- Our choices while carrying out a project or study reflect our values and ‘codes of conduct’ not only as professionals but also as persons.
- Research methodologies, designs, research methods cannot be combined in all ways. There should be an internal logic in any study.
- Internal Logic: mix of appropriate research methods, designs and tools to ensure higher quality of research studies, good research practices and also with regard to the relevance and use of the research results.
- Changes in Research Focus and Purpose: Changing micro level conditions for a development project- e.g., intra and inter-household power relations and macro–level conditions of sector policies, decentralisation, etc.
- Important to reflect on and change the research purpose throughout the whole process.

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Designing a Research Plan- Steps

1. Identify and define the research problem.
2. Review theory and undertake initial documentary studies.
3. Clarify goals, objectives and expectations of the study in consultation with others.
4. Choose main topics.
5. Prepare list of sub-topics, indicators, and key questions.
6. Identify sources of information for each sub-topic
7. Select tools to collect and analyze information
8. Design research tools
9. Outline field work tasks
10. Test and adjust research tools
11. Collect field data
12. Start analyzing data in the field
13. Adjust objectives and reschedule data collection if required.
14. Complete data analysis and reporting
15. Disseminate results.

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References used for this lecture

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- Britha Mikkelsen, "Methods For Development Work And Research, A New Guide For Practitioners, 2005, Sage Publications.

- Michael Edwards, "Development Practice and Development Studies: Working Together", *Development in Practice*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1996.

- Vandana Desai and Robert B. Potter, *Doing Development Research*, 2006, Sage Publications.

For a comprehensive literature on the topics covered in this lecture it is also suggested that students go through the reference list of the above cited papers.

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Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
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