

Significance of Field Survey in Geographical Studies

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Abstract

Geographical studies are designed in a way that much of the information about the natural and geographical study area is collection in a way that nothing remains doubtful. For it, field surveys are encouraged and approved. Geographical field survey aims at exploring the realities about the problem to be studied. Field survey has ever since been there in Geography. At all the level of teaching geography, field surveys are considered essential without which the study of Geography remains incomplete.

The major components of a field research include (Lounsbury and Aldrich, 1986):

1. Clearly stating the problem,
2. Defining the study area
3. Formulating hypotheses
4. Identifying the necessary data
5. Establishing the classification and resolution (scale) of the data
6. Acquiring the data
7. Processing and analyzing the data
8. Resolving the problem and rejecting or accepting the hypotheses

Designed on the inductive method and secondary sources of data collection, the study is theoretical and comprehensive in nature. It deals with the various aspects including the significance of field survey in geographical studies. The study has much to reveal about the field survey adopted for the geographical studies at the level of research.

Keywords: Significance, Field, Survey, Studies, Methodology, Observation.

Introduction

In all the social sciences including Geography, survey is a common thing which is carried out by the study maker. The history of field survey in geography is as old as is the study of one or the other aspect of globe or earth. Since times immemorial, field surveys have been in prevalence. Survey has an utmost value for the geographers who, through the conduction of the field surveys, first collect primary data, and then arrive at final findings and conclusion that result into development of concepts and formulation of geographical theories.

Geographical field surveys are conducted undertaking the following steps-

Defining the Problem

First, the geographer defines the problem to be studied precisely in a way that he develops familiarity with it. For the understanding of the problem, this step that paves the path of the study, is very important.

Outlining Objectives

Under this step, specific objectives and purposes associated with the field survey are set, and all the requirements delineated in order to get the objectives fulfilled. In addition, suitable tools of acquisition of data and methods of analysis are chosen.

Considering and Determining the Scope of the field survey

Scope of field survey that the geographer needs to keep in mind include-

1. the study of geographical area
2. time period of enquiry
3. specifying the themes of studies

Tools and Techniques of information collection

The various types of tools that are required to collect information in geographical studies. Include-

Collection of Recorded and Published Data

Recorded and published data that provides base information about the problem is collected from government agencies, non-governmental organizations. For example, information about households, persons is collected from Local Government Office, while physical features like earthquake, flood, landslide, relief, drainage, environment, vegetation, land use, etc. can be traced out from the topographical maps.

Field Observations

For a geographer, field observations are very important. They are very important & necessary inputs which provide much help in finding the characteristics and associations of geographic phenomena. The effective tools that field observations possible are many, but undoubtedly, sketching and photography are very effective and helpful tools for the purpose.

Measurement

Measurement of site is essentially made by the geographers. It will not be wrong to say that most of the geographical field surveys that are conducted for the purpose of geographical studies earnestly demand on site measurement of objects and events. It involves use of appropriate equipment including state-of-art equipment like DGPS.

Interviewing

Interviewing is the next step in the conduction of field surveys. In all field surveys, personal interviews are needed to gather information about social issues, problems, practical difficulties through recording the experiences and knowledge of each individual.

Compilation & Computation

The next step that is observed by the geographers while making field survey is the compilation and computation. Information thus collected is organized systematically so as to make a meaningful interpretation. Then analysis of all the information collected is undertaken to achieve the set objectives. Notes, field sketches, photographs, case studies, etc. are first organized according to theme & subthemes of the study. Similarly, questionnaire and schedule based information are tabulated on the same pattern.

Cartographic Applications

All the geographers are expected to have a good command over cartography and map making because, it is essential for them to reflect the things through maps and diagrams which are used for giving visual Impressions of variations in the phenomena.

Presentations

The field study report is prepared in concise form and it contains all the details of the procedures followed, methods, tools and techniques employed. At the end of the report, the summary of the findings of the investigation is provided.

Review of Literature

Ira M. Sheskin (1985), in Survey Research for Geographers, holds the idea that survey research can be said to be as much an art as it is a science—hence, the debates about how to conduct surveys, but the science aspect is the most important. For the survey questionnaire was carried out on a face-to-

face basis, which is deemed the most sociable way to gather survey data and is the most effective way of enlisting the cooperation of most people. Potential survey respondents were approached and contacted at the park entrances, on main routes of the parks, and in key locations in the parks, for example, at the center of the park, in and around the playgrounds and at popular sitting-out areas.

Ruth Panelli & Richard V. Welch (2005), in Teaching Research Through Field Studies: A Cumulative Opportunity for Teaching Methodology to Human Geography Undergraduates, argue that field studies should follow the teaching of research methodology. They record observations on both the field studies course and the linkages between it and the preceding research methodology training students receive. They show that while the wish for more 'real' or 'hands on' field practice is widely expressed by their students, so is satisfaction with the group learning approach adopted in the 300-level course and with the range of personal skills covered in the research methodology and field studies training received.

David Barker (2006), in his book entitled Field Surveys and Inventories, emphasize the need and significance of field surveys in geographical studies and researches. According to the author, field survey is the core concern of geographical studies, and that without field surveys, the spirit of geography disappears from them. Hence, field surveys form an integral and inseparable part and aspect of all the geographical studies.

Paul J. Lavrakas (2008), in Field Survey, discussing the various aspects of field survey and the advantages and disadvantages of field survey, writes that the term field is used in survey research to refer to the geographical setting where data collection takes place. Typically this refers to in-person interviewing and thus the name, field survey. One of the key decisions when designing a survey is the choice of the mode of data collection. Field interviewing is one of three traditional modes of survey data collection (along with telephone and mail). In field surveys, which are also referred to as face-to-face or personal-visit surveys, an interviewer visits the respondent's home or office (or another location) and conducts the interview.

Yee Sze Onn & Wong Poh Poh (2008), in Fieldwork in Geography —importance, objectives and scope, observes that as a subject concerned with the study of human activities in relation to the physical environment, geography should have a strong appeal to young people. Yet in many instances the subject evokes little interest and has even to justify its place in the curriculum. It is regrettable but true that in many of our schools geography is still largely taught as a compendium of facts about the world. Although more enlightened approaches are available, many teachers still cling to the traditional method for putting the subject across and emphasize learning of facts rather than understanding of principles. How can teachers avoid burdening the minds of children with mere factual information and make Geography more realistic, meaningful and intellectually challenging?

Philip Wheeler (2012), in The value of fieldwork in Life and Environmental Sciences in the context of higher education: a case study in learning about biodiversity, observes that fieldwork is assumed by most practitioners to be an important if not essential component of a degree level education in the environmental sciences. However, there is strong evidence that as a result of a wide range of pressures (academic, financial and societal) fieldwork is in decline in the UK and elsewhere. The study reports that the students love and enjoy fieldwork and value it (in the contexts of their learning at university, life-long learning, and in relation to their career aspirations) and felt that they learn more effectively in the field.

Nicholas J Crane (2014), in Contemporary Research Strategies in Cultural Geography, raises the issue of strategies for cultural geography in relation to relevant scholarly debates, e.g., around positionality in feminist geography, reflexivity in critical human geography, and world-making in cultural geography.

David Simm (2015), in Making sense of place: unravelling the geographical palimpsest of Barcelona, approving the fieldwork, concludes that every place has its own unique characteristics • Our senses mediate our relationship with the environment • So learning about a place involves:- i. Learning to see a place with a critical eye ii. Recognising that a sense of place means different things to different people acknowledging that as a visitor you are an outsider

Objectives of the Study

1. To develop an understanding of the ongoing trends of research in Geography
2. To have an idea about the process of geographical research and the steps that are prescribed for it
3. To concentrate on the data collection in geographical studies
4. To learn and reflect the various sources through which the data for geographical studies are collected
5. To discuss the importance of field survey in geographical studies
6. To develop an understanding of the need and significance of field survey in geographical studies
7. To point out and highlight the various aspects associated with the geographical field survey
8. To discuss the various steps involved in the geographical field survey
9. To interpret the causes of making field survey in geographical studies
10. To explore the effects of geographical field surveys

Hypothesis

1. Geographical studies are different from the other types of studies
2. Geographical research is carried out under a prescribed process that lays down certain steps to be rigidly observed and followed by the geographers
3. The geographer has to incline to all the steps of geographical research in order to keep up the scientific spirit

4. Each of the steps of geographical research is important and significant in itself, and none of can be set aside
5. Field survey is an integral part of geographical studies
6. Field survey enables the geographer to make observation of the geographical sites to be studied, to measure the sites, and to see the geographical occurrences with his own eyes
7. Geographical surveys require certain tools handy on the part of the survey maker
8. Geographical field surveys are conducted under a prescribed process
9. Geographical surveys are helpful in providing real information about things
10. Geographical surveys result into adding knowledge of the geographer

Methodology

The method adopted for the study is inductive which allowed the author to develop and understanding and to present it gradually. Personal experience of the author, her own observations and her reading passion enabled her to shape up this study into a research paper. Though the personal observations, her own experiences of conducting field surveys as part of teaching Geography to the students blessed her with the knowledge, the secondary data that were found in the 8 selected research papers authored by foreign writers and that were published in international journals especially supplied her required contents and information on the theme of field survey. The scientific approach of the author and scientific spirit of the work was maintained by undergoing the prescribed process of theoretical studies that includes the following steps-

1. Selection of the title and defining the problems
2. Study of the related literature through various sources like books, magazines, research papers, theses and dissertations etc.
3. Search of the literature on the internet sites
4. Final selection of the 8 research papers designed on the selected theme
5. Borrowing subject matter from them for the sake of study and research paper writing
6. Analysis of contents
7. Drawing conclusion and findings on the basis of the studied papers

Key-Findings

1. The ongoing trends of geography and geographical research reveal field survey to be integral and inseparable
2. Geographical research is made under a set process that allows the geographers to make a scientific study of the phenomena
3. The process of geographical research includes especially field survey and data collection that enables the geographers to make the study of the geographical occurrences systematically
4. There are several techniques of data collection, but observation, field survey, Questionnaire, GIS, remote sensing are some of the effective techniques
5. The sources that supply the data for the geographical research are questionnaire,

- observation, GIS, field survey in addition to the books, journals, magazines, government records and internet sites
6. Field survey is the soul of the geographical studies without which no real geographical study is possible
 7. Defining the problem, outlining the objects and purposes, considering and determining the scope of the field survey, tools and techniques of information collection, collection of recorded and published data, field observations, measurement, interviewing, compilation & computation, cartographic applications, presentations etc. are the important steps of geographical field survey.
 8. Geographical field surveys are made to get accurate information about the problem to be studies
 9. The major effect of the geographical surveys is to add to the existing knowledge of the researcher about the aspect of geographical phenomenon that is being studied
 10. It is binding on the part of the geographers to act upon the prescribed steps and process of geographical research and study
 11. Most of geographical studies are quantitative in nature, hence, geographical survey should be treated as the basis
 12. Actual observation of the phenomena, measurement of the site and the visualization of the geographical occurrences is possible only through field surveys
 13. Camera, Scale, Measuring tape, Diary and Pen and other essential instruments are essential during the field survey

14. Every place has its own unique characteristics, and the field survey reflects the geographer's sense of observation
15. Survey-research is both science and art.

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