

Chapter III

Methodological Framework and In-Situ Investigation

3.1 Philosophical Foundations of the Study

Social science research entails an understanding of the ontological and epistemological perspectives to conduct informed research. For Gray (2009), this combination of ontological and epistemological postulations leads to the development of theoretical stance and methodological postulations, thus emerging a ‘paradigm’.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) view paradigm as a set of beliefs that defines our worldview. It influences the insights about the nature of questions, and how we choose to seek their answers, which subsequently leads to the presentation of a probable solution. In short, paradigm plays an important role in guiding one’s action. Chilisa and Kawulich (2012) point out that every researcher has their own perspective on research and a view of the world. Hughes (2010) opines that research centers itself around a paradigm of looking at and making sense of the world in a particular way. This, therefore, affects a researcher’s overall perspective towards identifying a problem, exploring research methodology, and subsequently identifying tools for the collection of data and its analysis.

The ontological standing of this study rests on reality being subjective, which is constructed by social actors who participate and engage in different social realities. Therefore, asserting a difference between natural and social reality. This ontological standing allowed me to explore perceptions of different stakeholders in a school community on various prospects with the broad one being focused on social capital and its meaning within a particular school community.

The epistemological position of this study as represented in Figure 2, stems from Constructivism, wherein Crotty (1998) argues that for a social actor, truth and meaning are not existential features of the external world, but rather a creation of the interaction between social actors as a subject with the outside world. Mertens (2012) concurs that a social actor’s social reality is grounded in the experience it had in that reality. This notion that the meaning is constructed rather than discovered is an underpinning of Interpretivism, which has founded the theoretical perspective for the current study.

Cohen et al. (2007) view Interpretivism as people interpreting meanings about social reality and acting based on its interpretation. Therefore, without value ascription to the subjects by the researcher, Creswell (2003) points out that the researcher practices ‘bracketing’ the social actor’s understanding of reality from the pre-conceived opinions of the researcher.

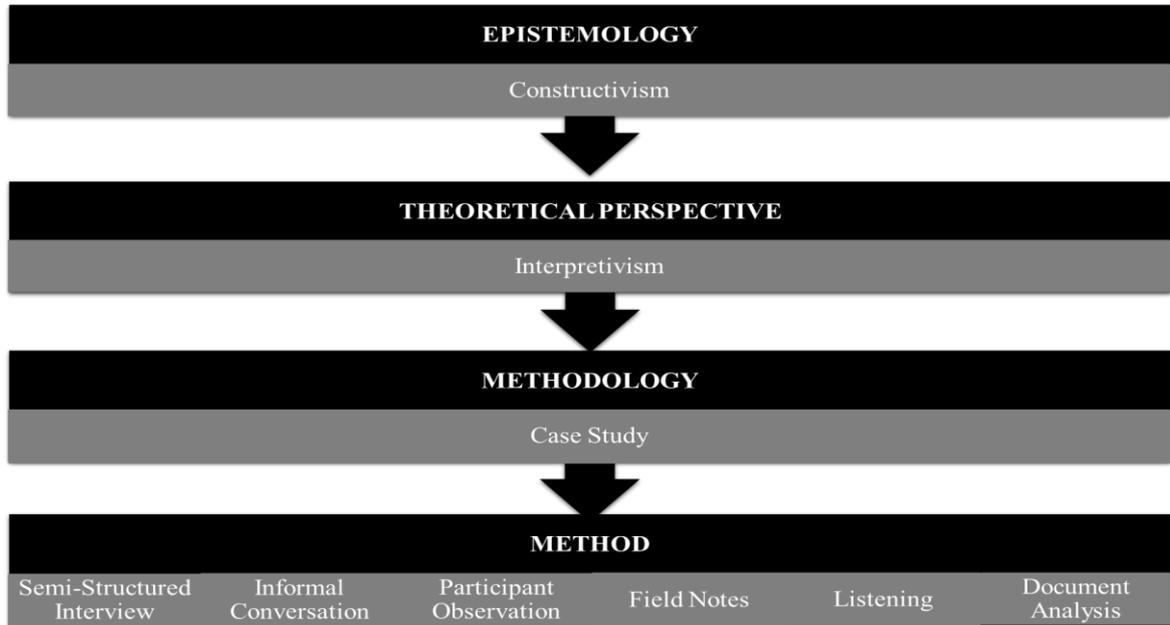


Figure 2. A Visual Representation of the Framework of the Methodology (Modified from Crotty, 1998)

A Case study coherently amalgamates the ontological and epistemological foundations as it investigates as per the view of Pring (2000) a phenomenon in a real-life setting, that Yin (1992) opines to have blurred boundaries between the setting and reality, leading to an opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence.

This study attempts to focus on the meaning that was derived by stakeholders such as perceptions about the school, and school community, and how they gave meaning to social capital, which was subjective and personal. The focal point of this study was to understand the experiences, and views of students, teachers, principal, and parents in relation to social capital.

3.2 Research Design

The present study follows a qualitative framework of research. This means that the strategies employed put emphasis on words rather than the quantification of data. In

view of Bryman (2016), qualitative research resides in the embodiment of social reality as an individual's creation. Candy (1991) opines that inquiry is always value-laden. This is because the researcher is a part of the society. These values, in turn, influence our entire research process right from the conception of the study to the reporting of the data related to it.

A Case study is qualitative research, according to Stake (1995), that concentrates on one or more cases in their natural context. In the realm of educational research, a case study is posited by Gerring (2004) as a meticulous examination of a single unit to understand larger or analogous units. These units are bounded spatially with respect to a phenomenon, observed at one time or at different times over a large period. In other words, case studies provide a setting by exploring one's reality, thus allowing one to identify distinctive features of an institution across all the cases. Mills et al. (2009) highlight that case studies are not only done to create knowledge and understanding but also to gain experience from a phenomenon. Therefore, it is usually idiographic in nature.

A Case study significantly relies on the interaction between a researcher and the participant. The success of a case study, therefore is dependent on the mutual trust and the dynamics that the researcher and participant share. This allows a researcher, according to Mills et al. (2009), to triangulate data through various sources and methods including one's observations and discussions. Therefore, it offers freedom to the researcher to conduct the study and change the plans if the need arises.

The current study followed an Instrumental Case Study design with an interpretive approach. An instrumental case study design, according to Stake (1995) is employed to draw a deeper understanding of a particular issue, revisit generalizations, or theory-building. Here, the case itself is secondary yet plays a supportive role in facilitating an understanding of a phenomenon. Thus, the case is detailed based on its context, and the activities are scrutinized. The foundation of an instrumental case study design as per the view of Stake (1995) is a collaboration between the researcher and participant(s) to reconstruct their experiences. It offers a 'thick description' of a certain individual, institution, site, or group(s). Concurrently, Stake (1995) warns that an instrumental case study does not allow a scope of generalizing as done in quantitative research. Rather, it tries to identify patterns and themes that are comparable to other cases.

The essence of the Interpretive approach rests on the attempt to find and interpret the meaning in a context by the researcher. According to Garrick (1999), the Interpretive approach provides a scope to recognize individuals as active in their social, political, and historical context. This leads to the development of autonomy in terms of thoughts, judgment, perception, and ideas. Thus, one can understand and make meaning out of the ‘lived experience’ of individuals as participants rather than limiting through determinacy, rationality, and prediction.

From a case study perspective, an interpretive approach focuses on human meaning, human behaviour, and human action in terms of the social context; allowing it to be interpreted. Idiographic efforts, such as, observations are made to understand the entirety of a phenomenon, person, or group of persons. These undertakings allow one to describe social actions taken by an individual or a group of individuals. Thereby making a case study, as per Mills et al. (2009) both a process and a product of inquiry.

The basis of the case study includes sampling and selection of the field, entering the field, data collection, and data analysis. Below are these points discussed in detail under separate sub-sections.

3.3 Defining the Field

As a novice researcher, I often came across dilemmas regarding the first step of research, how should I proceed? What should encompass the sample? What tools would be appropriate to get the required data? Apart from this, I had to be mindful of the expense in terms of temporal and economic. This was an ongoing process, that culminated in developing an understanding of the social and educational realm which Cohen et al. (2007) assert to be complex, dynamic, and multilayer. Furthermore, they contend that these realms resist the familiar reductionist approach as observed in quantitative research, rather they accentuate an understanding that can be attained by examining components in totality instead of in isolation.

Patton (1990) defines a field as a physical environment that sufficiently provides support to the researcher to visualize and conduct a study. Flick (2009) elaborates that in a field, the information is recognized and collected through effective communication between the researcher and the respondent. Thus, defining the field of study is imperative to establish a spatial framework. The focus of the current study is to understand how social

capital presents itself in an educational context, which in this study was an elementary school.

As iterated previously in Chapter I, the state of Rajasthan has introduced successful interventions at the elementary level. These initiatives became a hallmark of success due to the engagement of stakeholders in the form of civic participation, which was the major dimension of Putnam's (1995) conception of social capital. Yet, the overall literacy rate of Rajasthan, according to Census 2011 stood at 66.11%, much less than the national average. According to U-DISE+ 2019-20 data, there were 9112 schools in Jaipur district, out of which 1990 were Private Unaided Recognised Upper Primary Schools. Thus, the total share of Private Unaided Recognised Upper Primary Schools was 21.8% in the Jaipur district. These upper primary schools are those schools that have classes from I to VIII only.

By understanding the concept of the case study and its related assumptions, I explored many schools in Jaipur. I came across SFS school through one of my contacts. The SFS school was a Private Unaided Recognised Upper Primary School located in the periphery of Jaipur city. Typically, there are many schools in Jaipur city that are affiliated with the Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education (RBSE). The SFS school was established in 2000 by an Air Force couple and was affiliated with RBSE. The school did not have any permanent infrastructure and hence would shift within an area after some time. Apart from this, the school was largely dominated by teachers and students of a particular community. A school like this was something that I never heard of. This could be due to reasons such as my exposure to a realm of schools that has been limited to a permanent infrastructure, which remains the same for a long time, and a consistent number of students and teachers. This led to a curiosity to understand how social capital generates and sustains in such a school, and how the school is being thought of by its community members.

During my association of more than two and a half years, the school had shifted twice. The dwindling numbers of students, and teachers in a school that shifted its location and continued to remain functioning during and after the COVID-19 lockdown, motivated me to look upon this school as a case for conducting my research. In addition to this, SFS school offered me a free hand to talk and interact with students and teachers. This was a relief as compared to the constraints such as no interaction with teachers and

children, no photography, and the compulsion to share the findings that were put forth on me in other schools. The understanding of repercussions in the future deterred me from continuing my quest and thus, SFS emerged as the case for the study.

3.4 Sampling

For qualitative research such as a case study, Ishak and Bakar (2014) pointed out that the basic purpose behind the exercise of sampling is to collect information-rich, specific cases that can clarify the understanding of the concerned study. In the case study, the sampling acts as a guide to enable a researcher to delineate sampling strategies, and the number of cases, along with defining the unit of analysis.

The principal focus of a case study, hence, was to select an information-rich sample, that would enhance the depth of information and validate the gathered information. According to Bryman (2016), purposive sampling aims to sample cases or participants in such a way that sampled cases or participants are relevant to the framed research questions. Brumanns et al. (2008) have employed purposive sampling in their study of environmental disputes among different stakeholder groups. Falk (2003) also used purposive sampling to choose twelve VETs in his instrumental case study in Australia. The studies by Eng (2013) and Roth (2013) to study educational achievement and educational inequality of students respectively, also used purposive sampling.

In this study, I initially interacted with all the teachers, students, and principal. This was done so that the members of the school would not feel that they were either being outrightly rejected or the focus was on a particular group. During the pre-COVID-19 phase of my study, there were seventeen teachers and around one-fifty students in school. However, after the COVID-19 lockdown, there were only seven teachers and nearly ninety students in total. This was further aggravated by students switching between online and offline classes. Hence, twenty-five to thirty students who were consistently coming to the school were selected for the study. In the case of teachers, out of seven teachers, six teachers voluntarily agreed to be a part of the study. The principal was also chosen as the sample to understand the school structure, administration, and other aspects.

3.5 Entering the Field

Entering the field in view of Flick (2010) is a complex process of self-identification and role-playing in the field. Hence, the longitudinal nature of the study in terms of time made me realize the importance of building a rapport with complete strangers. This rapport-building entailed letting go of reluctance among the participants. In other words, I had to be ready for situations where I had to consciously dissociate myself as a researcher or at least be able to project that I was ready to become a part of the group. Therefore, I determined that being in the school should cause no or the least disturbance to the lives and work of the school community.

Social capital brings focus to the importance of relationships to help us achieve goals that otherwise are not possible through other forms of capital. My breakthrough to enter the field was meeting an English teacher from Happy Rites School, Mrs. Karuna Rathore. She was the mother of my brother's junior. She agreed to arrange a meeting with the SFS school's principal. The school was situated in an area called Khirni Phatak, which was on the outskirts of Jaipur City. I visited SFS school and spoke to the principal in the presence of Karuna Madam. The principal agreed to let me conduct the study by requesting to cause minimal disturbance to the school activities. She asked for a formal letter from the institution, without which she would not permit. I assured her that on my next visit, I would provide a formal institutional letter.

On the way back, I noticed that we were traveling through the Jaipur-Delhi highway, which is National Highway 8. SFS school was almost 20 km from where I was staying. Despite going to school on a two-wheeler, it took us nearly one and a half hours on each side. My formal entry into the school happened in two phases- pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19. This led to a distinction in the experience I had in both times.

In the upcoming section, I have talked about entering the field under two sub-sections- entering the field in pre-COVID-19 time, and entering the field in post-COVID-19 time.

3.5.1 Formally Entering the Field in Pre-Covid-19 Time

I took a permission letter from my department and handed it to the principal of SFS school. I was introduced to the whole school in its assembly. The principal asked everyone including the teachers to cooperate with me. Later, one of the teachers, in my presence shared her apprehension of bringing in a stranger into the school. The principal

introduced me as a relative of Mrs. Karuna Rathore. This reminds me of Flick's (2010) warning that getting access to individuals is much more difficult than getting institutional access. This is further aggravated by the problem of identifying individuals who will give the information that one seeks. The principal reiterated the rules of not engaging with students and teachers during their classes, no loitering in the school, asking permission from the teachers in case I am interested in observing their classes and lastly, she added that in no way I should interact with the parents.

I assured her that I would be mindful of my movements, tone, and behaviour in school. She seemed relieved. She kept a table and a chair for me in her cabin. I met the teacher who had apprehensions about my presence. I introduced myself, my institution, and the purpose of the study in the simplest language. She introduced herself as Rambha Madam and asked me a few personal questions. I tried to navigate through the awkwardness. She would ask me to remain in the common area during classes, lunch breaks, and meetings since I was not part of the 'SFS family.' I observed that other teachers and the principal would not speak. I decided to show persistence by acquainting myself with the routine of teachers and students.

During my visits, I observed reluctance among the teachers. They would shut the doors if they saw me loitering near their class. On the other hand, the students particularly in class V were curious to know who I was. They began spending their lunch break with me. Once I could not go to school for two days, and when I returned, a student from class V asked about my whereabouts. It was an unexpected question but I told him the reason. He seemed to squint his eyes and went away. Later the students of class V would ask me to come to their class during their free time. I requested the principal to give me any empty classes so that I could teach as well as interact. I received a negative response from the school on account of syllabus completion. With COVID-19 making its presence known in India, the schools were eventually closed. I came back to the University.

3.5.2 Re-entering the Field in Post-Covid-19 Times

During the first 21 days of the lockdown of COVID-19, I called the school principal once. We exchanged greetings on the phone and asked about each other's well-being. When I inquired about how the school is managing itself in terms of classes and

examinations, she sounded assured that the school would reopen after the twenty-one days lockdown.

As time passed and the lockdown was extended, so did my sense of insecurity. In later conversations, the principal shared that one of the issues that as a school they faced was the digital inclusion of all students. Most of the students of SFS do not have smartphones or laptops. In some cases, there would be only one smartphone that was shared between the siblings. Therefore, the school teachers would send videos on WhatsApp instead of taking online classes. My tenacity and insistence on accessing the videos and the responses of the students were found to have no avail. At this time, the only link between me and SFS school was the principal. When the principal stopped responding to phone calls and messages, I resolved to wait for the schools to reopen.

Meanwhile, I met Dr. Madhuri Bhatnagar, who retired as a professor of Sociology at the University of Rajasthan to gain insight and sources to understand the sociology of education in Jaipur. She was unaware of the concept of social capital. Yet, our sessions were fruitful as she would talk about the caste structure in Rajasthan and its prominence even in present times. I discussed my initial reflections on the school. She suggested identifying the demography of students who come to school irrespective of what the school authorities say.

I revisited the school in September 2021, as the school personnel were allowed to come but the students were being taught online. The principal informed me that the school would open for 3 hours every day and the teachers were taking online lectures from the school. Upon reaching I noticed the lock on the door. I asked the neighbours who told me that the school had shifted. I called the principal who gave me the new school address.

Upon meeting, I reiterated my study. She ignored my question about the change in the building and instead asked me to come on alternate days as they were trying to settle into the new building. She refused to take my help in setting up the new building. In the upcoming days, the teachers seemed to remain oblivious to my presence as they did not return the pleasantries nor did they agree to talk.

My breakthrough with teachers happened in the third lockdown. The school would open every day for two hours. During this time, I encountered two teachers who shared their

interest in doing higher studies. They shared their stories and experiences with the school but would stop talking when I scribbled in the notebook.

Reflecting on my experience on “Refusals to Entering the Field”

I hailed from Jaipur and therefore was confident about my social skills to gain access to conduct the study. I selected 16 prominent schools in Jaipur where I believed my study would be supported. I sent emails, visited the schools, and talked to the principals at length about my study.

In one case I visited the school closer to my home. I called and made an appointment to meet the principal. I went to the school and was asked to wait in the reception area. After waiting for almost 1 hour, I was called inside. The principal asked me about my study, and what I intend to do. I assured him that nowhere the name of the school nor the participants will be mentioned.

In his refusal, he informed me that while he respects the assurance, his earlier experiences with research scholars like me did not bode well. He added that the research scholars come to the school, teach in the manner they want to teach, and hardly take any form of feedback from students, teachers, and even principals. This often led to awkward situations including reteaching the content. I tried to be persistent and negotiate as I explained my study again, to which it was proposed that I visit once a week, with no interaction with anyone, and no photographs. He also demanded to show me the findings before submitting my thesis. When I explained to him that the code of conduct of a researcher does not allow me to share the findings. I was asked to leave. I politely thanked him for his time.

At the outset, these refusals seemed like a combination of the power and irrationality of the administration. In hindsight, I reflected on my contribution to the school while I was there as a researcher. The experience of entering the field seemed analogous to the biological concept of an immune system. Any intervention of a foreign object in the body causes an immune reaction. The defensiveness that I encountered can therefore be viewed as an effort of the school as a system to protect and sustain itself from the ripples my mere presence must have caused. The ‘strangeness’ between me and the school could be one of the reasons for the opacity. I thus realized that as a researcher I must transition from a stranger to at least a point of familiarity where participants are open to negotiating on disclosure and transparency.

Reluctantly I decided not to carry one and relied on my mental ability. I noticed a shift in their behaviour to the extent that I was able to interview them and was invited to have lunch. Yet, their disinclination to talk on the record continued. I would convince and assure from time to time about the confidentiality of the conversation between us. They seemed to be surprised when they came to know the distance between the school and my place of stay, the travel time, and my ability to drive a car on the highway.

Later, when a few children from class VIII started coming to the school, I was asked by the principal if I could teach Mathematics to them. I took this as an opportunity to break the ice and meet the students. Gradually even the principal and teachers except one appeared to be at ease with my presence not only in the celebration of festivals but also in the school meetings.

3.6 Tools and Techniques for Data Collection

During the fieldwork, the data was collected from different sources, namely students, teachers, parents, and principal. In the upcoming sub-sections, a comprehensive presentation of the employed tools and techniques has been done.

3.6.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview is one of the common but efficient tools employed in qualitative research. It aids a researcher to explore aspects or events, that are not observable or took place at some other time but are relevant in the context of the study. According to Bryman (2016), semi-structured interviews have a contextual tonality to the questions. It offers a scope to the researcher to vary the sequence of the questions and even pose further questions to receive significant information from the participants. For me, semi-structured interviews became one of the important tools to collect data as they allowed me to explore a variety of subjects. The questions put forth allowed the participants to share their experiences in a safe cocoon within the school.

To have fruitful interviews, Yow (1994) points out that it is important to develop an interview guide. According to Patton (2014), an interview guide outlines the exhaustiveness of data due to pre-decided coverage of topics and issues. Thereby making the interview a conversational activity rather than an exercise. I developed an interview guide for students, teachers, and principal. I kept in mind to avoid any jargon and ask questions using simple and comprehensible words. I modified my interview

guide constantly regarding words, length of questions, and complexity. Some of these questions had common dimensions such as problems and issues they face in school, and their perception of the school and other members. However, there were many sets of questions that were developed separately. The interview guide for the principal focused on aspects like the vision of the school, administrative issues, support from teachers, support from the community, expectations from teachers, and school success.

The interview guide for teachers focused on their qualifications, subjects they teach in school, previous experience of school, comparing school with their previous schools, conditions in which they joined, and their relationship with each other, and with students. The interview guide of students explored their family background, aspirations, friendships, their views about teaching, views about teachers, and relationships.

The interviews happened a couple of times, punctuated by the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to November 2023. In many cases, the recorder caused hesitation among respondents to which at times I had to resort to pen and paper. The transcriptions of interviews helped me to revisit the participants with more areas to explore and fill the gaps that were encountered.

3.6.2 Informal Conversation

Webb et al. (1966) observe that as compared to when no evaluation is taking place, the conduct of the participant changes if they are aware of being under evaluation, irrespective of the degree of naturalness present in the interaction between the researcher and the participant. This was one of the lessons that I learned during my data collection in the form of an epiphany that the recording of everything cannot happen every time.

Therefore, I gradually learned to be open, attentive, and sensitive to casual conversations that happened with parents, teachers, principal, and students. These conversations provided insights into their feelings and views about various aspects such as their feelings about schools, their perception of the leadership, and many more. The informal conversations happened outside the school, in the staff room, during lunch breaks, and in preparation for a festival celebration or any other event. This increased the scope of acquiring data as sometimes the participant would engage in a conversation, that they might not have, had they been aware of being on record. Thus, informal conversations became one of the mainstays of my source of data.

3.6.3 Participant Observation

Participant observation is another good technique to collect data from participants. However, for me, this did not happen overnight. Being a participant observer is a two-way street. By merely deciding for oneself, participant observation does not happen. Gold (1958) points out the spectrum of observers that allows the extent of one's participation.

My initial detachment could be credited to the naivety I had as a researcher. As Gold's (1958) complete observer, the initial days in the field were a concoction of doubt and fear about how to navigate myself in a new environment. I observed that whenever I passed by a class, the teachers would stop teaching, come out, and ask if I needed anything. I would be asked to leave the room during the meetings. I realized that this 'strangeness' was mutual as having a stranger in their midst was a new experience for them as well as much it was for me to be there.

I slowly acquired the role of Gold's (1958) observer-as-participant as I increased the frequency of my interactions and visits. The observation during this time was more formal in nature with limited opportunities for participation. This superficiality of participation transformed my persistence to become Gold's (1958) participant-as-observer as I became a part of the school activities in the form of teaching classes and organizing activities. At this point in time, I, as a researcher was also at risk of 'becoming native,' as warned by Levine et al. (1980). I, therefore, would consciously remind myself about my intentions of being in the field, and my purpose of interacting with participants with empathy.

3.6.4 Field Notes

According to Bryman (2016), field notes are generally used as a reflective tool by ethnographers as a "detailed chronicle of events, conversations, and behaviours." It is important that as a researcher we accept the threat posed by the frailties of the human mind can be misleading. Field notes are sometimes written as quick notes about an incident or behaviour on the field. The inconspicuous prompts added in it serve as a trigger to write an elaboration about the day on the field.

I initially carried a notebook with me and would instantly note down if I was unable to record it. This caused reluctance among the participants about talking to me as they

would insist on sharing what I was writing, a persistent issue faced by researchers as per Lofland and Lofland (1995). Later, I would record the field notes in my voice while I was in the field, which were later transcribed. I also depended on making mental notes where it was not feasible to either write or record or could be deemed inappropriate, such as attending the staff meeting. I would later write down the moment as soon as I got some space away from the participants. Thus, these field notes became an important pillar of my study.

3.6.5 Using Listening Skill

As a researcher, Parul (2016) highlights that it was important to listen to the participants. This listening was not merely limited to being focused on getting the answers we wanted. In one of the semi-structured interviews, the interviewee talked about her family life, husband, divorce, and life as a single mother. I could not find anything conclusive in that recorded interview during my transcription. But the behaviour of that interviewee changed towards me who would later come upfront and later became a key informant about the school. In retrospect, I realized that listening, as Palmer-Mehta (2016) points out is a powerful tool that has the potential to change the nature and quality of our interactions.

I consciously tried to create an environment where the respondents could talk freely. This increased my confidence in myself over the probable organic nature of the information I secured through semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and even during my observations. Hence, through listening I noticed the shift in the usage of words, ideas, and perceptions that participants had about the school, colleagues, students, and even me. This difference of opinion was indicative of the hesitation and distrust that the participants still harboured; the causes of which I explored.

3.6.6 Documents

The realm of research is founded on proof. While doing research documents such as research articles, journals, theses, publications, and reports helped me to frame my research questions. Later, I used the information and findings of these studies to corroborate my findings. This was done to provide much stronger support to my findings, thereby adding to the existing body of knowledge about social capital in a regional context that resonates closer to Indian roots. In addition to this, I was shown lesson planners by the teachers, but access to see the content was vehemently denied.

3.7 Data Analysis

For Bogdan and Biklen (2007) qualitative data analysis encompasses organizing data, generating codes, categories, and themes, identifying patterns among themes, and finally interpreting the data in the form of a write-up. Indeed, a properly channelled analysis of data could convert a researcher's raw data to meaningful findings. Strauss (2003) says that a qualitative analysis of data must be done at different levels of explicitness, abstraction, and categorization.

The data analysis began the moment I entered the field. During my initial days of investigation, I came across challenges pertaining to the sources of the information and validation of the acquired information. At this point, every experience, and every interaction became an object of inquiry. However, later as I dived deeper into data collection, I became more confident about my analysis.

The qualitative data analysis for the current study is based on Miles et al. (2014) framework, which is done in three distinctive stages viz., data condensation and data display ultimately leading to drawing conclusions. Based on this framework, the following sub-sections, have provided details about the steps such as transcription of data, organizing, coding, and categorizing, thematic generation, and categorization, and lastly interpretation and reporting.

3.7.1 Transcription of data

During my stay in the field, I interacted with different members of the school through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. While I recorded the semi-structured interviews as audio, I would write the conversations that were off-record in a small notebook. This formed a part of my transcription. I transcribed the semi-structured interviews verbatim in English and Hindi. This was done because many times teachers and students would answer in Hindi. I avoided the transliteration of the data and wrote in Hindi language. Despite coming from the same region many times, the teachers often used local dialect and words, whose meanings were checked by someone who knew that dialect.

3.7.2 Organizing, Coding, and Categorizing

The first step of the qualitative data analysis framework as given by Miles et al. (2014), is data condensation. While I was in the field, my primary focus was to gather data. I

periodically transcribed my interviews. I would read them again to understand how to proceed. However, during data collection, I collected data from so many sources that at one point I became flustered about its organization. The data condensation allowed me to select, and simplify the data which was obtained in the form of field notes, transcripts of interviews, observations, and interactions. This was done by separating semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and observations that I noted in my field notes into different codes and categories. The transformed data was then extracted to identify concepts and patterns. By doing this step, there was an ease of identifying patterns.

3.7.3 Thematic Generation and Thematic Categorization

The data display as per Miles et al. (2014) was the second step that entailed a comprehensive assembly of information that allows one to draw conclusions. Once I was able to categorize, I was able to identify themes. By corroborating with the research questions and objectives, I generated more categories that in turn led to a much clearer understanding of the pattern. This helped me to gain much-needed clarity for interpreting the data and reporting the findings.

3.7.4 Interpretation and Reporting

According to Miles et al. (2014) a researcher, should refrain from jumping to conclusions based on the initial data. During the fieldwork, I consciously left room for scepticism toward the information I obtained. Thus, it ended up making the initial conclusions equivocal. As the study proceeded my engagement with the participants increased. This provided a relative ease of access to the information that aided in identifying repetitive patterns and meanings. Thus, the final conclusions drawn from verification and re-verification were tested on the credibility, confirmability, and robustness of the data by triangulating from different sources.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, one of the challenges that were in front of me was to be able to carry out an ethical investigation. Alderson and Morrow (2004) maintain that at every stage one should take ethics as a researcher into account. As a qualitative researcher, I practiced the principles of ethics such as ensuring the least interference in their everyday routine, getting informed consent, voluntary participation, and maintaining the confidentiality of the participants. This was also extended through the analysis of data,

wherein it was ensured that the information given was not merely a judgment of mine but rather founded on the data that was gathered. This is important because Garfinkel (1967) and Gouldner (1973) on separate accounts have argued that every researcher is a part of society and therefore cannot be deemed as a value-free person. Przeperski and Cicizkowska-Giedzuin (2022) underscore the significance of espousing reflexivity and highlight that, in the context of qualitative research, the research findings inexorably carry traces of the background, context, and personal biases of the researcher.

As an investigator, I ensured to follow the principles of ethics in research at each step. The first step was being considerate of the participants' readiness, morality, confidentiality, and experiences. I sought access to the field by providing an institutional permission letter to the school. I answered the questions of the authorities about my study, its objective, how I intend to collect information, the nature of the information, the duration of the study, and with whom I shall interact.

Even though the principal permitted me, I was asked to seek individual permission from each teacher before observing their classroom and talking to them otherwise. In addition to this, I was asked not to interact with the parents as the authorities were not sure how they would react to having a stranger in the school.

The interviews were mostly conducted in the school. I later had informal meetings and discussions with two teachers and the principal who later invited me to their homes. The information and anonymity during interviews were maintained by not discussing the content of it with other participants. Therefore, instead of going head-on first, I decided to initially focus on understanding the routine and working of the school by trying to interfere minimally. This helped me to gain trust, and build rapport and a non-threatening environment for the participants to interact with me.

In the case of children, I first met them outside their classroom on several occasions. When I conducted the interviews, I briefed them about the questions that they could expect and informed them about their rights as interviewees. The participants were informed that the interviews shall be recorded. At any point, if the responses of the students felt could be compromised due to the presence of their teachers, I would encourage them to refuse to talk to me. The study focused on relationships that students

have within the school, therefore in case questions were found to be causing distress, a choice to refuse to answer was given before the interview.

The teachers were informed about the nature and purpose of the interview along with their rights as interviewees. I told them that their participation was voluntary. This meant that at any point if they chose to stop the interview and refuse to talk further was accepted. I informed them that their interviews were being recorded. Since I was recording their interview, at any point if they were uncomfortable or wanted to say something off the record, I complied with those and would write in short. Throughout the study, I was careful about the tone and language I used during interactions with the school personnel(s) or students.

Since the school did not allow me to interact with the parents, I faced issues regarding gaining information from them. Most of the conversations that took place happened as informal talks in the presence of the teachers or the principal.

One of the concerns that was shared during my search for a field was the inability of the researchers to report back the findings of the study. This was shared by the principal and teachers of my sample school as well. I negotiated with them by reporting back periodically about the experiences I had in school. I also offered to help the school by teaching classes, taking proxy periods, and sharing videos and photographs during the celebration of festivals.

Throughout the discussions at various steps, I have employed the use of pseudonyms for the name of the school, and the name of the principal, teachers, and students. In subsequent chapters, I have replaced the names of the participants by their level in school and the number in which I interacted with them. For instance, the principal is given P, teachers are given numbers as T1, T2, and so on, and lastly, the students are discussed as S1, S2, and so on. However, in my own field notes, transcription of the interview, and questionnaire I have written the actual names of the participants.

Conclusion

The preceding sections have illustrated the philosophical basis of the study, which was followed by a comprehensive understanding of the instrumental case study as the research design. Nevertheless, the field experiences highlighted the opportunities and challenges I faced in my fieldwork. The chapter has also put forth an attention on the

ethical practices that were done. The data collection tools and techniques and the subsequent data analysis provided a strong basis for the interpretation and its reporting which has been presented in detail in the succeeding chapter.