Exploratory, Descriptive, Explanatory, and Confirmatory Designs

* Exploratory research is chosen as a research type when the researcher is at an early stage of enquiry. It is a necessary step to any researcher planning before to embark on any extensive research. Thus exploratory research precedes. This type of research serves as preliminary investigation and a foundation for further research. Exploratory researchers are in search for new insights into interesting areas of research which, later on, descriptive or explanatory research will build on.
* The approach used at this stage is mostly inductive, relying on flexible qualitative data collection tools.
* Descriptive studies are conducted to “provide an accurate profile of situations, people, or events” as they happen naturally without any control from the part of the researcher. Description involves determining the characteristics of phenomena, classifying, and analysing them. Description can also study relationships between variables, but the focus is on description rather than on manipulation of variables.
* Surveys, correlational studies and, ethnography are examples of descriptive studies.
* Explanatory research aims at explaining the causal relationship between variables. This type of research helps in understanding reasons why a phenomenon happens. The data collected in explanatory research is meant to explain why a phenomenon occurs. Results at the end of an explanatory research establish causal relationships between variables.
* Explanatory research includes experimental research and causal-comparative one.
* Confirmatory research refers to any research that examines evidence to confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis. It is also referred to as deductive or hypothesis-testing research.