

Paradigms and Characteristics of a Good Qualitative Research

*Muhammad Farooq Joubish, Muhammad Ashraf Khurram, Aijaz Ahmed,
Syeda Tasneem Fatima and Kamal Haider*

Department of Education, Federal Urdu University, Pakistan

Abstract: Qualitative research seeks out the ‘why’, not the ‘how’ of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information - things like interview transcripts, open ended survey responses, emails, notes, feedback forms, photos and videos. It doesn’t just rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative researchers. Qualitative research is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles. It is used to inform business decisions, policy formation, communication and research. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis, ethnography, evaluation and semiotics are among the many formal approaches that are used, but qualitative research also involves the analysis of any unstructured material, including customer feedback forms, reports or media clips.

Key words: Qualitative research • Quantitative research • Mixed research • Paradigms • Evaluation • Multi-paradigmatic

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research is used to help us understanding how people feel and why they feel as they do. It is concerned with collecting in-depth information asking questions such as why do you say that? Samples tend to be smaller compared with quantitative projects that include much larger samples. Depth interviews or group discussions are two common methods used for collecting qualitative information.

A qualitative approach refers to situations where you collect data in an unstructured way. If you use an unstructured interview you will have qualitative data. If you ask subjects to keep a diary of what they are doing, you are collecting qualitative data [1].

Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. That is to say, it aims to help us to understand the world in which we live and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about [2]:

- Why people behave the way they do.
- How opinions and attitudes are formed.
- How people are affected by the events that go on around them.
- How and why cultures have developed.
- The differences between social groups.

Qualitative approaches to research are based on a "world view" which is holistic and has the following beliefs:

- There is not a single reality.
- Reality based upon perceptions that are different for each person and change over time.
- What we know has meaning only within a given situation or context.

The reasoning process used in qualitative research involves perceptually putting pieces together to make wholes. From this process meaning is produced. However, because perception varies with the individual, many different meanings are possible.

When You Might Emphasize Qualitative:
The likely indicators for emphasizing a qualitative approach are:

- Your interest is in the qualitative nature of the subjects' behaviours.
- You are searching out an area of interest and you cannot find anything much to guide you. So you need to get some sort of overview.
- You have a long term research program in view. You want to get a good feel for the scope of the variables which might be involved.

Qualitative Research: Dealing with phenomena that are difficult or impossible to quantify mathematically, such as beliefs, meanings, attributes and symbols; it may involve content analysis.

Qualitative Research: Is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research and further contexts [3].

Qualitative Research: Is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Interaction between variables is important. Detailed data is gathered through open ended questions that provide direct quotations. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation. This differs from quantitative research which attempts to gather data by objective methods to provide information about relations, comparisons and predictions and attempts to remove the investigator from the investigation [4].

Definitions of Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln [5] Define Qualitative Research:

- Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials case study, personal experience, introspective, life story interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts-that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives.

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosses the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretative understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions.

Creswell [6] Defines it As: Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Creswell [7] divides qualitative research into five main Qualitative Research Types and identifies the key challenges of each mode of inquiry.

- The Biography.
- Phenomenology.
- Grounded Theory.
- Ethnography.
- Case Study.

The Characteristics

Purpose: Understanding - Seeks to understand people's interpretations.

Reality: Dynamic - Reality changes with changes in people's perceptions.

Viewpoint: Insider - Reality is what people perceive it to be.

Values: Value bound - Values will have an impact and should be understood and taken into account when conducting and reporting research.

Focus: Holistic - A total or complete picture is sought.

Orientation: Discovery - Theories and hypotheses are evolved from data as collected.

Data: Subjective - Data are perceptions of the people in the environment.

Instrumentation: Human - The human person is the primary collection instrument.

Conditions: Naturalistic - Investigations are conducted under natural conditions.

Results: Valid - The focus is on design and procedures to gain "real," "rich," and "deep" data.

The Qualitative Paradigm: The design of a research study begins with the selection of a topic and a paradigm. A paradigm is essentially a worldview, a whole framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place. It is this world views within which researchers work. Contemporary qualitative research has

been conducted from a large number of various paradigms that influence conceptual and meta-theoretical concerns of legitimacy, control, data analysis, ontology and epistemology, among others. Research conducted in the last 10 years has been characterized by a distinct turn toward more interpretive, postmodern and critical practices. Guba and Lincoln [8] identify five main paradigms of contemporary qualitative research: positivism, postpositivism, critical theories, constructivism and participatory/cooperative paradigms.

According to Creswell [9] "A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting.

Alternatively a quantitative study, consistent with the quantitative paradigm, is an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true."

The paradigm framework is made up of:

- P Philosophy
- O Ontology
- E Epistemology
- M Methodology

Objectives of the Study

- To provide the reader with a basic understanding of qualitative research.
- To equip the reader with sufficient information to appreciate how qualitative research is undertaken.
- To enable prospective researches to consider the appropriateness of a qualitative approach to their chosen field of investigation.
- To provide practitioners contemplating or undertaking qualitative research for the first time with guidance on the collection and analysis of data.

Qualitative Methodology: Procedure and research designs. All kinds of qualitative methods have in common that their main research aim is a deeper understanding of the research object. It involves nominative or ordinal data. Nominative data is the one that assigns a label to categories and ordinal data additionally includes rank. It is not mathematically quantifiable. Respondent's words and actions represent the data of qualitative inquiry and this requires methods that allow the researcher to capture language and behavior. The key ways of collecting

qualitative data is:

- Observation -both participant and direct
- In-depth interviews
- Group Interviews
- The collection of relevant documents
- Photographs and Video Tapes

The human element of qualitative inquiry is both, strength and weakness - its strength is fully using human insight and experience, its weakness is being so heavily dependent on the researcher's skill, training, intellect, discipline and creativity. The researcher is the instrument of qualitative inquiry, so the quality of the research depends heavily on the qualities of that human being.

The analysis of qualitative data is a difficult task. All qualitative research studies are unique and thus demand unique strategies for analysis. Qualitative data analysis consists of identifying, coding and categorizing patterns found in the data. Qualitative research is a broad field of inquiry that uses unstructured data collection methods. There are 15 methods of data analysis in qualitative researches [10-25]:

- Taxonomic Analysis.
- Typological System.
- Constant Comparison /Grounded Theory.
- Case Study analysis.
- Ethno-statistics.
- Logical Analysis /Matrix Analysis.
- Phenomenological.
- Event Analysis.
- Analytic Induction.
- Hermeneutical Analysis.
- Semiotics.
- Discourse Analysis.
- Narrative Analysis.
- Content Analysis.
- Domain Analysis.
- Metaphorical Analysis.

Processing the Data:

- You need to think about the data from the moment you start to collect the information.
- You need to judge the value of your data, especially that which may come from dubious sources.
- As your research progresses you need to interpret the data so that you and others, can gain an understanding of what is going on.
- Finally, you need to undertake the mechanical process of analysing the data.

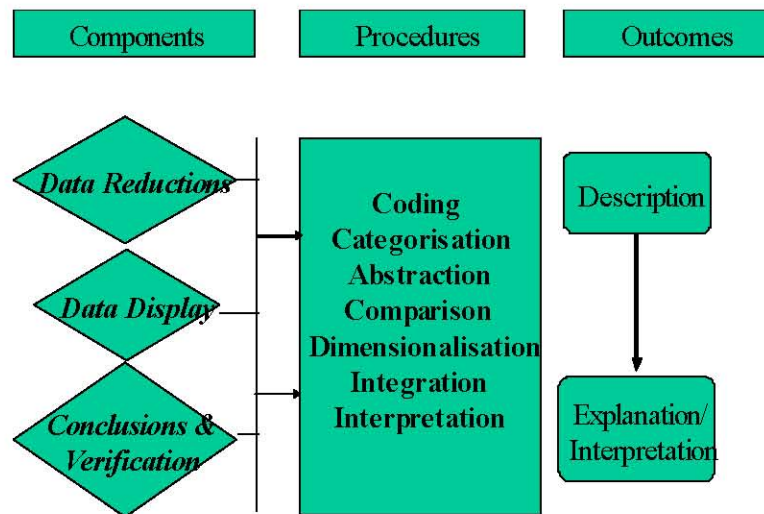


Fig. 1: The Qualitative Analytical Process (Adapted from descriptions of Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Spiggle 1994, Miles and Huberman, 1994 and Mary, 2005)

Reasons for Conducting Qualitative Research: Given these distinctions and definitions of a qualitative study, why does a person engage in such a rigorous design? To undertake qualitative research requires a strong commitment to study a problem and demands time and resources. Qualitative research shares good company with the most rigorous quantitative research and it should not be viewed as an easy substitute for a "statistical" or quantitative study. Qualitative inquiry is for the researcher who is willing to do the following:

Commit to extensive time in the field. The investigator spends many hours in the field, collects extensive data and labors over field issues of trying to gain access, rapport and an "insider" perspective.

Engage in the complex, time-consuming process of data analysis - the ambitious task of sorting through large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories. For a multidisciplinary team of qualitative researchers, this task can be shared; for most researchers, it is a lonely, isolated time of struggling with the data. The task is challenging, especially because the database consists of complex texts and images.

Write long passages, because the evidence must substantiate claims and the writer needs to show multiple perspectives. The incorporation of quotes to provide participants' perspectives also lengthens the study.

Participate in a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and evolving and changing constantly. This complicates telling others how one plan to conduct a study and how others might judge it when the study is done.

If an individual is willing to engage in qualitative inquiry, then the person needs to determine whether a strong rationale exists for choosing a qualitative approach and there are compelling reasons to undertake a qualitative study. In this respect Creswell [26] offers the following advice:

First, select a qualitative study because of the nature of the research question. In a qualitative study, the research question often starts with a *how* or *what* so that initial forays into the topic describe what is going on. This is in contrast to quantitative questions that ask *why* and look for a comparison of groups (e.g., Is Group 1 better at something than Group 2) or a relationship between variables, with the intent of establishing an association, relationship, or cause and effect (e.g., Did Variable explain what happened in Variable Y).

Second, choose a qualitative, study because the topic needs to be *explored*. 'By this, I mean that variables cannot be easily identified, theories are not available to explain behavior of participants or their population of study and theories need to be developed.

Third, use a qualitative study because of the need to present a detailed view of the topic. The side angle lens of the distant panoramic shot will not suffice to present answers to the problem, or the close-up view does not exist.

Fourth, choose a qualitative approach in order to study individuals in their *natural setting*. This involves going out to the setting or field of study, gaining access and gathering material. If participants are removed from their setting, it leads to contrived findings that are out of context.

Fifth, select a qualitative approach because of interest in *writing* in a literary style; the writer brings himself or herself into the study, the personal pronoun "I" is used, or perhaps the writer engages a storytelling form of narration.

Sixth, employ a qualitative study because of *sufficient time and resources* to spend on extensive data collection in the field and detailed data analysis of "text" information.

Seventh, select a qualitative approach because *audiences are receptive* to qualitative research. This audience might be a graduate adviser or committee, a discipline inclusive of multiple research methodologies, or publication outlets with editors receptive to qualitative approaches.

Eighth and finally, employ a qualitative approach to emphasize the researcher's role as an *active learner* who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an "expert" who passes judgment on participants.

CONCLUSION

Qualitative methods have been in use in philosophy, sociology, psychology and history for centuries. Probably the oldest qualitative method is naturalistic observation. A variation on naturalistic observation used by some sociologists and psychologists is called participant observation. One qualitative method that goes back a long way is the case study. Another example is the clinical method which was particularly well used by Jean Piaget and his followers. Another version of the clinical method is called experimental phenomenology. One more example is the method of introspection used by Wilhelm Wundt. Many researchers using qualitative methods adhere to a school of thought called phenomenology and refer to their methods as phenomenological methods. There are arguments for and against the use of qualitative methods. The arguments for qualitative methods revolve around realism. Measures do not encompass the whole of an event. It is concluded that quantitative methods are still preferred in education and psychology; more and more people are acknowledging that qualitative methods also have an important place. Not everything about human beings can be understood by measurement, or in laboratories.

To Summarise, Qualitative Research:

- Uses words rather than numbers.
- Flows from concreteness to abstractness.
- Compared to quantitative research is relatively new. Thus, new techniques and strategies are emerging.

- Data collection occurs concurrently with data analysis.
- Involves the researcher influencing the individuals being studied to varying degrees. In turn, the researcher is influenced by those being studied.

REFERENCES

1. Cohen, L. and L. Manion, 1989. Research Methods in Education. (Third ed.). London, England: Routledge.
2. Bryman, A. and R. Burgess, (Eds). 1993. Analysing Qualitative Data. London, Routledge.
3. Denzin, Norman K. and S. Lincoln, Yvonna (Eds.). 2005. The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-2757-3.
4. Miles, M.B. and A.M. Huberman, 1984. Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.
5. Denzin, Norman K. and S. Lincoln, Yvonna (Eds.). 2005. The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-2757-3.
6. Creswell, J.W., 1994. Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
7. Creswell, J.W., 1994. Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
8. Guba, E.G. and Y.S. Lincoln, 2005. "Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging influences" The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd ed.), pp.191-215. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-2757-3.
9. Creswell, J.W., 1994. Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
10. James P. Spradley, 1980. Participant observation. For Worth: Harcourt Brace.
11. John Lofland and Lyn H. Lofland, 1995. Analyzing Social Settings, 3rd ed.
12. Anselm L. Strauss, 1987. Qualitative analysis for social scientists. New York: Cambridge University Press.
13. Sharon Merriam, 1988. Case study research in education. Jossey-Bass.
14. Report P. Gephart, 1988. Ethnostatistics: Qualitative foundations for quantitative research. Newbury Park, Cal: Sage Publications.
15. Miles, M.B. and A.M. Huberman, 1994. Qualitative data analysis. 2nd ed. Newbury Park, Cal.: sage [Note: I think this may well be the best book available on qualitative data analysis].

16. Moustakas, C., 1990. Heuristic Research. Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage; and Moustakas, C. 1994. Phenomenological research methods. Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage.
17. Frederick Erickson, 1992. Ethnographic microanalysis of interaction. In M. LeCompte, *et al.*, (eds). The handbook of qualitative research in education (chapter 5). San Diego: Academic Press.
18. Jack Katz, 1983. A theory of qualitative methodology. In: R.M. Emerson, (Ed.), Contemporary field research. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland.
19. Max Van Manen, 1990. Researching lived experience. New York: State University of New York Press.
20. Peter K. Manning, 1987. Semiotics and fieldwork. Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage.
21. James P. Gee, 1992. Discourse analysis. In M. LeCompte, *et al.*, (Eds), *The handbook of qualitative research in education* (chapter 6). San Diego: Academic Press.
22. Catherine K. Reisman, 1993. Narrative analysis. Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage.
23. Weber, R.P., 1990. Basic content analysis. Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage.
24. James P. Spradley, 1980. Participant observation. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace. Also see J. P. Spradley, Ethnographic interview (1979, Same Publisher).
25. Nick Smith, 1981. Metaphors for evaluation. Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage.
26. Creswell, J.W., 1994. Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.