



Qualitative Research Approach

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Abstract: *The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured [if measured at all] in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Qualitative forms of inquiry are considered by many social and behavioral scientists to be as much a perspective on how to approach investigating a research problem as it is a method. This paper covers the theme to understand the qualitative methodology significantly.*

Key Words: *Qualitative research methods, Social and behavioral studies.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A starting point in trying to understand the collection of information for research purposes is that there are broadly two approaches: quantitative research and qualitative research. Early forms of research originated in the natural sciences such as biology, chemistry, physics, geology and it was concerned with investigating things which we could observe and measure in some way. Such observations and measurements can be made objectively and repeated by other researchers. This process is referred to as “quantitative” research.

Much later, along came researchers working in the social sciences: psychology, sociology, anthropology etc. They were interested in studying human behavior and the social world inhabited by human beings. They found increasing difficulty in trying to explain human behavior in simply measurable terms. Measurements tell us how often or how many people behave in a certain way but they do not adequately answer the question “why?” Research which attempts to increase our understanding of why things are the way they are in our social world and why people act the ways they do is “qualitative” research.

Qualitative research attempts to broaden and/or deepen our understanding of how things came to be the way they are in our social world. If the research question involves exploring how people experience something, or what their views are, exploring a new area where issues are not yet understood or properly identified (e.g. before developing questionnaire items), assessing whether a new service is implementable, looking at ‘real-life’ context, or a sensitive topic where you need flexibility to avoid causing distress, your team probably needs to discuss using qualitative methodology.

II. THE NATURE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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 the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about:

- ❖ 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 in the way they have

Qualitative research is concerned with finding the answers to questions which begin with: why? how? in what way? Quantitative research, on the other hand, is more concerned with questions about: how much? How many? How often? To what extent? Further features of qualitative research and how it differs from quantitative research are listed below.

- ❖ Qualitative research is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data.
- ❖ Qualitative research describes social phenomena as they occur naturally. No attempt is made to manipulate the situation under study as is the case with experimental quantitative research.
- ❖ Understanding of a situation is gained through an holistic perspective. Quantitative research depends on the ability to identify a set of variables.



- ❖ Data are used to develop concepts and theories that help us to understand the social world. This is an inductive approach to the development of theory. Quantitative research is deductive in that it tests theories which have already been proposed
- ❖ Qualitative data are collected through direct encounters with individuals, through one to one interviews or group interviews or by observation. Data collection is time consuming.
- ❖ The intensive and time consuming nature of data collection necessitates the use of small samples.
- ❖ Different sampling techniques are used. In quantitative research, sampling seeks to demonstrate representativeness of findings through random selection of subjects. Qualitative sampling techniques are concerned with seeking information from specific groups and subgroups in the population.
- ❖ Criteria used to assess reliability and validity differ from those used in quantitative research

III. WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

There are about as many definitions of qualitative research as there are books on the subject. Some authors highlight the research purpose and focus:

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. (Merriam, 2009, p. 13)

Others emphasize an epistemological stance:

[Qualitative research is] research using methods such as participant observation or case studies which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice. Sociologists using these methods typically reject positivism and adopt a form of interpretive sociology. (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011)

Still other definitions focus on the process and context of data collection:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3)

A. What are ‘Qualitative Methods’?

‘Qualitative methods’ is a broad term that can be applied to a range of research approaches that have their theoretical origins in a range of disciplines.

The Research Design process in qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study. In addition, researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or set of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study. Further, in many approaches to qualitative research, the researchers use interpretive and theoretical framework to further shape the study.

There are 5 methods for Qualitative Researches as mentioned as follows.

Ethnography:

In which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational data (Creswell, 1998). The research process is flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting (Lecompte and Schensul, 1999).

Grounded Theory:

In which the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study. This process involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). Two primary characteristics of this design are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize the similarities and the differences of information.

Case Studies:

In which the researcher explores in depth a program, and event, and activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995).

**Phenomenological Research:**

In which the researcher identifies the "essence" of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Understanding the "lived experiences" marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustaas, 1994). In this process, the researcher "brackets" this or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993)

Narrative Research:

A form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then retold or restored by the researcher into a narrative chronology. In the end, the narrative combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

B. Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research:

The use of reliability and validity are common in quantitative research and now it is reconsidered in the qualitative research paradigm. Since reliability and validity are rooted in positivist perspective then they should be redefined for their use in a naturalistic approach. Like reliability and validity as used in quantitative research are providing springboard to examine what these two terms mean in the qualitative research paradigm, triangulation as used in quantitative research to test the reliability and validity can also illuminate some ways to test or maximize the validity and reliability of a qualitative study. Therefore, reliability, validity and triangulation, if they are relevant research concepts, particularly from a qualitative point of view, have to be redefined in order to reflect the multiple ways of establishing truth.

Reliability:

Although the term 'Reliability' is a concept used for testing or evaluating quantitative research, the idea is most often used in all kinds of research. If we see the idea of testing as a way of information elicitation then the most important test of any qualitative study is its quality. A good qualitative study can help us "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). This relates to the concept of a good quality research when reliability is a concept to evaluate quality in quantitative study with a "purpose of explaining" while quality concept in qualitative study has the purpose of "generating understanding" (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551). The difference in purposes of evaluating the quality of studies in quantitative and qualitative research is one of the reasons that the concept of reliability is irrelevant in qualitative research. According to Stenbacka (2001) "The concept of reliability is even misleading in qualitative research. If a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is rather that the study is no good" (p. 552)

On the other hand, Patton (2001) states that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study.

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Seale (1999), while establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, states that the "trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability" (p. 266).

Validity:

The concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies. This concept is not a single, fixed or universal concept, but "rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects" (Winter, 2000, p.1). Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, but at the same time, they have realised the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure for their research.

For example, Creswell & Miller (2000) suggest that the validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption. As a result, many researchers have developed their own concepts of validity and have often generated or adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as, quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001).

The issue of validity in qualitative research has not been disregarded by Stenbacka (2001) as she has for the issue of reliability in qualitative research. Instead, she argues that the concept of validity should be redefined for qualitative researches. Stenbacka (2001) describes the notion of reliability as one of the quality concepts in qualitative research which "to be solved in order to claim a study as part of proper research" (p. 551).

In searching for the meaning of rigor in research, Davies and Dodd (2002) find that the term rigor in research appears in reference to the discussion about reliability and validity. Davies and Dodd (2002) argue that the application of the notion rigor in qualitative research should differ from those in quantitative research by "accepting that there is a quantitative bias in the concept of rigor, we now move on to develop our preconception of rigor by exploring subjectivity, reflexivity, and the social interaction of interviewing" (p. 281).



Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that sustaining the trustworthiness of a research report depends on the issues, quantitatively, discussed as validity and reliability. The idea of discovering truth through measures of reliability and validity is replaced by the idea of trustworthiness (Mishler, 2000), which is “defensible” (Johnson 1997, p. 282) and establishing confidence in the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

If the issues of reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigor are meant differentiating a 'good' from 'bad' research then testing and increasing the reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigor will be important to the research in any paradigm.

C. Testing Validity and Reliability:

So far, the concepts of reliability and validity as they have been redefined for their usefulness in qualitative research have been presented. Now, the question which remains to be answered is ‘How to test or maximize the validity and as a result the reliability of a qualitative study?’ 603 *The Qualitative Report* December 2003

If the validity or trustworthiness can be maximized or tested then more “credible and defensible result” (Johnson, 1997, p. 283) may lead to generalizability which is one of the concepts suggested by Stenbacka (2001) as the structure for both doing and documenting high quality qualitative research. Therefore, the quality of a research is related to generalizability of the result and thereby to the testing and increasing the validity or trustworthiness of the research.

In contrast, Maxwell (1992)[60] observes that the degree to which an account is believed to be generalizable is a factor that clearly distinguishes quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Although the ability to generalize findings to wider groups and circumstances is one of the most common tests of validity for quantitative research, but Patton (2001) states generalizability as one of the criteria for quality case studies depending on the case selected and studied. In this sense the validity in quantitative research is very specific to the test to which it is applied – where triangulation methods are used in qualitative research. Triangulation is typically a strategy (test) for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings.

D. Triangulation in Qualitative Research:

Mathison (1988) elaborates this by saying: Triangulation has raised an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology. (p. 13)

Patton (2001) advocates the use of triangulation by stating “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 247) However, the idea of combining methods has been challenged by Barbour (1998). She argues while mixing paradigms can be possible but mixing methods within one paradigm, such as qualitative research, is problematic since each method within the qualitative paradigm has its own assumption in “terms of theoretical frameworks we bring to bear on our research” (p. 353). Even though triangulation is used in quantitative paradigm for confirmation and generalization of a research, Barbour (1998) does not disregard the notion of triangulation in qualitative paradigm and she states the need to define triangulation from a qualitative research’s perspective in each paradigm. For example, in using triangulation of several data sources in quantitative research, any exception may lead to a disconfirmation of the hypothesis where exceptions in qualitative research are dealt to modify the theories and are fruitful.

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