

ECSO5003

DR CAROLINE LOHMANN-HANCOCK

What is Qualitative Research?

‘Qualitative research seems to promise that we will avoid or downplay statistical techniques and the kind of mechanics of the kinds of quantitative methods used in e.g survey research.....’

(Silverman, 2000)

Qualitative research...

‘... has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments of how things work in particular contexts’

(Mason, 2002)

Qualitative research connects context with explanation

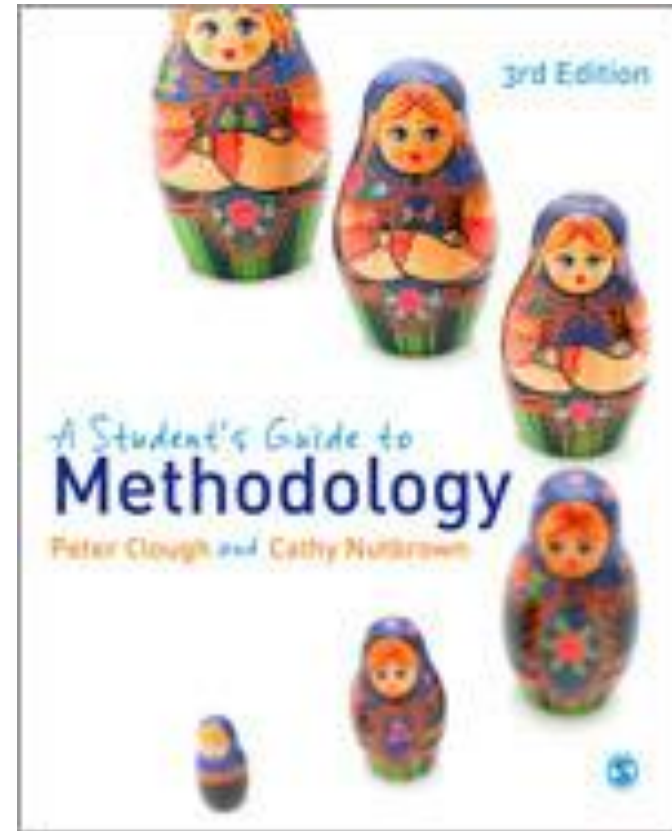
Discuss

What is this research paper telling you from:

- A quantitative researchers point of view?
- A qualitative researchers point of view?

Methodology versus Methods

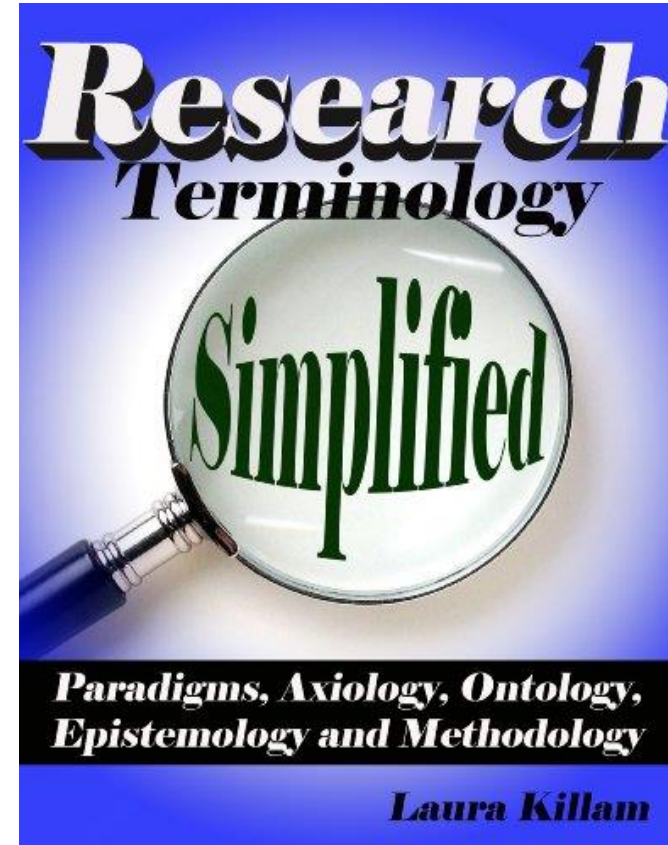
Clough P. & Nutbrown C (2012) *A Student's Guide to Methodology*, London: Sage.



What is Methodology?

Killam, L. (2015) *Research Terminology Simplified: Paradigms, Axiology, Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology*, Kindle.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCOsY5rkRs8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xvpXBVCo0c>



Paradigm

Based upon:

- Ontology
 - Epistemology
 - Methodology

- (Guba & Lincoln, xxx).

Ontology

- From the Greek work 'to be'.
 - Beliefs about the nature of reality
- What we believe impacts upon our Ontology

What is True?

What Exists?

What is Real?

Epistemology

Driven by Ontological Beliefs

- More philosophical than methodology
- How we come to know what we know
- Our Ontological beliefs will dictate how objective the relationship between the researcher and what can be known should be

What is the relationships between the researcher and what can be known?

Methodology

The way we go about discovering knowledge in a systematic way.

How do we discover Knowledge?

It is more specific and practice based than epistemology

The Appropriate Methodology is driven by our ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Paradigm

Ontology within Qualitative and Quantitative Paradigms

Perceptions of Reality

- Qualitative = Realism
- Quantitative = Relativism
- Perceptions that fall within these two positions.

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 107) define paradigms as 'basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions'

Qualitative

- Constructivism
- Critical theory
- Post-positivism

Quantitative

- Positivism

Paradigm: Positivism

Ontology:

- Realism = One reality exists that can be found
- Epistemology = Dualist and objective
- Methodology = Experimental leading to decontextualized results
 - The methodology in this paradigm is therefore experimental or manipulative in nature where hypotheses are tested and quantitative methods are viewed as superior.
 - Measures are taken to control anything that may influence the research.

Positivism is a paradigm of inquiry

- searches for "the truth" or facts about reality.
- a belief that there is an objective, constant reality that exists and can be measured objectively.
- Since a reality exists that can be discovered the epistemology within positivism is objective in nature.

This objectivity means that

- the researcher maintains distance from the researched in order to prevent any influence on the results.

Ontology: Realism

Realists believe in:

- 'the truth' that is objective, static and measurable
- Context-free generalisations
- Cause and effect laws
- Research that converges on the truth
- Reductionist and deterministic approaches

Reality exists

Driven by natural laws

This reality is objective,

independent of any theories or human beliefs
or human behaviour

and exists even if it is not yet known.

It is context-free.

*Realism is the ontological perspective within
the quantitative or positivist paradigm of
research.*

Paradigm: Modernism

Modernism is based on

- generalized truths about reality.

It emerged during the modern period in history where it was believed that

- reasoning, science and technology
- would improve our body of knowledge and well-being
- due to rational control of nature and society

Modernists search for certainty and permanent universal laws.

Ontology: Relativism

Relativists believe in:

- Searching for meaning rather than truth
- 'Truths' are subjective, dynamic and contextual
- Knowledge that is contextual
- Multiple truths that may conflict but are still true
- Perceptions or truths that may change with time
- Relativism is the ontological perspective within the
 - qualitative
 - or constructivist paradigm of research

The strongest contrasting ontological perspective to realism is relativism

Research founded on relativism searches for meaning in the experiences of individuals

Relativism is the belief that reality cannot exist without context

Relativists believe that there are multiple mental constructions of reality

These realities are influenced by experiences and social interactions

Each person therefore has their own reality that is considered "correct"

Paradigm: Constructivism

Ontology:

- Relativism
 - Realities are co-constructed
 - that individuals or groups construct meaning or reality based on interactions with the social environment
- Epistemology:
 - Interactive/transactional and subjective with co-created findings
 - considers the researcher and participant as co-creators of the findings
- Methodology:
 - Qualitative, interpretative, and logical with a well described context
 - based on interactions between and among the researcher and participant

- We do not find knowledge, we construct it
- It is therefore possible to have
 - multiple,
 - socially constructed realities
 - that are all considered correct
- Constructivists
 - reject the notion that an objective reality exists
- It involves interaction between the researcher and participants
- A consensus is sought within the findings
- Qualitative methods
 - like in-depth interviews are used and context is well described.

Post-Modernism

- Combination of both Positivism and Constructivism
 - although these are opposing perspectives!!!
- Post-modernism represents
 - a range of viewpoints
 - and is therefore impossible to define!!

Post-modernists believe that

- it is not possible to define social phenomenon,
- meaning that attempting to define it would be contrary to postmodernism itself

Alternatively they postulate that:

- Instead, it is a term that refers to a movement away from traditional schools of thought that is founded on a distrust of large or abstract theories that explain reality

Postmodernists do not believe in a truth that can be defined

Paradigm: Post-Positivism

Ontology:

- Critical Realism
 - 'Truth' exists but it cannot be accurately detected

Epistemology:

- Modified Dualist and Objective
- Values objectivity
 - But they do not think it is not possible to maintain such objectivity – absolute distance from the researched
 - Try to control potential influences that the researcher's background knowledge could have on observations.

Methodology:

- Modified Experimental and interpretive Research
- Qualitative and Quantitative
- Falsifying hypothesis through quasi-experimental methods

Theory:

- Can not be proven but a strong case can be made for it by disproving alternative explanations

Like realists,

- critical realists believe that a reality exists

However,

- they do not think that it can be perfectly detected
- due to our flawed ways of finding it
- as well as the nature of phenomena

Critical Realists believe that

- that claims of reality need to be critically examined in a variety of ways
- in order to get the closest possible estimation of reality
- but it will never be perfect

Findings:

- Evaluated based on pre-existing knowledge and critique

Paradigm: Critical Realism

Ontology:

- Realist

Epistemology:

- relativist
- Critical realists believe that a reality exists, which does not depend on our perception of it

Paradigm: Critical Theory

Ontology:

- Historical Realism

Epistemology:

- Transactional and Subjective findings that are influenced by Values

Methodology:

- Dialogue based and logical

Critical Realists believe that:

- reality exists
- which does not depend on our perception of it

Critical Theory:

- Paradigm that represents
- a further shift from positivism than post-positivism.
- It is founded on historical realism
- which essentially proposes that what is seen as real
- has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values
- While these "realities" are inaccurately considered truth
- they are essentially real now.

Main Research Methods Associated with Qualitative Research

Ethnography/participant observation

Qualitative interviewing

Focus groups

Language based approaches to the collection of data

The collection and qualitative analysis of texts and documents

Features of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers

Features of Qualitative Research

Theory is generated out of the research

Focus is toward understanding the social world through examining the way in which participants interpret that world

Social properties are outcomes of interactions between individuals rather than separate phenomena

Student Task

Complete the two short exercises and come back prepared to discuss what you have learned from the process of doing them and how you think the activities may throw light on doing qualitative research.

Task 1

Separate in two 2/3s

Interview each other about a subject about which the 'interviewer' know little

- Note down . . .
 - what the 'interviewee' says
 - How they say it
 - Describe their appearance
 - Describe their mannerisms
- Consider the challenges and possibilities

Task 2

Go into the Halliwell and spread out

Choose another person in your group to describe at a distance

- Describe someone in the group just by observing them during a 15/20 min period

Consider the challenges and possibilities

Features of Qualitative Research

Focus is toward understanding the social world through examining the way in which participants interpret that world

Social properties are outcomes of interactions between individuals rather than separate phenomena

Criticisms of Qualitative

Qualitative research is often treated as a relatively minor methodology

- 'Non Quantified Data'

Problems with reliability?

'Anecdotalism' questions validity?

Reference List

- Cohen L., Manion, L., & Morrison K. (2000). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge Falmer,
- Costley C; Elliot, C,G; Gibbs P (2010) *Doing Work Based Research: Approaches to Enquiry for Insider-Researchers*. London: Sag
- Creswell, J, W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative, & Mixed Methods Approaches*. LA: Sage
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds). (2011) 'Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research', in Denzin, NK & Lincoln, YS. (eds) (2011) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousands Oaks: Sage
- Denzin, NK & Lincoln, YS. (eds) (2011) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousands Oaks: Sage
- Macintyre. (2000) *The Art of Action Research*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Mercer, J. (2007) 'The Challenges of Insider Research in Educational Institutions: Wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas' *Oxford Review of Education*, 2007, 33 (1), pp. 1-17
- McNiff,J.,Lomax,P.,&White,J.(2003) *You and Your Action Research Project*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- O'Donoghue, T. (2007) *Planning Your Qualitative Research Project: An Introduction to Interpretivist Research in Education*, Abingdon, Routledge
- Punch K, (2005) *Introduction to Social Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, London: Sage.