

Qualitative Research

Week 5

Qualitative research writing

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Questions for Discussion

- What are the key characteristics of qualitative research?
- Why do researchers conduct a qualitative study?
- What is required to undertake this type of research?
- How do researchers design a qualitative study?
- What topics should be addressed in a plan or proposal for a qualitative study?

The Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- *Qualitative research* begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.
- Qualitative researchers use:
 - The collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to people and places under study
 - Data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes.

The Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- There are several common characteristics of qualitative research:
 - *Natural setting* – data is collected in the field at the site where participants' experience the issue or problem under study.
 - *Researcher as key instrument* – researchers collect data themselves. They do not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers.
 - *Multiple sources of data* – interviews, observations, documents, etc. are gathered.
 - *Inductive data analysis* – patterns, categories, and themes are built from the “bottom-up”

The Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- *Participants' meanings* – the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue.
- *Emergent design* – the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed and all phases of the process may change or shift after research begins.
- *Theoretical lens* – a lens is used to view studies, such as concepts of culture, social, political, or historical contexts.

The Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- *Interpretive inquiry* – researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand.
- *Holistic account* – researchers try to develop an understandable picture of the problem or issue under study. Researchers try to identify the complex interactions of factors in any situation.

When to Use Qualitative Research

- We conduct qualitative research because:
 - A problem or issue needs to be explored
 - Need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue
 - Want to empower individuals to share their stories without the power relationship between researcher and participant
 - To write in a literary, flexible style without formal academic structures of writing
 - To understand contexts or settings of participants
 - To follow up quantitative research
 - Quantitative measures do not fit the problem

When to Use Qualitative Research

- Qualitative inquiry is for the researcher that is willing to:
 - Commit extensive time in the field.
 - Engage in the complex, time-consuming process of data analysis.
 - Write long passages.
 - Participate in a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or procedures and is constantly changing.

The Process of Designing a Qualitative Study

- All researchers typically:
 - Start with an issue or problem
 - Examine the literature
 - Pose questions
 - Gather data
 - Analyze data
 - Write up reports

Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research

- The researcher determines if the research problem is best examined using a phenomenological approach.
- A phenomenon of interest to study is identified.
- The researcher recognizes and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.
- Data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.
- The participants are asked two broad general questions:
 1. What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?
 2. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?

Challenges

- Phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals.
- Knowing some common experiences can be valuable for groups such as therapists, health personnel, and policymakers.
- Phenomenology can involve a streamlined form of data collection by including only single or multiple interviews with participants.

The Process of Designing a Qualitative Study

- Four basic types of information:

1. Interviews
2. Observations
3. Documents
4. Audiovisual materials

- The backbone of qualitative research is extensive collection of data from multiple sources.

- After organizing, analyze and try to make sense of the data.

The Process of Designing a Qualitative Study

- As data is collected, shape the narrative.
 - Talk about our experiences in conducting the study and how they shape our interpretations of the results.
- Be sensitive to ethical considerations:
 - Personal information
 - Slow withdrawal
 - Power imbalances
 - Consent
 - Confidentiality/Anonymity

The Process of Designing a Qualitative Study

- Characteristics of a *good* qualitative study:
 - Researcher employs rigorous data collection procedures.
 - collects multiple forms of data
 - adequately summarizes data
 - spends adequate time in the field
 - Researcher frames the study within the assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach to research. Includes:
 - evolving design
 - presentation of multiple realities
 - researcher as instrument of data collection
 - focus on participants views

The Process of Designing a Qualitative Study

- Researcher writes persuasively so that the reader experiences “being there.”
 - Writing is clear, engaging, and full of unexpected ideas.
- Study reflects the history, culture, and personal experiences of the researcher.
- Research is ethical.

Maxwell's Nine Arguments for a Qualitative Proposal

We need to better understand . . . (the topic).

We know little about . . . (the topic).

I propose to study . . .

The setting and participants are appropriate for this study.

The methods I plan to use will provide the data I need to answer the research questions.

Analysis will generate answers to these questions.

The findings will be validated by . . .

The study poses no serious ethical problems.

Preliminary results support the practicability and value of the study.

Summary

- Qualitative research is:
 - an approach to inquiry that begins with assumptions, worldviews, possible a theoretical lens
 - the study of research problems exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem
- Researchers collect data in natural settings with a sensitivity to the people under study.
- Data is analyzed inductively to establish patterns or themes.

Summary

- The final report provides for:
 - The voices of the participants
 - A reflexivity of the researchers
 - A complex description and interpretation of the problem
 - A study that adds to literature or provides a call for action
- The structure of a plan or proposal for a qualitative study will vary.