

Chapter 30

Qualitative Methods in Research: Alternative Approaches and Navigating Complexities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses various methods and approaches to data collection under the qualitative methodology framework, noting that these methods provide rigour and depth understanding in an inquiry. Though the chapter touches on traditional qualitative methods such as the interview and observations, it focused more on examining alternative and non-traditional qualitative methods in data collection, such as the bricolage and distance researching. The chapter further identified other strategies such as sampling, triangulation and ethical considerations that may be relevant to a qualitative study. The chapter helps the reader to reach a broad-based understanding as to the location of qualitative research and the methodological demands necessary to apprehend complex social worlds of studied participants.

INTRODUCTION

The qualitative method has become a dominant approach characterizing much of the research that is conducted by both students and senior researchers. In some quarters the qualitative method is also referred to as the naturalistic approach. Eisner (1985: 198) argued and rightfully so, that 'the field of research needs to avoid methodological monism.' Methodological monism can be seen in two ways:

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the first may have to do with a preoccupation or obsession with doing all research in a positivist way; and secondly, the failure to appreciate that some aspects of diverse methods can and do co-exist and complement one another.

Patton (2015) also contends that depending on the strategy intended to elicit data from different sources within the same enquiry and other alternative approaches can be applied. This chapter will discuss main methods in qualitative research and other alternative research strategies relevant to a qualitative inquiry that are suitable in apprehending phenomena especially in challenging contexts devoid of the convention. The main areas to be discussed in this chapter will include the following:

- Brief Background
- Research Methods
- Triangulation
- Alternative Strategies in Qualitative Research
- Ethical considerations
- Access and Sampling

By the end of this chapter, the reader should be able to explain some qualitative approaches to data collection, identify qualitative sampling procedures, and examine the nature and characteristics of alternative methods.

Furthermore, they should be able to make some ethical considerations related to qualitative methods and locate the critical place of validity and triangulation in qualitative methods.

Case Study

Mary, an undergraduate student had her first encounter with research methods and found it difficult to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative methods of research. She set out to write a research proposal where she had to give a rationale for choices made. Having chosen to collect data using the interview and observation methods she went on to propose that she will use random sampling on participants and indicated how she will interact with participants. Unfortunately, her lecturer marked her down for failure to align relevant sampling strategies to the chosen qualitative methodology. Worse still, she failed to consider ethical standards about interactions with participants. This disappointed her a lot but later motivated her to read more on research methods going into her master's degree, to align and support her rationale more effectively.

The case study above shows how easy it is, especially for beginners in research studies to falter when it comes to aligning methodologies and proving appropriate rationale and expectations for a qualitative inquiry. It is noted that while the truth is good, respect for human dignity is better. By its nature, the qualitative method is considerate of ethical issues. The researcher needs to act ethically in accessing various information, data and setting up meetings or interview times. Despite varied claims about what quantitative methods can achieve, it is imperative to state that the qualitative method is critical for enhanced understanding in an enquiry.

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