

# EDUCATION 5.0

# PERSPECTIVES

# AND


# PINPOINTERS

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## METHODS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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### Abstract

This article brings in the fundamentals of qualitative research in education: meaning, characteristics, different types, methods, advantages and disadvantages. Qualitative research has big bang in educational field. How a qualitative research can be done in an educational research is also outlined in this study.

### Introduction:

Qualitative research is an umbrella term for various philosophical orientations to interpretive research. Some of the qualitative research methods are ethnography, case study, phenomenology and educational criticism. Qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry that seeks in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting. It focuses on the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena and relies on the direct experiences. It collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help people understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places. It uses multiple systems of inquiry for the study of human phenomena including biography, case study, historical analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenology.

### Meaning:

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative research stresses upon the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. So the people who do qualitative research emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

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. Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. Qualitative Research is also used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem.

### Characteristics:

The following are the basic qualitative research characteristics.

1. It begins with a single case, chosen because of its convenience or interest.
2. It studies phenomena in the contexts in which they arise through observation and/or recording or the analysis of printed and Internet material.
3. The hypotheses are often generated from the analysis rather than stated at the outset.
4. There is no one agreed way to analyze the data.
5. Multiple research models exist and sometimes conflict with each other
6. Where numbers are used, these are usually in the form of simple tabulations designed to identify deviant cases and do not lead to statistical correlations or tests.

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7. The design of a qualitative research is generally based on a social constructivism perspective.
8. The research problems become research questions based on prior research experience. The sample sizes can be as small as one.
9. The data collection involves interview, observation, and/or archival (content) data.
10. Interpretation is based on a combination of researcher perspective and data collected.

### **Qualitative Research in Education:**

It is difficult to find a clear-cut and ultimate meaning or definition as to what qualitative research in education actually is. Lancy (1993) points out to the fact that topic, theory and methodology are usually closely interrelated in qualitative research. Therefore, for a brief meaning and definition one has to center on the methods, terms and topics employed in qualitative research.

These have been quite diverse. Bogdan and Biklen (1994) point out that qualitative research in education draws from many sources, reflected by the use of such terms as symbolic interactionist, inner perspective, phenomenological, case study, interpretive, ethnomethodological and descriptive.

### **Methods of Qualitative Research:**

There are a variety of methods to be followed in a qualitative research, including observations, textual analysis from books or visual analysis from videos and interviews that may be individual or group. Qualitative researchers use their own eyes, ears, and intelligence to collect in-depth perceptions and descriptions of targeted populations, places, and events. Their findings are collected through a variety of methods, and often, a researcher will use at least two or several of the following methods while conducting a qualitative study.

**Direct Observation:** Direct observation is a distinguished method that can be used for a qualitative research. First, a direct observer doesn't typically try to become a participant in the context. However, the direct observer does strive to be as unobtrusive as possible so as not to bias the observations. Second, direct observation suggests a more detached perspective. The researcher is watching rather than taking part. Consequently, technology can be a useful part of direct observation. For instance, one can videotape the phenomenon or observe from behind one-way mirrors. Third, direct observation tends to be more focused than participant observation. The researcher is observing certain sampled situations or people rather than trying to become immersed in the entire context. Finally, direct observation tends not to take as long as participant observation. For instance, one might observe teacher – student interactions under specific circumstances in a laboratory or in a class room setting from behind a one-way mirror, looking especially for the nonverbal cues being used. With direct observation, a researcher studies people as they go about their daily lives without participating or interfering. For example, a researcher might observe the ways in which students interact in playground as they gather to play.

**Participant Observation:** Participant observation is also one of the most demanding methods for qualitative data collection. It requires that the researcher become a participant in the culture or context being observed. Participant observation often requires months or years of intensive work because the researcher needs to become accepted as a natural part of the culture in order to assure that the observations are of the natural phenomenon. This method is similar to observation, however with this one, the researcher also participates in the action or events in order to not only observe others but to gain the first-hand experience in the setting.

**Open-Ended Surveys:** While many surveys are designed to generate quantitative data, open-ended questions help a researcher to collect qualitative data. For example, a survey might be

used to investigate not just which teacher is considered as an efficient teacher, but why he is considered as efficient in the own words of students.

**Focus Group:** Focus groups share many common features with less structured interviews, but there is more to them than merely collecting similar data from many participants at once. A focus group is a group discussion on a particular topic organized for research purposes. This discussion is guided, monitored and recorded by a researcher. In a focus group, a researcher engages a small group of participants in a conversation designed to generate data relevant to the research question. Focus groups can contain anywhere from 5 to 15 participants. Educational researchers also can use it for example by examining an event or trend such as student involvement in political parties and protest for common social issues.

**In-depth Interviews:** Researchers conduct in-depth interviews by speaking with participants in a one-on-one setting. Sometimes a researcher approaches the interview with a predetermined list of questions or topics for discussion but allows the conversation to evolve based on how the participant responds. Other times, the researcher has identified certain topics of interest but does not have a formal guide for the conversation, but allows the participant to guide it. For example in educational research text book analysis and curriculum evaluation may be done by in depth interviews from the students.

**Oral History:** The oral history method is used to create a historical account of an event, group, or community, and typically involves a series of in-depth interviews conducted with one or multiple participants over an extended period of time. For example the growth and development of education from a specified time may be studied through oral history.

**Ethnographic Observation:** Ethnography is a multi-method qualitative approach that studies people in their naturally occurring settings. The purpose is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice. An ethnographic understanding is developed through close exploration of several sources like participant observation, observation, interviews, documents, newspapers, magazine articles or artifacts.

Ethnographic observation is the most intensive and in-depth observational method. Originating in anthropology, with this method, a researcher fully immerses herself into the research setting and lives among the participants as one of them for anywhere from months to years. By doing this, the researcher attempts to see events and have experiences from the viewpoints of those studied in order to develop an in-depth and long-term account of the community, events, or trends under observation.

**Content Analysis:** Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique. Rather than being a single method, current applications of content analysis show three distinct approaches: conventional, directed, or summative. All three approaches are used to interpret meaning from the content of text data and, hence, adhere to the naturalistic paradigm. The major differences among the approaches are coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness. This method is used by sociologists to analyze social life by interpreting words and images from documents, film, art, music, and other cultural products and media. The researchers look at how the words and images are used, and the context in which they are used to draw inferences about the underlying culture. In the last decade, content analysis of digital material, especially that generated by social media users, has become a popular technique within the social sciences.

**Phenomenology:** Phenomenology is a research methodology which has its roots in philosophy focusing on the lived experience of individuals. Phenomenological researchers are interested in the nature or meaning of something, their questions are about essence and not about appearance. There is strong emphasis on the researcher's personal experience of the research process itself. Data are collected through a variety of means: observation, interviews, focus groups, diaries, videotape and written descriptions by subjects. During the

process of analysis, the researcher reflects upon his or her own preconceptions about the data grasping the experiential world of the research participant. Analysis is largely inductive and not guided by a formulated hypothesis.

**Phenomenography:** Phenomenography is a qualitative research methodology, within the interpretive paradigm, that investigates the qualitatively different ways in which people experience something or think about something. It is an approach to educational research which appeared in publications in the early 1980s. It initially emerged from an empirical rather than a theoretical or philosophical basis.

Phenomenography is related to a field of knowledge, which is defined by having experience as the subject of the study. It takes a non-dualistic ontological perspective; meaning that object and subject are not separate and independent of each other. When a textbook and someone who is reading it are considered, we cannot assume the text in itself and the reader's conceptions are separate things. There is not going to be a textbook in itself, it always has meaning to someone and it is not going to be independent from the reader (Walker, 1998).

**Narrative Method:** Narrative research is a term that subsumes a group of approaches that in turn rely on the written or spoken words or visual representation of individuals. These approaches typically focus on the lives of individuals as told through their own stories. The emphasis in such approaches is on the story, typically both what and how is narrated. Narrative research can be considered both a research method in itself but also the phenomenon under study. A number of data collection methods can be used, as the researcher and the research subjects work together in this collaborative dialogic relationship. Data can be in the form of field notes; journal records; interview transcripts; one's own and other's observations; storytelling; letter writing; autobiographical writing; documents such as school and class plans, newsletters, and other texts, such as rules and principles; and pictures. Audio and video recordings are also useful data in narrative research.

**Action Research:** Action research consists of a family of research methodologies. The focus is a social problem, rather than the theoretical interests of a scientist. It is a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams, as part of a community of practice. The aim is to promote change by engaging participants in a process of sharing knowledge. Types of data include interviews, focus groups, observation, participant observation, participant-written cases and accounts.

**Case Study:** A case study is based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group, or event to explore causation in order to find underlying principles. It may involve the collection of both qualitative and quantitative like documents, researchers' field notes, interview transcripts, interview protocols, photos of environmental texts found in the communities under study (e.g., signs, books, advertisements, magazines, etc.), scanned artifacts collected during the conduct of the field work (e.g., newspapers, flyers, memos), official documents, and all other collected data such as the demographic information of participants and video recordings archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, physical artifacts. Several analytic strategies for case studies have been described like placing the evidence in a matrix of categories, pattern matching, statistical procedures, and also coding has been proposed as a way to approach analysis.

**Grounded Theory:** Grounded Theory is an inductive methodology. Although many call Grounded Theory a qualitative method, it is not. It is a general method. It is the systematic generation of theory from systematic research. It is a set of rigorous research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories. The purpose of a grounded theory study is to generate, or discover, a theory. A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from

the study of phenomena. The theory is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages:**

Qualitative research is not a part of statistical analysis. That's because the results can't be tested to see if they are statistically significant. As a result, findings can't be extended to a wider population. That doesn't mean this type of research is useless: in many studies, getting hard numbers is inappropriate or just impossible. The advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research are quite unique.

#### **Advantages:**

- a) Subject materials can be evaluated with greater detail.
- b) Research frameworks can be fluid and based on incoming or available data.
- c) Qualitative research data is based on human experiences and observations.
- d) Gathered data has a predictive quality to it.
- e) Qualitative research operates within structures that are fluid.
- f) Data complexities can be incorporated into generated conclusions.
- g) Qualitative research is an open-ended process.
- h) Creativity becomes a desirable quality within qualitative research.
- i) Qualitative research can create industry-specific insights.
- j) Smaller sample sizes are used in qualitative research, which can save on costs.
- k) Qualitative research provides more content for creative and marketing teams.
- l) Attitude explanations become possible with qualitative research.

#### **Disadvantages:**

- a) The quality of the data gathered in qualitative research is highly subjective.
- b) Data rigidity is more difficult to assess and demonstrate.
- c) Mining data gathered by qualitative research can be time consuming.
- d) Qualitative research creates findings that are valuable, but difficult to present.
- e) Data created through qualitative research is not always accepted.
- f) Researcher influence can have a negative effect on the collected data.
- g) Replicating results can be very difficult with qualitative research.
- h) Difficult decisions may require repetitive qualitative research periods.
- i) Unseen data can disappear during the qualitative research process.
- j) Researchers must have industry-related expertise.
- k) Qualitative research is not statistically representative.

#### **Conclusion**

Qualitative research has both merits and demerits. It paves way for an in-depth understanding of the attitudes, behaviors, interactions, events, and social processes that comprise everyday life. The methods also have the benefit of being flexible and easily adaptable to changes in the research environment and can be conducted with minimal cost in many cases. But at the same time the findings of a qualitative research are not always widely generalizable. Researchers may easily influence the data and so rigorous training is essential to eliminate or reduce research bias in qualitative research.

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