

Qualitative Research

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INTRODUCTION

Core material of qualitative research: Fabric of social life

What emerges from qualitative research: Text of one kind or another

Qualitative methods elicit narrative and discourse expressed as text ----- essentially stories

To tell a good story is to spin a fine yarn

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative analysis:

- answer questions about how people make sense of world
- address many dimensions of human action and interaction
- relate these findings to the contexts in which they occur

Qualitative researchers:

- seek answer to their questions in real world
- purpose is to learn about some aspect of the social world
- generate new understanding that can be used by the social world

(Rossman and Rallis 1998)

WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

A type of scientific research??

scientific research consists of an investigation that:

- Seeks answers to a question**
- Systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question**
- Collects evidence**
- Produces findings that were not determined in advance**
- Produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study**

WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

Qualitative research shares these characteristics

Seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population

Effective in obtaining culturally specific information about population ---- values, opinions, behaviors, social contexts

What is Qualitative Research ?

- Describes & analyses culture & behaviour from the point of view of those being studied (emic perspective)
- Emphasis on providing a “holistic” understanding of the social setting in which research is conducted
- Relies on a research strategy which is flexible and iterative

LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Health researchers and practitioners daily confront a myriad of challenging questions

- How do people make health care related decisions?**
- How are health promotion messages understood by individuals at risk?**
- How a new contraceptive product will be received? How people will react to public health message?**
- How a woman will negotiate the use of condoms during sex with an infected partner?**
- How couples decide how many children to have?**

LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

We cannot know for certain how any individual will respond to any of these issues

Lessons learned from countless observations and studies of related human behavior

--- some idea of a range of responses

Formulation of research questions, and from the set of more general statements and many lessons learned:

- we develop conceptual and theoretical frameworks

LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

These frameworks provide the logic and the language that guide our research

Through a common understanding of how the world works (or doesn't work), theory provides researchers and practitioners with reference points for understanding human behavior in a more general context

Uses of Qualitative Research

- ❖ Exploring a health problem
- ❖ Identifying local perceptions
- ❖ Identifying relevant interventions
- ❖ Investigating feasibility, acceptability & appropriateness of health programmes / interventions

Uses of Qualitative Research

- Developing suitable information, education & communication
- Identifying problems in ongoing interventions & suggesting solutions
- Complementing quantitative data by helping in interpretation
- Designing more valid survey instruments

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

- **Case studies**
- **Developmental research**
- **Historical research**
- **Ethnographic studies**

Case Studies

- Focused on individual's own actions & explanations
- Individual “illness episode” very useful type of case study ,wherein:
 1. Subject to tell about entire illness episode
 2. Use a checklist of items to fill in entire sequence of treatment seeking

Case Studies (Contd..)

3. Get subject to tell about actual encounter with health provider (use probes)
4. Ask for explanations on cause of illness, reasons for worsening/ improvements
5. Re-visit subject for more details

Developmental Research:

- **Individuals / group / institution / community**
- **Cross-sectional / Longitudinal**

Historical Research:

- **Information on an event, development and/or previous educational experience**
- **Process - studying previous situation, checking on current situation, to predict if same situation will occur again**
- **Conclusion on previous event - based on collected facts and evidences to answer why and how the event and repercussions occurred**
- **Useful to solve questions that involve sensitive issues**

Ethnographic Research:

- **In-depth study of natural behaviours in a culture or social group**
- **Purpose – to understand relationships between behaviour and culture**
 - **Education Res – to understand schooling process (SE Scale.....) - observations (participant & nonparticipant)**
- **Starts without hypothesis – hypothesis is developed in the process of observations, and the researcher explores and test his hypothesis**

Qualitative Research Techniques

Wide range available :

- ✓ Individual In-Depth Interviews
- ✓ Focus Group Discussions
- ✓ Participant Observation
- ✓ Systematic Interviewing Techniques

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

A qualitative method with roots in traditional ethnographic research

Objective: To help researchers learn the perspectives held by study populations

- multiple perspectives within any given community**
- understanding diverse perspectives and interplay among them**

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

- **Always takes place in community settings**
- **Distinctive Method - researcher approaches participants in their own environment**
- **Researcher:**
 - **tries to learn what life is like for an “insider” while remaining, inevitably, an “outsider”**
 - **makes careful, objective notes about what is observed, recording all accounts and observations as field notes in a field notebook**

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION?

Data obtained observation serve as check against participants' subjective reporting of what they believe and do

Also useful for gaining an understanding of the -----

- physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants live**
- relationships among people, contexts, ideas, norms, events**
- people's behaviors and activities – what they do, how frequently, with whom**

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION?

Enables researchers to develop a familiarity with the cultural milieu

Observing and participating –

- integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of the human experience**

- an overarching research endeavor for any public health or development project**

DISADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Time-consuming

Traditional ethnographic research: researchers spend at least one year in the field site collecting data through participant observation and other methods

Difficult for most applied research studies – need for focused inquiry

Difficulty of documenting the data

Inherently subjective exercise

understand the difference between reporting or describing what you observe (more objective) versus interpreting what you see (less objective)

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic

Person being interviewed - 'expert'

Interviewer - 'student'

Motivation: desire to learn everything the participant can share about research topic

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Researchers engage with participants by:

- posing questions in a neutral manner,**
- listening attentively to participants' responses,**
- asking follow-up questions and probes based on those responses**

Researchers do not:

- lead participants according to any preconceived notions,**
- encourage participants to provide particular answers by expressing approval or disapproval of what they say**

Usually conducted face-to-face and involve one / two interviewers and one participant

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS?

Learning about perspectives of individuals, as opposed to group norms of a community, for which focus groups are more appropriate

An effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions and experiences

EFFECTIVE PROBES

Direct questions:

“What do you mean when you say . . . ?”

“Why do you think . . . ?”

“How did this happen?”

“How did you feel about . . . ?”

“What happened then?”

“Can you tell me more?”

“Can you please elaborate?”

“I’m not sure I understand X. . . .Would you explain that to me?”

“How did you handle X?”

“How did X affect you?”

“Can you give me an example of X?”

EFFECTIVE PROBES

Indirect probes:

**Neutral verbal expressions such as “uh huh,”
“interesting,” and “I see”**

**Verbal expressions of empathy, such as, “I can
see why you say that was difficult for you”**

**Mirroring technique, or repeating what the
participant said, such as, “So you were 19 when you
first experienced. . .”**

**Culturally appropriate body language or gestures,
such as nodding in acknowledgment**

FOCUS GROUP

One or two researchers and several participants meet as a group to discuss a research topic

Sessions: usually recorded / videotaped

Moderator: leads the discussion; response to open-ended topics as per 'Topic Guide'

Note-taker / Observer: detailed notes on the discussion

FOCUS GROUP

Strengths:

- Large amount of information over a relatively short period of time
- Effective for accessing broad range of views on a specific topic

Limitations:

- Not the best method for acquiring information on highly personal or socially sensitive topics

(one-on-one interviews are better-suited for such topics)

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FOCUS GROUPS?

Especially effective for capturing information about:

- social norms**
- variety of opinions or views within a population**

Richness of data emerges from group dynamic and from the diversity of the group

Participants influence each other through their presence and their reactions to what other people say

Different viewpoints of participants:

- not everyone will have the same views and experiences (age, gender, education, access to resources, etc.)**

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM FOCUS GROUPS?

Can also capture idiosyncratic experiences and views of individuals

Within a study, focus groups are typically one method among many that are used to create a complete picture of how a given issue affects a community of people

Focus groups contribute to a broad understanding by providing well-grounded data on:

- social and cultural norms,**
- pervasiveness of these norms within the community**
- people's opinions about their own values**

Suggested ground rules for building rapport in focus groups

Take time to establish ground rules

Participants:

- to be kind to one another during the FGD**
- respect one another's privacy afterwards**

Laying ground rules is an opportunity to address which behaviors are desirable and which are unacceptable

A good moderator . . .

Shows flexibility

Shows sensitivity

Has a sense of humor

Links ideas together

Encourages participation from everyone

A good moderator tries not to . . .

Dictate the course of discussion

Lose control over the conversation

Judge comments or be an “expert”

Inform or educate *during* the group

Lead a question and answer session

Pile Sorting

- ✓ Aims to study relations among items within a domain
- ✓ Useful for discovering perceptions on similarities & differences among items
- ✓ Helps to look at intra-cultural variations in how informants define domains
- ✓ Informants asked to sort cards with names of items written into piles or groups according to their own criteria

Sampling Techniques

Selection of respondents based on information they can provide

Types of sampling strategies :

- Purposive
- Snowball
- Convenience
- Quota
- Extreme Cases

Sample Size : Sample to informational redundancy or sample to saturation

PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

One of the most common sampling strategies

groups participants according to pre selected criteria relevant to a particular research question (for example, HIV-positive women in a City)

Sample size: may or may not be fixed prior to data collection

depends on

- resources and time available**
- study's objectives**
- theoretical saturation**

Most successful when data review and analysis are done in conjunction with data collection

QUOTA SAMPLING

How many people with which characteristics to include as participants (while designing study)

age

place of residence

gender

class

profession

marital status, etc.

Focus on people most likely to experience, know about, or have insights into the research topic

Using recruitment strategies appropriate to location, culture, and study population --- until prescribed quotas

SNOWBALL SAMPLING

**snowballing – also known as chain referral
- a type of purposive sampling**

participants or informants with whom contact has already been made use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study

Often used to find and recruit “hidden populations,” (groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies)

RECRUITMENT IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- **A recruitment strategy is a project-specific plan for identifying and enrolling people to participate in a research study**
- **The plan should specify criteria for screening potential participants, the number of people to be recruited, the location, and the approach to be used**

Qualitative Data Analysis

- ❖ Taped interviews transcribed verbatim
- ❖ Translated into English
- ❖ Codes assigned to segments of text
- ❖ Coding framework developed
- ❖ Look for patterns & emerging themes

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

**In all social research (Qual + Quant)
systematically examine data to
discover patterns, associations
identify cause and effect relationships**

In Quantitative

- Identify key predictor and outcome variables in advance**
- Contextual var – controlled**
- Data collection and analysis separate phases**
- Statistical**

In Qualitative

- Understand broader context**
- General open ended Qs – to greater precision**
- Data collection and analysis interlinked - iterative**

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

PRINCIPLES

People differ in their experiences and understandings

Social phenomenon cannot be understood outside its own context

Theory – guides as well as a result

Exceptional cases – insight into problem

Understanding behaviour – slowly, nonlinearly

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

STEPS

- **Reading – develop an intimate relationship content, quality, patterns**
- **Coding – identify emerging themes label text, evolving coding**
- **Displaying data - distinguish nuances of a topic**
- **Developing Hypothesis, questioning & verification**
- **Data Reduction – big picture**
- **Interpretation**
- **Synthesizing findings**

REPORTING RESULTS

Writing up qual research “converts private problems into public issues, thereby making collective identity and solutions possible” (Richardson, 1990)

Introduction

Methodology

Context

Results

Discussion

Conclusion & Recommendations

Triangulation

- ✓ Main research tool used are the researchers themselves
- ✓ Subjective nature of data can open it to criticism
- ✓ A method to enhance quality of data is through triangulation :
 - Data, Researcher, Combining qualitative & quantitative methods

QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Many quantitative and qualitative researchers today, choose pragmatism over “one-sided paradigm allegiance”

Understand similarities and differences, strengths and limitations, and the contribution that each can make to research.

“Often a distinct set of strengths and limitations that are markedly different but potentially complementary when combined in a mixed – method research design” (Wolff et al. 1991)

Methodological appropriateness – using theory and related methods to make reasoned decisions

“appropriate to the purpose of the study, the questions being investigated, and the resources available” (Patton 1990)

QUALITATIVE-QUANTITATIVE

CHARACTERISTICS	QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
Research Objectives	Discovery of new ideas, insights and feelings	Validation of facts, estimates, relationships
Type of Research	Usually exploratory	Descriptive and causal
Type of Questions	Open-ended, semi-structured, unstructured, probing	Mostly structured
Sample Size	Smaller	Larger

What are the advantages of qualitative methods for exploratory research?

- **Use of open-ended questions and probing evoke responses:**
 - **meaningful and culturally salient to the participant**
 - **unanticipated by the researcher**
 - **rich and explanatory in nature**
- **Flexibility to probe initial participant responses – ask why or how?**

SETTING STANDARDS FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

**At the heart of the debate on research standards is
the much used, but often misunderstood**

'concept of subjectivity'

**For a quantitative scientist, data are facts that must
be isolated as much as possible from the
personal or subjective values of the researcher**

'subjectivity can mean distortion'

Notion of a perfectly objective social science is

'a widely acknowledged myth'

**Accuracy of quantitative data often depends on the
separation of facts from subjective judgment**

Take Home Message

Qualitative + Quantitative

NOT

Qualitative vs Quantitative

