

1.2. The historical background

As stated by Academia (n.d), anthropology, philosophy and sociology constitute the basis of qualitative research. Already during the first years of the twentieth century, this was used as a method of inquiry to find out about native and foreign cultures by anthropologists such as Malinowski (1922) and Mead (1935), and sociologists such as Park and Burgess (1925).

Bronislaw Malinowski, an Austro-Hungarian anthropologist, was considered one of the most important anthropologists of the 20th century because of his findings of social anthropology. Among his field studies, the following stand out:

- The family among the Australian aborigines: A sociological study (1913)
- Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea (1922)
- The sexual life of savages in North-Western Melanesia: An ethnographic account of courtship, marriage, and family life among the natives of the Trobriand Islands (1929)

Symbolic interactionism was conceived by George Herbert Mead, an American social philosopher and sociologist, who stated that people's selves are social products. The book published by Huebner and Hans, Mead's students, *Mind, Self and Society* (1935) highlights the core concept of social interactionism in which *Mind* refers to the individual's ability to use symbols to create meanings for the world around him/her, *Self* implies the individual's ability to reflect on the way that the individual is perceived by others, and *Society* is where all of these interactions are taking place.

In the 1920s, Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick D. McKenzie, American and Canadian sociologists published their study *The City* (1925), which contains "both key theoretical expositions and interpretative essays about the cultural patterns of urban life". (Introduction, 1925, p. 5)

In the 1960s, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, American sociologists, developed the Grounded theory based on a study of staff's handling of dying patients in hospitals. In line with Punch (cited by Bulawa, 2014), this theory is a research strategy aimed at generating theory from data. Addressing it is essential to make comparative analysis constantly in order to force the researcher to be close to the data and keep away from subjective understanding of it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rennie, 2000).

The American ethnographer, James Spradley wrote some relevant books on ethnography and qualitative research.

The *Ethnographic Interview* (1979) is a self-teaching handbook that focuses on interview techniques used to research ethnography and culture. This describes three important ethnographic elements:

1. Explicit purpose
2. Ethnographic explanations
3. Project explanations
4. Recording explanations
5. Native language explanations

6. Interview explanations
7. Question explanations
8. Ethnographic questions
9. Descriptive questions
10. Structural questions
11. Contrast questions

Participant Observation (1980), an ethnographic research handbook, describes the degree of the involvement, both with people and in the activities they observe.

Under the umbrella of these studies, professionals in the education and healthcare fields started on researching in their own areas. In education, *The Journal Qualitative Sociology* and the *International Journal for Qualitative Studies in Education* were published in 1978 and 1988; respectively, in the United States of America (USA). In the 1970 and 1980s, texts used in educational sociology were also published in Britain.

On the other hand, qualitative research as a type of inquiry was considered appropriate and respectable in medicine but not wholly accepted as an alternative form of research (Webb et al., cited by Academia, n.d.). Nevertheless since 1991, papers in the field of public health have been published in the *Qualitative Health Research*, an American medical journal. In the same way as the USA, a series of articles were published in the *British Medical Journal* (Mays, 1996; Pope, 1999). Apart from that, an overview of qualitative concepts and methods was published by the World Health Organisation (Hudelson, 1994).

It was undeniable that qualitative research, no matter the different terms to define it, has contributed in different disciplines of human activities. Even though this has been dismissed as non-scientific, it has been proved that this approach can play a key role in understanding deeply the context within a social controversy takes place and based on that, establishes foundations for significant interventions.

2.1. Definition

Because of its increasingly prevalent at the present time, some definitions of qualitative research from different philosophical perspectives will be exposed in order to better understand its usefulness and relevance.

John Creswell (1994) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding that is based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry to explore a social or human problem. In this inquiry process, a qualitative research builds a complex and holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Sharan B. Merriam, professor emeritus at University of Georgia, emphasises on the qualitative theory and focus. Merriam states (2009) that "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. (p. 13)

Dr. Leslie Curry (2015), professor at Yale University, explains that qualitative research is a strategy to collect, organise and interpret textual information

systematically to generate insights into phenomena that are difficult to measure quantitatively.

2.2. Characteristics

As claimed by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), there are different types of qualitative research that have common characteristics and similar procedures even though differences in data collection and analysis exist.

- **Naturalistic**

The word naturalistic comes from ecological approaches in biology and is defined as a no experimental approach in which subjects are studied in their natural settings. They are observed by the researcher, whose presence might be either known (overt observation) or unknown (covert observation).

There is no manipulation of the environment; that's why, activities are observed in the setting in which they occur habitually. Most of the time, this is used during the initial stage of a research study because of its worth of descriptive value and as a base for hypotheses.

Based on naturalistic approach, Grady, Ale and Morris (2012) conducted a study to assess the impact of parental departure during daily drop-off at preschool on children's settling into daily preschool routines.

- **Descriptive data**

The data collected in qualitative research take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The data could imply interview transcripts, photographs, field notes, videos, personal documents, and other official records.

Researchers describe the data deeply, which means all the details must be considered. Qualitative articles and reports often contain quotations in order to narrate a particular situation as accurately as possible.

Sandelowski (2000) noted that researches present comprehensive narratives of phenomena or events based on open-ended questions. No matter what type of question, exploratory, descriptive or interpretative, they have to produce findings closer to the data.

In-depth narrative descriptions were used in educational research. Some studies include The Good High School (Lightfoot, 1985), Life in Classrooms (Jackson, 1990), Teaching and Learning in an Innovative Middle School Program (2007), and The Impact of Texting on Writing Professors (Carr, 2015).

(Armfield, 2007)

- **Concern with process**

Qualitative research focuses on process rather than outcomes; that's why, this uses multiple interactive. The three main methods of data collection, focus group,

in-depth interviews and participant observation, involve more active participation by participants.

The concept of growing involvement of participants has a decisive importance in case of qualitative research, and then qualitative strategies suggest the participant expectations are translated into daily activities, procedures and interactions. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007)

This research has been particularly helpful in clarifying students or teachers' performance in education field. A participant observation study was conducted by Luschen (1998) in a day care centre for high student-mothers in order to show how teachers continually worked to shift the students' understanding of mothering; and in 2000, Middleton and Hewitt studied the transition of caring when people with deep learning difficulties were moved from long-term care in hospitals to community-based living

- **Inductive**

Qualitative research analyses the data in an inductive which means that theories or concepts are built on the base of gathering data. This approach uses a bottom-up direction to understand situations, focus on behaviours, construct theories and reach conclusions.

When researchers develop theories, they have to spend time with participants to experiment themselves particular situations. In the words of Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the qualitative researcher "constructs a picture that takes shape as he/she collects and examines the parts". (p. 6)

- **Meaning**

Qualitative researchers know that meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach; and that is the reason, why they are really interested in participants' perspectives (Erickson, 1986); and these perspectives focus on the assumptions participants make about their lives and what they take for granted.

Then the key element is to capture perspectives as precise as possible. For this, sometimes researcher's interpretations will be checked with those of the participants; and even though this procedure is criticized, this reflects a deep concern to discover "what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences, and how they themselves structure the social world in which they live". (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 8)

2.3. Ethical considerations

In qualitative research, participants have a vital role and as explained by Hossain (2011), they contribute to the analysis of the data they generate. So the treatment of participants becomes an ethical issue to be considered.

Codes of ethics have to be set by researches in order to protect participants and support ethical approaches to fieldwork. Bogdan and Biklen highlight the following basic ethical considerations:

In qualitative studies, conducting an ethical research is vital because dealing with human subjects in depth can affect both participants and researchers. Then clear strategies must be adopted to carry out sensitive studies and provide trustworthy outcomes.

3.1. Epistemological dimensions

As discussed earlier, in qualitative research it is required to know the relevance of data, setting and participants. However, in order to have an in-depth understanding, it is crucial to analyse the meaning that individuals attribute to the construction of this knowledge – their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and actions (Illingworth, 2006).

There is no an outstanding method or theory; that is the reason why researchers have to use a wide range of epistemological dimensions to understand participants' interpretations. To do this, there is a range of epistemologies that underlines how knowledge can be generated.

Objectivism	Constructivism	Subjectivism
Meaning and meaningful reality exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness. In this epistemology, of what it means to know, understanding and values are considered objectified in the people researchers study. Using appropriate methods researchers can discover objective truth.	Constructivism rejects the objectivist view of human knowledge. Truth or meaning is constructed not discovered. People may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomena. There can be no unmediated grasp of the social world that exists independently of the researcher and all claims to knowledge take place within a particular conceptual framework.	Evident in structuralist, post-structuralist and postmodernist thinking. Meaning does not emerge from the interaction between the object and the subject; it is imposed on the object by the subject.