

# Research Methodology: Qualitative Research

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# Lecture outline

- General idea of qualitative research.
- Goal of qualitative research.
- Description of six kinds of qualitative studies:
  - Case studies
  - Ethnography
  - Phenomenological studies
  - Grounded theory studies
  - Narrative inquiry
  - Content Analysis

# Introduction

- To answer some research questions, mere skimming across the surface is not sufficient.
- To develop complete understanding of the phenomenon, we need to dig deeper.
- Enter qualitative research: we indeed dig deep.
- Various forms of data are collected and examined from various angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation.
- The phenomenon may be occurring currently or have previously occurred in natural settings - “Real World”
- Capturing and studying of the complexity of those phenomenon is required.
- Simplification and quantification of observed phenomenon is not the goal, rather the issue is studied from multiple dimensions and layers.
- Usually most common in academic disciplines including anthropology, sociology, psychology, biology, history, political science, education and medicine.

# Difference between Qualitative and Quantitative Studies

- Quantitative studies: data collection comes first, data analysis follows in the next step.
- Qualitative studies: *Iterative and recursive process* of data collection and data analysis.
- For example: The research might:
  - collect some preliminary data in a natural setting
  - inspect the data for possible patterns
  - return to the setting to collect additional data that might substantiate, clarify or contradict those patterns
  - conduct a more thorough, detailed analysis of the data.

# Research Problems and Methodology Choice in Qualitative Research

- Qualitative Researchers often formulate only general research problems and ask only general questions about the phenomenon under investigation.
- Example: “What is the nature of the culture of people living in Gadchiroli?” or “What is it like to live with someone who has Alzheimer’s disease?”.
- As the study progresses, understanding of the phenomenon is improved and specific questions can be developed - often leading to working hypothesis.
- The methodology of the qualitative study evolves over the course of investigation.
- *Qualitative Research requires considerable preparation and planning.*
- Training in observation techniques, interview strategies and data collection methods is necessary.
- Firm grasp over previous research related to problem is required.
- This kind of research is not for quick results and easy answers.

# Potential Advantages of a Qualitative Approach

- **Exploration:** Gain initial insights into little-studied topic or phenomenon.
- **Multifaceted description:** Reveal complex, multilayered nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relationships, systems or people.
- **Verification:** Test validity of certain assumptions, claims, theories or generalizations within real-world contexts.
- **Theory development:** Enable developing of new concepts or theoretical perspectives related to a phenomenon.
- **Problem identification:** Help uncover key problems, obstacles, or enigmas that exist within the phenomenon.
- **Evaluation:** Means to judge the effectiveness of particular policies, practices, or innovations.

Qualitative studies do not allow to identify cause-and-effect relationships.

# Case study

- Also called as *idiographic research*.
- A particular individual, program, or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time.
- Examples: Study the nature, course, and treatment of a rare illness for a particular patient.
- Educator analysing the instructional strategies used to teach high school history.
- A political scientist trying to study the origins and development of a politician's campaign as he/she runs for public office.
- Common in medicine, education, political science, law, psychology, sociology, anthropology.
- May study single case or two or more cases that are similar/different in certain key ways - to make comparison, build theory, or propose generalizations. This approach is called **multiple** or **collective** case study.

## Case study Contd.

- Research collects **extensive** data on the individual(s), program(s) or event(s) on which the investigation is focused.
- Data could be observations, interviews, documents (e.g. newspaper articles), past records (e.g. previous test scores), and audiovisual materials (e.g. photographs, videotapes, audiotapes).
- Information about context surrounding the case or cases of focus, physical environment and any historical, economic, and social factors is also important.
- Context information helps in understanding the extent of generalization of the findings to other situations.
- Case studies are especially suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation.
- Appropriate to investigate how an individual/program changes over time, as a result of some events.
- Useful for providing preliminary support for tentative explanations regarding phenomenon being studied.



# Ethnography

- Word comes from **ethnos**, Greek for “a nation or other close-knit group of people”, and **graph**, “something written or recorded”.
- Examination of an **entire group** - more specifically, a group that shares a common culture.
- Study of a group in its natural setting for a lengthy time period, from several months to several years.
- Focus is on everyday behaviours of the people in the group (e.g., interactions, language, rituals), to identify cultural norms, beliefs, practices, and social structures, and other patterns.
- Attempt to identify both explicit and implicit cultural patterns.
- Ethnographies were first used in cultural anthropology, now seen in sociology, psychology, education and marketing research as well.
- Concept of culture has undergone a change.
- Earlier it referred to long-standing large cultural groups (e.g. people living on the island of Samoa).
- More recently, culture also included, adult work environments, elementary school classrooms, exclusive social cliques in adolescence, and Internet-based communities.

# Ethnography Contd.

- Group chosen should be “stranger ” to the researcher and researcher should have no vested interests in the study’s outcomes.
- Familiar group will make it difficult for research to look at it in detached manner and hinder in a balanced perspective.
- This research involves fieldwork - the essence of ethnography.
- Long time in field gives ethnographic researchers time to observe and record processes.
- Gaining legitimate access to the site is important.
- **Gatekeeper**: a person who can smooth the way for researcher’s entrance into the situation. Eg. Tribal chief in a community, principal, teacher in a school/classroom, or a program director at homeless shelter.
- Researcher needs to establish rapport with and gain trust of people.
- The principle of **informed consent** remains vital.

# Ethnography Contd.

- Researcher identify broad group of informants, intermingle with them and identify **primary informants** - also known as **key informants**.
- They provide information and insights relevant to the research question and facilitate contacts with other helpful individuals.
- Researchers engage in **participant observation**, become immersed in daily life of the people.
- With the study progress, the role of the researcher might change from being an “outsider” to an “insider”.
- Advantage: possibility to gain in-depth knowledge.
- Disadvantage: emotional involvement might prevent objective assessment of the situation.
- Argument to this : ethnographers are urged to be aware of and explicitly of their subject biases.
- Ethnographers are required to be careful observers, interviewers, and listeners.
- Informal notes are taken on fields, later on formalized notes are prepared.
- Audiotapes used to record lengthy conversations and significant events.
- Photographs of artifacts (e.g. tools, ritualistic implements, artistic creations) and documents (e.g. site documents, personal journals, lesson plans) could be collected.

# Ethnography Contd.

- Especially useful for gaining an understanding of the complexities of a particular socio-cultural group.
- Provides considerable flexibility in the methods used to obtain informatoin.
- This can be an advantage (experienced researcher knows what to look for) or disadvantage (novice may be overwhelmed and distracted by unimportant details).
- Solid grounding in cultural anthropology is suggested before venturing into ethnographical study.

# Phenomenological Study

- **Phenomenology** refers to a person's perception of the meaning of an event.
- Attempts to understand people's perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation.
- It tries to answer the question: **What is it like to experience such-and-such.**
- Example: Experience of people caring for a chronically or terminally ill relative, living in an abusive relationship, or home-schooling of a child.
- What something is like from an insider's perspective.
- Depends on lengthy interviews (perhaps 1 to 2 hours in length) with small, carefully selected sample of participants.
- Sample size could be 5 to 25 individuals having direct experience with the phenomenon being studied.

# Phenomenological Study: Three-interview series

- Developed in 2013, a prominent phenomenological study design.
- First interview: Getting details about participants' life histories, researcher attempts to *situate* participants' lived experiences with the context of the study.
- Second interview: Pin down concrete details of particular experiences related to the topic under study.
- Third interview: Encourages participants to reflect on the meanings of their experiences.
- Researcher listens closely in the last interview, as participants describe their experiences relevant to the phenomenon at hand.
- Researcher must be alert for subtle cues in participants' expressions, pauses, questions, and occasional sidetracks.
- Throughout the process, try to suspend preconceived notions or personal experiences which may influence what you “hear” participants saying.
- Ultimate goal: to provide a sense that “ **I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that**”.

# What is the difference between Case study and Phenomenological Study?

## Case Study

- In-depth investigation of an individual, group, institution or event.
- Case study examines a particular case in detail and answers the questions “why”, “how”, and “what”
- Researchers may employ interviews, observations, questionnaires.

## Phenomenological study

- Designed to understand the subjective, lived experiences and perspectives of participants.
- A philosophical movement based on the principle that a certain experience can be perceived in several ways.
- Researchers mainly use interviews.

# Narrative Enquiry

- Method of studying complex, multi-faceted phenomena by focusing on the recollections and stories of individuals who have had experiences related to these phenomena.
- **Three-dimensional narrative space** : comprising of the concepts of *interaction*, *continuity* and *situation*.
- Focus not only on events in the “here and now” but also seek to understand the past and future dimensions of events and experiences.
- Narrative enquirers and researchers collect data including autobiographical writings, oral histories, letters, conversations and dialogues, interviews, family stories, photographs, poetry, and artefacts.
- Researchers try to identify common themes, threads, and tensions.
- **Restorying**: Process of narrative analysis.
- Crafting of rich narratives and stories that provide a better understanding of the setting, context, time period, an/or sequence of events.



# Content Analysis

- Detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material.
- Quest to identify patterns, themes, or biases.
- Typically performed on *forms of human communication*, including
  - books
  - newspapers
  - personal journals
  - legal documents
  - films, television, art, music
  - videotapes of human interactions
  - transcripts of conversations
  - Internet blog and bulletin board entries.
- Example: Content analysis to understand the theme of different mainstream movies in Bollywood.
- Found in disciplines like fine arts, education, history, psychology, journalism, and political science.
- Involves greatest amount of planning at the front end of the project.

# Steps in Content Analysis

- The researcher identifies the specific body of material to be studied.
- If it is relatively small, it is studied in its entirety.
- Else, sample is drawn. For eg. if the study consists of all newspaper articles written during a particular time period, a sample is selected.
- Researcher defines the characteristics or qualities to be examined in precise, concrete terms. May define specific examples of each characteristics as a way of defining it more clearly.
- If the material involves complex or lengthy items, the researcher breaks down each item into small, manageable segments that are analysed separately.
- Depending on subjective/objective judgment single rater or two/three raters may be required.
- Content analyses aren't necessarily stand-alone designs. Example: A systematic content analysis might be an integral part of the data analysis in a phenomenological study.
- It is apt to have a quantitative component.
- Quantification may involve simply counting the frequencies with which various characteristics are observed in the body of data being examined.

Next lecture onwards Analysing Quantitative data. Install RStudio on your machines.