

# Qualitative Research

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# Qualitative Research

- Is used to describe behaviors, actions, feelings, perceptions, and interaction among people
- Assume that respondents or people observed have unique views of their personal experiences or the surrounding environment.
- Help us understand lifestyles and cultural values, actions, and symbols.

# Reliability or Dependability

- From a **quantitative** perspective, reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated
- From a **qualitative** perspective, dependability, (reliability) in qualitative research is not based on outsiders getting the same results, but that outsiders concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense. In other words, the results are dependable and consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

# The Credibility of Qualitative Analysis

Depend on three distinct but related inquiry elements:

- 1 Rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that is carefully analysed, with attention to issues of validity, reliability, and triangulation
- 2 Credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self
- 3 Philosophy: A fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis and holistic thinking

# Possible qualitative data

- What people are saying or doing (endless possibilities).
- What the people or setting looks like (buildings, spaces, clothing, arrangement of furniture, cemetery).
- Description of an event (Big Day Out, Christmas lunch).
- How an organisation 'works' in terms of its rules (household spaces, the school, clubs or church).
- A piece of writing or a document (magazine, song words, books, twitter).
- Images (graffiti, pictures in magazines, on the television, on billboards etc).

# Three types of qualitative data

- Observation
- Interviewing
- Text analysis

You may use all two or three methods in one study

# Observation

- To observe and record aspects of everyday life while taking part, in some way, in what you are observing.
- For example, a football match, a shopping expedition, riding on public transport, how people use their mobile phones in public, going to a bbq.

# Strengths

- Allows one to directly see what people do without having to rely on what they say they do.
- Excellent way to discover what is occurring in a setting.
- Helps in understanding importance of contextual factors.
- Provides firsthand experience, especially if the observer participates in activities.

# Weaknesses

- Reasons for observed behaviour may be unclear.
- People may act differently when they know they are being observed!
- Busy settings can be overwhelming
- Observer may “go native” (i.e., over-identifying with the group being studied).



# Interviews

- Different types of interviews:
  - **Structured** (set questions)
  - **Semi-structured** (usually with some set questions, but can follow up interesting points)
  - **Unstructured** (no interview schedule and conducted over lengthy periods)
  - **Focus groups** (group interviews with small groups using group interaction to generate data)

# Strengths

- In-depth information from the 'horses mouth'.
- Good for measuring attitudes and most other content of interest.
- Telephone and e-mail interviews provide very quick turnaround.
- Allows probing and posing of follow-up questions by the interviewer.

# Weaknesses

- Stage fright.
- Asking embarrassing questions.
- Can be time consuming.
- Interviewee might only give answers which are deemed desirable.
- Untrained interviewers may distort data because of personal biases and poor interviewing skills.

# Text analysis

- Content analysis
  - Detects, records and analyses specific words or concepts in a sample form of communication
  - Count and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of these words and concepts
  - They then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writers, the audience, time, place and 'wider cultural context of which they are a part' (Rose 2001: 55).

# Content Analysis

- Case records
- Audio tapes, videotapes, TV shows, and films.
- Books
- People's diaries
- Newspaper accounts of events

# Strengths

- Clear and systematic study of textual content
- High degree of validity and reliability in terms of sampling, empirical evidence
- Grounding analysis on empirical content rather than interpretive
- Relies on data that is easy to find

# Weaknesses

- The 'objectivity' of content analysis can be questioned in that qualitative judgements inform the definition of coding
- Concerned mainly with what is said rather than how it is said (word count misses social context)
- Description of texts rather than their interpretation, meanings, effects

# Text analysis

- Discourse
  - Is concerned with meaning of text (content) in relation to its social and political context
  - Is an interpretive method that makes explicit the social and political contexts
  - Is shaped by relations between power and knowledge
  - Its about coding themes to reveal the invisible or discursive structures

# Strengths

- Provides useful tool for researchers to analyse the ways in which power is organised in social settings
- Provides political critique in which some people seek to represent themselves, others or events as 'normal' or 'true'

# Weaknesses

- Selection of texts?
- Reducing social life to language (discourses are not simply spoken but also embodied and part of our geographical landscape)
- Claims that it is considered unscientific

# Ethnography research



# Ethnography

- A research process used in the scientific study of human interactions in social settings
- Used extensively in anthropology
- Has become increasingly popular in educational research over the past few years
- Has been relatively slow to become accepted in agricultural and extension education

# Principles of ethnographic research

- Naturalistic – ecological hypothesis
- Qualitative – phenomenological hypothesis

# Four Types of Ethnography

- Classical
  - Years in the field, constantly observing and making sense of actions. Includes description and behavior. Attempts to describe everything about the culture.
- Systematic
  - Defines the structure of a culture.
- Interpretive (hermeneutic)
  - To study the culture through inference and analysis looking for “why” behaviors exist.
- Critical
  - Relies on critical theory. Power differentials, who gains and who loses ...

# Covert/overt research

- Most ethnography nowadays is semi-overt
- Covert – the ethnographer does not reveal their ‘true’ identity
- Overt – the participants are aware of the researcher’s motives and they grant their consent for the data to be used

# The Nature and Value of Ethnographic Research

- Ethnographic research is particularly appropriate for behaviors that are best understood by observing them within their natural settings.
- The key techniques in all ethnographic studies are in-depth interviewing and highly detailed, almost continual, ongoing participant observation of a situation.
- A key strength of ethnographic research is that it provides the researcher with a much more comprehensive perspective than do other forms of educational research.

# Topics That Lend Themselves Well to Ethnographic Research

- topics that defy simple quantification
- those that can best be understood in a natural setting
- those that involve studying individual or group activities over time
- those that involve studying the roles that individuals play and the behaviors associated with those roles
- those that involve studying the activities and behaviors of groups as a unit
- and those that involve studying formal organizations in their totality.

# ‘Going native’

- When the ethnographer becomes a member of the studied group/ loses the sense of being a researcher
- May be dangerous but it happens
- Religious conversion, romantic involvement with a research participant, taking on the views of the group studied

# Sampling

- Whatever is available

or

- Convenience and snowball sampling

Or

- Theoretical sampling – gathering data in accordance with the emerging theory
- From a general research question to a hypothesis



# The Use of Hypotheses in Ethnographic Research

- Ethnographic researchers seldom formulate precise hypotheses ahead of time. Rather, they develop them as their study emerges.

# Data Collection and Analysis in Ethnographic Research

- Major means: participant observation and detailed interviewing.
- Triangulation: a variety of instruments in ethnographic studies to collect data and to check validity.
- Analysis consists of continual reworking of data with emphasis on patterns, key events, and use of visual representations in addition to interviews and observations.

# Advantages and Disadvantages

- Strength:
  - Provide a much more comprehensive perspective than other forms of educational research.
  - Lend itself well to topics that are not easily quantified.
  - Particularly appropriate to studying behaviors best understood in their natural settings.
- Limitations:
  - Highly dependent on the particular researcher's observations.
  - Some observer bias is almost impossible to eliminate.
  - Generalization is practically nonexistent.

# Technology support for ethnography

- Technologies mostly used for data collection
- Questions, notebook, pen
- Tape recording
  - less intrusive than video but data is less detailed
  - awareness of being recorded not a problem
  - useful to record long explanations, especially highly technical or domain-specific kinds

# Technology support for ethnography

- Video
  - Data can be analysed repeatedly off-site
  - Time-consuming data collection and analysis
  - Difficulty setting up and using equipment in some domains
  - Missing visual actions that are peripheral to the video field-of-view
- Programs to support analysis
  - e.g. Ethnograph, Nvivo