

Introduction to qualitative methodology

YFIA205 Basics of Research Methodology in Social Sciences

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Qualitative methods programme

- n Lecture & introducing the group exercise
Fri 22.9.2017 at 2-4pm, room C141
Marjo Kuronen

- n Interviewing in qualitative research
Fri 29.9.2017 at 2-4pm, room L346
Tiina Sihto

- n Qualitative exercise & discussion (see instructions)
Mon 9.10.2017, at 10-12am, room C141,
Marjo Kuronen

Contents

- n What is qualitative research methodology - what differentiates it from quantitative research
- n What kind of research questions can be answered by using qualitative approach /methods
- n Different methodological approaches in qualitative research
- n Different data and methods for data collection used in qualitative research
- n Analysis of qualitative data

What is qualitative research?

“Qualitative research is an **umbrella term** for strategies for conducting inquiry that are **aimed at discerning how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world**”
(Mason, 1996)

“**Qualitative research is not a unified form of inquiry**, but rather home to a variety of scholars from the social sciences, humanities, and practice disciplines **committed to different and, sometimes, conflicting philosophical and methodological positions**”
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000)

Source: The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods

Quantitative vs. qualitative research?

- n Qualitative research is often defined in relation to quantitative research (what qualitative research is not)
- n At the 1970s and 80s strong critique towards quantitative research /labelled as positivism (especially by feminist researchers but also other social scientists)
- n Quantitative research was (is still?) seen as providing more surface and descriptive (and less interesting) analysis and findings of a certain phenomena, whereas qualitative research is seen to provide more in-depth understanding
- n Quantitative research was accused of objectifying people studied instead of understanding them as subjects /active participants, “giving them a voice”

Quantitative vs. qualitative (continues)

- n Critical debate led to a dichotomist and “black and white thinking” of qualitative and quantitative research as opposite to each other, and divided researchers into two “camps”
- n However, qualitative methods are not any better than quantitative methods (or vice versa), methodologically there is only good or poor research (qualitative and quantitative), and it is up to the research questions, which methods and data should be used
- n Recently, there has been more interest in so called mixed methods, in combining qualitative and quantitative methods and data in the same research project (if only aware of their differences, possibilities and limitations)

Qualitative vs. quantitative methods?

Hard (sciences) – Soft (sciences)

More scientific - Less scientific

Factual – Interpretive

Numbers - Words

Objective – Subjective

Clear and neat – "Messy"

Rigorous analysis – Vague impressions

Dogmatic, iterative – Innovative, creative

Less interesting, "dull" – More interesting and meaningful

Superficial – More in-depth



Qualitative research consists of different

- § theoretical and methodological approaches (e.g. phenomenology, grounded theory, social constructionism, even realism), which are interested in different questions
- § methods of data collection (e.g. interviews, participant observation/ethnography, collecting documentary data, data collected from media)
- § and methods of analyzing data (thematic analysis, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, narrative analysis etc.)

Thus, it's not enough to define one's research as qualitative research but it should be defined more precisely what kind of qualitative research it is.

In every research project

- n methodological approach and methods for data collection and analysis should be chosen based on the research question(s) and the aims of one's research
 - What kind of questions you are interested in and want to answer?
 - Are you interested e.g. in people's personal experiences, facts, opinions, stories, discourses?

- n Analysis in qualitative research is more often data- rather than theory driven (or often interaction between theoretical concepts, previous research and own empirical data)

Main methodological approaches in qualitative research

- n Phenomenology
 - in sociology especially Alfred Schutz
 - studying people's experiences of the world
- n Grounded theory
 - Glaser & Strauss 1967
 - refers to a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed toward theory development
- n Ethnography
 - in sociology the origins in the Chicago school
 - often understood as studying cultures (e.g. sub-cultures, local cultures) 'from inside' as a participant observer (but there are also different approaches in doing ethnographic research)

Main methodological approaches (continues)

n Narrative research

- interested in stories people tell, their content and structure, story lines, based on the idea that we tend to understand our life as narratives (narrative can be a life story but also a short episodic narrative)

n Discourse analysis

- concerned with the structures and functions of discourse, or talk and text, often tied to the analysis of social actions and interaction

n Conversation analysis

- Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, Gail Jefferson (inspired by Garfinkel & Goffman)
- Analyses small details and structures of interaction order

Methodological approach and the actual research process

- n All the methodological approaches include several versions and they can be adopted differently by individual researchers
- n They can be also understood differently e.g. narrative inquiry/research can be seen as methodological, or even theoretical approach, but also more concretely as a way of analysing narrative data
- n Methodological approach does not give concrete guidelines in the actual empirical research process, but a researcher has to make her/his decisions (and this makes qualitative research challenging but also interesting)
- n but the methodological approach chosen directs the actual research process, what kind of data to collect, how to collect it and also how to analyse it, and also the findings we are able to get, how to understand the phenomenon we are studying

What is typical to qualitative research

The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Method

- n typically studies the perspectives of certain people, often referred to as the actor's point of view (or as 'giving a voice' to a specific group of people)
- n case orientation, sensitivity to cultural and historical context, and reflexivity
- n emphasis is on providing (deep) understanding of particular phenomena, events, or cases
- n typically entails some form of purposive (theoretical instead of statistical) sampling for information-rich cases; in-depth and open-ended interviews, lengthy participant/field observations, and/or document or artifact study

Typical for qualitative research (continues)

- n involvement of the researcher in data collection and the whole research process (relationship between researcher and the participants)
- n data is in the form of spoken or written language and cannot be transformed into numeric form
- n ongoing development and refinement of the research design after entering the field of study (flexibility in research design)
- n use of expressive language and more literary representational styles for disseminating findings (personal style, active presence of the researcher)

Some examples of the research questions possible in qualitative research

Our aim is to investigate the meanings of parental responsibility using as data readers' letters to a Finnish newspaper. (Böök & Perälä-Littunen 2008)

We examine the complex dynamics of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Using focus group and semi-structured interview data, we explore mothers-in-law's and daughters-in-law's perceptions of "being part of the family." (M. Jean Turner, Carolyn R. Young & Kelly I. Black 2006)

continues

This article explores the complex interconnection between gender and emotion in the context of client-perpetrated violence at work, focusing on interviews with and writings by Finnish nurses and social workers to discuss the 'feminine' emotional skills that are supposed to prevent violence. (Virkki 2008)

The aim of this article is to analyse 20 Finnish working carers' perceptions of their sibling relations and the sharing of the responsibility for parental care. (Leinonen 2011)

I analyse life stories written by lone mothers in order to examine the meanings that they give to their lone motherhood in relation to their larger family context. (May 2004)

Different data used in qualitative research

Data collected /produced by the researcher (primary data):

- individual or group interviews ([Tiina Sihto's lecture on this](#))
- spoken or written (life)stories, narratives
- (participant) observation and field notes /recordings based on that (sometimes even photographs or drawings) in ethnographic research
- audio or video recorded situations in studying (everyday or professional) interaction, especially in discourse and conversation analysis

Existing (natural) data (secondary data):

- written personal materials e.g. autobiographies, diaries, letters etc.
- media products e.g. newspapers, tv or radio programs, movies
- public (policy) documents
- data collected by other researchers

Ethnographic research

- n Ethnography can be understood as a method, methodology or even a theoretical approach, its main method of data collection is participant observation, which might take several months or even years
- n Ethnographic research is widely used in social/cultural anthropology and in social sciences, but also in education, nursing, health science etc.
- n In social sciences ethnographic research is often used in institutional settings e.g. hospitals, schools, residential institutions, nursing homes, shelters, (also public places like restaurants, especially in Finland, studies of alcohol culture), but there are also ethnographic studies of specific sub-cultures (youth cultures, minority cultures etc.)
- n The field of ethnographic research is very diverse: it can be based on different theoretical and methodological approaches (e.g. realism, constructionism, phenomenology, feminist theory), in that respect, ethnographic research is not a specific methodological approach
- n Current ethnographic research is more personal, reflective, linguistic than the earlier traditions of ethnography

Ethnography as a method for data collection

“We see the term (ethnography) as referring primarily to a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 1.)

Example of an ethnographic research project: School ethnography (Gordon et al. 1999)

... ethnographic study in two secondary schools in Helsinki in 1994-95.... We observed these schools for one school year, conducted interviews and collected a range of data. We followed four groups of the new intake from the first day onwards, and conducted participant observations during lessons, breaks and special events. During the first 2 weeks we observed and recorded almost 100 lessons, including over 30 first encounters between teachers and their new students. Our observations were based on a jointly planned non-structured schedule based on previous, exploratory school visits. Sometimes two or even three of us followed the same lesson, which gave us the opportunity to cross-check our notes. We also wrote daily field diaries recording events outside lessons, informal discussions, and our own process of getting acquainted with the schools: getting lost, becoming routinized etc.

Narrative research

What is narrative? (Hyvärinen 2009)

- Narratives tell about events and how humans experience them.
- A narrative requires a temporal aspect: one or two events represented in a temporally organized way. “Somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened” (Phelan 2005, 18).
- Life story, autobiography, illness narrative, news report, diary entry, comic strip, film and novel are typical examples of narratives.
- Oral, “naturally occurring” (existing without a prompt by the researcher) short narratives and interview narratives are also typical materials in narrative analysis “

Narrative analysis

(Vanessa May, University of Manchester)

- n Narrative analysis is ... the study of any narrative texts, such as:
 - narratives found the private, public or political realms
 - ‘naturally occurring’ narratives
 - oral or written narratives collected for research purposes
 - public/policy documents or media texts
- n Most narrative studies focus on both form and content; both the told (the content of what is said) and on the telling (how it is told)
- n From life-stories to episodic short narratives

Analysing data

- n Analysis can be data or theory driven (in qualitative research more data-driven, but most often something between these)
- n "Data won't answer to the researcher without questions but it can tell what is worth asking from it." (Ruusuvuori ym. 2010, s.15 – translation mk)
- n There is a huge variety of different methods/ approaches for analysing data in qualitative research see e.g. <https://koppa.jyu.fi/avoimet/hum/menetelmapolkuja/en/methodmap/data-analysis/data-analysis> and they might be used (and understood) slightly differently in different disciplines and by different researchers
- n But there are also some concrete steps in analysing data no matter what the methodological approach is: organising data – coding – analysis – interpretation
- n Systematic analysis of the whole data is important (instead of trusting your first impressions)

Practical guide to qualitative (thematic) analysis

Laws, Sophie , Harper, Caroline & Marcus , Rachel (2003) *Research for Development Analysis*. Sage, pp. 376-421

- n Familiarise yourself with the data: read and reread your notes, interview schedules, transcripts. Begin to make notes of themes you see arising.
- n Make a preliminary list of themes or categories you can see in the data.
- n Go through the data, making notes in the margins of the text as you go along, as to what theme is being dealt with where.
- n Look again at your list of categories, before, during and after this second reading of the materials, and make changes as problems emerge.
- n Set out your list of categories in some clear format (separate sheets, charts, file cards) where you can link them with notes, quotes, or references direct from the data.
- n Go through the data again, and note all material that you find relating to each category under its heading (crucial here to make detailed references to the data with any quotes or notes, so that you can trace them back).
- n Then you can look at each category and see what you have got, and it will be easy to make sense of the material you have collected.
- n Essentially the task is to draw from the data a set of key themes which summarise the important categories within the data, and to look at how these relate to each other.

For further information

Sage Research Methods Database (available via University library)

<http://srmo.sagepub.com/>

Many textbooks & handbooks available e.g.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Taylor, S. J. (2016). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource* (Fourth edition.). Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley.

Flick, U. (2014). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Textbooks for more specific qualitative methods e.g.

Birks, M. (2015). *Grounded theory: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Andrews, M., Squire, C. & Tamboukou, M. (2008). *Doing narrative research*. Los Angeles, [Calif.] ; London: SAGE

Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis: An introduction* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury.

Have, P. t. (2007). *Doing conversation analysis* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, Calif. ; London: SAGE.

Relax and enjoy doing your research!

