

Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods

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Opening Remarks

- I am an advocate of the importance of qualitative research and have been for a long time, before it became popular.
- Allow me to talk a little about its development and growing acceptance
- Quantitative has a much longer history, since 1920s
- In 1960s, 'social indicators' were gaining interest, but still measured quantitatively.
- Question arose: What is the difference between 'Quantity of life' vs. 'Quality of life' and how do we measure each?
- One current area of usage is with SIA

What are the differences between quantitative and qualitative?

To understand one, must understand the other:

- Quantitative data are objective, can be counted or measured and given a numerical value, answering 'how many?' 'how often?' 'how much?' and is fixed/universal. Deals with variables that have a natural numerical value like age, income
- Qualitative data are subjective, exploratory, descriptive, referring to things that can be observed, but not objectively measured, like colours or emotions, answering 'why' or 'how'?

Comparing Q & Q

(Streefkerk, 2019, Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research
www.scribbr.com/methodology/quantitative.....)

Quantitative

- Focuses on testing
- Analyzed with math and statistical analysis
- Expressed in tables, graphs, numbers
- Requires many respondents
- Closed questions

Key terms: testing, measurement, objectivity, replicability

Use when you want to test or confirm something

Qualitative

- Focuses on exploring ideas
- Analyzed by categorizing, interpreting, summarizing
- Expressed in words
- Few respondents
- Open-ended, discussion questions

Key terms: understanding, context, complexity, subjectivity

Use if you want to understand something.

Which is 'better'?

“To say that one or the other is ‘better’ is trivializing of a far more complex topic.... In most applied social research projects, there is value in combining both quantitative and qualitative methods in what is referred to as “mixed methods” approach.... The bottom line is that Q & Q data are to some extent virtually inseparable. Neither can be considered devoid of the other.”

Source: Trochem, W. (academics.lmu.edu/./quantitative-vs-qualitative)

- Conclusion to the earlier question is: neither is better, each has its advantages, but also limitations.
- Use of each depends on what research is trying to achieve.
- Qualitative methods should not replace survey, but rather insights can provide explanations to quantitative findings

Research Methods used as related to Specific Objectives of the Studies

SD = Secondary Data; IDI = In-depth interviews; FGD = Focus Groups Discussions; DO = Direct Observation (Use of check list)

Objectives to be addressed	SD	Survey	IDI / Leaders Officials	FGD	DO	Comm- unity Mapping	Paired Needs Ranking
a) Describe in general terms, the population size and structure, settlement patterns, ethnic structure and ethnic groups within the community, leadership pattern, etc;	X	X	X	X	X	X	
b) Identify administrative/socio-cultural institutions/ leadership patterns, migrant status of villagers, etc.	X		X	X			X
c) Assess level of infrastructural development in terms of social amenities and infrastructure available and present condition;			X	X	X	X	X
d) Present a gender analysis of livelihoods, etc.		X		X			X
e) Find out potential for conflict and attitude or perception to the proposed project;	X	X	X	X			
f) Determine livelihood strategies in terms of farming, hunting, non timber forest collection, logging, etc ;	X	X	X	X			
g) Identify socially marginalized groups within the community		X	X	X			
h) Identify and assess status of resources (land, forest, water, etc.) and level of dependence upon natural resources	X		X	X	X	X	
i) Suggest mechanisms to minimize negative effects of proposed project upon local population	X		X	X			X

What can we achieve by using qualitative methods?

- Qualitative research provides multiple contexts for understanding the situation or issue under study by gender / generational / cultural differences in FGDs or from leaders of different groups in IDIs, etc.
- *“At the heart of qualitative research is the belief that reality is based on perceptions and can be different for each person, often changing over time.”* (Source: Wilson et al, (2020) “Understanding Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches” accelerate.ufu.health.utah.edu/explore/...)

“Qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions. Therefore, qualitative research is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives.”

McLeod, S. A. (2019, July 30). *Qualitative vs. quantitative research*. Simply Psychology.
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/qualitative-quantitative.html>

Advantages and Limitations of Qualitative Research

Advantages

- Researcher gains an insiders' point of view
- Flexibility: design may evolve to adjust to field experience
- Builds research-respondent rapport
- Encourages greater understanding of situation, issue or population
- Can suggest possible relationships, causes, effects and dynamic processes.

Limitations

- Smaller number of respondents
- Time-consuming
- Greater potential for subjectivity by researcher
- Lack of adequate validity and reliability
- Almost impossible to replicate
- Potential for ethical research issues to emerge

Three major types of qualitative research designs:

1. Phenomenology: To understand the experience of meaning of persons to a particular situation
2. Ethnography: focuses on the culture of a group of people
3. Grounded theory – beginning with a general research problem, select persons most likely to gain insights, then use a variety of tools to gain understanding

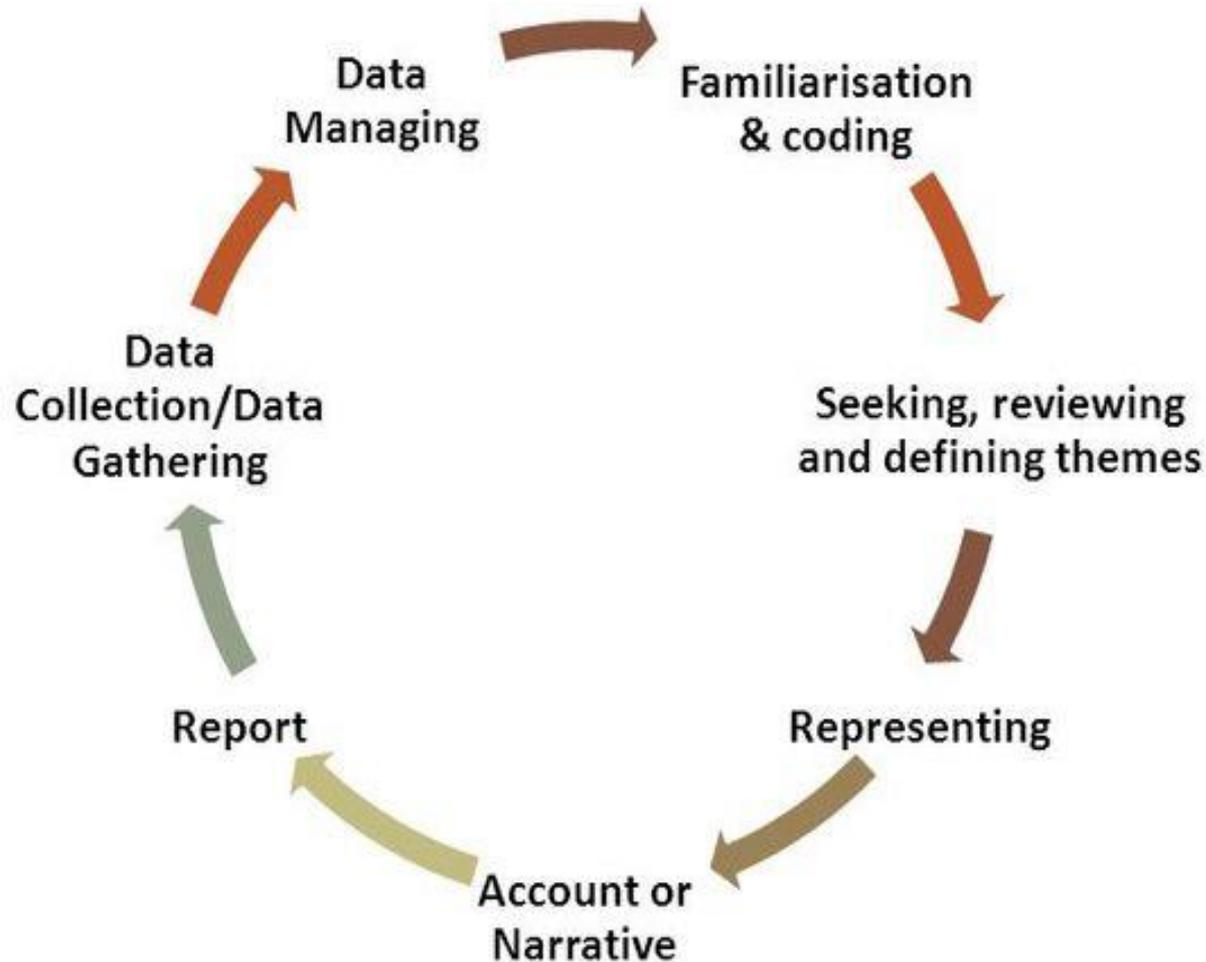
Action research and narrative are two less common designs

What do we do with qualitative data after we gather it?

- Form of analysis depends on purpose of research: Is it just to gain information on a situation, group or issue? Or, does research seek to develop theory or answer set questions?
- Qualitative data is sometimes quantified by placing observations/answers on nominal or ordinal scale, like using 5-pt Likert Scale to rank people's attitudes.

Analysis of qualitative data

McLeod, S. A. (2019, July 30). *Qualitative vs. quantitative research*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/qualitative-quantitative.html>



Most common way of giving quantitative values to qualitative data : **'Thematic Analysis'**: Data is coded to identify recurring keywords or topics

Steps to carry out thematic analysis:

1. Prepare and organize data – transcribe field notes or recordings
2. Examine data for patterns/repeated ideas
3. Develop coding system to apply to categorize data
4. Assign codes to data
5. Identify recurring themes

Researchers need to remember:

- We do not know all the possible questions to ask or the potential answers.
- We should not assume a higher level of precision in the data than reality suggests is possible.
- We are sometimes not objective and allow our perspectives, biases or opinions to affect the analysis of findings
- Data collection is not just to understand or describe, but to proffer solutions on the way forward.
- We need to develop professional 'humility', acknowledging that we are dependent upon the people to get good data.

Guidelines for conducting any research

- Don't allow subjectivity to rule your impressions, presentation of questions or recording of responses.
- Probe for hidden social reality, but don't push
- Treat respondents as you would like to be treated – be courteous and respectful
- Be sensitive to their time constraints
- Create a relaxed atmosphere
- Use good public relations/communication techniques

Significance of this training

- Qualitative methodology has become popular: everyone talks about it, but relatively few know how to conduct it or use the various tools. ***Don't think it's easy!***
- It is not just something to add on to the main research study: should be integrated into the research design of most studies.
- Facilitators in this training are researchers who don't just teach about qualitative methods, but have used the tools repeatedly in the field.
- At the same time, we can all learn from each other's experience and expertise to add value to all our research skills.

Qualitative, Participatory Methods Requires Training & Experience

