

Qualitative research design

Temilade Sesan
temi@gbengasesan.com

February 9, 2021



First things first

‘The decision about whether to commission and use qualitative or quantitative methods, or a combination of both, is a pragmatic one. The overriding question should be, what methods will provide answers to the question at hand in the most effective and efficient manner?’

(Murphy and Dingwall 2003, pp.49-50)



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY



Examples

- How likely is a large-scale clean cooking transition in Nigeria, including among the poor – and how is it likely to happen?
- How can incentives for relevant stakeholders be realigned to mediate and sustain the transition in a pro-poor manner?

Fundamental principles

- Seeing social phenomena ‘through the eyes of the people being studied’ (Bryman 2004, p.279)
- Inductive rather than deductive: from specific data to general theory
- Interpretivist rather than positivist

Fundamental principles

- The task is to *understand*, not explain
- Focus on quality, not quantity
- Not generalisable, but gives insight into the story behind the numbers – the ‘why’ questions

Decisions, decisions

- Justification: helps you take responsibility – reason why active voice is encouraged

‘The limited scope of ethnographic work... may be seen to be restrictive; however, considering its primary aim to establish and consolidate access to the key implementing organisations, the progress made... was sufficient to facilitate the planning and design of the second, more comprehensive round of fieldwork.’

Case/site selection

- Determined by methodological criteria and opportunity
 - Who do you know?
 - Where can you gain entry?
 - Where can you afford to go?
 - Prioritise security and safety
 - Covid-era considerations should apply

Sampling

- No random samples
- Selective sampling ‘... entails the **purposeful** selection of informants according to the aims of the research, filtered through relevant categories such as age, gender, status, role or function in organisation’ (Schatzman and Strauss 1973).

Sampling

- Snowball sampling highly effective for elite and key informant interviewing
- Allow for serendipity – things will *definitely* not go as planned – but be systematic
- What is a good number? Keep at it until you reach theoretical saturation, but keep the numbers relatively small

Ex-post justification?

‘The following sections discuss the final plan prepared in advance of the main round of fieldwork and show how actual events in the field deviated considerably from the original plan in certain respects, but ultimately yielded rich and varied data which facilitated a more robust analysis than originally anticipated.’



Research instruments

- (Multiple) interview guides
- Observation protocols
- Fieldwork journals (more tomorrow)
- Semi-structured; open-ended; flexible
- #1: The **researcher**



Example

- Who do you think would benefit the most from renewed government attention to clean cooking (e.g., through a shift to LPG)? Who would lose the most?
 - Probe: What are the costs/benefits to women vs. men? Government vs. business? Informal vs. formal private sector?
 - Do you think the costs would outweigh the benefits for any of the actors?

Ethical considerations

- Apply to all research involving ‘human subjects’
- UI ethics approvals: SSHREC
- At a minimum, obtain informed consent
- Maintain anonymity and confidentiality
- Need to balance cultural sensitivity with academic standards
- Be careful with photographs
- Think in advance about data protection

Questions?

Temilade Sesan
temi@gbengasesan.com

