Qualitative Research Methods

Katie Rommel-Esham
Education 604
Characteristics

• Natural Setting
• Direct Data Collection
• Rich Narrative Descriptions
• Process Orientation
• Inductive Data Analysis
• Participant Perspectives
• Emergent Research Design
Interactive Inquiry

• In-depth study using *face-to-face techniques* to collect data from people in their *natural settings*
Interactive Modes of Inquiry

• **Ethnography**
  • Description and interpretation of a *cultural or social group or system*
  • Involves *prolonged field work*
  • Focuses on mundane details of everyday life
  • Final product is a comprehensive and holistic narrative description integrating all aspects of group life and its complexities
Interactive Modes of Inquiry

• **Case study**
  • Examines a case in detail *over an extended period of time*
  • Employs multiple data sources
  • The case may be an individual, program, or event
  • *Cases may be selected for their uniqueness, not generally for representativeness*
  • Provides a detailed description of the case, an analysis of themes, and researcher’s interpretations
Interactive Modes of Inquiry

• **Phenomenology**
  
  • Describes the *meanings of a lived experience*
  
  • Researcher collects data on how individuals make sense out of their experiences
  
  • Typically involves in-depth interviews
  
  • Enables readers to more fully understand the concept relating to the experience
Interactive Modes of Inquiry

• *Grounded Theory*
  • Develops “dense” concepts related to a particular phenomenon
  • Primarily uses interview data collected through multiple field visits
  • Goal is to specify the historical and social conditions that influence the phenomenon of interest
Interactive Modes of Inquiry

• **Critical Studies**
  - Assumes that knowledge is subjective
  - Researchers view society as structured by class, status, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation
  - Begin with a commitment to expose social manipulation and oppression and to change oppressive social structures
Noninteractive Inquiry

• Analytical research that investigates *historical concepts and events* through analysis of documents
Qualitative Research Methodologies
Qualitative Techniques

• Data are collected in the form of words rather than numbers

• Provides detailed narrative descriptions, analysis, and interpretation

• Data are analyzed inductively
Participants/Sample

- *Purposeful sampling* (Ethnography)

- *Internal sampling* (Case Study)

- Those who have "lived the experience" (Phenomenology)

- Those who are able to provide significant contributions to the theory being developed (Grounded Theory)
Data Collection Methods
Participant Observation

• Participating in *naturally occurring situations* and writing extensive field notes about what occurs

• Data collection does not address a specific hypothesis, but explanations are derived inductively

• Researchers are careful to document their levels of involvement*

• Researchers learn from their own experience in the setting as a result of having spent so much time there
Levels of Researcher Involvement

- *Participant Observer*: Researcher creates role for purpose of study
- *Insider-Observer*: Researcher has formal role in organization
- *Interviewer*: Researcher establishes role with each person interviewed
- *Participant-researcher*: Researcher establishes a dual role for purpose of the study
Field Observation

• Direct accounts of everyday social action and settings in the form of *field notes*

• Field notes are detailed descriptions of *events, people, actions, and objects in the setting*
Descriptive Fieldnotes

- Portraits of the subjects
- Reconstruction of dialogue
- Description of physical setting
- Accounts of particular events
- Depiction of activities
- The observer's behavior
Reflective Fieldnotes

- Reflections on analysis
- Reflections on method
- Reflections on ethical dilemmas and conflicts
- Reflections on the observer's frame of mind
- Points of clarification
In-Depth Interviews

• A conversation with a purpose
• Generally very open ended
• May rely on a general interview guide, but not precisely worded questions for every interview
• Interviewee is encouraged to provide in-depth discussion of areas of interest
• Often recorded, then transcribed
Documents and Artifacts

• Documents are *records of past events that are written or printed* (notes, letters, diaries, internal papers, student personnel files, etc.)

• Artifacts are *material objects and symbols of current or past events, groups, persons, or organizations* (mascots, diplomas, artwork, award plaques)
Establishing *Validity and Reliability* in Qualitative Research
Promoting *Validity* in Qualitative Research

- **Extended Fieldwork**
  - Data are collected *over a period of time*

- **Low Inference Descriptors**
  - Use of descriptions phrased very closely to the participants’ accounts and researcher’s field notes

- **Participant Feedback**
  - Feedback and discussion of interpretations and conclusions with participants
Promoting *Validity* in Qualitative Research

- **Triangulation**: when different sources agree, information is corroborated
  - *Data*: use of multiple data sources
  - *Methods*: use of multiple methods
  - *Investigator*: use of multiple investigators
  - *Theory*: use of multiple theories and perspectives
Promoting *Validity* in Qualitative Research

- **Peer Review**
  - Discussion of conclusions and interpretations with others, including discussion with a “disinterested” peer who can provide insights as well as play devil’s advocate

- **Negative Case Sampling**
  - Locating and examining cases that *disconfirm* expectations and tentative explanations
Promoting *Validity* in Qualitative Research

- **Reflexivity**
  - Self-reflection and critical awareness on potential biases and predispositions

- **Pattern Matching**
  - Predicting a series of events that form a pattern and then matching that to the actual results
Reliability

- Deals with *degree of accuracy of observations* (agreement between observations and setting)

- Enhanced by the use of *supporting documentation* (field notes, recordings, agreement of others in same situation etc.)
Now let’s try it!