

Qualitative Research

Laya Prasad Uprety

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y. 2005. (eds.) *Qualitative Research*. Third Edition. London: Sage Publications. Preface, Index, 1210pp. hardcover

This book entitled 'Qualitative Research' is the latest contribution in the history of qualitative research and has been exceedingly successful in charting the course and importance of qualitative research in the contemporary research regime. This book is extremely useful in social and cultural anthropology where the research tradition has been dominated by ethnographic research practices. However, it can be used by the researchers of other disciplines because of the growing paramount importance of the qualitative research for the interpretation of realities. In the contemporary world, there has been a growing emphasis on the judicious mixture of the qualitative and quantitative tools and techniques in the social research because such methodology can always give a better integrated and comprehensive picture of what we investigate in the society and culture. In this context, this book proffers the opportunities to the contemporary social science researchers for having the deeper understanding on the nuts- and -bolts of qualitative research.

N. K. Denzin and Y.S Lincoln, in the preface of the book, have underscored the extent of qualitative revolution taking place in the social sciences and related professional fields. The audiences of this book have been graduate students wanting to learn the qualitative research, interested faculty hoping to be better informed about the field, professionals working in the field of policy settings who understand the value of such qualitative research methods and are interested to learn about their latest developments, and faculty who have some expertise on qualitative research and want to be better informed about the most recent developments in the field. The editors have argued that the qualitative inquiry, *interalia*, is the name for a "reformist movement" that began in the early 1970s in the academic field. They have further argued that the interpretative and critical paradigms are central to this movement. Given the fact that the experimental quantitative model of research is ill suited to examining the subtle social differences triggered by gender, race, ethnicity, linguistic status, or class, etc; qualitative inquiry has been immensely important. Definitely, qualitative researchers have fight against the neo-liberal regimes of truth and science. The overall emphasis of qualitative research has been on the critical interpretative approach.

This book has been structured into 44 chapters. Leaving aside the **Introduction** chapter, all the other chapters have been organized into six parts. Part One, that is, **Locating the Field**, consists of six chapters. Part Two, that is, **Paradigms and Perspectives in Contention**, consists of seven chapters. Part Three, that is, **Strategies of Inquiry**, consists of 10 chapters. Part Four, that is, **Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials** consists of 11 chapters. Part Five, that is, **The Art and Practice of Interpretation, Evaluation, and Presentation** consists of 7 chapters. And finally, Part Six, that is, **The Future of Qualitative Research**, consists of two chapters. The book also contains an epilogue.

Interestingly, the editors have shared that the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism when emphasis was laid on the generation of knowledge about indigenous knowledge. They have also argued that, to a large extent, qualitative research also served for colonial knowledge and truth. Both qualitative and quantitative researches were the objective way of representing the colonized people to the colonizers, the white world. Understandably, qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Succinctly speaking, qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive. The contemporary emphasis of the qualitative research has been on the liberation and empowerment of the socially and economically disadvantaged people.

Part One of the book, that is, **Locating the Field**, focuses on the suggested form of the social sciences and the academy through participatory action research. Similarly, it underscores the need of critical theorizing and analysis of injustice, researching the natives, freeing researchers from colonial domination in research (with the utilization of a Kauppapa Maori approach to creating knowledge), emphasis on the social, political, and moral responsibilities of researchers, and ethics and politics of qualitative research.

Part Two of the book, that is, **Paradigms and Perspectives in Contention**, basically examines the major paradigms and perspectives that structure and organize the contemporary qualitative research. These comprise positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, participatory action frameworks, perspectives of feminism, critical race theory, queer theory, and cultural studies. Understandably, these perspectives have developed their own criteria, assumptions and methodological practices. Interestingly, the borders and boundaries between these paradigms and perspectives have begun to blur, and have resulted in "interbreeding". However, the qualitative researcher has to understand the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumption of each paradigm/perspective to be able to use them in the dialogue.

Part Three, that is, **Strategies of Inquiry**, underscores the research design and choice of strategy of inquiry. Contributors have emphasized on the practice and politics of funded research (which is not neutral and value-free), performance ethnography (the reenacting and inciting of culture), qualitative case studies, the observation of participation and the emergence of public ethnography, interpretative practice and social action, application of grounded theories for advancing the social justice studies, critical ethnographies, subalternity and narrative authority, participatory action research and clinical research.

Part Four, that is, **Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials**, contains the contributions on the uses of narrative inquiry (with focus on multiple lenses, approaches, and voices), arts-based inquiry (with focus on performing revolutionary pedagogy), interview (from neutral stance to political involvement), re-contextualization of observation (with emphasis on ethnography, pedagogy, and the prospects for a progressive political agenda), auto-ethnography (with emphasis on making the personal political), methods, politics and ethics of representation, analytic perspectives, Foucault's methodologies, analyzing texts and talks, and focus groups (with emphasis on strategy articulation of pedagogy, politics and inquiry).

Part Five, that is, **The Art and Practice of Interpretation, Evaluation, and Presentation**, explores the art, practices and politics of interpretation, evaluation and representation. More specifically, the contributors have underscored relativism, criteria and politics, emancipatory discourses and the ethics and politics of interpretation (with emphasis on connecting indigenous epistemologies, and theories of decolonization), writing (a method of inquiry: a way of making sense of the world), cultural poesis (with emphasis on the generativity of emergent things), and qualitative evaluation and changing social policy (where evaluators are interpreters).

Part Six, that is, **The Future of Qualitative Research**, focuses on qualitative research into the new 21st century. The emphasis has been on the role of researchers to uncover in new situations the "human possibilities previously hidden". A neutral and non-committed form of inquiry is an impossibility. In every truly democratic society, everyone is free to question everything that is pre-given. Put in other words, qualitative research becomes a vehicle for questioning that is pre-given. Contributors have called for the "re-functioning of ethnography", that is, a grounding of ethnography in the contemporary moment. There is the need to orient the contemporary ethnography to the ecologies of knowledge, existing discourses and local practices that are in place in the field settings. Finally, the epilogue gives the message that the message of the book is not the final one but it treated as a punctuation that has marked the stop to take a breath. There is a lot to explore. There is also the need to reconnect the social world to social purpose and emphasize on the growth of

indigenous social sciences, and decolonization of academy. There is also the need to address the issue of representation.

Thus, this book has been immensely successful in helping the community of graduate students, academicians and development professionals in understanding the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research, its importance for understanding the social world, historical context of the evolution of the contemporary qualitative research, its role for the liberation/emancipation of underprivileged or disadvantaged communities, the need for thick descriptions of cultures by deciphering the layers of meanings, the rise of indigenous social sciences and decolonization of the academy. Indeed, use of the quantitative approach alone cannot produce the realistic picture of the society and culture. It is only through the complementarity of both quantitative and qualitative approaches that the realities would be understood in a better way. Therefore, the editors and contributors of this edited book deserve very many appreciations.

Despite the monumental value of such book, it is not free from shortcomings. The book is written in a very complex and scholarly way and therefore, its comprehensibility (by all the general readers) is questionable. One can only understand the book after having a deeper understanding of number of paradigms/perspectives, which is itself very challenging for a generality of the readers. Simplicity in writing would help the readers to be immensely benefited. Despite the fact that editors and authors have been effortful in reducing a number of other shortcomings as they did in the past, they have not been successful in this regard. These shortcomings comprise incomplete treatment of the intersection of critical and indigenous inquiry and failure to include more indigenous scholars from the underdeveloped societies who would furnish the *emic* perspective for the analysis of the indigenous communities and contribute to the process of decolonization of the academy.