Rummaging on a Research Method

Dr. Shiva Ram Pandey[1]

[1]Associate Professor, Gramin Adarsha Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Abstract

Rummaging on a research method is a review article on qualitative research method. It briefly presents what qualitative research is, its philosophical perspectives, paradigms and parameters, nature and features, how to generate qualitative data and analyze them, rigour and quality in qualitative research. It draws the conclusion that qualitative research is really good in the field of social and educational research to develop quality in teaching, learning and research. Furthermore, it was explored from the study that qualitative research method is subjective in nature. It uncovers and discovers rich data and reality in a naturalistic context. It is both reflexive and communicative. It has its deep faith on multiple realities. It is highly rigorous in terms of process to unearth in-depth information out of a phenomenon. It aspires to make a quest for maintaining quality in the field of research.

Keywords: method, qualitative, review, rigour

Introduction

I like to begin writing this article with forceful adage which is in a way related to qualitative research method that is impermanence is the rule of game in this post modern world. I believe that life is incidental and death is accidental. To my understanding, qualitative research method is full of life with incidents. One should have the ability to capture the incidents of joy or pain while carrying out the qualitative research (Pandey, 2012). The other prominent thing in this postmodern world is that the only constant thing is change. Change is contextual. What is good to me in one context may not be good in another context. It indicates that a number of interpretations are possible in a qualitative research method. The strength of this method is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the human

side of an issue – that is, often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals.

Qualitative research methods are effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent. When used along with quantitative methods, qualitative research can help us to interpret and better understand the complex reality of a given situation and the implications of quantitative data (Paton, 1990). Although findings from qualitative data can often be extended to people with characteristics similar to those in the study population, gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon typically takes precedence over eliciting data that can be generalized to other geographical areas or populations. In this sense, qualitative research differs slightly from scientific research in general (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research is a type of scientific research. In general terms, scientific research consists of an investigation that seeks answers to a question, systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question, collects evidence, produces findings that were not determined in advance and produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study. Qualitative research method shares these characteristics. Additionally, it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations (Paton, 1990).

Qualitative research method is not only about what people think but also why they think so. It is based on the disciplines of social sciences like psychology, sociology, and anthropology (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the qualitative research methods allow for in-depth and further probing and questioning of respondents based on their responses, where the interviewer/researcher also tries to understand their motivation and feelings. Understanding how your audience takes decisions can help derive conclusions in market research (Paton, 1990).

Qualitative research methods are designed in a manner that help reveal the behavior and perception of a target audience with reference to a particular topic. There are different types of qualitative research methods like an in-depth interview, focus groups, ethnographic research, content analysis, case study research that are usually used. The results of qualitative methods are more descriptive and the inferences can be drawn quite easily from the data that is obtained. Qualitative research methods originated in the social and behavioral sciences. Today our world is more complicated and it is difficult to understand what people think and perceive. Online qualitative research methods make it easier to understand that as it is more communicative and descriptive (Creswell, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

Research, in a common parlance, is a systematic process of investigating the truth. It is an academic and problem-solving activity. Qualitative research makes an attempt to

understand the meaning of an experience and strives to understand how all the parts work together to form a whole (Paton, 1990). In this context, the purpose of this study is to explore different perspectives of qualitative research method both in social and educational settings.

Research Question

This study has aspired to explore the different dimensions of qualitative research method. As this is a review-based article, the researcher has accessed to the relevant literature and documents. In this context, the study has cultivated the following research questions:

How do you perceive qualitative research method?

Why is qualitative research method vital in social and educational settings?

How is qualitative research method carried out?

Literature Review

I believe that qualitative research explores multiple realities and it is subjective (Pandey, 2012). It is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. It is characterized by a concern for the individual to understand the subjective world of human experience. Qualitative research tends to be associated with participant observation and unstructured, in-depth interviewing (Creswell, 2012).

I really agree with the idea that qualitative methodologies are powerful tools for enhancing our understanding of teaching and learning and they have gained increasing acceptance in recent years. Quantitative measures, on the other hand, cannot adequately describe or interpret a situation. Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that qualitative research means any kind of research that produces findings not arrived yet by means of statistic procedures or other means of quantification. Qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations; qualitative inquiry accepts the complex and dynamic quality of the social world.

Patton (1990) advocates a 'paradigm of choices' that seeks methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality. Some researchers like Strauss and Corbin (1998) believe that qualitative and quantitative research can be effectively combined in the same research project. Qualitative methods are appropriate in situations where one needs to first identify the variables that might later be tested quantitatively or where the researcher has determined that quantitative measures cannot adequately describe or interpret a situation. Research problems tend to be framed as open-ended questions that will support discovery of new information. It describes data both from researchers' and readers' perspective.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) qualitative approach to research is a critical interpretive approach to understand social complexities through the use of multiple methods in order to triangulate the lived reality. It is a field of naturalistic inquiry and situated activity that locate the observer in the world. As the world is constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed through continuous interpretive performance of humans, qualitative research captures this interpretive phenomenon from multiple and contrary lenses.

The key difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is their flexibility. Generally, quantitative methods are fairly inflexible. With quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires, for example, researchers ask all participants identical questions in the same order. The response categories from which participants may choose are 'closed-ended' or fixed. The advantage of this inflexibility is that it allows for meaningful comparison of responses across participants and study sites. However, it requires a thorough understanding of the important questions to ask, the best way to ask them, and the range of possible responses. Participant responses affect how and which questions researchers ask next Study design is iterative, that is, data collection and research questions are adjusted according to what is learned Denzin and Lincoln (2005).

According to Paton (1990) qualitative methods are typically more flexible – that is, they allow greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the study participant. For example, qualitative methods ask mostly "open-ended" questions that are not necessarily worded in exactly the same way with each participant. With open-ended questions, participants are free to respond in their own words, and these responses tend to be more complex than simply 'yes' or 'no'. In addition, with qualitative methods, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is often less formal than in quantitative research. Participants have the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail than is typically the case with quantitative methods. In turn, researchers have the opportunity to respond immediately to what participants say by tailoring subsequent questions to information the participant has provided (Cresswell, 2012). It is important to note, however, that there is a range of flexibility among methods used in both quantitative and qualitative research and that flexibility is not an indication of how scientifically rigorous a method is. Rather, the degree of flexibility reflects the kind of understanding of the problem that is being pursued using the method (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Methods

The available literature such as articles, thesis, journals, books and google have been reviewed, interpreted, and analyzed to explore ideas, needs and importance of research methods in general and qualitative research method in particular. Thematic and theoretical literature have been reviewed to further substantiate the study. The concept of qualitative research method has been intensively reviewed. The relevant research method theories,

personal and professional experiences and expertise of the researcher have been deployed to arrive at the conclusions.

Philosophical Perspective and Paradigm

Philosophical position is very significant to conduct any research. The reason behind it is that it is a comprehensive belief system, world view or framework that provides research guidelines for successful research practice (Babbie, 2015, as cited in Sapkota, 2019). The philosophical position is determined by ontology, epistemology and axiology of the study. According to Henn, Weinstein, and Ford (2010), ontology is the set of assumptions regarding the real world, and epistemology refers to the way of knowing the world, which shows such assumptions. Axiology is considered as the theory of value or the nature of ethics, which "considers what value we shall attribute to different aspects of our research, the participants, the data and the audience to which we shall report the results of our research" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 28).

Epistemological position was that human knowledge of the world is relative and it depends on the interpretation of an individual's past and present experiences as participant is the source of knowledge (Kazmierska, 2018).

The recent development of qualitative research proceeded in different areas. Each of them is characterized by specific theoretical backgrounds, specific concept of reality and their own methodological programs. For example, ethonomethodology is a theoretical program, which first led to: the conversational analysis differentiated in new approaches like genre analysis and discourse analysis. Even though there are variations in theoretical assumptions and their methodological focus, three major perspectives summarize them. The three research perspectives are: symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, ethnomethodology and constructionism, structuralist or psychoanalytic positions assume unconscious psychological structure and mechanism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)

Qualitative research opposes the normative approach that human behavior is essentially rule governed and it should be investigated by the methods of natural science. It believes that knowledge is subjective. It opposes the imposition of external form and structure by retaining the integrity of the phenomena under investigation. It believes in interpretive approach by opposing the traditional normative approach to study human behavior by getting inside the person and understanding him/her from within. It assumes that there are multiple realities; the world out there is not an objective thing but a function of personal interaction and perception (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

According to Patton (1990) qualitative method is a highly exploratory, inductive approach in need of interpreting rather than measuring with a focus on processes rather than ends. It does not believe in manipulation of variables, administering a treatment or predetermining of hypotheses rather it observes, intuits and senses what is occurring in a natural setting. It does not believe in establishing a universal theory to account for human and social behavior rather a theory should emerge, grounded on data generated from research (Creswell, 2012).

Before conducting a qualitative study, a researcher must do three things. First, he/she must adopt the stance suggested by the characteristics of the naturalist paradigm. Second the researcher must develop the level of skill appropriate for a human instrument or the vehicle through which data will be collected must prepare a research design that utilizes and interpreted. Finally, the researchers must prepare a research design that utilizes accepted strategies for naturalistic inquiry (Patton, 1990).

Features of Qualitative Research

According to Patton (1990) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) the features of qualitative research can be presented as below:

Qualitative research helps uncover multiple truths rather than single truth. It studies phenomenon/a exploring its multiple complexities. It uses different sets of assumptions of knowledge claim. It is intently associated with epistemological pluralism with different rigour/validity criteria. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. It studies things in their natural settings. It involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials. It is interpretive and a meaning making process. It is a matter of craft. It is inductive theory building process. The researcher is the source and force of process.

Qualitative research method is reflexive in the sense that it values the reflexivity- the self-awareness- of the researcher. It is also empathetic since it aims to understand people, not to measure them. Moreover, it is communicative as it focuses on communication which is considered a selective process of meaning production in social contexts (Sarantakos, 2005).

Benefits of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research allows for flexibility and adaptability when undertaking research, so a study can be adapted and tailored in response to emerging issues, problems or trends. It provides the opportunity to collaborate with participants and include them as an active part of the research process (Patton, 1990). Qualitative research is very important in educational research as it addresses the "how" and "why" research questions and enables deeper understanding of experiences, phenomena, and context. Qualitative research allows researchers to ask questions that cannot be easily put into numbers to understand human experience (Sarantakos, 2005).

Qualitative research method is valuable when studying information relevant to specific populations. Qualitative method may be the right approach when the researcher aims to explore a problem, honor the voices of participants, map the complexity of the situation, and convey multiple perspectives of participants (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative approach to gathering information focuses on describing a phenomenon in a deep comprehensive manner. In qualitative method, this involves interviews, open-ended questions, or focus groups. Typically, a qualitative study is made up of a small number of participants due to the fact that qualitative studies tend to take more time. Because of the investment in this type of research

and the relatively few number of participants, findings from qualitative research cannot be generalized to the whole population. However, such research serves as a spring board for larger studies and deeper understanding that can inform theory, practice, and specific situations.

There are some benefits of using qualitative research approaches and methods.

Firstly, qualitative research approach produces the thick description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences; and interprets the meanings of their actions (Denzin, 2005). In terms of language testing, for example, Bachman (1998) showed in his study that qualitative research results provide the relationship of information processing with performance specifically and deeply. Similarly, Chalhoub-Deville and Deville (2008), argued that qualitative approaches are employed to achieve deeper insights into issues related to designing, administering, and interpreting language assessment.

Secondly, there are some who argue that qualitative research approach holistically understands the human experience in specific settings. Denzin and Lincoln (2005), for example, mentioned that qualitative research is an interdisciplinary field which encompasses a wider range of epistemological viewpoints, research methods, and interpretive techniques of understanding human experiences. From the perspective of epistemological position, any language assessment cannot be set apart from context, culture and values of where it was used (McNamara, 2001).

Thirdly, interpretivism research approach is regarded as an ideographic research, the study of individual cases or events (Kelin & Myers, 1999); and it has abilities to understand different people's voices, meanings and events. So the source of knowledge in this approach is the meaning of different events (Richardson, 2012).

Fourthly, the qualitative research admits the researchers to discover the participants' inner experience, and to figure out how meanings are shaped through.

Fifthly, qualitative research methods such as participant-observation, unstructured interviews, direct observation, describing records are most commonly used for collecting data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). During the data collection, the researchers interact with the participants directly such as it happens while data collection through interviews. Consequently, data collection is subjective and detailed.

Thus, the thorough and appropriate analyses of an issue can be produced by utilizing qualitative research methods, and therefore the participants have sufficient freedom to determine what is consistent for them (Flick, 2011). As a result, the complex issues can be understood easily. For example, researchers acknowledged that, because of the nature of classroom dynamics, learners' behaviour may be affected by the numerous factors outside of research focus. In this respect, the qualitative research approach is required to capture these dynamics (Sarantakos, 2005).

Maintaining Rigour and Quality

In the case of findings, both researchers and readers share a joint responsibility of reestablishing the value of the qualitative research product. I agree with Eisner (1991) who

says that coherence, consensus and instrumental utility are the three feature of qualitative research. To maintain trustworthiness redefinition, interpretation of the interpretations of others, credibility can be established through triangulation of data, which contains method, data, multiple analyses, theory triangulation (Patton 1990). The output of the research should be generalizable. It should be very appealing on the part of readers. There should be a good harmony or consistency between process and product. It has to be dependable. Conformability contains raw data, analysis notes, reconstruction and synthesis products, process, personal notes, preliminary development information (Lincoln and Guba: 1985). Eisner and Patton (1990) say that the credibility of a qualitative research report lies heavily on the confidence readers have in the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field. Lincoln and Guba (1985) say that humans are the instruments of choice for naturalistic inquiry. Humans are responsive to environmental cues and able to interact with the situation. They have the ability to collect information at multiple levels simultaneously. They are able to perceive situation holistically. They are able to process data as soon as they become available. They can provide immediate feedback and request verification of data and they can explore atypical or unexpected responses. Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data.

Techniques and Tools of Data Collection

In qualitative research method unstructured interview, observation, life history, and open ended questions are used as a technique in the study to gather information about the participants' lives as suggested by Bryman (2008) that life history interview is used to gather information about the participants' complete life history, and as suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) that particularly unstructured interviews are used in the process of data collection in narrative inquiry. Butina (2015) also mentioned the use of an interview to collect narratives/stories of individuals reflecting their identities.

Generating and Analyzing Data

I agree with the idea of Patton (1990) who says that purposeful sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research. Purposeful sampling seeks information rich cases, which can be studied in depth.

Qualitative interviewing utilizes open-ended questions that allow for individual variations. Patton (1990) says that interview can be taken through informal conversational interviews, semi-structured interview and standardized open-ended interviews. Tape-recorder is an indispensable vehicle to record the data. Another way of data collection is through observation.

According to Sarantakos (2005) observation provides knowledge of the context in which events occur and may enable the researchers to see things that participants themselves are not aware of or that they are unwilling to discuss.

Observing from outside, passive presence, engaging in limited interaction can be done while making observation. To record the data, field note can be used. In other source of data, the document analysis can be done. Such document might include official records, letters, newspaper accounts, diaries and reports (Patton, 2005).

While analyzing the data, qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data (Cohen, Manon & Morrison, 2007). Qualitative analysis requires some creativity. Analysis begins with identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes refer to as open coding. The actual voice of participant is coded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Another way of analyzing the data, according to Patton (2005) is linking which is also called axial coding. Reexamination of data can be done.

Conclusion

From the aforementioned review on qualitative research method, it is concluded that qualitative research allows for flexibility and adaptability when undertaking research. A research study can be adapted and tailored in response to emerging issues, problems or trends. It provides the opportunity to collaborate with participants and include them as an active part of the research process. Qualitative research is very important in educational and social research as it addresses the "how" and "why" research questions and enables deeper understanding of experiences, phenomena, and context. It allows researchers to ask questions that cannot be easily put into numbers to understand human experience. It is valuable when studying information relevant to specific populations. Qualitative method may be the right approach when the researcher aims to explore a problem, honor the voices of participants, map the complexity of the situation, and convey multiple perspectives of participants. It uncovers and discovers a new insight in a related field. It is subjective in nature. It explores rich data in a naturalistic context. It is both reflexive and communicative. It has its deep faith on multiple realities. It is highly rigorous in terms of process to derive in-depth information out of a phenomenon. It aspires to make a quest for maintaining quality in the field of research. Qualitative research is the demand of a day in the present world. However, it is more time-consuming, and expensive. It requires special knowledge to carry out the research. Maintaining generalizability is quite challenging in this method. However, contextual generalizability can be well-maintained.

Author's Bio

Dr. Shiva Ram Pandey is an Associate Professor in English Education at Gramin Adarsha Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He has been teaching at campus since 2098. Dr. Pandey has published a number of articles both in national and international journals. He has authored and co-authored a number of books. He has been supervising a number of M.Ed., MPhil., and PhD level theses from both national and international Universities

Reference

Bachman, L. F. (1998). Interfaces between second language acquisition and language testing research. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Butina, M. (2015, Summer). A narrative approach to qualitative inquiry. *Clinical Laboratory Science, 28*(3), 190- 196.

Chalhoub-Deville, M., & Deville, C. (2008). Utilizing psychometric methods in assessment. In E. Shohamy, & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), Encyclopedia of language and education (2nd ed., Vol. 7, pp. 211-224). New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media LLC.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education.* Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). Research methods in education (7th ed.). London: Routledge.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990, June-July). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*(5), 2-14.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research.* Pearson Education Services Pvt. Ltd. India.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The sage handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Eisner, E. W (1991). *The enlightened eye*: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company

Flick, U. (2011). *Introducing research methodology: A beginner's guide to doing a research project.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Glaser, B.G & Strauss, A. L (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago,   IL: Aldine Publishing Company.

Guba, E. G (1978). *Toward a methodology of naturalistic inquiry* in educational evolutional. Monograph 8. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study6 of Evaluation.

Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Foard, N. (2010). *A critical introduction to social research* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Kazmierska, K. (2018). Doing biographical research: Ethical concerns in changing social contexts. *Polish Sociological Review, 203*, 393-411.

Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education, 6*(5), 26-41.

Klein, H. K., & Myers, M. D. (1999). A set of principles for conducting and evaluating interpretive field studies in information systems. MIS Quarterly, 23(1), 67-93. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/249410

Lincoin, Y. S. & Guba, E,. G (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing Company, Inc

McNamara, T. (2001). Language assessment as social practice: Challenges for research. Language Testing, 18(4), 333-349.   http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026553220101800402

Pandey, S.R. (2012). Professional development of English teachers through reflective practice: *An Unpublished PhD thesis*, Kathmandu University, Dhulikhel, Nepal.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed).   Newbury Park , CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Richardson, A. J. (2012). Paradigms, theory and management accounting practice: A comment on Parker (forthcoming) "Qualitative management accounting research: Assessing deliverables and relevance". Critical Perspectives on Accounting, 23(1), 83-88. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2011.05.003

Sapkota, M. (2019). Research philosophy in Development Studies: An inquiry from Qualitative Design. *Research Nepal Journal of Development Studies, 2*(1), 137-150. **https://doi.org/10.3126/rnjds.v2i1.25278**

Sarantakos, S. (2005). *Social research*. Palgrave Macmillian, UK.

Strauss, A.L. & Corbin, J.M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques   and procedures for developing grounded theory.* Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage