

Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation

Buckley and Chiang define research methodology as “a strategy or architectural design by which the researcher maps out an approach to problem-finding or problem-solving.”^[1] According to Crotty, research methodology is a comprehensive strategy ‘that silhouettes our choice and use of specific methods relating them to the anticipated outcomes,^[2] but the choice of research methodology is based upon the type and features of the research problem.^[3] According to Johnson *et al.* mixed method research is “a class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, theories and or language into a single study.^[4] In order to have diverse opinions and views, qualitative findings need to be supplemented with quantitative results.^[5] Therefore, these research methodologies are considered to be complementary to each other rather than incompatible to each other.^[6]

Qualitative research methodology is considered to be suitable when the researcher or the investigator either investigates new field of study or intends to ascertain and theorize prominent issues.^[6,7] There are many qualitative methods which are developed to have an in depth and extensive understanding of the issues by means of their textual interpretation and the most common types are interviewing and observation.^[7]


Interviewing

This is the most common format of data collection in qualitative research. According to Oakley, qualitative interview is a type of framework in which the practices and standards be not only recorded, but also achieved, challenged and as well as reinforced.^[8] As no research interview lacks structure^[9] most of the qualitative research interviews are either semi-structured, lightly structured or in-depth.^[9] Unstructured interviews are generally suggested in conducting long-term field work and allow respondents to let them express in their own ways and pace, with minimal hold on respondents’ responses.^[10]

Pioneers of ethnography developed the use of unstructured interviews with local key informants that is., by collecting the data through observation and record field notes as well as to involve themselves with study participants. To be precise,

unstructured interview resembles a conversation more than an interview and is always thought to be a “controlled conversation,” which is skewed towards the interests of the interviewer.^[11] Non-directive interviews, form of unstructured interviews are aimed to gather in-depth information and usually do not have pre-planned set of questions.^[11] Another type of the unstructured interview is the focused interview in which the interviewer is well aware of the respondent and in times of deviating away from the main issue the interviewer generally refocuses the respondent towards key subject.^[11] Another type of the unstructured interview is an informal, conversational interview, based on unplanned set of questions that are generated instantaneously during the interview.^[11]

In contrast, semi-structured interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents have to answer preset open-ended questions and thus are widely employed by different healthcare professionals in their research. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are utilized extensively as interviewing format possibly with an individual or sometimes even with a group.^[6] These types of interviews are conducted once only, with an individual or with a group and generally cover the duration of 30 min to more than an hour.^[12] Semi-structured interviews are based on semi-structured interview guide, which is a schematic presentation of questions or topics and need to be explored by the interviewer.^[12] To achieve optimum use of interview time, interview guides serve the useful purpose of exploring many respondents more systematically and comprehensively as well as to keep the interview focused on the desired line of action.^[12] The questions in the interview guide comprise of the core question and many associated questions related to the central question, which in turn, improve further through pilot testing of the interview guide.^[7] In order to have the interview data captured more effectively, recording of the interviews is considered an appropriate choice but sometimes a matter of controversy among the researcher and the respondent. Hand written notes during the interview are relatively unreliable, and the researcher might miss some key points. The recording of the interview makes it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview content and the verbal prompts and thus enables the transcriptionist to generate “verbatim transcript” of the interview.

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Similarly, in focus groups, invited groups of people are interviewed in a discussion setting in the presence of the session moderator and generally these discussions last for 90 min.^[7] Like every research technique having its own merits and demerits, group discussions have some intrinsic worth of expressing the opinions openly by the participants. On the contrary in these types of discussion settings, limited issues can be focused, and this may lead to the generation of fewer initiatives and suggestions about research topic.

Observation

Observation is a type of qualitative research method which not only included participant's observation, but also covered ethnography and research work in the field. In the observational research design, multiple study sites are involved. Observational data can be integrated as auxiliary or confirmatory research.^[11]

Conclusion

Research can be visualized and perceived as painstaking methodical efforts to examine, investigate as well as restructure the realities, theories and applications. Research methods reflect the approach to tackling the research problem. Depending upon the need, research method could be either an amalgam of both qualitative and quantitative or qualitative or quantitative independently. By adopting qualitative methodology, a prospective researcher is going to fine-tune the pre-conceived notions as well as extrapolate the thought process, analyzing and estimating the issues from an in-depth perspective. This could be carried out

by one-to-one interviews or as issue-directed discussions. Observational methods are, sometimes, supplemental means for corroborating research findings.

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