

Issues Associated to Qualitative Research Paradigm

Joshi S

Nursing Campus Maharajgunj

Correspondence Address: Prof. Dr. Sarala Joshi, Nursing Campus Maharajgunj

Qualitative research paradigm encompasses an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry which helps to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena in the natural setting. The key philosophical assumption of qualitative research paradigm is based on the belief that reality is constructed by individual links with their social world. Moreover, it adopts inductive reasoning process and the researchers act as primary instrument for data collection¹.

In this paradigm, a multidisciplinary group is formed while conducting a qualitative inquiry process for exploring and understanding social or human problems; and adopts interpretative technique to explore the phenomena in naturalistic situation. It also explores the subjective issues by adopting holistic approach and analyzes (physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, social, environmental factors) the subject matter which is unclear or little is known about particular phenomena. The qualitative researchers often collect a variety of empirical materials by means of: case study, personal experience, introspective, life story interview, observation, historical, international, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives².

There is paradigm conflict between the proponents of positivist paradigm (quantitative researchers) and proponents of naturalistic paradigm (qualitative researchers). The proponents of positivist paradigm have often undermined the usefulness of naturalistic paradigm and they consider that the quality of a study depends on extent of establishing validity and reliability of the measurements and the degree of generalisability of the findings. Therefore, the proponents of positivist paradigm visualize the qualitative research from their own positivist perspectives³; so it is often criticized that the qualitative research lacks: **representativeness** (as the study conducts in small sample, so findings cannot be generalized), **replicability** (as it cannot repeat/replicate the findings in other settings), **reliability** (as consistent findings cannot be obtained as they often use unstructured/semistructured instruments), and **reactivity** (as human beings often react differently to a stimuli based on their mental mechanism, so consistent findings cannot be obtained).

Moreover, the proponents of quantitative research paradigm further try to proclaim and confine the qualitative research activities in relation to seven points which can be abbreviated

as **EMIC-SMR** model, as given below:

“E”- violates **ethical** aspects of the respondents, as the researchers often collect data for a long period/repeatedly;

“M”- adopts emergent design without specified **methodology** which decreases validity and reliability of its findings;

“I” - **inform** consent is often questioned, as it gathers subjective issues;

“C” - **confidentiality** and anonymity cannot be maintained during in-depth interviews and observation.

“S” - gathers **sensitive** issues which also violate the rights of the respondents;

“M” - uses multimethods for data collection and uses panel of **multidisciplinary** team for data analysis; and

“R” - style of **reporting** findings is rather tedious; as thick narrative voluminous information is often presented.

However, the perspective of the naturalistic paradigm claims that the qualitative research paradigm encompasses certain decisive features which are quite different from quantitative research paradigm. As the qualitative research paradigm has certain critical uniqueness: it adopts **emergent design** without predetermined structure; implements in **naturalistic setting**; considers as a **context-bound** research; implements **inductive reasoning** of logic; **explains phenomenon** of interest from holistic perspective; **uncovers patterns** of human behaviors/realities; believes on **multiple realities** in identifying the issues of a phenomenon; although it selects **small sample purposively**, it provides detail **subjective descriptions** from the research participants; takes into considerations **emic as well as etic** perspectives to postulate the findings; try to understand the **universe**; data analysis is considered as a **labor intensive work**; data collection and data analysis process proceeds side by side in a **cursive manner**; findings of the study are analyzed into **codes, category, concepts, and declarative themes**; incorporates **multiple perspectives** where the voices of respondents as well as key informants' accounts; initiates **strong interaction** between researchers and being researched; **explicitly portraits** and acknowledge the value laden nature of the research; internal **values** and **interest** often emerges from informants; takes **longer period** in exploring in-depth

information; **determines accuracy** by verifying the information by “**triangulation**” among different investigators/methods of data collection/ theories/ sources of data collection and produces **thick narrative information**¹.

Furthermore, the proponents of the naturalistic paradigm believes that the rigor of qualitative research paradigm depends on five major components: (a) **trustworthiness** (overall reliability and validity of qualitative research) (b) **credibility** (appropriateness, accuracy of data sources and interpretations of findings including *member checking*) (c) **transferability** (representativeness in terms of contextual boundaries of the findings, which enables to make inferences about the transferability of the findings), (d) **conformability** (as the researchers keep detailed records (audit trail) of data collection methods as well as data analysis procedures to reveal in detail regarding why, and how they arrived at their conclusions; and (e) **Constancy/Dependability** (record of coding and analysis procedures such as compares, and revise codes through their audit trail “inquiry auditor” by record-keeping procedures as well as the products of the investigation (findings and interpretations)².

In this milieu, Denzin & Lincoln³ suggests to the qualitative researchers to implement certain protective measures so that the qualitative report reveals soundness of its findings. In order to keep short the identified points can be easily remember is abbreviated as “**AM-PPPP-RR-TT**”:

- (i) **Audit trail:** revealing evidence of the multidisciplinary groups;
- (ii) **Member checking:** reports of the expert reviewers;
- (iii) **Purposive sampling/snowball:** extensive study of the samples/respondents;
- (iv) **Peer debriefing:** elaborate report of reviewers;
- (v) **Prolong engagement** in the field during data collection;
- (vi) **Prolong observation** of the respondents depending on the issues to be explored;
- (vii) **Referential adequacy:** proper and adequate citation of date/materials;
- (viii) **Reflexive journal:** keeping records of empirical evidences;
- (ix) **Thick description:** detail narrative description of the issues/events; and
- (x) **Triangulation:** process of determining evidence of rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness of the findings.

Furthermore, each research paradigm has its own pros and cons; in order to curtail inherent weaknesses of each paradigm (both qualitative research paradigm as well as quantitative research paradigm) a new paradigm research paradigm has been developed: a **mixed research paradigm**⁴ - this is the combination of the quantitative as well as qualitative research paradigms. This mixed research paradigm is further divided into two types i.e. **mixed-method** (inclusion of quantitative as well as qualitative methodology in a single research study) and **mixed-model** (mixing qualitative and quantitative methodologies in two phases in a single research project).

Both of these positivist paradigm as well as naturalistic paradigm are the valid means of inquiring scientific knowledge within their own methodological and interpretative features. These research paradigms need to be visualized based on their own perspectives, as these research paradigms with their own decisive features are complementary rather than contradictory to counteract the inherent constraints. One need to evaluate these two paradigms from two different lenses designated for each paradigm. As these two paradigms are equally important in investigating the scientific knowledge; hence, both of these paradigms need to be employed in harmonizing intrinsic limitations.

References

1. Merriam, B. S. *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*, 1998.
2. Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.
3. Maxwell, J. A. Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*; 1992; 62(3), 279–300.
4. Creswell, J. W. *Research designs: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage ; 1994
5. Lincoln, Y. S. (1992). Sympathetic connection between qualitative methods and health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 2(4), 375-391.
6. Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications 1994
7. Onwuegbuzie A.J.& Leech N.L. Enriching the interpretation of significant findings: the role of mixed methods research. *The Qualitative Report* 9 (4), 770-792. Retrieved 8 March 2012 from <http://nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR9-4/onwuegbuzie.pdf>