

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



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Qualitative Approach to Educational Research

Dr. Vishal Sood*

The term "qualitative research" encompasses a wide range of philosophical positions, methodological strategies and analytical procedures. It seeks out the 'why', not the 'how' of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information – things like interview transcripts, open-ended survey responses, e-mails, notes, feedback forms, photos and videos. It doesn't just rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative researchers. It is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis, ethnography, evaluation and semiotics are among the many formal approaches that are used in qualitative research studies. Apart from this, qualitative research also involves the analysis of any unstructured material, including feedback forms, reports or media clips. Shank (2002) defines qualitative research as "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning". By systematic, he means "planned, ordered and public", following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By empirical, he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". Most qualitative research approaches have :

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Analysis of Qualitative Data

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Qualitative research, broadly defined, means "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Where quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction and generalization of findings, the qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations. Qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry. There are several considerations when deciding to adopt a qualitative research methodology. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. Thus, 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. The particular design of a qualitative research study depends on the purpose of the inquiry, what information will be most useful, and what information will have the most credibility. There are no strict criteria for sample size (Patton, 1990) in qualitative

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