

## Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Education
Paper Name	Perspectives, Issues and Research in Teacher Education
Module Name/Title	Basic Tenets of Qualitative Research
Module Id	e-PGEDN 10.32
Pre-requisite	Basic concepts of qualitative research
Objectives	After going through this topic the learner will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce various methods of qualitative research</li> <li>• Introduce methodology of qualitative research</li> </ul>
Keywords	Biographical studies, Phenomenology, Grounded theory, Ethnographic studies, case study, Anthropology, Exploratory research, consultative research, Participatory research & service learning, symbolic interactionism, structuralism, feminism

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### 1. Introduction

In this age of virtual societies research has become a challenging task for a social scientist. As the process of modernization has been booming, the whole world is being virtually re-

constructed as an electronic, timeless space-less, and sophisticated technical universal global sphere. There is spatial mobility, temporal mobility, social mobility and logical mobility. Our tastes have changed, our languages have changed, and our life styles have changed. In this age of globalization we have started eating fast and foreign food. Everyone likes to share the state with others. But, all seem to be full of their own problems, where is the time and space to receive and respond to the problems of others. We have lost our sensitivities to our basic values. Mediocrity is trying to administer and govern in every sphere. There are problems, questions, descriptions and their publications. Where are the solutions, answers, controls and regulatory mechanisms? Phenomenology, Triangulation, Ethnography and Grounded Theories all are frequently used but with little return. Our problems are multiplying and escalating. There are also many perspectives or schools of thought which interpret reality in different ways, namely, Empiricism, Marxism, Phenomenology, Naturalistic Enquiry, Ethnomethodology, Scientific Relativism, Symbolic Interaction, Feminism, and Structuralism. There are various philosophical terms emerging in the context of qualitative research to realize better existence and living. There are various propositions, doctrines and principles of qualitative research.

Let us begin with Survey the most common tool of social analysis. Useful as they are, though, surveys face a host of interpretive problems. The positive outlook of researchers is based on several basic tenets. First, the **‘Objectivity Postulate’**: the realities that the survey tries to investigate would exist “out there”, and would have a reality independent from the way in which the individuals perceive them. A second tenet of the positivist outlook on surveys would be the **‘Transparency Postulate’**. But the search for a perfect, unambiguous, referentially transparent, purely de-notational language is one of the characteristic longing of the positivist frame of mind. The third positivist tenet would be the **‘Generality Postulate’**: the unequivocal meaning of the words and expressions involved in the research process. As a general rule, the more alien the subjects of the research are regarding the social ontology that the researcher represents; the more likely it is that their answers appear as anomalous and inconsistent. Similarly, the wider the sociological scope of survey, the higher its semantic diversity is likely to be, and less the equivalence principle will work. A measure of socio-semantic distance between the items of a questionnaire may help solve the problem to a reasonable extent. Even in the mega research projects the field investigators and project assistants are very often neither fully qualified nor properly paid. So, is the status of the

reality perceived? The raw data are very often more substantive and revealing than the processed data because in the absence of proper analysis the essence is lost.

In experimental research, largely the scholars move from induction to abduction to thesis to analogy to facts to theories. But inconsistent scattered researches lead us nowhere. Social laboratory is a myth and figment of imagination. It has become essential to sustain social life that the social scientists evolve their own methods.

In case study research diagnosis of a case is as important as prognosis of its disposition. But, a large majority of us have become excellent in describing the problems and cases, but we have become solution blind. Here the presage, process and product variables, all, need to be treated very carefully.

Naturalistic enquiry which phenomenology demands needs to be conducted in an open, naturalistic, parametric setting. Because more and more are the controls in a social science laboratory, lesser and lesser is the generalization. The social science research can be better localized than universalized.

Qualitative research cannot be conducted through a-priori samples only. Sampling goes on throughout research, through various sampling techniques, such as, typical case sampling, intensity sampling, critical case sampling, sensitive case sampling, convenience sampling, primary selection and secondary selection.

Qualitative Research cannot be conducted through static tools and techniques, because very often the researcher employing qualitative research methodology does not have a sound theoretical base related to the reality. Theory in fact is the product of enquiry.

Qualitative Research is affected by a wonderful interaction of subject and object. The object needs to be perceived as objectively and comprehensively as feasible.

One of the basic tenets of qualitative research is awareness of one's own biases. There is a need to address diversity issues, such as, gender, race, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and

socio-economic status. The pursuit of knowledge should be conducted with sincerity and care.

Critical theory takes as a central concern the issue of power in the knowledge context. It focuses on how and in whose interest knowledge is produced and passed on. Where are the funds floated? What is the interest? What is the return on investment?

## 2. Focus of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research can focus on several aspects, such as, biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, anthropology, exploratory research, consultative research, community-based participatory research and service-learning.

- In **biographical studies** the investigator begins with an objective set of experiences in the subject's life, noting life course, stages and experiences.
- For **phenomenology** the investigator requires a solid grounding in the philosophical precepts of phenomenology. A careful selection of people who have or are observing the phenomenon has to be made.
- Instead of proceeding with a preconceived theory and set of hypotheses, **grounded theory** tries to study a phenomenon and a set of data in context through which the theory emerges. The phrase "grounded theory" refers to theory that is developed inductively from a corpus of data. If done well, this means that the resulting theory at least fits one dataset perfectly. In grounding theory building there are various phases, namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding is the part of the analysis concerning with identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text. Essentially, the text is read in search of the answer to the repeated question "what is this about? What is being referenced here? Axial coding is the process of relating codes (categories and properties) to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking. Grounded theorists emphasize causal relationships, and fit things into a basic frame of generic relationships. The frame consists of elements, such as, phenomenon, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action strategies and consequences. In contrast selective coding is the process of choosing one category to be the core category.

- In an **ethnographic study**, a portrait is drawn of a cultural group or people. The researcher needs to have a sound knowledge in cultural anthropology and meaning of socio-cultural system as well as the concepts explored by ethnographers. The time taken for data collection is extensive, involving prolonged time in the field.
- In a **case study** a specific case is examined. It is exploration of a bounded system, bounded by time and space through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in variety. It is wholistic in nature and examines a real life situation.
- **Anthropology** more than any other social or behavioral science, has resisted simplistic, reductionist explanations of social phenomena. The wholistic perspective encourages anthropologists, to consider a wide range of factors while attempting to understand human behavior- biological, social, cultural, psychological, economic, political, ecological and many others. A fundamental proposition of anthropology is that no part can be fully or even accurately, understood apart from the whole.
- **Exploratory Research** is an early step in the research process used for identifying problems, solutions and other information needed to prepare for trials of improved practices. It includes in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions.
- **Consultative research** uses interactive information gathering methods for data collection. During consultative research important scientific information and key cultural and personal concerns are examined, and changes in behavior are negotiated.
- **Participatory Research and Service- Learning** have many common elements. Integrating academic content and service in the community can bring students a sense of connectedness between classroom learning and their personal lives and lives of others within the larger community. This is what the service- learning intends to. Community Based Participatory Research has an iterative process that provides an ongoing engagement between campus and community in terms of learning as well as the development of skills, capacity, and power. Learning for participants, community members and students is personal in terms of working closely with people with whom they would be very unlikely to interact. This contributes to building critical and civic consciousness.

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## **Symbolic Interaction**

### **Basic premises and approach**

With Symbolic interactionism, reality is seen as social, developed interaction with others. Most symbolic interactionists believe a physical reality does indeed exist by an individual's social definitions, and that social definitions do develop in part or relation to something "real." People thus do not respond to this reality directly, but rather to the social understanding of reality, i.e., respond to this reality indirectly through a kind of filters or eyeglasses--perspectives. This means that humans exist not in the physical space composed of realities but in the "world" composed only of "objects." According to Blumer, the "objects" can be divided into three types: physical objects, social objects and abstract objects.

Both individuals and society cannot be separated far from each other for two reasons. One, being that they are both created through social interaction, and two, one cannot be understood in terms without the other. Behavior is not defined by forces from the environment or inner forces such as drives, or instincts, but rather by a reflective, socially understood meaning of both the internal and external incentives that are currently presented (Meltzer et al., 1975).

Herbert Blumer (1969) set out three basic premises of the perspective:

- "Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things."
- "The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society."
- "These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters."

### **Mind, Self and Society**

"Mind, Self and Society" is the book published by Mead's students based on his lectures and teaching. The title of the book serves as the key concepts of symbolic interaction theory. The mind refers to an individual's ability to use symbols to create meanings for the world around him. Individuals use language and thought to accomplish this goal. Self refers to an individual's ability to reflect on the way that he/she is perceived by others. Finally, society, according to Mead is where all of these interactions are taking place.

## **The "I" and the "me"**

While establishing the idea of self, Mead introduces a distinction between the "I" and the "me", respectively, the active and socialized aspects of the person. The "me" is a similar concept to Cooley's looking-glass self. An example of these concepts is the Pygmalion effect whereby a person (I) behaves to match the sense of self (me) they derive from others, in a form of self-fulfilling prophecy.

## **Five central ideas behind symbolic interactionism**

There are five central ideas to symbolic interactionism according to Joel M. Charon, author of Symbolic Interactionism an Introduction, an Interpretation, Integration:

- a. "The human being must be understood as a social person. It is the constant search for social interaction that leads us to do what we do. Instead of focusing on the individual and his or her personality, or on how the society or social situation causes human behavior, symbolic interactionism focuses on the activities that take place between actors. Interaction is the basic unit of study. Individuals are created through interaction; society too is created through social interaction. What we do depends on interaction with others earlier in our lifetimes, and it depends on our interaction right now. Social interaction is central to what we do. If we want to understand cause, focus on social interaction.
  
- b. The human being must be understood as a thinking being. Human action is not only interaction among individuals but also interaction within the individual. It is not our ideas or attitudes or values that are as important as the constant active ongoing process of thinking. We are not simply conditioned, we are not simply beings who are influenced by those around us, we are not simply products of society. We are, to our very core, thinking animals, always conversing with ourselves as we interact with others. If we want to understand cause, focus on human thinking.
  
- c. Humans do not sense their environment directly, instead, humans define the situation they are in. An environment may actually exist, but it is our definition of it that is important. Definition does not simply randomly happen; instead, it results from ongoing social interaction and thinking.

- d. The cause of human action is the result of what is occurring in our present situation. Cause unfolds in the present social interaction, present thinking, and present definition. It is not society's encounters with us in our past, that causes action nor is it our own past experience that does. It is, instead, social interaction, thinking and definition of the situation that takes place in the present. Our past enters into our actions primarily because we think about it and apply it to the definition of the present situation.
- e. Human beings are described as active beings in relation to their environment. Words such as conditioning, responding, controlled, imprisoned, and formed are not used to describe the human being in symbolic interaction. In contrast to other social-scientific perspectives humans are not thought of as being passive in relation to their surroundings, but actively involved in what they do."

### **Structuralism**

Structuralism is a theoretical paradigm in sociology, anthropology, linguistics and semiotics positing that elements of human culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to a larger, overarching system or structure. It works to uncover the structures that underlie all the things that humans do, think, perceive, and feel. Alternatively, as summarized by philosopher Simon Blackburn, Structuralism is "the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture". Structuralism originated in the early 1900s, in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent Prague, Moscow and Copenhagen schools of linguistics. In the late 1950s and early '60s, when structural linguistics was facing serious challenges from the likes of Noam Chomsky and thus fading in importance, an array of scholars in the humanities borrowed Saussure's concepts for use in their respective fields of study. French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was arguably the first such scholar, sparking a widespread interest in Structuralism. The structuralism mode of reasoning has been applied in a diverse range of fields, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, economics and architecture. The most prominent thinkers associated with structuralism include Lévi-Strauss, linguist Roman Jakobson, and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. As an intellectual movement, structuralism was initially presumed to be the heir apparent to



existentialism. However, by the late 1960s, many of structuralism's basic tenets came under attack from a new wave of predominantly French intellectuals such as the philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, the philosopher and social commentator Jacques Derrida, the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, and the literary critic Roland Barthes. Though elements of their work necessarily relate to structuralism and are informed by it, these theorists have generally been referred to as post-structuralisms. In the 1970s, structuralism was criticized for its rigidity and ahistoricism. Despite this, many of structuralism's proponents, such as Jacques Lacan, continue to assert an influence on continental philosophy and many of the fundamental assumptions of some of structuralism's post-structuralism critics are a continuation of structuralism.

### **Feminism**

**Feminism** is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A **feminist** advocates or supports the rights and equality of women.

Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender. Some of the earlier forms of feminism have been criticized for taking into account only white, middle-class, educated perspectives. This led to the creation of ethnically specific or multi culturalist forms of feminism. Feminist activists campaign for women's rights – such as in contract law, property, and voting – while also promoting bodily integrity, autonomy, and reproductive rights for women. Feminist campaigns have changed societies, particularly in the West, by achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality in English, equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Feminists have worked to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. They have also advocated for workplace rights, including maternity leave, and against forms of discrimination against women. Feminism is mainly focused on women's issues, but author bell hooks and others have argued that, since feminism seeks gender equality, it must

necessarily include men's liberation because men are also harmed by sexism and gender roles.

### 3. Subjects for Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research cannot be conducted through apriority samples only. Sampling may go on throughout research. Various sampling techniques, such as, follows may be employed in qualitative Research:

- Typical case sampling
- Intensity sampling
- Critical case sampling
- Sensitive case sampling
- Convenience sampling
- Primary selection
- Secondary selection

### Tools and Techniques of Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research cannot be conducted through static tools and techniques. Tools & Techniques are Very often functions of the field. Theory in fact is the product of enquiry. Tools and techniques of qualitative research are innumerable, such as, observation, interview, triangulation, Focus Group Discussion, Reflective Dialogue.

- **Observation** is a technique of data collection in which one or more persons observe the happenings in a relevant situation on the basis of pre-determined scheme. It could be participant observation in which the observer participates himself in said situation. In non-participant observation the observer observes the behavior in real life situation.
- **Interview** is a two person conversation initiated by the researcher on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation.
- **Triangulation** uses two or more methods to investigate to get a more complete, accurate picture of human behavior. This can be done through convergence of gathering data from different sources through different methods.
- **Focus Group Discussions** are organized group discussions which are focused around a single theme. The group is a purposive sample-based on certain pre-determined criteria. Statement(s) of one person initiates a chain reaction of comments/ responses

from other respondents. When a group deliberates over a theme/problem, many a time, there is an excitement among participants to put forward their views.

- **Email –Facilitated Reflective Dialogue** may be used to engage human service practitioners as partners in research about sensitive areas of front line work which otherwise can be difficult for a range of reasons, such as, time constraints, geographic limitations, trust in the research relationship, issue of privacy, and fear of professional judgment.

#### **4. Assumptions for Qualitative Research**

Assumptions are the beliefs which have never been tested nor testable at a given point of time. Very often the assumptions of a qualitative study are that the respondents would make authentic responses. No testimony is required of their responses. The investigator would make valid observations.

#### **Formulation of a Qualitative Research Problem**

The steps for formulation of a qualitative research problem are presented as follows focusing on some of the basic tenets.

##### **a. Identification of a focus of interest or problem**

Some of the problems identified are presented as:

- Study of the Process Issues for Organizing Research and Training in Distance Teacher Education
- A study of a 23 year girl having compulsive obsessive neurosis
- A Study of a five year child having learning difficulties seemingly due to inattention by parents and teacher and short attention span of the child
- A Study of 12 year girl having obsessive neurosis

Very often the problem titles are broad having specification of limited domains and variables.

##### **b. Feasibility of the Study**

Prior to taking off, the feasibility of the studies needs to be examined from various angles, such as,

- Technological
- Procedural
- Legal

- Ethical
- Social
- Economical

### c. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the studies need to be enunciated as specifically and inter-connectedly as possible. The objectives corresponding to the problems stated above could be as follows:

#### Problem-1

- To study the process issues in organizing research, organizing support services and developing and using media and materials in distance teacher education.

#### Problem-2

- To diagnose the case.
- To suggest prognosis for its disposition.

#### Problem-3

- To assess the needs of the child.
- To devise suitable teaching programs for implementation in individual, small group or class setting.
- To provide specific advice, programs and materials to enable class teacher to consolidate and extend the learning of the child on the case load.

#### Problem-4

- To find out the causes of the obsessive neurosis of the child.
- To suggest remedies for relieving the child of the disease.

### d. Formulation of hypotheses, propositions or research questions

There is no piece of research without research questions. But hypotheses and propositions emerge only on having thorough understanding of the number and nature of variables related to the problems and their inter-relation.

#### **e. Decision regarding the Research types and Methods**

Decisions regarding the research type and methods to be employed are guided by the nature of problems. For problem 1, both, quantitative and qualitative research may be conducted. It may employ status survey method. Problems-2, 3 & 4 demand more of case study approaches.

#### **f. Population and Samples**

For problem-1 all the distance teacher education institutions may constitute the population for the study. One of the distance teacher education institutions may be identified purposively for the study of process issues in teaching and research. Then the different samples may be identified for naturalistic enquiry, some a-priori and others during process. Problems- 2, 3 and 4 are single case studies.

#### **g. Tools and Techniques**

Semi structured interviews may be developed for studying process issues in organizing research, organizing support services and developing and using media and materials in distance teacher education. Problem-2 requires study of the girl by a Psychologist, Psychiatrist and Social Worker. Problem-3 requires observation of the child by the expert, interviews with the child, parents, teachers and peers. Problem-4 requires observation of the child at home, in school, interviews with the child, parents, teachers, and peers. Also, some tools may be developed/selected for the diagnoses of the children.

#### **h. Data Analysis**

The data could be analyzed for problem-1 through content analysis and frequencies and percentage responses. The data with respect to problem-3 may be analyzed through increase in attention span. The data with respect to problem-2 and 4 may be analyzed through reduction of obsessive neurosis.

### **5. Some Reflections**

Presented below are two illustrations for reflection:

**A child of about 5 years plucks a wild flower in full bloom and asks his father to fix and display it on his shirt.**

How to study this phenomenon?

- Why did the child pluck the flower?
- Does the child have aesthetic sense?
- Does the child have concept of life and death?
- How does this phenomenon affect the environment?
- What was the objective of giving the plucked flower to the father?
- Was it a joyful activity for the child?
- How does the mother plant feel?
- How about the state of the immediate community of flowers?
- Who all are sensitive to the phenomenon?
- How about the feelings of the squirrel, butterfly and birds?
- Is there any theory governing the plucking of flowers?

**The frequency of mental illness has been found significantly high in Dangs in Gujarat.**

How to conduct the naturalistic enquiry and produce an ethnographic scenario?

- Who should conduct such a study?
- Can such a state be attributed to early child marriage?
- Are there some historical hereditary reasons?
- Which tools and techniques could be employed for such a study?
- How to relieve the Dangs of the disease?
- What could be the relative roles of the universities, communities, and society at large?

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

The qualitative research, be it any type, is wholistic in nature. It not only cuts across the commonalities, but is inclusive of unique features of each constituent of the phenomena under study. We need to appreciate logical positivism as well as scientific relativism. Empiricism has its own strengths and limitations. There is reality in this cosmos not obeying scientific laws. There are fields and attribute values which are not amenable to senses. Intuition has its own strength. Grounded theories and thick descriptions require research rigor and research depth. A large number of researchers leave the relationships at linear levels. There is a need to theorize. There are innumerable questions which every researcher needs to focus, such as,

- How do I identify my own professional needs and values?

- What possibly are the causes, that is, active variables and context, that is, background variables?
- Which are the moderating variables and intervening conditions with mediating variables?
- How do I formulate a research focus?
- How do I formulate a research approach and justify it?
- What ethical principles should guide my research?
- How should I collect data?
- How do I reduce bias?
- How do I analyze data?
- How do I formulate research syntax?
- How do I build a theory?
- How do I monitor change?
- How do I generate professional development through research?

Scattered inconsistent researches take us nowhere. There should be continuity of research area. Research culminating into mathematical equations to the reality is the climax. But social reality is too complex to be represented through mathematical equations. On the other hand qualitative research demands competent, seasoned, dedicated, empathetic scholars. Nomothetic research though cutting across the commonalities has drawbacks due to the missing ideographs. All forms and all types of researches together are too limited to understand the social reality. Ethnography has been marginalized for long because it has been subversive to positivistic and entrenched conceptions of research rigor, and its privileged alternative ways of thinking, knowing and viewing the world. Qualitative methods have also resulted from the failure of experimental approaches to answer critical questions asked about the field. Due to enormous un-wielding problems, we need to course and recourse through qualitative research in the true sense. Qualitative research methodologies demand opens, empathizing, dedicated, competent, faithful, ethical, integrated, interdisciplinary personalities.

## **7. Basic Tenets of Qualitative Research: Some Self-Check Questions**

- What is quality?

- What is qualitative?
- What are the characteristics of Qualitative Research?
- Which are the sampling techniques employed in Qualitative Research?
- At which stage of Research sampling is done in Qualitative Research?
- Which tools & techniques are employed for Qualitative Research?
- Which data analysis techniques are employed for Qualitative Research?
- How is the Research Reporting done in Qualitative Research?
- What is the criticism against Qualitative Research?
- What are the prerequisites for employing Qualitative Research?
- How is a Grass Root Theory developed?
- What are the characteristics of various Qualitative Research Methods, namely?
  - Biographical Studies
  - Phenomenology
  - Grounded Theory
  - Ethnographic Studies
  - Case Studies
  - Anthropology
  - Exploratory Research
  - Consultative Research
  - Participatory Research
  - Symbolic Interaction
  - Structuralism
  - Feminism, and
  - Naturalistic Enquiry?
- Can sampling be done a-priori for Qualitative Research? Reflect
- Can tools & techniques be decided a-priori for Qualitative Research?
- Why qualitative research is most frequently talked, but, least in practice?