



A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CHALLENGES AFFECTING NOVICE QUALITATIVE RESEARCHERS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

All research whether qualitative or quantitative are based on some underlying assumptions about what constitute valid research and which methods are appropriate. The most pertinent philosophical assumptions are those which relates to epistemology, which is the assumption about knowledge and how it can be obtained. The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework describing the challenges affecting novice researchers in carrying out qualitative study, using secondary sources. The findings identified sampling issues, data collection, analysis and naturalistic (fieldwork) nature of qualitative research as challenging to novice researcher. The study contributed in advancing the discussion of qualitative research method. To enhance the novice researchers knowledge-based, the study recommends the need for capacity building, training and retraining, workshops, seminar, national and international conferences to gain knowledge from experts in qualitative methodology.

Keywords: Research, Qualitative, Quantitative, Novice Researchers

Introduction

All research whether qualitative or quantitative are based on some underlying assumptions about what constitute valid research and which methods are appropriate. The most pertinent philosophical assumptions are those which relates to epistemology, which is the assumption about knowledge and how it can be obtained, in this manner Chual (as cited in Agbo & Ntim, 2012) noted the paradigms of positivist and interpretative. Positivist generally assumed that reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable variables, which is independent of the researcher and his instrument. Positivist studies generally attempt to test theory and to increase the predictive understanding of phenomena. In this line Orilikowski and Barodi (as cited in Agbo and Ntim, 2012) classified research as positivist if there was evidence of formal propositions, quantifiable measures of variables, hypothesis testing and the drawing of inferences about a phenomenon from the sample to a stated population.

Despite the popularity of positivism Kura (2012) stated that positivism has weakness that undermined its applicability in social science research. It

oversimplifies the world into experimental situations that is difficult to apply in reality, it lacks detail explanation of causes and processes of a research phenomenon and it is also impossible to separate people from their social contexts and they cannot be understood without grasping their perception and understanding. Weber (2004) stated that capturing complex phenomena in single controlled quantifiable variables can be misleading since this imposes certain constraints on results and may neglect important findings. Cicourel and Kuhn (as cited in Kura, 2012) argue that the weakness of positivism have paved way for Interpretive.

Interpretive emerged in response to the limitations and demerits of positivism, starts with the assumption that access to reality is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. Therefore, Interpretive attempt to understand a phenomena through the meaning that people assigned to them and aimed at producing understanding of context (Kura, 2012). Kaplan and Maxwell (as cited in Esew, 2005) notes that interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables but focuses on the full

complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges. Interpretive uses research methods such as participant and non-participant observations to understand details of interactions in their context and believe that social reality is based on subjective interpretation of actions.

Interpretive are criticised in terms of difficulties in establishing validity, reliability and generalisation in social research and the researchers intrusion into the lives of participants as the interpretation, which rest within the researcher, could be biased (Weber, 2004). While interpretive research reduced these limitations through triangulation of data collection (Agbo & Ntim 2012). "Since positivist and Interpretive take on different kind of problems and seek different kind of answers, their research requires different methods" (Steven & Bogdan, pg.4 n.d)

An Overview of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Research generally is the scientific and systematic process through which answer can be found to identify problems. The overall objective of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of scientific methods. It is essential to explain each on its own merit and differences. Mouton (2007) pointed out that scientists uses a wide variety of methods and techniques in empirical research. Einstein (as cited in Patton, 2002) stated that "not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted" (p.27).

Qualitative method is more easily described than defined, it is a research method that involves collecting in depth information from relatively small number of cases or sampling and it involves the use of qualitative data such as interview, documents and participant observation to understand and explain social phenomena (Esew, 2005). Qualitative research is the type that has variables that can neither be measured nor verified empirically and cannot be subjected to statistical analysis to prove or reject hypothesis (Myers, 2013). Qualitative research is the research method which is characterised by its aims, which relate understanding some aspects of social life, and its method which generates words rather than number as data of analysis (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates

the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that makes the world visible, these practices turn the world into the a series of representations including field note, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos (Denzin & Lincoln as cited in Kura,2012).

According to Myers (2013) qualitative research are designed to help researchers understand people, what they say and do because " what people say, what people do and what people say they do are entirely different things" (Margret as cited in David 2013, p.15). Qualitative research is designed to help researchers understand the social and cultural contexts within which people live. Kaplan and Maxwell (as cited in Myers, 2013) stated that the goal of understanding a phenomena from the point of view of participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data are quantified. Mouton (2007) pointed out the qualitative researchers attempt always to study human social functions from the perspective of social actors and the primary goal of studies using this approach is defined as describing and understanding rather than explaining human behaviour and data are presented in words rather than number as the case of quantitative research.

Quantitative research was originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena and it is an empirical research where the data are in the form of numbers. It employed the language of numbers, the syntax of mathematical operations and present data in numerical values (Abbas, 2006). It employs statistical tools in the collection and interpretation of data. Kura (2012) stated that quantitative methodologists believe that research can only be done by statistics and statistical methods. It is therefore seen as more representative and reliable and it emphasis on systematic statistical analysis helps to ensure that findings and interpretations are robust (David, 2013).

Quantitative research It is deeply rooted in positivism and their epistemological orientation view social world as analogous to natural science, aim at establishing causal explanations and followed scientific laws of establishing relationship between the social phenomena being investigated (Kura, 2012). Richard (2009) stated that quantitative researchers focus on describing and explaining

behaviour rather than describing the meaning of social phenomena, they adopt deductive approach in using a theory to generate hypothesis and test them emphatically. Quantitative researchers deal with large amount of data which are subjected to statistical analysis (Saul, 2008)

Methodology

In this regard data was sourced through review of the existing relevant text materials and the assembling of data will be through government policy documents, Journals, published books, seminar presentations, unpublished materials, Newspapers and relevant materials were sourced from UPM library and others were retrieved from the website. Documents are good sources of data, it provides ideas and gives information about the related activities (Creswell,

2007; Yin, 1994). In this situation, the researcher adopted Creswell (2007) proposed a guideline for obtaining the document in qualitative studies. These include: Identify the relevant documents, seek permission to use the identified documents and examine its merit in terms of accuracy and completeness in answering the research questions. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data because the method requires the examination of every single part of the materials that is in any way relevant to the research purpose (Margrit, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Based on the data collection and analysis five themes emerged and formed the conceptual framework of the Challenges affecting Novice Qualitative Researchers (see figure 1)

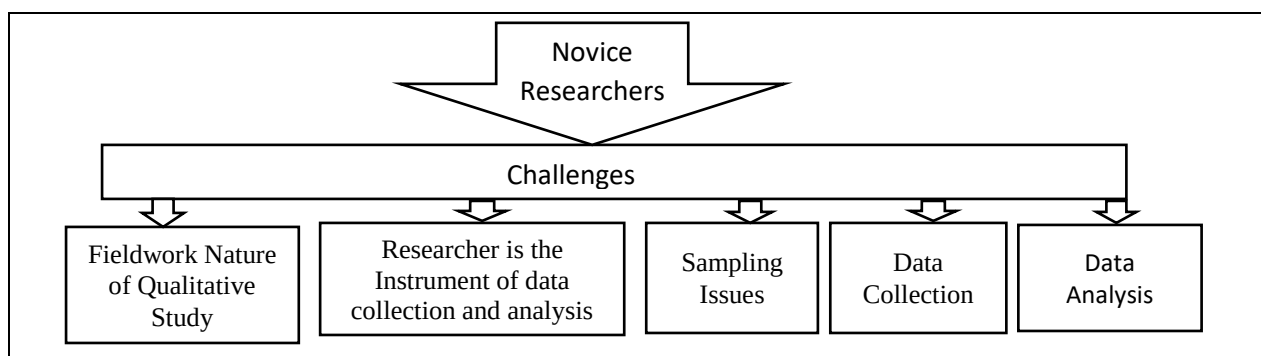


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of challenges affecting novice qualitative researchers

The diagram (Figure 1) shows the conceptual framework of the study, it provides the platform to understand the challenges affecting novice researchers carrying qualitative studies. The framework presents (1) fieldwork nature of qualitative study, (2) researchers is the instrument of data collection and analysis, (3) sampling issues, (4) data collection and (5) data analysis as the challenges for novice

Fieldwork Nature of Qualitative Study

The naturalistic stance of qualitative research makes it demanding to carry-out compare to quantitative or experimental research because it is not done in the laboratory but the researcher must physically go to the people, because qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln as

cited in David 2013). The distinguishing features of qualitative research method is its emphasis on a naturalistic and interpretative approach as a way of understanding the meanings individuals attached to phenomena based on their actions, beliefs, values, decisions within their social realities (Kura, 2012).

To get into the field, relationship must be established and require the researcher to interact in the field in the way people find pleasant and rewarding, Richard (2009) noted that the challenge to establish, maintain and terminate the relationship between the researcher and the participants, is one of the issue that few qualitative researchers think about at the outset of the project. This is issue of establishing relation at the field is “non-issue for quantitative researchers; it take little or no personality or skill to distribute a survey but qualitative researchers must master the additional

challenges of making, managing and gracefully existing from the relationship” (Richard, 2009,p10)

Qualitative Researcher as an Instrument of Data Collection and Analysis

Researcher in qualitative is the only instrument that is sufficiently complex to comprehend and learn about human existence (Burgess as cited in David, 2013). This implies that social research benefits from being performed as field research, based in the interaction between the researcher and the individual studied (Sofia, 2008). The cumbersome and the hard role of qualitative researcher in designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing and reporting makes it difficult to carry-out when compared with quantitative. However, because of naturalistic nature of qualitative which require an in-depth data from the participants in interview techniques the researcher must talk to the participant to agree to participate and to stay for the duration of time required, this is not an issue in quantitative research (Richard, 2009).

Data are mediated through this human instrument and the researcher is responsive to the context. Sofia (2008) and Sani (2022) noted that interview are structure in according to the interview guide made by the researcher and during the interview session recordings are often done by assistant personals but instruction are given to research Assistance according to the researcher’s preference. Coding of data might be done by using computer analysis program package Sofia (2008) stated that “whether one choose computer or not, it is the researcher who defines and name the categories of the data” (p.5). By coding and analysing data “the researcher uses his personal knowledge and experience to make sense of the materials” (Strauss and Corbin as cited in Sofia, 2008 p.5). At reporting stage it is the researcher who will be the one to judge how understanding the context will be related to the respondents’ remarks and the reporting covers the part of the research process where the researcher writes his report and present his findings (Kvils as cited in Sofia, 2008).

Sampling Issues

Many think that the sample being purposive and small makes qualitative easier to carry out not minding to consider the purpose of the small size in terms of the accuracy in detail description. Choosing

someone at random to answer qualitative questions is like asking a passer-by how to repair a broken down car, rather than a garage mechanic. The passer-by might have a stab but asking the mechanic will be more productive (David, 2013). Studying random sampling provides the best opportunity to generalize the result to the population but not effective way of developing an understanding of complex issues relating to human behaviour (Martin as cited in Mbachu. 2002).

Most researchers studies rely on random sampling to ensure that the subjects of a study are representative of the larger population but the sample size in qualitative are smaller in size and are purposive which is also known as judgemental and selective because the sample relied on the judgement of the research when it comes to the selection of units, the people, cases and organization that are to be studied the sample being investigated is quite small , especially when compared with probability samplings. Mark (2010) stated that qualitative research involves in-depth description of certain phenomena, they rely on small sample size to enable researcher to observe and explore the subject in-depth and drawing large sample in qualitative may sacrifice the depth of the study.

Samples in quantitative research are neither hard-to-get and nor the researcher undergo difficulties in getting them compared to qualitative where there are hard and hidden samples which are difficult for researchers to get; examples sex workers, drug users, lesbians and criminal syndicates and a times they lives are at risk. Access to these kinds of samplings according to Creswell (2011) “is not an easy task” (p.232). Patton (2002) say can be possible in qualitative research through snowball sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique that is used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies, that are hard to locate (Joseph, 2009). After observing the initial sample the researcher asks the same sample for help to identify sample with a similar trait of interest but the researcher must be cautious not to fall a victim of another criminal syndicates. This constitute a great challenge to qualitative researchers, which is not an issue in quantitative.

Richard (2009) stated that some research site are physically dangerous to the while being of the

researcher or a times crises or conflict will emanate while the researcher is conducting the research at the site, this makes qualitative more difficult to carry out than quantitative.

Method of Data Collection in Qualitative Research

The collection of qualitative data is generally more time consuming than quantitative data. When you talk of qualitative many become apprehensive because of mass of data to transcribe and difficult to code data, its techniques of data collection are in-depth interview, participant observation and focus group discussion among other which seeks to understand the experiences and the practices of participants and locate them within their settings and context (Derine, 2002). For the researcher to obtain data must physically be in the people setting, site and organisation to participate, observe or interview the participants.

The difficulties in collecting data in qualitative research are time consuming and quite expensive for instance in Ethnography research it requires the researcher to be at the field-site for long period of time (Statzel, 2013). In participant observation which is a technique of data collection that requires the researcher to be present at, involve in and recording the daily routine activities of people in the field, for him to get into the field he must set of a relationship and build rapport to get a gate keeper. Organisational problems in focus group discussion in terms of getting all the participants at the same time in one place (Agbo and Ntim, 2012). Carolyn and Palena, (2006) stated that interview is time intensive evaluation activity, because of the time it takes to conduct interview, transcribe them and analyse the result and it required a great skill for the researcher to collect details and rich data, the interviewer must make the interviewee comfortable and appear interest in what they are saying. This is not the case with quantitative researchers, who in fact require no extra-skill to distribute questionnaire.

Documents provide an important source of information in qualitative research. "It has the advantage of being the language, words and thought of participants" (Creswell, 2011,p 223). And it provides "insights into a setting or group of people that cannot be observed or noted in another way"

(Lincoln and Guber as cited in Obasi, 2008; p.21) but the method suffers the problems of being incomplete, inaccurate, questionable authenticity and non-accessibility becomes a challenges to qualitative researcher because some are term to be classified, some expensive and far distance to get them "require researcher to travel" Creswell, 2011; p.223) but this is not an issue in quantitative research.

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data such as interview, documents and participant observation to understand and explain social phenomena. So data in this case are not presented or express in numbers, frequency distributions, and probability table are not to be used. Data in qualitative method comes in forms of words, images, impressions, gestures or tones which represents real events or reality as it is seen symbolically or sociologically (David, 2013). Qualitative data are descriptive data such is harder and difficult to analyse than quantitative (Kura, 2012). Analysis of qualitative data is difficult and requires accurate description of participants' responses. For instance, sorting responses to open questions and interview into broader themes. Quotations from diaries or interview might be used to illustrate points of analysis (Saul, 2008). Quantitative research provides data that are expressed in statistical or number form, application of statistical test in making statement about the data. This include descriptive statistics like the means, median and standard deviation, can also include inferential statistic like t-tests, Anova and multiple regression correlation, Barnes (as cited in Agbo & Ntim, 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the paper presented the conceptual framework of challenges affecting novice researchers in carrying out qualitative research. Characteristically qualitative is a field work research that requires the researchers to go to the field and obtained in-depth data using its multiple techniques of data collection. The researchers at the field encounter difficulties and challenges in establishing, maintaining and terminating the relationship and some research sites are dangerous to the physical well-being of the researchers. During interview "they

rely on participants to show up, agree to talk to and stay for the duration of time required". This requires great skill and extra-effort. These challenges among others constitute great challenges to novice qualitative researchers and makes qualitative more demanding to carry-out than quantitative research, and these challenges are not issues in quantitative research, as well quantitative researchers requires no

great skills to distribute questionnaire. To enhance the novice researchers knowledge-based and acquire a better understanding of qualitative methodology, the study recommends the need for capacity building, training and retraining, workshops, seminar, national and international conferences to gain knowledge from experts in qualitative method.

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