

Chapter 18

Establishing quality (Trustworthiness or validity)

- There is no shared understanding of "good" quality research. Researchers find difficulty agreeing on how to judge the validity of qualitative research, so many suggested establishing new criteria to evaluate qualitative research.
 - This criteria is the alternative for the traditional one used in quantitative research.
 - Here are the concept used in quantitative and their corresponding alternatives in qualitative:
 - 1- Rigour – trustworthiness
 - 2- Reliability – dependability
 - 3- Validity – credibility
 - 4- Generalization (external validity) – transferability
 - 5- Objectivity – confirmability
-
- Rigour – trustworthiness:
 - It indicates thoroughness and competence. It can also imply inflexibility and rigidity, so excessive rigour may hinder creativity and artistry.
 - Rigour has particular connotation with measurement and objectivity, thus better used in quantitative methods.
 - In qualitative research, "trustworthiness" is the alternative which means methodological adequacy and is achieved by establishing dependability, credibility...etc.

 - Reliability – dependability:
 - In quantitative inquiry, it implies replicability; ie. Similar condition ---- (with the same methods) -----> same results.
 - As the researcher is the main tool of a qualitative inquiry, the study can never totally replicated because investigators have different perspectives and foci.

- To achieve same measure dependability in quantitative research an audit trail is necessary. This helps the readers follow the path of the researcher and demonstrate how he achieved his conclusions.

- **Validity- credibility:**
 - In quantitative inquiry, it reflects to what extent an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure, while in qualitative it depends on:
 - A. Good description and interpretation by researcher, where he doesn't impose his own ideas.
 - B. Telling the truth by the participant. However, describing the world by their own words and from their own perspective, doesn't mean it is not true.

 - **Relevance:** is a concept added to validity which means that the research must not only be meaningful but also useful for those who undertake it.
 - Internal validity is achieved to some extent by member check (discussed later)

- **Generalizability (external validity) – transferability:**
 - The applicability of the outcomes of a study to similar settings and populations.
 - In quantitative methods, this is achieved by random sampling, while in qualitative is hardly achieved, considering the fact that in many occasions qualitative research, is concerning unique cases and not meant to be generalized
 - However, qualitative research can have external validity through "theory-based generalization". If a theory developed from certain data can be verified in other sites and situations, the theoretical ideas are generalizable.

- **Objectivity-confirmability:**
 - Means a research is free of bias, but in qualitative research the subjectivity of both the researcher and participant shouldn't be neglected. It should be acknowledged and then set aside, which is described by the term "critical subjectivity".
 - Audit trail is needed to achieve confirmability of qualitative research, as it enables the readers to trace the data to their resources.

- **Strategies to ensure trustworthiness:**

1) Member checking:

After interpretation, the researchers present the data to the participants and ask whether it is a true or fair representation of their perspective. The participant's reaction to the findings can help changing any mistakes.

❖ Ways to carry out member checks:

- a. Providing the participants with a transcript of their interview and asking for their comments on it. This is time consuming and not recommended for undergraduates. Also, doesn't provide comments on interpretations.
- b. Giving the participants a summary of their interview and the researcher's interpretation of their words. It's a check on the understanding rather than the field notes of observation. **(This way is the best.)**
- c. Asking for comments on the final copy of the report. Time consuming and needs commitment from participants.

❖ Problems with member check:

- a. Different perspectives of both researchers and participants
- b. Defensive reaction of the participant
- c. Close relationship may prevent critical stance
- d. Perceptions may change over time

2) Searching for negative cases and alternative explanations:

It enhances the validity of the research if the researchers identify the data that doesn't fit into the developing theory or their own thoughts. These negative cases may provide alternative explanations. Single or few "dissenting voices" in the final report demonstrated the complexity of the research.

3) Peer review or "debriefing"

The researcher can discuss and re-analyze the raw data with their colleagues in the field who may detect bias or inappropriate subjectivity and try alternative explanation.

Its best achieved when colleagues are involved in the research rather than judging from the outside. For example, researchers can analyze the data individually and then discuss each one's analysis.

4) Triangulation:

Means that the findings of one type of method is checked by others. Reflects generalizability although not necessarily aimed for.

- Types:
 - A. **Data triangulation**: multiple sources of data (different settings and groups)
 - B. **Investigator triangulation**: involving many researchers and used in large studies.
 - C. **Theoretical triangulation**: several theoretical interpretation in the study.
 - D. **Methodological triangulation**: using 2 or more methods to answer similar question.
 - a) Between – method triangulation: using a quantitative method to confirm the findings of qualitative one.
 - b) Within – method triangulation: ex checking observations with answers of qualitative interviews (both qualitative). This is more used than between-method.

5) Audit or decision trail

All research should have an audit trail which is a detailed record of the decisions made before and during the research and the description of the research process.

- Types:
 - a) Contextual: contain excerpts from field notes of observation, the description of setting, people and location.
 - b) Methodological
 - c) Analytic
 - d) Personal response: describe the thought process and demonstrate the self-awareness of the researcher.

6) Thick description :

It's linked to the audit trail, means a detailed description of the process, context and the people in the research.

7) Reflexivity:

- Means that researchers critically reflect in their own preconceptions and monitor their relationship with the participants and their reactions to participant's actions.
- If they adopt a self-critical stance to the research and their own, the study will be credible and dependable.

- As qualitative inquiry is labeled as "not really valid" by quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers became somehow obsessed with validity of their research in a defensive manner, and hence neglecting creativity.
- Authenticity : page 304