

Qualitative research - Introduction

Set-up & Conduct- Study Preparation

VERSION

4.0

The field of qualitative research is very broad, with many different theoretical approaches and research methods. This guideline aims to offer you a short introduction to this field and to make you attentive towards some important aspects. Many references for further reading are offered, as well as several examples of qualitative research.

Overall, qualitative studies mostly aim to answer questions about the ‘what’, ‘how’ of ‘why’ of a phenomenon, instead of questions on ‘how many’ or ‘how much’. These studies are mainly about the nature of a phenomenon and perceptions or experiences of respondents. Qualitative research methods are particularly appropriate if you want to study the meaning of interactions, processes, behaviours, feelings, attitudes and experiences or if you want to give a detailed in-depth description of a situation or a case.

It is strongly advised to read this complete guideline before starting a qualitative study, because an important feature of qualitative research is that it is an iterative process. This means that data collection and analysis take place simultaneously and the researcher can also go back to the previous phase. The analysis of the material starts as soon as the first data have been collected. In a way, this analysis guides subsequent data collection. The researcher starts with a few global insights or sensitizing concepts that provide an initial frame for the initiation of the search process. After having become acquainted with the field, these insights or preliminary concepts can become important focus points for the research questions, and finally focused work can be undertaken using the specific research questions.

The novice qualitative researcher, with little prior knowledge of social science theory, is advised to read Green & Thorogood (2010). They give an introduction to qualitative methods in health research and describe the designing, conducting and writing stage: Green, J. & Thorogood N.

(2010) Qualitative Methods for Health Research. Third edition. London: Sage Publications.

Read more:

- Denzin, N.K & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (2011) The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. Fifth edition. London: Sage.
Offers information on many different aspects and forms of qualitative research, for instance different paradigms and perspectives, strategies of inquiry, methods of data collection and analysis, and representation.
- Given, L.M. (2008) The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods. London: SAGE.
Provides entries on every major facet of qualitative methods, divided into topical categories including approaches and methodologies, theoretical and philosophical frameworks, research design, data collection, data analysis, gaining access to research participants, and research ethics.
- Kuper, A. & Levinson, W. (2008) Critically appraising qualitative research. BMJ, 337: a1035.
Offers guidance for readers on how to assess a study that uses qualitative research methods.
- Pope, C. & Mays, N. (eds) (2006) Qualitative research in health care. Third Editions. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, BMJ Books.
This edition of Qualitative Research in Health Care offers a clear and accessible introduction to conducting and interpreting qualitative research, incorporating examples, references and chapters relevant for a comprehensive introduction to the subject.

Dutch references:

- Baarda, B. et al. (2013) Basisboek kwalitatief onderzoek. Groningen/Houten: Noordhoff.
- Boeijs, H., Hart, H. 't & Hox, J. (2016) Onderzoeksmethoden. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom.
- Maso, I. & Smaling, A. (1998) Kwalitatief onderzoek: praktijk en theorie. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Mortelmans, D. (2009) Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden. Tweede druk. Leuven/Den Haag: Acco
- Wester, F. (1987) Strategieën voor kwalitatief onderzoek. Muiderberg: Coutinho. ISBN: 90-6283-896-0.
- Netwerk Kwalitatief Onderzoek AMC - UvA (2002) [Richtlijnen voor kwaliteitsborging in gezondheids\(zorg\)onderzoek: Kwalitatief onderzoek](#). Amsterdam: AMC.
A comprehensive checklist describing aspects of designing and implementing qualitative research (in Dutch).

Differences between qualitative and quantitative research

For researchers familiar with quantitative research, it is important to realize there are some fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative research. These references offer insightful overviews:

- Frambach, J. et al. (2013) AM Last Page: Quality Criteria in Qualitative and Quantitative Research. Academic Medicine, 88, 4, 552.
While qualitative and quantitative research share similar standards for good evidence (quality criteria), the conception and operationalization of these quality criteria differ between the two. This page provides an overview of these criteria and a number of techniques that researchers can use to meet them.
- Kuper, A. & Levinson, W. (2008) An introduction to reading and appraising qualitative research. BMJ, 337, a288.
This article explores the difference between qualitative and quantitative research and the need for doctors to be able to interpret and appraise qualitative research.
- Castillo-Page, L. et al. (2012) AM Last page: Understanding Qualitative and Quantitative Research Paradigms. Academic Medicine, 87, 3: 386.
https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/fulltext/2012/03010/am_last_page_understanding_qualitative_and.33.aspx
Gives an overview of different research paradigms.

Mixed methods research

In mixed methods research, qualitative and quantitative research is combined. For example, qualitative research can be used to gain more insight into a relatively unknown phenomenon or topic and this can be used to develop a survey to quantify the results. Or qualitative research can help to get a better understanding of quantitative results. According to Creswell and Clark (2011) mixed methods 'focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.'

Read more:

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- Cresswell, J.W. & Plano Clark, V.L. (2011) Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2015) A concise introduction to Mixed Methods Research. Thousand Oaks, Sage publications.
- Curry, L. & Nunez-Smith, M. (2015) Mixed Methods in Health Sciences Research. A Practical Primer. London: SAGE Publications.
This guidebook shows readers how to design, conduct, review, and use mixed methods research findings.
- Morse, J.M. & Cheek, J. (2015) Introducing Qualitatively-Driven Mixed-Methods Designs. Qualitative Health Research, 25 (6): 731-733.
- O'Cathain, A., Murphy E. & Nicholl, J. (2007) Why, and how, mixed methods research is undertaken in health services research in England: a mixed methods study. BMC Health Services Research, 7: 85.
- O'Cathain, A., Murphy E. & Nicholl, J. (2008) The quality of mixed methods studies in health services research. J Health Serv Res Policy, 13, 2, 92-98.
- O'Cathain, A., Murphy E. & Nicholl, J. (2010) Three techniques for integrating data in mixed methods studies. BMJ, 341, c4587.
- Östlund, U. et al. (2011) Combining qualitative and quantitative research within mixed method research design: A methodological review. International Journal of Nursing Studies, 48: 369-383.
- Sparkes, A.C. (2015) Developing mixed methods research in sport and exercise psychology: Critical reflections on five points of controversy. Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 16, 49-59.
Critical reflection on mixing methods, addresses several conceptual, practical and pedagogical challenges.

Examples:

- Boot, C.R.L. et al. (2014) [Predictors of work participation with chronic disease in the Netherlands: a mixed method study](#). Eur J Public Health, 24 (Suppl 2): cku151-073.
- Boot, C.R.L. et al. (2016) [Factors important for work participation among older workers with depression, cardiovascular disease and osteoarthritis: a mixed method study](#). Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 26, 2, 160-172.
- Ham, A.J. van der et al. (2014) [Toward healthy migration: an exploratory study on the resilience of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines](#). Transcultural Psychiatry, 51, 4, 545-568.
- Theunissen, M-J. et al. (2012) [The early identification of risk factors on the pathway to school dropout in the SIOO study: a sequential mixed-methods study](#). BMC Public Health, 12: 1033.

LINKS

| | Link |
|---|---|
| AmCOGG Richtlijnen voor kwaliteitsborging in gezondheids(zorg)onderzoek : Kwalitatief Onderzoek | https://docplayer.nl/329015-Richtlijnen-voor-kwaliteitsborging-in-gezondheids-zorg-onderzoek.html |
| Predictors of work participation with chronic | https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/24/suppl_2/cku151-073/2838872 |

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| disease in the Netherlands: a mixed method study | |
| Factors Important for Work Participation Among Older Workers with Depression, Cardiovascular Disease, and Osteoarthritis: A Mixed Method Study | https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10926-015-9597-y |
| Toward healthy migration: An exploratory study on the resilience of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines | https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1363461514539028 |
| The early identification of risk factors on the pathway to school dropout in the SODO study: a sequential mixed-methods study | https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-12-1033 |

DOCUMENT HISTORY

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| 4.0 | Revision | 19MAY2021 | Lana Kluit, Dr. Astrid de Wind |
| 3.0 | Revision guideline | 20OCT2017 | EMGO |
| 2.0 | Revision format | 12MAY2015 | EMGO |
| 1.2 | Removal of link kwalitatief sterk | 01DEC2011 | EMGO |
| 1.1 | English translation | 01JAN2010 | EMGO |
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DOCUMENT APPROVAL

| Role | Name | Date |
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