

Qualitative research - Research design	Set-up & Conduct- Study Preparation	
	VERSION	4.0

In general, qualitative researchers commit to some form of naturalistic interpretative approach to inquiry. However, there are many different forms of qualitative designs. For instance, the role of theory can vary from using a specific theory to certain overarching theoretical concepts, generating theory, or no (explicit) use of theory (Cheek in Given, 2008).

Read more:

- Bergman, E. et al. (2012) AM Last Page: A Guide to Research Paradigms Relevant to Medical Education. *Academic Medicine*, 87, 4, 545.
Provides an overview of some of the concepts underlying four philosophical paradigms in medical education research (positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism) and illustrates the relationships between them.
- Cheek, J. (2008) 'Research Design', in: Given, L.M. (ed.). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. London, SAGE, pp. 761-733.
- Green, J. & Thorogood N. (2010) *Qualitative Methods for Health Research*. Third Edition. London: Sage Publications.
See chapter 2 on developing qualitative research designs.

Theoretical approaches

The field of qualitative research is characterized by the use of many different theoretical perspectives. The theoretical perspective shapes the questions a researcher addresses and the research design, interpretation of data and explanations that follow. Examples of theoretical perspectives are phenomenology, interactionism, or grounded theory. Reeves et al. (2008) illustrate how different theories would highlight different facets of a specific research problem. In general, different types of theories are distinguished, focusing on different levels. For instance, they focus on how societies work (grand theories or macro theories), how local systems or organizations function (mid-range theories) or interaction on an individual level (micro level theory) (Reeves et al., 2008). Green and Thorogood (2010) offer a short overview of different levels of theory.

Read more:

- Bradbury-Jones, C., Taylor, J. & Herber, O. (2014) How theory is used and articulated in qualitative research: Development of a new typology. *Soc Sci Med*, 120, 135-141.
This article furthers the debates on how theories are used in qualitative research, how they might influence a study and how they are articulated in publications. The aim is to provide a framework through which the relationship between theory and qualitative research can be understood.
- Green, J. & Thorogood N. (2010) *Qualitative Methods for Health Research*. Third Edition. London: Sage Publications.
See chapter 1 on Qualitative Methodology and Health Research.
- Reeves, S. & Hodges, B.D. (2008) Why use theories in qualitative research? *BMJ*, 337, a949.
Theories such as interactionism, phenomenology, and critical theory can be used to help design a research question, guide the selection of relevant data, interpret the data, and propose explanations of causes or influences.

Dutch references:

- Boer, F. de & Smaling, A. (red.) (2011) *Benaderingen in kwalitatief onderzoek. Een inleiding*. Den Haag: Boom Lemma uitgevers.

This book gives an overview of scientific paradigms which provide the foundation for qualitative research methods; furthermore the books gives an overview of different qualitative research approaches that were developed based on these different paradigms.

- Bosch, R. (2012) *Wetenschapsfilosofie voor kwalitatief onderzoek*. Den Haag: Boom Lemma uitgevers. The aim of this book is to provide an alternative for the post positivist approach within science. It provides information about ontological issues related to epistemological questions about reality, truth, objectivity and plausibility within the qualitative research approach.

Research questions

Research questions in qualitative studies are open questions; they aim to answer a 'what', 'how' or 'why'. They are meant to give insight into perspectives or meanings of people, or provide information on experiences, needs or considerations. Furthermore, the research question includes a description of the study population and the topics of research, such as 'decision making', 'coping', 'experiencing', 'perspectives' or 'support'.

Examples of research designs

There are many different types of research design and divisions between them are not necessarily clear-cut (Green & Thorogood, 2010). Therefore, only some examples are provided in this guideline. Case studies provide an in-depth study to understand the complexity of a case. Abma & Stake (2014) describe different approaches to case studies, for instance using a preordained theoretical framework (Yin, 1994) or a naturalistic - non-interventionist - approach to understand the particularities of a case (Stake, 2000).

Read more:

- Stake, R.E. (2000) Qualitative case studies. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp. 443-66.
- Abma, T.A. & Stake, R.E. (2014) Science of the Particular: An Advocacy of Naturalistic Case Study Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24, 8, 1150-1161.
- Simons, H. (2015) Interpret in context: Generalizing from the single case in evaluation. *Evaluation*, 21, 2, 173-188.
- Examples:
- Abma, T. et al. (2011) Responsibilities in elderly care: Mr Powell's narrative of duty and relations. *Bioethics*, 26, 1, 22-31.
- Schipper, K. et al. (2009) A patient's journey with polycystic kidney disease. *British Medical Journal*, 338, b1595.

Studies using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967) aim at the development of categories or concepts 'grounded' in the data, that could subsequently lead to the formulation of a formal theory. Data collection, data analysis and reflection form a cycle (iterative study); analysis informs the next cycle of data collection, and the subsequent analysis leads to further refinement. In grounded theory, 'iterative study design, theoretical sampling, and system of analysis are intimately related. An iterative study design requires theoretical sampling for interactions to be meaningful, and constant comparative analysis allows the integration of new and existing data in this iterative cycle, towards a well-grounded theory' (Lingard et al. 2008: 460).

Read more:

- Charmaz, K. (2014) *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Third Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.

- Lingard, L. et al. (2008) Grounded theory, mixed methods, and action research. *BMJ*, 337: a567. This article discusses three commonly used methodological approaches: grounded theory, mixed methods, and action research. It provides background for those who will encounter these methodologies in their reading rather than instructions for carrying out such research. It describes the appropriate uses, key characteristics, and features of rigor of each approach.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (eds.) *Grounded Theory in Practice*. London: Sage 1997. This volume presents a series of readings that emphasize different aspects of grounded theory methodology and methods.

Dutch reference:

- Boer, F. de (2011) De Grounded Theory approach: een update. *KWALON*, 16, 1, 25-33.

Example:

- Verbrugge, R., De Boer, F. & Georges, J-J. (2013) Strategies used by respiratory nurses to stimulate self-management in patients with COPD. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 22, 2787-2799.

In action research, ‘theory and action [are integrated] with the goal of addressing important organizational, community and social issues together with those who experience them. (...) it is really a shared-values stance founded on a commitment to generating knowledge through democratic practice in the pursuit of positive social change.’ (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014: xxv)

Read more:

- Bradbury, H. (2015) *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Coghlan, D. & Brydon-Miller, M. (2014) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*. London: Sage.
- Lingard, L. et al. (2008) Grounded theory, mixed methods, and action research. *BMJ*, 337: a567. This article discusses three commonly used methodological approaches: grounded theory, mixed methods, and action research. It provides background for those who will encounter these methodologies in their reading rather than instructions for carrying out such research. It describes the appropriate uses, key characteristics, and features of rigor of each approach.

Example:

- Baur, V. & Abma, T. (2012) ‘The Taste Buddies’: participation and empowerment in a residential home for older people. *Ageing & Society*, 32, 1055-1078.

Respondents

The recruitment of respondents in qualitative research is not aimed at generalization of a selected population. Instead, researchers strive for transferability, which they try to reach through theoretical saturation: inclusion continues until a point is reached where there is a sense that sufficient insight has been acquired about the research phenomenon. Important principles in this process are constant comparison, purposive sampling, and theoretical sampling: the researcher is constantly looking for new “cases” that are able to sharpen up, confirm or correct earlier cases. This results in the research group usually being relatively small (maximum of tens of participants) and heterogeneous.

Read more:

- Kuper, A. & Levinson, W. (2008) Critically appraising qualitative research. *BMJ*, 337: a1035. Box 2 provides an overview of qualitative sampling methods for interviews and focus groups.

LINKS

[Link](#)

Amsterdam Public Health



DOCUMENT HISTORY

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4.0	Revision	27MAY2021	Lana Kluit, Dr. Astrid de Wind
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