

# The Nature of Qualitative Research



# Qualitative research:-

is a type of in-depth study of the behaviors and interactions of a defined group of individuals. Qualitative researchers keep track of many variables and use many different types of measuring techniques in order to collect a rich set of data that describes these individuals and their interactions as completely as possible. Qualitative research fits loosely under the

**TABLE 18.1** *Quantitative Versus Qualitative Research*

**Quantitative Methodologies**

Preference for precise hypotheses stated at the outset.  
Preference for precise definitions stated at the outset.  
Data reduced to numerical scores.  
Much attention to assessing and improving reliability of scores obtained from instruments.  
Assessment of validity through a variety of procedures with reliance on statistical indices.  
Preference for random techniques for obtaining meaningful samples.  
Preference for precisely describing procedures.  
Preference for design or statistical control of extraneous variables.  
Preference for specific design control for procedural bias.  
Preference for statistical summary of results.  
Preference for breaking down complex phenomena into specific parts for analysis.  
Willingness to manipulate aspects, situations, or conditions in studying complex phenomena.

**Qualitative Methodologies**

Preference for hypotheses that emerge as study develops.  
Preference for definitions in context or as study progresses.  
Preference for narrative description.  
Preference for assuming that reliability of inferences is adequate.  
Assessment of validity through cross-checking sources of information (triangulation).  
Preference for expert informant (purposive) samples.  
  
Preference for narrative/literary descriptions of procedures.  
Preference for logical analysis in controlling or accounting for extraneous variables.  
Primary reliance on researcher to deal with procedural bias.  
Preference for narrative summary of results.  
Preference for holistic description of complex phenomena.  
  
Unwillingness to tamper with naturally occurring phenomena.



# General Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- ◆ Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe five general features of Qualitative Research:
  - 1) The natural setting is a direct source and key element
  - 2) Collection is in the form of words or pictures
  - 3) Researchers are concerned with **how** things occur
  - 4) Construction of a picture while data is being collected vs. knowing what to expect
  - 5) Special interest in the participants' thoughts

# Steps in Qualitative Research

- ◆ All qualitative studies have a distinct starting and ending point. They begin when the researcher identifies the phenomenon and ends when a final conclusion is made.
- ◆ The steps are as follows:
  - Identification of the phenomenon to be studied (foreshadowed problems)
  - Identification of the participants in the study (purposive sample collecting)
  - Generation of hypotheses
  - Data collection (continual observance)
  - Data analysis
  - Interpretation/Conclusions



# Approaches to Qualitative Research

- ◆ The following are approaches to Qualitative Research:
  - Biographical Study
  - Phenomenological Study
  - Grounded Theory Study
  - Case Study
- ◆ **Case study** is a research method involving an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a subject of study (the **case**), as well as its related contextual conditions.

◆ Case studies can be produced by following a formal research method. These case studies are likely to appear in formal research venues, as journals and professional conferences, rather than popular works. The resulting body of 'case study research' has long had a prominent place in many disciplines and professions, ranging from psychology, anthropology, sociology, and political science to education, clinical science, social work and administrative science.

# Historical research:

is conducted to study the past in order to reconstruct as accurately as possible what happened during that time and to explain why it did. Historical research fits loosely under the general heading of descriptive research.





# Historical Research

- ◆ Another form of **Qualitative** Research.
- ◆ Some aspect of the past is studied.
- ◆ Data are collected and evaluated objectively in order to establish whether causes, effects, or trends of a past event may explain present or future events or occurrences.
- ◆ The major problem with this research is the question of using an event or time sequence as a true outcome.



◆ Ethnographic research is a qualitative method where **researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in their real-life environment.** Ethnography was popularised by anthropology, but is used across a wide range of social sciences. Within the field of usability, user-centred design and service design, ethnography is used to support a **designer's deeper understanding of the design problem** – including the relevant domain, audience(s), processes, goals and context(s) of use.

◆ The aim of an ethnographic study within a usability project is to get 'under the skin' of a design problem (and all its associated issues). It is hoped that by achieving this, a designer will be able to truly understand the problem and therefore design a far better solution.

◆ Anthropological ethnographers often live amongst a group/society for a year or more, in order to learn about them. This fully immersive, long-term 'live and work' approach to ethnography has not proven popular within the field of usability.

◆ **Action research:** it is focused on immediate application, not on the development of theory or on general application.