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A Critical Review of Pertinent Qualitative Research Processes, Approaches, and Tools in Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT This paper is a review of pertinent qualitative research processes, approaches, and tools in social sciences. The purpose is to attempt to lay the groundwork and provide insight to both the theoretical and practical considerations behind qualitative research, especially as it is conducted in South African universities. The review adopted a purposive non-probability sample from the population of participating universities, namely, the so-called previously advantaged White universities, and the previously disadvantaged Black universities, to critically look at research challenges that the latter universities face. This review established amongst other thing that the research output of the previously advantageous White universities far surpasses and outclasses that of the previously Black university… and this gap in research output levels between the two types of institutions was remarkably unacceptable. It was on the basis of this outcomes that the review suggests and recommends the thematic model of qualitative research discourse that includes the following processes, approaches and tools: (a) selection and choice of a research paradigm/approach; (b) qualitative research design; (c) introduction of and background to the study;(d) problem formulation and statement of the problem and sub-problems; (e) formulation of the research questions; (f) identification key research aim and objectives; (g) qualitative data collection and gathering; (h) qualitative data analysis and interpretation; (I) the significance of the study; (j) the scope and/or limitations of the study; (k) discussion of the findings ; (l) recommendations; and (m) summary and conclusion of the study. It is believed that if this model can be effectively implemented, could lead to the performance of qualitative research processes, approaches, and tools in social sciences research, and further lead to the improvement of research outputs in the previously disadvantaged Black universities in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research has proven to be the major stumbling block amongst many novices and even seasoned social science researchers, particularly in the so-called previously Black universities, that is: University of the North (Turfloop), The University of Zululand (Ngoye), The University of Bophuthatswana (Unibo) and the University of Forth Hare (Alice), before the 2003 merger process. This is attested to by the fact that research outputs of the so-called previously White universities such as University of Pretoria (TUKKIES), the University of Potchefstroom (PUK) University of Free State (UOFS), Rand Afrikaanse Universiteit (RAU), University of Witwatersrand (WITS), and the University of Stellenbosch, far outnumber and outclass that of the former. Furthermore, research has found that a high percentage of Black students who registered for research (in particular, qualitative social science research), find themselves in a state of distress as they do not go beyond the proposal stage. This paper is an attempt to leverage the plight of qualitative social sciences researchers and to enable them to appreciate the role and the contribution they can make in solving social problems. This exposition will encourage many qualitative social sciences researchers to participate in large numbers in the effort of addressing social problems in the country.

This review begins by providing a background overview followed by a comprehensive discussion of the qualitative research. The purpose is to lay the groundwork for the methodology that will follow and provide insight to both the theoretical and the practical considerations behind qualitative research. This approach does not mean to frighten away the novice researcher, but, in the contrary, it encourages the reader to be more knowledgeable and well-prepared to undertake a qualitative study. The methodology highlighted in this article focuses largely on the steps in the qualitative research, theory-building and literature review in qualitative approach, by highlighting pertinent issues relating to qualitative research design, data collection and presentation methods, data analysis and interpretation techniques, and population and sampling techniques. Finally, the paper proposes a qualitative research model that can, as-

sist the aspirant novice researchers in undertaking their research studies on the one hand, and to make seasoned researchers aware of recent developments in the field of qualitative research on the other.

In respect of the latter, the view of Strauss (1993) in Corbin and Strauss (2008) needs some degree of emphasis when he says that:

… I grew up intellectually in the Age of Dinosaurs, or so it seems when I read the literature pertaining to qualitative research today. I carried within me the values, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge of my profession and the time. I believed what I was told and wrote about it. But one day I looked about and found that I had been labeled a "post-positivist" Denzin (1994). "Oh Dear, I thought, "I've been labeled just like we do in qualitative research ". It seems that while I was going about business as usual, a Qualitative Revolution was taking place. As part of that revolution the word "interpretation," the byword of qualitative research in the old days, became passe'. The new qualitative jargon centered on letting our respondents talk for themselves. Also, it was now considered okay to "go native," a dreaded accusation in the "old days." It gets worse. I know my research world, like that of Humpty Dumpty, had tumbled down when the notion of "objectivity" was dismissed as impossible to achieve. Instead of being the "objective researcher," the postmodern movement puts the researcher into the center of the study. But the final assault on my research identity came when the notion of being able to capture "reality" in data was deemed a fantasy. All is relative. There are "multiple perspectives."The postmodern era had arrived. Everything was being "deconstructed" and re-"constructed."This particular assertion should ring a bell to any qualitative researcher to the effect that qualitative research is not a static domain, but it is a challenging and dynamic field of study in its own right. Thus, it must remain incumbent to all qualitative researchers (novice and seasoned), not only to recognise, but also to embrace this dynamism, and to always keep themselves abreast to these changes and challenges posed by this discourse.

Overview

Qualitative researchers must constantly review and revise their theories and assumptions about the nature of their work, and about the perspectives that they have about their subjects, as such a review and revision will lead to change in their research objectives and practices. For example, when a researcher is contemplating to undertake a piece of research work, certain fundamental questions need to be fairly considered and answered pertaining to the subjects of analysis (that is, informants/participants) of the intended study. These questions relate to how one can find out relevant information from his/her informants. For instance, Hollaway and Jefferson (2004) highlight the following pertinent questions:

- Do you just ask them directly the question(s) to which you wish to find an answer? If not, why not?
- How else would you approach them?
- Would it be feasible to observe them in relevant situations?
- If you decide on a face-to-face interview is it best to structure it through a series of questions?
- What should they cover and how many do you need? In other words, just how are you going to produce data which, when analysed, will help answer your starting research problem/question?

Similarly, Corbin and Strauss (2008) raised equally significant questions such as:

- What are methods? Are they merely set of procedures? Or are they philosophical approaches with few, if any, procedures?
- What role do procedures play in research? Are they guides, or just a broad set of ideas?
- What and how much structure is necessary to give students? And what is the role of the researcher?
- How can the researcher be acknowledged while still telling the story of participants? And
- How much or how little interpretation to be involved?

On the surface, these questions may appear to be simple and seeking easier answers and solutions. Yet, in reality a closer intelligent scrutiny will reveal that they are complex, seeking a multiple and multidimensional approaches in not only answering them, but also addressing them adequately. It is, however, the purpose of this paper to share light and find the ways and means of doing exactly that. The point of departure in this endeavour is to look at a number of steps in

the phases constituting what one can consider as a "real" qualitative research. Within the context of this review, a research discourse is viewed as a process consisting of different phases with a number of steps which also differ depending on whether the researcher uses a qualitative or a quantitative paradigm. This paper focuses on the qualitative research. However, a brief review of steps common to both the qualitative and quantitative approaches will serve as a starter:

- ***Selection of a Researchable Topic*:** In both qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the first stage is the choosing of researchable topic based on a researchable problem or question. This presupposes that for one to be able to select a researchable topic for his/her research, he/she must clearly define the problem or question of the study. The fundamental consideration in this regard could be the formulation of the answer to the question: what really the researcher wants to achieve by undertaking the study. The identification of researchable topic is therefore the first step in any research discourse. Padgett (1998) advises that:
  before choosing a topic, a prospective researcher should consider two overarching aspects: first, that a qualitative, as opposed to a quantitative approach should only be chosen if the research goals and objectives point to such a course. One should not decide to do a qualitative study and then search for a topic. Second, one should clarify his/her epistemological stance or framework early on. Let me not hesitate to indicate that any researcher who fails to heed to this important advice will be opening him-/herself to a series of problems as he/she will not, in the final analysis, able to produce the intended outcomes from his/her research.
- ***Problem Formulation:*** In this second step, the researcher is expected to assess the suitability of the research approach and formulate the research problems in accordance with the unit of analysis, the research goal, and the research approach he/she prefers. As soon as a researchable theme has been identified, the importance of pinpointing a specific research problem becomes eminent. In this critical step, the role of the supervisor should be to insist and encourage that the student identifies some feasible research questions within the theme he/she is interested in. In fact, the problem-definition phase of the research starts with identifying an area of interest and then generating ideas around which to do your study, with the aim of producing one or more clearly posed questions based on a well-developed knowledge from amongst others, scientific research and theory. Therefore, a careful conceptualisation and phrasing of the research questions becomes fundamental, as almost everything in the research discourse will revolve around these. A thorough exploration of possible problems and questions becomes critical. While the aspirant researcher is entangled in this step, a word of consolation from Holliday (2002) points out that:
  rather than controlling variables, qualitative studies are open ended and set up research opportunities designed to lead the researcher into unforeseen areas of discovery within the lives of the people he/she is investigating.

This is a powerful statement that holds water and qualitative researchers are urged to consider it and take it as their guide as and when they venture into the unknown and unchartered territories of theory and knowledge building.

- ***Drafting a Research Proposal:*** In this manuscript a research proposal is viewed as a document that explains and outlines how the researcher proposes to undertake the research. In fact, a proposal is nothing else, but a proposal; a beginning; a starting place; and literally a point of departure suggesting that something is about to be done. In real terms, a proposal, like a business plan, presents a plan for research project evaluation, the purpose of which is to convince research evaluators that the researcher is capable of successfully conducting the proposed research project.

A well planned research proposal usually exhibit the following features: *introduction,* that provides introduction to a more detailed discussion of the research problems/questions; *significance of the study*, in which the researcher takes the opportunity to convince his/her reading audience of the value of the proposed research and indicate that the results of the study will be relevant to people in other settings. According to Mark (1996),

convincing the reader that the study is significant and should be conducted entails building an argument that links research to larger, important theoretical problems, social policy issues, or concern of practice, research problem , goals, and objectives ,which is the section that puts the problem, goals, and objectives underlying the study into the spotlight; review of relevant literature, which entails evidence of some preliminary reading on the research theme, the development of initial ideas, and the information concerning the theoretical literature on the research topic.

Fundamentally, this element of the proposal must indicate mastery of the literature in the discipline, acquaint the reader with the existing knowledge on the subject matter, discuss the proposed study in relation to the current literature, and displaying the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. Wolcott (2001) argues that:

if the urge and the urgency to provide a traditional literature review reflect the wishes of a dissertation committee, the researcher can negotiate for the review to be incorporated into the research proposal rather than into the final account.

Research Methodology, which includes information on the population and sample pertaining to the study involved. This element of the proposal deals with the identification and definition of the population and the sample used in the study as well as research method to be employed; *limitations*, which involves the identification and listing of potential limitations, and during this process, the researcher must consider the validity and reliability of all data collection instruments, the generalisability of the sample to the population from which it was drawn, access to data, ethical problems , and lastly, he/she must detail the specific actions that he/she will propose to ensure that the sample is as representative as possible of the population from which it is drawn; and finally, *the project outline,* that shows the organisational plan, work and time schedules and financial planning (De Vos et al. 2005).

In the preparation of a proposal, the researcher must always be mindful of the fact that proposal reviewers and evaluators are usually having a difficult and time-consuming engagement. Theirs is a momentous task of being faced with numerous proposals for review and evaluation at any given time. However, despite the number of proposals to be reviewed and evaluated and the difference in their quality, reviewers and evaluators are expected to read each proposal very carefully. A clearly organised proposal has therefore the added advantage of success. In this regard, Smit (1995) cautions that:

several factors facilitate clear organisation. As indicated above, a clear, unadorned prose style is absolutely essential. Short, simple paragraphs are required. Major and minor headings also enhance a proposal's organisation. They highlight important points and allow proposal reviewers who may be interested in one substantive (or methodological) issue than another to page back and forth through the proposal with ease.

STEPS UNIQUE TO QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In addition to the common steps discussed above, there are other steps that are unique to the qualitative research domain. They include, but are not limited to:

- ***Selecting a Research Paradigm and Considering the Place of Literature Review***: The initial thing that a qualitative researcher must focus on is to outline the paradigm underpinning the study. A paradigm must reflect the researcher's point of view or frame of reference for viewing at life or understanding the "real" world. Different scholars in the qualitative research provide different definitions of the concept "paradigm". However, for the purposes of this chapter, the following definitions will suffice: A paradigm according to Babbie (2001) is:

  the fundamental model or frame of reference we use to organise our observations and reasoning.

  Monette et al. (2002) allude that:

  scientific activity is shaped by paradigms, which are general ways of thinking about how the world works and how we gain knowledge about the world. Paradigms are fundamental orientations, perspectives, or world views that are often not questioned or subject to empirical test.

  Yet again, Creswell (1998) states that:

  all qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or worldview, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions

that guides their inquiries. These assumptions relates to: (a) the nature of reality; (b) the relationship of the researcher to what is being researched; (c) the roles of values in the study; and (d) the process of research (the methodological issue).

The common thread in these definitions is that a paradigm is a frame of reference, and therefore it would not be unbecoming to conclude that a paradigm is a fundamental element in qualitative discourse. The place of the literature study refers to the extent to which theory and literature review must be used to guide the research studies. It has been found that many qualitative researchers grapple with the decision to determine to what extent theory and literature review could be used to guide their studies. In this paper it is suggested that in order to find ourselves in the safe side, and thus make a correct decision in this regard, it is crucial to remember that there is a difference between theory and literature review. In helping us to understand this important difference, a number of authors can be cited. For example, Rubin and Babbie (2001) state that:

[a]theory is a systematic set of interrelated statements intended to explain some aspect of social life or enrich our sense of how people conduct and find meaning in their daily lives.

Neuman and Kreuger (2003) indicate that:

social theory was defined as a system of interconnected abstractions or ideas that condenses and organise knowledge about the social world.

Based on these definitions, it is correctly assumed that relevant and appropriate theories do form the theoretical framework of an empirical study, while the literature review should be organised around the theories. But what is literature review one may ask?

What is Literature Review?

Literature review means different things to different researchers**.** However, the view of Mouton (2001) will suffice for the purposes of this manuscript. Mouton (2001) views literature review as:

a review of the existing scholarship or available body of knowledge, it helps the researcher to see how other scholars have investigated the research problem that he/she is interested in.

In terms of this definition, the need for a qualitative researcher to learn from other scholars in the field becomes evident. For example, the researcher needs to understand how these scholars have theorised and conceptualised on issues relevant to his/her topic of interest and what they have empirically discovered, as well as the research tools they have used to what effect. Evidently, literature review helps researchers to familiarise themselves with the current state of knowledge regarding the research problem and learn how others delineated similar problems.

Selecting a Qualitative Design

It is extremely important that qualitative researchers gain an understanding of the terminology related to strategies and designs, gain a clear perspective on the different qualitative research designs, and a fair in-depth perspective on the major qualitative designs. Even though qualitative research has been in existence for quite a long time, qualitative researchers are still grappling with a problem of how such studies best be conducted. The remedy for this is the understanding that there are plenty of qualitative research writers who provide important suggestions and guidelines for such research. However, these guidelines should not be regarded as an "open sesame", since their role is, at best, to make recommendations regarding the right ones to use. However, the true proponents and strong advocates of qualitative discourse Denzin and Lincoln (1994) look at themes such as ethnography, phenomenology, and the biographical method as strategies of inquiry, or tools that can be used to design a qualitative research. Thus qualitative researchers, as opposed to their quantitative counterparts, almost always develop their own designs as they go along, using one or more of the available strategies or tools as an aid or guideline, suggesting that terms such as strategies, methods, traditions of inquiry , and approaches are somehow integrated in the term design.

These three themes, namely: ethnography, phenomenology, and biographical method, are critical in qualitative research, and thus need a further explanation in this regard. However, providing this explanation, it is crucial to indicate that a well- defined research design is a precondition for any qualitative study. The develop-

ment of a research design follows logically from a clearly identified research problem. Mouton (2001) defines a research design as:

a set of guidelines to be followed in addressing the research problem. Following from this definition, it becomes absolutely clear that the main function of a research design is to enable the researcher to anticipate what the approximate research would be, so as to maximise the validity of the eventual results.

Ethnography

Ethnographic approaches have been greatly influential in the development of qualitative research. Such approaches, represent a range of perspectives and activities .Ethnography is a research strategy or approach which is grounded in a particular *ontology* (which is a qualitative research philosophy regarding the way of asking what one sees as the very nature and essence of things in the social world . In the true sense of the word, ontology entails different versions of the essential component properties of social realities, and different ideas about where these are located, for example, in people, bodies practices, discourses, in social, legal, and administrative structures) .To understand more about this important research philosophy, readers are urged to consult scholars in the field, in particular, Mason (2002). In simple terms, ethnography is based on the principle that in its practice, science produces its realities and as well as describing them (see Law 2004). It is a strategy of inquiry characterised by observation (participant observation), and to a larger extent the description of the behaviour of a small number of cases. DeVos et al. (2005) alluded that:

in ethnography, data analysis is mainly interpretive, involving description of the phenomena, having as its aim being to write objective accounts of life experiences.

Biography

This is a qualitative research design strategy that shows a wide genre of biographical writings. Basically, it is used to report on and document an individual's life and experiences as told to the researcher or found in documents and archival materials. Biographical studies represents an attempt to construct the history of life of a particular phenomenon, and the methods of data collection in this design are in-depth interviews and detailed pictures of individual's life being the product of the research. According to Creswell (1998):

the activities involved in the design include but are not limited to: collecting extensive information from and about the subject of biography; having a clear understanding of historical, contextual material; having a keen eye for determining the particular stories or angles that work in writing a bibliography, and bringing into the narrative report and acknowledging the standpoint.

A famous and well-documented example of a biography, is the autobiography entitled "Long Walk to Freedom" detailing the life of Dr. Nelson Mandela, the well-known international leadership icon. Readers are urged to read this autobiography in order to appreciate the role that biography play in qualitative research.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is actually a supporting theory for interpretive qualitative research. In this paper, phenomenology is considered to be a discipline that studies people's perception of the world. The focus here is on understanding the perspective of the person(s) being studied. This understanding often calls for different forms of research and different ways of reporting the results of research, with the insinuation that some research methods that attempt to get at the perceptions of the persons being studied are often called phenomenological research methods. In stressing the significant role that phenomenology plays in qualitative research, Willis et al. (2007) state that:

In general, interpretivists tend to use more qualitative methods such as case studies and ethnography, and the reports they write tend to be much more detailed. Rich reports are necessary because the context is needed for understanding.

In other words, phenomenological studies in within the context of this chapter are viewed as the studies that describe the meaning of experiences of a particular phenomenon, theme, topic, or concept for various individuals. According to Moustakas (1994):

eventually, the researcher utilising this approach reduces the experiences to a central meaning or the essence of the experience, and

the product of the research is a description of the essence of the experience being studied.

Grounded Theory uses inductive coding and grounded approaches to the derivation of theory. In a nutshell, grounded theory involves several steps that include, but are not limited to the following: (a) underlining key terms in the text; (b) restating key phrases; (c) reducing the phrases and creating clusters; (d) reducing clusters and attaching labels (the process of patterns coding); (e) generalisations about each phrase in the cluster; (e) generating minitheories; and(f) finally integrating theories in an explanatory conceptual framework. The aim of grounded theory is to organise data for later and deeper analysis, while at the same time also clarifying ideas about meaning of data and suggesting leads for added data collection (see Miles and Huberman 1994) Grounded theory is indeed a qualitative strategy used with reference to the creation of theory based more (but not exclusively) on observation than on deduction. In this strategy the researcher generates an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon –that is, theory that explains some action, interaction, or process. Strauss and Corbin (1990) comment further that:

is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and the analysis of data pertaining to the phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with one another. The researcher does not begin with a theory then proves it; rather he begins with an area of study, and what is relevant to that area is gradually allowed to emerge

Case Study: Another important qualitative research design strategy is the case study technique, which in this chapter is considered as an exploration or an in-depth analysis of a single or multiple cases over a period of time. The case being studied may be a process, an activity, an event, a programme, a project, and individual or multiple individuals. It can even refer to a period of time rather than a particular group of individuals. In this regard, the exploration or description of the case is occurs through a detailed, in-depth data collection methods, involving multiple sources of information that are rich in content and context. These may include interview, documents, observations or archival records. The fundamental feature of this strategy is that the researcher needs access to, and confidence of the participants of the study, with the product of this research being an in-depth description of a case or set of cases. Stakes (1995) argues that:

the sole criterion for selecting cases for a case study should be the opportunity to learn, and where multiple cases are involved, it is referred to as a collective study.

It appears that these five strategies and/or traditions of qualitative research are selected due to the fact that they have proven themselves beyond reasonable doubt as representative of common practice in different disciplines in qualitative inquiry.

Select Methods of Data Collection

Data collection attempts to capture people's words and actions for the purposes of conducting a systematic research or inquiry. This chapter identifies and deals more extensively with the three major qualitative data collection methods: participant observation; in-depth interviews; and document study. In choosing this method, the researchers, particularly, the beginning ones are encouraged to maintain a research journal from the beginning to the end of their research project. A richly detailed researcher's journal is a useful part of the data collection and analysis process. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994):

Participant Observation *as a data collection method that seeks to understand the lives of people in their own terms by spending extended amounts of time with people in the natural settings they inhabit. In a nutshell, the participant observer tries to enter the lives of others, to indwell, suspending as much as possible his/her own ways of viewing the world.*

The objective of participant observation is to produce reliable and useable data. Therefore, a participant observer must take into account data must be consistent over time and place. In practice, this data collection method represents a sort of continuum ranging from total involvement on the one hand and total observation on the other. For this reason De Vos et al. (2005) caution that:

the researcher will have to decide beforehand on the role he/she intends to take in the inquiry, since this decision will affect the total process of participant observation". It is the view of this chapter that in exercising this im-

portant decision, the novice qualitative researcher must seek the advice, support, and guidance of his/her supervisor/promoter.

In-depth Interviewing is another method of qualitative inquiry. In fact, the gist of qualitative inquiry is deeply influenced by the manner in which in-depth interviewing has been conducted. Coincidently, in-depth interviewing remains a predominant mode of data collection in qualitative research. This implies that a researcher who is interested in other people's stories, and want to understand their stories, he must interview them in depth. In this article, qualitative in-depth interviewing is explained as an attempt to understand the world from the participant point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. In the same token, Mouton (2001) alludes that:

in qualitative research, the investigator usually works with wealth of rich descriptive data, collected through methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing and document analysis. The research strategy is usually of a contextual nature.

On the surface, qualitative in-depth interviewing may appear to be easier to implement, but in reality the method is extremely complex, and thus requiring that the researcher be extremely conscious and continuously seeking the supervisor's/promoter's guidance at all costs. More importantly, he/she must acknowledge the major challenges that he/she might face when choosing such a method, including but not limited to: establishing rapport in order to gain information from the participant; coping with the unanticipated problems and rewards of interviewing in the field, and recording and managing large volume of data generated by even a relatively brief interview (Morse 1991). Also available as a qualitative data collection method is *document study*. This method represents a variety of non-personal documents such as minutes of meetings, agendas of such meetings, and internal office memos written with a view to the continued functioning of the organisation, or for the execution of a particular matter. Other relevant documents may include but not necessarily limited to, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and public (government publications). Incidentally, if these documents are studied and analysed for the purposes of scientific inquiry, the method of document study as a method of qualitative data collection becomes applicable. Basically, there are a number of methodological criteria that ought to be followed during the process of data collection using this approach, and they include: suspension of personal biases; systematic and accurate recording of the observations; establishment of trust and building rapport with the interviewees; and creating optimal conditions in terms of location or setting of data collection. This manuscript reminds qualitative researchers (both novice and seasoned ones) to be mindful and extremely cautious of the documents they use and their authenticity as scientific documents. Once again, the advisory and supportive role of the supervisor/promoter in this regard must be sought, and must not be compromised.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Parallel to qualitative data collection methods is qualitative data analysis and interpretation techniques. There are several of these techniques available for a qualitative researcher, but for the purposes of this contribution, focus will be placed on three of them, namely: qualitative content analysis; qualitative content analysis; and qualitative case study analysis. As a qualitative data analysis and interpretation technique, ***content analysis*** plays an important role in social science inquiry. This technique involves detailed and systematic examination of the contents and context of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns and themes. Leedy and Ormord (2005) state that:

content analysis is characterised by the greatest amount of planning at the front end of the project, and the researcher typically defines a specific research problem/question at the very begging, and also identifies the sample to be studied and the methods and techniques of analysis to be used early in the process.

The aspirant qualitative researcher is particularly reminded that the justification/*rationale* for the selection of any qualitative inquiry should be identified, defined, and fully stated. For example, the *rationale* for the selection of *content analysis* technique is that the researcher can, if the material to be analysed involves complex or lengthy items, break each item into small, manageable segments that can be analysed separately.

For example, in qualitative research, the data to be analysed come mainly from different sources, such as interviews; fieldnotes; texts; and transcripts. In respect of interviews, it is important to consider the various ways that the researchers can read sense into answers that respondents give to the open-ended interviews. The most popular approach in this instance is, according to Siverman (2000) is "to treat respondents' answer as describing some external reality (for example, facts, events) or internal experience (for example, feelings, meanings)". Following this approach, it is appropriate to build into the research design various devices to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation.

Document Analysis

This qualitative data analysis and interpretation technique is one of the most suitable techniques the qualitative inquiry. This contribution is in line with Prior (2003) who states that:

in fact documents form a 'field' of research in their own right, and should not be considered as mere props of human action, and they are produced in human settings and are always be considered as collective (social) products.

Once more, the justification/rationale for the choice of this technique must be clearly stated and substantiated. Aspirant researchers are once again advised not to undermine or compromise on this principle, and supervisors/promoters are urged to provide the necessary support and guidance in this regard. For instance, the justification for the selection of this could be that documents provide precise information in a written form, and thus, access to information could be easy and of low cost, and because the information provided may differ substantially from that in spoken form. Again, texts endure and thus give historical insight, and written documents provide a 'true' indication of the original meaning than do other types of evidence. The significance of document analysis in qualitative inquiry cannot be overemphasized, and it is indeed stressed by Henning et al. (2004) who submit that:

collection of documents and other artefacts is often neglected in QR. Yet they are a valuable source of information and if they are available (the researcher cannot co-construct these, only use them) they should be included in the design.

Therefore, any document, whether old or new, whether in printed format, handwritten, or in electronic format and which relate to the research question may be of value.

Case Study Technique

Qualitative case study analysis takes multiple perspectives into account and attempts to understand the influences of multilevel social systems of subjects' perspectives and behaviours. The defining characteristics of a qualitative case analysis technique are its emphasis on an individual. Using this technique, the study concentrates on case studies where qualitative inquiry dominates, with its strong naturalistic, holistic, cultural and phenomenological interest. In support of this assertion, Babbie and Mouton (2001) express the view that:

it is quite clear that the case studies have been used to study organisations, events as well as people .

Furthermore, this manuscript aligns itself with Prior (2003) when stating that:

naturally case studies by their nature cannot be representative, yet they can be indispensible for developing theoretical insights and for examining the fine details of social life. Similarly, the justification as well as the motivation for the selection of the choice of this technique remains a key factor to an aspiring qualitative researcher. Such justification lie in the fact that it is useful for investigating how, for example, a programme or a project change over time, perhaps as a result of certain circumstances or interventions.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) are of the view that:

this particular technique allows the researcher to study a particular programme in depth for a definite period of time.

Framing and Development the Sample

Population

Even long before data collection and presentation, and data analysis and interpretation, the framing and development of the sample becomes a priority. In recent years it has become a norm in qualitative inquiry to use inductive and analytic inference from a small number of examined cases to a larger population of similar cases. For instance, the undertaking of defining a

population can be performed in terms of two processes, and be understood in terms of two dimensions: the target population, which is the population to which one wishes to generalise(which must be identified first), and second, the sample frame that must be constructed. The author accedes to Mouton's (2001) advice that that when defining the target population, there are two important considerations, namely, the scope of the generalisation planned and the practical requirements of drawing the sample. For the purposes of this manuscript the term population is population is defined accordingly as follows:

- A population is a 'collection of objects, events, or individuals having some common characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying'; and
- The 'population' is the "aggregate of all the cases that conform to some designated set of specifications" (Roscoe 155; Selttiz and Cook) in Mouton (2001)

Sample Technique

Technically, a sample is a small representation of a whole (population) .The most considerations in sampling is the size and representativeness. For instance, the size must be sufficient enough to allow estimates about the characteristics of phenomenon with a reasonable degree of precision. There are a variety of non-probability samples that are extremely important, suitable and user-friendly to novice and seasoned researchers. However, for the purposes of this paper, focus will be given to purposive and/or judgmental sampling. According to Berg (2001):

Non-probability sampling, the investigator does not base his/her sample selection on probability theory. Rather, efforts are undertaken (1) to create a kind of quasi-random sample, and/or (2) to have a clear idea about what larger group or groups the sample may reflect. Non-probability samples offer the benefit of not requiting a list of all possible elements in a full population, and the ability to access otherwise highly sensitive or difficult to research study populations.

When developing a purposive/judgmental sampling, researchers use their knowledge or expertise about some groups to select subjects who represent this population. In some cases, purposive samples are selected after field investigations on some groups, in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study. Despite some limitations (for example, the lack of wide generalisability) purposive samples are occasionally used by (qualitative) researchers. For example, delinquent youths, who might not appear in sufficient numbers to be meaningful under more traditional random techniques, might be purposively sampled (Berg 2001). The following views of the various authors pertaining to purposive sampling are in line with the views of the author, and are likewise duly commented and fully supported . Siverman (2000), in De Vos et al. (2005) is of the view that "in purposive sampling, a particular case is chosen because it illustrates some feature or process that is of interest for a particular study—though this does not simply imply any case we happen to choose. In purposive sampling, the qualitative inquirer must first think critically about the parameters of the population and then choose the sample case accordingly. Clear identification and formulation of criteria for the selection of respondents is, therefore, of cardinal importance". Similarly, Creswell (1998) in De Vos et al. (2005:) comments as follows in this regard ;(the purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in qualitative research. Researchers designing qualitative studies need clear criteria in mind and need to provide *rationales* for their decisions.*"* De Vos (2005) points out that "in the case of purposive sample, researchers purposively seek typical and divergent data". Finally, (Erlandson et al. 1993, in De Vos et al. 2005) advises that "the search for data must be guided by process that will provide right and detail data to maximise the range of specific information that can be obtained from, and about that context.

Presenting Research Report

The last and the final step in qualitative inquiry of presenting a qualitative research report, a final document that consists of a number of elements. Williams et al. *(*1995) is of the view that:

a qualitative research report is the manner in which a completed study is described to other people , whether they are colleagues at work or a worldwide audience, and further defines a qualitative research report as a written docu-

ment produced as a result of procedures undertaken to reveal information.

In essence, the qualitative research report must consist of, and highlight the following sections: (1**)** *Introduction,* that must reflect on the title of the manuscript, the abstract (when applicable), the table of contents, and the introduction proper, which normally consists of the first chapter of the report, and according to Silverman (2000) the title should "catch the attention of readers while at the same time informing them about the main focus of study"; (2) *Literature review,* which indicates that the field of the study has to be located in the research paper. This is usually done through a literature review, which maps out the main issues in the field being studied and points out where this particular research fits in, in the entire process. It is a crucial requirement that only what is relevant to the arguments should be included in the report. It is, however disturbing to notice that even though several authors on the framework of qualitative research mention the importance of a literature review and its pace in the research the readers to do likewise**;** *Research Methodology***,** which must be treated as a separate action of the research report, must be described comprehensively so that the reader develops confidence in the methods used. According to McBurney (2001) the description of the participants, the research design, the sampling plan, data collection procedures, and also the apparatus must be included in the report. In this part of the engagement, it is essential that the relationship between the research question and the data collected must be clearly articulated. Patton (2002) seems to suggest that methods decisions tend to stem from disciplinary prescriptions, concerns about scientific status, old methodological habits , and comfort with what the researcher knows best". This tricky situation must always be taken into account by all qualitative inquirers; *Findings and discussion,* which is the larger portion of the report, consisting mainly of the findings, including processing, analysis and interpretation of data in tables, figures, or other forms of data display. In this respect, the researcher must convey to the reader, participants, and any interested group that the data were competently analysed and must tell the reader what was discovered. It is in this section of the report that the review of literature and the findings of empirical methods are compared with one another. According to (Babbie 2001; Rubin and Babbie 2001) the reader should also be told what the results are believed to mean and how they should be interpreted". In fact the interpretation of the results should follow logically from the actual data obtained in the study; and *summary, conclusions, and recommendations,* this part of the report provides a summary of the investigation and further interpretation as well as the conclusion and recommendations. The summary of the report summarises the main points and suggest the idea of finality to the reader.

Presentation of a Qualitative Research Model

This segment of the chapter seeks to empower and to enhance qualitative researchers with the ability to undertake independent research projects in their chosen field of study. The understanding is that if they follow the model suggested it will become the matter of filling in the details required by the study. Based on the above theoretical exposition, the following qualitative research model is suggested as a blueprint and/or framework (format outline) for writing qualitative research project.

The Suggested Model

The thematic model of the qualitative research is presented graphically in terms of Figure 1**.** It must be noted that for the purposes of this chapter, the information highlighted and discussed here, is not exhaustive of the entire qualitative research themes and processes. This part of the chapter is limited to, and only covers initial basic pertinent themes that are deemed so crucial to a qualitative researcher in social science research discourse, namely: selection and choice of a research paradigm/approach; qualitative research design; introduction of and background to the study; problem formulation and statement of the problem and sub-problems; formulation of the research questions; identification of key research aim and objectives; qualitative data collection, gathering and presentation; and qualitative data analysis and interpretation. Those themes are also critical and important, but are not treated in this part of chapter are: the significance of the study; the scope and/or limitations of the study; discussion of the findings; recommendations; and summary and conclusion.

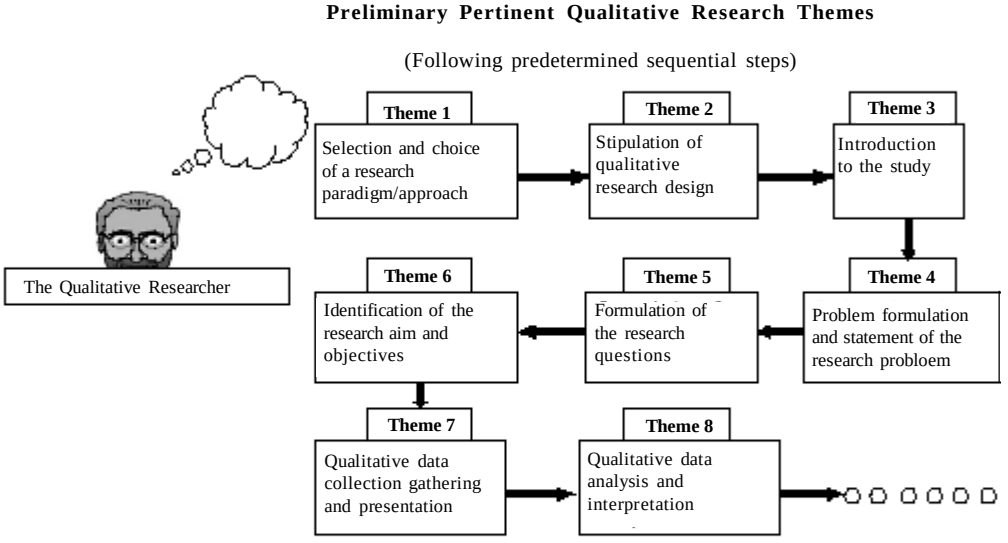

Fig. 1. Graphic presentation of the suggested model
Source: Author's own source

Explanation of Figure 1

The figure, which represents the qualitative social research endeavour, depicts the qualitative researcher himself/herself having been amused by the qualitative research themes and phases that lie before him/her, that he/she actually have to learn, understand and master as he/she contemplates on undertaking the research project for the first time. First and foremost, in his/her amusement, he/she reckons that he/she must select and choose the most appropriate paradigm/approach for his/her research inquiry. In this particular respect, based on his/her research topic, he/she selected qualitative research paradigm/approach due to its suitability. Secondly, he/she realised that he/she must identify and define research design for his/her study, and again, influenced by the topic of his/her research project, he/she adopts a qualitative research design (phenomenological). In the third phase, having satisfied himself/herself with his/her paradigm and design, he/she introduces his/her research by sketching a background to the study. In stage four, the researcher continuous by formulating and stating the research problem, the research questions and the research objectives and , in phases five and six respectively. For the purposes of this chapter, the researcher will proceed with data collection, gathering and presentation as well as data analysis and interpretation, which both constitute phases seven and eight respectively. The dots at the end of Figure 1 indicate that the eight qualitative research themes highlighted in this part of the chapter are not the only ones. There are other pertinent themes that due to the limited space of the chapter could not be covered and treated in the model. It is believed that the use of this model will assist qualitative researchers, and help in allying the fears of potential researchers who are to undertake qualitative inquiry for the first time.

CONCLUSION

This study, introduces the novice and aspiring qualitative social sciences researcher to some of the initial and most pertinent themes of and steps in the qualitative research discourse, namely: selection and choice of a paradigm/approach; qualitative research design; introduction of and background to the study; problem formulation and statement of the problem; formulating the research questions; identifying and stating research aim and objectives; qualitative data col-

lection, gathering and presentation; and qualitative data analysis and interpretation. On the basis of these initial and pertinent qualitative research themes and/or steps, this analysis and discussion in this chapter, attempt to leverage the plight of the novice and aspiring qualitative social sciences researcher and to enable him/her to appreciate the role and/or contribution that he/she can make in solving the social problems. It is also believed that such an exposition will encourage many novice and aspiring qualitative social sciences researchers to participate in large numbers in the effort of addressing social problems in the country.

Finally, the purpose of this chapter is to offer novice and aspiring qualitative social sciences researchers a means of fulfilling their research aspirations. This is not a perfect means of doing so and I acknowledge this. However, the researcher does provide some words of wisdom derived from years of experience as a researcher and analyst. I present a few analytic procedures and techniques—ones that I have found useful, and the idea behind them being to provide novice and aspiring researchers with something that they can turn to if, and when they research data and not know what to do with that data.

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