

Key Elements of the Research Proposal

Qualitative Design

What are the main types of qualitative approaches to research?

While there are many different investigations that can be done, a study with a qualitative approach generally can be described with the characteristics of one of the following three types:

Historical research describes past events, problems, issues and facts. Data are gathered from written or oral descriptions of past events, artifacts, etc. It describes “what was” in an attempt to recreate the past. It is different from a report in that it involves interpretation of events and its influence on the present. It answers the question: “What was the situation?”

Examples of Historical Research:

- A study of the factors leading to the historical development and growth of cooperative learning
- A study of the effects of the historical decisions of the United States Supreme Court on American prisons
- A study of the evolution of print journalism in the United States through a study of collections of newspapers
- A study of the historical trends in public laws by looking recorded at a local courthouse

Ethnographic research develops in-depth analytical descriptions of current systems, processes, and phenomena and/or understandings of the shared beliefs and practices of a particular group or culture. This type of design collects extensive narrative data (non-numerical data) based on many variables over an extended period of time in a natural setting within a specific context. The background, development, current conditions, and environmental interaction of one or more individuals, groups, communities, businesses or institutions is observed, recorded, and analyzed for patterns in relation to internal and external influences. It is a complete description of present phenomena.

One specific form of ethnographic research is called a **case study**. It is a detailed examination of a single group, individual, situation, or site.

A **meta-analysis** is another specific form. It is a statistical method which accumulates experimental and correlational results across independent studies. It is an analysis of analyses.

Examples of Ethnographic Research:

- A case study of parental involvement at a specific magnet school
- A multi-case study of children of drug addicts who excel despite early childhoods in poor environments
- The study of the nature of problems teachers encounter when they begin to use a constructivist approach to instruction after having taught using a very traditional approach for ten years
- A psychological case study with extensive notes based on observations of and interviews with immigrant workers
- A study of primate behavior in the wild measuring the amount of time an animal engaged in a specific behavior

Narrative research focuses on studying a single person and gathering data through the collection of stories that are used to construct a narrative about the individual’s experience and the meanings he/she attributes to them.

Examples of Narrative Research:

- A study of the experiences of an autistic student who has moved from a self-contained program to an inclusion setting
- A study of the experiences of a high school track star who has been moved on to a championship-winning university

track team

REFLECTION: In your Reflective Journal free write for one minute, listing as many terms and concepts associated with qualitative methodology that you can recall. Use those terms to jog your memory as you write a one paragraph summary of what you understand the qualitative approach to research design to be. Do NOT look back at the information on this website, and do NOT try to write a dictionary definition. Just your own words and ideas.

Qualitative methodology is **inductive** in its reasoning. The researcher selects a general topic and then begins collecting information to assist in the formation of an hypothesis. The **data** collected during the investigation creates the **hypothesis** for the researcher in this research design model.

What is the basic methodology for a QUALITATIVE research design?

1. Identify a general research question.
2. Choose main methods, sites, and subjects for research. Determine methods of documentation of data and access to subjects.
3. Decide what you will collect data on: questions, behaviors to observe, issues to look for in documents (interview/observation guide), how much (# of questions, # of interviews/observations, etc.).
4. Clarify your role as researcher. Determine whether you will be obtrusive or unobtrusive, objective or involved.
5. Study the ethical implications of the study. Consider issues of confidentiality and sensitivity.
6. Begin to collect data and continue until you begin to see the same, repeated information, and stop finding new information.
7. Interpret data. Look for concepts and theories in what has been collected so far.
8. Revise the research question if necessary and begin to form hypotheses.
9. Collect further data to address revisions. Repeat Steps 6 and 7.
10. Verify your data. Complete conceptual and theoretical work to make your findings. Present your findings in an appropriate form to your audience.

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