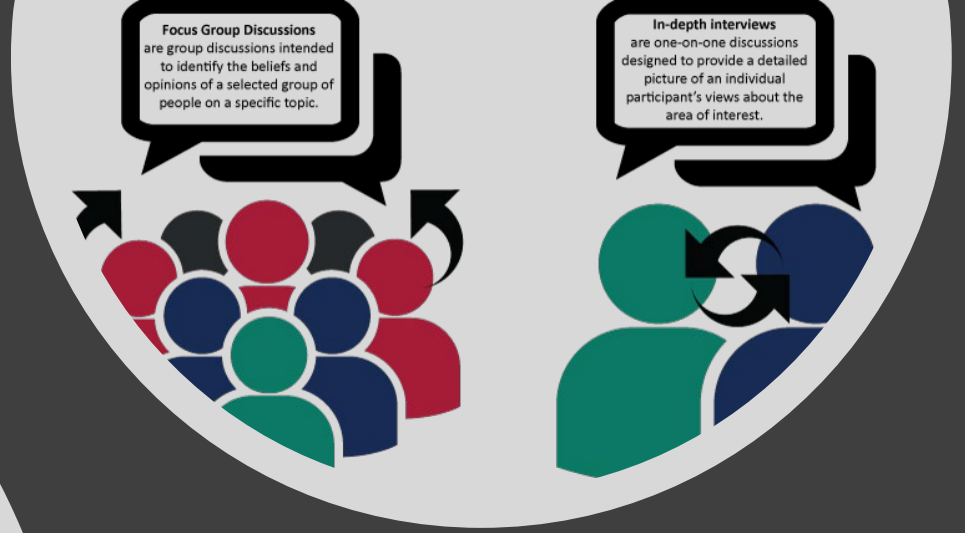


Qualitative Data Collection Methods-1

April 2025

Intended Learning Outcomes

After this lecture, you will be able to:

1. Identify various data collection approaches in qualitative research.

2. Describe the types of qualitative research interviews.

3. Distinguish between interviews and focus groups.

4. Identify different types of observation in qualitative research.

5. Identify challenges facing researchers using participant observation approach.

Lecture outline

1. Interviews

- ❑ Types of interviews
- ❑ challenges of interviews
- ❑ Quality of interviews

2. Focus groups

- ❑ Definition of focus groups
- ❑ Advantages of focus groups

3. Observation

- ❑ Definition of observation
- ❑ Why use observation to collect data?
- ❑ types of observation
- ❑ Styles of observation
- ❑ How does one conduct an observation?
- ❑ Challenges of observation

Interviews

What do we mean by interview?

- Interview method is the art of questioning and interpreting the answers (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

- Advantages

❖Use of open-ended questions gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses.

❖ They allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses - that is, to ask why or how. Thus aid in further elaboration on their answers (Stuckey, 2013).

Interviews (Continued)

- Interviews can take place in an individual (one to one) or a group setting.

- Types of interviews:

❑ Structured

❑Unstructured

Types of interviews

- Structured interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011)

- The interviewer asks interviewees a series of pre-established questions.

- The questions would be asked in the same order for all respondents.

- Structured interviews are rigid as the interviewer reads from a script and deviates from it as little as possible.

- Since researchers take a very active role in question design, there is a possibility that they inadvertently or overtly bias data collected.

- Highly standardized procedures are designed to substantially reduce the probability of the results being influenced by the interviewer's bias.

Example of interview guide (schedule)

- What do you think is the most effective way of assessing a child's pain?
- Have you come across any issues that make it difficult to assess a child's pain?
- What pain-relieving interventions do you find most useful and why?
- When managing pain in children what is your overall aim?
- Whose responsibility is pain management?
- What involvement do you think parents should have in their child's pain management?
- What involvement do children have in their pain management?
- Is there anything that currently stops you managing pain as well as you would like?
- What would help you manage pain better?

Types of Interviews (Continued)

- Unstructured interviews (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009)

- More flexible , do not use predefined questions.

- Synonyms: Informal conversational interview, in-depth interview, non standardized interview, and ethnographic interview (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

- Rely entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction (Patton, 2002).

- Can be considered as a natural extension of participant observation, because they so often occur as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork (Patton, 2002).

- It is accepted that the structure of the interview can be loosely guided by a list of questions, called an aide memoire or agenda (McCann & Clark, 2005).

- Aide memoire or agenda is a broad guide to topic issues that might be covered in the interview, rather than the actual questions to be asked

- Unlike interview guides used in structured interviewing, an aide memoire or agenda doesn't determine the order of the conversation and is subject to revision based on the responses of the interviewees (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

- Note-taking is a traditional method for capturing interview data. But in an unstructured interview, note-taking is likely to disrupt the natural flow of the conversation. Thus, when possible, it is preferable to audio record the interviews by tape or digital recorder (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Challenges of unstructured interviews

- **Requires a significant amount of time to collect the needed information** (Patton, 2002).

- Especially when the researcher first enters the field and knows little about the setting.

- Because each interview is highly individualized, the length of each unstructured interview session also might be longer than structured interviews.

- **The challenge for researchers to exert the right amount and type of control over the direction and pace of the conversation** (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009)**.**

- When a new topic emerges in the discussion, it is difficult for the researcher to know whether to follow it and risk losing continuity, or to stay on the major theme and risk missing additional useful information (Patton, 2002).

- To develop your skills in controlling unstructured interviews, both training and experience are important (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

- **Analysing the data gathered by unstructured interviews** (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009)**.**

- The questions asked in each unstructured interview were dependent on the context of the interview and so can vary dramatically across multiple interviews.

- Different questions will generate different responses so that a great deal of effort has to be made to analyse the data systematically, to find the patterns within it (Patton, 2002).

Challenges of interviews

- Most interviews are recorded and will need transcribing before analysing. This can be extremely time-consuming, with 1hour of interview requiring 5–6hours to transcribe (Bryman, 2016).

- The analysis itself is also time-consuming, requiring transcriptions to be pored over word-for-word and line-by-line (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

- Interviews also present the problem of bias the researcher needs to take care to avoid leading questions or providing non-verbal signals that might influence the responses of participants (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

Quality of Interviews

- Quality of an interview can be maintained by paying careful attention to the following three principles:

(1) Maintaining the flow of the interviewee's story.

- The flow of the interviewee's story can be inadvertently disrupted by the interviewer, such as by redirecting the narrative or interrupting it, rushing to complete the interviewee's sentences, prematurely terminating a narrative, failing to clarify terms or asking questions the interviewee does not understand. Thereby stalling the interview.

(2) Maintaining a positive relationship with the interviewee.

- Positive relationships with the interviewee can be maintained by not offering opinions about responses and avoiding non-verbal indications of surprise or shock, as well as not using non-verbal cues such as nodding to indicate approval or a correct answer.

(3) Avoiding interviewer bias.

- The interviewer should not pose leading questions or fail to follow up or omit topics introduced by the interviewee.

(Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999)

Focus groups

Focus groups

- Focus groups (sometimes called focus group interviews) take place in a group setting.

- Focus groups are not recommended for studying sensitive topics that people will be reluctant to discuss in public.

(Qu & Dumay, 2011)

Focus groups (Continued)

- A key characteristic is the interaction between members of the group (Cameron, 2005).
- Focus groups typically consist of 8-12 people (ideal 4-8), with a moderator who focuses the discussion on relevant topics in a nondirective manner.
- The smaller the group, the less information we gather.
- On the other hand, having more than 10 people in the group make it crowded and difficult for all members to participate and interact.
- Multiple focus groups should be conducted in order to gather sufficient amount of data, opinion, and views on the study (Oun & Bach, 2014).

Focus groups (Continued)

- Focus group advantages

❑Convenience

❑Time and expenses savings

❑Because the researcher (sometimes called facilitator or moderator) takes a less active role in guiding the discussion, less bias is introduced by the researcher than in individual interviews.

Factors to consider	Use group interviews when…	Use individual interviews when…
Group interaction	Interaction of respondents may stimulate a richer response or new and valuable insights	Group interaction is likely to be limited or non-productive
Group or peer pressure	Group or peer pressure will be valuable in challenging the thinking of respondents and illuminating conflicting opinions	Group or peer pressure would inhibit responses and cloud the meaning of results
Sensitivity of subject matter	Subject matter is not so sensitive that respondents will temper responses or withhold information	Subject matter is so sensitive that respondents would be unwilling to talk openly in a group
Extent of issues to be covered versus depth of individual responses	There is a need to cover a small number of issues on a topic on which most respondents can say all that is relevant in less than 10 minutes	There is need to cover a greater number of issues on a topic that requires a greater depth of response per individual
Requirement for interview guide	Enough is known to establish a meaningful topic guide	It may be necessary to develop the interview guide by altering it after a series of initial interviews
Logistics requirement	An acceptable number of target respondents can be assembled in one location	Respondents are dispersed or not easily assembled
Cost and training	Quick turnaround is critical, and funds are limited	Quick turnaround is not critical, and budget will permit higher cost
Availability of qualified staff to conduct the interview	Focus group facilitators are able to control and manage group discussions	Interviewers are supportive and skilled listeners

Source: Adapted from Frechtling, Sharp and Westat (*43*).

Sample on paper utilised interviews and focus groups

- Surgeons' aims and pain assessment strategies when managing paediatric post-operative pain: A qualitative study (Interview study).

- "I couldn't even talk to the patient": barriers to communicating with cancer patients as perceived by nursing students (Focus group study).

Observation

Observation (observing in the field)

- Simply…..

Observation in qualitative research involves "going into the field"--describing and analysing what has been seen (Mays & Pope, 1995)

Observation (Continued)

- Observation in qualitative research is one of the oldest and most fundamental research methods approaches.

- Traditionally, observation has been extensively used in the social sciences including psychology and medical settings.

- When using questionnaires and interviews sometimes a social desirability approach impacts on participants' responses, where they say what they think the researcher wants to hear rather than what they actually believe or do. This makes it hard to find out what is really happening in practice (Twycross & Shorten, 2016).

- Observation involves collecting data using one's senses, especially looking and listening in a systematic and meaningful way"(McKechnie, 2008).

Observation (Continued)

- Observation sometimes referred to as <u>unobtrusive method</u>
  - Unobtrusive measures allow for data collection and analysis to be completed without the researcher intruding in the research context.
  - Their advantage is that they do not disturb the naturally occurring processes that are the subject of the research. In particular, because the informants are not aware of the research that is going on, their behaviour and self-descriptions are not modified by the researcher's presence or activities .
  - Other names for these techniques are ‘non-reactive’ or ‘indirect’ methods.
- The research setting for participant observation is the study informants’ own daily environment rather than a setting assigned by researchers (Spradley, 2016).
- Observation provides an enormous amount of data to be captured and analysed.
- One approach to helping with collection and analysis is to digitally record observations to allow for repeated viewing (Meriläinen, Kyngäs, & Ala-Kokko, 2010).

Observation (Continued)

- Observation' is more than just recording of data from the environment.
- When we observe, we are active, not passive collectors of data like a tape recorder or video camera.
- Observation seeks to find out "what is going on here?
- Data collected in observational studies can be qualitative, quantitative or both.

Why Use Observation to Collect Data?

- They provide researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and check for how much time is spent on various activities.

- Participant observation allows researchers to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share.

- Help researchers observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants (Kawulich, 2005)

Why Use Observation to Collect Data? (Continued)

- Makes it possible to collect different types of data. Being onsite over a period of time familiarizes the researcher to the community, thereby facilitating involvement in sensitive activities to which he/she generally would not be invited.
- It helps the researcher to develop questions that make sense in the native language or are culturally relevant.
- It gives the researcher a better understanding of what is happening in the culture.
- Enables the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and interviews.

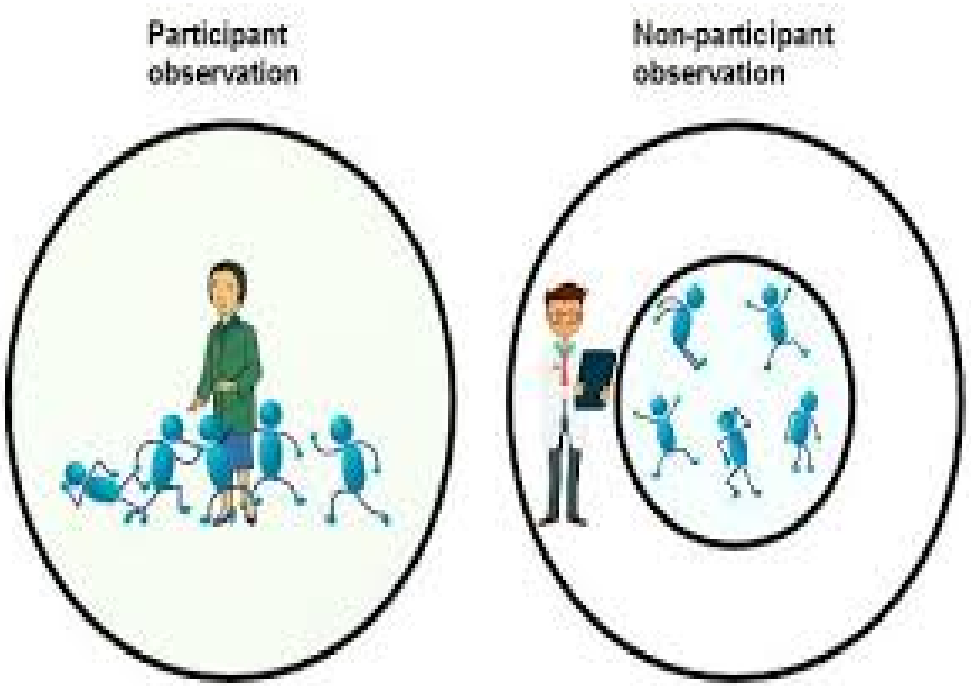
(Bernard, 2017)

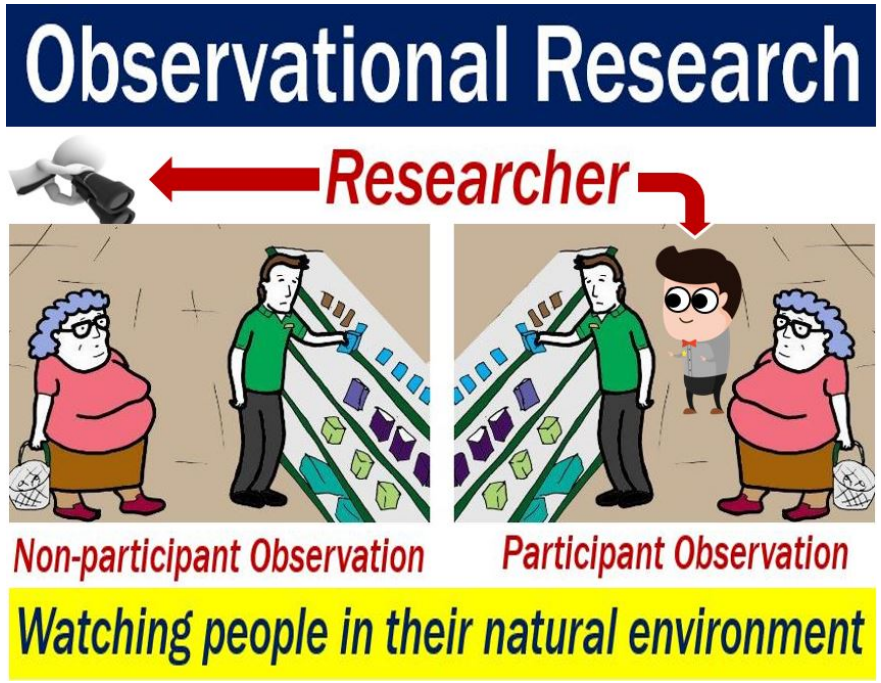
Two types of observations

- **Non- participant observation**. Researcher is not part of the activity taking place, but simply observes. May be identified as observer/researcher (Observers adopt a detached role)

- **Participant observation**. Researcher takes part in community, organization, or activity. Researcher attempts to learn what it is like to be part of the community, organization, or participate in the activity (i.e. observer participates in the activities being observed).

Types of observation





Types of Observation

- Participant (interact with those you are observing; become a participant) vs. Non-participant (sit, watch, take notes with no interaction).
- Participant observations may alter events
- Non-participant observations may not gain complete understanding of event.

Participant observation

- Marshall & Rossman (1989)
  - “The systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p.79).
  - Observations enable the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing a "written photograph" of the situation under study
  - A process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities.
  - “The process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting”

Participant observation- Methodology

- The researcher assumes a role in the setting or group being studied.
  - Often the researcher actually takes on the role being studied;
    - Becoming a firefighter
    - Enrolling in flight training school
    - Working in a mental hospital (or passing as a patient)

In both types of observation, the researcher attempts to learn about context in which behavior takes place. Context includes:

- Physical surroundings.
- Other people in the setting.
- The interactions among different people in the setting.
- The social, cultural, political, or economic context in which the behavior occurs and why it occurs

Styles of observation

- Unstructured observation – describing what occurs. Researcher usually does not have a preconceived idea about what would occur.

❑ The most common type

❑ Uses the researcher's words for thick description of phenomena or events (Mulhall, 2003).

- Structured observation. Starting with an operational definition of what you want to measure – and counting only the behavior or situation that "fits" the definition

❑ Uses a template to record tabulations of specific behaviours that can be measured and analysed statistically (Callahan & Bertakis, 1991).

- Mix of both- unstructured and structured

Researchers record what they see, hear, smell, and taste using:

- Field notes. Written record of what is observed, impressions, reactions, and hypotheses about what has happened.
- Photos of people and setting may be added to analysis.
- Audio-tape and video-tape are also used to document what researchers find.

An example of field note taken during triage nurse observation

‘7am Saturday. I followed Andrew as he moved through each clinical area on his way to triage. I asked about this behaviour. He explained, it’s important to know the number of patients in each area and which beds are free. Arriving at triage, the night nurse was directing a patient to the waiting room. Andrew asked about the shift. Looking out into the waiting room, eight people sat on chairs. Some were watching the television, others rested with their eyes closed, of which two had draped around them hospital blankets. Andrew listened, mainly nodding, as the nurse discussed each patient: how long they had waited, why they came to the ED, if the Triage Nurse had done anything to speed up their care, and the rate that patients were seen. The Triage Nurses, turned back towards the computer and brought up a different screen that appeared labelled Patient Expect. Doctors entered the details and conditions of expected ED patient arrivals into this screen. Expected patients appeared listed on the computer screen. The information provided on this screen sometimes assisted Triage Nurses to determine their activities.

THANK YOU