Book Review

Reviewed by Narges Badri[1], Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

The recent development of qualitative research, despite the traditional domination of positivist research, continues to accelerate. However, the specific topic of qualitative research methodology in the realm of language education needs more attention. Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini who has many years of experience in the field, has attempted to address this need. His formally-edited Reflection on Qualitative Research in Language and Literacy Education (2017), and recently-authored Doing Qualitative Research in Language Education which I review here, offer a contribution to expanding the body of texts on qualitative methodologies in the vast area of language education. This book illustrates what novice researchers and graduate students of TESOL, TEFL, TESL, and applied linguistics need to know about planning and conducting qualitative studies. It also provides them with a framework not to lose their way in the path of their inquiries. Moreover, it potentially creates a source for instructors of courses of (qualitative) research to bolster the content of their classes. Offering a detailed account of the theoretical foundations and the practicalities of qualitative research, and adopting a contextualizing approach to place qualitative research in the particular context of language education concerns are two distinctive characteristics of the book.

The first chapter of the book mainly concerns the theoretical discussions about various types of knowledge and ways of searching for knowledge based on two different philosophical positions: positivism and constructivism. In the introductory section of the chapter, Mirhosseini raises a few questions basically on formerly-accepted understandings of knowledge and research, and other possible definitions of and insight into these concepts. These fundamental questions are not only focused on in this chapter. Still, they can also, as the author believes, "shape the stepping stones in our journey of learning to perceive and practice qualitative language education research in this book." (p.2). Intending to avoid merely categorizing different kinds of knowledge, the author clarifies that his purpose for opening up the discussion is to state that "there are different types of knowledge in the world. Therefore, it can logically be assumed that various research procedures may exist for gaining different types of knowledge that can be important and worthwhile." (p.4). Thus, he provides an image of research as a significant element in further learning and understanding.

Taking into account the decisive role of the research question as a guide in various steps of an inquiry, Chapter Two elaborates on the how of forming a research question. This chapter, considering an initial research concern as the point of departure and stating a finalized qualitative research question as the destination, goes forward step by step and offers sources to find a research idea. Then, discussing the process of conceptualizing the research question based on the

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[1] Narges Badri received her MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from Alzahra University in Tehran, Iran. Email: honest.nsb@gmail.com

constructivist standpoint, the author brings the significance of gaining "a contextualized and complex type of knowledge and understanding" in qualitative studies to the readers' notice and says: "a critical consideration in conceptualizing qualitative research questions is to avoid perceiving the question and what you specifically want to know, based on the too-familiar cause and effect links and comparative mentalities of experimental research." (p.32).

Chapter Three, titled Designing Qualitative Studies, focuses on the process of planning for qualitative language education research. The conception of designing "as meaningful and balanced planning for research and as a vibrant ongoing process of constructing rather than selecting and following a plan for a research project" (p.46) shapes the basis for the discussion in this chapter. The author deals with some considerations that are required to be taken into account in the process of qualitatively designing a study and categorizes them mainly as Purpose, Theory, Question, Data Collection, and Data Analysis. Then, Research Quality and Practicalities, as two subcategories, are included and discussed. The author appropriately distinguishes between the qualitative and quantitative conception of the word design and emphasizes that qualitative researchers, avoiding too rigid a plan, need to frequently refer to the primary research design and modify it to satisfy unexpectedly occurring conditions in the inquiry process.

Collecting different kinds of qualitative data in language education studies is the issue to which Chapters Four, Five, and Six are devoted. First, the author elaborates on participation and observation as the best procedure to gain an in-depth understanding of what goes on in the context of the study. Some practical obstacles distancing researchers from participation is the issue which the author does not overlook to discuss. So, in Chapter Five, he extensively deals with the dimensions of conducting qualitative interviews. Mirhosseini, reminding the audiences of the nature of qualitative inquiries, emphasizes that "Interview data is shaped by interactions that involve the subjectivities of both interviewers and participants in a context." and "it is important for the qualitative interviewer not to view interview participants as data producing machines but as people who have their extremely diverse concerns" (p.103). Considering the point that "in qualitative research, anything can potentially be your data" (p.112), the author in Chapter Six, as the third chapter of data gathering, presents some other sources to collect qualitative data. In these three chapters, Mirhosseini provides the readers with a collection of different sources of data, which can widen their views about data gathering procedures in their qualitative studies.

Interpreting qualitative data to arrive at their contextualized understanding is the most difficult phase in qualitative inquiries. Hence, the author dedicates two chapters of the book to the approaches to qualitative data exploration in language education research. Chapter Seven, titled Data Analysis Through Coding, presents theoretical discussions about grounded theory perspectives and practicalities of applying data coding procedures based on grounded theory. At the beginning of the chapter, Mirhosseini briefly refers to the epistemologically positivist basis for the prevalent conception of data analysis and notes that this understanding can be reflected in "dealing with mathematical problems, physical objects, and chemical substances, and this may extend to issues in biology, geology, and even some schools of linguistics." (p.132). To apply the term data analysis in qualitative studies, he believes that qualitative researchers need to reconceptualize this conception and take into account the context-dependent nature of qualitative data. The strength of this chapter can be seen in offering the discussion on coding in distinct phases and drawing a stepwise illustration of this process; meanwhile, the author does not overlook to remind the readers that "away from the fragmented presentation of the coding stages, the actual process of coding is one whole process" (p.149).

Considering that "grounded-theory-based coding is not the only approach to qualitative data analysis, and perhaps not the most qualitative one" (p.157), Chapter Eight, as the second data analysis chapter, presents some more qualitative approaches to the exploration of data in language

education research. Before entering into the discussion and elaborating on narrative analysis as one of these approaches, the author refers to Maxwell & Chmiel (2014) to make a brief comparison between similarity-based and contiguity-based analysis. In fact, he draws the readers' attention to two different perspectives on qualitative analysis. Since coding procedures and narrative analysis are shaped based on these two perspectives respectively, novice language education researchers are provided with a more in-depth understanding to decide knowingly upon an appropriate approach to making sense of data. Moreover, Mirhosseini, highlighting a practical point that should be addressed in the case of narrative analysis and other procedures of analyzing qualitative data, recommends that researchers keep an eye on the research question and consider it as the guide to remember what they aim to discover from their data.

Chapter Nine focuses on the complicated issue of the quality of qualitative studies. Early in this chapter, the author revisits three perspectives from which the concern of evaluating the strength of qualitative inquiry can be addressed. Positivism Continued, Seeking Trustworthiness, and Qualitative Quality, are three headings under each, one specific perspective is discussed. The author, problematizing the first two perspectives due to their fundamental perception influenced by positivist epistemological views, believes that "for a truly qualitative approach to the quality of inquiry, researchers need to distance and free themselves from such perspectives." (p.180). As to the third one, Mirhosseini describes it as an approach that refers to the philosophical basis of qualitative research and can truly direct researchers' attitudes when they consider quality in qualitative research. Then, he discusses seven aspects of the quality and provides the audience with the manifold conceptualization of good and bad qualitative inquiry.

How to present findings of qualitative studies in the form of writing academically is the central concern of Chapter Ten. To open the discussion, the author refers to the considerable influence that the excellence of the research report has on finalizing the procedure of the study, and among different formats of disseminating the outcome of the research, draws the audiences' attention to academic writing. Mirhosseini, however, believes that "qualitative research writing may basically be more learnable than teachable" and "An important aspect of this challenge is to extensively and reflectively read qualitative research writing through time" (p.200). Still, just to provide novice researchers with preliminary understanding about academic writing, he touches on some practicalities of writing qualitative research reports. He closes the chapter by familiarizing readers with some major journals about qualitative research and language education, aiming to help newcomers to the field find more samples of published qualitative research and mediums to publish their future works.

Finally, as a point mentionable is the inclusion of two sections (Questions and Further Readings) at the end of each chapter. They respectively provide readers with some commonly-asked questions and an up-to-date list of resources pertaining to the issue discussed in the chapter. Another strength of the book is the illustration of examples related to language education which can facilitate smoother reading and aid the audiences in gaining more accurate understanding of the concepts. The author's attempt to consider the details of both practices and theories of the qualitative inquiries has resulted in the creation of a book that goes beyond the realm of English language education and can feed students from other disciplines of social sciences and humanities. However, as he believes, "no book can claim to have comprehensively covered the entire theoretical and practical landscape of qualitative research in any disciplinary area" (p.ix). Overall, Doing Qualitative Research in Language Education can be recommended as a valuable guide to teaching and learning qualitative study.

References

Maxwell, J. A., & Chmiel, M. (2014). Notes toward a theory of qualitative data analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 21–34). Sage.

Notes on Contributor

Narges Badri received her MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from Alzahra University in Tehran, Iran. She is interested in the social and cultural aspects of teaching English as a foreign language.