

Book Review

Hurst, A. L. (2023). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Helpful Guide for Undergraduate and Graduate Students in the Social Sciences*. Oregon State University

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ABSTRACT

The book titled “*Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Helpful Guide for Undergraduate and Graduate Students in the Social Sciences*” by Allison L. Hurst (2023) at Oregon State University provides a comprehensive foundation for conducting and assessing qualitative research in the social sciences. This book comprises 21 chapters and spans 314 pages. Chapters 1 through 9 discuss the first half of the book, covering various facets of qualitative research. Chapters 10 through 19, as the second half of the book, discuss data collection, methods, techniques, analysis, and coding. The last chapter, 21, covers presentations and communication of research findings. Furthermore, this book includes online application platforms, such as Zoom, Webex, Skype, and GoToMeeting, and others, which can help novice qualitative researchers conduct online interviews, focus groups, and other activities in the same space, similar to traditional methods for data collection and analysis.

KEYWORDS: Qualitative research, methods, research, digital space, narrative inquiry

In Chapter 1, Hurst (2023, p. 1) delves into what is “research” by referring to a historical approach to understanding the world through empirical research. This implies that empirical research is based on evidence from which conclusions can be drawn from observable data (Hurst, 2023). In Chapter 2, Hurst (2023) explores the research design process in qualitative research and offers practical guidance. The author also notes the need to consider a topic of interest and its importance before starting, and this should not be confused with a specific research question (Hurst, 2023, p. 206).

In the book, strengths are in Chapters 3 and 4, which explore guidance on epistemologies, finding research questions, and approaches to qualitative research. Hurst (2023) introduces epistemology to explain how humans know things about the world. So, the author ponders epistemological approaches, meaning thinking about what a researcher knows about the questions posed, listening to people, and the context under which the study is taking place to acquire knowledge that is as accurate and dependable as possible. Additionally, Hurst (2023, p. 39) posits that research question development must be tailored around a particular phenomenon, context, and

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time boundaries in the research design because those questions must be answerable by data. The book focuses on practical research design and data collection guidance—not theory-driven qualitative research methods. In doing so, conducting research, it is important to be careful when developing a research question, or even when it changes.

Another strength of the book is that the author comprehensively covers the practical ethical considerations throughout the book. In chapters 7 and 8, the author talks about ethical considerations and the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). This is a strength articulated in the book because the mandate of the IRB is to ensure that the rights and welfare of human subjects in research are protected by reviewing the research protocols and other materials (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023, p. 104). It is good to note that “being ethical goes beyond following the rules and regulations,” as stated by the author (Hurst, 2023, p. 85). That is, researchers ought to go beyond the formalistic approach of research ethics and have continuous reflection by underscoring ethics reflexivity (Berkovich & Grinshtain, 2021, p. 559). This is because every research project is unique and involves paying attention and deliberation, so researchers must proceed and not neglect ethical requirements in the entire research process (Hurst, 2023, p. 86).

Additionally, the book offers a significant contribution to data collection techniques. The author identifies visual analysis and biographies as primary data collection techniques or approaches in qualitative research, to be used independently or in supplement to interviews, focus groups, observations, and document review (Hurst, 2023). Thus, the book explores qualitative data collection techniques; the author employs multiple approaches to qualitative data collection that encompass comparisons across populations and settings, a practice known as triangulation (Hurst, 2023). Hurst (2023) delves into how triangulation strengthens a study's validity by using diverse data sources, multiple methods, theoretical perspectives, and other approaches. That is, qualitative research charts the path—a myriad of visual techniques can be utilized in in-depth biographical interviews relevant for information triangulation for improving the validity of a study. This suggests that biographies may be relevant to supplement interviews as part of qualitative research data collection tools (Olmo-Extremiera et al., 2023, p. 248). For instance, Olmo-Extremiera et al. (2023, p. 283) highlight the use of visuals to support biographical interviews for understanding, analyzing, and studying educational communities, including their stakeholders, in modern educational settings, particularly for data collection.

Furthermore, the book recognizes and integrates technologies as we navigate the evolving methodological landscapes. Hurst (2023) highlights the relevance of technological platforms, technologies, and software necessary for data collection, analysis, information communication, and presentation, which demonstrates the modern conduct of qualitative research in our digital space. Additionally, Kayyali (2025) emphasizes the relevance of technology in qualitative research—and has helped transform traditional approaches to data collection, analysis, and presentation, demonstrating a strength of the book.

However, the book has a weakness in engaging with the online and digital application platforms that could be used with qualitative traditions or approaches inherent in qualitative work. Hurst (2023) emphasizes chapters 10 through 17—data collection techniques, such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and others—without exploring videoconferencing applications and digital platforms that may aid data collection in our post-COVID-19 contemporary qualitative research. The emerging digital space, though, may come with its challenges; the online application platforms such as Zoom, Webex, Skype, GoToMeeting, and others can assist qualitative researchers in engaging in online interviews, focus groups, and others as versions of traditional methods (Lobe et al., 2020, p.3).

Again, a weakness identified in the book is that the author was limited in deeply exploring narrative inquiry as a traditional approach in qualitative research. This is because narrative research helps to inquire about the unfolding lived experiences in chronological order within an individual's personal, social, and historical context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since qualitative research approaches—consider more human elements- the inclusion of narrative inquiry as an approach to the data collection process could be of greater importance. However, the book is limited to exploring narratives as a qualitative research inquiry approach.

Conclusion

Overall, this book achieves its goals as an invaluable resource for students, researchers, and professionals who seek to embark on qualitative research. Throughout the book, the author employs simple, unambiguous language. The book covers various examples in each chapter to offer a comprehensive understanding of the purpose and motivations that inform a study—how to develop good research questions as part of the research design. For instance, the various approaches and techniques, particularly mixed methods as tools, are beneficial for the qualitative research—field traditions.

However, addressing shortcomings like incorporating digital platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Webex, Teams, Artificial Intelligence tools, and others for data collection in our emerging technological world and narrative approaches tends to increase the value of the book. For instance, Kayyali (2025) posits that transformational growth constitutes a qualitative research approach; emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality, and cloud-based research environments, can be leveraged to advance qualitative research inquiry.

Despite the weaknesses identified, Hurst's book offers a valuable contribution for undergraduate, graduate, and early-career researchers or scholars seeking well-organized, high-quality guidance on qualitative research methods, particularly in pedagogy, access, and applied research projects.

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Notes on Contributor

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