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Thinking 'Qualitative' Through a Case Study: Homework for a Researcher

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ABSTRACT
This study portrays the necessary preparation of a qualitative researcher who intends to undertake case study research. Here, it is argued that the case study method identifies the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. This study has policy implications for the potential case study researchers. This present study raises the awareness of a case study researcher and highlights that a case researcher should be familiar with and follow a rational and effective process before designing the research. At the initial stage, a case study researcher should plan for an appropriate entry through formal and informal gatekeepers at the research site. The case researcher also needs to plan the periods in the fieldwork well in advance. This study also illustrates that the case researcher should know data generation and collection procedures and the techniques to analyzing case study data. As the case study data cannot be generalized the researcher needs to adopt a prior theoretical stance for validity, reliability, and generalizability of the case study data. In this study, it is argued that the case study is based on replication, not sampling logic. Therefore, in the case study, theoretical generalization is possible but not statistical generalization.

KEYWORDS: Qualitative Research, Case Study, Case Study Data, Theoretical Framework, Generalization.

A qualitative research method is not a unified set of techniques or philosophies and indeed has grown out of a wide range of intellectual and disciplinary traditions (Mason, 2002). It represents a broad view to understanding human affairs and behavior which is insufficient to rely on quantitative surveys and statistics (Holliday, 2007). Patton (2002) argued that the qualitative research method is an in-depth and detailed inquiry of a selected issue; on the other hand, the quantitative method requires the use of standardized measures and it can be varied on perspectives and experiences of people. Patton (2002) claimed that qualitative methods provide detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. Patton illustrated different themes of qualitative research (see in Table 1). The same view was expressed by Wadsworth (1997) and Barbour (2008). Barbour (2008) argued that qualitative methodology identifies which, what, when, why, and how of certain phenomena, while quantitative methods are mathematical and statistical which, identify how many, how often and how much of a certain phenomenon. In a quantitative study, the research question tries to find out the relationship between a small number of variables but in qualitative studies, the research questions typically are oriented to cases or phenomena (Stake, 1995). Quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships

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between variables but qualitative studies stress the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2011; Gaffikin, 2006).

Creswell (2007) discussed epistemological and ontological assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the theory or theories of knowledge. It seeks to inform us how we can know the world. Epistemology shares with ontology in establishing the kinds of things that exist (Jary & Jary, 1991). The nature of the phenomena, of entities or social 'reality' that is investigated, is the ontological perspective and the knowledge or evidence of the entities that are investigated is the epistemological position (Mason, 2002). Rothe (1994) also mentioned that the theory of knowledge is epistemology and the study of reality is ontology. Creswell (2009) mentioned that in quantitative research the ontological assumption of the researcher is that the reality is objective and singular but in qualitative research, the reality is subjective and multiple. Creswell (2009) also asserted that on the epistemological question, in quantitative research, the researcher is independent but in qualitative research, the researcher interacts with the study. Gaffikin (2008) also argued that in a quantitative study, the researcher remains separate, outside from data to maintain objectivity, but in a qualitative study, the researcher is intimately involved with the subject under investigation.

Table 1

Theme of Qualitative Inquiry

Themes	Discussion
1. Naturalistic inquiry	Studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling; openness to whatever emerges- lack of predetermined constraints on outcomes
2. Inductive analysis	Immersion in the details and specifies of the data to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships; begin by exploring genuinely open questions rather than testing theoretically derived (deductive) hypotheses
3. Holistic perspective	The *whole* phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus on complex interdependencies not meaningfully reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships
4. Qualitative data	Detailed, thick description; inquiry in-depth, direct quotations capturing people's perspectives and experiences
5. Personal contact and insight	The researcher has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study; the researcher's personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon
6. Dynamic systems	Attention to process; assumes change is constant and ongoing whether the focus is on an individual or an entire culture
7. Unique case orientation	Assumes each case is special and unique; the first level of inquiry is being true to, respecting, and capturing the details of the individual cases being studied; cross-case analysis follows from and depends on the quality of individual case studies

8. Context sensitivity	Places findings in a social, historical, and temporal context; dubious of the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space
9. Empathic neutrality	Complete objectivity is impossible; pure subjectivity undermines credibility; the researcher's passion is understanding the world in all its complexity- not proving something, not advocating, not advancing personal agendas, but understanding; the researcher includes personal experience and empathic insight as part of the relevant data while taking a neutral nonjudgmental stance toward whatever content may emerge
10. Design flexibility	Open to adopting inquiry as understanding deepens and/ or situations change; avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness; pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge

Note. Adapted from Patton (2002)

In qualitative research, the researchers can make holistic observations of the entire context within which social actions occur rather than analyze social reality through variables (Gaffikin, 2008; Taylor & Trumbull, 2005). An in-depth study is particularly relevant in this regard. In an in-depth study the researcher analyses social settings, organizations, culture, individual's daily activities, motives and meanings, actions and reactions, and negotiation of roles within the context of daily life (Rothe, 1994). An in-depth study cannot be done using a quantitative research framework. By using qualitative research methodology, a study is something like naturalistic inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) which provides a thick description (Geertz, 1973). NØrrekilit et al. (2006) argued that reality is some kind of relation between actors - whether individuals or organizations. Chua (1986) mentioned regarding qualitative research: 'Social reality is emergent, subjectively created, and objectified through human interactions.

Creswell (2007) argued that qualitative research is an interpretive inquiry in which researchers interpret what they see, hear and understand. Ahrens (2008) mentioned that the term *interpretive* is often used interchangeably with *qualitative, phenomenological*, and *naturalistic* as for research approach. Qualitative research using interpretive methodologies has become increasingly influential (Alam & Lawrence, 2009; Andon et al., 2007; Baxter et al., 2008; Chua, 1988; Hoque et al., 2004; Irvine & Gaffikin, 2006; Kakkuri-Knuuttila et al., 2008; Llewelyn, 2003). Interpretive perspective epistemologically holds that social meaning is created during interaction and people's interpretations of interactions. The implication is that different social actors may understand social reality differently, producing different meanings and analyses (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Blaikie (2000) also mentioned:

> *Interpretivism is concerned with understanding the social world people have produced and which they reproduce through their continuing activities. This everyday reality consists of the meanings and interpretations given by the social actors to their actions, other people's actions, social situations, and natural and humanly created objects. In short, to negotiate their way around their world and make sense of it, social actors have to interpret their activities together, and it is these meanings, embedded in language, that constitutes their social reality* (p. 115).

The nature of the research problem is also a key element in the choice of methodology and method to conduct research. Creswell (2009) mentioned that in a quantitative approach an experimental design is used in which attitudes are assessed both before and after experimental treatment. However, in a qualitative approach, the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants Creswell (2009) argued that qualitative research is exploratory and is useful when the researcher does not know the important variables to examine. Qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, and situations as they are constructed in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment course of events (Woods, 2006).

Qualitative research can be done using a diverse range of strategies such as ethnography, focus group interviewing, content analysis, discourse analysis, oral history, in-depth interviewing, or case study. During the last two decades, researchers put greater emphasis on using the case study method to understand the social reality (Baxter & Chua, 2003; Cooper, 1981; Ferreira & Merchant, 1992; Granlund, 2001; Gurd, 2008; Hopwood, 1983; Jarvenpaa, 2007; Kaplan, 1984; Lapsley & Pallot, 2000; Moll & Hoque, 2011; Otley & Berry, 1994; Scapens, 1990, 2006; Wickramasinghe & Hopper, 2005). Qualitative case study methodology enables researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of intricate phenomena within some specific context (Rashid et al., 2019). There have been many calls for researchers to adopt case-based research methods but only a small number of examples of its application have emerged. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), exploratory studies can use the case study method as a research strategy. Regardless of the unit of analysis, a qualitative case study seeks to describe that unit in-depth and in detail, in context, and holistically (Patton, 2002).

Case Study Method as a Holistic Approach of Qualitative Research

Human actions are an essential feature of the holistic approach. In holistic research, the researchers continually are cognizant of the relationship between epistemology, theory, and methods and consider research as a process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). To conduct research using a holistic approach, the case study research method has been used by many researchers. Otley and Berry (1994) mentioned that case studies can play several potential roles but the central role seems to be that of exploration. They claimed that case-based methods can provide a more holistic approach. Ryan et al. (1992) and Yin (2009) also mentioned that the case study method identifies the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Macintosh and Scapens (1990) also argued that case studies are particularly suitable for this type of research where the researcher is allowed to adopt a holistic orientation. Case studies stress the holistic examination of a phenomenon, and they seek to avoid the separation of components from the larger context which may be related (Jorgensen, 1989). This approach also locates particular social systems in their particular context.

The case study comes from the tradition of medical, legal, and psychological research. It involves a detailed analysis of an individual case that tries to identify the dynamics and pathology of a given disease, crime, or disorder (Rothe, 1994). Stake (1994, 2010) argued that a case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. A qualitative case study is characterized by the researcher spending substantial time, on-site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on (Irvine & Gaffikin, 2006; Stake, 2010).

Humphrey and Scapens (1996) mentioned that case studies were consistently promoted in the 1980s as a useful way of enhancing knowledge. Scapens (1990, 2006), Lodh and Gaffikin (1997), Llewelyn (2003), Otley (2003), Irvine and Gaffikin (2006), Gurd (2008), Berry et al. (2009), Mir and Rahaman (2011) also put greater emphasis on using case study method to

understand social and organizational practices. Irvine and Gaffikin (2006) pointed out that though there have been many calls from qualitative researchers to conduct case studies; little attention has been given to the dynamics of such work.

To adopt an effective research strategy Yin (2009) asked three questions:

1. What is the form of the research question- is it exploratory, does it seek to describe the incidence or distribution of some phenomenon or does it try to explain some social phenomenon?
2. Does the research require control over behavior, or does it seek to describe naturally, occurring events?
3. Is the phenomenon under study contemporary or historical?

To answer the questions in adopting an effective research strategy Yin (2009) identified five types of strategies: experiment, survey, archival analysis, history, and case study. Sometimes case study is used synonymously to refer to a style of investigation such as field study (Booth, 1991; Ferreira & Merchant, 1992; Lodh & Gaffikin, 1997; Ryan et al., 1992). Ferreira and Merchant (1992) mentioned that 'field research' is sometimes have been used interchangeably with the term "case studies." They identified five characteristics to distinguish field studies from other forms of research. They mentioned that in field studies:

1. The researcher has direct, in-depth contact with organizational participants, particularly in interviews and direct observations of activities, and these contacts provide a primary source of research data.
2. The study focuses on real tasks or processes, not situations artificially created by the researcher.
3. The research design is not structured. It evolves along with the field observations.
4. The presentation of data includes relatively rich (detailed) descriptions of company contexts and practices.
5. The resulting publications are written to the academic community. (Some of the field research literature is also easily read and used by practitioners.)

Ryan et al. (1992) mentioned that case studies are used to provide descriptions of practice, to explore the application of new procedures, to explain the determinants of existing practice, and events. They also mentioned that case studies provide a research method and different types of case studies are used in researches. These are:

a) Descriptive Case Studies - which describe systems, techniques, and procedures currently used in practice.
b) Illustrative Case Studies - case studies that attempt to illustrate new and possibly innovative practices developed by a particular society or organization.
c) Experimental Case Studies - case studies that examine the difficulties involved in implementing the new proposals and evaluate the benefits which can be derived.
d) Exploratory Case Studies - the study to explore the reasons for a particular practice.
e) Explanatory Case Studies - case studies that are used to explain the reasons for observed practices.

Kaplan (1986) observed that case studies would seem to provide the ideal vehicle for communicating the deep, rich slices of organizational life. Kaplan (1984) put greater emphasis on field-based research strategy and pointed out that there is a lack of research initiative in this regard.

The Design of the Case Study

Mason (2002) argued that in the 'real world' of social research, there are good enough reasons to produce a research design. However, qualitative researchers should produce quite detailed research designs for their use, whether or not they are required to write a research proposal for another audience. According to this view, in qualitative research, research design needs for internal purposes only. Mason (2002) further argued that thinking 'qualitative' means rejecting the idea of a research design as a single document which is an entire advanced blueprint for a piece of research. It also means rejecting the idea of a priori strategic and design decisions, or that such decisions can and should be made only at the beginning of the research process. This is because qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven, and context-sensitive. In a real sense, it is also very difficult to discuss the research methods in a case study because in a case study, some issues can be addressed before the study starts; others evolve or can only be addressed as the research progresses (Booth, 1991; Merriam, 2009; Nagy et al., 2010; Thomas, 2021; Yin, 2011).

Case studies can be conducted on a single site or multiple sites. Yin (2009) mentioned that the choice of designing single or multiple sites depends on the research question. Yin (2009) suggested that a single case is appropriate when it represents the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory. Yin (2009) also argued that a single case can represent a significant contribution to knowledge. A multiple case study approach is used for a cross-site comparison (Eckstein, 1975; George, 1979; Hussain & Hoque, 2002). As Stake (1995) argued, case study research is not sampling research. Stake pointed out that a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case.

The Research Site

In qualitative research, access to the research site is an important concern for the researcher (Baxter & Chua, 1998). The view of what is being studied is at the center of the researcher's attention to understand its "truth," inserted in a given context (Takahashi & Araujo, 2020). Marshall and Rossman (2006) mentioned that in qualitative research, the researcher should plan for appropriate entry through formal and informal gatekeepers in an organization. A gatekeeper is a person who controls access to a research setting. Holliday (2007) mentioned five criteria for selecting research settings. The criteria are provided in Table 2.

Time Periods in the Field Work

Case study research consists of a detailed investigation, often with empirical material collected over a period of time from a well-defined case to provide an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon (Rashid et al., 2019). A case study researcher needs a substantial time period in conducting the case study research. The case researcher should plan before the purpose and specific time period allocation in this regard. For example, a case researcher may consider the following (Table 3) which shows the time periods needed for the fieldwork. However, it is mentioned here that it may vary from case to case.

Table 2

Criteria for research settings

Criteria	Details
1. The setting must have a sense of boundedness.	Time, place, and culture
2. The setting should provide a variety of relevant, interconnected data.	People to watch or interview, artifacts (e.g. displays, clothing, decoration, implements)
3. There should be sufficient richness.	Different instances, facets, and viewpoints- a microcosm of the research topic in wider society
4. The setting should be sufficiently small.	Logistically and conceptually manageable
5. There should be accessibility.	For the researcher to take whatever role is necessary to collect data.

Note. Adapted from Holliday (2007, p. 34)

Table 3

Time periods of Involvement with the research site

Stage	Purpose	Time periods of involvement	Site
I	Familiarization with the organization		
	Primary data collection		
II	Extensive data collection		
III	Extended data collection		
IV	Follow up and clarification		

Method of Generating, Collecting, and Analyzing the Case Study Data

Mason (2002) and Barbour (2008) pointed out that data generation encapsulates the much wider range of relationships between researcher, social world, and data in qualitative research spans. Mason (2002) and Barbour (2008) also argued that the data generation process involves activities that are intellectual, analytical, and interpretive. An interpretive approach not only sees people as a primary data source but seeks their perceptions also. The researcher can use the approach to observe people and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings, and understandings as the primary data sources.

Sources of Data

In qualitative research methodology, various sources of data are used such as interviews, observation, document analysis, and records analysis (Nelson et al., 1992). The main data sources for a case study are archival official documents and interviews. Direct observations of actors' activities are also be used in the study to supplement and complement the archival documents and interview data.

Ferreira and Merchant (1992) suggested that true field studies use interviews and direct observations as the primary means of data collection. Patton (2002) mentioned that qualitative

methods consist of three kinds of data collection. These are (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents. Patton argued that multiple sources are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective. For this reason, a field worker uses different data sources to validate and cross-check findings. Similarly, Marshall and Rossman (2006) also mentioned that in qualitative research the fundamental techniques for gathering information are observation, in-depth interviewing, and archival records.

Official Organizational Documents and Archival Records

In the case study, documentary evidence provides an important data source. Documents allow the researcher to track what happened when it happened, and who was involved (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The researcher needs to maintain a high level of confidentiality in this regard. These official documents help the research to supplement and corroborate the interview data.

Interviews

One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview (Yin, 2009). The ontological position suggests that people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties in social reality. If the researcher is interested to explore people's perceptions and these came out of interviews. The epistemological position also influences the researcher to conduct interviews because it allows a legitimate or meaningful way to generate data by talking interactively with people, asking them questions, listening to them, gaining access to their accounts and articulations, or analyzing their use of language and construction of discourse (Mason, 2002). Mason (2002) also argued that qualitative interviewing is widely used because the data we want may not feasibly be available in any other form. Through interviews, it is also possible for the researcher to generate a large amount of in-depth data. Patton (2002) mentioned that interview data consist of direct quotations from people about their opinions, feelings, experiences, and knowledge.

The primary interview method can be unstructured and open-ended. This type of interview is also called 'non-standardized interview' (Denzin, 1978a, 1978b; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2003, 2008; Fontana & Prokes, 2007; Kumar, 2011; Richardson et al., 1965). This type of interview is chosen because from unstructured interviews, researchers, can receive more accurate responses on sensitive issues, and these provide a completer and more in-depth picture than other forms of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If the researcher intends to get information through free-ranging conversations this type of interview provides opportunities to discuss in an informal conversational style (Patton, 2002). As Mason (2002) mentioned, most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore, the job of the interviewer is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced. Unstructured interviews are very effective in this regard because questions can be tailored to the respondent's knowledge, degree of involvement, and status (Rothe, 1994).

To conduct the interviews the researcher then needs to select the respondents. The researcher can select the sample as per the research questions. Various sampling techniques can be used. For example, the snowball sampling technique can be used. This technique is used primarily for interview-based research. This technique identifies respondents who are then used to refer researchers on to other respondents. One respondent gives the researcher the name of another respondent, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on. This sampling technique is used

mainly for two reasons. Firstly, it is an informal method to reach a target population. Secondly, this technique is used in explorative, qualitative, and descriptive research which offers practical advantages.

Ethical Issues

Any research involving human and animal subjects requires ethical clearance from the relevant institution (Hoque, 2006). To understand the purpose of the research project, each of the participants needs to provide a *Participant Information Form* which includes the project title, details of the researcher and the supervisors, project aim and benefits, general outline of the project, participant involvement, confidentiality, anonymity, data storage system, ethics committee clearance and queries and concerns about the research project. Each participant also needs to provide an *Informed Consent Form*. Before conducting the formal interview, the participant is required to sign the Consent Form stating that the participant understands the information about the research. Both the *Participant Information Form* and the *Informed Consent Form* needs to be approved by the Committee for Ethics in Human Research, of the respective organization.

At the very beginning of each of the interview sessions, the researcher needs to discuss the background issues with the participant in an informal way according to the respondents' characteristics (say, for example, job position). Before conducting the interviews, the researcher can list the discussion issues. However, during the interview sessions, they may not be followed up in a fixed order. There is no hard and fast rule for the duration of the interviews. It may be an hour on average. It is a wise decision to record the interview proceedings on a tape recorder with the consent of the participant. For safety reasons, backup notes will also be taken and checked, and compared when the transcriptions would be made. The interview tapes need to be transcribed later word for word. Key interview transcripts may be shown to the respective interviewees to establish the validity of the interview data.

Observation

Observation data come from detailed descriptions of people's activities, actions, behaviors, interpersonal interactions, and organizational processes (Patton, 2002). Patton asserted that observation data is sufficiently descriptive and the reader can easily understand what occurred and how it occurred. Therefore, the objective of the observational analysis is to take the reader into the setting that was observed. Marshall and Rossman (2006) also mentioned that observation entails the systemic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study.

Observation can also be used to overcome validity threats because it focuses on actual behavior, not perceptions (Birnberg et al., 1990). Observation can be done in four ways. These are complete observer, complete participant, observer as a participant, and participant as an observer (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Cohen et al. 2007; Denzin, 1978a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2008; Flick, 2009; Pearsall, 1970; Rallis & Rossman, 2012; Stake, 2010). The researcher can take any of the above-mentioned roles. As a complete observer, a researcher conceals himself from the participants of the study. As a complete participant, the researcher works within the organization as an employee. In the observer-as-participant role, a researcher observes a large number of people. Finally, in the participant-as-observer role, a researcher observes few people.

Observation data can be collected from casual watching and attending several informal meetings and information sessions within the research site. In the observation stage, data are collected in the field notes. Field note is a very important document for a qualitative researcher.

All field notes need to be dated with the appropriate reference number, time, place, attendees, and researcher's opinion towards the situation.

Data Analysis

In qualitative inquiry, data collection is not an end. It requires analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings (Irvine & Gaffikin, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Nagy et al., 2010; Patton, 2002). Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (2006) mentioned that qualitative data analysis requires some steps. These are organizing the data; immersion in the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, writing analytic memos, offering interpretations, searching for alternative understandings, and writing the report or representing the inquiry.

Miles and Huberman (1994) wrote that the important feature of qualitative data is their richness and holism and such data provide thick descriptions that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a strong ring of truth that has a strong impact on the reader. They explained the way of qualitative data analysis and described that analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Creswell (2007) also mentioned that in qualitative research, the general process that researchers use in analyzing data are: preparing and organizing data, reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. Creswell (2007) also argued that data analysis in qualitative research needs data managing, reading, memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, representing, and visualizing.

Patton (2002) mentioned that in qualitative inquiry, data collection is not an end. It requires analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings. Patton pointed out that qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. Patton further explained that no formula exists for this transformation. There is guidance but no recipe. Therefore, in qualitative data analysis, different types of techniques are used. Computer-based data analysis techniques have also been developed in qualitative research. Though there are various techniques available for the analysis of data, however, there is no standardized method for data analysis within qualitative research (Irvine & Gaffikin, 2006). Basically, in qualitative research, data analysis requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts (Creswell, 2007).

Hammersley (1992) argued that an account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize. One of the most common issues of case study research is validity and reliability. The validity and reliability can be ensured by adopting a theoretical stance.

Theories in Research

Related to qualitative research methods, a variety of approaches have been set forth in the literature using the terms conceptual framework, theoretical framework, paradigm, and epistemology (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Gaffikin (2007) argued that research is undertaken to either generate new theories or support existing theories. It has been observed that there are various views among the researchers in adopting a prior theoretical stance in research. Some scholars argued that a prior theoretical stance may bias or limit the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989; Flinders, 1993; Layder 1995). The critics, however, claimed that adopting a pre-determined theory in research can be more robust because these theories have already been tested in previous research. However, supporters in favor of adopting a prior theoretical framework in research (e.g., Alam & Lawrence, 1994; Baxter & Chua, 2003; Berry et al., 2009; Gaffikin, 2007; Hoque, 2005; Lodh &

Gaffikin, 1997; Quattrone and Hopper, 2001) argued that in researching organizational and social practices, it is legitimate to use a wide range of theoretical approaches to explain such activities. In qualitative research, a useful theory helps to organize the data (Cooper, 2008; Irvine & Gaffikin, 2006; Jacobs, 2012; Jorgensen, 1989; Llewelyn, 2003; Lodh & Gaffikin, 1997; Maxwell, 2009).

A theory distills research into a statement about social life that holds transferable applications to other settings, context, populations, and possibly time periods (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The theory is a framework for viewing the social world that is too general, too broad, and too all-encompassing to be confirmed or refuted by empirical research (Cooper, 2008). It is also assumed that when knowledge is gathered with the help of theory, there is a potential for data coherence and control, which prevent the researchers from collecting an unsystematic pile of accounts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Kaplan & Manners, 1986). Theories are widely used in all sorts of research. Christenson (1976, p.641) mentioned:

> *…. theory is like the bucket, rather than like the water in the bucket. A person has to have a bucket before he can collect the water and he has to have a theory – a framework for measurement – before he can collect "the facts". No matter how much water he collects, it will never accumulate to a bucket; no matter how many facts he collects, they will never accumulate to a theory.*

In the above statement, Christenson (1976) pointed out that in research one must be guided by some conceptual framework and theory can be used as a conceptual framework in research. Silverman (2000) expressed the same view, stating that theory is a set of concepts used to define and/or explain some phenomena. In qualitative research, theory plays an important role. Qualitative research design and research practice are imbued with theory throughout (Mason, 2002). Mason (2002) argued that key research decisions have both theoretical grounds and theoretical consequences.

Creswell (2009) argued that theory is not a 'container' because it does not fit a particular situation, or it inadequately explains what is occurring naturally in a situation. According to Creswell (1994, 2009), a theory or pattern emerges after gathering detailed information. Creswell (1994) also mentioned that in a qualitative study, the researcher does not begin with a theory to test or verify but the researcher follows the inductive model and a theory may emerge during the data collection and analysis phase. Creswell (1994) argued that a theory or pattern emerges after gathering detailed information and forms categories or themes and the methodological issues of some larger explanation must fit into the logic of an inductive process of research.

Humphrey and Scapens (1996) also agreed that no researcher can avoid approaching a case study without some prior theoretical framework. However, they argued that adopting a pre-determined theory as a lens through which to interpret a case could well be gained at the expense of ignoring organizational dynamics and tensions which do not readily fit the chosen theory. There are opposing views among the researchers concerning the application of theories and the adoption of prior theoretical stances for research also. Some scholars have argued that prior theoretical stances may bias or limit the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Some researchers have also viewed adopting a pre-determined theory in research to be more robust because they have already been tested in prior research (Layder, 1995). Another limitation to adopting a prior theory is that prior theories are based on ideological assumptions and may limit the ability to capture the complexity of the field (Flinders, 1993). Therefore, there are different views among the researchers in adopting prior theoretical stances.

However, a larger number of supporters are in favor of adopting prior theoretical frameworks in research. For example, Maxwell (2009) claimed that in qualitative research, a useful theory helps to organize the data. It draws attention to particular events or phenomena and sheds light on relationships that might otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood. In making sense of the data, theorization is particularly important because it relates to the construction of meaningful patterns and organizations of facts. Jorgenson (1989) also argued that a theory is an arrangement of facts in the form of an explanation or interpretation. Going further, Laughlin et al. (1989) stated that theory and empirical research need to be brought together in a symbiotic relationship, each informing the other so that they can both be strengthened. It has been observed that, majority of existing literature favor a prior theoretical stance (Cooper 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Flick, 2009; Humphrey & Scapens, 1996; Irvine & Gaffikin, 2006; Laughlin et al., 1989; Llewelyn, 2003; Maxwell, 2009; Silverman, 2004; Vincent et al., 2006).

Theory and the Case Study

Yin (2009) mentioned that a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon. However, a simple narrative discussion does not make case study research. The phenomenon examined should be of theoretical significance (Booth, 1991). Humphrey and Scapens (1996) also mentioned that a theoretical framework is regarded as essential for any case study. Yin (2009) argued that the use of theory is an immense aid in defining the appropriate research design and data collection. He further argued that the same theoretical orientation also becomes the main vehicle for generalizing the results of the case study. Humphrey and Scapens (1996) observed that in general, understandings were developed illustrating the relevance of particular social theories and by their application to specific case studies. Otley and Berry (1994) expressed the same views and mentioned that case methods are in no sense "theory free." They argued that case studies are likely to be most valuable where their initial theoretical positions are clear.

One of the common criticisms of the case study is generalization. It is difficult to generalize case study findings because a case may not be representative of the population or even if representative, the findings are unique. Statistical sampling logic is not appropriate for case studies. To overcome this limitation, theories are widely used in case studies. Case studies rely on theoretical inference for the generalisability of their findings. To make it general, case study findings should relate theoretically relevant characteristics reflected in the case to one another in a logically coherent way (Mitchell, 1983; Silverman, 2020). Theoretical generalization is, therefore, possible instead of statistical generalization in case studies. As Humphrey and Scapens (1996) noted theories are rhetorical devices for both interpreting case studies and convincing the research community as to the validity of the case findings and interpretations.

Llewelyn (2003) also expressed the same notion. Llewelyn (2003) argued that qualitative research engages in empirical work to collect information on organizational actions, events, structures, and processes. She further mentioned that after the field research is over, the qualitative researcher faces some challenging questions. The questions are: how should these actions or events be understood? Or how can the organizational structures or processes be explained? Her advice is to "incorporate some theory" to understand these organizational issues. Llewelyn (2003) claimed that theorization or conceptual framing is the 'value addition' in qualitative academic research. She further stated that theory and data are interdependent in social science and the meaning of data cannot be understood without theory and theories cannot be validated through data.

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability of the Case Study Data

Qualitative data represent a large amount of information, and analysis implies abstraction and some degree of generalization (Malterud, 2001). In qualitative research, researchers are very much concerned about the validity, reliability, and generalizability of their research. Smith (2018) provides a broader discussion of analytical generalization along with three other types of generalizability in qualitative research, that is, naturalistic, transferable, and intersectional. Campbell and Stanley (1963) started the groundwork for current thinking on the issue of generalizability over 50 years ago. They argued that research should be judged by internal and external validity. Internal validity is the basic minimum requirement without which any experiment is uninterpretable. Internal validity can be ensured through the reliability of the data gathered. External validity is related to generalizability. Creswell and Miller (2000) argued that validity is how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them. Mason (2002) supported this, stating that validity can be ensured through observing, identifying, or measuring the phenomena.

Reliability involves the accuracy of the research methods and techniques and generalizability involves the extent to which the researcher can make some form of a wider claim based on the research and analysis rather than simply stating that the analysis is entirely idiosyncratic and particular. Rothe (1994) mentioned that in qualitative research, though validity concerns the difficulty of gaining accurate and true impressions of the phenomena being studied, there is a greater chance for data verification compared to any other research approach. Qualitative inquiry is concerned with the details of the setting observed as they naturally happen in their unique social context (Patton, 2002). Therefore, it is argued that qualitative research handles most valid issues more effectively than does quantitative work (Payne & Payne, 2004).

Cooper and Schindler (2003) found that reliability means many things to many people. But the general notion is consistency. They argued that a measure is reliable to the degree that it supplies consistent results. They further stressed that reliability is a necessary contributor to validity but is not a sufficient condition for validity. The external validity of research findings refers to the data's ability to be generalized across persons, settings, and times. Janesick (1994) also professed that descriptions of persons, places, and events have been the cornerstone of the credibility of qualitative research.

Patton (2002) mentioned the techniques for enhancing the validity and credibility of qualitative inquiry depend on three distinct but related inquiry elements. These are: first, rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that is carefully analyzed; second, the credibility of a researcher; and third, philosophical belief in the phenomenological paradigm, that is, a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, and holistic thinking.

To ensure reliability Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasized rigorous techniques for data gathering and analysis. To produce credible findings, the researcher should spend prolonged time periods in the field (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It will help to collect thick, rich descriptions of the setting, participants, and themes of the study. It also improves the credibility of findings, as McKinnon (1988) suggested that validity and reliability of findings can be improved when the observer spends considerable time in the field because it reduces the threats of observer-caused effects, observer bias, data access limitation and complexities and limitations of the human mind. Credibility depends on the personal and professional credibility of the researcher (Alkin, 2011; Alkin et al., 1979;). Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered the naturalistic inquiry paradigm as central to credibility.

In a case study, a validity problem arises because it is difficult to establish the extent of support for inferences (Birnberg et al., 1990). However, it can be solved by using triangulation. Denzin (1978a) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) defined triangulation in two ways: one is *within the method* and the other, *between methods*. When multiple sources are used in one data collection method, is called *within method triangulation*. On the other hand, in *between triangulation,* different data collection methods are used and it produces a different picture of reality. *Within the method, triangulation* is encouraged because it increases researcher confidence (Booth, 1991). For example, information learned during interviews is reinforced and perhaps modified, by observation, and study of documents, or by more interviews.

Schostak (2006) also argued that methodological and philosophical debates that question claims to 'knowledge', 'understanding' and the validity of representations of data derived from interviews, observations, and the collection of various artifacts, are essential. Triangulation extends this process to make comparisons and contrasts with other individuals, groups, and objects that furnish their worlds. Internal validity, as constructed here, refers to the process of examining an interview transcript for regular patterns that construct a subject position that can be considered to express authentically, an enduring view for that subject position.

Scapens (2004) pointed out that to ensure reliability and validity in case study research, researchers should consider procedural reliability, contextual validity, and transferability. The researcher can use multiple data sources and hence, one type of data source can be verified with other sources. It ensures contextual validity by including a detailed examination of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context. The other issue is transferability or generalizability. In qualitative research, due to the small sample size, it is not possible to generalize the findings (Patton, 2002). Gaffikin (2006) argued that in qualitative research the focus is the process and the behavior of individuals in response to an ever-changing, dynamic world. Gaffikin (2006) pointed out that in qualitative research, the researcher intimately involves the subject under investigation and the results of the study have potential interest to others but are not generalizable because each situation is different. Generalizability is an issue in the debate about the reliability of knowledge particularly in case studies also (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). One of the most important criticisms of a case study is that case may not be representative of the population or even if representative it provides a unique result.

Scapens (1990) pointed out that case study experiments are based on replication, not sampling logic. It is also argued that theoretical generalization is a possible but not statistical generalization in case studies (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the generalizability of case studies is based not on an explicit sampling of some defined population to which the results can be extended but depends on a theory that can be extended to other cases (Becker, 1991; Ragin, 1987).

Conclusion

This study illustrates the research strategies that a qualitative researcher can adopt in conducting case study research. First, it justified the case study method as a research strategy and then outlines the case design, data collection, and analysis method which are used in the case study research. This study points out that the choice of a particular research strategy is dependent on the researcher's value-based assumptions underpinning the research questions and objectives. The qualitative case study approach enables in-depth investigation of the research phenomena in context. In this study it argues that qualitative case studies stress the socially constructed nature of reality. In a qualitative case study, the researcher is intimately involved with the subject under investigation. This present study emphasizes on selection of research site and discusses about field work also. This study points out the data collection and data generation techniques in a case study

and claims that multiple data sources are the strengths of a case study. This current study explores that a case study can be conducted adopting a single case or multiple cases. A single case is used for an in-depth study; on the other hand, multiple cases are used for a comparative study. Case Studies may be limited in generalizability. However, it also claims in this study that instead of statistical generalization, theoretical generalization is possible in a single case study.

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