Qualitative Research & Literature Reviews

Outline

• What is Qualitative Research?
• What is a Literature Review?

WHAT IS A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY?

• not quantitative, often particularised, textual

• a comprehensive research strategy for undertaking empirical inquiry into phenomena in context, thus recognising the inseparable relationship between phenomena and context

• appropriate for the investigation, analysis, and interpretation of various aspects of complex and dynamic systems which are characterised by diverse, often contradictory information from a wide variety of sources

• not to be confused with specific qualitative techniques, such as participant-observation or ethnography (although it does utilise such techniques) – rather it is a more encompassing logic of research design, which pervades the complete research process – from formulation of the research question, to choice of data collection technique, to data analysis and finally to generalisation to theory
Example of qualitative questions

- Understanding how governance arrangements affect planning efforts
- How historical and international experiences can inform planning
- How to enhance equity of planning processes and outcomes

Qualitative research methodologies can include:

- Classical academic methods such as Case Study Research, which are concerned primarily with contribution to knowledge and broad theoretical understandings (e.g. of values and power). Case study researchers are usually more removed from the object of study.

- Newer more practically oriented methods such as Action Research and Program Evaluation which are concerned not so much with broadly understanding social structures but with particular contributions to practice. Such researchers typically identify with the subject of their study, that is, they take on the perspective and goals of the subject and use research results as part of an effort to achieve these goals.

Despite these distinctions, practitioners of both types of research share elements of both (e.g. classical case study researchers can not be totally free of interventionist effects on their participants and often hope that policy-makers and other stakeholders can make use of their final report).

Qualitative Data Collection

- Case-Study Approach: single/comparative
- Interviews
- Participant-Observation
- Document Analysis
- Ethnography
- Triangulation - Validity
References on qualitative research design and data collection


Literature Reviews

- Why do a literature review?
- How to undertake a literature review
- How to write up your literature review
- Frequently asked questions
- Further reading

Why do you have to write up your literature review?

#1 To define and clarify your research project upfront

- Helps you define and clarify the
  - General topic of your project
  - Specific research question/hypothesis
  - Project scope and limitations

- This definition and clarification therefore needs to come at an early stage in your research so that you can submit your research proposal (and possibly an Ethics Application!) and commence your research in a focused and strategic manner
Why do you have to write up your literature review?
#2 To emphasise why your research question is worth exploring

• Helps you show what the significance of the topic is

• Helps you show what research/scholarship has been done on your particular topic

• Helps you show what still needs further investigation (what are the issues to be investigated?)

What does writing up the literature review entail?
1# Picking a topic

1. Think about an issue relevant to your background and experiences

2. Think about the academic discipline in which you want to conduct your research

3. Try to frame your topic as a specific question

4. Think about why you want to research this topic (what are your research objectives?)

What does writing up the literature review entail?
# 2 Collecting the literature

1. Identify key words

2. Using these words, search the library catalogue, library databases and indexes, journals and the internet
   • Make a list of any new keywords/sources/authors you learn as you go along
   • Read the reference lists/bibliographies of the sources you find for other sources

3. List and copy the publications which are directly relevant to your topic
What does writing up the literature review entail?

#3 Reading your literature

1. Read each publication

2. Briefly summarise the central issues discussed in each publication (what do they say, what don’t they say, what is a point of contention etc)

#4 Presenting your literature

1. Construct an outline around your central issues, with a subheading for each issue

2. Write an introductory paragraph which introduces the issues

3. Discuss each issue, subheading by subheading

4. Conclude by describing what all of this literature and these issues mean as a whole for your topic (identify themes and gaps)

What will an examiner be looking for?

#1 Analysis

• Present an ANALYSIS of the literature, not just a description

• This requires synthesising and analysing the literature as a whole, not just publication by publication
What will an examiner be looking for?
#2 Scholarly Standards

• Write academically (e.g., in the same style of the journal articles and books which you are referring to)

What will an examiner be looking for?
#3 Significance

• That you can show why the focus of your research is important and how it adds something new to the field

What will an examiner be looking for?
#4 Clear and logical writing

• Use an outline to organise your ideas
• Be sure each paragraph focuses on just one point
• Be sure your points are presented in a logical order
• Use topic sentences, transitions and subheadings to enhance clarity
• Revise!
Frequently Asked Questions

1# How can I learn how to write better?

• Read more!

Summary

WHY WRITE A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE?

• To show what research/scholarship has been done on a particular topic and what that work has determined
• To show what still needs further investigation

HOW DO I DO A LITERATURE REVIEW?

• Conduct a literature search
• Determine what is and what is not known on the topic
• Highlight important gaps or points of contention
• Present an ANALYSIS of the literature, not just a description
• Structure the analysis to show the reasons why the focus of your research is important and how it adds something new to the field
• Write academically

Examples of Literature Reviews


