

Assistant professor, psychotherapist Loredana Drobot¹ PhD
Eftimie Murgu University
Resita

Original scientific paper
UDC: 303.442 (303.022)

=====

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION – BASIC PARADIGMS AND RESEARCH METHODS

Abstract: The qualitative research has gained more and more terrain in the social domain, especially in education. It has been noticed that when we speak of research, the tendency is to underline the role of the qualitative research, to bring in first plan more qualitative data (tables, numbers, diagrams, figures). The idea is not to discredit the quantitative research, but to underline that this one finds its well-deserved place in the research field and in qualitative research.

Key words: scientist-practitioner model, validity, loyalty, reflexivity, co-research.

1. The content of qualitative research.

Qualitative research in the social domain earned its well-deserved place, even if some studies underline the primacy of quantitative research under the name of “validity of the results obtained”. It is interesting that when we propose to education the realisation of research studies an effusion and exaltation for the development and the implementation of research design is not observed. An explanation would be the impermeability of the educational system borders, a quality that thus allowed the conservation of educational values. The purpose of this paper is to promote qualitative research in education by a short presentation of the content, the paradigms and of some methods of qualitative research in social sciences. When the elaboration of this paper was proposed, the realization of a quantitative demarche was underlined, the consequence in my subjectivity being my situation on the qualitative researcher’s position that co-creates a research with the subjects included in the research design. Regardless all these I haven’t chosen to present the differences between the two sides of the research, considering that both of them are useful to the educational development, even if our students are postmodern and teachers are most often modern.

One of the limitations of the scientist-practitioner model is that it exposes a conventional scientific approach and it is obliged to adopt a position of neutrality in connection to the problem. The basic values in the scientist-practitioner model are rationality, objectivity and severity. The passion and the researcher’s partial interest is supposed to be accepted, kept under control, and the introduction of subjectivity biases in the collection and data analysis process is agreed to. Any didactic frame must fix the border between the rational

¹ loredana_drobot@yahoo.com <loredana_drobot@yahoo.com>

aspects of knowledge and of human experience, on one side, and the emotional and interpersonal aspects, on the other side. Everything that we do, even in the researcher's role, is a form of our point of view, of motivations, of attachments and of the meaning given to our self. From the educator's perspective, the choice of becoming a researcher and the choice of the research methods are the consequence of some factors that acted in our personal history (John McLeod, 1999).

A research approach that can be useful to educators is the heuristic inquiry model developed by Moustakas (1967, 1990 a, b apud John McLeod, 1999). Moustakas mentions that the process of research resembles a personal journey; an immersion in the basic research question is produced that leads to other questions the researcher must ask, when engaging in a discipline for the realization of engagements assumed until insights are realized. Following the insight other insights will appear and these must be verified despite of external observations. Thus, we obtain a new synthesis in the level of understanding of the problems approached. We consider the approach of the validity notion useful in the following rows.

The problem of validity in the research practice is a basic one. The tradition of quantitative research is based on a large number of statistics and on the mentioning of techniques that estimate the validity of measures that can or not be generalized. The qualitative research, which is based on the analysis of written data or on measurements made over words from verbal communication, from the point of view of validity, is found in a process of development.

The criteria that guide the research practice are:

- The research must offer enough descriptive details about the client, counsellors, the counsellor's approach, the social and political context so that the readers may realize evaluations regarding the similitudes in their lives and the results of the study and their applicability in their everyday lives;
- A good practical research will offer enough information regarding the researcher's personal engagement in the study, about the heuristic process, so that the reader will be capable of appreciating the authenticity of the study and the researcher's integrity.

The first of the two criteria is called ecological descriptive validity and it is used in experimental research; a good study depends especially on the sensitive description of the phenomenon investigated. The second criterion is called personal validity and reflects credibility and belief in the researcher. The notion of personal validity is conceived with repulsion by many academicians and researchers that strongly manifest their adherence to a set of rational procedures. Still, personal validity, applied to education study reflects sensibility and a personal experience of the researcher educator.

Validity and trust refer at the authenticity and consistence of the data collected. One of the major problems that may appear refers to the connection between method and investigations, called internal validity, and the relation between the conclusions of the study and the external world, called external validity. The notion of validity is characteristic to the positivist paradigm. As an alternative, in the interior of

postmodernist thinking context (post positivism, constructivist-interpretation, and the paradigm of critical theory) all experiences are perceived as being based on a social reality.

A qualitative research implies more standards of quality, as: validity, severity, trust, correctitude, authenticity and credibility (Morrow, 2005).

The paradigm of qualitative research mentions the following types of validity types (apud Christine J. Yeh; Arpana G. Inman, 2007, p. 386-389):

- Subjectivity and self-reflexibility. One of the major concerns identified in the context of all paradigms of qualitative research is the biases of the data collected and their interpretation by the research. Self-reflexibility is a strategy used against the biases of data (Rennie, 2004). Another strategy used is the triangulation in different methodologies. The audience tends to offer an alternative of the data collected by the investigator (Denzin, 1978);
- Credibility and adequacy of data. The quality element refers to the accuracy and the completeness of data, aspects mentioned by post positivism and by interpretative-constructionist paradigms. Often, the credibility and adequacy of data have been based on simple measurements with grades positioned on ranks from 3 to 100 of transcripts. It is known that the study validity from qualitative research depends on the quality and depth of the interviews realized. Thus, Denzin (1978) as previously mentioned has developed the triangulation of data used in methods like ethnography, phenomenology, case studies and it includes sources of information like interviews, self-reflexive journals, the observations of participants and other reformation that could bring multi-dimensions to the data collected. The strategies mentioned reduce the risks of biases of the data collected and without a proper integration of the different sources and a deep understanding of the context of the participants' experiences may be altered.
- Data interpretation. The adequacy of data collected from the participants' realities brings into the first plan the avoidance or alteration of the participants' answers by the researcher. Equilibrium between the participants' words and the researcher's interpretations is recommended. An important element in data interpretation is the use of statistic data or of numeric results used in data interpretation. The identification of phenomena as being rare, different and typical or the use of frequent events allow the researcher to discuss in a quantitative manner about data evidence that reflect particular conclusions.

Qualitative research is related to the answer to the question "How?" or "What?" and it is opposed to "Why?". Qualitative inquiry is described as a study of "experiential life of people" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p.138). The researcher is capable of speaking from the depth of human experience, a fact that is not observed by the other and that cannot be gathered, collected through pools or by other methods of data collection.

Qualitative models are useful for the exploitation of variables that are not easily identified and for the identification of contradictory problems which appear in diverse social fields, and when theory cannot explain the phenomenon the research design facilitates the process of theory building. While quantitative methods allow the researcher to bring an

understanding of the phenomenon, qualitative approaches allow a research inside the complex process and illustrate mode facades of the human phenomenon. A reason for choosing a qualitative design is represented by the audience interest in a narrative approach or in the presentation of case studies. From this perspective, educators defined by practice and especially from the teachable feel more congruent with a Qualitative inquiry and with a narrative perspective.

Christine J. Yeh and Arpana G. Inman (2007) published a paper called “Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation in Counselling Psychology: Strategies for Best Practices” in which they realize a presentation of strategies of intervention of qualitative research (pp. 374-375):

- The case study – a central feature of the method is the ability detail and to deeply analyse one case study or more by using multiple sources like: interviews, observations and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2002; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995);
- A qualitative consensual research – this is a constructivist approach (between the participant and the researcher) with elements from post positivism (quasi-statistic or numeric classification of results). A central feature of the qualitative consensual research is the consensus between the researches and the use of an external audience that brings an objective perspective in the obtaining of data (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997);
- An oriented discovery – is a method that implied a naïve study of phenomena from a new situation, a still unknown situation. The method can be applied on a single sample or on more. A central characteristic of this method is the use of a consensus between evaluators (Mahrer, 1988; Mahrer & Boulet, 1999);
- Grounded theory – it is a method in which the researcher doesn't test hypothesis, but he builds the theory from unprocessed information or from the extension of the existent theory. Ideas and these results from information which are more connected to reality. Still, the grounded theory offers insights, develops an understanding and offers a meaning for the guidance of the research actions (Fassinger, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998);
- Ethnography – represents an approach in which the researcher engages in prolonged observations from the group's everyday life. Behaviours, values and interactions between the members of the group are deeply studied, described and interpreted by the researcher (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005);
- Long interview – is a constructivist approach realized in the individual's cultural context, centred on the obtaining of meaning of affective states and implies an intense focusing on the process of interviewing (McCracken, 1988);
- Narrative method – it is a method that includes the analysis of the characteristics of the narrative text and recently, of the meaning of inter-human relations in social, historical and cultural contexts (Hoshmand, 2005);
- Phenomenology – it is the method that accentuates the essence of the experience lived of the phenomenon studied. The meaning of the phenomenon is conceptualized in the interior of the individual's awareness (Creswell, 1998, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne 1989);

- Participative action research – it is a method that supposes the co-construction of meaning by the researcher and the client (PAR or participatory action research), thus, PAR implies the participants' study as research collaborators (Fine et al., 2002; Kidd & Kral, 2005)

2. Basic paradigms of qualitative research

Through basic paradigms we understand the presentation of basic elements from anthropology, sociology and education that have left a print in qualitative research.

The paradigm perspectives from the base of qualitative research and from education are many. A useful delimitation of paradigms is presented:

- Post-positivism – which assumes a realist ontological criticism, it adheres at an epistemological objective modification, and objectivity is seen as an ideal which the researcher tries to touch. The design of the research contains quantitative methods and a few qualitative ones; some post-positivist researcher used the *grounded theory* design.
- Interpretative-constructivist – assumes a relative ontology in which more realities of the participants and the one of the investigator adhere to a subjectivist epistemology and to a transactional one. The research design based on the interpretative-constructivist paradigm is given by the particularization of education counselling;
- Critical ideology – assumes the existence of multiple realities as the paradigm presented and a real reality related by power and oppression. Most of the times researches in education are interested and influenced with intent by critical-ideological paradigms in the approach of problems like feminism, sex, gender, race and problems from the justice field.

Paradigms determine standards after which they researches realized by educators will be evaluated. Still, an interpretive-constructivist project will not be evaluated as being negative because there is no external audience, while the same audience is more appropriate for a post-positivist study. In the same manner, a study based on critical-ideological can be improper because it neglects the voice of the researcher. Also, no study can fall under the incidence of just one paradigm, thus being useful to see the research and the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur*.

3. The description of methods in educational qualitative research

3.1. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has been applied on a large group of literature texts, history and law and during the 20th century the study method of social sciences has been taken into consideration. As research method based on interpretation, hermeneutics is an act of interpretation, which underlines the coherence or the meaning of actions and behaviours of a person or group of people. Thus, hermeneutics is an interpretative social science with the purpose of understanding, without explaining the act of interpreting or the experience of understanding in a certain cultural context.

Hermeneutics investigation is a process of interpretation of the text, the reader and the researcher are at the same level in front of the text, and the two will co-understand the text. In qualitative research readers receive pieces of information or parts of texts.

The research based on hermeneutics in education is especially met in the educational philosophy domain, where more researchers interpret the same pedagogical texts.

3.2. Phenomenology. IPA (Interpretative phenomenological analysis)

The most important name in phenomenology is Edmund Husserl. During his time, Europa was dominated by a Christian vision and passed through a period of transition, from the world dominated by tradition to modern industrial world. Philosophies were personal and offered answers to people's questions, to their prejudices and religious believes. Husserl was inspired by Descartes thinking, but he didn't totally accept the idea that the man can be fulfilled only by reason and logic. Thus, he considered that an analysis of a daily experience is necessary in order to reach the true meaning of emotions, actions and relations. Phenomenology demands isolation towards the world, theories and existent believes. Contemporaneous qualitative researches adopt a constructivist position, sustaining that contextual discoveries contain the truth and not a supreme truths, unlike Husserl's opinion, aspect more and more met in education.

Husserl wasn't convinced that phenomenological method in disciplines like philosophy and sociology can be used. His purpose was to better understand human basics like: time, intent, color and number. This understanding was realized by applying phenomenological methods to himself, to his proper experiences, but exactly for this reason he cannot sustain the idea that phenomenology can be applied to other domains.

3.3. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

The purpose of IPA is to explore, in detail, the way in which participants understand their personal and social world and the purpose of IPA studies is based on the meaning of particular experiences of participants (J.A. Smith, M. Osborn, in J. A. Smith coord., *Qualitative Psychology. A practical Guide to Research Methods*, Sage, 2008, pp. 54-55). The approach is a phenomenological one, because it implicates the examination of experiences and at the same time, it sustains that it is a dynamic process by the fact it tries to approach the participant's personal world, in order to have a perspective from the inside. The study implicates a process of interpretation on two stages, in which participants try to understand the world and at the same time, the researcher tries to understand the participants. IPA is also connected to hermeneutic and with all interpretation theories. This approach has a theoretical connection with the cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical person and supposed a chain of connections between statements, thinking and emotional situation.

The connection with cognitive psychology and the cognitive-social approach puts an accent on mental processes, but IPA deviates from traditional psychology, because psychology puts an accent of qualitative and experimental. We may sustain that the loyalty of the approach towards the meaningful exploration results from a cognitive psychology and from the introjections of behaviourist paradigms, which have dominated this discipline.

IPA is a positive approach; it tries to discover the way in which individuals perceive particular situations and the way in which they understand them.

IPA represents a stimulative manner of approach of the educational researcher and in the same time of co-creation of research and the relation between the two.

3.4. Grounded theory

An analysis through grounded theory is a research method used not only in psychological counselling and education, but also by social sciences. The theory has many adepts, by the fact there are a series of stages used as guide and a series of papers published as models. The grounded theory was formulated by two sociologists: Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1965). In their book "*The discovery of the grounded theory*" the basic principles are presented:

- The task of research is to discover new methods of understanding the social;
- The purpose of the analysis is to generate a theory, a formal frame of the phenomenology investigated and the theory must be based on data and not be imposed by these.

In the book mentioned the landmarks of a proper investigation are presented, a series of procedural rules are prescribed under the form of stages (Strauss, Corbin, 1990, p. 60, 61):

1. the researcher identifies the question that stands at the basis of the research; the question is a declaration of identification of the phenomenon studied;
2. a frame or a group of persons is chosen for different variations of the questions that can be studied. Normally, this kind of research uses data collected from 8-10 participants;
3. the researcher doesn't try under any circumstances to study the specialty literature before the collection of data so that he isn't influenced. The purpose is to approach the phenomenon with an open mind, so that themes result from data, without being imposed by them;
4. there is a timing between the data and the analysis. If it is possible, each interview or set of observations is analyzed immediately after the collection of data, using a theoretical frame in order to sensitize the researcher on the problems targeted by the interview; the selection of participants is realized according to the interest generated by the problem targeted;
5. the collection of data is over when the theory is saturated, once the research ceases from starting new insights by interviews and through the observation of the material collected;
6. the researcher reads the materials, gets involved in the process of coding, in the process of examination, conceptualization, comparison and data categorizing;
7. when possible, the categories observed are defined as activities of processes, for example, basic social processes;
8. the categories discovered through this process are archived together with the units of interview to which these refer to;
9. the file or the set of categories is then examined in order to identify other categories more comprehensive, ideas that allow the gathering of subsets of initial categories through an open coding;

10. the connection between categories is then explored through the technique called axial coding and supposes the identification of conditions in which categories appear and allow the fragmentation of the research text during coding;
11. the meanings of categories are compared, encouraging the reunion of the category system. For example, initial different categories may have the same meaning and can be united into the same category;
12. in all data stages, the researcher has the preoccupation of putting down all the ideas that come to mind and he draws diagrams. Through these techniques he can keep his ideas to further check when needed, without searching the entire material;
13. a main category is realized that holds the meaning of the phenomenon studied as a whole; through the analysis of the material studied a map of the meaning discovered is described and at the same time the themes that hold the basic meanings are identified;
14. the analysis is written; initially, the analysis through the grounded theory is represented through the defining of basic categories and subcategories with examples from observations and interviews. Some researchers use data to write papers or chapters with accent on individual categories.

A practical problem of the method is determined by the registration of different categories. Researchers note information on the side of the transcript and then cut these notes in order to form segments of texts or copy segments of texts directly on sheets of paper. Each sheet represents in fact a set of examples from the same category. Recently, softs for data protection and processing have been conceived, as for example NUDIST, ATLAS-T, QDA-MINER. All these softs have a large applicability in education.

The purpose of the authors of the basic analysis was to use hermeneutics and phenomenology in order to describe a series of procedures easy to apply and learn. The method is easy to apply due to procedures presented. The categories discovered through the analysis may have three sources:

- the construct of the researcher's good sense;
- technical terms resulted from the theoretical and professional;
- the language used by the participants. Still there is a problem, because the analyst expresses the manner in which he sees problems and the way the professional community he belongs to sees them.

The result of the analysis refers to the discovery of categories which in the end translate by a compromise between pragmatism, the researcher's desire to be clear and the joining of categories in a set that works in the real world.

Conclusions

The material presented is just a sequence from what the qualitative research in the social domain represents. The initial formation of didactic personnel, the continuous development is recommended to insist on the importance of qualitative research that in the same time represents a method of approach between the researcher and the subject of the research. Quantitative studies have their importance in fitting the results obtained

to the social reality, but a humanist formation for teachers allows and facilitates the teacher's sensitivity with a qualitative research. A case study, a phenomenological analysis, a study presented through the grounded theory will be possible with a greater impact on the reader and will determine the will to rapidly transpose the results of the research into practice.

References:

- Creswell, J. (1998) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2002) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Denzin, N. K. (1978), *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) (1994a) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) (1994b) Introduction: Entering the field of Qualitative research, in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, S. L. (Eds.). (2005) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Evans, K., Finlay, L. (2009) *Relational – centred Research for Psychotherapists. Exploring meanings and experience*. A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Publications.
- Fassinger, R. E. (2005). Paradigms, praxis, problems, and promise: Grounded theory in counselling psychology research. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52, 156-166.
- Fine, M., Torre, M. E., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., et al. (2002). Participatory action research: From within and beyond prison bars. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 173-198). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Glaser, B. G., Strauss, A.L. (1965) *Awareness of Dying*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., Ladany, N. (2005) Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52, 196-205.
- Hill, C. E., Nutt-Williams, E., Thompson, B. J. (1997) Are joinder to Stiles's, Hoshmand's and Tinsley's comments about "A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research", *Counselling Psychologist*, 25: 606-14.
- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., Nutt-Williams, E. (1997) A guide for conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 25, 517-572.
- Hoshmand, L. T. (2005). Narratology, cultural psychology, and counselling research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 178-186.
- Husserl, E. (1960) *Cartesian Meditation: An Introduction of Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Kidd, S. A., Kral, M. J. (2005). Practicing participatory action research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 187-195.
- Mahrer, A. R. (1988). Discovery-oriented psychotherapy research: Rational, aims, and methods. *American Psychologist*, 43, 694-702.
- Mahrer, A. R., Boulet, D. B. (1999). How to do discovery-oriented psychotherapy research. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 55, 1481-1493.
- McLeod, J. (1999a) *Practitioner Research in Counselling*. London: Sage.
- McLeod, J. (1999b) Counselling as a social process, *Counselling*, 10: 217-22.

- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counselling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 250-260.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1967) Heuristic research, in J. Bugental (ed.), *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1990a) *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1990b) Heuristic Research, design and methodology, *Person - Centered Review*, 5: 170 - 90.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989) Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Balle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience* (pp. 41-60). New York: Plenum Press.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (2005) Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. 52, 137-145.
- Rennie, D.L. (1992) Qualitative analysis of the client's experience of psychotherapy: the unfolding of reflexivity, in S.G. Toukmanian and D.L. Rennie (eds.), *Psychotherapy Process Research: Paradigmatic and Narrative Approaches*. London: Sage.
- Rennie, D.L. (2004) Reflexivity and person-centered counselling. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 44, 182-203.
- Smith J.A. coord. (2008) *Qualitative Psychology. A practical Guide to Research Methods*, Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A., Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Yeh J. C; Arpana G. Inman (2007) *Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation in Counseling Psychology: Strategies for Best Practices the Counseling Psychologist*, Vol. 35, No. 3, May 369-403

Biographical note

Drobot Loredana is Assistant Professor PhD at the Eftimie Murgu University in Resita, teaching the following disciplines: social pedagogy, psycho-pedagogy, psycho-pathology and psychotherapies, counseling in social assistance and child psychological counseling. She is also Chartered Psychologist in British Psychology Society, supervisor and consultant in multicultural counseling at the Valleys Regional Equality Council (VALREG) U.K. The activities practiced of trainer, supervisor and psychotherapist in integrative psychotherapy are combined with the academic activity and concretized by numerous publications, more than 10 books in the counseling, psychotherapy and pedagogy domains, from which we can mention "Precepte de educatie scolara" (2007) Didactics and Pedagogy Publishing House Bucharest; "Pedagogie sociala" (2008) Didactics and Pedagogy Publishing House., Bucharest; "Fundamente in psihoterapie integrativa" (2009), V&I Integral Publishing House, Bucharest; "Consiliere integrativa educationala. Elemente de psihopatologie" (2009, V&I Integral Publishing House, Bucharest; "Psihologie organizationala sociala" (2009), Eftimie Murgu Publishing House Resita and "An Integrative Model of Psychotherapy. A Case Study" (2011) Published in Dolman Scott, UK.