Developing the 'how' and 'why' for Qualitative Case Study Research

The extant literature on case study research has dominantly advocated the use of 'how' and 'why' research questions for the said methodology. However, this ideation has been from Yin's work that encourages to have theoretical propositions prior to starting the study using case study research.

This holds true for positivist stance which requires you have hypothetical assumptions, imposing study of causal relations between variables. However, with respect to our journal we emphasise on using inductive approach without establishing prior assumptions of theoretical propositions. Thus for us the 'how' and 'why' questions should be issue based, as proposed by Robert Stake.

In other words, issue questions are questions pertaining to those issues the researchers wishes to answer during the course of the study. Stake doesn't say that a question should be what, why, how etc. Instead his idea about issue questions are that they should be broad and "something more problematic" which deeply connects the context of the case to provide conceptual understanding. He reminds – "Good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking".

He further warns the researchers to not confuse issue questions with information or evaluation questions. Information and evaluation questions would provide shallow answers. While issue questions will provide answer which contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon. Examples of the three types of questions – information, evaluation and issue are provided below.

Information questions – How many education institutes shifted from physical to online mode of teaching?

Evaluation questions – What was the impact of online education on the teaching learning process?

Issue Questions – How did the transition to online line learning influence the teaching learning process?

To answer the above two information and evaluation questions, the researcher is not required to do an in-depth study, a simple survey may answer them or in the matter of first question maybe information available online will suffice. While to answer the last question the researcher needs to immerse themselves to understand the issue at hand, take interviews from multiple stakeholders, make observations etc. Nonetheless information and evaluation question are vital as they complement the contribution of the issue question, hence they should not be discarded but they should not be the main questions that the researcher tries to address. Hence, identifying the appropriate research questions is crucial for the success of the study.

Further, Stake encourages the researcher to have multiple issue questions to begin with and gradually reduce them to the most relevant ones. For instance, the initial question could be – 'what challenges were faced by the institute to change to online mode?', 'how did different departments help in this transition?', 'how did the constantly changing government advisories influenced the transition?', 'how did students cope with this transition?', 'how did the teachers cope with the transition?', etc. Gradually, the researcher may narrow down to specific questions which seem most relevant and feasible, sometimes an overarching questions can become the focus and the remaining questions become a part of the interview protocol.