

Ensuring Quality and Qualitative Case Study Approach

Sharon Merriam's version of ensuring quality of a qualitative case study research includes the notion of credibility, consistency (dependability) and transferability. She replaces internal validity with credibility while suggesting the same ways to achieve it as provided by Stake – triangulation. In place of external validity, she argues that the researcher should strive for transferability. Further in place of reliability, consistency and confirmability can be taken care of. Each are explained below.

Transferability

Transferability can be achieved by providing rich and descriptive data, which the individual applying the findings can rely on and thus transfer to their own setting or study. Quoting Lincoln and Guba, for transferability “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do. The investigator needs to provide ‘sufficient descriptive data’ to make transferability possible”. (1985, p. 298).

However, not all readers agree with this idea. Hence, Lisa Given, (2008), suggests that to ensure transferability, researchers need to tightly bound their context of the study and justify that choice of participants are ‘relevant members of the community’. This is particularly imperative for qualitative case study research.

Consistency

Further as a replacement of reliability she uses the notion of ‘consistency’ as provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Thus arguing, “The more important question for qualitative research is *whether the results are consistent with the data collected.*” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221) What they insist on is that the findings are consistent with the data rather than promoting the notion that other should be able to find similar results, thus promoting consistency or dependability as a quality parameter over confirmability.

Credibility

Finally, Merriam notes that to do a credible qualitative research it is essential for the researcher to be ethical in representing the data. This parameter is particularly important in qualitative case study research as different sources may provide different information and how much of it is should be represented in the findings is a dilemma often faced by researchers. To address this concern she advocates to use a 10 pointer ethical checklist as provided by Patton (2002) these include – 1) Explaining purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used, 2) Promises and reciprocity, 3) Risk assessment – will your study put the participants at any kind of risk, 4) Confidentiality, 5) Informed Consent, 6) Data access and ownership – who will have it and why, 7) Interviewer mental health, 8) Advice (who will be your counsellor on ethical matters), 9) Data collection boundaries and 10) Ethical versus legal conduct – ensuring that the ethical parameters used for the study stay within the legal boundaries of the law under which the study falls (p. 408-409).

Confirmability

Although, some researchers reject the need for confirmability, however, all reviewers and readers may not consent to it. Hence, one can use one or more types of triangulation to establish confirmability. Robert Stake has provided different ways of triangulation which be used by researchers. For this he asks researchers to develop and follow certain protocols. He draws these from Norman Denzin's book *The Research Act*, wherein four protocols are provided. 1) data source triangulation – an effort to see if what is being observed and reported carries same meaning when found under different circumstances. For instance, if the students are asked what do you miss most about physical mode of learning, and their responses indicate the presence of teacher and the ease to communicate with them. By asking similar question, when the teaching mode is shifted to physical, if the students provide similar reply, then the findings can be said to be valid. Moreover, if similar findings are found from multiple sources for instance newspaper report may be in the interview of the parents or the teachers, then it suggests that you have achieved data source triangulation. 2) investigator triangulation – when other researchers look at the data and provide their own interpretation of the same. The researcher then tries to look for similarities and dissimilarities among their own and other interpretations to achieve triangulation. 3) theory triangulation – It is given that there will be dissimilarities in the interpretations of two investigators, however, as long as they agree to the meaning of each other's interpretations, it is said to be theoretically triangulated. Moreover, the differences allow better conceptual understanding of the phenomenon and thus results in higher validation in the eyes of the reader. 4) the final and most sort after triangulation is methodological triangulation, which requires researcher to gather data from multiple forms, as mentioned earlier, through interviews, observations and documents, and looking for correspondence to the findings. Finally, 5) member check, where the participants of the study are approached to corroborate their version of the story to what the researcher's meaning-making outcomes.