

---

# Topic ► Qualitative 8 Data Collection Methods

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

1. Describe the major types of data gathering techniques;
2. Discuss the time spent in collecting data;
3. Elaborate on sampling issues in qualitative research;
4. Identify the skills required of the qualitative researcher; and
5. Critically evaluate validity issues in qualitative research.

## ► INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 7 we discussed four main methods of qualitative research commonly adopted in educational research, namely; ethnography, case study, action research and the basic qualitative method. Irrespective of research method adopted, the techniques of data collection are more or less similar. In this chapter, we will discuss in detail three common data collection or evidence-gathering techniques employed in qualitative research methods. For example, the experimental method in quantitative research uses tests or attitude scales to collect data. Similarly, the survey method use questionnaires and interview checklists to collect data. So, for ethnography or case study methods the data collection techniques employed could be observations, interviews or the examination of documents or a combination of three techniques.

## 8.1 DOCUMENT EXAMINATION

### What is Document Examination?

If the focus of your study is the examination of documents, then you should have access to such material which may include letters, memos, notes, diaries, photographs, audiotapes, videotapes, films, articles, books, manuscripts, e-mails, online discussions and so forth. In general documents are any preserved recording of a person's thoughts, actions or creations (Potter, 1996). Documents may be examined to investigate patterns and trends of the past as is commonly done by historians. In this case, documents are the primary source of data. Documents examination may also provide confirmatory evidence of the information obtained from interviews and observations.

### 8.1.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a technique for analysing the content of documents which would be in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, pictures, symbols or ideas. Content analysis is widely used by law enforcement agencies to analyse e-mail, letters and telephone conversations. Content analysis can be done both quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Very often researchers use computer programmes to assist in analysis. Most content analysis in education has been aimed at answering questions directly relating to the material analysed. For example, content analysis of student essays can provide information about grammatical and spelling errors which may be applied in the development of remedial programmes. A content analysis of textbooks can tell us such things as topics covered, emphasis is each topic, sequence of topics and so forth. Other areas of education that have been studied using content analysis include the treatment of women and minorities in textbooks, newspapers, literature and television; the communication taking place in the classroom.

For example, you could use content analysis to examine teacher feedback based in the classroom based on phrases such as, "All right," "Good," "Why do you say that?," "Can anyone give another factor?."

- The first step in content analysis is to establish the objectives of the investigation. For example, you may be interested in finding evidence for critical thinking activities in science textbooks or the infusion of values in economics textbooks or the treatment of world events in history textbooks.
- The second step in the content analysis process is to locate data that is relevant to the objectives. For example, if the objective of your study is to examine how women are treated in Malaysian novels for teenagers, you have

to locate these novels and decide on the number and variety of novels to select.

- The third step is to establish an empirical link between the data selected and the inferences to be made from the data (Borg & Borg, 1988). In other words, you need to provide some theory or model based on reviewing previous research or citing expert opinion that supports the relationship between the data and the objectives upon which the study is based. For example, a review of previous literature may reveal that novels for teenagers tend to portray women as helpless, 'waiting for their prince charming' and so forth.
- The fourth step is to sort the content into themes or categories. For example, if you are examining the minutes of meetings, you might have themes such as issues, delegation and action. The next step is to devise a coding scheme which could record frequency (the number of issues discussed and how often they are discussed), direction (who is the content directed to), intensity (power of content), and space (size of content). However, not everything always fits in the themes or categories and there is some leftover content to be accounted for. This content must be interpreted by a knowledgeable researcher who knows something about the culture of his or her subjects. The researcher should be careful about making inferences about motivation or intent and as far as possible content analysis should be confined to what is in the text. For example, you cannot use content analysis to prove that newspapers mislead the public or that certain articles in newspapers have a certain effect on public attitudes. However, you can use concepts such as 'unconscious bias' or 'unintended consequences' when interpreting text.

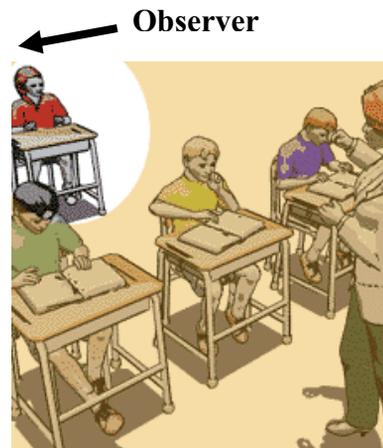


### SELF-CHECK 8.1

1. What do you understand by document examination? Give specific examples.
2. Explain what content analysis is.

## 8.2 OBSERVATION

Imagine that you want to find out what goes on in the teachers' lounge or staff room. You could interview those involved, or maybe even send out a questionnaire. Using the interview or the questionnaire, *you would be getting what people thought about what was going on*. Sometimes, the best way to gain a 'rich picture' of a setting such as the staff room, the school canteen, a staff meeting, the playground or the classroom is to see for yourself what is happening, rather than depending on your respondents.



Observation is the technique of obtaining data through direct contact with a persons or group of persons. Since, the main focus of qualitative research is naturalism; the researcher has to observe person or persons in their natural state as undisturbed as possible (Christians & Carey, 1989; Smith, 1987). The role of the researcher may be viewed as a continuum. On one extreme, the researcher is a passive observer and on the other extreme the researcher is a participant observer. In between these two extremes, the researcher may be an active observer (Potter, 1996).



(a) **Passive observer:**

The best way to be not involved and keep you distance from your subjects is to be a passive observer. As a passive observer, you simply gather documents and observe the individual or individuals without doing anything to disturb the situation. The researcher is unobtrusive and watches the group from the outside; i.e. the ethic or outsider's perspective. To do so, the researcher must gain access and be accepted by the individual or individuals being observed. For example, in collecting e-mails or essays written by subjects or learning journals of students, the researcher examines them without being involved. Similarly, when a researcher interested in studying children interacting in school canteens or the playground, merely observes them without being involved. A certain amount of distance is maintained between the researcher and the person or persons being observed.

**(b) Participant Observation:**

As the name 'participant' suggests, the researcher participates in the activities of the persons being observed rather than being an observer. The researcher has two role – as observer and as participant. The researcher participates as much as possible in the daily life of the subjects while also carefully observing everything he or she can about it. Through this, the researcher is seeking to gain what is called an 'emic' perspective or the native's point of view or the insider's perspective. The researcher records detailed field notes, conduct interview based on open-ended questions and gather whatever site documents might be available in the setting as data. Participation can take many forms.

For example, the researcher could show a film or video to stimulate discussion or question subjects and observe how they would react to the stimulus. The researcher takes an active position with the purpose of stimulating subjects to think about things they might never have thought about before. However, as pointed out by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), there is the danger of the researcher "going native" which means being too involved or having too closed a rapport with the person or persons being observed to the extent that you lose objectivity.

**(c) Active Observer:**

Between being a passive observer and an active participant, the researcher could take a middle position of being an active observer. Here, participation is allowed but limited. The researcher may intrude into the lives of subjects such as entering their homes or their communities but remains passive once inside the environment so as not to influence the natural occurring behaviours and conversations. For example, a researcher interested in TV viewing habits may enter a household, eat with the family, play with the children and take part in family activities. Family members are told not to change their routines in order to accommodate the observer. However, the researcher tries as far as possible to be passive, saying as little as possible so as not to influence the behaviours and conversations of subjects.

**SELF-CHECK 8.2**

1. What is the difference between passive observation and participant observation?
2. Give an example of passive and participant observation of classroom processes in a primary or secondary school.



### ACTIVITY 8.1

To practice being a passive observer, undertake a 15 minutes observation of an educational setting. This setting could be the teacher's lounge (staff room), the school canteen, playground, staff meeting, classroom or any setting in your place of work. Make notes on what you observed and from the notes write down some of your thoughts on the interesting issues observed.

## 8.3 INTERVIEWS

Interviewing is a technique of gathering data from humans by asking them questions and getting them to react verbally. There are many different ways of conducting interviews (see Figure 8.1). Structured interviews use an interview schedule that is similar to the survey questionnaire. You could phrase the question in such a way that so that you have a limited range of responses.



For example, 'Do you think the image of teachers in society has gone down?' *Strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree and strongly disagree.* Structured interviews are widely used in surveying opinions, beliefs and perceptions of people. Individual interviews are expensive and you should consider whether the same amount of data can be more efficiently collected using written questionnaires.

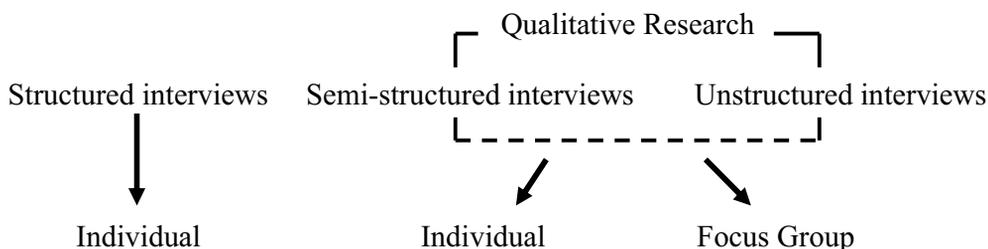


Figure 8.1: Types of interviews

Semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews are widely used in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews consist of a list of open-ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher intends to study. The open-ended nature of the questions provides opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss certain topics in more detail. If the interviewee has

difficulty answering a question or hesitates, the interviewer will probe. Three types of probes commonly used by the interviewer are:

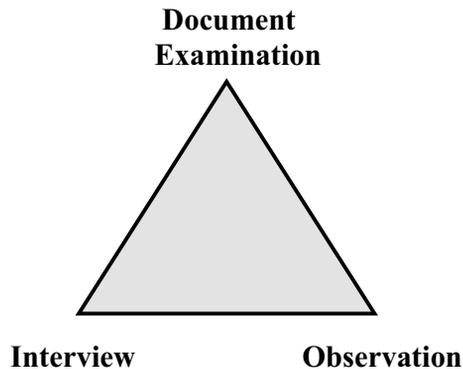
- (a) **Detail-oriented probe**  
When did it happen to you?  
Who was with you?
- (b) **Elaboration probe**  
Tell me more about the incident.  
Can you give an example.
- (c) **Clarification probe**  
I'm not sure I understand what you mean by 'hanging out'. Can you explain further?  
You said that your principal is extremely autocratic.  
What do you mean by autocratic?

Unstructured interviews aim to obtain in depth interviews of persons interviewed. Only a limited number of topics are discussed, sometimes as few as one or two topics. Although only a few topics are discussed, they are covered in great detail. The interview may begin with a question such as "I'd like to hear your views of school discipline". Subsequent questions would follow from the interviewee's responses. Unstructured interviews are used to find out about a specific topic but have no structured or preconceived plan or expectation as to how the interview will proceed.

Face-to-face or personal interviews are labour intensive but can be the best way of collecting high quality data, especially when the subject matter is very sensitive, if the questions are very complex or if the interview is likely to be lengthy (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 2002).

## 8.4 TRIANGULATION

Triangulation is the process of strengthening the findings obtained from a qualitative inquiry by cross-checking information. A researcher who argues that his or her findings are derived from many different kinds of people across many different situations will be more convincing than another researcher whose conclusions are based observations of one person in one setting (Potter, 1996).



**Figure 8.2:** Triangulation of methods

There are three types of triangulation:

- **Methods Triangulation** – The use of multiple research methods to study a phenomenon (see Figure 8.2). For example, you examine the lesson plans of a history teacher (document examination) and then observe her teaching using the lesson plan (observation). At the end of the lesson, you follow-up by interviewing the teacher regarding what was planned and what was actually performed in the classroom.
- **Investigator Triangulation** – The use of multiple investigators (i.e. multiple researchers) in collecting and interpreting the data.
- **Theory Triangulation** – The use of multiple theories and perspectives to help interpret and explain the data.

Triangulation is used in bringing together different sources of information to converge or conform to one interpretation. With the convergence of information from different sources (documents, interviews and observations), settings and investigators, the researcher can make a powerful argument that the interpretation is more credible.



### SELF-CHECK 8.3

1. When would you use unstructured interviews?
2. What is triangulation?

## 8.5 SKILLS REQUIRED OF THE RESEARCHER

In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analysing data. So, it is very important that the researcher maintain impartial if the findings are to be accepted. As it is well established that human make mistake and to err is human; it essential that the researcher is aware how his or her personal biases may influence interpretation of data. Just as any research instrument is fallible, the human instrument is even more susceptible to error. Merriam (1998) identified the following skills required of qualitative researchers:

First, as a qualitative researcher, you must have an enormous *tolerance for ambiguity*. Tolerance for ambiguity means the ability to tolerate or accept inconsistencies and uncertainties. In qualitative research, there are no set procedures or guidelines to be followed step by step. From the design stage to the data collection and data analysis stages the researcher has to be prepared to face unforeseen events and change in direction. Merriam (1998) compares the role of the qualitative researcher to that of a detective who looks for clues, finds the missing clues and puts the pieces together. If you are a person who likes structured situations and have no patience with ambiguity, you should choose quantitative methods which are more structured and there are step by step guidelines.

Second, a qualitative researcher should be *sensitive*. Sensitive refers specifically to data collection. How should the researcher be sensitive when collecting or gathering data?

- (a) The researcher should be sensitive to the obvious or explicit information and not so obvious or implicit information such as the nonverbal behaviour of people (such as gestures, silence, etc).
- (b) The researcher should be sensitive to the information collected in terms of what it reveals and how it reflects what is happening.
- (c) The researcher should have a keen sense of timing.
  - (i) When observing he/she knows when it is enough and to stop observing.
  - (ii) When interviewing, the researcher should know
    - When to probe;
    - When to allow for silence; and
    - When to change the direction of the interview.

Third, the qualitative researcher should be able to *detect personal biases*. It should be remembered that the primary instrument is the researcher and being human there is a likelihood that his/her values might creep into the observations and interviews conducted. The researcher will bring his/her perceptions or interpretations into the phenomenon being studied. Some scholars have argued that this is unavoidable and will to accept this as part and parcel of qualitative research. However, if the findings of any qualitative research are to be accepted by others, there is needed to ensure that infiltration of the researcher's values is minimised.

So the qualitative researcher should be able to understand how biases or subjectivity shape an investigation and interpretation of findings.

Fourth, the qualitative researcher must also be a *good communicator*. "A good communicator empathises with respondents, establishes rapport, asks good questions, and listens intently" (Merriam, 1998. p. 23). The extent to which qualitative researchers are able to communicate warmth and empathy often marks them as good or not-so-good data collectors (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Another vital communication skill is listening. It is only by listening to individuals can a researcher obtain good information whether in interviews and even observations ("hearing" the implied meanings of communication). Besides having oral skills, a good qualitative researcher must also be a good writer. Writing is needed when taking notes and writing the report of findings. A qualitative researcher needs to do a lot of writing; much more than in quantitative research.



#### SELF-CHECK 8.4

1. What are the skills required of a qualitative researcher?
2. List other qualities of a good qualitative researcher.

## 8.6 LENGTH OF TIME SPENT IN COLLECTING DATA

Generally, it has been argued that when doing qualitative research, a substantial amount of time should be spent in the field collecting data. However, there is less agreement on how long should the researcher be in the field collecting data. If you are not sure how much time is spent in collecting data, read the literature in your area of research. If you find that the research study you are referring to is too superficial and there is a lack of in-depth explanation, than you may conclude

that more time should be spent in conducting the study. The length of time spent in collecting can be viewed from two angles:

- Span of Time – how long? 2 week, 1 month, 3 months and so forth.
- Degree of Contact – The number of contact hours the researcher spent with the person or persons.

For example, Researcher A who observes a group of low ability students at the rate of 1 hour per week for a span of 6 months which comes to a total of 24 hours. Researcher B who moves in with the family of a low ability student and observes the learner during all his waking hours. Who spent more time collecting data? Researcher A took more time gathering data if you are focusing on span of time. If you are focusing on contact hours, than Researcher B took more time collecting data. Both conceptions of time (span of time and contact hours) are important. A long span of time enables you to see broad and overall patterns while long contact hours allow you to detect micro patterns or details in the environment.

While it is not advisable to prescribe the length of data collection, it would be wise for the researcher to address the issue of time both in terms of span and degree of contact. This is a minimum requirement. It is best that the researcher justify the span of time and degree of contact proposed. For instance, you might state that the X number of contact hours would be sufficient to capture interesting patterns about the phenomenon being observed.

### Examples of Studies: Length of Time Spent

- Cox (1980) observed a kindergarten class for two hours a day [though not every day], between September and June. Thus about 132 hours of observation took place over 66 day period.
- Bossert (1974) watched two classrooms over a six month period about 3-4 hours each week. He observed for 40-60 minutes each time, and observations were rotated so that all classroom activities could be sampled.
- Baker (1985) observed children in the playground twice a day during each of two recess periods. These observations took 30-40 minutes each day over a one year period.



#### SELF-CHECK 8.5

1. What is the difference between the span of time and the contact hours in terms of length of time spent in data collection?
2. How should a researcher determine the length of time spent in collecting data?

## 8.7 SAMPLING

In quantitative research, sampling is the selection of a group of persons from a population with each person having an equal chance of being selected. The objective is to draw a representative sample and the results obtained from the sample can be generalised to the population. How is the issue of sampling dealt with in qualitative research? In qualitative research the concern is with the issue of 'access'. What is meant by access?

When the researcher intends to observe or interview a individual or a groups of persons, he or she must gain access which means getting permission to be physically present to gather the data. Once gaining access, the researcher is obliged to follow certain social rules so as to maintain access. This is especially important in relatively private settings where people do not want an outsider to interview or observe them. Related to the issue of access, is the rationale or reason for selection of the particular sample (which could an individual or a group of individuals). In qualitative research, there are two main reasons for selection of the sample (Potter, 1996).

- (a) First, the researcher might select person or persons to investigate because of efficiency or convenience.
- (b) Evidence is collected from people who are easily available to support the researcher's arguments. For example:
  - (i) a teacher might ask his or her students in the class to allow themselves to be interviewed.
  - (ii) the researcher might go into the community to which he or she belongs and observe the behaviours of easily accessible parents.
  - (iii) the researcher might use the 'snowball technique' of interviewing those people who are available and than asking them to suggest others who might be willing to be interviewed. In the process, the number of people gradually expands to those who have been referred.
- (c) Second, the researcher might want to select a sample based on representativeness or a critical case or a typical case.
  - (i) If the researcher wants a sample that is *representative*, than the method of sample selection used in quantitative research is adopted where each individual case has an equal chance of being selected.

- (ii) If the researcher wants a *critical case*, all possible cases are examined until a critical case is found that best captures the unique features of what he or she wants to illustrate.
- (iii) If the researcher wants a *typical case*, he or she looks for the case that best exemplifies the norm, and the extent to which cases are different or similar to the typical case.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise that the guiding principle of sampling in qualitative research is one of convenience. An important consideration in sampling is whether there are people available who will allow the researcher to collect data about them. For example, the researcher interested in preschoolers interacting during recess may call up several kindergartens until he or she finds kindergartens that will allow him or her to observe children during recess.

If you read research using qualitative methods, you will see a range of positions on the issue of sampling. Some studies do not give much information about how the people interviewed or observed were selected. Other studies give some information about why they selected certain people and how they gained access. The main issue with sampling is the extent to which readers trust the findings of the research. If the researcher fails to provide sufficient information about how he or she collected evidence especially in relation to how and why particular persons were selected, it would be difficult for the reader to trust the findings. On the other hand, if the researcher provides detail description about the process of gaining access and selection of the persons interviewed or observed, readers will be more inclined to trust the findings.



#### SELF-CHECK 8.6

How do you decide on who and how many subjects to include in your sample?

## 8.8 VALIDITY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The shift in focus from a quantitative paradigm to a qualitative paradigm in educational research has raised many questions about the latter approach. Various books and articles and conferences have and continue to discuss important issues with regards to qualitative research. Among the issues raised is whether qualitative research can be considered as scientific. How can the qualitative method be considered scientific if the probability of the values of the researcher creeping into the research is very high? Can the results of qualitative research be generalised to other situations or other individuals? Still others

question whether quantitative which is considered 'more' scientific is truly free from the influence of values and beliefs of the researcher.

### 8.8.1 Types of Validity

The issues of validity have been discussed to great length by qualitative researchers. Validity in qualitative research is defined as whether the data is plausible, credible and reliable, and can be defended when challenged. Unlike validity in quantitative research which is more definite, validity in qualitative research is debatable. There are some researchers who believe that the concept of validity as understood in quantitative research is not congruent with qualitative research and as such should be ignored. Others are of the opinion that effort should be made to ensure validity if the results of qualitative research are to be believed, Maxwell (1996) identified three types of validity that should be given attention in qualitative research.

1. **Descriptive Validity**

This is defined as the accuracy of the behaviours, events, objects, settings and others reported by the researcher. For example, that which is reported is actually what happened or what was heard or observed. .

2. **Interpretive Validity**

This is defined as the accuracy of interpretation as to what happened in the minds of subjects and the extent to which the researcher understands exactly the opinions, thinking, feelings, intentions and experiences of subjects.

3. **Theoretical Validity**

This is defined as the extent to which the theoretical explanations developed are in congruent with the data and is reliable and can be defended.

### 8.8.2 External Validity of Qualitative Research

External validity is defined as the extent to which the findings of a study may be generalised to another setting or another group of people. According to Benz and Newman (1998), state that,

That one should be able to generalise underlies science. However, we are unwilling to accept fully that generalisability is consistent with the qualitative paradigm..... in principle; generalisability is the purpose of quantitative, not qualitative research.

In fact, we have assumed that, if the purpose of the research is to generalize, one should employ quantitative methodology. (p.54).

They are of the opinion that generalisation is not important and is not consistent with the qualitative paradigm or perspective. If generalisation is the objective, then quantitative methods should be used and not qualitative methods. However, there are other researchers who believe that efforts should be made to generalise findings of qualitative research. These researchers argue that the in-depth description of a particular phenomenon is sufficient for the researcher to make generalisations to other individuals or individuals. To enable the findings of qualitative research to be generalised, researchers have proposed ways in which validity can be enhanced. Benz and Newman (1998) proposed the following terms while discussing the issue of generalisation of qualitative research findings:

(i) **Applicability**

Can the study be applied to another sample? It should be remembered that there is no 'significant differences' and it is difficult to generalise to the population based on the findings of a sample. The deep description of the characteristics of the subject being studied may allow one to conclude the extent to which it is comparable to other subjects. If the subjects are comparable, then one would be more comfortable to make generalisations. For example, you observe three science teachers. Can you generalise what you observed to all science teachers in the country? It has been argued that the in-depth description of subjects or the sample studies enables the researcher to decide the extent to which it is the same with other subjects or another sample. The greater the similarity between subjects, the higher is the possibility of making generalisations.

(ii) **Context Dependent**

Can the findings of a study be generalised to another setting or context? Say for example, what was observed is not dependent on the context. Or what was observed was not so much context dependent. In these situations the findings may be 'transferred' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) to another context or situation. Then you may generalise the findings.

(iii) **Replicability**

What is the likelihood of a particular product or event will occur given similar conditions? It is difficult to replicate or repeat a qualitative research because the natural setting is constantly changing. Unless you have data showing the changes, you are advised to be cautious when making claims that a study can be replicated.

On the issue of generalisation or external validity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the term *transferability*. They warned researchers to be careful when

suggesting the generalisation of qualitative research findings. If the readers of the report or other researchers wish to generalise the findings of one study to another setting, it is their responsibility. It is not necessary for the original researcher to show that the findings can be generalised.



### SELF-CHECK 8.7

1. Discuss the issue of validity in qualitative research?
2. To what extent can you generalise the findings of qualitative studies?

## 8.8.3 Enhancing Internal Validity of Qualitative Research

Johnson (1997) and Benz & Newman (1998) discussed in detail the issue of internal validity of qualitative research. They identified the following strategies that should be considered by researchers if they wish to enhance the internal validity of their studies.

(a) **Triangulation:**

This involves the cross-checking of information from different dimensions. Data triangulation is when the researcher refers to different sources of data in understanding a particular phenomenon. Methods triangulation is when the researcher uses different methods to study a particular phenomenon. Investigator triangulation is when the research involves different investigators or researchers in interpreting and explaining the data. Theory triangulation is when different theories are used to explain the data.

(b) **Longer Period of Time:**

Obviously, given the time and resources, researchers would like to remain in the field as long as possible collecting data to provide a more accurate picture of the phenomenon observed. For example, a researcher studying classroom processes will encounter problems when the school is preparing for sports day. It is possible that classes may be cancelled or no proper teaching will be conducted as students and teachers are busy with various activities. So, it is essential that adequate time be allotted to enable the researcher to obtain a more accurate and holistic picture of classroom processes.

- (c) **Member Checking:**  
To enhance internal validity, a researcher could return to the subjects who were interviewed and check whether what you had recorded was what they had said in the interview. For example, “Is this what you meant when you said ...?” Or go back to the subjects you had observed and ask them whether what you had recorded about their behaviour is accurate. For example, “Did you do this?” Through this process of verification, the internal validity of qualitative research can be enhanced.
- (d) **Peer Review:**  
Discuss the interpretations and conclusions of the findings with a peer. Choose a peer who is not involved in the study but is interested in what you are doing. A person who is interested in the study is more likely to be critical and challenge what you wrote. Involving a peer who is interested in your study will enhance the likelihood that he or she will give an in-depth opinion about your data.
- (e) **Low Inference Descriptors:**  
Inference descriptors are words or phrases used to describe a collection of information. By using low inference descriptors you are using descriptors that are close to what the subjects said or what you had recorded as field notes. The closer the raw data is with the inference descriptors the lesser is the inference made and more accurate is the description. For example, if you use the inference descriptor “autocratic” to describe the behaviour of a principal you are making an inference based on evidence such as “one-man show”, “refuses to listen”, “his way is always right”. The closer your descriptor is to the data, less inference is made by the researcher and ‘interpretative validity’ is enhanced.
- (f) **Negative Case Sampling:**  
To enhance internal validity, you could pick cases that are different to the cases you are studying. The aim is to confirm or disconfirm the findings of your study by comparing it with the findings of cases that are opposite or different. For example, you are studying the leadership behaviour of a principal based on interview with selected teachers and your findings indicate the principal studied is autocratic. To enhance the validity of your findings, you interview teachers from another school where you suspect the principal is less autocratic and compare the opinions of these teachers.
- (g) **Reflexivity:**  
One of the main issues with the validity of qualitative research is the likelihood of the researcher’s values creeping into the interpretation of data. To minimise this happening you critically examine critically yourself to detect any potential bias and inclination that may influence the conclusions

you make about the data. Though no data can be hundred percent value free and objective, the researcher should make serious effort to convince others that the level of objectivity of your study has been maintained. If you had used other investigators in your study, you should provide evidence that there was high inter-rate reliability and consistency between investigators.

(h) **Audit Trail:**

Audit trail is the keeping of detailed and accurate records of everything the researcher did and of the data collected. Such records should be documented and organised appropriately for retrieval purposes. These records should be made available as evidence of data collected when challenged as well as validation of the interpretation of data.



**SELF-CHECK 8.8**

What should a researcher do to enhance the internal validity of qualitative research?

## SUMMARY

- Examination of documents such letters, memos, notes, diaries, photographs, audiotapes, videotapes, films, articles, books, manuscripts, e-mails, online discussions reveal people's thoughts, actions and creations.
- Observation is the technique of obtaining data through direct contact with a persons or group of persons.
- Interviewing is a technique of gathering data from humans by asking them questions and getting them to react verbally.
- Triangulation is the process of strengthening the findings obtained from a qualitative inquiry by cross-checking information.
- If you the research study to is too superficial and there is a lack of in-depth explanation, than it may be conclude that more time should be spent in conducting the study.
- Validity is the credibility of findings and includes descriptive validity, interpretive validity and theoretical validity.

- External validity is defined as the extent to which the findings of a study may be generalised to another setting or another group of people.
- Triangulation, member checking, negative case sampling and audit trail and some techniques of enhancing qualitative research.

## KEY TERMS

Document Examination

External Validity

Internal Validity

- descriptive, interpretive

Interviews

- structured interviews
- unstructured interviews

Length of Data gathering

Observations

- observer
- participant observer

Sampling

Skills of a Qualitative Researcher

Triangulation



## DISCUSSION

1. "Characteristics of Racial Interaction in the Playground of a Vision School"
  - (a) What data collection techniques would you use for the above study?
  - (b) How long do you think you should be in the field?
  - (c) Describe how you would select the subjects for your study?
2. "Comparative Study of the Leadership Style of Two School Principals"
  - (a) What data collection techniques would you use for the above study?
  - (b) How long do you think you should be in the field?
  - (c) Describe how you would select the subjects for your study?

**READINGS****Internet Resources**

Chapter 15: *Interviewing in qualitative research* (n. d.). Retrieved from:  
<http://www.oup.co.uk/pdf/0-19-874204-5chap15.pdf>

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4). Retrieved from:  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-4/golafshani.pdf>

*Module 3: Essentials of participant observation* (n. d.). Retrieved from:  
<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~mid/edr725/class/observation/>

*Observation with Intervention* (n. d.). Retrieved from:  
[http://www.ccnycunyu.edu/bbpsy/modules/observ\\_with\\_interv.htm](http://www.ccnycunyu.edu/bbpsy/modules/observ_with_interv.htm)

Palmquist, M. (n. d.). *Content analysis*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/content.html>

*Two explanation of content analysis* (n. d.). Retrieved from:  
[http://www.uiowa.edu/~commstud/adclass/research/content\\_analysis.html](http://www.uiowa.edu/~commstud/adclass/research/content_analysis.html)