



ACTION RESEARCH
SESSION 3.2
**DESIGNING A
QUALITATIVE
ACTION RESEARCH**



Objectives

At the end of the session, teachers should be able to:

- 1 Describe what qualitative research method is;
- 2 Identify situations when qualitative research method is appropriate For Action Research;
- 3 Determine techniques in obtaining data for qualitative Action Research; and
- 4 Explain the procedure for analyzing qualitative data.



Key Understandings

- 1 Qualitative Action Research is used when the interest, after implementation of an intervention or treatment to solve a classroom problem or issue, is to gain an understanding of underlying sentiments, opinions, and motivations, which cannot be measured through quantitative instruments.
- 2 Qualitative research method focuses on narratives of experiences or descriptive data that cannot be adequately expressed through quantitative instruments.
- 3 Among the data collection methods in qualitative Action Research are interviews, observations, and documents. Open-ended questionnaires are also sometimes used.
- 4 Thematic analysis is the appropriate data analysis technique for qualitative data.

Materials

- LCD projector
- laptop
- manila paper
- marking pens
- whiteboard and marker (or chalk and eraser if blackboard is used in the meeting room)

Introduction

Begin the learning session by greeting the participants and presenting the objectives. Say: “Good _____, everyone. I am _____, your LAC facilitator. How are you? Thank you for taking the time to attend today’s two-hour LAC session. We will be continuing our discussion on Action Research methods. Today, we will particularly tackle qualitative research, which will help you carry out Action Research using qualitative method. We will focus on understanding what qualitative research method is and when it is used. We will also talk about techniques for gathering and for analyzing qualitative data.

At the end of this session, you are expected to exhibit learning by being able to describe qualitative research method, identify situations when qualitative research method is appropriate for an Action Research, determine techniques in obtaining data for specific qualitative Action Research, and explain the procedure for analyzing qualitative data.”

Activity (10 minutes)

Lead the conduct of the pre-discussion activity by observing the following instructions.

- 1** Ask the participants to group themselves in three’s according to subject area. Allow them to settle before continuing with the activity.
- 2** Distribute Action Research question sheets with the following formats.
 - a)** How do experimental and control groups compare in terms of _____ scores after intervention _____ is implemented?
 - b)** Is there a difference between scores in _____ obtained before and after intervention _____ is implemented?
 - c)** How do _____ and _____ interact in _____ classroom when intervention _____ is used?
 - d)** What are the effects of intervention _____ on _____?
Give one per group.

- 3 Let the groups discuss among themselves what specific topic might complete the Action Research questions. Let them know that they may decide on the question by choosing from one of the general categories of problems mentioned in LAC Session 2.2 (Generating Action Research Topics), such as student performance, student attitude, student behavior, classroom instruction, and classroom management.
- 4 Post the two metacards with the words “Qualitative” and “Quantitative” on the board. Once the groups have written Action Research questions using the format given to them, ask them to post those on the board under either one of the two classifications.

NOTE TO THE FACILITATOR: Remind the participants that the two types of research questions have already been discussed in LAC Action Research Session 4 and in Section 2.3 of their Teacher’s Guides.

Conclude the activity by saying: “Action Research topics should be properly classified as quantitative or qualitative. Based on our activity, questions a and b are both quantitative Action Research questions. Both require numerical data.

In contrast, questions c and d are both qualitative Action Research questions. Both require descriptions or narratives as data.

Analysis (20 minutes)

Lead the participants in the discussion of qualitative research design by asking them the following questions.

1. Notice the type of questions that are considered quantitative and those classified as qualitative. How do they differ? (Quantitative questions ask for numerical data, while qualitative questions ask for descriptions)
2. Do test scores tell us how students and teachers interact in the Math classroom? (No, but verbal descriptions will)
3. What is the best way to pursue questions a and b? (Quantitative research method or experiment)

4. How about questions c and d? How do we go about finding the answer to these Action Research questions? (Qualitative research method)
5. What are the methods in analyzing data collected for questions a and b? How about for questions c and d? (for questions a and b, statistical; for questions c and d, qualitative analysis)

Abstraction (40 minutes)

Start the discussion proper of the session by saying: “The Action Research questions ‘How do _____ and _____ interact in _____ classroom when intervention _____ is used?’ and ‘What are the effects of intervention _____ on _____?’ can be carried out through qualitative research design. Let us look at the characteristics of this type of research design and the related procedures in collecting and analyzing qualitative data.”

UNDERSTANDING QUALITATIVE ACTION RESEARCH

Qualitative Action Research is characterized by its purpose, which is to understand some aspects of students’ experiences after an intervention or treatment is applied to address a classroom problem or issue. Data come in the form of verbal descriptions. Data collection methods involve interviews, observations, and documents—methods that either generate words or provide verbal information rather than numbers (Patton and Cochran 2002).

Qualitative Action Research is applied when the interest is to gain knowledge about underlying sentiments, opinions, and motivations following the introduction or implementation of an intervention or treatment. It uncovers trends in thoughts, opinions, and feelings that are not described in quantitative Action Research (experimental design).

Qualitative data enhance the usefulness of the intervention or treatment in its succeeding applications because these clarify some of the possible reactions or responses of recipients to the intervention or treatment.

Qualitative Action Research also gives a more in-depth and detailed description of the situation in which the intervention was successfully (or unsuccessfully) applied in order to duplicate the success factors or remedy the reasons for failure.

Qualitative Action Research method aims to answer questions about the “what,” “how,” or “why” of an intervention or treatment rather than “how many” or “how much” has been its effect, which are answered by experimental design. If the goal is to understand how a class or individual students perceive the institution of an intervention or treatment to address a particular problem or issue, then qualitative research method is the appropriate research design.

Qualitative Action Research is also useful if you want to initially try out an intervention or treatment, such as a new instructional design or a learning material, to address a certain learning problem prior to formally using it for the entire class.

Comparing Qualitative and Quantitative (Experimental) Action Research

Qualitative and quantitative Action Research methods differ in several ways. The following table outlines the differences between the two, as suggested by Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge (2009).

NOTE TO THE FACILITATOR:

Provide copies of the following table to the participants.

TABLE __. COMPARISON BETWEEN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ACTION RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative Action Research	Quantitative Action Research (Experiments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> focuses on how students look or feel about their experiences with the intervention or treatment as implemented in the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> focuses on quantitative or numerical assessment of the effects of the intervention or treatment as implemented in the classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describes in detail the classroom phenomenon before, during, and after intervention or treatment by portraying the real-world classroom context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> summarizes the classroom phenomenon before and after intervention or treatment by precisely stating differences in scores or grades
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> studies effect of intervention or treatment using students’ narrative accounts as data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> examines the effect of intervention or treatment using tests, rating scales, or numerical instruments



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses thematic analysis of narrative reports of experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses statistical techniques that allow Action Researchers to talk about “how likely” it is that the effect of the intervention or treatment applied is “true” for a given population in an objective or measurable way
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> employs the systematic Action Research process with more flexibility such that the procedures are “emergent” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adheres to the prescribed procedure of the specific experimental design selected

TYPES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

There are three common types of qualitative Action Research, namely, case study, ethnography, and phenomenological study.

1 Case Study

Case study involves a deep understanding of one individual or one class through multiple types of data sources. Case studies can be explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive of an individual student or an entire class after an intervention or treatment has been applied. One example of a case study is that of one pupil who is given a behavior-modification intervention to help him or her manage disruptive or violent behavior. Another example might be a teacher-monitoring system applied to an at-risk student who is frequently absent from class. A third example might be an entire class undergoing brief daily-homeroom sessions with their adviser to discuss learning, relational, and personal difficulties. The experience of the entire class may be the subject of the qualitative case study.

Case study might also be used during the “Assess the situation” stage of the Action Research framework (stage 1). Prior to the implementation of an intervention or treatment, you might want to examine the specific difficulties of an at-risk student. For this reason, you may apply case study to examine the circumstances surrounding this student so that an appropriate intervention or treatment can be devised and implemented.

2 Ethnographic Study

Ethnographic study is probably the most familiar and applicable type of qualitative study to many Action Researchers. In this type of study, the Action Researcher immerses himself or herself in the target participants’ environment to understand their goals and culture, as well as the challenges they face and



motivations for life. For example, let us say that you are curious if being accessible to your students after school for tutorial might help improve their scores in Physics. You may request permission to be allowed to spend two hours after school, say, 5-7 p.m. to tutor students. As you implement your after-school tutorials, you also get to know the life of students and the kind of activities that take much of their time and deter them from focusing on doing their homework.

Ethnography may also be a means for you, as Action Researcher, to execute stage 1 of the Action Research framework (Assess the situation). For example, one way of understanding the experiences of 4P's recipients is to "follow them home" and observe them. The teacher-researcher does not necessarily have to live with them but may schedule the frequency and duration of visits in order to get insights on their circumstances. It is not necessary for the Action Researcher to have formulated a research question or a research hypotheses at this stage. The ethnographic study may, however, lead one to identify a problem or issue that may be addressed by an intervention or treatment implemented through an Action Research.

3 Phenomenological Study

Phenomenological study examines student experiences (called "lived experiences") through their own descriptions. Its goal is to describe the meaning that experiences hold for each individual participant. This type of research is suitable for topics in which there is little knowledge (Donalek 2004). Any intervention or treatment developed to address a specific issue can also be tentatively applied using this type of qualitative research similar to how a case study or an ethnographic study could be conducted prior to its full implementation for groups of learners.

For example, let us say you notice that some pupils in your advisory class have "absentee" parents (either deceased or working abroad or elsewhere) or have been put in the care of grandparents or other relatives by their own parents. You also notice that they often have difficulties submitting requirements due to lack of finances. You are thinking of matching each of these pupils with other pupils whose family may help provide these needs and may occasionally invite the "disadvantaged" pupils to their homes in the hope that this will provide a semblance of "parental care." After implementing this "Adopt-a-classmate"

intervention for one quarter, you examine its effectiveness by interviewing the participants. Participants, both the “adopted” pupil and the “adopting” pupil with his or her family, narrate the activities that they engaged in and share their feelings and views about them. You are now using phenomenological study as qualitative Action Research design for your intervention.

As in the two previous types of qualitative research, phenomenological studies may also be used prior to the identification of an Action Research topic and the development and implementation of an intervention. It may be applied as a way of “Assessing the situation” (stage 1 of the Action Research framework). For example, you may want to describe how families of “balik-aral” students adjust to the situation. A phenomenological study can be designed for this purpose.

SAMPLING METHOD

Qualitative Action Research usually uses purposive and accessible sampling method.

In some situations, snowball (or referral) sampling is also used occasionally in interviews. What happens is the first respondent “refers” the Action Researcher to another respondent, who then also leads the investigator to the next participant, and so on. Sometimes, the Action Researcher does not have an entire list of participants; he or she may know only one or a few students who can provide the data needed. The rest of the respondents are identified by the first few participants.

If an Action Researcher wants the sample to “represent” the proportion of subgroups, say, girls and boys, in the population, quota sampling is the sampling procedure applied. Suppose that out of 50 students, 30 are girls and 20 are boys. For a sample of ten ($n = 10$), 6 have to be girls and the rest, boys.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Using qualitative Action Research means that you will be generating data that are primarily in the form of words, not numbers. Some common methods of data collection for qualitative research are the following:

- 1 individual interviews
- 2 focus groups or focus group discussions

- 3 participant observations
- 4 documents or materials
- 5 open-ended questionnaires

The sample size is typically small with respondents often selected purposively. Sometimes, a given quota of participants is required. However, there are two key ethical issues that should be considered in any qualitative research project—the consent of participants and those responsible for them and the confidentiality of information obtained from them. Participants should be informed about any risk or harm that joining the study might entail. Their consent must be expressed through a signed written document. In addition, identities and responses of participants should be kept confidential.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis is performed through the development of themes, a process that is sometimes referred to as thematic analysis. General classifications of responses are derived from a cursory examination before themes are assigned. Frequencies and percentages for each theme may also be derived.

Sampling, data collection, and data analysis for qualitative Action Research will be discussed in detail in future LAC sessions.



Application (40 minutes)

Let the participants apply what they have learned by asking them to plan for a qualitative Action Research. Observe the following instructions.

- 1 Ask the participants to form two groups. Present on the board the format to be used in the presentation of responses to this activity. Have the participants to draw a table with six columns using the manila paper provided and following the format shown on the board.
- 2 From the following list of topics, let each group choose one and have them write one qualitative Action Research question about it.

- a** Senior High School students' reactions to the use of tablets
- b** experiences of students engaged in Group Study organized to help them understand concepts in Geometry
- c** opinions of elementary pupils on weekly Career Guidance sessions

You may add some more to the topics provided they are stated as qualitative research topics.

3. Ask the participants to describe how the subjects of their study will be selected and how many would they be.
4. Have them determine the data collection method/s applicable for their Research Question/s.
5. Ask them to list down three-five possible themes that may emerge from data that might be collected.

FORMAT FOR ANSWERS

Problem	Research Questions	Participants (Selection and Sample Size)	Data Collection Method	Themes

- 1 Give the participants ample time to discuss their research topics and to complete the matrix above. After about 10 minutes, call the groups together and ask them to present their output, one at a time. Spend about 15 minutes for the sharing.



Closing (5 minutes)

End the learning session for the day by saying: “Thank you for your participation. I hope you learned enough about qualitative research methods to be able to plan to use it for your own Action Research. Keep your outputs because in the next LAC sessions, we will discuss other research designs. Let me leave you with this quote from the renowned physicist and genius, Albert Einstein.

“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

—Albert Einstein



Prepared by:
CAROLINE L. GUERTA
Education Program Supervisor
Planning, Policy, and Research Division
Department of Education-Region XIII

Edited by:
FE' JOSEFA G. NAVA, PHD



BEST Basic Education Sector Transformation



BEST is supported by the Australian Government