

Qualitative research – theoretical outline

GLCb1008 Introduction to Methodology of Social Sciences

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Testing vs. understanding

Quantitative

- **deductive** logic
- the goal is to **test** a hypothesis
- limited scope of **isolated** information about **many** units/individuals (reduction of reality to variables)
- allows **generalization** of conclusions to a wider population

Qualitative

- Inductive/**abductive** logic
- the goal is theory **formulation** (hypothesis/concept generation)
- **lots** of information about a **small** number of units/individuals (case reduction)
- attempt to capture reality in its **complexity**
- generalization to population is impossible - it is about **understanding**

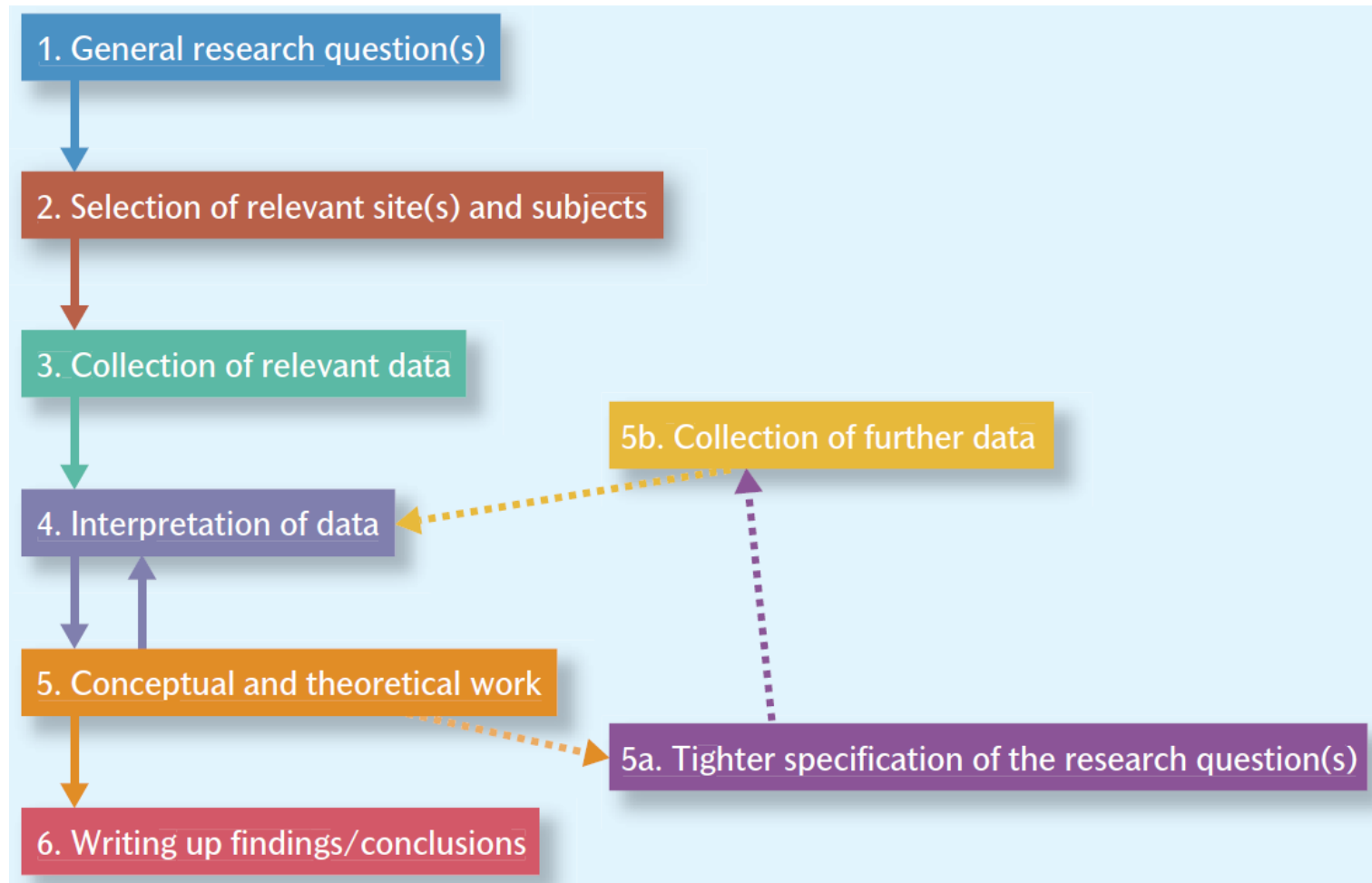
What is characteristic of qualitative research?

- The focus of research attention is the human being, people (it can also be locations, formations where people live and work)
- The problem we set out is never completely bounded, we are always clarifying it in our research
- We study the phenomenon that is the subject of our research interest in its natural context

What is characteristic of qualitative research

- Research starts with fewer cases (individuals, NGOs, ...)
- Interactive and developmental aspect of the research (important for describing the research process and interpreting the data) (something new/unexpected is happening?)
- Openness to new, unusual, atypical situations and possibilities
- Consistent description of our research process (what, why and how I did it) - field notes
- Typical research methods: ethnography/participant observation, qualitative interviewing, focus groups, language analysis, text analysis

Main steps of qualitative research



Main focus of qualitative research

- Seeing through the eyes of actors under study (social constructivism, face-face interaction, participation in the mind of other people)
- Capturing context (thick description)
- Emphasizing process
- Flexibility and limited structure
- Concepts + theory grounded in data

Reliability and validity in qualitative research

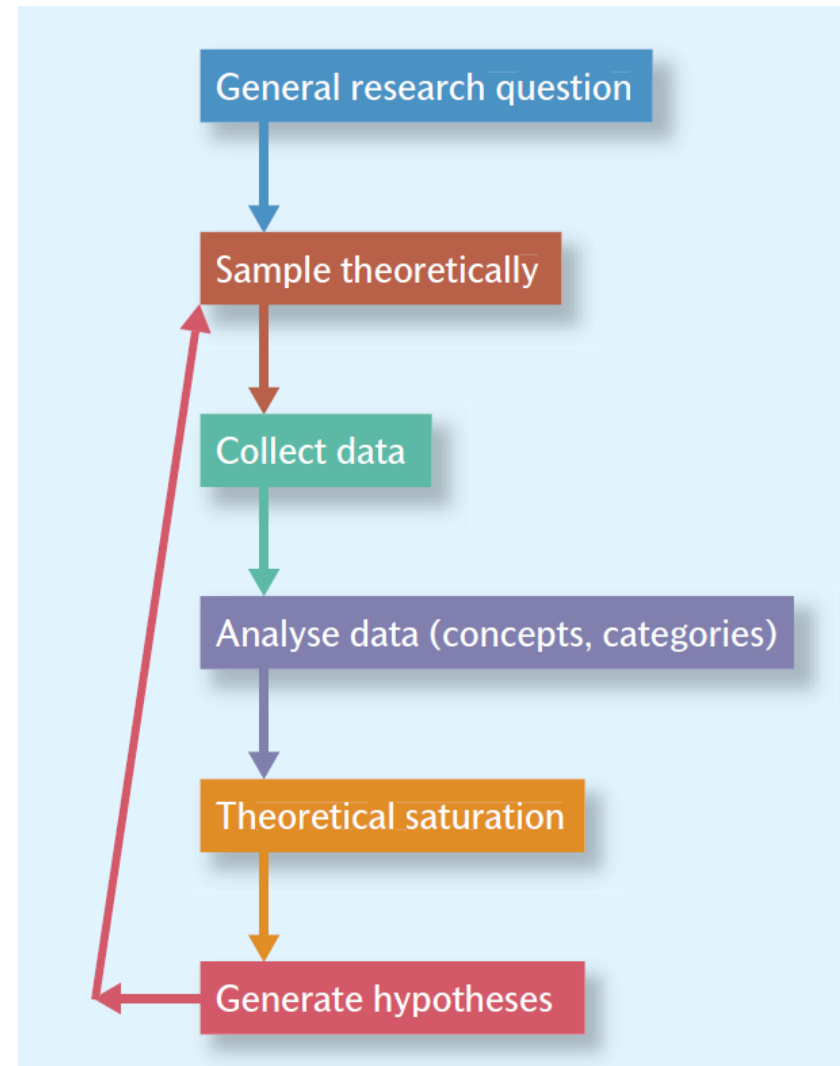
- External reliability (replication) - weak
- Internal reliability (inter-researcher) - weak
- Internal validity (observation-ideas) – strong
- External validity (generalization across settings) – weak

But:

Alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research (**trustworthiness** - + **authenticity**)

Sampling

- Case study „style“ (extreme/deviant case, typical case, ... etc.)
- Sampling both **context** and **participants**
- Often **purposive sampling** (theoretical sampling, generic purposive sampling, snowball)
- Theoretical sampling – **theoretical saturation** (no new data emerging in relation to category + category is well developed + relationships among categories are well established)

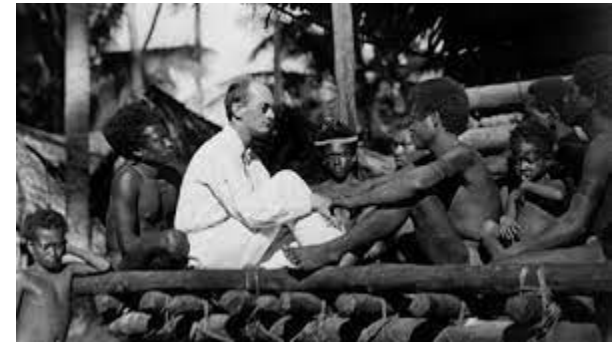


Basic types of qualitative research

- Case study (?)
- Ethnographic approach
- Grounded theory
- Phenomenological research

Ethnographic Research

- It is similar in nature to the case study, but with more emphasis on everyday experience.
- It also differs from the case study:
 - Longer stay in the "field", more identification with the environment under study
 - More flexible strategies
 - Ethnographic writing
 - **Example: William F. Whyte: "Street Corner Society" (1955) - Study of groups, gangs of young Italian immigrant youth in Boston**



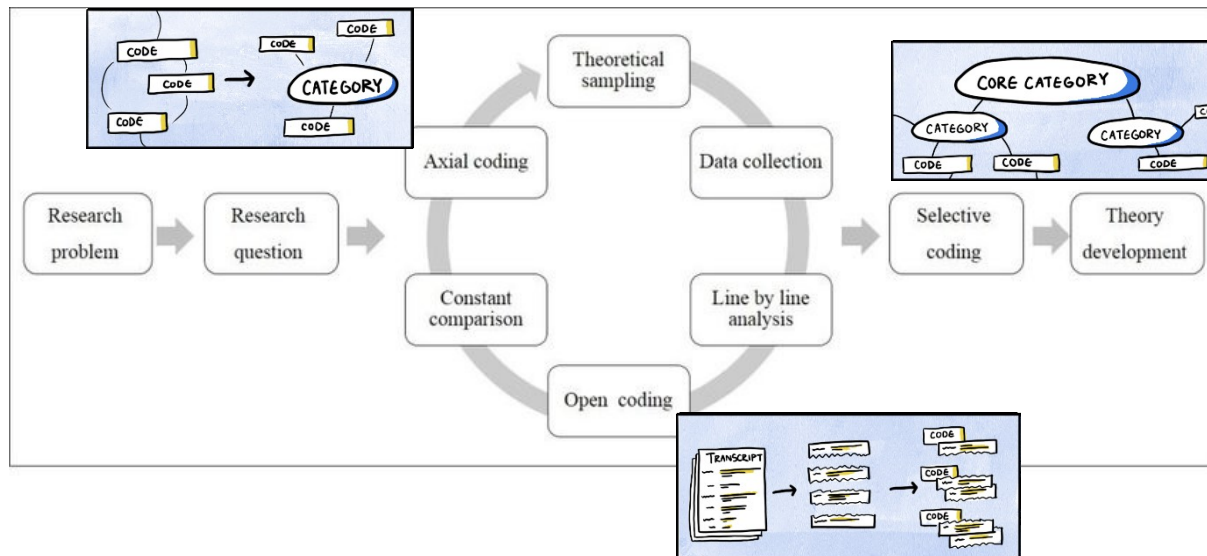
Grounded theory

It is not really a theory but a research strategy (Glaser and Strauss 1967).



- Absence of predefined hypotheses
- Begins with exploration, tends towards the generation of new theories (i.e., exploration)
- Theory grounded in data - search for structure that emerges in the data
- Analysis uses software to sort, link and code different parts of the text/recording

Example: study of remarriage, study of tax avoidance



Phenomenological research

- Phenomenology - deals with the study of the experiential individual, uncovering the "commonplaces" and habitual ways of perceiving in our lives
- Seeking to understand an individual with a particular experience whose meaning we want to explore (membership of a political party, relationship to religion, stay in hospital/prison)
- Aiming to understand the subjectivity of existence, gaining insight into human motivations and actions, seeing through conventional knowledge and prevailing assumptions
- Seeking to enter the inner world of the other person in order to understand the meanings they ascribe to the phenomenon under investigation
- The essence of the research is to capture the essence of the lived experience through the description and interpretation of the lived experiences that the respondent describes to us
- It is usually conducted using unstructured interviews
- **Example: Berger, Luckmann: The social construction of reality; Berger - the interconnectedness of the social construction of the world and religion (internalization and legitimization of the world order that gives meaning to human action)**



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