

Organising and Analysing Your Qualitative Data

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Aims of the session

- To offer students an opportunity to describe the nature of the data emanating from their research;
- To consider ways of organising qualitative data systematically;
- To identify strategies for managing the impact of researcher bias on the analysis.

Acknowledgements

Slides 4-12 Adapted from Morrison and Watling
'Introduction to Research Methods' support
materials for P/T students.

What is 'data'?

- Dictionary definition: 'given facts from which others may be inferred' (Chambers)
- Pure sciences: information researchers record and note in the lab/elsewhere
- Social sciences: information, observations, materials, findings etc.

How do you define what is ‘appropriate’?

- Previous/existing research
- You and your research

Activity 1: Individual reflection

Part 1: From your readings so far, make a list of the **types of data** key authors in your area have referred to in their work.

Part 2: Can you think of any **other forms** of data that are likely to occur in your discipline and, in particular, in your own study? Note these down as well, being as specific as you can about the data you will need to gather.

(Remember that 'data' can refer to anything which will need to be identified, recorded, stored, retrieved, analysed and reported).

Activity 1 cont.

- Go back to the list you made in part two of the task and see if you can work out in which order you want to collect this data. Where will you start? Where will you finish? Will one sort of data be used to influence the way you collect any others?

Activity 2: Paired discussion

In pairs, explain to each other:

- The focus of your thesis;
- The data collection method(s)/tools you are using;
- the order in which these are being used (eg survey then interviews etc) and why;
- The type of data you are gathering;
- Your proposed method of organising the data for analysis.

Activity 3: small groups

Join another pair. Introduce your partner to the group and explain:

- The focus of his/her thesis;
- The research methods/tools s/he is using;
- The order in which s/he is using them and why;
- The type of data s/he is gathering;
- His/her plans for organising and analysing the data.

Organising qualitative data systematically

- Storing
- Copying
- Backing up
- Handling & analysing

Storing, copying and backing up data

1. Try to keep materials in similar formats;
2. Collate raw data so you have space to add comments, eg wide margins you can write in for interview transcripts;
3. Give each piece of raw data a code or number for easy retrieval and reference;
4. Keep back-ups of everything & store originals safely, separate from back-ups.

Handling and analysing data

‘Analysis is the researcher’s equivalent of alchemy – the elusive process by which you can turn your raw data into nuggets of pure gold. And, like alchemy, such magic calls for science and art in equal measure’ (Watling 2002: 262).

Data analysis and project stages

- Defining and identifying data
- Data reduction and sampling
- Categorising and manipulating data
- Theory building and testing
- Reporting and writing up research

(adapted from Watling 2002)

Coding and analysis of qualitative data

- Structured interviews & pre-coding
- Semi-structured and unstructured interviews & inductive logic (see Strauss & Corbin 1990)
- Coding: manual or electronic? (Software: NVivo, NUD*IST, Ethnograph) – See Basit (2003)

Managing researcher bias

- Concern with bias in qualitative research (Denzin 1992; Huber 1973).
- Mutual impact of researcher and research: ‘the mythology of ‘hygienic research’’ (Stanley & Wise 1993:114).

A framework for managing researcher subjectivity

1. Acknowledge your lack of detachment from the research
2. Acknowledge your predispositions and your influence on and involvement in the research
3. Consider how the research process might benefit from your participation in it
4. Avoid a 'head-in-the-sand' attitude (Patai 1994:62)

The problem of bias

- Researchers may not be able to identify their own prejudices (Cohen & Manion 1989).
- Identify sources of bias and apply techniques to reduce them (Cohen *et al* 2000; Plummer 1983)

Summary of key points

- A reliable system is needed for the identification, collection, storage, analysis and reporting of data appropriate to your study.
- Some thought needs to be given to the most appropriate order in which data are to be collected;
- You need to be able to account for how you have ordered and used your data;
- Analysis is an ongoing process at all stages of the project;
- Coding of qualitative data enables patterns/themes to be identified;
- Researcher bias needs to be acknowledged and managed.

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