

Peer-reviewed academic journal

**Innovative Issues and Approaches in
Social Sciences**

IIASS – VOL. 8, NO. 1, JANUARY 2015

Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences

IIASS is a double blind peer review academic journal published 3 times yearly (January, May, September) covering different social sciences: political science, sociology, economy, public administration, law, management, communication science, psychology and education.

12

IIASS has started as a Sldip – Slovenian Association for Innovative Political Science journal and is now being published in the name of CEOs d.o.o. by Založba Vega (publishing house).

Typeset

This journal was typeset in 11 pt. Arial, Italic, Bold, and Bold Italic; the headlines were typeset in 14 pt. Arial, Bold

Abstracting and Indexing services

COBISS, International Political Science Abstracts, CSA Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, CSA Sociological Abstracts, PAIS International, DOAJ.

Publication Data:

CEOs d.o.o.

Innovative issues and approaches in social sciences, 2015,
vol. 8, no. 1

ISSN 1855-0541

Additional information: www.iiass.com

ISSUE OF QUALITY IN A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

Iqbal Ahmed Chowdhury¹

| 142

Abstract

The issues of quality in a qualitative research cannot be addressed by a single or constant method. It, however, may be judged through the aggregate of various perspectives such as “credibility,” “dependability,” “confirmability,” “ethics” and so on which is the central focus of this paper. In a qualitative research, researchers often engage with flexible realities where the subjective views of respondents may shape the research frame and the whole process of an inquiry. In such a situation, quality issue is more pertinent as it deals with people’s everyday reality and subjective explanation of it. The study focuses on the issue of quality in a qualitative research and provides a middle way to deal with this issue in respect to the debates over it. Using secondary sources it provides a comprehensive idea for ensuring quality in a qualitative research.

Keywords: Method, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Quality, Validity, Reliability, Ethics, Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12959/issn.1855-0541.IIASS-2015-no1-art09>

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh. Email: chowdhia@myumanitoba.ca

Introduction

The issues of quality in a qualitative research cannot be addressed by a single or constant method. It, however, may be judged through various perspectives such as “credibility,” “dependability,” “confirmability,” “ethics” and so forth. In a qualitative research, researchers often engage with flexible realities where the subjective views of respondents may shape the research frame and the whole process of an inquiry (Creswell 1994:5). As a result, creation and recreation of multiple realities may be frequent based on the field situations where researchers may not come up with a quality research outcome by only using a single, predetermined way. Moreover, qualitative research “carries its meaning in its entire text” where the conventional ways of ensuring quality may not be sufficient. So, to make sure of a successful and sensible qualitative social research, researchers may follow multiple criteria of quality in their work (Richardson 2008:474).

The question of quality in a qualitative research, which often depends on the emerging methods of inquiry, is different from the question of quality in a quantitative research, which stands for conventional pre-structured methods of inquiry (Cook 1983:78). For example, “trustworthiness” is usually considered as an influential criterion of the quality of a social research, where quantitative inquiries assess it with the help of “validity,” “reliability,” “generalizability,” and “objectivity” and advocate for predetermined methods for social researches as well (Marshall & Rossman 2011:19; Lincoln & Guba 1985: 289-331). Contrary, the inherent characteristics of a qualitative research are different from quantitative one (Holloway & Wheeler 1996:172; Emden et. al. 2001:205). In a qualitative research, researchers often use “credibility,” “reliability,” “transferability,” and “confirmability” as the criteria of “trustworthiness” (Lincoln & Guba 1985:289-331) and use multiple methods to ascertain it. Besides, the qualitative paradigm contains the values of appreciation, aesthetics, ethics, humanity, and morality and usually suggests different methods to produce a quality research (Clifford & Murcus 1986, cited in Richardson 2008:475). Moreover, qualitative research is adaptable to multiple realities and is also more open to multiple shaping of research methods (Lincoln & Guba 1985:40). Hence, the aspects of quality in a qualitative research cannot be addressed in the similar ways it is incorporated in a quantitative research.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, the ethical questions are also important attributes to evaluate the quality of a research. In a qualitative social inquiry, researchers often involve with the respondents’ activities and thus their values and emotions may affect the outcomes of the

research (Fine 1993:281). Likewise, researchers may face unintended consequences during fieldwork which may not be solved by the pre-given guidelines of ethical committees (Guillemin & Gillam 2004:261-263; Haggerty 2004:393). In such a situation, ethical consideration may substantiate the quality of a social inquiry.

Beyond these concerns, additional issues, such as “triangulation” and “crystallization,” choosing appropriate data collection method(s), ways of data analysis, and processes of writing qualitative notes may be considered to be significant aspects of judging quality in qualitative research (Goffman 1989:131; Richardson 2008:473-495).

This paper focuses on the matter that quality of qualitative research may be ensured through the combination of multiple criteria. For this reason, the analysis is divided into six parts. The first section conceptualizes the notion of ‘quality in a qualitative research’. Debates over “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability” in the context of a quality social research is discussed in the section two. The third section focuses on the importance of ethical issues to judge the quality of a qualitative inquiry. Issues related to “triangulation” and “crystallization” are illustrated in the fourth section. The fifth section covers data collection and data analysis methods in respect to the production of a quality research. The last section conveys the author’s reflection and conclusion.

Conceptualization of the Term ‘Quality in a Qualitative Research’

What is meant by “quality” in view of qualitative research? How can quality of a qualitative research be judged? In which ways can a quality research be produced? These issues depend on the clarification of the term ‘quality’ in respect to qualitative research. So, before proceeding to the main issues, the term ‘quality in qualitative research’ needs to be conceptualized.

As discussed earlier, researchers may not be able to identify specific criteria to measure quality in qualitative research because they often depended on the conventional positivistic paradigm (which emphasize on the application of the methods of natural science in the fields of social sciences) which emphasized on “validity,” “reliability,” “generalizability,” and “objectivity” as the standards of ensuring quality in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman 2011:41; Richardson 2008:475; Lincoln & Guba 1985:289-331). However, the conventional principles seem to be insufficient to provide adequate standards for a quality inquiry in the field of a qualitative research as qualitative study deals with multiple realities. In such a situation, researchers needed to explore the realities

with full of confidence as it relies on the interpretation of informants (Creswell 1994:5-6). So, the conventional fixed criteria of judging quality may not be effective in qualitative inquiry. Recently, researchers emphasize on the “trustworthiness” as a determinant of the quality research (Marshall & Rossman 2011:39-41). Besides, they advocate for “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability” for “trustworthiness” of a research work. The pioneers of the qualitative paradigm also propose ethical issues as the prerequisites of this endeavor.

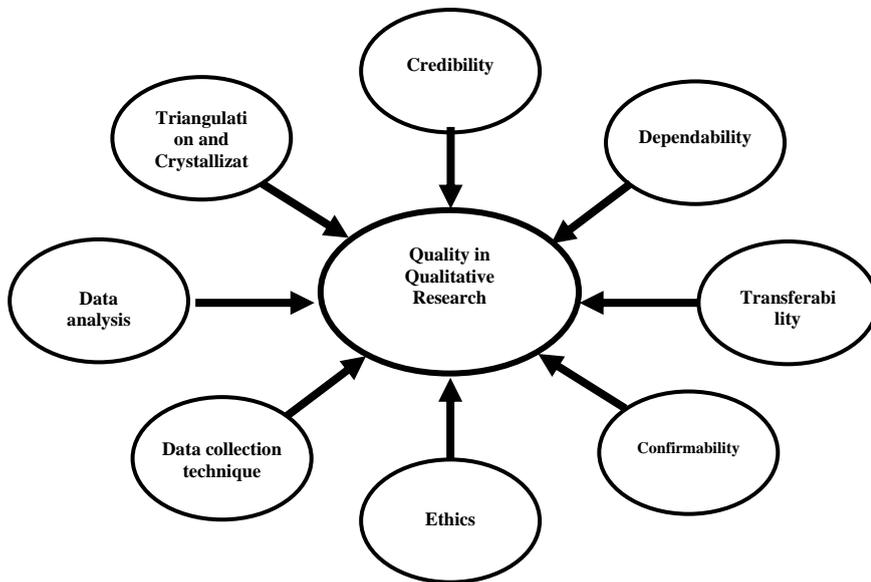
Besides these dominant criteria, researchers may also include dimensions of “triangulation” such as, “methodological triangulation” and “theoretical triangulation” for producing a quality project. Richardson (2008) advocates for “crystallization” instead of “triangulation”. Similarly, the quality of the techniques employed in qualitative research for collecting and analyzing data may be regarded as the facilitators of a quality project. Moreover, the mode of qualitative writing might also matter for the quality of a qualitative research. Lastly, there are other criteria in qualitative research which are different from the criteria of quality of quantitative social research. For example, Creswell and Miller (2000, cited in Marshall & Rossman 2011:40) provide lists of items to ensure quality of a qualitative research. These are:

- Triangulation;
- Searching for disconfirming evidence;
- Engaging in reflexivity;
- Member checking;
- Prolonged engagement in the field
- Collaboration;
- Developing; and
- Audit trail Peer debriefing.

Apart from these above mentioned aspects, Maxwell (1996:92-98) explains eight items to define the quality of a qualitative social inquiry. Moreover, researchers need to consider multifaceted ethical issues emerged during the fieldworks which may be incongruent with the predetermined rules.

Based on the above discussion, this paper, therefore, conceptualizes the term ‘quality’ from multiple dimensions. In this regard, it concentrates on the following model related to the issue “quality in qualitative research”:

Figure 1: Quality in Qualitative Research



From the above figure, the term ‘quality’ can be conceptualized clearly where quality of a qualitative research depends on the multiple aspects such as, credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, triangulation, data collection technique(s), data analysis procedures, and ethical issues. The quality of combined issues, mentioned above, reflects the overall quality of a qualitative research and this overall quality is considered to be the quality measures of a qualitative research. Due to the dependent on more than one issue, the quality of a qualitative research may be fluid and vary in degrees. It is expected that this conceptualization would provide a break from the conventional fixed criteria and provide a new criterion—a new way of thinking— for quality issues in a qualitative research. Moreover, this conceptual model can also be used to validate the quality of a qualitative writing which is regarded as “intertextuality” (Richardson 2008:478-479).

The issues of Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability

The quality of a social research necessitates “truth value,” “applicability,” “consistency,” and “neutrality”. These issues are identified as the indicator of “trustworthiness” of a research, and in a qualitative research, these are known as “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability” in the place of “internal validity,” “external validity/generalizability,” “reliability,” and “objectivity” used in the quantitative research. As these characteristics are believed to be a widely accepted

ways of assessing quality of qualitative social inquiry, the debates over these issues are discussed in this paper.

To ensure the quality of a social research, the techniques offered by quantitative paradigm such as validity (internal and external), reliability, and objectivity may not be applicable in the field of a qualitative social research (Marshall & Rossman 2011:41; Lincoln and Guba 1985:289-331). Researchers in the qualitative research often deal with naturalistic fields where different techniques of data collection may need to be followed. In such a situation, their values may affect the whole research process. Similarly, respondents could also affect the research findings. As a result, qualitative research may lack clearly defined quality measures. According to Hammersley (2007),

“There is a sharp conflict between the demands for explicit criteria, for example in order to serve systematic reviewing and evidence-based practice, and arguments on the part of some qualitative researchers that such criteria [advocated by quantitative researchers] are neither necessary nor desirable” (p. 287).

Hence, a dearth of knowledge may arise in the way of judging the quality of a qualitative research through the techniques of quantitative social researches. So, the issue of quality in qualitative research is debating due to the disconformities over the ways of addressing it.

The application of quantitative techniques, which deal with threats to the “validity” and “reliability” of data, started since 1986 (Munhall & Oiler: 1996:273), in the qualitative fields of inquiry may bring about incompatibility in the world of knowledge. Likewise, The influence of “mechanistic scientism and quantitative research” tradition may be inappropriate in the qualitative field of inquiries because it undercut the dynamic and creative process of qualitative research (Richardson 2008:474). The qualitative paradigm does not use the term validity and reliability to assess its quality (Holloway & Wheeler 1996:169). Lincoln and Guba (1985: 288) in their thought provoking writing, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, express contradictory attitude to the positivist paradigm and propose alternative of the concepts of “internal validity,” “external validity,” “reliability,” and “objectivity” as “credibility,” “transferability,” “reliability,” and “confirmability”. These standards are widely used to assess the “trustworthiness” of qualitative research. Moreover, these criteria of “trustworthiness” have been cited extensively in many other fields, such as nursing, midwifery, and education, where qualitative inquiry is considered to be an ideal way of research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also give their argument that, these alternative criteria “have become the ‘gold standard’ for determining quality in qualitative research, in much the same way that the randomized controlled trial is

the gold standard for quantitative research” (Emden et. al 2001:205). These facets can be presented in the following table:

Table 1: Aspect of “Trustworthiness (Quantitative vs. Qualitative)

Aspect	Scientific term (Quantitative)	Naturalistic term (Qualitative)
Truth value	Internal validity	Credibility
Applicability	External validity or generalizability	Transferability
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability

Source: Guba (1981:80)

In a quantitative research, validity is commonly used for assessing quality. According to Nachmias & Nachmias (2008),

“Validity is concerned with the question “Am I measuring what I intend to measure?”...to answer such question researcher must provide supporting evidence that a measuring instrument does, in fact, measure the variable that it appears to be measuring” (P. 149).

They also divide validity as “content validity,” “face validity,” “empirical validity,” “predicted validity,” “construct validity,” and “empirical validity” (Nachmias and Nachmias 2008:149-153). Beyond these divisions, the controversy comes in case of “internal validity” and “external validity” which assess the “trustworthiness” of a research.

Internal validity can be procedural, methodological, and interpretive which indicates the extent to which “the study measures or tests what is actually intended” (Shanton 2004:64). But in a qualitative researcher an alternative measurement, “credibility,” is followed instead of “internal validity”. It is the accuracy of research findings where investigators attempt to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented (Shanton 2004:63). Guba (1981:84-86) mentions several procedures, such as “prolonged engagement at the site,” “persistent observation,” “peer debriefing,” “triangulation,” etc to confirm the “credibility” of a research.

Besides, “external validity/generalizability” may not have direct application in the qualitative research which means relevance, auditability and contextual detail of a research study. In respect to

qualitative inquiry, “transferability” is considered for evaluating the applicability of a research in the place of “external validity”. It can be defined as, *“they provide sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork for a reader to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting”* (Shanton 2004:63).

Here, both “credibility” and “transferability” are required for the quality measurement of qualitative researcher.

Like “validity,” researchers need to ensure “reliability” of a research project to insure its quality. *““Reliability” indicates replication, consistency, and auditability of the findings of an inquiry. It can be defined as [Reliability] refers to the extent to which a measuring instrument contains variable errors, that is, errors that appear inconsistently between observations either during any one measurement procedure or each time given a variable is measured by the same instrument. For example, if you measure the length of a desk at two points in time with the same instrument- say, a ruler- and get slightly different result, the instrument produces variable errors.”* (Nachmias and Nachmias 2008:154).

In a quantitative research, “test-retest method,” “parallel-forms technique,” and “split-half method” are widely used to assess reliability. (Nachmias and Nachmias 2008:155-156). In qualitative research, “reliability” is used as a synonymous word “dependability” which is considered to be difficult to measure in a qualitative research where researchers need to facilitate a future investigation to get the consistency of their study (Shanton 2004:63). According to Shanton (2004:71), “if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained.” In this case, “overlap methods- stepwise replication,” “establishing an audit trail,” and “arrange for a dependability audit” are usually followed to be sure about “dependability” of qualitative research (Guba 1981:87).

Furthermore, another aspect related to the quality of social researches is “objectivity” which refers to neutrality, value free, auditability and reflexivity of a research work. Shanton (2004:72) explains “pattern associates with objectivity in science with the use of instruments that are not dependent on human skills and perception.” However, this aspect may not be employed in qualitative research where researchers’ personal traits may have the chances of involving with the whole research process. In that case, an alternative concept, “confirmability,”

may be used in qualitative social inquiries where “researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not [from] their predisposition” (Shanton 2004:63). In the same line, Guba (1981:87) explains “interpretational confirmability” and provides three criteria to assess it (confirmability). These are: 1) triangulation; 2) practicing reflexivity; and 3) arrange for a confirmability audit.

The aspects of “trustworthiness” of a qualitative research are presented in the following table

Table 2: “Provisions that May be Established by a Qualitative Researcher Wishing to Address Guba’s Four Criteria for Trustworthiness”

Quality criterion	Possible provision made by the researcher
Credibility	Adoption of appropriate, well recognized research methods; Development of early familiarity with culture of participating establishments; Random sampling of individuals serving as informants; Triangulation via use of different methods, different types of informants and different sites; Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants; Iterative questioning in data collection dialogues; Negative case analysis; Debriefing sessions between researcher and superiors; Peer scrutiny of project; Use of “reflective commentary”; Description of background, qualifications and experience of the researcher; Member checks of data collected and interpretations/theories formed; Thick description of phenomenon under scrutiny; and Examination of previous research to frame findings;
Transferability	Provision of background data to establish context of study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made.
Dependability	Employment of “overlapping methods”; and In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated.
Confirmability	Triangulation to reduce effect of investigator bias; Admission of researcher’s beliefs and assumptions; Recognition of shortcomings in study’s methods and their potential effects; In-depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinized; and Use of diagrams to demonstrate “audit trail”.

Source: Shenton (2004:73)

Besides above mentioned criteria, Burns and Grove (1993) propose five standards of the quality of qualitative research such as, “descriptive vividness,” “methodological congruence,” “analytical preciseness,”

“theoretical connectedness,” and “heuristic relevance”. Besides, Munhall (1994) in her writing, *Revisioning Phenomenology: Nursing and Health Science Research*, gives ten criteria for measuring the “trustworthiness” of qualitative research. These are, “phenomenological nod,” “reasonableness,” “representativeness,” “recognizability,” “raised consciousness,” “readability,” “relevance,” “revelations,” and “responsibility.” Drawing the explanation of the Lincoln and Guba (1985), Leininger (1994) also proposes six criteria for quality in a qualitative social inquiry such as, “credibility,” “confirmability,” “meaning-in-context,” “recurrent patterning,” “saturation,” and “transferability.”

In a nutshell, quality of a qualitative research may depend on the “soundness” of the research process, “well-foundedness” of the research techniques, “goodness” of research information, and “worthiness” of the whole aspect of research. Along other well discussed criteria, these dimensions also determine the “trustworthiness” which is standard for determining quality in qualitative research (Emden 2001:205). Regarding the “trustworthiness” of a research work, there is a debate based on the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. In quantitative paradigms, “validity (external and internal),” “reliability,” and “objectivity” are considered to be the criteria of “trustworthiness”. On the other hand, qualitative researchers deny applying these criteria for measuring “trustworthiness” in qualitative researches. They advocate for alternative criteria such as, “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability”. Researchers such as, Lincoln and Guba, Shenton and others discuss the different processes of analyzing these criteria. Besides, randomized controlled trial is also proposed to be a criterion for “trustworthiness” of qualitative research. So, “trustworthiness” may be an essential part of the quality of qualitative research.

Ethical Issues in a Quality Research

To what extent ethics can be used to ascertain quality of a qualitative social inquiry? How can the debates over multidimensional ethical issues be examined to collect sufficient and accurate information and to produce a quality research? These questions are considerably relevant to the issue of this paper. Therefore, it focuses on the ethical issues in aspect of a qualitative research. An authentic research requires ethical consideration because researchers need to “get into the field” and collect sufficient data (Goffman 1989:126-130). More specifically, in order to maintain integrity and validity of a research, ethical issues need to be considered.

Davides and Dodd (2002:281) conceptualize “ethical issues” as, “ethics are more than a set of principles of abstract rules that sit as an

overarching entity guiding our research.” At the time of conducting research, researchers need to be faithful to social justice and moral principles and should show respect to the person and do justice to informed consent (Marshall and Rossman 2011:44). In such a situation, ethical issues may be useful to protect the right and dignity of participants. Thus, throughout the endeavor of qualitative research, researchers maintain privacy, anonymity, and right of participants which guarantee no harm to them. To Nachmias and Nachmias (2008:73-79), informed consent (competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension); privacy (sensitivity of data, setting being observed, and dissemination of information); anonymity; and confidentiality (deleting of identity, crude report categories, and micro aggregation) are the primary facets of research ethics.

In respect to the ontology of a qualitative research, “reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in a study” where researchers need to understand the contexts of every action (Creswell 1994:4). In such a situation, ethics are in prime. Sometimes, in a social study, researchers may dehumanize informants by misleading, evading, and lying and sometimes they might be dehumanized by the participants. Researchers, therefore, consider ethics to deal with participants. Furthermore, in a particular research, subjects may deserve the right to know what they are getting themselves into the research process (Fine 1993: 270-271). Here, researchers maintain ethics through which they get guidelines to deal with the issues. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Fine 1993:274), researchers might not be sure about the subjects in qualitative inquiries. Therefore, they should not pollute research situation during the investigation.

The epistemological assumptions of a qualitative research also reveal that, “[a] researcher interacts with that being researched” where multifaceted external and internal forces may treat the code of ethics of a social research (Creswell 1994:4). To get detailed explanation of social realities, analyses of the data collected by qualitative field investigations are essential. Thus, priority needs to be given to research ethics. Likewise, public and government concerns in aspect of privacy protection, change in disciplines and the emergence of new research entrepreneurs may influence the application of ethical codes in the contemporary social researches. Overall, in order to ensure ethics in a research, privacy and confidentiality are important (Hoonard 2006:262).

Researches in a social research start with institutional ethical guidelines approved by an ethical committee of the respective institution, to name a few Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Review Ethics Board (REB).

These committees suggest principles related to harm, consent, and anonymity of research subject and mandate guidelines to adequately deal with informed consent, confidentiality, right to privacy, deception, and protecting human subject from harm (Ellis 2007:4; Swauger 2011:489). Now-a-days, 'discipline-specific codes of conduct' and 'the professional standing of research scientist' govern the ethical status in the field situations (Haggerty 2004:393). But, during the fieldwork, researchers may not be able to follow the guidelines of ethical committees because some ethical questions related to the actual field situation may arise during the research process which may not be congruent with the instruction of the ethics committee. Such types of ethics may be identified as "ethics in practice" (Guillemin and Gillam 2004:261-263; Gonzalez-Lopez 2011:450). Ellis (2007:6) discusses the 'relational ethics' involved with research studies. Similarly, Gonzalez-Lopez (2011:447-461) develops an ethical viewpoint, "mindful ethics" where researchers should be conscious and alert to the emotional, physical, and political safety and wellbeing of people participating in the inquiry. In addition, Cutcliffe and Ramcharan (2002:1000-1008) explain "ethics-as-process" where they emphasize on balancing of harm and benefits of individual participants. Along the same line, Swauger (2011:497-501) discusses the "ethics in representation" and "ethics in process". These aspects may not be considered earlier by the ethical committee at the time of issuing guidelines to deal with ethical issues during fieldwork.

Furthermore, researches involved with human participants, more likely undergo tensions related to ethical issues. They, therefore, need to be careful about the code of ethics related to qualitative research (Guillemin and Gillman 2004:271). During a field work when researchers go to the field setting, stay with research subjects, become close to them, build up rapport, and develop intimate relationships with them to collect necessary data. What should be their ultimate course of actions if any unexpected incidence occurs? What ethical consideration may researchers follow in respect to intimate relationships with participants? Also, in a real field work, researchers can face some unforeseen situations where existing guidelines of ethical committees may not provide sufficient directions (Haggerty 2004:393).

It is widely agreed that sometimes the results of a qualitative research might be confusing as most of the methods of it are related to the human beings. As a result, possibilities of discrepancy with the guidelines provided by ethical committees are very likely. What occurs when the approved guidelines are not congruent with the actual field situation? How could informed consent be obtained? Moreover, some cases

require ongoing consent because after giving consent participants may be reluctant to provide information. What should a researcher do then? Is simple consent insufficient? In each attempt, research findings may be confused with the crude and unethical initiatives. In respect to the discussed issues, tensions may escalate with the increasing complexities of the social milieu.

The oscillation in aspect of the association between guidelines provided by the formal ethical committees and practical process of dealing with it may cause complexities during data collection. Ethical issues, therefore, become a part and parcel of qualitative inquiries in this situation. Besides, in the majority cases, a qualitative research involves with human subjects. So, it may be useful for researchers to conduct their research within general ethical goals to ensure respect, protection from harm, and prevention of embarrassing exposure of the participants (Swauger 2011:489). Equally, qualitative researches deal with participants' life activities and explain the reality from the respondents' point of view. In such a case, without proper ethical guidelines, research findings may provide a false account of the social universe. Thus, the ethical issues are worthwhile in qualitative social inquiry.

According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004:261), tensions related to the ethical issues are part of a research work, more specifically in the qualitative social inquiries. In a fieldwork, when the existing framework does not fit with the actual social situations and when participants' interest get priority and their security needs to be ensured, ethics may pave the ways in such a situation. Researchers should be concerned about ethical issues which may be related to research background, procedures, methods, kind of respondents, and types of data. Nachmias and Nachmias (2008:69) express a similar persuasion, "the sole objective of the research is to contribute to the development of systematic and verifiable knowledge"; in such a position, ethics are matters for a sound and unique qualitative research.

Tensions over ethical issues in a field research may be seen also in the contemporary qualitative inquiries. As the present society has become more complex than the previous one, researchers may face multiple intricacies in dealing with the social reality which cannot be overcome simply by using the guidelines of the ethics committee. Under such circumstances, they may consider different types of ethics namely, "ethics in practice", "relational ethics", "mindful ethics", and "ethics-as-process". According to Brinkman (2007, cited in Swauger, 2011:501), ethical situations cannot be codified or summarized within a universal pattern. In such a situation, they can apply their own expertise and past

experiences in addressing ethical issues in a more appropriate manner. They can also consider both the guidelines of the ethical committees and their own efficiencies obtained from past examples in prolonged, in-depth, intimate, and/or frequent contact with the research participants (Linclon & Guba, 1985, cited in Cutcliffe and Ramcharan, 2002:1005). Likewise, researches need to be disciplined so that it can balance between participants' potential risk and benefits (Cutcliffe and Ramcharan 2002:1008). Moreover, the relationship should be explicit about the purpose and value of the researchers.

In short, a quality social research requires appropriate, ethically sound, and morally strong procedures where ethical issues are important. Although, institutional ethical committee(s) approves guidelines to meet the demand of ethics, in actual field research these directions may not be sufficient as researchers deal with a complex social environments. In such situations, researchers follow various types of ethics such as, "relational ethics," "mindful ethics," etc. Hence, fitting appropriate ethical aspect may ensure the quality of a qualitative social inquiry.

Data Collection and Analysis Technique (s)

Besides the "trustworthiness" and "ethical issues," the qualitative paradigm proposes diversified ways of collecting data from the very field of society and also of the processes of analyzing data. The natures of a qualitative research vary from quantitative research in respect to "epistemology," "ontology," "axiology," and "methodology" (Creswell 1994:5). Hence, similar techniques may not be useful in both areas to collect and analyze data. According to Richardson (2008:474), in a qualitative researcher, researchers commonly speak of the importance of individual researcher's skill and aptitudes. In such a situation, several issues can be considered to identify data collection and analysis techniques as the parts of a quality social inquiry. These are: 1) what new and different techniques can be employed in qualitative social inquiries than quantitative research to identify the quality of qualitative research? 2) how can qualitative data be analyzed? 3) to what extent can the quality of qualitative data be ensured to come up with a quality research project? This section concentrates on these issues.

The authentication of data collection techniques and the appropriate ways of analyzing data may substantiate the process of ensuring quality of a qualitative researcher. In each and every step, efficiency of researchers cannot be ignored because, "the more honed the researcher, the better the possibility of excellent research" (Richardson 2008:474). According to Danzin & Linclon (2000:18), qualitative research, as "a moment of discovery and rediscovery; a new way of

looking, interpreting, arguing, and writing,” is debated issue. In such a situation, “knowledge of the truth” may be easy and error might be “virtually impossible” if one adopts the precise language about moral and social consequences” in data collection and data analysis (Clifford & Marcus 1986, cited in Richardson 2008:475).

In collecting qualitative data, researchers usually used “participant observation” “in-depth interview,” “ethnographic method,” “phenomenological interview,” “focus-group interview,” “life history method,” “narrative inquiry,” “digital story telling,” “interviewing elites,” “case study,” and “historical method” (Marshall & Rossman 2011:140-155; Pink 2008:177-178; Flyvbjerg 2006:220; Squire 2005:92-106; Nunkoosing 2005:690-692; Foley 2002:469-488; Ellis 1999:673-674; Griffin 1993:1096-1099; Goffman 1989:125-130; Gilliat-Roy 2011:470-484). Among these techniques which one can be more applicable? This query may not have a satisfactory answer. As the nature of qualitative data are different, such as “structured text” (writings, reports, survey comments, news articles, books etc.); “unstructured text” (transcription, interviews, focus groups, conversation); “audio recordings,” music; “video recordings” (graphics, graphics, photographs, visuals) etc. Each sort of data may require technique(s). Likewise, research topic, overall design of research, nature of the field, and, more importantly, characteristics of respondents can be considered during the selection of appropriate technique(s) for collecting data. That is, the nature of research may indicate the appropriate technique(s) for collecting data to ensure the quality of a qualitative social research.

Likewise, researchers may face difficulties to analyze data collected in a qualitative fieldwork. In this respect, qualitative researches also differ from quantitative one. Because, quantitative researches generally follow fixed processes basing on the distinct epistemological, ontological, rhetorical, axiological, and methodological positions (Creswell 1994:5-6) and hence keeps belief on the “objective, accurate, unambiguous, noncontextual, and nonmetaphoric” aspects (Richardson 2008:475). The application of quantitative data collection techniques in a qualitative research may not bear positive results; instead, it may create unintended consequences in qualitative inquiry. Researchers usually follow several distinct techniques to analyze data in qualitative researches, such as “thematic analysis,” “content analysis,” “narrative analysis,” “discourse analysis,” “grounded theory approach” etc. (Braun & Clarke 2006:78-105; Burck 2005:244-256; Taylor-Powel & Renner 2003:1-6; Neuendorf 2002:1-23). Through the application of one or more techniques, researchers try to provide a holistic explanation of qualitative data to maintain its quality.

Moreover, data collection and analysis technique(s) are expressed in the quality writing of a qualitative research because qualitative data/text is highly complex and merely skilful writing may do justice to this. Likewise, the contributions of qualitative writings may depend on the ability of successful balancing between the interpretation of repondents views and the real field situation. In this line, it may be necessary for qualitative researchers to be able to use an assortment of stylistic devices. In qualitative research, reflexivity is usually considered to be an important aspect of collecting and analysing qualitative data. This is also included in the quality criteria of a qualitative social research (Guillemin & Gillam 2004:273-277). Guillemin & Gillam (2004) also suggest three ways of applying reflexive skills in the practice of qualitative research: 1) "writing self critical account", 2) "maintaining a field diary", 3) "reflecting on writing style".

In brief, qualitative and quantitative researches follow different sets of data collection and data analyzing technique. To put the quality in the centre, qualitative researchers propose multifaceted data collection techniques, such as "participant observation," "in-depth interview," "ethnographic method," "phenomenological interview," "focus-group interview," "life history method," "narrative inquiry" etc. Besides, several techniques are also considered to analyze the collected data in a qualitative research project, to name a few, "thematic analysis," "content analysis," "narrative analysis," "discourse analysis," "grounded theory approach" etc. Along with other indicators of the quality of qualitative research, these techniques may also be helpful. In a qualitative research, writing style may effects the quality of the project where skillful application of reflexivity can substantiate the initiative of ensuring quality of qualitative research. So, the quality of qualitative research may explain by the nature and applicability of the techniques used to collect and analyze qualitative data.

Triangulation and Crystallization

Triangulation and crystallization may not have the direct bearing of the quality assessment of a qualitative research. Both are often considered to claim validity of data and data analyses. As the collected data and analyses of them have considerable significance in ensuring quality of qualitative research, the issues, triangulation and crystallization, have been considered in this paper. There is a debate over triangulating the methods. Denzin and other propose "triangulation" (Creswell 1994:174) but, Richardson and other emphasis "crystallization or inter-textuality" in the place of it (Richardson 2008:478). Researches use "combination of methodologies in the study of same phenomenon" (Silverman 2010:63;

Creswell 1994:174) which is known as “triangulation”. According to Creswell (1994),

“The concept triangulation was based on the assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods...a combined method study is one in which the researcher uses multiple methods of data collection and analysis. These methods might be drawn from “within methods” approaches, [from one paradigm] ... [or] alternatively “between methods” drawn on qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures (e. g. a survey and in-depth interview)” (p. 174).

Triangulation may also be used to assess “credibility” and “transferability” of a qualitative research (Shanton 2004:65; Guba 1981:84, 87). Moreover, it might be used in validating the research data (Goffman 1989:131). Above all, in a qualitative research “triangulation” generally confirms the authenticity of research data and findings. On the contrary, in the post-structuralist era, researchers may not rely on the “triangulation” which depends on two or more methods. In that case, they advocate for “crystallization” or “inter-textuality” (Richardson 2008:478) where the authenticity of a text or analysis is verified by several other texts written about the same subjects. This process of “inter-textuality” is an alternative way of validity claim may apply in a qualitative research.

In summary, in the case of quality issues of qualitative researches, “triangulation” and/or “crystallization” may not have direct connection; rather these techniques may be used to validate data in a qualitative research. Besides, it may also give the guarantee of a valid qualitative text constructed through data analysis in a research project where authenticity of data, analysis, and text are considered to be the important determinants of the quality of a qualitative research.

Author’s Reflection and Conclusion

The paper deals with the central issue, how quality of a qualitative research can be ensured and argues that quality of a qualitative research may be addressed through a combination of several techniques. It discusses the issues related to the quality of a qualitative research separately and also compares the important aspects of qualitative and quantitative researches. In qualitative research, different issues have different aims regarding the issues of quality where no one can ascertain the overall quality of a qualitative project. In such a

situation, the quality of the different issues together can ensure the overall quality of a qualitative research.

In a qualitative research, “trustworthiness” is often considered to be an important criterion of quality which depends on other criteria such as, “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability”. These fourfold criteria are used to ensure “truth value,” “applicability,” “consistency,” and “value neutrality” and thus “trustworthiness” of a qualitative social research. Beyond these frequently used criteria, many other techniques such as, “phenomenological nod,” “recognizability,” “readability,” “relevance,” and “revelations” etc. are also used to explain the quality of a qualitative research.

Equally, in a qualitative fieldwork, researchers may face complexities at the time of dealing with fluid social environment constructed by human subjects. In the practical format, researchers are given guidelines by the formal ethics board which may not be sufficient in aspect of actual field situation. At that time, researchers may consider different other ethical issues, such as “ethics in the process,” “relational ethics,” “mindful ethics,” “ethics as a process” etc.

Besides, the quality of a quality research may be ensured if the quality of the techniques of data collection and analyses can be ensured. Various types of qualitative data are collected through various data collection techniques, such as “participant observation,” “in-depth interview,” “ethnographic method,” “focus-group interview,” “life history method,” “narrative inquiry” “case study,” etc. Besides, qualitative researchers follow different ways to analyze qualitative data, for example “thematic analysis,” “content analysis,” “narrative analysis,” “discourse analysis,” “grounded theory approach” etc. So, the quality of the techniques of collecting and analyzing qualitative data may substantiate the overall quality of a qualitative research.

As mentioned earlier, triangulation and crystallization have no direct impact on the quality issues of a qualitative research. Both methods are used to assure the authenticity of data, accuracy of the qualitative analysis, and also “trustworthiness” of a research. In this way, these two methods substantiate the issues of quality in qualitative research.

Generally, qualitative research involves with five points: 1) “studying the meaning of people’s lives, under real-world conditions;” 2) “representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study;” 3) “covering the contextual conditions within which people live;” 4) “contributing insights into or emerging concepts that may help to *explain* human social

behavior;” and 5) “striving to use *multiple sources of evidence* rather than relying on a single source alone” (Yin 2011:7-8). As a result, no single measure can be appropriate in addressing the issues of quality in a qualitative research. Because, by utilizing a single criteria we may make a partial assessment of the outcomes, but to draw a complete picture of the aspect of quality combination of multiple criteria are needed. Besides, qualitative researches need to adopt different criteria that quantitative researches to deal with qualitative issues and this distinct criteria should be formed based on the core subjects, such as “credibility,” “transferability,” “reliability,” “confirmability,” “ethical issues,” “issues related to data collection and analysis,” and “triangulation and crystallization issues”. In this way, more acceptable criteria for addressing quality issues of a qualitative research can be developed.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Burck, C. (2005). Comparing Qualitative Research Methodologies for Systemic Research: the Use of Grounded Theory, Aiscourse Analysis and Aarrative Analysis. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 27(3), 237–262.
- Burns, N., & Groves, S. K. (1993). *The practice of nursing research: conduct, critique and utilisation*. Philadelphia: Saunders.
- Cook, T. (1983). Quasi-experimentation: Its ontology, epistemology, and methodology. In G. Morgan (Ed.), *Beyond method: strategies for social research* (pp. 78-88). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Cutcliffe, J. R., & Ramcharan, P. (2002). Leveling the Playing Field? Exploring the Merits of the Ethics-as-Process Approach for Judging Qualitative Research Proposals. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(7), 1000-1010.
- Davides, D., & dodd, J. (2002). Qualitative Research and the Question of Rigor. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(2), 279-289.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ellis, E. (2007). Telling Secrets, Revealing Liver: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(3), 3-29.
- Emden, C., Hancock, H., Schubert, S., & Darbyshire, P. (2001). A web of intrigue: the search for quality in qualitative research. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 1(4), 204-211.

- Fine, G. A. (1993). Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22(3), 267-294.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Foley, D. E. (2002). Critical Ethnography: the Reflexive Turn. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(4), 469-490.
- Gilliat-Ray, S. (2011). "Being there" the experience of shadowing a British Muslim Hospital Chaplain. *Qualitative Research*, 11(5), 469-486.
- Goffman, E. (1989). On Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18(2), 123-132.
- Gonzalez-Lopez, G. (2011). Mindful Ethics: Comments on Informant-Centered Practices in Sociological Research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 34(3), 447-461.
- Griffin, L. J. (1993). Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis, and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(5), 1094-1133.
- Guba, E. (1981). Criteria for Assessing the Trustworthiness of Naturalistic Inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology*, 29(2), 75-91.
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261-280.
- Haggerty, K. D. (2004). Ethics Creep: Governing Social Science Research in the Name of Ethics. *Qualitative Sociology*, 27(4), 391-414.
- Hammersley, M. (2007). The issue of quality in qualitative research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 30(3), 287-305.
- Holloway, I., & Wheeler, S. (1996). *Qualitative research for nurses*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.
- Hoonard, W. C. V. D. (2006). New Angles and Tangles in the Ethics Review of Research. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 4(1), 261-274.
- Leininger, M. (1994). Evaluation criteria and critique of qualitative research studies. In M. J (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Marrium, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Munhall, P. (1994). *Revisioning phenomenology: nursing and health science research*. New York: National League for Nursing.
- Munhall, P. L., & Oiler, C. J. (1986). *Nursing research: a qualitative perspective*. Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Nachmias, C. F., & Nachmias, D. (2008). *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Nunokoosing, K. (2005). The Problems With Interviews. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(5), 698-706.
- Pink, S. (2008). An Urban Tour: The Sensory Sociality of Ethnographic Place-Making. *Ethnography*, 9(2), 175-196.
- Richardson, L. (2008). Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (3rd ed., pp. 474-499). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Losangeles: Sage.
- Squire, C. (2005). Reading Narratives. *Group Analysis*, 38(1), 91-107.
- Swauger, M. (2011). The Ethics of Risk, Power, and Representation. *Qualitative Sociology*, 34(3), 497-502.
- Tayllor-Powel, E., & Renner, M. (2003). Analyzing Qualitative Data. *Program Development and Evaluation*, 1-10.
- Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research From Start to Finish*. New York