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## The Qualitative Design and Challenges in Thesis Reporting: The Case of Graduate Students of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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### **Abstract:**

*Recent scholarly work and practice in students' career development and assessment plans appear to be fraught with many challenges. Contextualizing views in many encounters, the realization is that, many graduate students seem not to deepen their research skills using the qualitative designs, precisely for the appropriate writing reports. This paper therefore examines; the qualitative design and challenges in thesis reporting, the case of graduate students of the Faculty of Educational Foundations, University of Cape Coast. The paper sets tone to address issues emerging from the existential and experiential points of view where much epistemology from early career researchers is hoped to provide relevant information for reporting, effective monitoring and restructuring of research seminars for graduate students. Participants interviewed on this investigation were 20 graduate students and 5 supervisors of the Faculty of Educational Foundations, University of Cape Coast. Qualitative data using the thematic approach was the tool employed for the discursive analysis. Responses from the majority of graduate students indicated that, valid opinion was due to the phenomenal cultural setting of research which used to be more of quantitative rather than qualitative. It is recommended that, workshops and seminars must be organised to help students develop interest in qualitative methodology and skills for quality reporting.*

**Keywords:** Qualitative designs, paradigms, challenges, career development, epistemology

### 1. Introduction

Research work as scholarly practice among graduate students is very significant. How this is reported has pertinent questions. This is because of the culture of research and its underlying assumptions in various dimensions (Berg, 2001). Some countries and institutions have certain designs that they follow to generate scientific evidence. That is to say, scholarly practice in most cases appears to follow certain "traditions" that describes the pre-dominant nature of research in certain parts of the world. The idiosyncrasies of research knowledge are to bring about diversity where knowledge-based approaches are made more attractive, scientific with several discoveries. While some researchers advocate for quantitative or qualitative tradition, others have the view that the mixed approach is also appropriate and relevant in modern scientific research (Creswell & Plano, 2007). Whatever dimension research assumes, it is considered as very important provided the research methodology for a research problem meets the acceptable criteria and standards. Quiet recently, it appears research "tradition" such as the qualitative methodology seems not to stimulate purposeful actions among graduate students of the University of Cape Coast. The researcher notes from several seminars and workshops that qualitative research is rather a big challenge for most graduate students during reporting. Nevertheless, conducting qualitative research in the graduate schools also an integral part of being a scholar-practitioner with the skills, experience and credibility to establishing social realities (Campbell & Ballou, 1977). Unfortunately many research challenges for reporting from choosing research problem to findings remain unparalleled debate among many graduate scholars in academia. In my opinion about graduate students, there also seems to be considerable gap between students' understanding about qualitative research and what is expected of them during reporting. This work provides concise understanding of the challenges using the Foucauldian approach (Foucault, 1984) expressed through qualitative language in reflection to graduate students' scholarly behaviour, and the relationship between language and power of research reporting. The arguments raised also highlight how applications of discourse are produced. This work also attempts to illustrate understanding on how students view the research environment in different perspectives. Delving into this research (qualitative) orientation is not to oppose the use of quantitative designs but rather accounting for the responsibility of graduate students' career development in qualitative research. Kendall and Wickham (2012) steps in discussing Foucauldian procedures are seen as useful and relevant information in support of assertions raised. These steps include; 1. recognition of problem identification and statements that are organised in a systematic qualitative language. 2. How statements including theories are developed. 3. What can be said (written) and what cannot. 4. How spaces in new statements can establish relationship and can be created and 5. Making practices material and discursive at the same time. It is important to state that, adapting the Foucauldian procedures do not only consider its wider international reception but also how it suggests the use of appropriate language in qualitative research. The Foucauldian ideas also employ the use of

empirical concepts and the development of multidisciplinary synthesis (Cheek, 2004). Also to consider is the increasing interest in methodological positions and considerations about how to explore discourses, that is identifying the structures and the discursive practices (Gavin & Gary, 1999). These are big questions as to whether graduate students count on such experiences in scholarly practice. Two major questions are posed to guide the study.

### 1.1. Research Questions

- What are the challenges that graduate students face when using the qualitative methods to generate scientific evidence?
- To what extent do students apply the qualitative methods and methodology?

The study is to serve as reference source for graduate students, supervisors and academics of the University of Cape Coast. Also, it is to whip up interest of students, precisely for those pursuing their career paths in qualitative research.

### 1.2. What the Qualitative Design Means

Contextually, the qualitative design refers to the plans and procedures for the research that spans the decisions from broad and specific assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). The design also provides systematic approach to describe life experiences and give them meaning. This plan involves methodological strategies that provide the overall decision and which design should be used in the study of a topic. The selection of a qualitative research will depend on the nature of the research problem, personal experiences and what audiences would expect (Creswell, 2007). In this discussion seven major types of qualitative designs have been provided.

#### 1.2.1. Phenomenological Research Design

Phenomenological research design is experienced from the perspective of the individual. The purpose is to identify the ways perception influences and how people interact with what they encounter (Strauss & Cobin, 1990). It is also a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value, and one which sees behaviour as determined by the phenomenon of experience rather than by external objective and physically described reality (English & English, 1958). In phenomenology, there is the application of a combination of methods, such as conducting interviews, video elicitation, conversations, observations, focus meetings, visiting of places and events to understand the meaning of participant's own perspective. Interestingly, the methodological framework of this study is phenomenology which examines graduate students' experience in qualitative reporting.

#### 1.2.2. Ethnography

Ethnography is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies an intact or a typical cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational and interview data (Creswell, 2007). Although, ethnographic research is associated with anthropology and sociology, ethnographic methods have been used in a number of fields in Education including the study of computer human interactions. The research process is flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In ethnography, it is important for researchers to immerse themselves in the target participants' environment to understand the goals, cultures, challenges, motivations and themes that emerge.

#### 1.2.3. Narrative Research

Narrative research provides framework of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the analytical stage of the story, the narrative combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's composition in a collaborative narrative.

#### 1.2.4. A Case Study Research

A Case study research focuses on analysing a small number of events or conditions to help understand more complex issues within the context of real life. It is also a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth programme, event, activity, process or one or more individuals (Denzin, 2005). Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). There are different kinds of case studies. Exploratory case studies explore events where there may be no clear outcomes. Explanatory explains causal links in an event, and Descriptive describes the event. A wide variety of disciplines make extensive use of case studies. A case study can assume a multi-stage approach and can either incorporate the use of explanatory and descriptive in a study.

#### 1.2.5. In Grounded Theory

A Case study research the theory or explanation of behaviour derives from the data in a bottom-up fashion. That is, a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or inaction grounded in the views of participants (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Invariably, theory has to fit the facts. This process involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information to reflect primary characteristics of the design. The overlapping aspect is the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximise the similarities and the differences of information.

### 1.2.6. Historical Research

A Case study research explores the background and development pattern of the study subject. Results derived from the research offer insights into the present state and future possibilities for the subject (Hatch, 2002). The historical research approach has broad applicability for organizations striving to understand themselves. Steps for conducting historical research include; defining the problem, gathering information, forming research questions, organizing and verifying the information and drawing a conclusion.

### 1.2.7. Action Research

Action research is the process of attempting to solve a problem while trying to understand its forms. Cyclical in nature, action research alternates between planning, action and critical reflection in a spiral-fashion to zero in on a solution (Creswell, 2008). Organisations of all types and sizes use action research to improve their performance. For all designs, researchers need to examine which area is appropriate and suits a particular methodology. Identifying this creates room for the precise procedures. In some cases, the methodology may have multiple strategies and techniques that may call for the use of multiple methods. This indeed may depend on the type of research problem and methodology to suggest that, there is no hard and fast rule in qualitative methodology.

## **2. Why Qualitative Report Writing is a Challenge for Graduate Students**

For some critics, qualitative research is synonymous with gossiping (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This is because they view the process of engaging in and reporting about qualitative research as a "story telling" without any structure thereby lacking in reliability and validity (Creswell, 2007). That is, the researcher randomly selects some quotes and reports them as happening "everywhere." Issues such as trustworthiness, repeatability and confirmability of qualitative reports continue to pose challenges to researchers using this research paradigm (Freeman, DeMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). For example, Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) argue "The worth of any research endeavour is assessed by a variety of audiences..." (p.28).

In qualitative research, issues such as whether other readers of a qualitative report will find the accounts believable and the extent to which a reported phenomenon is widespread (generalizability) are all crucial in determining the trustworthiness of such a report (Cheek, 2004). It is therefore, important that readers find whatever is reported credible, trustworthy, a phenomenon that can happen in situations which are similar to the observed context. Doing so requires that the processes of engaging in qualitative research from conception of the study to reporting of the findings are made public (Anfara et al., 2002). Readers of any qualitative study should be able to find the findings and conclusions very consistent and accurate just as applies in the case of quantitative studies. Unfortunately, this process of making an obviously private (personal) project by graduate students' public (wider readership) is quite challenging. Anfara, et al. (2002) identified three challenges that confront graduate studies when conducting research namely; 1. the use of a popular song, "themes emerged", what does a student mean by themes emerge? 2. use of triangulation or member check in the design of the study, and 3. data collection procedure that is lack of inadequate information about the instruments used in collecting the data. What kinds of questions were posed? How many items were on the instrument? How were the items obtained, is it based on a priori construct or theory or what, etc.? These three observations highlighted by the authors deal with issues related to the "methodological rigour" and "analytical defensibility" of qualitative research. By rigour, Anfara, et al. (2002) refer to efforts made by a researcher to make the research process (method) and data analysis process public so that any reader can find the findings believable because sufficient evidence have been provided by the researcher to support various claims made. In the next section, I provide insights on the three observations made by Anfara, et al. and end with some thoughts on the way forward. Specifically, I focus on challenges graduate students face in terms of the rigour of their qualitative work.

### *2.1. Observation One: Themes Emerged*

In qualitative research, the main data is text (word, speech, pictures), that is, anything not quantified but qualitative in nature. The researcher has to analyse text in order to make meaning of the data obtained and arrive at some conclusions. Typically, the first process of analysing qualitative data involves an open coding (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005; Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, & Blinkhorn, 2011). This involves naming of events or actions in the data. By naming an event or action, a meaning is fixed to such an event or process allowing for the researcher to make comparisons with other texts in the data in terms of whether they can be classified under that name or not. Following the open coding, the researcher then looks for patterns (themes) by trying to cluster or categorize common codes.

Patterns can take the form of patterns of variables (similarities and differences among categories) and patterns of processes (involving connections in time and space within a context), (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The search for patterns should conform to some conceptual or empirical evidence, that is, you should not be sceptical about the patterns that are being obtained. Since these patterns are as a result of your own interpretation of the data, your interpretive lens (Harry et al., 2005) is important to ensure that they occur a number of times and at places that you expect to find it. Also, it is important to determine whether the pattern makes conceptual and contextual sense. For instance, if it is a pattern, then one would expect that anytime A happens, B should follow. Example, Is that the case? Is there a counterexample?

The third phase of analysis involves finding interrelationships between themes. This involves putting together or condensing related themes into big ideas. Clustering or developing of themes "can be seen as a process of moving to higher levels of abstraction" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.250). The key is to make sense of the central idea embedded in

the categories created after subsuming or clustering related codes into a common construct. The idea of finding interrelationships among constructs or themes is so that one can tell a coherent story which is empirically grounded and theoretically sound.

From the processes outlined, the question that arises whenever a student states that after coding his or her data themes emerged is what does it mean to emerge? Where were the themes hiding? What happened for the themes to suddenly emerge (Anfara, 2002)? Unfortunately, this cliché is pervasive in the work of most graduate students who engage in qualitative research. There is no record of the codes that were obtained and the number of codes that were obtained during analyses. Also, there is no definition of the various codes that are used to fix various actions or events in the data so that another person can, using the same definition to repeat the analytical process.

Following this initial challenge is the very opaque description for the second round of analysis, the clustering of codes based upon some patterns realized from the data. For instance, which codes were deemed to be related and therefore subsumed under a particular construct? How many categories were obtained following this process of data reduction? Where there are some codes that did not seem to fit under any category and what happened to such codes? Another issue that graduate students have to address and make explicit in reporting their work is how categories were obtained. Did the graduate student use priori constructs (deductive coding) as suggested from literature or they were obtained from the data (using a grounded theory approach, thus an inductive coding process)? In all these questions, it is important for the graduate student to make public, all the processes he or she undertook so that another person, given the same data set can analyse the data and arrive at the same codes, patterns, and themes. That is, is it possible for another person to arrive at the same construct that a student obtained using your definitions (or following your coding book). Simply put, is it possible for another coder to "replicate" your findings by following your code book or something different would result?

The challenge, therefore, for graduate students is the need to provide enough evidentiary warrant to convince the sceptic that he or she did not just pick and choose from the dataset quotes from interviews or texts that suit him or her. Erickson (1986) identified five major types of evidentiary inadequacy; 1. inadequate amounts of evidence --- providing a thin data to support an argument or a warrant, 2. inadequate variety in kinds of evidence ---for instance, are all the evidence coming from a single person or from a single data source or the multiple, confirming sources? 3. faulty interpretive status of evidence, 4. inadequate disconfirming evidence and 5. inadequate discrepant case analysis (cited in Freeman et al., 2007). As such, the challenge a graduate student faces in undertaking a qualitative study is determining what kinds of data to collect, for how long, and determining what data would be considered adequate. Also, there is a need to provide sufficient evidence that various claims being made have evidentiary warrant, that is, looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence throughout the data. Additionally, there is a need for the student to ensure that the findings being reported are dependable (reliable) by: 1. creating "an audit trail", 2. "code-recode strategy" --- that is, it is not enough to code once. There is a need to engage in at least three rounds of coding including selective, 3. "triangulation", and 4. "peer examination" or supervisor examination (Anfara et al., 2002, p.30).

Considering the various strategies involved in providing evidentiary warrants, a graduate student who is required to do an independent work has an uphill task in meeting these demands. Also, it means that engaging in qualitative data analysis cannot be taught as business-as-usual. There is a need for them to have practical experience working with data so that they understand what is meant by open coding, what it means to have patterns clustering of data and determining themes (Ankomah & Kwao, 2018). The moral of the story is that themes do not just emerge. The researcher imposes themes (or theoretical constructs on the data) based upon some theory or empirical evidence. Other readers would want to be convinced that whatever assertions made are warranted through the provision of an audit trail. Such an audit trail can be in the form of a table which indicates the kinds of questions asked, excerpts of codes, how codes were clustered, the resulting constructs and their interrelationships (Anfara, et al. 2002).

## 2.2. Empirical Issues on Practice

My observations are that, the approach to choosing the right topic appears to be an enormous challenge to most students. The topic is the foundation on which the whole methodology rests and so it is critical to choose it carefully (Ankomah & Kwao, 2018). For most of the students that seems to be a "headache." Other contributors also have the notion that students must read around the subject matter widely and also seek authoritative advice before choosing the topic. It is important to add that:

- Students must have in mind to develop a researchable topic. Define the problem according to concepts and appropriate contexts and describe the circumstances surrounding it. Frame the factors that contribute to the problem. This may demand questions like; what, how, and to what extent is the problem? This indeed helps to provide the rationale or justification to the problem. In choosing the topic, one must also determine the resources available, such as time, money and participants. In research development and assessment plans, it is advisable to work on your own topic as early as possible. Getsch (2012) scraps an initial study of replicating another researcher's study because it may not contain substantive evidence as may be expected. This may happen when a researcher feels he or she would review someone's work, particularly, in situations where choosing a topic becomes a problem.
- Find theoretical and empirical basis to support your topic. To most graduate students during presentations, there is confusion whether to dwell on classical or modern theories or both. The consent by most supervisors is that, more of modern theories could be utilized with some relevant classical theories, especially when conceptualizing the root cause of the problem, thus tracing the historical antecedents of the research problem. In such a situation, Getsch suggested theoretical connections that have interdisciplinary framework for understanding the systems.

We also add that such theoretical frameworks could also link transdisciplinary or multidisciplinary fields but that will depend on the locations and research sites relevant to the problem (Ankomah & Kwao, 2018). In a proposal presentation, a student remarked, "I was completely confused when I realised that some of the theories on the topic were not captured." The suggestion was that, theories must fit into the study like a glove, says Getsch.

- Make sure the topic is researchable, relevant, and catchy and can arouse interest. The topic will have to be compelling enough to attract audience or stakeholders. Some students admitted during seminar, "ahaa..aa , that was why our topics were rejected for many times." One student re-echoed, "I also wish to say, the topic I chose was in no way of what I ended up with, mm...mm..mm, the topic was not attractive enough neither did it offer something new to the field." Getsch (2012) recommends that, take every opportunity you can to pick the brain of experts. By that, one needs thorough specialists' advice when choosing a topic.

### 2.3. Challenge: Choosing the Appropriate Methodology

Although qualitative research does not require specific and rigorous formatting procedures like the quantitative methods, its procedure adopts sequencing and appropriate "language use" to describe techniques and strategies involved in the methodology (Cresswell, 2009). What comes to mind under the methodology is describing the specific and multiple procedures. First to mention is the design. For example, is the design a case study, action research, phenomenology, ethnography etc.? The type of design determines the relevant paradigms to use. In this particular instance, the researcher will have to define and describe the design, provide rationale and its relevance to the research methodology.

The issue of participants borders around population and credible data. Practising researchers need to know the identifiable groups and their roles in data collection. This involves close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic in a natural setting. One also needs to know the exact sample and what sampling procedures to employ (Wolcott, 2001). This raises the question, why the identifiable groups, what should be the sample size and reasons for choosing participants. The role of the researcher is very important. This is because a lot of professionalism needs to consider ethical issues pertaining to credibility, confidentiality and trustworthiness of data. That is, the appropriateness, relevance and consistency levels in the data collection and analyses that are scientific thus based on the principles of accurateness and suitability.

The instruments to use should be relevant to the research problem. Example, when to use in-depth interviews, face-to-face interviews, observations and focus group interviews. Career researchers at any stage need to assign reasons to why such instruments are used. The utilization of all these must address ethical issues on anticipated and unanticipated events including controversies and dilemmas. Ethical encounters must be based on trust, beneficence and justice. As to whether ethical issues are considered in the proposals, the majority of students admit this during a workshop that, "it was not clear to distinguish between anticipated and unanticipated events and even at stages ethical issues could be applied in the research." This also unearthed ignorance and mediocrity on the part of students.

The role of a researcher is to establish positive neutrality in all cases of encounters with participants so as to get the needed information. It is important to know which direction the researcher is heading towards since he or she is to examine documents and participants. For example, how to evaluate theoretical assumptions or interview participants for data analysis is very important. The researcher in this direction must take caution so that ethical considerations for data collection are not misconstrued (Creswell, 2000). That indeed may render the data as being bias and ambiguous. In the process of gathering data and data processing, it is appropriate to apply triangulation to cross-check whether information from other sources has relationships and relevance that cuts across all responses.

The data analysis process determines how scientific the primary or secondary sources are. To a large extent, qualitative data depend on primary sources, except during exemplifications or the use of reflective and reflexive analyses where secondary data could be used to augment information. Ideationally, qualitative data analysis has a unique feature characterized by the use of thematic approach where data sets are developed for answers to be generated from participants.

Inductive reasoning is very essential in qualitative data analysis. That is, qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This inductive process illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes.

In another way, it may involve collaborating with the participants interactively, so that participants can have a chance to shape the themes or abstractions that may emerge from the process (Patton, 1980). I argue that a researcher needs to look at qualitative data analysis as following steps from the specifics to general issues, and as involving multiple levels of analysis. This also suggests that, there is no hard and fast rule in data analysis since research can assume multi-stage approaches. Another important issue is to keep with meaning (Norris, 1990).

The researcher keeps track and focuses on learning and meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writer express in the research. The key issue to note in qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from the participants so as to obtain the needed information (Miller & Bell, 2002). As well, multiple tools of inquiry such as interviews, observations and documents could be used rather than a single data source (Borg, 1989).

In the qualitative research, the use of grounded theory is commonly applied to buttress various assumptions that might derive from the data. This is to help establish facts, truths and discover ideas, and to fulfil standards criteria for scientific research. Quiet recently, qualitative research has gained wider grounds in the use of grounded theory which goes beyond

generic analysis. For example, grounded theory has systematic steps (Corbin&Strauss, 2007); Strauss&Corbin, 1990, 1998). Their propositions involve generating categories of information (open coding), selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model (axial coding) and then explicating a story from the interconnections of these categories, thus the selected coding. This can typically be used in case study or ethnographic research which involve thick description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of data for themes (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994). In a situation where data is transcribed, the correct translations and interpretations must fall within the exact contexts (Clandinin& Connelly, 2000).

Some issues raised by students of the Faculty of Educational Foundations during a seminar were that, "we are at a loss because issues bordering the entire methodology are not known adequately." "There is confusion in the use of the theories, methods and the paradigms, hmm mm..., identifying and understanding the procedures is what we need to put into practice." This issue also portrays some level of ignorance and inadequate qualitative research skills and experience. Perhaps such graduate students have superficial knowledge in this sense.

### 3. Methodology

The main text of the methodology is the qualitative design and challenges in thesis reporting. It is a case study of graduate students of the University of Cape Coast. Precisely, graduate students in this inquiry refer to Master of Philosophy students (M.Phil) of the Faculty of Educational Foundations, University of Cape Coast. The methodology adopts phenomenology as a paradigm to generate answers on the natural occurrences of graduate students' knowledge, skills and experiences in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The research design also seeks to inquire more about graduate students' direct experience taken at face value (English and English, 1958) and which sees behaviour as determined by their direct experience in qualitative research reporting. The sample consists of 20 M.Phil. students and 5 supervisors of the Faculty of Educational Foundations, University of Cape Coast. The category of students selected for interviews constitutes the largest number of graduate students whose exposure to qualitative research in the faculty is more frequent when it comes to thesis reporting. This requirement makes the selection more appropriate for both students and supervisors. Sampling procedure is by the use of the purposive technique with interview as the main instrument. Triangulation is employed as verification and validation strategy to assess trustworthiness and credibility of information. The thematic approach using data sets is the strategy for analysing data which is purely a discursive method.

### 4. Interviews

Views sought from participants derived from the research questions. These constitute the basis of data analysis. Research Question 1. What are the challenges that graduate students face when using qualitative methods to generate scientific evidence?

The questions were clearly designed to elicit a similar response to that which we had garnered so readily to reflect students' challenges. That is, in what ways has qualitative research been reported in terms of research problem (topic), research questions, literature review and the methodology?

- Response 1. "Hmm...mmm..., a big problem in choosing topic and how to frame the research questions in the context of text is another source of worry." This was a universal response by all graduate students. It appeared that, qualitative method became incomprehensible design in research. In a focus group discussion all the 5 supervisors say, "That is a big problem which needs to be tackled." The collective views draw absolute relationship between students and lecturers' responses to suggest that problem identification and its definition is a major task for graduate students.
- Response 2. The majority of respondents, that is, 19 out of 20 say, "the literature review needs some conceptual and theoretical framework and developing this in qualitative context is another headache." The majority response was as if, there was confusion in the use of theories. That is, critical review becoming a major problem which could also be attributed to the use of appropriate concepts and contexts.
- Response 3. The universality in response is that, "hmm..., the methodology is another difficult part, especially how to identify the research strategies and discuss other techniques to the data analysis stage is another task." Surprisingly, all the 5 supervisors admitted, "the claims are undisputed facts." Obviously, the claims were unanimous and appeared as reliable facts confronting students' methodological stance.
- Research Question 2: To what extent do students apply the methods and the methodology: What is required in this context includes; differences between methods and methodology, sampling techniques, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis.
- Response 4. The universality of response is that, "yes..., but we are confused to substantiate between methods and methodology." All the students appeared to make brave attempt at responding to question of what they are experiencing as a deficiency. In this argument, 4 out of 5 supervisors supported the students' views, saying that, "most students are not able to distinguish between methods and methodology." The set of procedures and processes in the methods and methodology are problematic areas for students. This indeed borders around research orientation.
- Response 5. This is a typical exclusive case by a student. "Ahaa..., for me, I am entirely confused since it is difficult for me to know which sampling techniques are appropriate for a particular design." The claim is about some techniques and strategies of the qualitative research methodology. Another issue of probability and non-probability sampling procedures emerged from all students. "We are not sure whether probability sampling procedures can fit into the non- probability, and are there some specific rules to apply during reporting?" Issues

of sampling and data processing techniques were general comments raised. As to whether the 5 supervisors agree to the students' views, they all claim, "those were common errors students used to commit during supervision."

- Response 6. "We know most of the tools are in the form of interviews, but as to what aspect of interview is another problem, hmm..... can questionnaire be used in qualitative methods?" The universal response of students established the fact that, students were aware of some instruments used but the application is another issue which interrogates relevance and appropriateness of such instruments. The use of questionnaire is mainly for quantitative analysis and not qualitative.
- Response 7. "Yes, data collection procedure is similar to that of quantitative methods, except that the interviews take too much time." Seventeen out of 20 students put up this claim. Those responses though drew meaningful and common answers, these demanded a clarification since the methodology for the two methods are not the same. A missing link in universal responses by both supervisors and students was ethical considerations they failed to address. From the collective views however, interviews and observations overlapped. That is, can be applied in both quantitative and qualitative methods. It can also be used as multiple techniques in different contexts and styles.
- Response 8. "Ahaa...haa...a..aa, we don't know whether method for analysis can be exploratory and descriptive just as in the quantitative data analysis." This was also a universal response which appeared like confusion set in the minds of students. Analytical procedures seemed to be critical since students were used to the "descriptive" approach most often in quantitative analysis. This also appeared like "intuitive" knowledge of students. By intuitive knowledge refers to students' most common practice of the "descriptive" approach which is dominant and as a "traditional" practice in quantitative research. Accordingly, this inference showed narrow understanding and interpretation of students' methodology in qualitative research. As to whether the 5 supervisors agreed to the students' views. "Infact, this is a critical issue we need to address, that is, about 98% of supervised thesis in this Faculty is mostly quantitative with the descriptive approach as the main analytical tool." This universality is a claim made by all the respondents to conclude that a little reporting is done using the descriptive approach in qualitative research by graduate students. The revelation further interrogates the extent to which qualitative reporting could assume a new paradigm shift.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The critical analysis generated several arguments on challenges graduate students have in qualitative research reporting. My valid opinion was the phenomenal cultural setting of research which students perceived differently about qualitative research methodology. This revelation was partly due to inadequate knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience that most graduate students face from problem identification to data analysis to suggest that the challenge was unintentional.

Therefore, qualitative research reporting by graduate students seemed to be in "crisis." And in this respect, the argument put forward was the location and identification of the use of qualitative designs and the application of paradigms. This assertion reflected issues of trustworthiness, relevance, credibility and conformability of qualitative report which continue to pose challenges to researchers (Freeman, DeMarrais, Preissle, Roulston & Pierre, 2007). The locus of argument was also the development and assessment plans by graduate students which seemed not to merit the standards and criteria for qualitative research reporting.

Whilst recognizing the diversity of the qualitative procedures, self-reflexivity of simple and complex understanding appeared to have narrowed graduate students' reasoning. Engaging in qualitative research from conception of the study to reporting of the findings was fraught with many difficulties which also reflected Anfara et al, (2002) assertions. In a similar discourse, Miles and Humberman, (1994) also highlight on; emerging themes, triangulation and open coding as part of students' challenges. These were undeniable claims made by respondents.

In examining the likelihood of students changing to credible qualitative research reporting, whether at training or seminars, students are unlikely to seek comprehensive knowledge and holistic approach to qualitative research. Yet, this pessimistic viewpoint assumes that students are not able to see clearly the "nature" of "qualitative language." For one would expect some greater degree of self-consciousness in academia in respect of competence and credibility to reflect what Giddens (1991) describes as the reflexive project of self, in this instance students changing in behaviour. In the inquiry, change in behaviour referred to students' ability and capability in qualitative research reporting which carried little weight.

Change can only come through students' own effort but it appeared this immersion, thus cultivating the habit of qualitative report sounded like alternative discourse to most graduate students. The realization was that research knowledge has resonance rather for countless strategies and techniques for students in quantitative reporting. Change remains unresolved because the discursive construct is not providing a ready and privileged means of relevance for students (Butler, 1990). The case analysis identified competence, consistency, verification and validation strategies as other forms of challenging nuances in qualitative "language."

Certainly, despite the presence of students' challenge in reporting qualitative research determined and constructively informed, supervisors including lecturers on this evidence have more task to perform.

## 6. Recommendations

The following recommendations hope to inform policy and practice:

- Workshops and seminars should be organized frequently in all departments to help students understand the scientific basis of qualitative research reporting most especially in proposal writing and dissertations.
- Graduate students must develop interest in qualitative methodology to enhance quality reporting techniques and strategies. This will allow students demonstrate higher level knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories, positions, arguments and key developments in assessment plans.
- Supervisors within a department should exchange ideas, best practices and discuss their own approaches to supervision and presentations. This will help address current issues of students during lectures and tutorials.
- There is the need to organize research projects with graduate students where much experience from the field will help provide adequate insights on appropriate methodologies that require critical, theoretical and practical approach by both students and supervisors.
- There should be the need for supervisors to carry out a number of roles and functions, including keeping students on track, providing students guidelines and helping to develop student's independence and agency in the research process.
- To encourage peer review teams across departments, and to help students out of the challenges. Qualitative reporting has a multi-disciplinary dimension and therefore requires experts to handle aspects in diverse forms irrespective of their class, status and the department one might belong to.
- Giving the in-depth of these challenges, there is the need for the University to provide training programme for supervisors and those teaching research methods. This should serve as a form of motivation for both students and lecturers in a bid for quality work, accepted standards and the best practices.

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