

# Analysing Qualitative Data in Research, Processes and Features

Margaret Zinyama:

Lecturer, Department of Construction Economics and Management,  
National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe

Farayi Matare:

Lecturer, Department of Business Studies, SARPCCO  
Centre of Excellence:  
Associate College of the University of Zimbabwe,  
Zimbabwe

Sydney Chimbanga:

Lecturer, Department of Construction Economics and Management,  
National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe

Professor George Nervous Shava:

Lecturer, Department of Science and Technology Education,  
National University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

**Abstract:- Qualitative research methodology focuses on gaining a deeper understanding and insight of a phenomenon rather than examining superficial features. It necessitates organization of large quantities of raw data by breaking down raw data into manageable chunks and themes. Effective qualitative data analysis is vital and different methods are available to suit the research requirements. To increase credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research, the use of well-designed qualitative data analysis and software packages is very essential. This paper frameworks key features in qualitative research and provide procedures in carrying out data analysis. Various methods for analysing qualitative data were discussed outlining where they can be used. The research focusses on the features, procedures, methods and software programs used in qualitative data analysis. It emphasizes on the importance of ensuring credibility, transferability and trustworthiness in qualitative conclusions.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

In order to carry out a good qualitative research study, it is critical to use the right and effective data analysis technique. Results produced from qualitative research aren't based on numerical methods (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The data obtained has to be organized, set into practicable bits, synthesized, outlined, observing what is significant and cultured, and deciding what to tell others, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982). In order to better understand people's social realities and the situations in which they live, qualitative research is a type of socially responsive action that focuses on how individuals construe and make sense of their experiences (Flick, 2014). The natural context serves as a direct data source in qualitative research. It is concerned with actual, lived experiences and situations that arise in the course of daily activities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

According to Mayring (2000), qualitative data analysis is an inductive, methodological regulated investigation of texts within their context of communication, adhering to content analytical guidelines without haste measurement.

Qualitative analysis, according to Hsieh Shannon (2005), can be utilized to investigate some message, descriptive responses, discussions, set attention on groups, open-ended review questions, observations, and print materials eg articles, books, or manuals. Its goal is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of human conduct and the influencing elements. Quantitative researchers pursue incidental purpose, forecast, and findings generalization, whereas qualitative researchers search for intelligence, profound perceptions, and comprehension to comparable circumstances according to Patton (2001). The administration, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative empirical materials, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), involves complicated procedure of exceedingly sophisticated linguistic and discourse structures. Procedures in qualitative data analysis should be followed religiously to produce meaningful results. Data is usually qualitatively analyzed in qualitative researches utilizing various methods and software programs.

The goal of this paper is to highlight features, procedures, explore methods and discuss software used in qualitative data analysis. Qualitative data analysis is crucial because it can be employed investigate effectively communication materials of any kind, such as narrative solutions, interviews, published works and open-ended survey.

## II. CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

*Natural setting:* The natural setting serves as a direct data source in qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define it as the study of actual, lived events and circumstances as they emerge during routine activities. The investigation's time, place, and protocols are chosen by the subjects, if not entirely under their control (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). The setting isn't intended for investigation and data gathering. According to Muzari, Shava and Shonhiwa (2022), In terms of how control symbols are used, simulating a natural environment can resemble a natural setting. Researchers aim to establish an overview of

experiences drawn from the context of real real-life event. Context here refers to the reality of taking into account the physical, intellectual, cultural, and emotional contexts. Lune & Berg (2017) highlighted that the aim is to comprehend views of individuals in a natural setting.

*Researcher is the key participant:* The key participant is the researcher, however vocal and nonverbal acts are not seen as being stemming from their role (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). Qualifying the data for interpretation depends on what has been observed or perceived during contact with participants. In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary data collector. This contributes to the researcher's personal or self-engagement with the phenomena, resulting in the findings' trustworthiness, credibility and reliability (Muzari et al., 2022).

*Reports are descriptive:* Generated data under qualitative paradigm is subjective and descriptive because qualitative data is always informed by words combining voice and emotive language in the text (Shava & Nkengbeza, 2019). When data is presented in the form of pictures and symbols, some words may be required to describe the images (Berg, 2009). People's perceptions, opinions, motivations, and sentiments are reflected in the data.

*Humanistic:* The human aspect is retained by providing facts in the participant's own words (Muzari et al, 2022; Shava & Nkengbeza, 2019). Zireva (2013) alluded that voice in the text, also known as verbatim, is a method of expressing facts in words that serves as evidence of participants' opinions. It emphasizes all participants' opinions, which are quoted directly for trustworthiness considerations. Qualitative research is explicitly people-centered aiming at discovering ideas based on gathered facts. Its focus is holistic, emphasizing the acquisition of an entire or full picture in order to obtain factual and profound data (Lune & Berg, 2017). Due to the human aspect, this paradigm discovers novel or unique conclusions.

*Pragmatic in nature:* The research study resolves an existing social problem by providing immediate benefit focusing on direct and instant insight into ongoing social procedures (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). It may or may not aid in the formation of theories.

*Interpretive in nature:* Shava and Nkengbeza (2019) posited that qualitative study's goal is to interpret and comprehend both the meanings that events have for the people who experience them and how the researchers have interpreted those meanings. Because its foundation is based on the development of understandings, role molding and interpretations are communicated because it is more worried about processes than products (Zireva, 2013). This can be determined through employment of descriptive analogy a method used by social scientists to probe deeper into tales.

*Evaluation criteria:* When evaluating qualitative research specific criteria for trustworthiness, credibility and transferability are employed unlike in quantitative research where validity and reliability are evaluation criteria. Lincoln

and Guba (1985) use the notions of confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability to convey quantitative ideas of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity to measure the rigor of qualitative research.

It should be noted that these traits are strategic goals that guide a roadmap for specific procedure development and actual data gathering processes, rather than absolute aspects of qualitative inquiry. The features are intertwined and reinforce each other (Denzin & Lincoln 1998). Statistical test of significance does not exist in qualitative research to establish if the findings are significant, thus the researcher and the reader must make their own decisions about usefulness and acceptability.

### III. PROCEDURES FOR ANALYZING QUALITATIVE DATA

When analyzing data certain procedures have to be followed. In this research data compiling and organizing, disassembling, reassembling, identifying themes, relationships and patterns, ensuring reliability and validity (trustworthiness) in the analysis and interpretation and conclusion of the results are some of the processes to be looked at.

#### ➤ *Compiling and organising of data*

According to Gibson (2003), data presentations that are systematically organized to address the current research issue and are concentrated enough to allow seeing data set in one spot are extremely helpful for effective analysis. (Miles and Huberman, 1994). If all information is easily accessible in one location and assessed uniformly, it is simpler to summarize and make judgments. Compiling could mean write out the data to make it easier for the researchers to view. Returning to the interview guide is the greatest approach to arrange the data. Although it might seem obvious, in order for the researcher to fully understand the data, they must study and reread it. Although it might seem obvious, in order for the researcher to fully understand the data, they must study and reread it throughout the analysis. During this stage, the researcher will record interviews or focus groups, compile responses, and arrange extra textual data for the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Returning to your interview guide is the greatest approach to arrange your data. Always look back to the research questions and utilize them as a framework for determining whether data is valuable.

#### ➤ *Disassembling*

After the data is collected, it must be segregated, organized and categorized into the significant patterns or themes noticed for analysis. Disassembling data entails breaking down and organizing it in relevant ways (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). "Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of the analysis and one that can integrate the entire endeavor." (Marshall & Ross, 1995, p. 114). When analyzing various responses to a single question, the researcher may see that particular terms or concepts recur, in which case they ought to be grouped together.

The disassembling process is frequently accomplished through coding which is the procedure by which unusable data are progressively transformed into usable data by locating ideas, themes and concepts that are connected to one another (Harding and Whitehead, 2013). Through coding researchers identify resemblances and disparities, categorizing and assigning properties and patterns to the collected data. After assigning codes to data, building of patterns can begin to obtain a deeper understanding of the data and make more informed judgments. Coding can be done manually making use of folders, filing cabinets, wallets etc. or using qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, Atlas ti 6.0, Hyper RESEARCH 2.8, Max QDA mainly. Coding is a multi-level activity that entails systematically discovering interesting data features across the full data set. Initially, codes are assigned to data units of several magnitudes for example paragraphs, phrases and sentences but a broad idea representation is encouraged (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). They can be in the form of a descriptive label that is taken directly from the text or a descriptive label that is taken from the text.

➤ *Reassembling, identifying themes, relationships and patterns*

The application of codes, the development of categories and finally themes are all steps in this process. "Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of the analysis and one that can integrate the entire endeavour." (Marshall & Ross, 1995, p. 114). Each response category has one or more associated themes that provide further context for the data. According to Patton (2001), patterns, categories and themes of analysis emerge from the data; they are not imposed on the data before data is collected and analysed. Codes might be compared to separate jigsaw pieces that, when put together, add to the data visualization of a researcher. A true reflection of the story is entirely contained in the codes, instead the researcher must first comprehend how to compare and contrast different codes. The categories capture these linkages and contrasts between them which will assist the researcher in developing their themes (Cho, Chad & Lochmiller, 2020).

A theme captures an aspect of the data that is pertinent to the research question and represents some degree of organization or meaning in the data set. Codes are compared to the bricks of a building that make up the walls in Braun and Clarke's (2006) example of a structure to explain codes and themes. The fundamental process of developing themes and subthemes involves condensing or assembling codes that seem to share a common characteristic in order to reflect and represent data coherent and pertinent pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is of paramount importance to determine cross-category similarities, differences, and connections and after acknowledging these linkages, each of the themes is assigned a statement by the researcher. All primary categories must be included in the theme name, evocative of their content with connections between them, and any parallels or distinctions that may be discovered. (Cho et al., 2020). The study's primary research questions determine the themes, which are frequently connected to the study's analytical

objectives. The researchers' analytical thinking is demonstrated during reassembly. The researcher begins by compiling all relevant data into each potential topic, then evaluates each theme on a regular basis to see if it is stable in connection to the coded extracts and data collection. Care must be taken in telling the data's story rather than arranging it to match the researchers' theory or overreaching the data (Anderson, 2010). This can be easily accomplished through NVivo and other analysis software programs.

➤ *Ensuring Reliability and Validity (Trustworthiness) in the Data Analysis*

Validity and reliability are essentially positivist epistemology methods whilst transferability, trustworthiness, credibility and dependability are commonly employed in qualitative phenomena (Shava & Nkengbeza, 2019; Patton, 1990). However, to use validity and reliability in qualitative, they should be redefined. Credibility is the assurance of accurate results placed on the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It is equivalent to core legitimacy in quantitative research which seeks the precision with it intended to measure. Validation should not be confined to a single stage of the investigation, but rather should be applied across the entire research process. Shenton (2004) posited that triangulation, peer reviews, member checks and audit trail are some of the strategies that can be used to ensure credibility. The degree to which the results of one study can be used or transferred to other circumstances and contexts with other respondents is known as transferability (Lincon & Guba, 1985). This requires use of purposive sampling and provide thick description of the phenomenon in question.

Dependability entails the stability of results over time and this can be achieved through triangulation and peer examination (Shenton, 2004; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It is equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. Ensuring dependability necessitates consistent efforts and dedication throughout the interviewing, transcription, and analysis of the data. Trustworthiness encompasses credibility, dependability and transferability. For research to have trustworthiness, the results should be precise, consistent and exhaustive in nature. Data triangulation can help to increase trustworthiness. Triangulation implies data source convergence from numerous sources as well as data generating processes. When triangulation techniques are used in qualitative research, it is typically a tactic to increase the validity and reliability of the study findings (trustworthiness) (Chisaka, 2007). Because triangulation is used to control bias and develop valid ideas in naturalistic and qualitative research, it is vital to recognize that it has important methodological considerations.

➤ *Interpretation and conclusion of the results*

Data do not speak for itself, therefore there is need to interpret the results. At this stage, the researcher makes critical in-depth inferences from the data gathered and provided as codes in the research process (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Despite the fact that the processes of analysing data are given in chronological order, its interpretation can be done concurrently not waiting until the end rather it should be happening throughout the process. According to Yin (2011), there is no checklist for what constitutes good interpretation,

but all qualitative interpretations should strive for five traits. First and foremost, the interpretation must be complete meaning the commencement, intermediate and the end must be visible to the person who reads the results on how they were drawn. Second, the interpretations must be impartial, such that other researchers if given the same evidence will derive the same conclusions. Thirdly, the interpretations should show the true meaning of underlying and fundamental facts. Fourth, well interpreted investigations should evidence worthiness that is understandable in relation to the topic literature. Lastly, data methods and succeeding interpretations ought to be trustworthy to gain the respect of audience.

The researcher can then take excerpts from the data and view them in relation to and in concert with each another after the data has been rebuilt through coding. Because of this, the researcher can start to assess what is happening within and across different experiences, beliefs, and histories, and can start to find themes in the data. (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Themes capture the essence of the phenomenon being researched in relation to the objective of the study aim or topic. Data visualizations in the form of a three-dimensional map of code clusters are especially beneficial when using qualitative data analysis software. You can see linkages and connections between constructs that aren't initially evident by viewing your reassembled data in this way. Interpretations should easily come from the data, which will serve as the foundation for the conclusions.

Responses to research questions or the goal of the study are provided in the conclusions. Every study should start with a solid research question, with analysis providing answers to it. Research question changing during the data analysis processes is also a possibility that should be expected. (Braune & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the analysis process, research must produce results that are open to close inspection of the researchers' decisions. This can be done by providing a full description of coding techniques and criteria, as well as a detailed description of how codes and patterns of codes lead to themes and the interpretation that resulted (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). It's worth mentioning that qualitative study findings are rarely generalizable (Shava et al., 2021).

#### IV. METHODS FOR ANALYZING QUALITATIVE DATA

According Shava and Nkengbeza (2019), of all the aspects of qualitative research, analysis of data is without doubt the much more challenging and confusing, yet it receives the least attention in the research literature. Analysis is a reasoning strategy aimed at understanding relationships between ideas by disassembling a complex whole into its component parts (Lune & Berg, 2017). Data is fragmented into logical patterns, themes, linkages and trends when analysing it (Mouton, as cited in Zireva, 2013). In qualitative research, data is analysed inductively, with important themes emerging from the data. Patton (1990) alluded that creativity in qualitative analysis is paramount because of the

involvement of raw data which should be sequenced into eloquent and reasonable categories and communicate the interpretation to others. There are numerous methods of analysing qualitative data, each method is unique and has its own specific benefits and shortcomings. Content analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, grounded theory, thematic analysis and conversation analysis are some of the methods employed in qualitative analysis (Warren, 2020).

##### ➤ *Content Analysis*

According to Shava, Hleza, Tlou, Shonhiwa & Mathonsi (2021) content analysis is a systematic of coding and theme-finding process, or methodology that allows for the subjective assessment of text data. Patton (2002) defines content analysis as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”. In their view Hsieh and Shannon, (2005) express content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Based on these definitions, content analysis permits academics to gain a subjective yet scientific understanding of social reality. The method promotes a holistic view of the texts as well as their specific contents (Shava et al, 2021).

It extends beyond extracting content from textual material to examining, patterns, meanings and themes that are present. It can be used, for example, to determine the frequency with which an idea is shared or discussed. Alternatively, you may look for trends in the deeper underlying interpretations. In essence, qualitative content analysis entails speculating interpreting, or deriving meaning from data by segmenting it into categories and tags that may be applied, and then creating a pattern for the entire data set by connecting the tags (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). However, it has been criticized for omitting important communication details due to its multifaceted focus on both qualitative and quantitative elements, as well as for requiring a long duration of time because it demands lengthy reading and revisiting of the texts (Warren, 2020)

##### ➤ *Narrative Analysis*

Narrative analysis, implies listening to what people say and derive meaning through analysis. Dudovskiy (n.d) defined it as a method that involves rewriting the accounts provided by participants while taking into consideration both their individual histories, experiences and the context of each event. Riessman (1993) alluded that researchers examine the goals or purposes of a tale as well as how it is generated, organized, and concluded. Life experiences narrated in life histories, autobiographies, chronicles, diaries, interviews, or biographies and the stories investigated are of lived experiences (Josselson & Liebeck, 1995). Unlike the other approaches, which aim to dissect a book in order to better comprehend human social realities, this methodology aims to create a written text that allows us to experience various social realities vicariously.

Nonetheless, due to prolonged recording procedures of narratives, sizes of the samples are typically uncertain (Warren, 2020). Therefore, it can be problematic to reproduce the same procedures in a later study, considering different social and lifestyle elements that influence a research area. This makes testing some of the research conclusions difficult. Similarly, researcher favouritism affects results, so the researcher must be thoughtful so that any bias is eliminated during analysis.

➤ *Discourse Analysis*

Luo (2019) defined discourse analysis as a method of assessing language in particular circumstances that focuses more intently on speech content. It emphasizes the actions that constitute the ideas, ideologies, attitudes, and patterns of behaviour that collectively comprise the topics and things people talk about. (Foucault, 1972). In other words, it analyses language in the background of the values and society in which it transpires, such as in a discussion, speech, etc. Furthermore, discourse analysis can be used to understand how factors such as culture, history, and power relations affect the discussion of ideas (Warren, 2020). However, Warren (2020) argued that it takes a while for the data sample to reach saturation.

➤ *Thematic Analysis*

Braune and Clarke (2012) defined it as a method of identifying, evaluating, and reporting patterns inside data characterized by reducing data into a flexible fashion compatible with other analysis techniques. Thematic analysis can help the researcher see and comprehend common or shared meanings and experiences. Braune and Clarke (2012) assert that thematic analysis is not concerned with locating particular and peculiar meanings and experiences that are contained alone within a single data item. It allows the researcher to uncover meaningful patterns which are vital in connection to the topic and research questions being studied (Warren, 2020). Analysis provides clear answers to research questions under investigation. There are various patterns that can be obtained in any dataset yet the aim of analysis is to identify the ones which are critical in answering specific research questions.

The researcher can also focus on thematic analysis as a way of analysing data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) alluded that to guarantee the validity of the results, context exploration using thematic analysis of open-ended responses from surveys or transcribed interviews can be used. By allowing for freedom and interpretation during data analysis, qualitative analysis demonstrates depth that quantitative analysis lacks. Thematic analysis typically yields a code frame, also known as a category frame, that summarizes themes. It should be carried out carefully, paying close regard to the method's transparency.

## V. GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory refers to a structured inductive approach for conducting qualitative research with a theory development goal (Charmaz, 2009). The data is 'grounded' which means it has been carefully collected and examined (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory is a suitable method when there is limited information available on a subject, it starts with the creation of a theory based on the gathering of information from many sources. Tie, Birks and Francis (2019) proves that the concept is "well-founded" because it's based on concrete data rather than being wholly speculative. Then other situations need to be reviewed for their relevance to the original theory and can be added to it (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). They also added that data collection and analysis occur concurrently and quantitative data is also welcomed. Researchers may alter or develop new theories as they examine additional cases until they identify one that fully explains all of them. Grounded theory is extremely important since it offers clear, step-by-step instructions for conducting qualitative research (Glaser, 2009). He added that, due to its greater ability to assist in finding answers to open-ended questions, it is frequently employed in the creation of policies and research on program assessment.

## VI. SOFTWARE PROGRAMS USED IN QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Computer software programs are commonly used to facilitate qualitative data analysis (Shava et al., 2021). These software solutions increase the total degree of organization of research by providing a measure of suitability and proficiency (Bassett, 2004). Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) is the data analysis software used in data analysis. The tools that are frequently used to provide technological support for qualitative research include ATLAS.ti, Datagrav Quirkos, webQDA, Research Text Analytics Software HyperRESEARCH, NVivo, MAXQDA, Quirkos, Dedoose, Raven's Eye, Qiqqa, F4analyse Transana, and Annotations. These tools enable more intricate, in-depth data analysis (Shava, et al., 2021) and differ in complexity and sophistication, but their main aim, according to Bassett (2004), is to help researchers organize, manage, and code qualitative data more efficiently.

Researchers that employ these software tools balance their capacity to identify patterns and quirks in massive data sets with their ability to categorise, analyse, explore, and reason through them (Richards & Richards, 1987). These are useful, but programs like Microsoft Excel and Access are also useful. Additionally, researchers can explore relationships between codes across vast data sets and codes patterns making use of these useful software. A widespread misunderstanding is that CAQDAS software can evaluate your data for you this is far from the case. According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), even though software helps researchers to organize huge volumes of qualitative data, the intelligence of the researcher drives the analysis not the software.

Tesch (1990) concurs that employing computer software to analyse qualitative data allows for a greater focus on analysis than on the menial duties involved in doing research according to a growing body of literature on Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). Using CAQDAS techniques in qualitative data analysis can help qualitative research become more rigorous and flexible. The quality and transparency of qualitative research are the most essential contributions of CAQDAS. This also improves the results' conformability. When qualitative data is analysed with CAQDAS, structured the analysis is structured, and its progress can be tracked as it progresses (Shava et al., 2021). CAQDAS aids in the systematic use of all available evidence because the data is meticulously coded. According to Richards and Richards (1991), computerized qualitative data analysis is more readily accepted as valid research when it is founded in the data itself, has sound philosophy, and an adequate study design. Through transparency, qualitative data analysis gives a clear path to a comprehensive, empirical, tenable and externally legitimized qualitative research, which the qualitative method has traditionally lacked (Welsh, 2002; Gregory, 2010)

## VII. CONCLUSION

Qualitative research analysis aims at understanding social realities and relationships without using statistical methods. Data is broken down into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships during data analysis. Examining the connections between concepts and looking for any patterns or tendencies that can be identified and utilized to build themes in the data will help you understand the different parts of the data. For data to be categorised as qualitative, it should portray some of these aspects which include humanistic, natural setting, pragmatic, descriptive, researcher being the key participant, trustworthiness and interpretive in nature. For proper qualitative data analysis, the process involves compilation, organisation, disassembling and, reassembling the data, making themes and patterns, ensuring trustworthiness of the data, interpreting and concluding the findings. Qualitative data can be analysed using various methods and the choice relies on the objectives and nature of the study. Manual analysis can be cumbersome therefore, there are software programs that assist in analysis of data. These assist when coding and handling data but the analysis and interpretation will remain the researcher's responsibility.

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