Qualitative Methods

Dr. Pankaj Kumar Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, MGCUB

Research in the Social Sciences

- The nature of human phenomena is dynamic and multi-faceted and transactional
- Regarding human conduct, beliefs and practices, incongruence is as interesting as (if not more than) congruence
- Increasing heterogeneity and mobility of populations provides much scope for misinterpretation in quantitative methods
- Complexity of human social life cannot be captured by any single method (Yoshikawa, 2012)
- It is possible and even advisable to use mixed methods

Qualitative	Quantitative
Inductive	Deductive
Ethnography	Grounded in the 'scientific method'
In-depth interviews	Experiments
Life histories	Surveys
Autoethnography	Questionnaires
Focus group interviews	Evaluation
Case studies	Statistical analysis
Conversational analysis	Content analysis
Discourse analysis	
Content analysis	

Common myths about Qualitative Research

- Qualitative research
  - is unsystematic
  - is easy and quick
  - is unscientific
  - does not make contributions to theory
  - is not rigorous
  - cannot be used along with quantitative research methods

Grounded theory

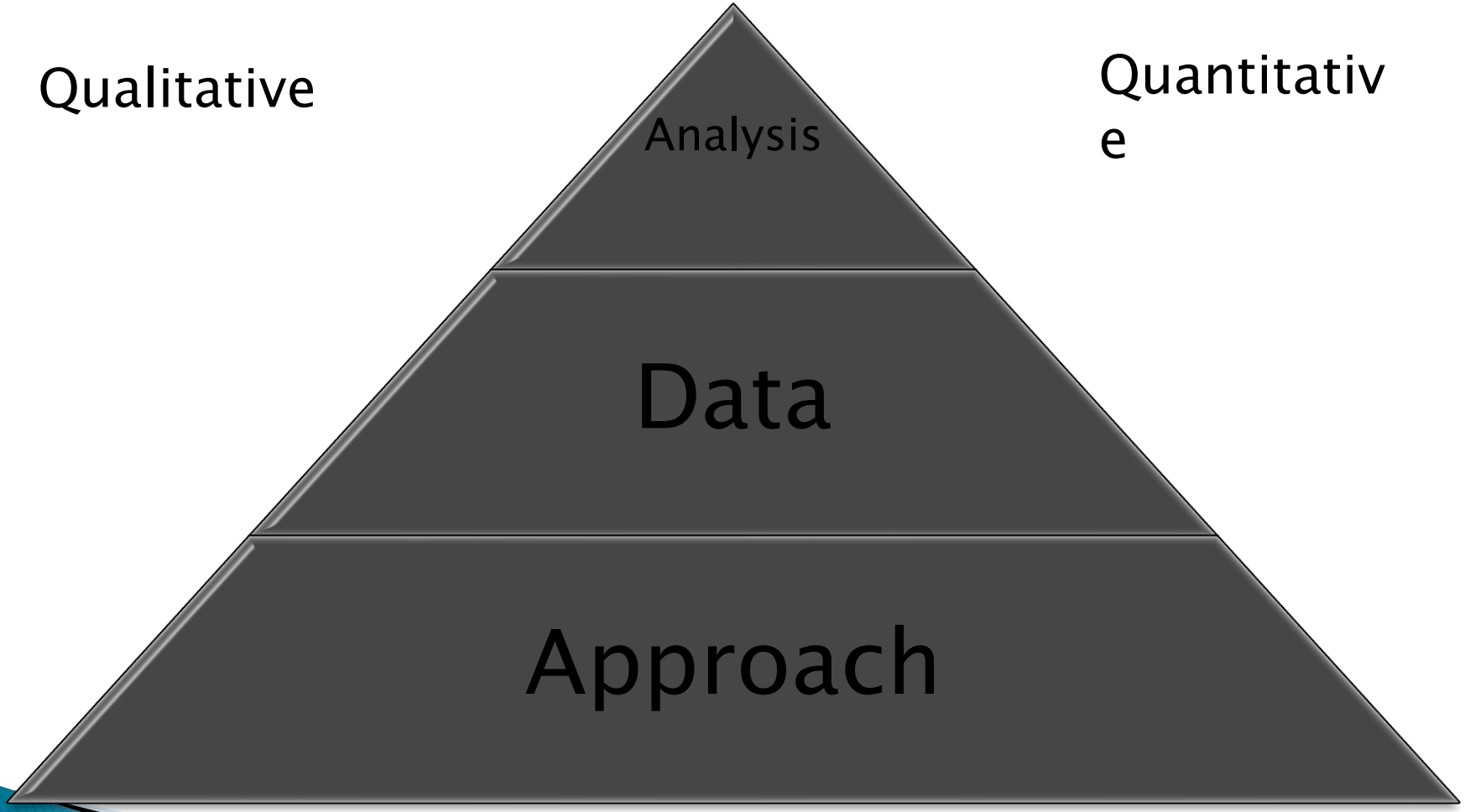
Introduced in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss in the book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* – Challenged:

1. The division between theory and research
2. The notion that qualitative research was a precursor to more "rigorous" quantitative research
3. Beliefs that qualitative research methods are impressionistic and unsystematic
4. The separation of data collection and analysis
5. The assumptions that qualitative research could produce only descriptive case studies rather than theory development

Three levels

Qualitative

Quantitative



Qualitative and Quantitative approaches

- Quantitative approach
  - Research agenda is predetermined, preplanned
  - Methods are finalized and prepared beforehand
  - Methods of analysis, categories, procedures are predetermined
  - Domains are largely predetermined
- Qualitative approach
  - Data directs further exploration
  - Methods often emerge from the field (Suneja, in progress)
  - Analysis categories, procedures follow principles of grounded theory
  - Open exploration of domains

Quantitative and Qualitative Data

- Quantitative: Numbers to represent information like questionnaires, survey data, frequencies, measurements, performances, levels, ratings
- Qualitative: Words, texts, pictures, observations, conversations, videos
- Epistemologically, there is no contradiction. The polarity is conventional!
- Need to also distinguish between Ql and Qn data and Ql and Qn analysis

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis

- Analysis that relies on numerical computations, descriptive and inferential
- Searches for congruence, patterns, consistency, representation, means, sds

Qualitative analysis

- That does not rely on numbers
- Searches for single case explanations, illustrations rather than representations
- Focus is on variety
- Able to explain incongruence, subtlety. “We have no privacy in our home” (Kaura & Chaudhary, 2001)

Words and Numbers

- There is no inherent distinction between the two. It is an act of human representation
- Whereas quantitative methods use numbers, qualitative methods focuses on words and their meaning
- Numbers can be used either to count, rate or code
- Knowledge from numbers need not be contradictory to knowledge from words
- Numbers are also often used as labels, in fact very much like words, eg. Coding
- Opposing these two approaches has led to artificial boundaries

Data and Analysis

DATA / ANALYSIS	Qualitative	Quantitative
Qualitative	√ (Case-description, narrative analysis)	√ Counting of codes, frequencies, patterns
Quantitative	√ (Descriptions of people in a particular category)	√ (Statistical analysis of numeric data)

Examples

Data and Analysis.

- QlData, Ql An;
- QlData QnAn;
- QnData, QlAn;
- QnData, QnAn.

Examples

- Patterns of household expenses of single mothers
- Sources of stress among pre-teens
- Case-profiles of young adults criminals
- Ethnic communities and fertility rates
- Sex differences in play patterns of young children
- TV viewing among the elderly
- Compliance behaviour in the Delhi metro
- Eating patterns of young adolescent boys
- Sleeping arrangements in joint family households
- Physical settings in the care of children
- Caregivers of young children

Task 1

- Break-up into 4 groups. Each group will plan the research design outline of one of each of the following:
- QlData, Ql An;
- QlData QnAn;
- QnData, QlAn;
- QnData, QnAn.

Task 2

- Break up into groups of two, and from this video clip, look carefully and write what all aspects you can analyze and how.

Choice of methods: Approach, data and analysis

- Choice should be guided not by affiliation to one or another, but by the domain of study and research questions
- Other ways of dividing methods:
  - Small, large
  - Experimental, non-experimental
  - Experience-near, experience-distant
- This divide is artificial, and should be treated as complementary

Benefits of collaboration

- Cause-effect studies: Causes can be known by quantification, but process dynamics can be explored through qualitative approaches (Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil & Way, 2008)
- Beliefs, attitudes and practices: Congruence is important, but so are outliers and their reasons for disagreement
- Case-studies: Selecting exceptional, exemplary, representative, or typical of a category cases after quantification
- Developmental changes over time: Idiographic changes along with changes in groups
- Opinions: Nuanced understanding of scale-items
- Cross-cultural transfer of methods: Interpretation of scale items, same language but different culture, for instance! (Chaudhary, 2008)

Conclusions

- Avoid being 'methodocentric' (Weisner, 1996). The method should not become the research
- Focus should be on the domain, participants and theory
- Allow flexibility and explore culturally different groups
- Deliberately combine different approaches for triangulation, confirmation and validation of interpretation
- Complementarity is the best solution to discovery