

The Present and the Future of Qualitative Research in Asia: Strategies and Directions

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Abstract. With the growing interest in qualitative research and the increasing expectation to meet its methodological demands, qualitative researchers must strive to equip themselves with adequate knowledge and skills. In addition, they must know trends in qualitative research and decide which of those they can appropriately do and apply in their setting. According to Flick (2014), there are new methodological trends in qualitative research such as visual and electronic data, qualitative online research, using computers, hybridization, triangulation, linking qualitative and quantitative research, and ensuring quality of qualitative research (p. 528). Hesse-Biber (2017) adds that qualitative researchers should engage in more conversations regarding ethics, explore methodological innovations such as arts-based research and autoethnography, and consider other theoretical perspectives. Other innovations are the use of big data (Davison, Edwards, Jamieson, & Weller, 2019) and rethinking quality criteria for qualitative research (Morse, 2015). In this presentation, we will focus on some trends and possible future directions of qualitative research in Asia. We will discuss the following: (a) using well-established research designs, methods, and frameworks; (b) conducting data collection that is culturally-relevant and ethical; (c) using indigenous philosophical frameworks; and (d) building a community of qualitative researchers. Our presentation is rooted in our experience as the leadership team of the Asian Qualitative Research Association (AQRA), which was founded in 2015. We will share how AQRA has played a role in empowering qualitative researchers in Asia and how it has provided a platform for a conversation with qualitative researchers in other parts of the world.

Well-Established Research Designs, Methods, and Frameworks. The use of well-established research designs, methods, and frameworks is emergent in Asia. Through the years, at least in most parts of Asia, the five commonly used qualitative approaches or designs are narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These five designs are not the only qualitative research designs used in Asia; there are many others (e.g., photovoice, interpretive description, action research, discourse analysis, autoethnography). Qualitative researchers must not simply say that they are doing qualitative research; they must articulate what the design is and rationalize the fit between their methodology and the purpose of the study, the research questions, their participants, and the research context. In addition, they must use methods that other researchers have used and critiqued, and they must know the strengths and limitations of the methods they are using. If qualitative researchers are doing a narrative inquiry, it is a good practice to use narrative interviewing frameworks (see King, Horrocks, & Brooks, 2019), or if they are doing a transcendental phenomenological interview, they may use Seidman's (2019) phenomenological interview or Moustakas' (1990) interview framework. For data analysis, it is also a good practice to use a framework, especially one that is within the methodological tradition. For example, if they are doing a photovoice study, they may use the SHOWED framework by Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988), or if they are doing a case study, they may use the data analysis framework of Yin (2016) or the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006). While we advocate the use of well-established methods, we also encourage qualitative researchers to combine methodologies and methods (Flick, 2014; Hesse-Biber,

2017). Petre (2020), for example, combined action research with photovoice and case study. The combination may also be on the data collection methods. Beskow (2020) did a narrative inquiry. For his data collection, he used in-depth interview, shadowing, and aesthetic portrayal. The future is bright for qualitative research in Asia. This direction to empower qualitative researchers to use well-established qualitative research designs, methods, and frameworks will ensure that qualitative research studies in Asia are sound and rigorous.

Data Collection in the Asian Context. Is data collection in Asia different compared to other regions? No and yes. It is not different in the sense that the same data collection methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, documents analysis, and others can be done in Asia. It is different in the sense that Asia is a very diverse region in terms of culture, religion, socio-political conditions, geographical contours, among others. These are elements that qualitative researchers, even those coming from Asia, should seriously consider. How will they collect data in places where their safety is threatened, or where a woman cannot talk with a man, or where a “private” conversation with a stranger is a taboo, or where strangers are the object of extended and intrusive curiosity, or where strangers are not easily integrated into community life as in the case of Geertz (2005)? How will they enter and exit research sites in a manner that is culturally-sensitive and ethical (Reeves, 2010)? How will they determine when giving gifts is an act of gratitude or an insult? How will they decide whether to continue or stop a conversation that is deeply sensitive and confidential and is not relevant to their research (Guillemin & Heggen, 2009; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004)? How will they negotiate their shifting roles as an insider-outsider? These are among the questions that will be answered in this presentation.

Indigenous Philosophical Frameworks. Qualitative research “is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). Hence, understanding and formulating philosophical paradigm is critical to qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). However, philosophical lenses vary across different socio-cultural contexts and can be influenced by culture (Wong & Chai, 2010). The traditional Western philosophical frameworks do not always do justice to a research conducted in the Asian context. Moreover, an uncritical application of imported philosophical underpinnings can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpreting of qualitative data. In contrast with Western epistemology and ontology driven by rationalism and dualism, which separates “mind from matter, human nature from material nature” (Liu, 2009, p.13), Asian epistemology is more relational and dynamic. In the Asian perspective, personal self-perception stems out of holistic view of reality and is rooted in a dynamic interaction between humankind and nature (Rošker, 2021). Likewise, western philosophical perspective relies on pure reason in understanding the phenomenal world, whereas eastern worldview expands humans to be capable of “intuitive illumination” to grasp ontological reality (Liu, 2009, p.14,16). With the increasing interest to an indigenous research, there is a need for a culturally relevant and philosophically contextualized conceptual framework. This presentation will discuss the distinctively Asian perspective on such philosophical dimensions such as ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, and its implications to a cross-cultural qualitative research.

A Community of Qualitative Researchers. Some researchers say that conducting research is a lonely and difficult journey. This narrative, however, can change. When qualitative researchers come together in a common platform such as belonging to a qualitative research association, attending and/or presenting in qualitative research conferences, forming mentoring groups, conducting qualitative research as a team, the script of our conversations will be stories of possibilities and of accomplishments. We can reach out to one another and build not only formal relationships but even personal ones. Elizabeth Reilly, an AQRA mentor, during an AQRA colloquium, emphasized that “qualitative research has a way of embedding us deeply and immediately in the lives of other people,

and . . . it's both a privilege and a responsibility. It requires a continual interrogation of self." She suggested that we ask ourselves these questions: Who am I and who am I in my relationship to you and what can we learn together and how can we grow together through our investigation and our learning? In this presentation, we will share with you our journey at AQRA, how we have built a community of qualitative researchers from different disciplines and different levels of expertise in the Asian region and beyond.

Keywords: qualitative research, indigenous philosophical framework, data collection, qualitative research communities, qualitative research methods

Necessary resources: laptop, internet connection

Organization of the Panel Discussion

1- Brief context:

Research in Asia has followed the quantitative tradition for many years. Recently, however, qualitative research has gained acceptance in some academic circles and the interest to learn more about it is growing.

2- Objectives:

- (a) To trace the development of qualitative research in Asia—briefly touching its past, showing what is being done at the present, and projecting what directions it can take in the future.
- (b) To explore and present strategies and directions that qualitative research is taking and may take to equip qualitative researchers with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable them to conduct qualitative research studies that are sound, rigorous, and ethical.

3- Dynamics / Strategy:

a. Presentation:

There are four presenters. One of the panel members, Gracel Saban, will introduce the panelists.

b. Theoretical Exposition of the theme

Moderator of the Panel: Arceli Rosario

Arceli Rosario – Introduction, Building a Community of Qualitative Researchers – 20 minutes

Pavel Zubkov – Indigenous Research Philosophical Frameworks – 15 minutes

David Lumowa – Collecting Data in the Asian Context – 15 minutes

Gracel Ann Saban – Using Well-Established Research Methods, Conclusion – 20 minutes

c. Application in other contexts

The content of this presentation may also be applied in other settings, specifically those regions where qualitative research is still a growing phenomenon.

d. Discussion

To be moderated by Arceli Rosario - 20 minutes

- 4- Application of the proposal in reality / practical examples:
 - (a) Researchers to use well-established research methods, to collect data in a culturally-relevant and ethical manner, and situate their studies in indigenous philosophical frameworks.
 - (b) Researchers to belong to qualitative research associations and be a positive influence in building a community of qualitative researchers.

- 5- Expected results:

After listening to the panel discussion, the participants may consider adapting the strategies proposed such as using philosophical frameworks that are indigenous in their region, using well-established research methods, collecting data that is culturally relevant and sensitive, and building a community of qualitative researchers.

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Biographical Notes

David Lumowa, PhD, is a faculty of the Business Department of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines. While he comes from a quantitative research orientation, he has promoted qualitative research through his involvement with the Asian Qualitative Research Association as the chief financial officer. He is a trainer in qualitative research, specifically in analysing data using qualitative data analysis software. He wrote a chapter in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*.

Arceli Rosario, PhD, is a professor and chair of the Education Department of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines. She served as a high school principal, vice president for academic affairs, and college president. She has taught courses, conducted trainings, published studies using qualitative methodologies, and is a co-editor of *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in the Asian Context*. She is the incumbent president of Asian Qualitative Research in Asia.

Gracel Ann Saban. PhD, is an associate professor in the Education Department of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines. Her profound zeal in and growing exposure to qualitative research has empowered her to delve into various qualitative research endeavors such as her active membership and service as executive secretary in the Asian Qualitative Research Association and regular *participation* in the World Conference on Qualitative Research. She

ferently desires to make her teaching and research activities as means of sharing the love and hope of Jesus Christ to the community of expert learners.

Pavel Zubkov, PhD, is an assistant professor of the Applied Theology Department of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines. He teaches applied theology research and writing and serves as a seminary methodologist. He comes from a quantitative orientation but has extended his interest to qualitative research. He is a co-editor of *Qualitative Research for Practical Theology* and contributed several chapters in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. He is the chief operating officer of the Asian Qualitative Research Association.