QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Ahdi Makmur

English Department, State Institute for Islamic Studies Antasari Banjarmasin

I. Introduction

Many people (particularly lecturers and teachers) don't do any research for some reasons. The main reason is relating to research methodology, like finding the topic, problem, and focus, and understanding the method. Others are out of methodological aspects like financial support, enthusiasm, or time (job, family or household or social activities). My experience in directing the Research Center in my college during the last two years, about 50 % of lecturers never did any research. However, in my English Department, the condition is better. It sounds quite satisfied. From 17 English lecturers there, about 90 % have involved in research individually or in a group from 2013 – 2015. Of course, understanding methodology and its application in the field is very important to someone(s) who would like to do research.

There are two main streams in research methodology, Quantitative and Qualitative. Which one is the best? Though some say that Quantitative research is better than the qualitative, or vice verse, I think both have their outcomes and weaknesses. However, everyone or every researcher has his or her own habit in doing his or her research. Because I used to do quantitative research, of course, I did my research mostly in qualitative one. The following writing will discuss about the qualitative research, particularly for those who like to know more about this type of research, to share opinion, to refresh their knowledge, or to do qualitative research in the time to come.

II. What is Qualitative Research?

Exactly, a research is an activity that consciously and systematically done and well planned, so is the qualitative research. Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit there (Berg, 1995), or about phenomena that occur in daily lives of people (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). In addition, this research aims to produce rounded and contextual understanding on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data (Mason, 2002). It means that it –as its main goal- tries to understand and to describe social phenomena, people behavior and action that occur naturally. In relation to educational domains, the research might be applied on students' learning styles, teacher's strategies in teaching English, classroom interaction, or other topics.

Compared to quantitative research, qualitative research is holistic (Mason, 2002, Creswell, 2009), inductive (Earl, 2004, Creswell, 2009), and natural (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989; Creswell, 2009). It means that the social realities which become the object of the research cannot be separated; and that, they should be analyzed and explained in a single theme. Also, there is no generalization of conclusion. The theory is constructed through the inducted method by first observing aspects of social life and then seeking to discover

patterns that may point to relatively universal principles in findings (Earl, 2004). Moreover, there is no manipulation of any treatment in the process (Creswell, 2009).

In addition, qualitative research emphasizes on process other than product, meaning behind the fact, natural and realistic aspects (Tarigan, 1993; Sugiyono, 2006). On the other words, it refers to data collection process where the researcher as a key instrument develops theory; and that, qualitative data, as written by Neuman (2006), involve documenting real events, recording what people say, observing specific behaviors, studying written documents, or examining visual images. Also, it refers to the meanings as the result of thinking, associating and interpreting, to characteristics, facts, symbols, and descriptions of things (Berg, 1995). Nevertheless, other aspects like definitions, concepts, and theories are also important for being the domains of scientific enquiry.

Thus, qualitative research is a kind of research consciously and systematically employed and well planned on social phenomena, people behavior and action in natural setting.

III. Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has some characteristics. Creswell (2009) identified some characteristics of qualitative research as follows.

1. Natural setting, the researcher's tent to collect data in the field, not in the lab. In gathering data, they have to communicate with the subject directly, face-to-face, and not sending out instrument like questionnaire. They observe what the people behave or act, and note the realities or facts as they are, not artificial or manipulated.

2. Researcher as key instrument, they collect data him/herself through examining documents, observing behavior, action, phenomena, or interviewing informants.

3. Multiple sources of data, they gather multiple forms of data, particularly from observations, interviews and documents. This is done to complete the data, to cross check, or to avoid biases. Then, they review and organize the data into categories or themes.

4. Inductive data analysis, they build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information, leading to a comprehensive set of themes.

5. Participants' meanings, every researcher tries to keep a focus on learning and to understand the meaning behind the facts he/she has observed. He/she should never bring his/her opinion to the field, and expressions written in the literatures, but what the people say about it or them (the object like things, people, behaviors or actions).

6. Emergent design, they process the research emergently. It means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, but they may change their focus after interring the field and while gathering the data.

7. Theoretical lens, they often use lens to view their study that might be different from the theoretical review. Sometimes, their study is   organized and identified around the social, political, cultural or historical context of the problem under study.

8. Interpretive, they interpret what they see, hear and understand. Their interpretation cannot be separated from their background, prior understanding, and socio-cultural context or even from other perspectives. At the end, it is apparent how multiple views of the problem can emerge.
9. Holistic account, they try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting many different perspectives.

However, the characteristics could be simplified into some points as stated by Seliger and Shohamy (1989), Tarigan (1993). They are: holistic, heuristic/inductive, and no/low control (natural).

IV. Types of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has some types: (1) Phenomenology, (2) Case study, (3) Grounded research, (4) Discourse and Content analysis, and (5) Ethnography (Sugiyono, 2009). Moreover, associated with certain schools, traditions or disciplines, there are a lot of types of it as follows.

1. Phenomenology
2. Ethnomethodology
3. Symbolic Interaction
4. Ethnography
5. Discourse and Content Analysis
6. Case Study
7. Oral and Life History
8. Grounded Research (Mason, 2002).

The question is which one(s) is/are relevant to research in ELT. It is difficult to answer for each has its own scientific tradition. However, in terms of the object, phenomenology, I think, is suitable. There are some phenomena, facts, and realities can be observed in teaching-learning English at schools, courses, and classrooms, or even outside the class room like in the park, in the lab, etc. On the basis of the subject, the amount of them, the case study is absolutely relevant to design for ELT research. If the subject is very small and specific, for example, the students in accelerated class, the students with disabilities, or the students with the low socio-economic status, no other types are better and more relevant than the case study is.
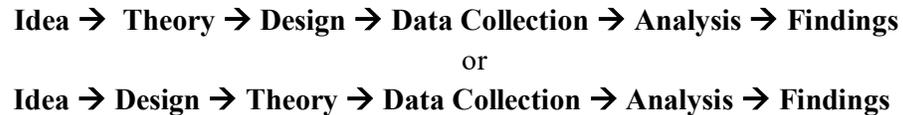
V. Design of Qualitative Research

Before designing qualitative research, at least, there are five important questions to be answered by the researchers as suggested by Mason (2002). The questions are as follows.

1. The social reality (Ontological perspective), what is the nature of phenomena or social reality I want to investigate?
2. Knowledge and evidence (Epistemological perspective), what might represent knowledge and evidence of social reality I wish to investigate?
3. Broad research area, what topic or substantive area is the research concerned with?

4. Intellectual puzzles and research questions, what do I wish to explain it to explore? What are my research questions?
5. The aims and purpose, what is the purpose of my research? What am I doing it for?

Having answered the questions, they might come to write the research design. Some scholars (Berg, 2002; Mason, 2002, Creswell, 2009) have discussed different procedures or steps. One of them is, proposed by Berg (1995), the following steps as seen in this diagram.

Idea → Theory → Design → Data Collection → Analysis → Findings
or
Idea → Design → Theory → Data Collection → Analysis → Findings

VI. Data Collection and Analysis in QR

The data collected in qualitative research are verbal in the forms of words or pictures, nor in numbers like quantitative researchers do (Sugiyono, 2009). To gather the data, researchers use some methods or techniques. According to Mason (2002), Creswell (2009), data might be collected through observations, interviews, and documents. They may be spontaneous, on the spot, scheduled, participant observation, and structured, unstructured, or in-depth interview, formal or informal document. I think the most important ones are: (1) Participant Observation, (2) In-depth Interview, and (3) Document.

In qualitative research, data analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations and writing draft. While interview is going on, for example, the researcher may be analyzing the data collected earlier, writing memos that may ultimately be concluded as a narrative in the final report, and organizing the structure of the final report.

Other technique is that the researcher collects qualitative data, then analyzes them for several themes or perspectives, and reports 4-5 themes. However, today many researchers go beyond this generic form or this basic analysis. Moreover, Creswell (2009) wrote that based on grounded theory, researchers systematically generated categories of information, selected one of the categories, and then positioned it within a theoretical model. Case study and ethnographic research involve a detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of the data for certain themes or issues. Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generating of meaning units, and the development of an essence description.

So far, Creswell (2009) also suggested the following steps to analyze the data.
1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis
2. Read through all the data
3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding analysis
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative

6. Make an interpretation or meaning of data.

Other techniques are, as suggested by Mason (2002), sorting and organizing the data into three broad approaches, which she called: cross-sectional and categorical indexing, non cross-sectional data organization, and the use of diagrams and charts. Otherwise, Huberman and Miles (1994), they proposed to reduce irrelevant data that have been collected and then categorize the rest into some groups, followed by displaying them, and ending by verifying to make conclusion as shown in the interactive model of the following picture.
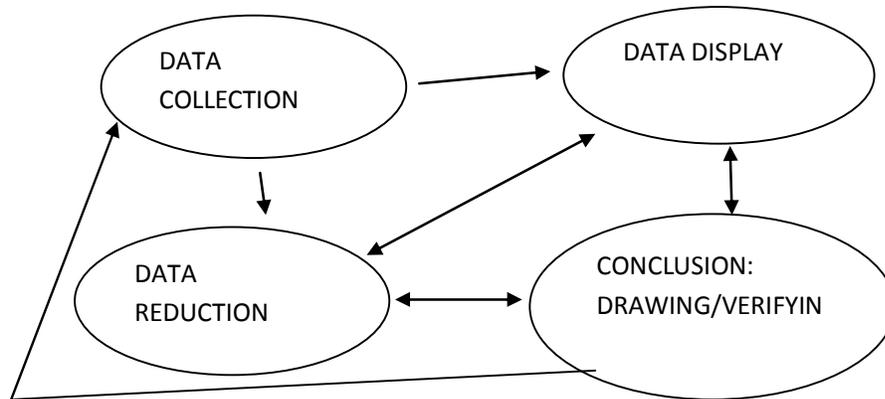
VII. The Procedures of Qualitative Research in ELT

There are some steps or procedures in qualitative research that may be employed in ELT:

1. Orientation with grand tour questions
2. Reduction and determining the focus
3. Selection or analysis the focus to become detailed components
4. Doing the research again to the field, and
5. Analyzing or reconstructing the data or information to build theory or hypotheses or innovations that could be considering significant for theoretically or practically.

VIII. Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

Validity in qualitative research does not always carry the same connotations as it does not do in quantitative research, nor it is a companion of reliability (Creswell, 2009). Although some writers have challenged or confused on terms of validity and reliability in qualitative research (see Lewes, 2009), both are parts of any research design; even validity is the strengths of qualitative research. Qualitative validity means the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is stable or consistent across different researchers, different projects, and different time.

There are two kinds of validity, internal and external. Internal means that there is an accuracy level of research design with the results of research. External –usually called generalizability- is the accuracy level of the applying research to new settings, people, or samples.

Here are some primary strategies to make any research become valid:
1. Triangulate different data sources of information
2. Use membership to determine the accuracy of findings
3. Use rich and thick descriptions to convey the findings
4. Present text information in tabular forms like matrices, tables, graphics, etc.
5. Use the wording from participants to form codes or themes
6. Intertwine quotations with the author's interpretations.

IX. Current Issues in ELT Research

Here some issues mostly done by my friends (some lecturers of English Department) in their researches.

1. EFL Learning styles and models
2. Teaching strategies
3. Classroom interactions
4. Gender in EFL teaching and learning process
5. Code switch in learning English
6. English in vocational, multicultural schools
7. Learning English through Electronic Devices
8. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)
9. English teachers' competences
10. English curriculum and materials

X. Conclusion

Qualitative research is different from quantitative research in some ways, like their objects, their instruments, their analyses, or the conclusion they draw. As a holistic, inductive, and natural research, qualitative research is designed on the basis of some steps, that is, orientation, reduction, selection, collection, analyzing, repetition, and reporting. If any different ideas or opinion come up, to some extent, it will be of different sources and perspectives. The different perspectives, however, could effect to the way someone thinks about. In addition, I believe that some disagree about my opinion, idea, and explanation in this paper; and that, I would like to accept your contributions as well.

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