



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

Introduction to Qualitative Research

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Introduction



WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?



CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.



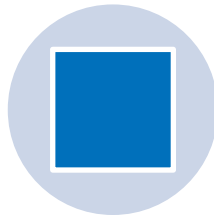
DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



SAMPLING, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS



CREDIBILITY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



A BRIEF NOTE ON MIXED METHODS RESEARCH



ETHICAL ISSUES



KEY TAKE HOME POINTS

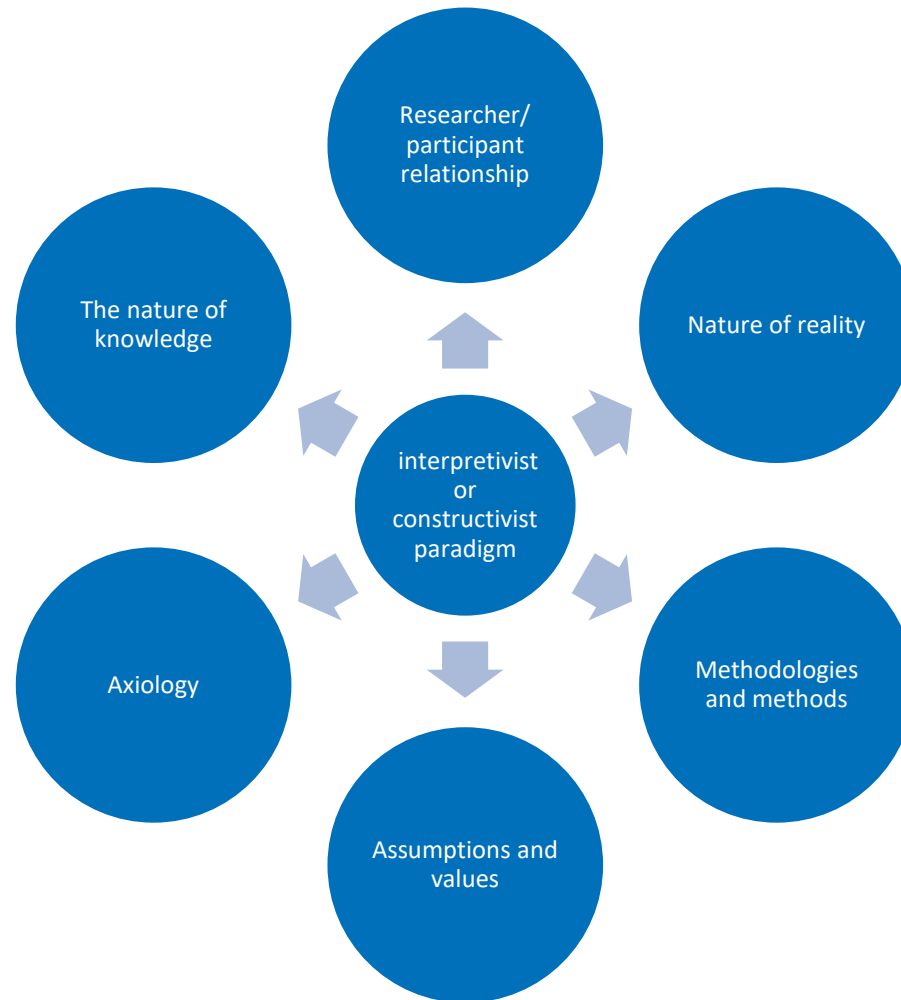
What is Qualitative Research?

An interpretative approach to data collection and analysis that is concerned with the meanings people attach to their experiences of the social world and how people make sense of that world (Pope and Mays 2020)

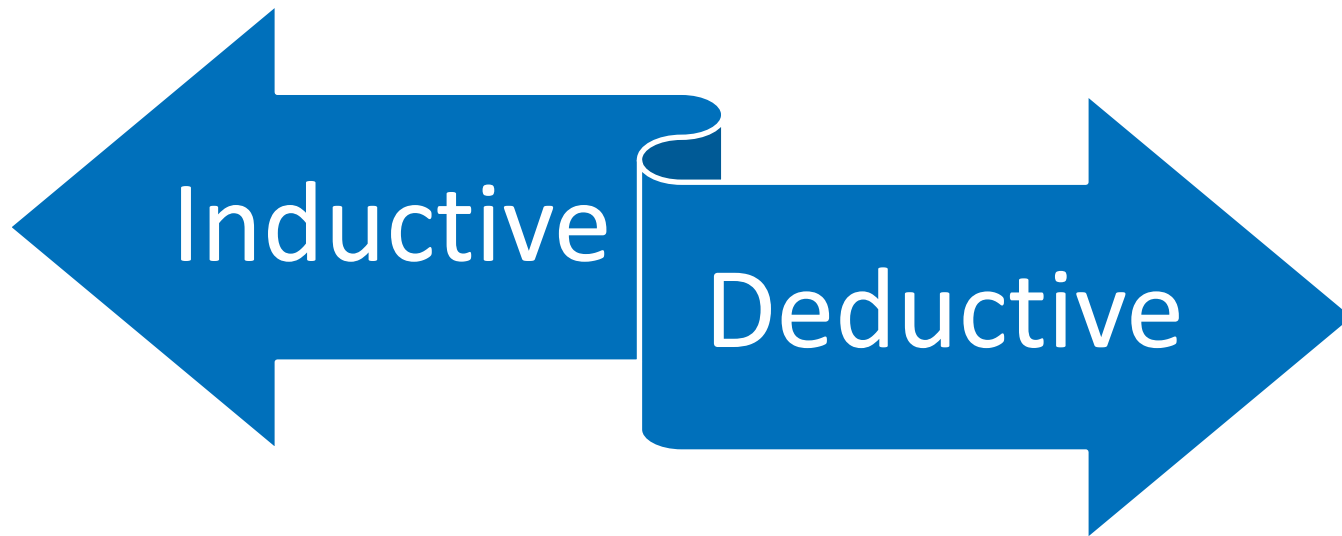
What this means is that qualitative research is concerned with understanding what people believe, think and how they interpret the experiences they have, as well as how they behave.

Qualitative research comprises a range of different approaches with some common characteristics that are applied in different ways depending on the aim of the research.

Key Characteristics of Qualitative Research



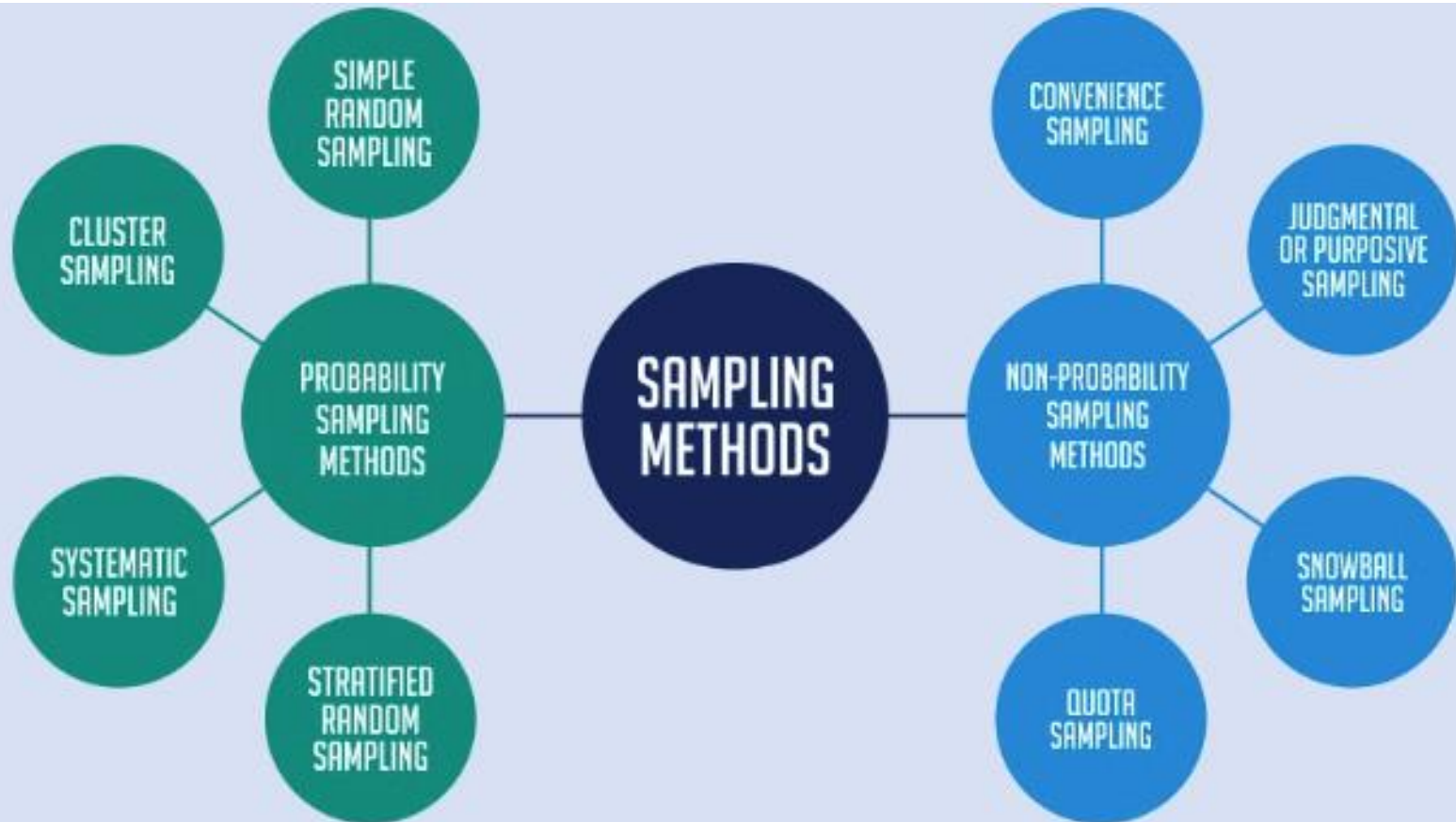
Inductive versus deductive



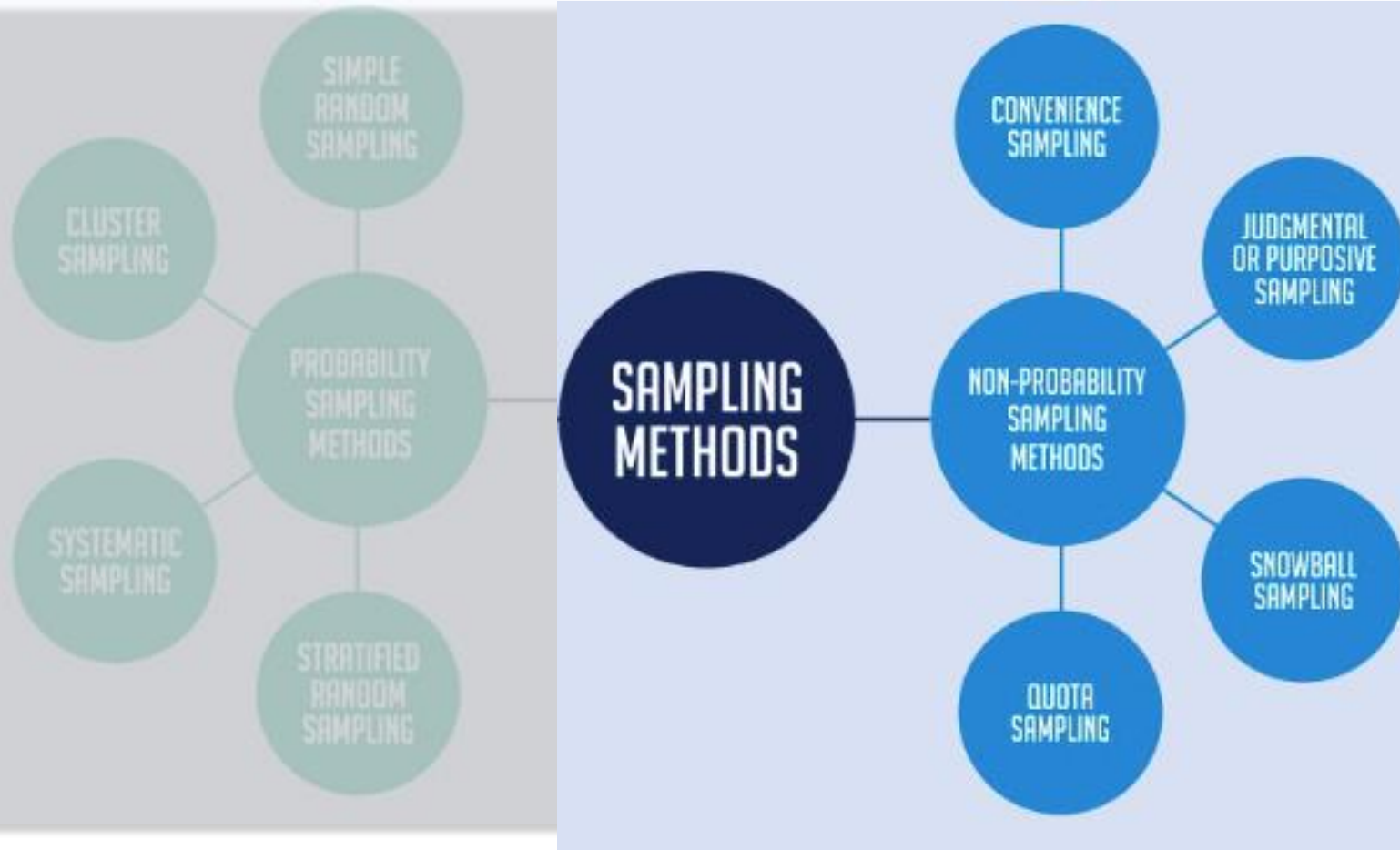
Different Types of Qualitative Research

- **Grounded theory**
- **Phenomenological research**
- **Narrative research**
- **Ethnography**
- **Action research**
- **Case study**
- **Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA)**
- **Descriptive/interpretive qualitative research**

Sampling, Data collection and Analysis



Sampling, Data collection and Analysis



Sample size in qualitative research



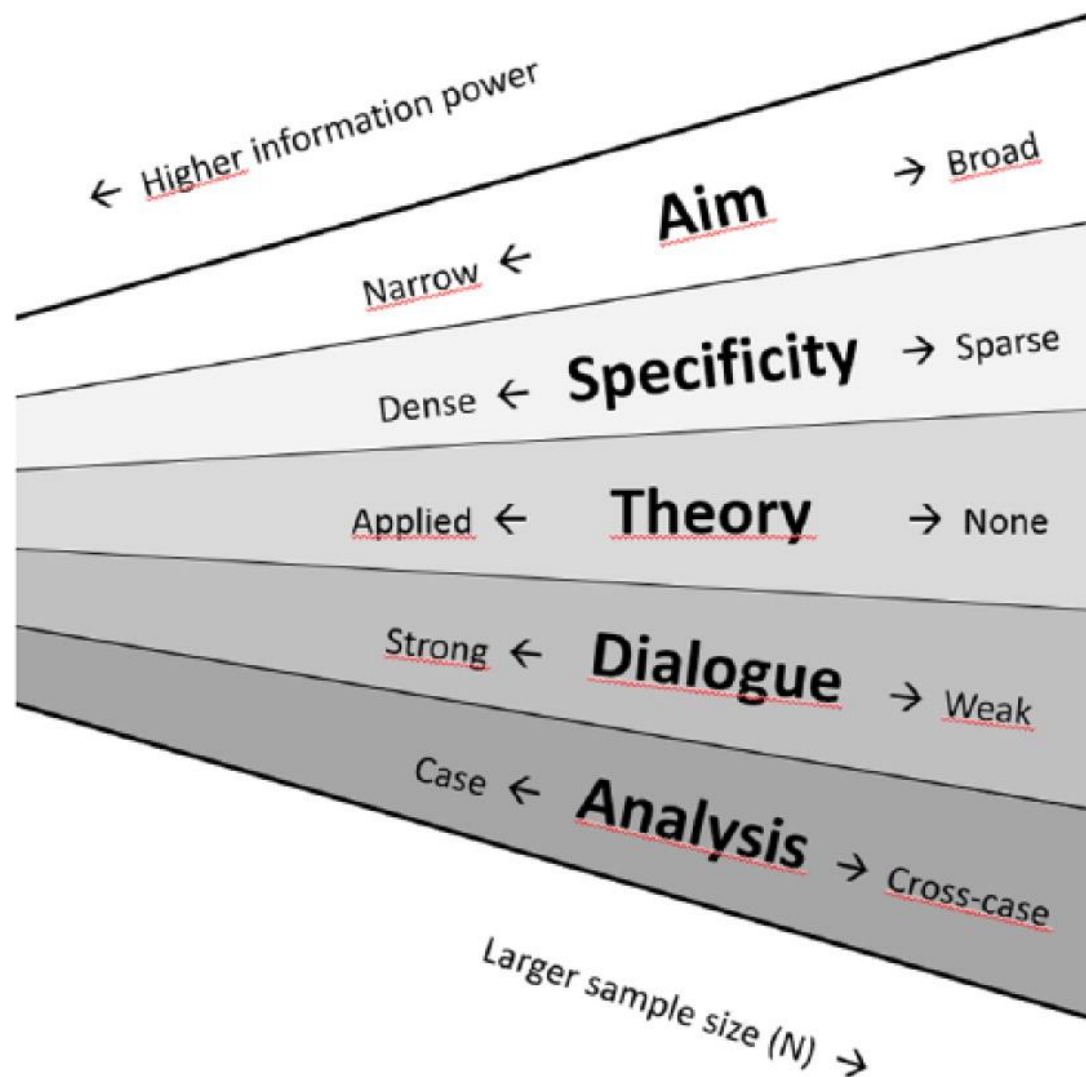
Types of saturation, their main focus, and judgment stage in the research process (Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024)

Types	Description: It refers to the stage where...	The main focus	The judgment stage
Data saturation	Previous data is repeated and new data does not contribute to addressing the research question.	Data collection	Repetition of data
Code or thematic saturation	Repetitive codes or themes are identified, and no new ones emerge.	Primary data analysis	Repetition of themes
Meaning saturation	All issues are fully understood, and no new information about the meaning of codes/ themes and their relationships emerges.	Data analysis	Depth of meaning in themes
Theoretical saturation	Collecting more data about a theoretical structure does not provide any new features or insights into the emerging theory.	Theoretical sampling based on data analysis	Completeness of concept features and relationships in overall theory

Data saturation versus information power

- Sample sizes must be ascertained in qualitative studies like in quantitative studies but not by the same means. The prevailing concept for sample size in qualitative studies is “saturation.”
- *Saturation* is closely tied to a specific methodology, and the term is inconsistently applied.
- “information power” to guide adequate sample size for qualitative studies.
- Information power indicates that the more information the sample holds, relevant for the actual study, the lower number of participants is needed.

Data saturation versus information power



To saturate or not to saturate?

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13(2), 201-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846>

We encourage researchers using reflexive TA to dwell with uncertainty and recognise that meaning is *generated* through interpretation of, not excavated from, data, and therefore judgements about ‘how many’ data items, and when to stop data collection, are inescapably situated and subjective, and cannot be determined (wholly) in advance of analysis.

Qualitative Research Methods: The top 4 Techniques



Data Analysis

- ❑ **Different approaches depending on the chosen methodology and aim of the research – analysis ranging from description of the data to construction of a theory which is developed from the data.**
 - ❑ Thematic analysis
 - ❑ Constant comparative analysis
 - ❑ Content analysis
 - ❑ Theory development
 - ❑ Narrative

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 - ❑ Theory development
 - ❑ Narrative
 - ❑ **Transcription of data to text.**
 - ❑ **Data familiarisation.**
 - ❑ **Use of an analytic framework or approach**
 - ❑ **Coding**
 - ❑ **Development of themes or categories**
 - ❑ **Rich, detailed description of the phenomenon under scrutiny**
 - ❑ **Excerpts from the transcripts to highlight findings**
 - ❑ **Use of software such as NVivo.**


Thick Description

Thick description refers to giving a thorough account of the participants' views, intents, circumstances, motives, meanings, and understandings. However, as individuals do not exist in isolation, thick description also requires accurately describing the context of the observations, including the psychological, institutional, sociological, and anthropological dimensions of the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, since the findings of qualitative studies are (re-) constructions by the researchers from “what the participants construct at the time”, thick description requires researchers to provide a concise account of what unfolded in their minds as they interpret the findings.

Younas, A., Fàbregues, S., Durante, A., Escalante, E. L., Inayat, S., & Ali, P. (2023). Proposing the “MIRACLE” Narrative Framework for Providing Thick Description in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221147162>

Credibility in Qualitative Research

Credibility is the extent to which qualitative research findings are believable, trustworthy, and accurate.

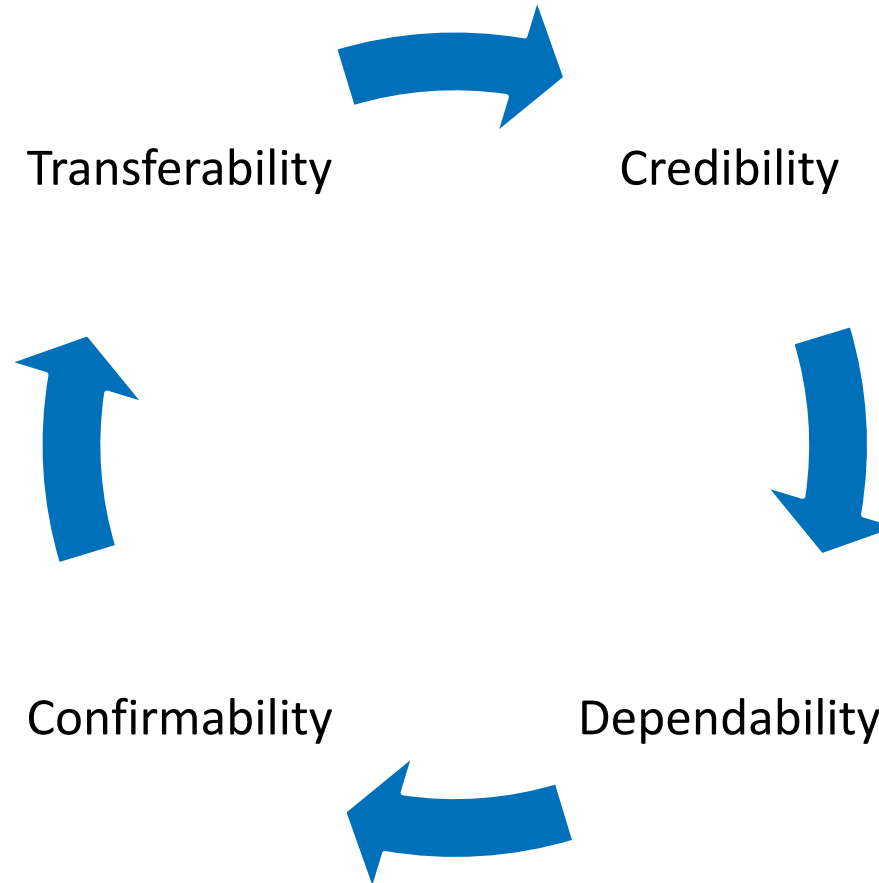


Credibility is established by demonstrating that the study's findings are consistent with the data collected and the participants' experiences.



The credibility of qualitative research depends on several factors, such as the research design, data collection methods, and the researcher's role.

Framework for Establishing Trustworthiness in a Qualitative Study (Guba & Lincoln 1994)



What strategies can qualitative researchers adopt to ensure the credibility of the study findings?

- Accounting for personal biases which may have influenced findings;
- Acknowledging biases in sampling and ongoing critical reflection of methods to ensure sufficient depth and relevance of data collection and analysis;
- Meticulous record keeping, demonstrating a clear decision trail and ensuring interpretations of data are consistent and transparent;
- Establishing a comparison case/seeking out similarities and differences across accounts to ensure different perspectives are represented;
- Including rich and thick verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts to support findings;

What strategies can qualitative researchers adopt to ensure the credibility of the study findings?

- Demonstrating clarity in terms of thought processes during data analysis and subsequent interpretations
- Engaging with other researchers to reduce research bias;
- Respondent validation: includes inviting participants to comment on the interview transcript and whether the final themes and concepts created adequately reflect the phenomena being investigated;
- Data triangulation, whereby different methods and perspectives help produce a more comprehensive set of findings (Noble & Smith, 2025).

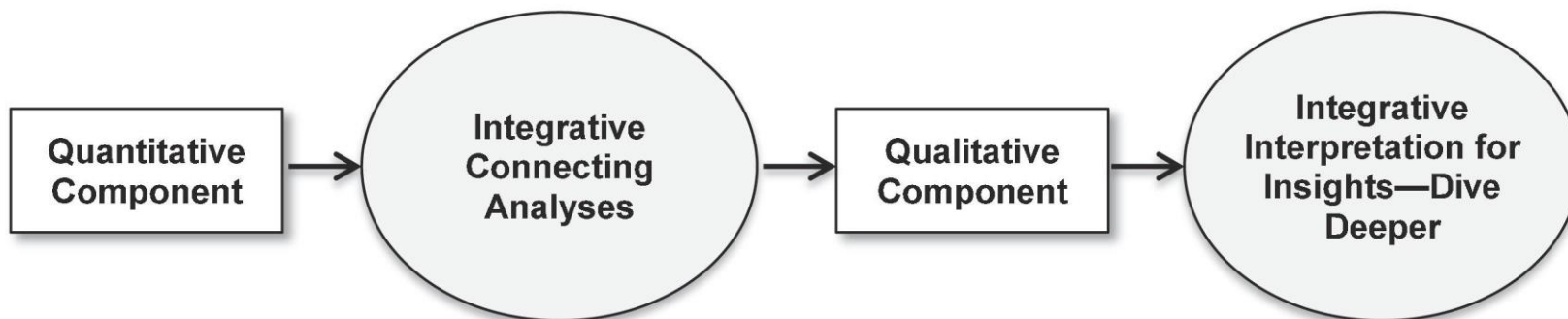
Mixed Methods Research

- ❑ Mixed methods may be defined as research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007).
 - ❑ Triangulation
 - ❑ Completeness
 - ❑ Offsetting weaknesses and providing stronger inferences
 - ❑ Answering different research questions
 - ❑ Explanation of findings (Doyle et al. 2016).

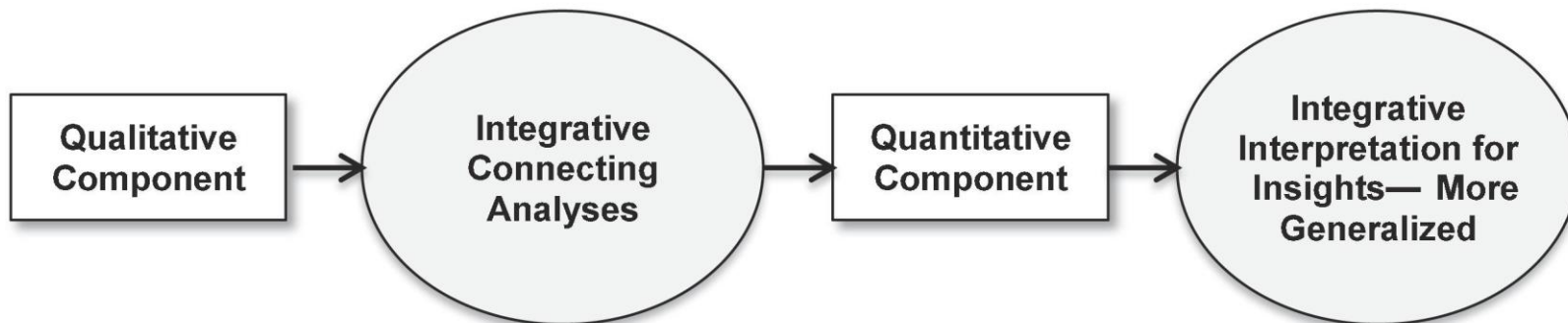
(a) Convergent mixed methods design (Quan + Qual)



(b) Explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Quan → Qual)



(c) Exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Qual → Quan)



Ethical Issues & GDPR



Limitations of qualitative research

- ❑ **Qualitative research offers valuable insights into human experience, but it also has some limitations to consider:**
 - ❑ Generalisability
 - ❑ Subjectivity
 - ❑ Causality
 - ❑ Time Consuming
 - ❑ Data Analysis
 - ❑ When reporting qualitative research, there needs to be clarity about how the research process was applied - COREQ - Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research
 - ❑ Limitations of the research need to be explicit

Key Points

- The aim of the research will dictate the methodology and research design.**
- Research that aims to explore individuals' experiences or to understand meaning attached to experiences or where there is little known about a phenomenon lend themselves well to qualitative approaches.**
- Rigorous and transparent approach.**
- Role of the researcher –reflexivity**
- Limitations of the research and the findings.**
- Data and findings.**
- Time.**

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Thank You

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