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I can't say I wasn't anticipating it, but I didn't see it coming in this magnitude: A Qualitative Fieldwork Experience in the North West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract

This article draws explicitly on the fieldwork challenging experiences of an ongoing PhD study which seeks to explore the role of the community in the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It is apparent that every qualitative researcher undertaking fieldwork anticipate being confronted with challenges and difficulties in the process. Nevertheless, in spite of the anticipation of these challenges and complexity that exist in the field, as well as prior preparation, fieldwork can still be a very intense and challenging experience. This is because many unanticipated encounters arise during fieldwork, which the researchers did not see coming. Whilst acknowledging that fieldwork in qualitative research can be challenging and complex, the unanticipated and underestimated magnitude and intensity of the challenges that occurred in undertaking qualitative fieldwork in the Northwest Region of Cameroon is the interest of this paper.

Keywords

Qualitative Fieldwork, Challenges, Complexities, Unanticipated, Magnitude, Cameroon

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I Can't Say I Wasn't Anticipating It, but I Didn't See It Coming in This Magnitude: A Qualitative Fieldwork Experience in the Northwest Region of Cameroon

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This article draws explicitly on the fieldwork challenging experiences of an ongoing PhD study which seeks to explore the role of the community in the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It is apparent that every qualitative researcher undertaking fieldwork anticipate being confronted with challenges and difficulties in the process. Nevertheless, in spite of the anticipation of these challenges and complexity that exist in the field, as well as prior preparation, fieldwork can still be a very intense and challenging experience. This is because many unanticipated encounters arise during fieldwork, which the researchers did not see coming. Whilst acknowledging that fieldwork in qualitative research can be challenging and complex, the unanticipated and underestimated magnitude and intensity of the challenges that occurred in undertaking qualitative fieldwork in the Northwest Region of Cameroon is the interest of this paper. Keywords: Qualitative Fieldwork, Challenges, Complexities, Unanticipated, Magnitude, Cameroon

The process of conducting qualitative fieldwork, particularly in developing contexts can be a very complex and challenging experience, even when one could be mindful of the fact that challenges and complexities exist in doing fieldwork in qualitative research (Palmer, Fam, Smith, & Kilham, 2014; Watts, 2008; Wood, 2006) and even for those doing it in their countries of origin (Mandiyanike, 2009). These challenges are equally true for researchers who are neither natives nor foreigners, and those who are third category or returners (i.e., those who have been distanced from their country of origin for a few years for educational reasons and return to their home countries to conduct research. They will need to adapt and adjust to the context as a result of transformational processes that have occurred, owing to the distance away from the context (Wustenberg, 2008).

Of course, there are clear advantages associated with doing research in one's country of origin (Wustenberg, 2008). The significant benefits include linguistic, that is, the ability to speak the relevant languages fluently, acquaintance with home culture, understanding cultural sensitivities, awareness of regional similarities and differences, opportunity of gaining access, opportunity to nurture rapport, and a creation of a sense of community, which of course enhances trust and openness in the research process. (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001; Wustenberg, 2008). Wustenberg (2008) explains that:

> Indigenous researchers come into the field with a high level of understanding of cultural nuances, informal conversations, hints, idioms, jokes and so forth. Cultural and linguistic skills are important even before the research itself begins. These scholars are well-equipped to assess whether their research design can be implemented practically and are likely to have fewer misconceptions that have to be "worked off" before they can get the "meat" of their study. (p. 19)

With reflections from the entire fieldwork process, this paper presents the complexities and challenges that were experienced in the field during the data collection process of my (first

author) PhD in my country (Cameroon) and region of origin (Northwest Region). This doctoral study, which focuses on exploring community's role in the inclusion of people with disabilities; however, is carried out in the Department of Special Needs Education of Ghent University. The department is comprised of a group of researchers—of which the authors of the current article are members— united under the banner of Disability Studies in Education (DSE). It is a *network group* with strong connections to people whose lived experiences reflect the kinds of concerns addressed by DSE scholars. As a work in progress, the group attempts shifting the perspectives of students into a DSE perspective, which is a change from the old-fashioned special education perspective to a human rights perspective. Simultaneously, the group is looking at how to work with their network companions in research, education, and service to the community (Van Hove & De Schauwer, 2015). In this light, and following a presentation regarding the progress made in the current doctoral study to some members, including the second and third author; the third author supervises the current doctoral study, the second author came up with the idea of writing this article. The subsequent sections will focus on: deliberations on challenges in qualitative fieldwork, study context, research on inclusive education, and the challenges.

Deliberations on Challenges in Qualitative Fieldwork

Fieldwork is a critical part of every qualitative research process, and the experiences in fieldwork present researchers with a plethora of challenges and complexities. Correspondingly, qualitative fieldwork involves contact between the researcher, the participants, and the research environment or site that cannot (and arguably should not) be closely controlled by the researcher; as a result, challenges are inevitable (Bloor, Fincham, & Sampson, 2010). In other words, fieldwork eventually brings the researcher into contact with participants, as well as into contact with the difficulties and complex issues that exist in conducting research at the research site.

Contact with the research environment has made researchers susceptible to physical risks like contracting physical illnesses such as hepatitis, malaria, etc. (Bloor et al., 2010; Peterson, 2000). Peterson (2000) explains the dangers in fieldwork by stating that:

> There is also the physical damage that comes from disease. For instance, I contracted Hepatitis A and was laid out for six weeks during my research, and during a [fieldwork teaching] course in Nicaragua most of my students spent time in a private clinic at one stage or another. One even lapsed into a coma state, and at one point we had difficulties finding a pulse. (p. 184)

The research environment has also exposed researchers to environments characterized by insecurity, and this eventually comes along with fear, frustrations, and anxieties (Mukeredzi, 2012). Mukeredzi (2012) explains that these feelings become aggravated in a politically insecure environment, and in those volatile circumstances, the likelihood is that these feelings may inhibit the researcher from entering the research field with as much openness as possible.

The researchers' connection with participants implies negotiating complex social situations and this to a larger extent presents the contentious issue of reciprocity which implies repaying favors or *give and take* (Gokah, 2006). Equally, contact with participants also presents the researcher with what Gokah (2006) calls *escort politics*, which requires the selection of good contact persons. This is owing to the politics that exist in relation to how researchers are treated by some contacts (e.g., corporate bodies in their attempt to take over and have greater control over the researcher's research agenda). Gokah (2006) as a novice researcher with experience of escort politics explains:

> There were attempts by my contact agency (a local NGO) to hijack my project. This took the form of them trying to reorganize my itinerary to suit their interests, deciding which organizations I could and could not visit, without regard to my costing and budgeting...I found in some cases that important organizations I had originally planned to visit were deliberately ignored by my escorts. This sometimes created tension and difficulties between me and my escorts. (p. 70)

Qualitative research fieldwork has also presented the issue of time as a challenge. This is because this research approach requires considerable amount of time in the field (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). Although an ideal length of time to be spent in the field is difficult to establish, some researchers have established a minimum of twelve months and others twenty-four months as the ideal time for fieldwork (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). Equally, the issue of time is reflected in time restriction, which could result from political instability, delay in accessing participant etc. This time restriction, as explained by Mukeredzi (2012) may adversely impact the quality and quantity of data collected.

Study Context

Cameroon is found in Central Africa and it is bordered by the countries of Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon (Delancey, Mbuh, & Delancey, 2010). This study was undertaken in the Northwest Region of Cameroon and the region happens to be one of the ten regions of the country and equally one of the two English-speaking regions. The region is comprised of of seven divisions: Boyo, Bui, Donga-Matung, Menchum, Mezam, Momo, and Ngo-ketunjia (Manu, Andu, Tala, & Agharih, 2014). This study was carried out in four of these seven divisions, namely: Mezam, Boyo, Bui and Donga-Matung. The Northwest Region covers approximately 17,900 km² with diverse climate, vegetation, and hilly landscape (Ngane, Ngane, Ndjib, Awah, & Ehabe, 2012). There are two main seasons: the rainy and the dry season. The rainy season in general lasts longer (eight months: mid-March to mid-October) than the dry season (Kometa & Akoh, 2012).

Research on Inclusive Education

This article is a product of a qualitative research project on inclusive education that explores the role of the community in the education of people with disabilities in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It examines community role by looking at the kinds of support and services which provide for people with disabilities. Owing to the fact that qualitative research requires studying people in their natural settings or context (Creswell, 1994; Holloway, 1997), people with disabilities, their families, regular school teachers, regular school principals, non-governmental organization personnel, community-based rehabilitation personnel, religious leaders, traditional leaders and social workers (the community-based on this study) were approached as research participants in their different contexts during the fieldwork process.

Semi-structured interviews and participant observations were the main research instruments used in collecting the data. Field notes were also used as a supporting instrument to the interviews and participant observations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The interview questions, which aimed at understanding the kind of support and services provided to people with disabilities by the community and the challenges involved, were transcribed to ensure accuracy. (Cohen et al., 2007)

This study prioritized purposive sampling at the beginning for its advantage in opening up information rich cases (Suri, 2011). Snowball sampling, which is the access to other participants with common characteristics with identified participants through the assistance of the identified participants, however, emerged as an additional sample and became unavoidable as the search advanced (Cohen et al., 2007).

Informed consent and protecting privacy were ethically observed in the study. The informed consent forms were given to the different participants and it stated the following in clear terms: participants' participation as voluntary, advice of withdrawal from study at any point as well as access to results from the study (Banister, 2007; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000).

The vehicles for protecting participants' privacy in this study are confidentiality (assumed pseudonyms-non-revealing of participants' real names) and respect for autonomy, whereby the participant's rights are respected and they are given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves— notably about whether to participate or not (Howe & Moses, 1999; Orb at al., 2000).

The Challenges

I anticipated, based on evidence from literature, daily observations, and personal childhood experience, that people with disabilities face huge difficulties which could be emotionally triggering; but, I had never before had the opportunity to sit down and actually listen to their experiences and stories.

Intricacies arose in the interview process; this was not only in relation to carrying out the numerous interviews and transcribing them but also in relation directly to the nature of the stories. Going through the audio tapes again triggered some awkwardness and painful emotional feelings as some of the stories were quite heart breaking, even more than when they were being told during the interview process (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007; Johnson, 2009). Sometimes when I am reflecting on the fieldwork, I feel terribly distraught about some of the stories I encountered. One of the family members of persons with disabilities explained:

> Hmmm!!! sometimes I really feel bad when I think of the time when we knew that she (daughter with a disability) will be like this throughout her life…we wondered why this kind of bad luck really came to us…you will not imagine that when we just came to this house that you see now, one morning like that, one of our neighbors here for no reason just came here and insulted my family as having witchcraft, that we do evil things and that is why she is disabled…it was a whole scene for about 30 minutes and other neighbors came and crowded in front of the house here…I was soooo embarrassed…I have never in my life been spoken to like that… she cried the whole of that day and refused to eat anything…my wife also cried and cried…it was really bad but we just left it for God (Interview with Family member of girl with disability, Mezam division, 16/06/2013).

These experiences and encounters brought to mind the fact that the current research did not start on a blank page as my mind went back to my childhood experience of living with an aunt with severe intellectual disability. The associations of her disability with witchcraft, the physical tortures she received when she acted contrary to expectations or in an unusual way, the neglect she experienced from the family, etc. brought what Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, and Kemmer (2001) called *emotional labor* of a researcher (p. 121), as it deals with work that

involves feelings. This creates risks to the researcher as some of the negative and powerful feelings which participants exhibit may sometimes be transferred to the researcher, who during these moments may feel helpless and vulnerable (Johnson, 2009; Hubbard et al., 2001). These moments upset me emotionally as I was reminded of my own personal experiences. Hubbard et al. (2001) explain that the influence of emotions on the researcher is intense when the researcher has similar experiences with the participants and the experiences of the participants remind the researchers of their own experiences. Hubbard et al. (2001) again state that:

> During fieldwork the researcher may encounter emotionally disturbing situations, such as witnessing a respondent who is experiencing psychological distress. Researchers may find themselves in situations where emotional support for the respondent is called for. Through encounters and experiences in the field, a researcher may also reflect on their own lives and personal situations. (p. 121)

Doing qualitative research requires going in to the lives of other people or causing others to tell you their personal information which of course is so hard and has the probability of causing distress to the interviewee, implying that the researcher is facing human feelings which of course require the researcher to demonstrate feelings and some degree of discretion, respect, help, support, care, and appreciation (Bahn & Weatherill, 2012; Dickson-Swift et al, 2007; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Hubbard et al. (2001) explains that, sometimes researchers feel a great urge to help participants, and most often in such cases, they struggle with the personally painful demands of whether to throw in the towel on doing research and give themselves entirely to helping participants, or make themselves available when need arises for emotional support for the respondent, or remain in the field as raconteurs of difficulties, etc. All of these have therapeutic value to participants, bringing in elements of friendship, and all of these come at a personal cost to the researcher (Bahn & Weatherill, 2012; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Most often according to Dickson et al. (2007), most participants find it hard to differentiate between therapy and research. This was quite critical for the researcher in the research process as the demonstration of this therapeutic value made the researcher more vulnerable to crossing the boundaries from research to friendship (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Ellis, 2007). This was crucial for the researcher as friendship in research according to Ellis (2007) and Tillmann-Healy (2003), requires or demands reciprocity, or should honor reciprocity. This to a larger extent did not only allow the voices of the participants to be heard (Bahn & Weatherill, 2012), but it also nurtured bonds which were beneficial to both the researcher and the participants, thus putting fieldwork relationship on a balance or equivalence with the project (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). In four of the families of people with disabilities which the researcher approached to carry out interviews, food had been prepared for the researcher. One of the families even offered the researcher money for her transportation back to her destination. This aspect, however, does not convey the strength of friendship to the researcher in the material sense, but it opened the eyes of the researcher to the accommodating and welcoming culture of the *Northwesterners* (someone from the Northwest Region of Cameroon) which had a positive impact on the research project. This portrayed the fact that friendship ripples through multi-faceted dimensions of life (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). This was also beneficial to the participants, as they did not only take pride in the contribution of their experiences to the researchers' projects but they also took pride in what I will interpret as or call *fulfilling their African nature*.

Again, causing participants to unveil their stories was considered a privilege on the part of the researcher and this came along with the feeling of gratitude, as well as debt to the participants. This obligation or responsibility to do something about the participants' situation weighed heavily on the researchers' conscience and led to guilt; failing to do something about

the participants' situation was like letting them down or just using them as a means to collect data (Bahn & Weatherill, 2012). This corroborates with relational ethics which involves an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on the participants; thereby, the researcher engages in reciprocity with participants, and do not co-opt the participants just to get their stories (Tracy, 2010). It recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between the researcher and researched and poses the question of *What should I do now?* or *How should I act?* (Ellis, 2007; Given, 2008). The feeling of being indebted to the participants in this study was, however, proven otherwise as the participant's actions (e.g., giving food and transport money to the researcher) challenged the researcher's feelings, and this was transformational for the research. Going into the lives of the participants and causing them to tell their experiences opens old wounds and rewinds them to moments of great hurts; but on the contrary, the participants whom the researcher felt indebted to reacted otherwise or contrary to the researchers' feelings through their actions. I anticipated the bureaucracy involved with my country's institutions when it comes to administrative matters, but I have never been there to obtain formal letters of access for research in the identity of a student from abroad or in a foreign country.

Access to the field is a pre-requisite and precondition for conducting research, and this has been challenging to fieldworkers since the days of Boas and Malinowski (Wanat, 2008; Shenton & Hayter, 2004). Access to the field and participants always involves going through gatekeepers, or through a hierarchy of gatekeepers, or tiers of management, or multiple entry points (Nind, 2008; Wanat, 2008). This implies first approaching the senior figure in the organization and then working through to people with firsthand contact with the participants (Nind, 2008). Building on this, the granting of access by gatekeepers is one of the fundamental complexities of all the bureaucracies involved in gaining access. This is because, any gatekeeper who denies the researcher access to his organizations also effectively prevents the researcher from approaching all the potential informants within them, unless, there are alternative routes available to the researcher (Shenton & Hayter, 2004). Following the challenge of accessing gatekeepers lies the persuasion of individual informants associated with the organizations to contribute data, usually via interviews, observations, etc. (Shenton & Hayter, 2004). Further, before gatekeepers are likely to grant access, they will need to be convinced of the benefits of the research as well as the protection of the participants (Nind, 2008). These associate us with the bureaucracies which according to Titchkosky (2011) is the *hierarchical and regularized form of structured procedure usually managed by an office or official of an organization* (p. 8) that accompanies the granting of access (Mollet, 2011).

The issue of bureaucracy in this study is not only explained in the fact that developing countries are much more pluralistic and characterized by huge bureaucracy (Mollet, 2011), but also in the heterogeneous nature of the sample of this study, which warranted the negotiation of access to participants at multiple entry points (Wanat, 2008). The researcher obtained official approval (i.e., formal approval backed by a written letter) from the regional delegation of education to access the educational institutions, the regional delegation of social affairs to access non-governmental organizations, and a Christian oriented organization to access community-based rehabilitation personnel and social workers. Access to the other members of the community or participants was informal (i.e., verbal approval) as permission from the above delegations, and organization included contact with the other community members or participants. Equally, obtaining letters of permission is even more complex for students from abroad, as numerous proofs are required. These made the obtainment of formal letters of permission to access participants from the authorities very difficult, leading to interruptions in the research process.

A complicated challenge arose when the researcher needed access to community-based rehabilitation personnel and social workers. It is generally recognized that all organizations

that are non-governmental are under the supervision of the regional delegation of social affairs, so to gain access to these sectors, the researcher complied by obtaining letters of authorization to access them. However, it was surprising to the researcher that the organization in charge of the community-based rehabilitation personnel and social workers, though non-governmental, had its own internal rules and regulations, and its own institutional review board and ethics committee, from which approval had to be obtained before access to these participants could be granted. This was quite challenging as the procedure in obtaining approval by the organization was complex and lengthy (took approximately a month and three weeks from the date of its application). The procedure and process here at some point made me feel as if I was starting another fieldwork process. However, the reason behind these complexities was the need for adequate evidence of the researcher being a student; and appropriate compliance to the ethical principles of the organization's institutional review board including measures of protecting confidentiality and anonymity as well as the contributions of the research. Johl and Renganathan (2010) explain that *many organizations deny access due to academic's failure to provide answers about what, how and why they are carrying out the study, and whether the study would provide value to the organization itself* (p. 42). Mollet (2011) puts that for developing societies which are often pluralistic, it is important for researchers conducting fieldwork to consider the cultural background and security, especially when it comes to sensitive issues. The author further states that this state of affairs can cause the researcher to find it difficult getting letters of permission from the local authorities, leading to delays in the research. Due to these challenges, this research fieldwork which was anticipated for 8 weeks ended up being a 16-week research fieldwork.

I underestimated the huge discrepancies that exist between procedural ethics and situational ethics (Ellis, 2007). Ethics is inescapable in qualitative research (Paoletti, Tomas, & Menendez, 2013). Many ethical issues are described as emerging unexpectedly, abruptly challenging the researcher in the field. This is in contrast with the ethical practices of review boards where ethical problems are generally planned and dealt with at the beginning of the research and researchers are responsible for adopting the prescribed procedures (Paoletti et al., 2013). Equally, disparities exist between what is sometimes written on paper and what actually happens on ground, or the realities that present themselves in the field. This is congruent with Darling's (2014) suggestion that *...procedural model...seeks to render the ethical outcomes of research encounters predictable. By contrast...fieldwork demands the development of situated judgements which exceed procedural models of ethics* (pp. 202-203). This brings to the front the discrepancies that exist between procedural ethics and situational ethics or ethics in practice. Procedural ethics according to Tracy (2010) is:

> The ethical actions dictated as universally necessary by larger organizations, institutions or governing bodies. Procedural ethics are encompassed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), including mandates such as do no harm, avoid deception, negotiate informed consent, and ensure privacy and confidentiality...encompasses the importance of accuracy and avoiding fabrication, fraud, omission, and contrivance...suggest that research participants have a right to know the nature and potential consequences of the research—and understand that their participation is voluntary. (p. 847)

Situational ethics or ethics in practice according to Ellis (2007) is that which *deals with the unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field* (p. 4). It is ethics that goes beyond what the review board states to defining detailed description of ethical problems as they emerge in actual research situations (Paoletti et al., 2013).

The consent forms (Banister, 2007; Orb et al., 2000) which received a lot of scrutiny by the ethics committee board was not very useful for most participants in the field, as some of the participants did not have the culture of signing papers, thus they were reluctant to sign the forms. In such instances, once the purpose of the research was explained and made clear to them and all what the visit was about, it was considered sufficient and polite enough to obtain their approval. This situation is in accordance with what Ellis (2007) explains:

> As qualitative researchers, we encounter ethical situations that do not fit strictly under the procedures specified by IRBs…there are no generative rules or universal principles that can tell you precisely what to do in every situation or relationship you may encounter, other than the vague and generic do no harm. (p. 5)

Further, on two occasions in the fieldwork process, access to two of the families was restricted as they failed to return and pick up my repeated calls before and on the date scheduled for the visit respectively. I anticipated, based on proofs from research that participation is voluntary and that participants possess the right to withdrawal at any point in the research process (Banister, 2007; Orb et al., 2000). However, what I underestimated was the fact that, participants could in reality refute access even after prior acceptance and scheduled visit dates without providing, even for civility's sake, any reason for their subsequent denial or change of mind. Agreeing with Ballamingie and Johnson (2011) statement that *it would behoove novice researcher to keep at the fore that participant access is a privilege, and not an entitlement, and to adjust expectations- and assumptions- regarding participation accordingly when planning research processes"* (p. 715), in the end, I accepted their implicit repudiation to participate in the interview even though their denial remained unbeknownst to me. Shaw (2011) explains that participants with problem experiences in most cases have unpredictable or fluctuating states of minds as they change their minds more easily; at one point they might be happy to volunteer their story and at another time they change their minds. The different priorities of participants to a larger extent could also suggest the denial to participate.

The researcher sought to strike a balance between procedural ethics and ethics in practice or situational ethics (Ellis, 2007; Guilleman & Gillam, 2004). Guilleman and Gillam (2004) put that it would be a mistake to suggest that procedural ethics cover the whole of ethics, for research ethics committees cannot help when you are in the field and difficult and/or unexpected situations arise such that you are forced to make immediate decisions about ethical concerns. They argued that it is within the dimension of *ethics in practice* that the researcher's competence comes to the fore (Guilleman & Gillam, 2004).

> *I was born in and grew up in a developing context (Cameroon) characterized by poor road networks, but I have never climbed a hilly terrain in the rainy season, not even for pleasure.*

This study was carried out in the rainy season where the roads are muddy, slippery and the landscape hilly, making it inaccessible for the available modes of transport (e.g., cars and motor bikes). Most often I engaged in long distance trekking to the various places where I had to meet some of the participants. This was not only because some of the areas were inaccessible for motor bikes, but also because of the alarming rates of motor bikes causing accidents.

> Each time I left for the interior areas, I knew I had to put on my rubber shoes in order to trek with ease in the muddy, slippery and hilly paths. Most of my leather shoes all got worn out due to the bad roads. I refused going to most of the areas

on motor bikes because of the rate at which they cause accidents. Informal discussions with some of the community-based rehabilitation and Non-governmental organization personnel reveal that most of the physical disabilities within the past five years resulted from motor bike accidents (Field notes from participant observation with community-based rehabilitation personnel 1, Boyo division, 23/07/2013).

The hilly slippery muddy roads did not only come along with its awkwardness of limiting transportation, but also with the fact that after visits to the participants, I had to get water to wash off the mud from my feet, shoes, and sometimes cloth.

> After visits to participants, I sometimes asked for water from them to rinse the mud from my feet…sometimes I asked for public taps with running water… sometimes I use the running waters that resulted from the rain to rinse off the mud (Field notes from participant observation after visit to traditional leader 1, Mezam division, 05/05/2013).

What is more challenging again in this ripple of complexities is the fact that the community-based rehabilitation workers I was going along with to the field were on duty, meaning that I had to trek in accordance with their pace and not at my convenience, since they had other clients which they scheduled to work with on each day, along with the fact that they had to take advantage of every moment without rain.

> Satina (the community-based rehabilitation personnel) and I left the city center by car and we stepped down from the car at the final halt. From there we both hired a motor bike but I remember the motorbike rider specifying to Satina the place where he was going to end with the ride. We trekked through footpaths from where the ride ended for approximately two kilometers on the hilly terrain. Satina made mention of the fact that this footpath of almost two kilometers was a shorter path as the main road was very slippery. I only wondered to myself how many kilometers the main path would be. At times when my speed reduced as we walked through the foot path, she made mention of the number of clients we had to visit on that day and it was an indication for me to speed up (Field notes from participant observation with community-based rehabilitation personnel 2, Mezam division, 22/07/2013).

These challenges came along with so much physical exhaustion. In some research, physical exhaustions emerged from numerous interviews that have to be conducted during the research as well as from emotions triggered owing to stories revealed by participants (Johnson, 2009; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007), but in my case, the greatest physical exhaustion emerged from the to and fro movements on the slippery, muddy, hilly landscape.

Conclusion

Challenging and complex experiences in conducting qualitative fieldwork are not uncommon, since in most cases researchers are aware of some of the existing challenges in doing qualitative fieldwork prior to their going in the field (Johnson, 2009). Even with rigorous preparations, researchers should anticipate the unanticipated. This implies that the critical aspect is the magnitude of the challenges which are revealed or which arise in the field, and which are unanticipated by the researcher.

Correspondingly, it is clear that doing fieldwork in developing countries differs immensely in circumstances. The role of the researcher's emotions is made overt as the practice of research engages the researcher to a larger extent in self-reflexivity; how even with the presence of previous theoretical ideas and experiences, researchers while in the field still reconstruct and recreate new ideas and experiences on the same issue (Hubbard et al., 2001). Hubbard et al. (2001) states that:

> The practice of research engages the researcher in an act of self-reflexivity. That is, researchers simultaneously draw on previous theoretical ideas and experiences, develop and construct new theoretical ideas and re-create themselves in the process and the idea that research practice was an emotional, personal journey became increasingly acknowledged. (p. 124)

This infers that the researcher uses data to think with theory; the researcher thinks with theory and fits in the data and the philosophical concepts into one another (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Correspondingly, this stirs up the imagination and opens up the researcher to new worlds of data, thus, not showing qualitative research fieldwork as a single story or linear process, or to a greater extent a re-production of what is already known (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Bureaucratic procedures involved in gaining access to the field and participants are exemplified (as huge amount of time is involved in obtaining access). The issue of ethics is made complicated, as in most cases the practical realities appear different from what is known or revealed in procedural ethics (Darling, 2014). This implies that fieldwork demands more than simply a response to procedural ethics; it demands a response that is based on situated judgements and the less certain, a search for ways to speak the right words at the right time (Darling, 2014). The current research also presents environmental challenges as evident in qualitative fieldwork with the context topography as a major intensifier. This article in effect offers a discussion of the magnitude and intensity in terms of the challenges and complexities involved in doing qualitative fieldwork in developing context.

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