12-21-2019

It Piques a Novice's Curiosity and Engages the Experienced: A Review of Designing Qualitative Research (The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit)

Julius Kyakuwa
Louisiana State University, jkyaku1@lsu.edu

It Piques a Novice's Curiosity and Engages the Experienced: A Review of Designing Qualitative Research (The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit)

Abstract

This book is one of ten in *The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit* and addresses the fundamental design issues in qualitative research. It outlines a framework for the other books in the kit on a practical and methodological level. Flick discusses obstacles in realizing success, technical matters like ethics, achieving quality, generalization, and considerations regarding the researcher's perspective in qualitative research designs. Several examples that support and motivate the text are derived from the author's qualitative research projects and publications. The book is appropriate for novice qualitative researchers and sufficiently informative to engage but also refresh the perspectives of the experienced scholar.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Designing Qualitative Research, Research Methods, The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit

Creative Commons License

It Piques a Novice's Curiosity and Engages the Experienced: A Review of *Designing Qualitative Research* (The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit)

Julius Kyakuwa
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisianna, USA

This book is one of ten in The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit and addresses the fundamental design issues in qualitative research. It outlines a framework for the other books in the kit on a practical and methodological level. Flick discusses obstacles in realizing success, technical matters like ethics, achieving quality, generalization, and considerations regarding the researcher's perspective in qualitative research designs. Several examples that support and motivate the text are derived from the author's qualitative research projects and publications. The book is appropriate for novice qualitative researchers and sufficiently informative to engage but also refresh the perspectives of the experienced scholar. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Designing Qualitative Research, Research Methods, The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit

Growing one's expertise in research comes with accumulated practical and theoretical experience. Any opportunity, therefore, to read a book that contributes to that advancement is worthwhile. Looking back to the days when I first learned about qualitative research, I now imagine how reading Flick's (2018) book then would have influenced me as a novice scholar. Reading it today as a doctoral student with a good background in qualitative research, it refreshes my theoretical knowledge about research in general and designing qualitative research in particular. *Designing Qualitative Research* (Flick, 2018), which is the first in a list of ten titles in The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit, outlines a framework for the other books in the series on a practical and methodological level. From attracting a new qualitative researcher, therefore, to engaging the experienced one, while making a case for the other books in the kit, Flick (2018) had to find balance for the three components. My review, which takes an ethnographic descriptive approach (Fetterman, 2009) of the book together with my major takeaways, also seeks to answer this question: how does the author use this book to orient a novice researcher about designing qualitative research, highlight the other books in the kit, and provide a how-to-do text for any qualitative researcher regardless of experience? The titles in the kit are:

- *Designing Qualitative Research:* Uwe Flick
- *Doing Interviews:* Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale
- *Doing Ethnography:* Amanda Coffey
- *Doing Focus Groups:* Rosaline Barbour
- *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research:* Marcus Banks
- *Analyzing Qualitative Data:* Graham R. Gibbs
- *Doing Conversation, Discourse and Document Analysis:* Tim Rapley
- *Doing Grounded Theory:* Uwe Flick
- *Managing Quality in Qualitative Research:* Uwe Flick

With 180 pages the book is broken down into 12 chapters; a glossary, an index, and visual illustrations in form of figures and tables. Chapter 1 is a brief overview about the qualitative research process from the angle of designing qualitative research. Through this chapter, the author discusses common features, proliferation, research perspectives, and the role of theory in qualitative research. Chapter 2 is about developing a research question from a general idea. Additional discussion focuses on issues of planning and preparing a study as a preliminary to the actual research in the field. Flick (2018) uses concrete examples in this chapter from his own research to discuss general issues and problems of planning. Chapter 3 explains in more detail the concept of research design in qualitative research. The focus is on influences and components in the construction of research designs. Through examples, Flick (2018) discusses the characteristics of good and bad qualitative research designs. Chapter 4 provides a discussion about the different logical approaches and decisions regarding levels of sampling in qualitative research. Furthermore, the chapter addresses ways of finding access to a field as well as helping the reader understand that sampling *in* cases complements sampling *of* cases. Chapter 5 focuses on the need for the qualitative researcher to know more about calculating the required resources for a project. The chapter also addresses the need to be aware of possible obstacles when conducting qualitative research since impediments are also connected to finding access, and how methods fit the conditions in the field. While the list of suggested stumbling blocks is not exhaustive, its construction depends on the context. Chapter 6 addresses the quality of qualitative research from a research design perspective. There is emphasis on the need for a researcher to understand how quality issues are relevant in the stages of planning, conducting, and reporting qualitative research findings. Chapter 7 discusses how ethical issues are broken down through systematic decisions in qualitative research. Chapter 8 addresses the main methods of producing verbal data—interviews and focus groups—and understanding the specific issues concerning research designs in using these methods. Chapter 9 gives an overview about ethnography and visual methods, issues concerning their usage, and when to apply them. Chapter 10 is about the basic analytic strategies in qualitative research with two different methods; coding and categorizing. The chapter also covers analysis of conversations, discourse, and documents. Chapter 11 extends the perspective beyond single methods or types of data. It addresses grounded theory, triangulation, and mixed methods as well an understanding of when to use them. The last chapter draws conclusions and discusses the relation between research and proposal writing.

The book is handy, user friendly and its content is structured in small sections making it easier for both novice and experienced researchers to comprehend. Flick (2018) incorporates practical examples and follows a consistent approach to his text structuring which makes it reader friendly. Although his examples relate to health sciences, they are easily understandable to any qualitative researcher. I found a couple of seemingly redundant and difficult sentences that may require a second or third re-read to unravel. In addition, a couple of sections are very brief in terms of their content; they lack the justification and motivation element for better comprehension. My highlights, nevertheless, that helped me better engage with his text are illustrations. One of the tables, for example (Flick, 2018, p. 150) juxtaposes qualitative design methods and design issues. Additionally, having a glossary of terms at the end of the book is convenient when the reader needs to look up a meaning to a term in the text. These two–the table and glossary—are particularly useful to novice researchers because of the summarized version of qualitative research design issues and technical language respectively. Flick (2018) also opens each chapter with objectives and a brief review of a previous section that he connects with the subsequent material. He closes each chapter with key points that help to recapitulate covered content while making the reading flow easily and connecting concepts in the process. Online research practices and resources utilization is a big part of today's research milieu. The book briefly covers the designing and ethical issues in qualitative online research. Considering

the increasing impact of both information technology and artificial intelligence, one can only imagine what this means for qualitative research in the future. Flick's inclusion of this subject triggers thoughts on continued research especially as humans and technology evolve toward a collaborative and symbiotic relation (Lombardo, 1996). After analyzing the book as my data source, my findings are presented in three themes to answer the set question.

Enough details to get the basics while arousing added curiosity

Flick's (2018) targeted audience for this particular book includes novice researchers who belong to the "many different types of readers" as he indicates in his editorial (2018, p. ix). Novice qualitative research practitioners, graduate as well as undergraduate students of different disciplines, and university professors can all make use of the book and the series in the kit. Each of the topics covered in the book, however, are just an overview. They only arouse the reader to utilize the other books in The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit (Flick, 2018, p. xii) or read from elsewhere. Flick writes:

> *Designing Qualitative Research…* gives a brief introduction to qualitative research … It is intended to outline a framework for the other books in *The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit* by focusing on how-to-do problems and how to solve such problems in the research process…This framework is filled out in more detail in the other books in the kit (2018, p. xii).

At the end of each chapter, Flick (2018) suggests other books that may provide additional information on a given topic. This, in a way indicates that enough details prevail in this book, but not enough to make one confident about the topic. Therefore, if the reader's curiosity is piqued, one might as well read the entire series.

You need to read the other books: A politely disguised invitation

In his introduction, Flick (2018) mentions that this book is an overview: the other books provide more details that collectively address the core issues that arise in qualitative research. Each of the books as Flick indicates; "focuses on key methods (e.g., interviews or focus groups) or materials (e.g., visual data or discourse) that are used for studying the social world in qualitative terms" (2018, p. ix). Throughout the book, he frequently refers the reader to the books in the kit that discuss a particular topic in detail. While this could be irritating to a reader who may not have access to all the books in the kit, and/or wishes to have it as one handbook, it is clear that the content in the books within the kit, which cross-references, makes it an invaluable collection for those undertaking qualitative research. Besides, Flick has written four books in the kit, therefore, it justifies in a way, why he would motivate reading of the other books in the series. Consequently, the impressive collection that the kit is suggested to be, as well as the cross-referencing justified in linking the content, makes it all sound like a politely disguised invitation to check out the other books. After reading this book and the highlights of the others in the kit, "I accepted the invitation" to purchase the tool kit for use in my own planning and conducting of research, and as a teaching/learning reference in academic environments. I do not consider myself a novice researcher, but neither am I seasoned; however, I was satisfactorily engaged.

Sufficiently engaging content for the experienced researcher

Individual perspectives are part of the qualitative research process. Setting aside one's preconceptions, nonetheless, is a necessary epoché in qualitative studies that include reading qualitative research material (Chenail, 2010). Different disciplines use qualitative research and as a result, particular ways of training researchers, the influences of academic colleagues, and disciplinary traditions, shape researchers' perspectives in the design and implementation strategies (Given, 2016). Flick's outlook on qualitative research design and qualitative research in general, is part of his epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspective. Openly engaging with his approach to qualitative research design allows any experienced researcher, who may not necessarily find anything new or agree with his approach, to be part of sharing knowledge that this book allows scholars to experience. The book's content refreshed me personally to give more attention to planning for research resources. It is common, as Flick (2018) notes, for researchers to underestimate the value of knowing the resources required to complete qualitative projects successfully. Researchers should plan thoughtfully for the necessary means "in form of time, personnel, technical support, competences, experiences, etc." (Flick, 2018, p. 62). The need for quality assurance was another refreshing takeaway. This was based on the criticism about qualitative research being too subjective in its design that leads to questioning its quality (Given, 2016). Flick acknowledges and argues that:

> There are still quite a number of quantitative researchers who ignore or reject the existence of qualitative methods, of qualitative researchers in general and of the results produced by it. Distinction and mutual rejection is still the first way both 'camps' treat each other. However, in many areas… the practice of research is characterized by more or less pragmatic eclecticism in using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods according to what the research question needs in order for it to be answered (Flick, 2018, p. 9).

Flick's (2018) inclusion, consequently, of quantitative research methods in his discussion regarding quality, quantity, and the position of the two approaches in complementing each other, was another highpoint. While a chapter is devoted to quality in this book, an entire book in The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit focuses on managing quality in qualitative research.

Conclusion

The book in general terms discusses the process of designing qualitative research in detail, including formulating a research question, selecting an appropriate strategy, and methodological issues to consider regarding data sources, collection and analyzing. This is justified by the fact that a good research design is the reflection of planning and clear decisions about the steps of constructing a design. Flick challenges the qualitative researcher to thoughtfully reflect on the research journey for any project from conceiving an idea to writing the report or presenting findings to an audience. The book is ideal for anyone in the social, health and educational study fields with a detailed introduction to the practicalities of qualitative research design. As for answering my question; he piqued the novice's curiosity, sufficiently engaged the experienced, and justified and motivated the need to look at the other books in *The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit.* However, as Hammersley & Atkinson, (1995, p. 23) note about research in general;

> All research is a practical activity requiring the exercise of judgement in context; it is not a matter of simply following methodological rules.

This was my review of the book and a research in its own right, in my context and perspective. What's yours?

References

Chenail, R. J. (2010). How to read and review a book like a qualitative researcher. *The Qualitative Report, 15*(6), 1635-1642. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-6/readreview.pdf

Fetterman, D. M. (2009). *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California, CA: Sage.

Flick, U. (2018). *Designing qualitative research*. (Book 1 of *The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit,* 2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Given, L. M. (2016). *100 questions (and answers) about qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*, (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge.

Lombardo, T. (1996). Information technology and artificial intelligence. In *Odyssey of the Future*. Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved on 07/25/2019, from http://www.centerforfutureconsciousness.com/pdf_files/readings/readinginfotech.pdf

Author Note

Julius Kyakuwa is a doctoral candidate in Music Education at Louisiana State University. Julius' research interests include culturally responsive pedagogies, multicultural music education, music teacher education and professional development, creative teaching of music and arts integration, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to:
Julius Kyakuwa at E-mail: jkyaku1@lsu.edu.

Article Citation

Kyakuwa, J. (2019). It piques a novice's curiosity and engages the experienced: A review of designing qualitative research (The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit). *The Qualitative Report, 24*(12), 3192-3196. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol24/iss12/15