Chapter 25

Conducting Qualitative Educational Research on the Internet

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Learning Objectives

1. Define “qualitative research.”
2. Compare qualitative and quantitative research.
3. Demonstrate the procedure for conducting a Web-based qualitative research.
4. Define “postmodern research.”
5. Describe the identifying characteristics of Web-based postmodern research.
6. Demonstrate the procedure for conducting Web-based postmodern research.
7. Summarize in your own words “post-modern dissertation research.” Describe the identifying characteristics of Web-supported post-modern research.

Abstract

“Qualitative research” is sometimes juxtaposed against “quantitative research,” other times against experimental research. The view taken in this chapter is that students should review both sides of the issue, explore a number of research styles offered in this and other books, and consider too the myriad of different methodologies.
Qualitative research of online teaching or learning can employ any one of a number of research styles, the specific aim can vary according to the research paradigm, methods, and assumptions because “qualitative research” is an interpretive approach to studying human behavior over the Internet that may include some on-site investigation as well.

## Qualitative Educational Research: What Is It?

Qualitative research methodology can be either ethnographic observations and interviewing, grounded theory, life histories, case studies, curriculum criticism, policy studies, ethnomethodology, social or educational critiques, a phenomenology, deconstruction or a genealogy. Frequently, data are collected from observations and interviews of selected individuals sometimes called “informants.” To some degree at least, the researcher must get personally involved in the research study; the researcher aims for clarity about their own biases, presuppositions and interpretations.

A qualitative study of online of human behavior would describe a psychological, sociological or educational phenomenon among users of cell phones, newsgroups, e-mail, chat or other Internet technology. One of these more common phenomena, for example, may be called Internet presence. “Internet presence” describes a characteristic that denotes an attitude, demeanor, and manner of a person or group in communication using a Web or chat protocol. The term is adapted from Shank’s presence theory of “what makes things unique in themselves” (2006, p. 226) into this more restricted study of online human behavior. Favorable characteristics of online human behavior include level-headedness, quickness, self-assurance, self-composure, sobriety, alertness, and so on. Favorable characteristic denotes a favorable presence over a Web or chat protocol. Realization of a favorable Internet presence could be considered to be a transformative insight gained as we experience a magnanimous act by someone, the act itself reflecting favorably on our opinion of the character of the person or group. For example, the ability to keep a secret is a difficult. With today’s technology and peer social and organizational pressures to maintain instantaneous communication, it becomes more difficult than ever to keep a secret. Someone who does so may be a transformative insight, valued highly among students or teachers within a group.

## Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

Qualitative online educational research is sometimes juxtaposed against quantitative research. The view taken in this book is that students should review both sides of the issue, explore a number of research styles offered in this and other books, and also consider the myriad of methodologies available before making a decision. As a means
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