

Albrecht Daniel Thaer Institut for
Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences
Agricultural and Food Policy Group
Hannoversche Straße 27
House 12

Qualitative Research Methods

Course-code: FM-22

Credit points: 6

Coordinators: Prof. Dr. Peter H. Feindt
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Semester: Summer semester

Place and time: Tuesday, 10-14, digital via Moodle
(HN 27, SR 2.21)

Examination: Group report (due date 30/09/2022)

Intended participants

This course has been especially designed for students of the MSc programme Agricultural Economics and the MSc programme Integrated Natural Resource Management. Students from other programmes who are interested in this course are presumed to have a Bachelor's degree in a social science discipline with sufficient knowledge of the foundations of social sciences methods as well as agriculture and rural development or gender studies. If in doubt, please contact the coordinating teachers to check whether you can follow this course.

Contents and activities

This course invites students to engage actively to develop their skills in qualitative social science methods. It provides students with academic concepts for the design and critical discussion of qualitative social science research. Students will be guided to apply these concepts to their own group research project.

The course consists of lectures, seminar discussions and guided group work. The lectures introduce the relevant concepts and provide signposts through the literature. The seminar sessions provide an opportunity to discuss the academic concepts. An important part of the course is the application of the concepts and methods. Students will work in groups and develop and conduct their own small research under guidance from the teachers. This will allow students to develop a profound understanding of the main qualitative research methods and basic operational skills for their application to own research in the field. Towards the end of the semester, students will present the findings from their research in class or in a digital format. Students are expected to study the assigned literature before each meeting, actively participate in (digital) classroom discussions and group work, prepare and deliver a (digital) classroom presentation and participate in the final exam.

Learning objectives

After successful completion of the module, students will be able to

1. Describe the methodological foundations and purpose of qualitative research methods;
2. Characterise different qualitative research techniques and explain the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions;
3. Explain different strategies of qualitative data analysis and interpretation;
4. Critically discuss methodological choices in qualitative research;
5. Assess the suitability and limitations of qualitative methods for research problems related to their taught programs (e.g., agriculture and food issues, resource management, gender studies);
6. Develop a research design for a topic of their own choice and justify their own methodological choices;
7. Reflect on the positionality of the researcher in the research process.

The literature (or, for copy right reasons, links to the relevant sources) will be made available on Moodle and in the semester apparatus in the library. Students are expected to read the assigned literature before each meeting.

Examination

The final grade will be based on a group report.

Students describe their respective contribution according to established guidelines for academic authorship.

To pass the course students need to regularly attend the sessions and to score at least 4 (sufficient) at the report.

Course schedule

Week	Date	Lecturer	Subject	Readings: Core [recommended]
1	26/4	PF, CB, PG	Introduction: Why qualitative methods? Overview over the course, learning goals, introduction to the group work Lecture: The case for qualitative methods Practical: Warm-up application	Silverman (2017), ch. 2 What You can (and Can't) Do with Qualitative Research
2	3/5	PF	Lecture: Paradigms of social science research: an overview Elevator pitches on research ideas	Silverman (2017), ch. 3 Focusing a Research Project
	9/5		Milestone: Students upload short outline paper by 10 am	
3	10/5	PF	Seminar discussion on readings: Wagenaar, Meaning in Action Practical: Observational techniques (introduction) Feedback on outline papers Reflecting on options for the group research project	Wagenaar (2013), ch. 9 [Silverman (2017), ch. 7 Using Theories]
4	17/5	PF	Lecture: Research design: Planning, conceptualization and implementation of a qualitative research plan Reflection on observational exercise Presentation of ideas for research project. Further reflection of options for the group research project. Preliminary formation of working groups.	Silverman (2017), ch. 10 Writing a Research Proposal
5	24/5	PG	Lecture: Interview techniques: An overview Finding the research topic, formation of working groups and group work kick-off Practical: Critical discussion of choices in research design (feedback on preliminary research design)	Silverman (2017), ch. 14.1 Collecting Interview Data
6	31/5	PG	Lecture: Qualitative interviews – the example of the SusValue-Trust project Practical: Developing a questionnaire (1)	Silverman (2017), ch. 15 Developing Data Analysis [Bogner et al., 2009]
7	7/6	PG	Lecture: Focus group research – the example of the WuP-GAP project Practical: Developing a questionnaire (2)	Silverman (2017), ch. 14.2 Collecting Focus Group Data
8	14/6	CB	Lecture: Case study research – the example of discursive constructions of legitimacy Practical: Reflecting on data and data analysis in the group project	Flyvbjerg (2006) [Silverman (2017), ch. 13 How many cases do you need?]
9	21/6	PF	Lecture: Coding: Strategies for data analysis; coding and writing up your research Practical: Coding (1)	Saldana (2009), ch. 1 [Silverman (2017), ch. 15 Developing Data Analysis]
10	28/6	CB, NiS	Guest lecture by Dr Nicolai Schulz: Qualitative content analysis – the example of the PolDerBio project Practical: Coding (2), Introduction to MaxQDA	Saldana (2009), ch. 2
11	5/7	CB, MP	Guest lecture by Dr Maria Proestou: Participatory observation in a Greek island (date tbc) Practical: Reflecting on opportunities for observation in the group project	Silverman (2017), ch. 14.3 Collecting Ethnographic Data [Proestou (2015), ch. 3]
12	12/7	CB	Lecture: Evaluating qualitative research, researcher reflexivity and research ethics Practical: Writing up your research Guided work on the group project	Silverman (2017), ch. 17 Quality in Qualitative Research [Silverman (2017), ch. 18 Evaluating Qualitative Research]
13	19/7	PF, CB, PG	Student presentations of research projects Wrap-Up	

Your own research project – tentative schedule

The course invites students to develop and conduct their own small qualitative research project in small groups. Besides guidance and discussions in class, this task will require student activities between sessions. These include meeting with your group, preparing the research, collecting and analysing data, and preparing a final document and presentation.

Week	Activity
1	During the session, students are introduced to the task and asked to think about possible topics for their own group research project. After class: Students think about a research topic and develop a short elevator pitch (90 seconds) on their idea
2	During the session: Students present their elevator pitch on research ideas in class and receive in-class feedback After class: Students write and upload a short paper (800-1,000 words) on their research idea for the group research project (due 9th May, 10 a.m.). The paper should contain a problem statement (societal and academic relevance), a research question, a rationale for the selection of method, a short outline of the proposed data collection and analysis, and a statement about the expected contribution of the research (to academic knowledge and/or practical problem solution).
3	Feedback by lecturers on the individual outlines of research ideas. In-class reflection on options for the group projects
4	Students present and discuss their research ideas in class. Preliminary formation of working groups, based on student interests. The groups start to develop a research design.
5	The groups receive feedback in class on their draft research design, which they then elaborate. Revision of group composition when needed.
6-8	The groups prepare their data collection. This includes developing interview guidelines or observation protocols, assessing relevant documents, contacting prospective interview partners etc. Students receive feedback in class on their activities and progress.
8-9	Data collection, e.g. conducting and transcribing interviews.
9-11	Data analysis. This activity is linked to the practicals on coding strategies.
11-12	Students write up their research and prepare their group presentations
13	The student groups present their research in class and receive feedback.

Literature

The literature (or, for copy right reasons, links to the relevant sources) will be made available on Moodle. Students are expected to read the assigned literature before each meeting.

Bogner, A., Littig, B., and Menz, W. (eds.), (2009). *Interviewing Experts*, London: Palgrave.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). 'Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research'. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(2): 219-245. doi: 10.1177/1077800405284363.

Proestou, M. (2015). *Understanding societies beyond economics: Wind energy development on the Greek island of Amorgos in times of neoliberalism: Ph.D. thesis*, Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Lebenswissenschaftliche Fakultät, available at <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/18452/18133/proestou.pdf>, last accessed 7 April 2021.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, London: SAGE.

Silverman, D. (2014). *Interpreting qualitative data. 4th Edition*, London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2017). *Doing Qualitative Research, 5th edition*, Los Angeles et al.: SAGE.

Wagenaar, H. (2013). *Meaning in Action. Interpretation and Dialogue in Policy Analysis*, Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe.

Further sources of information:

SAGE Research methods portal:

<https://sagepub.libguides.com/research-methods>