

Government of the Russian Federation
Federal State Autonomous Educational Institution of Higher Education
National Research University
“Higher School of Economics”

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Sociology

Course syllabus

Methodology and Research methods in Sociology: Qualitative Research methods

For the Master’s Degree Program 39.04.01.” Comparative Social Research”

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Moscow, 2018

Abstract

The course aims to introduce students to the use of qualitative methods in sociological research. The students will learn the basic fundamentals of qualitative inquiry from research design to data collection and analysis. They will be introduced to practical skills in qualitative data collection, including interviews, participant observation and writing field notes. In addition to methods for gathering data, they will learn the fundamentals of qualitative data analysis, for example how to interpret interview data, and how to identify and relate salient pieces of data to theory. Finally, students will engage in self-reflection on their position as researcher in the field and on the research process itself, for example ethical considerations that may arise during field research.

Field of Application and normative references

The program of the course builds up the minimum requirements to the knowledge and skills of a student and determines the content and types of classes and assessment. The program is designed for teachers of this discipline, learning assistants and students of sociology (“International Master in Comparative Social Research”). The program is developed according to:

- Educational Program of NRU HSE
- University Academic Plan of NRU HSE for Master level education, confirmed in 2014.

The place of the discipline in the educational structure

The current discipline relates to humanitarian disciplines preparing masters students in sociology. The discipline is a compulsory course for MA students of Comparative Social Research.

The course is based on the following previously covered BA courses:

- Sociological Theory
- Methodology and Methods in Social Studies
- Data Analysis

The basics of this discipline should be used in the following courses and activities:

- Master thesis writing
- Comparative sociology
- Applied social research

The course is strongly related and complementary to other compulsory courses provided in the first year (e.g. Comparative Social Research, Research Seminar) and sets a crucial prerequisite for later courses and research projects as well as for the master thesis. The course gives students an important foundation to develop and conduct their own research as well as to evaluate the research of others.

Learning objectives and outcomes

- The students will have learned the basic fundamentals of qualitative inquiry.
- The students will have learned the particularities of qualitative inquiry, including the *reflexivity* involved in qualitative research. They will be able to reflect on their own position as researcher.
- The students will master various qualitative methods, including observation and interview techniques; they will be able to design a research project by relying on these methods and choose appropriate designs to answer their research question.
- The students will have gained knowledge of the particularities of fieldwork and be able to use appropriate methods to gather data in the field.
- The students will be able to frame a theoretical problem into a qualitative inquiry.
- The students will master techniques to analyse data and frame qualitative data into an appropriate theoretical framework.

Grading

The cumulative grade of all class assignments consists of:

- Attendance (10%)
- Participation (10%)
- Oral presentation based on the reading material with a written hand out **OR** written assignment on the reading material (30%)

The exam grade consists of:

- Observation report (50%)

Final grade = Cumulative grade of class assignments (50%) + Exam grade (50%)

Rounding the final grade

If the final grade is non-integer, it is rounded according to algebraic rules. If it has a half (.5) at the end, we are rounding upward.

Guidelines for Knowledge Assessment

Oral presentation

15-20 minutes with a PowerPoint or Pdf file and a written handout of two pages.

1. Identify and summarize ONE central argument of the text. (The argument should not be copied from the text itself, but should be expressed in the student's own words in order to show that the logic has been understood. However, you can also add direct quotes from the text.)
2. Identify other arguments and theses of the text (see above).
3. Present in a clear and structured manner the main contents of the text (pay attention to the theoretical framework used / literature discussion and the empirical part if it applies).
4. Discuss how the text answers the main theme of the session; what is the contribution of the text to the session's topic?
5. Discuss the shortcomings and gaps in the text; how it can be linked to other theories, ideas, literature on the topic; discuss areas where further research could be conducted. (Optional; if it applies)

The student can choose a session to do a presentation in the first, second or third week of the course. The reading material is sent by the instructor one week prior to the presentation.

Assessment criteria: the main these(s) of the text have been identified; the main elements of the text are presented including the theoretical framework / literature discussion and empirical part (if it applies); the presentation is clear, well-structured and original; the student can reflect on how the text relate to the session and to broader debates in qualitative research; the student can answer the questions of the audience (instructor and other students) showing a detailed knowledge of the text.

Written assignment

1500 words, 3 pages

Answering questions sent by the instructor on the reading material for a particular session.

Questions are sent by the instructor one week before the session and the assignment is submitted by the student a day prior to the session.

Assessment criteria: correct, detailed, clear, well-structured and original answers to the questions assigned; clarity and precision of writing style; length of the assignment respected; capacity to relate the discussion of the text to other readings, theories and ideas, and to show an understanding of how the text relates to a particular session and to broader debates in qualitative research.

Observation report

Observation notes: 1000-1300 words

Analysis: 1000-1300 words

3 pictures (pictures can be taken outside of the place of observation if it is forbidden to take pictures inside)

3 literature references (references to texts read in class (at least 2) and to other sociological literature)

Total number of words: 2000-2600 words

Observation part:

Write down observation notes as a story unfolding. Write down notes on your own feelings (including of wonder, discomfort, embarrassment etc.) in the sense of reflexivity.

Analysis part:

Refer to sociological concepts to comment on your observation notes. Develop your own ideas based on a *close analysis* of your observation data. Add references to the literature read in class or to other relevant literature, again by referring closely to the observation data. Propose new avenues for future qualitative research; present your observation and analysis as one first step towards a qualitative research. Explain what is missing from the observation and what can be investigated

further and how.

Do not to mix observation notes and analysis. These are two separate parts.

Details about the observation report are given in the first session of the course and students' questions about the observations are answered in more details in the second and third week. The observation reports are submitted one week prior to the final session in order to allow the students to present a comparison of their observation reports in groups in the final session.

Assessment criteria:

Observation part: attention to details; density and originality of the observation; notes on reflexivity; clarity and precision of writing style; style of writing observation notes respected (unfolding story); length respected.

Analysis part: Capacity to relate observation data to sociological concepts; the concepts emerge through a *close* reading of the observation data; the analysis is original, clear, well-structured, rich and coherent; 3 literature references added; capacity to integrate the reading material to the analysis of observation data, including the knowledge acquired on reflexivity; capacity to identify appropriate methods to use in order to fill gaps in empirical observations and pursue the research further; length respected.

Methods of Instruction

The course consists of lectures based on the required and additional reading material, followed by group discussions aimed at clarifying the content of the lecture and answering the students' questions. The students present orally the reading material or write an assignment on it. They conduct an ethnographic observation and present in groups a comparison of their observations during the final session.

Required reading

Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic: *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Polity Press, August 1992

Charmaz, Kathy: *Constructing Grounded Theory*, London, Sage Publications, 2006

Creswell J.W.: *Qualitative inquiry and research design*, Sage Publications, 2nd edition, 2007

Flick, Uwe: *An introduction to qualitative research*, 4th edition, Sage Publications, 2009

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P.: *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007

Silverman, David: *Interpreting Qualitative Data. Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2006

Silverman, David: *Doing Qualitative Research. A Practical Handbook*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2010

Yanow, Dvora: “Thinking interpretively: Philosophical presuppositions and the human sciences”, in Yanow, D. and Schwartz-Shea, P. (eds): *Interpretation and Method*, Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2014

Structure of the course

I. Introduction to qualitative research

1. Introductory session. What is qualitative inquiry I?

The introductory session will be devoted to studying the course's programme and answering the students' questions. Some first observations on qualitative inquiry and the particularities of the qualitative approach in the social sciences will be discussed.

In particular, a table will be elaborated with students to gather some first thoughts on the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches. On the basis of the table, students will discuss what assumptions, for example about the social sciences, the researcher and the object of inquiry, underlie the qualitative approach. What does the qualitative approach allow the researcher to see and analyse that a quantitative approach does not? What are seen as the “weaknesses” in this approach?

2. What is qualitative inquiry II?

This session will build on the first session with the support of reading material and presentations by students. In this session, the emphasis will be put on the positioning of the researcher in qualitative approaches as well as the central role of *reflexivity* in the research process. Furthermore, philosophical assumptions and worldviews underlying qualitative inquiry will be studied.

Required reading

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P.: “What is ethnography?” in Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P. (eds.): *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007, pp. 1-19.

Additional reading

Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic: *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Polity Press, August 1992, pp. 224-247

Geertz, Clifford. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P.: “Epilogue: A distinctive analytic mentality” in Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P. (eds.): *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007, pp. 230-236

Yanow, Dvora: “Thinking interpretively: Philosophical presuppositions and the human sciences”, in Yanow, D. and Schwartz-Shea, P. (eds): *Interpretation and Method*, Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2014

Ping-Chun Hsiung: “Lives and Legacies: A Guide to Qualitative Interviewing”

<http://www.utoronto.ca/~pchsiung/LAL/>

Schatz, Edward, ed. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2010)

3. Qualitative inquiry and research design

This session will examine how to design a qualitative research proposal. The different components of a proposal will be discussed from the definition of the research problem and the formulation of a research question to the selection of cases and settings, the choice of methods to study the problem and the literature review.

The particularity of qualitative research is that the research question can evolve during the research process. It can be refined and reformulated in the process of data gathering and early data analysis.

Required reading

Creswell J.W.: *Qualitative inquiry and research design*, Sage Publications, 2nd edition, 2007, pp. 35-52

Additional reading

Flick, Uwe: *An introduction to qualitative research*, 4th edition, Sage Publications, 2009, pp. 89-104.

Hammersley, M., Atkinson, P.: "Research design: problems, cases and samples", in Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P. (eds.): *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007, pp. 20-40.

King, Gary, Keohane, Robert and Verba, Sidney. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (1994)

Silverman, David: *Doing Qualitative Research. A Practical Handbook*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2010, pp. 179-86.

II. Research methods and data collection

4. Field research

This session will introduce the concept of fieldwork and examine how to gain access and rapport in the field in order to adopt an "insider" perspective. It will discuss the advantages/disadvantages of the "insider" and "outsider" perspectives. What do the two perspectives allow the researcher to see/not see?

Required reading

Pader, Ellen: Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility: Explorations Beneath the Surface of Public Policies, in in Yanow, D. and Schwartz-Shea, P. (eds): Interpretation and Method, Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2014, pp. 161-175

Additional reading

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P.: "Field relations", in Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P. (eds.): *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007, pp. 63-96.

Flick, Uwe: *An introduction to qualitative research*, 4th edition, Sage Publications, 2009, pp. 105-13. (chapter 10: "Entering the field")

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean and Benjamin L. Read. *Field Research in Political Science*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press (2014).

Wolff, Stephan: "Ways into the field and their variants", in Flick, U./ von Kardoff, E./ Steincke, I. (eds.): *A companion to qualitative research*, Sage Publications Ltd. 2004, pp. 195-202.

5. Conducting interviews

This session will discuss sampling strategies, types of interviews and how to conduct various types of interviews.

Required reading

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P.: "Oral accounts and the role of interviewing", in Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P. (eds.): *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007, pp. 97-120.

Additional reading

Hermanns, Harry: "Interviewing as an activity", in Flick, U./ von Kardoff, E./ Steincke, I. (eds.): *A*

companion to qualitative research, Sage Publications Ltd. 2004, pp. 209-213.

Flick, Uwe: *An introduction to qualitative research*, 4th edition, Sage Publications, 2009, pp. 150-75.

Witzel, Andreas: "The Problem-Centered Interview", *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Volume 1, No. 1, Art. 22 – January 2000 [<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1132/2521>]

Mosley, Layna, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Ping-Chun Hsiung: "Lives and Legacies: A Guide to Qualitative Interviewing"
<http://www.utsoc.utoronto.ca/~pchsiung/LAL/>

III. Data analysis

6. Qualitative data analysis I: The relation between data collection and theory-building

In this session, the relation between data collection and theory-building in qualitative research will be discussed. How can data be analysed in order to relate it to a theoretical framework? How does the researcher "move up" from raw data to analytical concepts?

The particularities of the inductive approach in qualitative inquiry will be examined, for example how the researcher goes back and forth from the collection and analysis of data to theory. Further, the session will introduce students to "grounded theory".

Required reading

Charmaz, Kathy C. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 42-72. (Chapter 3: "Coding in grounded theory practice")

Additional reading

Suddaby, Roy: "From the editors: What grounded theory is not", *Academy of Management Journal*, 2006, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 633–642.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P.: "The process of analysis", in Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P.

(eds.): *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007, pp. 158-190.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P.: "Writing ethnography", in Hammersley, M. and Atkinson P. (eds.): *Ethnography. Principles in practice*, London-New York: Routledge (third edition), 2007, pp. 191-208

Mahony, James (2007) Qualitative Methodology and Comparative Politics, *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(2): 122-144.

7. Qualitative data analysis II: Presentation of observation reports and analysis

This final session will be devoted to the presentation of individual observation reports by groups of students. The students will discuss their individual observation reports and their analysis of observation data in groups in order to *establish comparisons*. This group work will allow them understanding what they have seen/overlooked during observation and how particular analytical concepts can be elaborated on the basis of observations in different settings.

Special Equipment and Software Support

No special equipment or software is required.