

Validity of Qualitative Research Study in Management Sciences: A Processual Approach

Kotun, Ahmed I., Adeoye, Abayomi O. & Ola-Oluwa James A.

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the adoption and use of validity in qualitative research studies in management sciences. Usage of validity is common in quantitative research, and it is a way of identifying extent of instrument's consistency over time and that the research is true to its procedures respectively. However, Qualitative research has redefined the use of validity to have cogent research finding. The concepts of quality, trustworthiness, adequacy, transferability, authenticity dependability, credibility, applicability and conformability are axiom as appropriate terms need for validity in management sciences when conducting qualitative research study. The study adopted exploratory research approach and it depends on information from past studies and reports. The study interrogates the relevant literature to validity in qualitative research. Nevertheless, for further openness of qualitative research based on findings, the study, concluded that qualitative research removes the concerns of bias whilst also enhances researchers' openness of data on research conducted so as to reflect the multiple ways of establishing facts of research.

Keywords: generalizability, paradigm, qualitative, quantitative, validity

INTRODUCTION

The principle of qualitative research study is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality (Leung, 2015). Researchers in management sciences routinely make complex choices about connecting ideas with facts which raise the basic question of, whether observations meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the concepts (Lub, 2015). Olabode et al. (2019), reasonably answered that the quality of a data in any research study determines the outcome of the research and its importance for further research work and relevance to business management.

Different to quantitative research, which deals primarily with numerical data and statistical interpretation under a reductionist, logical and strictly objective paradigm. Qualitative research seems to seek answers to questions of how, where, when, who and why with a perspective to build

a theory or refuse an existing theory which inextricably ties with human senses and subjectivity (Toye et al., 2013). Many topics on research methods with remarkable thoroughness have conducted studies on validity especially as it applies to quantitative studies such as Olabode et al. 2019. Rahi (2017) assumed qualitative research envisions reliable social contact to adhere researchers into the field of management sciences research.

Adcock and Ceollier (2001) established shared standards for qualitative and quantitative scholars due to skepticism with which qualitative and quantitative researchers sometimes view each other's measurement. While human emotions and perspectives from both subjects and researchers are considered undesirable biases confronting results in quantitative research, the same elements are considered essential and inevitable in qualitative research as they invariably add extra dimensions to enrich the quantity of findings (Taherdoost, 2016).

In spite of the ongoing debate about whether terms such as generalizability, validity and reliability are appropriate to evaluate qualitative research studies; tests and measures used in establishing the validity of quantitative research applies to qualitative research. Validity of quantitative research refers to the integrity and application of the methods undertaken, and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data, whilst qualitative describes consistency within the employed analytical procedures (Oluwatayo, 2012). Noble and Smith (2015) inquired if the qualitative method is inherently different from the quantitative method in terms of philosophical positions and purposes, and affirmed; that an alternative framework for establishing reliability and validity in the qualitative research perspective is appropriate. However, the issue of subjectivity and contextual ramifications have fueled incessant controversies regarding yardsticks for the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research results for management sciences research, hence, the need to evaluate the adoption of validity of research study in management sciences. Quality of management sciences research is uncompromised in determining the outcomes of investigation, and its importance for further research work (Olabode et al., 2019). The usage of validity of research study is common in quantitative research, and serves as a springboard to examine what the terms mean in the research paradigm. This is factually in connection with design that is quality not bias and constant (Jamia, 2016).

Adekeye (2016) viewed that qualitative research is concerned with establishing answers to the why's and how's of the phenomenon in question. Due to this, qualitative research often emphasizes on subjective and not objective of research study since, findings gathered are translates in a written format opposed to numerical in quantitative (Heale & Twycross, 2018). Given the diverse forms of conducting research study, there is no consensus for assessing how valuable any piece of research (Leung, 2015). As such, this may not do justice to qualitative study that differs in philosophical and epistemological paradigms. To explore the content of recommendations for management decisions given out by initial research conducted with subsequent content analysis, every step requires validation if it is transparent or systematic enough. In this manner, both the research process and results can assure high rigour and robustness. There was conduction of several studies

on the validity of qualitative research in management sciences (such as Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015 & Teherdoost, 2016). They all focus on the quality aspect of research design that probably may be useful for further research study over a period. Although, assessing the validity of a qualitative research is frequently criticised for lacking scientific vigor and the findings being merely a collection of personal opinions are subject to researcher's bias (Noble & Smith 2015).

Furthermore, scholars in management sciences probably seem to be contented with the worth of quantitative method in conducting research study owing to its verse acceptability and numerical value. These researchers perhaps may believe that this may be for the reason of insufficient awareness of the potentiality, validity, reliability and generalizability of qualitative research as a means of conducting further research studies. Hence, this study seeks to evaluate the validity of qualitative research in management sciences research studies. The objective of this study is to examine the adoption of validity in qualitative research in management sciences. The study adopted an exploratory research approach and depends on information from past studies, and reports such as journals, textbooks, magazines and the internet. The study explored relevant issues related to validity in qualitative research.

Leung (2015) mentioned that validity in quantitative research refers to the appropriateness of the tools, processes and the results of the data conducted. The proponent stated that in qualitative research with diverse paradigm, such a definition of validity is challenging and epistemologically counter-intuitive. Leung further emphasized that, the essence of validity for qualitative research lies in dynamism. Cresswell and Miller (2000) suggested that validity affects researchers' perception in the study of choice of paradigm assumption. According to Oluwatayo (2012) it is subjective assessment of the presentation and relevance of the measuring instrument as to whether the items in the instrument appear to be relevant reasonable, unambiguous and clear. Carcary, (2009) and Grossoehme (2014) asserted that a margin of changeability for results is tolerated in qualitative research, provided the methodology and epistemological logistics consistently yield data that are ontologically similar but may differ in richness and ambience within similar dimensions.

The concept of validity encompasses a wide range of definitions in qualitative studies. It is not a singular, fixed or universal concept but rather a contingent construct, inherently tied to the processes and intentions of a specific research methodology and project (Winter, 2000). Waterman (2013) noticed that some qualitative researchers such as Oluwatayo (2012) have argued that the term "validity," is not entirely applicable to qualitative research. However, these researchers also recognize the need for some form of qualifying checks and measures to ensure credibility of their studies. Consequently, the concept of validity in qualitative research has often associated with terms such as quality, rigor and trustworthiness. Patton (2001) argued that researchers should be concerned about validity in order for their work to be judged and worthwhile. Healy & Peary (2000) are of the view that the existing term that is the basis of each paradigm should serve as the basis of judgement. They suggested that validity is essential criterion for quality in quantitative

paradigms; credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability is essential criteria for quality in qualitative paradigm (Lincoln & Guba 1985). This is achievable because consistency of data and research steps are verifiable through examination of items such as raw data, data reduction product and process notes.

Furthermore, Seale (1999) established that examination of authority of research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as valuable when testing the qualitative works. Thus, since there can be no validity without consistency, demonstration of validity is sufficient to establish legitimacy (Patton 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2009); Lueng (2015); Bapir (2016) argued that validity of qualitative research indicates that researchers' approach is consistent across different researches and projects. They suggested validity procedures in qualitative research as:

1. Checking transcripts to ensure there are no obvious mistake during transcription.
2. Ensuring there is no drift in the definition of codes, a shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding by constantly comparing data with codes and by writing memos about the codes and their definition.
3. For team research, coordinate the communication among the coders by having regular documented meetings and sharing of analysis.
4. Cross-check codes developed by different researchers and comparing results that are derived independently.
5. Engaging in inter-coder agreement which is based on having two or more coders agree on codes used for the same passages in the text (to check if the verifier coder will code the same text as the earlier coder did with similar code).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) argued that sustaining trustworthiness of a research report depends on addressing issues often described in quantitative studies as validity. They asserted that the discovery of truth through measures of validity involves defensible strength and establishment of confidence in the findings. If validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigor are crucial for distinguishing good research from bad, then, testing and enhancing trustworthiness, quality, and accuracy become essential in any paradigm. Creswell (2009) proposed the following strategies for ensuring validity in qualitative research, particularly in management sciences:

- Triangulation: It is examining evidence from multiple data sources to construct a coherent justification for themes. Themes arise from the integration of data collected from researchers and participants, thereby enhancing the study's validity. This process is responsible for adding validity of the study.
- Engagement of research participants: Using research members to validate qualitative findings by sharing the final report or specific descriptions and themes with participants and to confirm whether participant views have been adequately represented.

- Rich, thick descriptions: Detailed descriptions to convey findings. Allowing readers to be transported to the research settings and experience the full context.
- Research reflectivity: It address potential bias by reflecting on the researcher's background, gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin. This self-reflection creates honest and transparent narrative that resonates with readers.
- Negative or discrepant information: This entails real life evidence to improve the credibility of the study. It acknowledges that real life data often include diverse and conflicting perspectives.
- Prolonged engagement on the field: Spend extended time in the research setting to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

METHODS

The traditional criteria for validity have their roots in positivist grounded in the systemic theory of validity. This framework assesses whether research measures what it is intended to measure and evaluates the truthfulness of the research in meeting its objective (Heale & Twycross 2018; Golafshani 2003). In quantitative research validity is often referred to as construct validity, as constructs are the initial concepts, notions, questions or hypotheses that determine what data is gathered and how it is collected (Yilmaz 2013; Wainer and Braun 1988). Yilmaz (2013) defined construct validity as the extent to which conclusion can be drawn from the operationalization of a study to the theoretical constructs on which those operationalizations are based.

Various forms of validity identified in quantitative research include face validity, internal validity, external validity, criterion validity, content validity and construct validity. Golafshani (2003); Heale & Twycross (2015) argued that, to validate investigations; quantitative researchers should ensure an active interplay between constructs and data through the application of tests and other validity processes. Taherdoost, (2016) outlined the following types of validity and methods to measure them:

- Face validity: Refers to the extent to which a measure appears to be related to a specific construct. It evaluates the questionnaire's appearance in terms of feasibility, readability, consistency of style and formatting, and clarity of language.
- Content validity: This refers to the extent to which items in an instrument represent the content universe to which the instrument will be generalized. It involves assessing a new survey instrument to ensure it includes all essential items and excludes undesirable items related to a specific construct domain.
- Criterion or concrete validity: It is castoff to measure validity of the new measuring techniques by correlating them with the established techniques. It involves computing the correlation coefficient of two measures of the same phenomena. This involves the ability of a measured phenomenon at one point of time to predict another phenomenon at a future point in time. If the

correlation coefficient between the two is high, the initial measure assume to have a high predictive ability. This includes predictive, concurrent and post-dictive validities.

- **Construct validity:** It refers to how well a concept, idea behaviour translates or transforms into a functioning and operating reality. This is instruments ability to accurately measure the variability in a concept i.e. the usage of a more sensitive measure (Likert scale) than a dichotomous response category (Agree or disagree). Nonetheless, Qualitative researchers in particular view differently the definitions and positions of positivists about the meaning of reliability and validity.

Table 1: Terminology and application of qualitative research

	Terminologoes associated with credibility of qualitative research
i.	Truth value—Recognizing that multiple realities exist; the researchers' outline personal experiences and viewpoints that may have resulted in methodological bias; clearly and accurately, presents research participants' perspectives.
ii.	Actuality—Relates to the 'practicality' by which the methods have been undertaken and its dependent on the researcher maintaining a 'decision-trial'; i.e. the researcher's decisions are clear and transparent. Ultimately, an independent researcher should be able to arrive at similar or comparable findings.
iii.	Neutrality (or confirmability)—It is achievable when truth-value, consistency and applicability have been addressed. It centers on acknowledging the complexity of prolonged engagement with participants and that the methods undertaken and findings are intrinsically link to the researchers' philosophical position, experiences and perspectives. These distinguishes participants' accounts.
iii.	Applicability—Consideration is giving to whether findings are applicable to other contexts, settings or groups.

Source: Adopted from Noble & Smith (2015)

From the explanations on the terminology of qualitative research and its application in management sciences, the analysis depicted truthfulness, neutrality, actuality and applicability of qualitative research. Despite its challenges on personal hermeneutics for correctness of the analytical procedures in management sciences research, the researcher's decisions are clear and transparent (Bapir, 2016). Consequently, the terminology explained that an independent researcher or research participants should be able to arrive at similar or equivalent findings in respect of the validity, actuality, impartiality and generalisability researchers advanced when conducting research findings in other contexts.

RESULTS

Several methods are used for data collection in qualitative studies such as group discussion, observation, participation, ethnographic, questionnaire etc. However, Questionnaire is a tool for data gathering and research that consists of a set of questions in a different form of question type that is used to collect information from respondents for the purpose of survey or statistical analysis of a study (Saldana, 2013). However, qualitative research study can be enhanced through other means as explained below:

Table 2: Presented strategies for enhancing qualitative research

	Mode	Remarks
i.	Truth Value	<p>Reflective journal upheld and decisions documented.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer debriefing to assist the researcher assumptions and to uncover biases (oral interviews took a more holistic approach) <p>Representativeness of the findings in relation to a phenomenon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to share experiences in depth enables clarification of findings as an ongoing process • Semi- structured/ audio-oral interview allows repeated and revisiting of data gathered to check emerging themes and remain true to researchers and research participants • Use of rich and thick verbatim assists researchers to make judgements about truthfulness or falseness of theme • Researchers and their participants are recallable to explain their findings and the research conducted.
ii.	Consistency and Neutrality	<p>Transparent and clear description of the research process from initial outline through the development of the methods and reporting of the findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining a research diary and documentation of challenges and issues encountered in the research study method • Discussion of the research theme with research participants who are experts in the open process where assumption could be challenged and consensus reached
iii.	Applicability	<p>Reach detail of context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of research study conclusions and transferability in respect of its truthfulness.

Source: Adopted from Noble & Smith (2015)

Table 3: Qualitative modes of inquiry; steps required in qualitative research

	Qualitative mode
i.	<p>Realities are multiple, constructed and holistic (Reality is socially constructed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knower and known are interactive, inseparable • Variables are complex, interwoven and difficult to measure • Inquiry is subjective
ii.	<p>Interpretation; understanding actors' perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contextualization
iii.	<p>Ends with grounded theory, hypotheses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher as the instrument • Naturalistic/ non-intervention • Inductive • Searches for pattern • Emergence and portrayal • Seek consensus, norm

	Qualitative mode
iv.	Personal involvement and partiality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphatic understanding • Emic (insider's point of view)

Source: Adopted from Yilmaz (2013)

Qualitative research questions are usually in survey and entails ask open-ended questions. If quantitative survey gets results based on numbers and computation, qualitative surveys ask for comments, feedback, suggestions, and other kinds of responses. Although the downside to asking qualitative questions would be the need to transcribe the answers accurately and correctly in order to assess the basis of their responses, the kind of answers that qualitative questionnaires provide are more in-depth and are richer in information than close-ended questions (Maxwell, 1996). Most, if not all, would likely include both qualitative and quantitative surveys in order to provide a balance of responses coming from their audience.

Validity in qualitative questions via a face-to-face (oral) or telephone interview, do not just stick to questions only. There is always the possibility of a follow-up and ensure respondents remain on track when giving responses to questions in the study to ascertain the validity of the content of the research questions (Saldana, 2013).

Table 4: Shows practical demonstration of validity of qualitative research

Type of research question	Examples
Qualitative research questions (exploratory)	Ontological research questions (capturing participants' realities) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the nature of.....? • What are the live experiences of? • What is it like being.....? • What is the real situation.....? • What have you heard about it..... ?
	Epistemological research questions (understanding phenomenon) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does.....? • What does it mean to be? • What factor influence.....? • Is there.....? • When was?

Source: Saldana (2013)

Saldana (2013) explained validity of qualitative research through practical examples of research questions above. The proponent stated that for researchers to keep research study tidy and systemic, they must ensure qualitative questions are arranged in a chronological manner. Maxwell (1996) however, declared tips of validity in qualitative research as follows;

- **Modus Operandi Approach:** Searching for clues as to whether or not threats to validity took place and were involved in the phenomenon in question
- **Searching for Discrepant Evidence and Negative Cases:** Penetrating through adverse or alternative result of the research study
- **Triangulation:** - form of collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods.
- **Feedback:** Soliciting feedback from others is an extremely useful strategy for identifying validity threats, your own biases and assumptions, and flaws in your logic or methods.
- **Member Checks:** systemic solicitation for feedback about one's data and conclusions from the study
- **Rich Data:** collection of data that are detailed and complete enough that provide a full and revealing picture of the study
- **Quasi-Statistics:** the use of simple numerical results that can be readily derived from the data.
- **Comparison:** either through the data such as multisite studies or through the literature.
- **Data saturation:** sampling until saturated (no new information).

Table 5: Validity of research by previous researcher(s) useful for further research; catalogue of validity method usage for research study

	Author(s)	Year	Title	Methodology	Remarks
1.	Golafshani, N.	2003	Understanding validity in Qualitative Research	Qualitative source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity • Reliability • Triangulation 	The paper assumed that association of quantitative and qualitative research through validity have changed researchers understanding of traditional meaning of validity from qualitative researcher's perspectives. Therefore, the research concept particularly from qualitative point of view needs to be re-definition in order to reflect multiple ways of establishing truth.
2.	Dustin J. B., Wendy H., Thomas W. L. & Terence R. M.	2010	Qualitative Research in Management: A Decade of Progress	Qualitative Source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity 	The study concluded that assessment of qualitative research in management sciences has moved past to 'quiet reconstruction', and presently gaining momentum towards tipping point. Management scholars are to consider their role in qualitative progress towards deepens understanding of management and continue to alter and expand the future of the field.

	Author(s)	Year	Title	Methodology	Remarks
3.	Jandagh, G. & Matin, H.Z.	2010	Application of Qualitative Research in Management (why, when and how)	Qualitative source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity • Reliability 	Qualitative research is fast growing in all areas of science and needs more attention in management sciences as it serves as a reliable source for making decisions in organizations. Management science researchers still need to study the different aspects of the qualitative research in order to compromise between both qualitative and quantitative research design. The implementation of either study design needs a great care.
4.	Cameron, R.	2011	An Analysis of Quality Criteria for Qualitative Research	Qualitative source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity 	The paper presented stances taken in quality criteria for qualitative research as a means to exploring complex issue. It argues for the need for qualitative management researchers to embed the chosen quality frameworks within the writing of the research that explicit self-reflexivity within the process and products of qualitative research.
5.	Leung, L.	2015	Validity, Reliability and Generalisability in qualitative Research	Qualitative Source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity • Reliability 	Validity, Reliability and generalisability apply in principle to assess quality for both quantitative and qualitative research, what differs will be the nature and type of processes.
6.	Taherdoost, H.	2016	Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument; How to Test validation in Research	Qualitative source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity 	The accuracy and consistency of of research design forms a significant aspect of research methodology. Often, researchers need to be consistent with selection and conduction of proper and valid type to test research instrument.
7.	Don-Solomon, A. & Kuroakegha, B.B .	2018	Unveiling the Validity and Reliability Rambles of Research Outcomes	Qualitative source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity 	The most cumbersome and challenging task in social and behavioural science research is the quantification of human behaviour- that is, using measurement instruments to observe human behaviour and giving accurate interpretation. The measurement of human behaviour belongs to the widely accepted positivist view- empirical-analytic approach, or subjective approach to discern reality in organization.
8.	Hayashi, P. Jr Gustavo, A. & Norberto H.	2019	Validity in Qualitative Research: A Processual Approach	Qualitative source <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity 	The study concluded that qualitative research should adopt a processual view approach of validity since it should not be the product of a single test or just one step in the research. Processual validity both support good research and helps in its reflection, guidance and quality of research in management sciences field.

Source: Researcher (2022)

DISCUSSION

Several studies on the validity of qualitative research reveal that different scholars have explore various methods for assessing data credibility, including validity, reliability and generalizability. The concept of validity and generalizability have been crucial in defining the value and utility of qualitative research. According to (Erlingason and Brysiewicz, 2013; Stenbacks, 2001) validity tests are essential for achieving credible and defensible research outcome. This perhaps supports the generalizability of research findings and contributes to the high quality of qualitative research (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

The validity of research is reinforced through transparent and thorough documentation of the research process. This includes a clear account of challenges and obstacles encountered during the study, which provides a comprehensive view of the research context. Validity in qualitative research is particularly relevant when assessing the applicability of mixed-methods approaches (Christensen & Petra, 2013). Moreover, the significance of qualitative research is growing across various scientific fields and warrants greater attention within management sciences, as it offers a reliable foundation for making sound decisions in organizational settings. The implementation of qualitative research designs requires meticulous attention to detail. The researcher observed that in management sciences, multiple analyses are often used to evaluate the truth-value, trustworthiness, consistency and neutrality of data. While the quality of research is closely associated with the generalizability of results, this relationship enhances the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative studies. Therefore, employing mixed–methods approaches for data measurement and testing is recommended.

CONCLUSION

Despite the various measures taken to ensure the quality of qualitative studies, scholars have suggested that integrating qualitative research with other research methods can produce more comprehensive and unified results. The primary criterion for assessing research validity is the evaluation of quality across both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, the processes that distinguish these methods are fundamentally ontological and epistemological. Association of qualitative and quantitative paradigms: The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches has redefined the traditional understanding of research validity.

Addressing early scholars' concerns: By incorporating mixed-methods strategies, researchers can mitigate biases associated with early qualitative studies and enhance trustworthiness, quality and rigor, thereby increasing research truthfulness. Achieving valid data: From a qualitative perspective, research validity can be attained by employing multiple methods to establish the truth.

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