



## Navigating the Perplexity of Doctorate Students: Dilemmas in Selecting Qualitative Research Methodologies

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**Abstract:** *The decision-making process of qualitative research methodology is a significant barrier in the journey to higher education, similar to navigating a maze, as it involves methodically investigating social phenomena in unstructured environments, such as people's perceptions, behavior, and interactions, with the researcher serving as the primary data gathering tool, aiming to understand the reasons behind occurrences and their significance to the subjects under investigation. This study employed the qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological of Creswell (2013), as it navigates the experiences of doctorate students in selecting their research methodology. The result shows emergent themes in every frame such as perplexities, dilemmas and initiative actions to be taken in selecting qualitative methodologies. For perplexities there are three (3) emergent themes being observed; Limited Knowledge, Struggling, and Fear of making a Wrong Choice. On the other hand, for dilemmas there are three (3) emergent themes immersed such as Time Constraints, Limited Resources, and Limited Practical Experiences. Furthermore, for the initiative action to be taken in selecting qualitative methodologies, there are two (2) emergent themes, Time Management, and Mentorship Programs. Doctorate students face challenges in selecting qualitative research methodologies, including limited knowledge, time constraints, and a fear of making incorrect choices, highlighting the need for support. Initiatives like effective time management and mentorship programs are crucial in addressing these challenges and enhancing students' confidence and competence in decision-making. Thus, universities and students can overcome qualitative research challenges through training, mentorship, time management, practical experience, and a growth mindset.*

**Keywords—**perplexities, doctorate students, challenges and experiences

### 1. INTRODUCTION

One particular predicament stands out as a significant barrier in the complex trip to higher education, where the path to a Ph.D. can be compared to navigating a maze is the decision-making process of qualitative research methodology. Accordingly, qualitative research is the methodical investigation of social phenomena in unstructured environments. Aspects of people's perceptions of their life, individual or group behavior, company operations, and interactions' effects on interpersonal relationships are just a few of these phenomena. The researcher is the primary data gathering tool in qualitative research. The researcher

investigates why things happen, what really occurs, and what those things signify to the persons under investigation

The pursuit of a Ph.D. in academia is an endeavor that involves personal and professional growth. Starting a Ph.D. program requires a serious dedication to academic study and intellectual development. Doctorate students are often confronted with decisions. One crucial decision, along this journey is selecting the research methodology, which has significant implications for the entire doctoral experience. The choice of an acceptable research approach is one of the most important things in doing research. However, it is a matter of choices and decisions on selecting what specific approach to use in methodology.

The selection of a qualitative research methodology poses unique challenges and dilemmas. The questions surrounding

the choice of qualitative research methodology loom big in this intimidating environment, creating a complex web of doubt and inquiry. Accordingly, students may struggle to find a suitable methodology that can bridge the gap between different disciplines. This dilemma emphasizes the need for flexibility and creativity in methodology selection (Thomas, 2018).

In the context of graduate studies, one of the primary dilemmas that PhD students face is understanding the various research methodologies available to them. Knowing the fact that they often lack exposure to research methodologies before embarking on their research endeavors (Thomas, 2018). This gap would greatly affect their decision making on selecting the proper methods to be used in research. As Kumar (2019) added that it is a challenge for students to grapple such changes since it requires current practices on selecting exact methodologies. In addition, practical considerations, such as resource constraints, can also impact students' methodology decisions (Bryman, 2016). As Creswell & Creswell (2017) emphasized that if the methodology is not aligned, it can lead to confusion and potentially flawed results.

One of the gaps in the selection of a research methodology in qualitative research, is the lack of comprehensive guidance. As Morse et al., (2016) stated that influence of academic advisors and supervisors is another significant factor in students' methodology choices. There have been numerous existing resources that offer advice on qualitative research methodologies but there could possibly be a comprehensive guidance tailored specifically to the unique challenges faced by PhD students. These gaps would serve as hindrances, and to address this gap, the researchers plan to engage with Ph.D. students who have experienced challenges in selecting qualitative research methodologies. Conduct surveys and in-depth interviews to understand their specific needs, concerns, and the information that they think is lacking in existing resources.

Henceforth, it explores the world of these aspiring scholars investigating the nuanced dilemmas they face and the intricate decision-making processes they go through when confronted with the quandary of choosing a research methodology. In order to understand the complexities of the issues Ph.D. students have when navigating the selection process for a qualitative research technique, this study dives into their perplexing experiences.

With the highlighted demands, it is hard to negate that the experiences of Doctorate students are valuable and but somehow having trouble in selecting the best approach in methodology. The dilemmas concerning selecting methodology was just one of the issues but somehow not prioritized for the reason that they are lack of comprehensive training. As a result, it is with the compulsive interest of the researcher to have navigate and identified the doctorate students to improve their decision-making in selecting qualitative research methods. The result of this study may provide ideas and suggestions on the development of such guidance for future researchers.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed the qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological of Creswell (2013), as it navigates the experiences of doctorate students in selecting their research methodology. It explores the phenomena and how it is perceived and experienced by individuals. The approach's primary objective is to describe the phenomenon's nature (Creswell, 2013) specifically on perplexities and dilemmas of Ph.D. students in the selection of qualitative research methodologies. The review specifically targeted peer-reviewed English publications published within the last ten years.

After an initial search yielded a substantial number of articles, a screening process based on titles and abstracts was conducted to narrow down the selection to seventeen (20) articles for detailed analysis. This careful examination uncovered recurring themes and patterns, offering a comprehensive insight into the perplexities experienced by doctorate students.

The participants of this study were five (5) doctorate students from the graduate studies who enrolled in thesis writing. The other five (5) participants were involved during the focused-group discussion (FGD). They were purposively selected through *Creswell's* sampling technique (2013).

This methodology integrated a diverse range of research sources, providing a well-rounded perspective on the subject matter. Valuable insights were extracted from individual articles, shedding light on the teaching styles of experienced and neophyte educators. The identified common themes are intended to guide future research endeavors, discussions, and strategic decisions aimed at addressing teaching styles among veteran and neophyte teachers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Perplexities of Doctorate Students in Selecting Qualitative Research Methodologies*

#### *Theme 1: Limited Knowledge*

Doctorate students may struggle due to a lack of familiarity with the diverse qualitative research methods available, leading to uncertainty and indecision. This limited knowledge can hinder their ability to make informed choices about the most suitable methodology for their research, potentially causing anxiety and apprehension about the consequences of selecting an inappropriate approach. Ultimately, the presence of limited knowledge as a perplexity highlights the importance of enhancing understanding and expertise in qualitative research methodologies to facilitate effective decision-making in doctoral research endeavors.

Other authors and literature discuss limited knowledge as a significant challenge faced by doctorate students in selecting qualitative research methodologies. They emphasize that this limited knowledge can lead to uncertainties, indecision, and struggles in navigating the various qualitative research methods available (Whitley & Massey 2018). Doctorate students may find it challenging to make informed decisions about the most suitable methodology for their research due to this lack of expertise (Clarke & Visser 2018).

### *Theme 2: Struggle*

The complexities inherent in navigating the diverse qualitative approaches available often lead to uncertainties, indecision, and difficulties in determining the most suitable methodology for their research objectives. Doctorate students may find themselves grappling with the process of decision-making, experiencing heightened stress and anxiety as they strive to identify the optimal research approach (Cornwall et al., 2018). Overcoming this struggle necessitates a concerted effort to enhance understanding, seek guidance from experts, and engage in practical experiences to build competence in qualitative research methodologies, ultimately enabling doctorate students to navigate the selection process with greater confidence and efficacy.

Other authors and literature emphasize that struggling is a common challenge faced by doctorate students when selecting qualitative research methodologies. According to Al-Eisawi (2022), novice researchers often encounter difficulties in making crucial decisions about appropriate methodologies, such as ethnography or grounded theory, after identifying their initial research questions. The complexity of qualitative research, particularly in terms of data collection and analysis, can intensify the struggles experienced by students and researchers. Additionally, the lack of planning and inadequate attention to the suitability of the selected approach in relation to the research purpose can further compound these challenges (Lindhult & Axelsson 2021). Overcoming these struggles requires a comprehensive understanding of qualitative research methodologies, meticulous planning at all stages of the research process, and a focus on coherence and consistency in methodological choices to ensure the effectiveness of the research endeavor.

### *Theme 3: Fear of Making Wrong Choice*

The fear of making a choice emerges as a significant perplexity for doctorate students when selecting qualitative research methodologies. This fear, known as decidophobia, is characterized by an irrational dread of decision-making, with some individuals experiencing full-blown panic attacks at the mere thought of having to make a decision. According to Greener (2018), the fear of making the wrong choice can lead to heightened stress, anxiety, and indecision, hindering students' ability to navigate the complexities of selecting the most appropriate qualitative research methodology for their research objectives. Overcoming this fear requires strategies to build confidence, enhance decision-making skills, and seek guidance to alleviate the anxieties associated with making choices in qualitative research methodology selection.

## ***Dilemmas of Doctorate Students in Selecting Qualitative Research Methodologies***

### *Theme 1: Time Constraints*

Doctorate students encounter dilemmas in selecting qualitative research methodologies due to time constraints, which can significantly impact the planning and execution of their research projects (Clarke & Visser 2018). The limitations imposed by time constraints hinder the students'

ability to thoroughly explore and evaluate diverse qualitative research methods, potentially leading to rushed decision-making processes. This constraint may restrict the students' capacity to engage in comprehensive data collection, analysis, and methodological considerations, ultimately affecting the depth and quality of their research endeavors. Overcoming these challenges necessitates effective time management strategies, prioritization of tasks, and a structured approach to selecting qualitative research methodologies that align with the students' research objectives within the given time frame (Mariam, Sofa, Wartningsih & Latianingsih, 2020).

### *Theme 2: Limited Resources*

Limited resources emerge as a significant dilemma for doctorate students in selecting qualitative research methodologies. The availability of resources, such as access to data, funding, or research tools, can greatly impact the students' ability to effectively explore and implement diverse qualitative approaches (Guraliuk, Varava, Holovko, Shapenko & Oleshchenko, 2023). Without adequate resources, students may find themselves restricted in their capacity to conduct in-depth investigations, gather rich data, and utilize the appropriate tools and techniques required by various qualitative research methodologies.

This constraint on resources can further complicate the decision-making process, as students may be forced to prioritize certain methodologies over others based on the resources at their disposal, rather than solely on the alignment with their research objectives (Guraliuk et al., 2023). Overcoming this dilemma requires strategic resource management, seeking external funding or support, and exploring creative ways to maximize the utilization of available resources to ensure the successful selection and implementation of the most appropriate qualitative research methodology.

### *Theme 3: Limited Practical Experiences*

Limited practical experiences present a significant dilemma for doctorate students when selecting qualitative research methodologies, as highlighted in the literature. The lack of hands-on experience in conducting qualitative research can hinder students' ability to navigate the complexities of various methodologies effectively. Novice researchers may struggle to understand the nuances of different qualitative approaches, such as phenomenology, case study, and grounded theory, and may find it challenging to apply these methodologies in real research settings due to limited practical exposure. This constraint on practical experiences can impede the students' proficiency in data collection, analysis, and methodological considerations, ultimately impacting the quality and depth of their research endeavors.

Overcoming the challenge of limited practical experiences requires opportunities for students to engage in hands-on research activities, such as conducting pilot studies, participating in research projects, and collaborating with experienced researchers (Phi, Nguyen, & Van, 2019). Practical exposure can enhance students' understanding of

qualitative research methodologies, improve their data collection and analysis skills, and provide valuable insights into the application of different qualitative approaches in research contexts. By actively engaging in practical experiences, doctorate students can develop the expertise and confidence needed to effectively select and implement qualitative research methodologies aligned with their research objectives.

### ***Actionable Initiatives to Solve the Challenges of Doctorate Students in Selecting Qualitative Research Methodologies***

#### ***Theme 1: Time Management***

Time management is a crucial actionable initiative to address the challenges faced by doctorate students in selecting qualitative research methodologies. Effective time management strategies, such as setting realistic goals, prioritizing tasks, and avoiding procrastination, can help students navigate the complexities of qualitative research methodology selection. By managing their time efficiently, students can allocate sufficient time for thorough research, data collection, and analysis, ensuring that their methodology selection is informed and well-considered. This approach also enables students to stay focused and avoid last-minute decisions, which can lead to suboptimal methodology choices.

To further enhance time management, students can leverage various tools and techniques, such as project management software, to-do lists, and time-blocking. These tools can help students organize their tasks, track their progress, and stay on schedule. Additionally, students can seek guidance from mentors or peers who have successfully navigated the challenges of qualitative research methodology selection (Soegiyanto, & Setiawan, 2020). By sharing their experiences and strategies, mentors and peers can provide valuable insights and support, helping students to develop the skills and confidence needed to make informed methodology choices. By adopting effective time management strategies and seeking support from others, doctorate students can overcome the challenges of selecting qualitative research methodologies and produce high-quality research that meets their academic and professional goals.

#### ***Theme 2: Mentorship Programs***

Mentorship programs emerge as a key actionable initiative to address the challenges doctorate students face in selecting qualitative research methodologies. The literature highlights the importance of strong mentorship relationships between faculty and students, which can provide invaluable guidance and support throughout the decision-making process. These mentorship programs should foster the exchange of expertise, technical support for research and writing, as well as managerial support for goal setting and time management. By establishing close working relationships with experienced faculty mentors, students can gain insights into the complexities of qualitative research methodologies, receive feedback on their choices, and develop the confidence needed to make informed decisions.

Furthermore, mentorship programs can expose students to diverse perspectives and experiences, enriching their understanding of qualitative research approaches. The opportunity to collaborate with faculty and peers from various backgrounds can broaden students' horizons and encourage them to think creatively about methodology selection. Additionally, according to Brown (2015) mentors can serve as role models, demonstrating the practical application of qualitative research methodologies and guiding students through the challenges they may encounter. By implementing comprehensive mentorship programs, doctorate students can overcome the dilemmas they face in selecting qualitative research methodologies and develop the necessary skills and expertise to conduct high-quality research.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Doctorate students face a myriad of challenges when selecting qualitative research methodologies, as evidenced by the emergent themes across the literature. The perplexities they encounter include limited knowledge, struggling with the complexity of research design, and a fear of making incorrect choices. These challenges underscore the importance of providing adequate support and guidance to students navigating the qualitative research landscape. On the other hand, the dilemmas students face revolve around time constraints, limited resources, and a lack of practical experiences, all of which can hinder their ability to make well-informed decisions. To address these challenges, actionable initiatives such as effective time management strategies and mentorship programs have emerged as crucial themes. Time management plays a pivotal role in helping students allocate sufficient time for research and methodology selection, while mentorship programs provide invaluable guidance

To effectively address the challenges faced by doctorate students in qualitative research, a multifaceted approach is essential, requiring collaborative efforts from teachers, faculty, students, and higher education institutions. Teachers and faculty must prioritize providing comprehensive training and mentorship, while students should actively seek these opportunities and develop strong time management skills. Institutions must allocate resources for robust mentorship programs, accessible research tools, and integrated curriculum enhancements, fostering a collaborative environment that supports the practical application and deep understanding of qualitative methodologies.

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