

Qualitative methods

Sara Svensson
Visiting Professor
School of Public Policy
Oktober u. 6/7 bldg; room 336
H-1051 Budapest
svenssons@ceu.edu

Simona Torotcoi
Teaching assistant
Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy and International Relations
Central European University
Nador u. 9
H-1051 Budapest
torotcoi_simona@phd.ceu.edu

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CEU Credits: 2

Aim and structure of the course

The course explores the philosophy of (social) science, research design and techniques of qualitative data gathering and analysis. We investigate what social scientists do and how they evaluate their theories and empirical material. In the course we explore research design (finding a research question, defining concepts and measurement, case selection), data gathering (interviews, using documents and archives, observation), data analysis and research based policy recommendation. The course also sets the ground for research design issues and themes that will be further explored in the quantitative methods course offered in the winter semester.

The course consists of ten seminars and two workshops. The formats of the seminars vary, but may feature guest speakers as well as short group exercises in addition to overviews given by the instructor/s and classroom discussions. The first of the workshops is devised to train students' capacity to analyze the research design of works by peers or scholars. The second workshop is a brainstorming session on how to put together the main building blocks of a research proposal. The workshops will be conducted in small groups, which are expected to submit short reports of their work afterwards. They may also be asked to present the results to the rest of the class.

Learning outcomes

The general goal of the course is raising awareness of methodological problems and solutions in qualitative research. The material is based on book chapters and papers from the respective field, new contributions in the field and a selection of applied studies. As specific learning outcomes students should be able to develop a coherent qualitative research design on their own and choose the appropriate method of data gathering and data analysis tailored to their research question. In addition, students should be able to critically review research and policy papers regarding their research design and methodological choices.

Readings & extra material

This course uses CEU's e-learning platform (e-learning.ceu.hu). For each seminar there is one required and one recommended reading on the topic of the day. Preferably, students should read both. The readings comprise a variety of textbook chapters and journal articles and also vary as to theoretical sophistication. They are selected to constitute basis for the discussions and exercises in the seminars. In addition, the e-learning site contains a number of additional readings, which students may want to consult prior to seminars or use for further engagement with the different topics. These extra readings may be chapters and articles on the methods, or and articles exemplifying the specific problem or method of the seminars. Sometimes these are taken up as examples in class seminars.

Note that separate material will be uploaded for the workshops.

For students who want to read a general introduction to research design and/or qualitative methods, especially in relation to public policy, we recommend the following:

- Majchrzak, A. & Markus. M., L. (2014). *Methods for policy research: taking socially responsible action*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications.
- Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Yin, R. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York: Guilford Press. Available via the CEU library as e-book.

Course Requirements

The class will be assessed through a combination of assignments that are concentrated in the second half of the semester, but there will be no final paper for the class. The assignments are designed to achieve the overall goals and learning outcomes of the course. All written assignments must be submitted on the CEU e-learning platform for the course.

- Participation: 20%
- Workshop reports (in groups): 20%

- Research paper review: 40%
- Thesis proposal: 20%

Participation: Students are expected to attend seminars regularly, to prepare the required readings, and to participate in workshop and seminar discussions. They will be evaluated upon the quality and quantity of participation.

Workshop reports: After each of the two workshops, the groups that worked together during the seminar should submit a 700-1,000 word workshop report. The report shall be handed in no later than one week after the workshop. There are no formal requirements on the structure of the report. The assignment will be assessed based on clarity, style and quality of arguments put forward. The assignment is graded collectively, unless in exceptional circumstances, and each report counts 10% towards a student's final grade.

Research paper review: The major requirement of the course is a methodological review of a published or presented scholarly paper. The review should discuss benefits and drawbacks of the applied research design with specific emphasis on the topics discussed in the class. Students should strive to provide a substantiated critique and take a position within a given debate or towards a scholarly contribution. The structure is not pre-set, but students are encouraged to be inspired by the style and structure of reviews published in scholarly journals. Students will be able to choose among a selection of articles posted on the e-learning site. The reviews will be evaluated upon the accuracy with which the research design and methods are summarized, the quality of insight into benefits and drawbacks of the choices the researcher has made, and the clarity with which this is presented. The reviews should be no longer than 1,500 words and should be submitted by late November (dead-line tbc).

Thesis proposal: A thesis proposal of maximum 600 words (excluding bibliography) should be submitted after the end of the semester. The thesis proposal should outline a clear research question (or questions) and how the student would attempt to answer the question/questions using qualitative methods. The assignment will be assessed based on clarity, comprehensiveness and feasibility. Note that the proposal does not have to be identical or similar to the department-required thesis proposal. For instance, a student planning to use quantitative methods in his/her thesis may use this as an occasion to think about what an alternative qualitative approach would entail.

Transferable skills

Students are strongly encouraged to consciously apply principles and methods discussed in qualitative methods seminars for the assignments in other courses and in their thesis research. Specific voluntary assignments may be designed together with the instructor on an individual basis, covering for instance

the preparation and conduction of a qualitative interview or observation of a phenomenon. Students interested in such voluntary assignments should signal this no later than week 8 of the course. Note that only textual feedback are provided to such assignments and they do not count towards the final course grade.

During and after the course (while enrolled in the program) you can also ask for consultations with the course instructor and teaching assistant on general issues related to research design.

Course structure

Session	Theme	Description
1	<i>Introduction</i>	Course structure & requirements, what is ‘qualitative’ about qualitative methods, from undergraduate to graduate research, qualitative methods in policy analysis
2	Setting up the inquiry	Research questions, theories, and social inquiry
3		Concepts and measurement
4		Working with cases
5	<i>Reviewing research</i>	WORKSHOP I
6	Data gathering	Interviews
7		Use of documents and archival research
8		Participant observation and ethnographic methods
9	<i>Creativity in research design</i>	WORKSHOP II
10	Identifying findings	Analyzing and interpreting data I: general approaches and specific methods (process-tracing, QCA
11		Analyzing and interpreting data II: coding and the use of software
12		Linking research results to policy recommendations

Detailed schedule with readings

1 Introduction: Research design and research methods

Research methods are our tools to make sense out of complex social phenomena and data. But more importantly, they help to make convincing arguments for ourselves and our audience and to start a sensible debate, which is the essence of scientific discourse and enquiry. Using qualitative methods is one approach, although the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is not as clear as it may seem. Qualitative methods is also often used for applied policy analysis, and it is important for policy makers to be familiar with their possibilities and limitations.

Required reading

Ormstone, R., Spenser, L., Barnard, M., & Snape, D. (2013). The Foundations of Qualitative Research, In: Ritchie, Jane, and Jane Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers* (1-23). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Recommended reading

Majchrzak, A. & Markus M. L. (2014). *Methods for policy research: taking socially responsible action*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications. Chapter 1.

2 Research questions, theories and social inquiry

Formulating a research question is a key step in the research process. For positivist scholars the explanation to this question will be called a theory, which can be supported or rejected by empirical data.

Required reading

King, G., Keohane, R., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Recommended reading

Brady, H. (2010). Doing Good and Doing Better: How far does the quantitative template get us? In Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Eds.) *Rethinking Social Inquiry. Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (67-82). Second edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

3 Concepts and measurement: How can we get hold of complex social phenomena?

We can conceive the social world only through theoretical constructs – concepts – we use to describe. Sometimes, the conceptual ideas we use do not correspond to social reality or they are too vague and encompass too many social phenomena to be useful for research. The concept itself is not enough, we also have to be able to assess it by numbers or words to be meaningful for scientific debate.

Required reading

Adcock, R. & Collier, D. (2001). Measurement Validity: Toward a Shared Framework for Qualitative and Quantitative Research. *American Political Science Review* 95: 3, 529–546.

Recommended reading

Gerring, J. (1999). What Makes a Concept Good?, *Polity*, 357-393.

4 Working with cases

‘Not in my village’ is an ironic quote from anthropology to portray empirically working anthropologist - they know their village so well that they cannot see the larger picture. Most of the time, cases in qualitative research are not unique. But this is good news, as it is difficult to learn from unique cases. Cases have an important place in research. Besides many other strengths, and compared with other research methods, they can provide very detailed information about a particular event or subject. In this seminar we aim to answer questions such as ‘How we select cases?’, ‘How we interpret the generated data?’, and ‘Under what conditions can the findings of case studies be generalised to the wider population?’.

Required reading

Geddes, B. (1990). How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics, *Political Analysis*, 2(1), 131-150.

Recommended reading

Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection for Case-study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques. In: Box-Steffensmeier, J. M., Brady, H. E. & Collier, D. (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (645-684). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

5 WORKSHOP I - Reviewing research

Reviewing the work of colleagues and others constitutes an important part of academic work. In this workshop, students will be divided into groups that will discuss two texts based on questions similar to those that you will need to work with for your individual research review assignments. The texts and group divisions will be posted on the e-learning site one week prior to the workshop.

6 Interviews

Talking to people is one of the most direct ways of acquiring qualitative data. The advantage is that interviewees often participated in the events we are interested in and report details we wouldn't know otherwise. The disadvantages, however, is that interviewees often have their own agenda, are biased, or difficult to access. When can we use interview data and how can we avoid bias? And how do we prepare for a research project based on interviews?

Required reading

Keats, D. M. (2001). *Interviewing: a practical guide for students and professionals*. Buckingham – Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 4 and 5.

Recommended reading

Bleich, E. & Pekkanen, R. (2013). How to Report Interview Data. In: Mosley, L. (Ed.) *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapter 4.

7 Documents and archives

There is a lot of written evidence of what policy makers decide and do, and most policy researchers will engage with documents in some form. In order for these documents to bring additional insights to your analysis you will need a clear idea how to approach these texts. Some researchers also gather data from larger archives. This is sometimes misunderstood as a tool for specialists of medieval history only. But it is actually a great source also for public policy research.

Required reading

Trachtenberg, M. (2006). *Working with documents*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 5 (140-168).

Recommended reading

Thies, C. (2002). A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations. *International Studies Perspectives*, 3(4), 351-372.

8 Participant observation and ethnographic methods

Participant observation doesn't seem to be the right tool for analyzing 'high stakes' politics, as most of such events have strictly limited access (think of crisis management within the ECB during the Euro-crisis, etc.). But there are many occasions relevant for public policy research that are open to researchers' participation. Participant observation can offer significant insight in how processes work (or not). Some public policy scholars also follow ethnographic methods, developed primarily for anthropological studies.

Required reading

Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (1994). *Observation techniques*. In Norman K. D. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (377-392). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Recommended reading

Gans, H. J. (1999). Participant observation in the era of "ethnography". *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(5), 540-548.

9 WORKSHOP II – Creativity in research design

The importance of ideas and creativity sometimes can be lost in the dos and don'ts of methodology debates. This workshop will be an exercise in brainstorming, where student groups will work on coming up with multiple ideas on how to frame and research specific problems. The following text serves as inspiration for the workshop:

Abbot, A. (2004). *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. W W Norton & Company Incorporated, Chapter 4.

10 Analyzing and interpreting data I: general approaches and specific methods (process-tracing, QCA)

After having worried a lot about what data to use and how to get it, the next worry is how to make sense of the abundance of data you bring back from the field. In this seminar we mainly discuss different experiences on how to handle and manage data. In addition, we will get snapshots of three popular methods for analyzing existing empirical data: process-tracing, QCA and social network analysis.

Required reading (pick ONE of the following three)

Beach, D. & Pedersen, R. B. (2013). *Process-tracing methods: foundations and guidelines*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c2013. Chapter 1.

Schneider, C. Q. & Wagemann, C. (2012). *Set-theoretic methods for the social sciences: a guide to qualitative comparative analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Robins, G., Lewis, J. M., Wang, P. (2012). Statistical Network Analysis for Analyzing Policy Networks, *Policy Studies Journal*, 40(3), 375-401 - **ONLY READ 375-383!**

Recommended reading

Richards, L. (2005). *Handling qualitative data*. SAGE Publications. Part 3 (Making sense of your data), 123-163.

11 Analyzing and interpreting data II: Coding and the use of software

This session will take place in one of the computer labs, where you will be given an introduction to how different types of software can help management of data.

Required reading

Seale, C. & Rivas, C. (2012). Using Software to Analyze Qualitative Interviews. In Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holstein & Karyn D. McKinney, *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft* (427-441), Second Edition. SAGE Publications.

Recommended reading

No recommended reading for this week, but if you have time you may familiarize yourself with AtlasTi, NVivo or any other coding software that you would like to use during the session's exercise.

12. Linking research to policy recommendations

Scholars are increasingly required to prove how their work is policy-relevant, but the link from research findings to policy recommendations is not always straightforward.

Required reading:

Court, J. & Young, J. (2003). *Bridging Research and Policy. Insights from 50 case studies*. Overseas Development Institute Available at <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/180.pdf> **ONLY READ 26-34!**

Recommended reading

Young, E & Quinn, L. (2012). *Making Research Evidence Matter. A Guide to Policy Advocacy in Transition Countries*. Budapest: Open Society Foundations. Chapter 2.