

## **Obstacles of Qualitative Research in The English Language Field from the Perspective of Its Faculty Members at King Abdul Aziz University (Case Study)**

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### **Abstract**

The current study aimed to identify the obstacles that prevent conducting qualitative research in the English Language field at university, as well as the theoretical and philosophical premises of qualitative research. The researcher used the explanatory approach, and used the interview as one of the qualitative research methods. The study found that we need to conduct qualitative research in the English language because of the predominance of quantitative research tools and methods in an explicit omission of qualitative research, despite its importance and suitability for the study of many phenomena and problems in the field of the English language. Philosophical study of the phenomenon is more in depth in the cognitive construction, in addition to its use of a number of means to collect the data of the phenomenon such as observation, interview, document analysis, and knowledge of the social, personal and material circumstances and scenes related to the phenomenon being studied. The study also found that there are many obstacles that prevent conducting qualitative research in the field of education in general and the field of English language in particular. The researcher has developed a set of proposals to overcome the obstacles of qualitative research in the English language field.

**Keywords:** Qualitative research, obstacles, English language

## 1. Introduction

Compared to quantitative research, qualitative research has become commonly used in educational research in general, and research in the field of language education in particular, due to its characteristics that enable it to provide a deep understanding of the issues and problems of language teaching and learning and its teaching methods according to its natural context, in addition to its ability to provide results that may contribute directly or indirectly to achieving knowledge addition. Either theoretical or applied in the field of language education.

Due to the lack of Arabic content that dealt with the design of qualitative research - starting with identifying the research problem, and ending with the presentation and discussion of the results - in the field of English language teaching research, in addition to the need for researchers in this field to a comprehensive and brief explanation of the procedures and steps for designing qualitative research, which enables them to use it in studying the issues and problems of teaching and learning English, And the curricula of its education, and thus finding appropriate solutions and treatments for it.

Accordingly, the current study aimed to shed light on the obstacles that prevent conducting of qualitative research in the field of English language, and finally to ways to confront these obstacles and find appropriate solutions.

Specialists in the field of language education research believe that the researcher should ask himself the following question before starting his research: What are the characteristics of educational research whose results can be used to address research problems related to language teaching? In this context, the National Council of English Teachers (2016) indicated that original educational research in the field of language teaching is generally characterized by the following characteristics:

- Addressing the issues and problems of teaching and learning the language that teachers, students, and parents see as important, and the need to discuss them.
- It starts from clear and specific research questions, based on a real problem, not artificial.
- Provides clear results, describing the assumptions and principles that guide language teaching and learning.
- It is characterized by comprehensive quality, so that the results reached by the researcher are logical, objective, honest and consistent.
- Take into account the ethical aspects and considerations of educational research.

The above characteristics can only be achieved in language teaching research with the presence of a competent and qualified researcher, who has sufficient knowledge and research skills, which enable him to design and implement the research correctly, to achieve the desired goals (Barghouti and Abu Samra, 2007).

### 1.1. Research Problem

Following of recent research trends in the educational field finds that qualitative research has become commonly used in language teaching research, due to its characteristics that enable it to provide a deep understanding of the issues and problems of language education according to its natural context, and its ability to provide results that may contribute to achieving a cognitive addition, either theoretical or applied in the field of language education (Benson, Chik, Cao, Huang, and Wang, 2009).

There is a global trend towards the use of qualitative research in the educational field, in academic institutions and universities in developed countries. The percentage of qualitative research published between 50% and 60% in the most famous Western scientific journals, while quantitative research did not exceed 30% of what was published in (2006-2008) (Devetak, 2010). This was confirmed by Mastropieri et al (2009) that the number of qualitative research that has been published in (11) prestigious scientific journal in special education during nineteen years (1988-2006) qualitative research was few in the eighties, and this trend differed in the nineties, in (1995) amounted to (40) qualitative research. The study of Bakhit (2005) also revealed the existence of a methodological crisis in scientific production in master's and doctoral theses in psychology, which were conducted in Sudanese universities in the period (1980-2005), represented in the prevalence of a certain type of scientific research methods - the quantitative approach - and the almost complete absence of the qualitative (qualitative) approach, which has become commonly used in studies in general (P. 54). Al-Subaie's study (1433 AH) recommended the need to achieve a balance between the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of educational research in master's and doctoral theses in the origins of education, and work to prepare master's and doctoral students intellectually and theoretically and train them on qualitative research methods (P. 83).

In confirmation of the above, Benson et al. (2009) conducted a survey study aimed at identifying studies that used qualitative research in studying the issues and problems of language teaching and learning, and its teaching curricula, and the survey included the most prominent (10) English

journals in the field of language education, which were published between (1997- 2006). In addition, the researchers found that these journals published (2202) studies in teaching and learning language, and teaching methods, including (477) study researchers used qualitative research methods, i.e. (22%) of the total published research.

In light of the above, it is clear the importance of using qualitative research in studying the issues and problems of teaching English, in addition to the need for researchers in this field to know the obstacles to faculty members' use of qualitative research from their perspectives at King Abdulaziz University.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following main question:

What are the obstacles that prevent conducting of qualitative research in the English language field from the perspectives of its faculty members at King Abdulaziz University?

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions must be answered:

- 1- What is the reality of qualitative research in the English language field?
- 2- What are the ways to confront these obstacles and find appropriate solutions?

## **1.3. Research Objectives:**

The general objective of the study: is to identify the obstacles that prevent conducting of qualitative research in the English language field from the perspectives of its faculty members at King Abdulaziz University.

Objectives of the sub-study:

- 1- Identifying the reality of using qualitative research in the English language field from the point of view of its faculty members.
- 2- Identifying ways to confront these obstacles and find appropriate solutions to them.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Type and Design of Research**

According to the nature of the study and its objectives, the qualitative approach was used, with the interpretive method, from which qualitative research is based, in order to reach an understanding of the reality of the use of qualitative research and the obstacles to its use in the field of English, and to reach future solutions to overcome these obstacles in order to develop research practices in the field of English.

The interpretive method is one of the latest research trends in the field of social and educational sciences. In it, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work, where they have meanings specific to their experiences, and these meanings are multiple and different, and they are formed through interaction with others socially and depending on historical and cultural norms. The use of this methodology has led to facts, data and generalizations that have increased our understanding and vision of social and educational phenomena.

In this study, the case study will be used, which is one of the most common qualitative research designs used in the educational field. The case study aims to identify the characteristics of the person, group, organization or events on which the research is carried out on the problem studied.

## **2.2. Instrument**

These are the mechanisms or procedures used to collect and analyze data related to research questions (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative research has a set of tools that can be used to collect and analyze data. They are often notes, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. So, to achieve the objectives of the current study, and to answer its questions, the in-depth qualitative interview tool (semi-codified) was used, as it is an important tool for obtaining information from human sources, and it also enables the researcher to obtain important information that exceeds in importance what he can obtain by using other tools (Obeidat and Kated, 2013).

Based on the above, it is clear that the qualitative researcher should have knowledge of the components of the previous research models, because they will help him in designing his research, and directing him to achieve his goals correctly. Therefore, the researcher has designed an interview guide in light of the study's objectives as follows:

### **Interview Guide:**

After the researcher identified the participants in this study, she obtained approval to conduct interviews, so she contacted them to determine the appropriate date for the interview, and tried to gain their trust by explaining the objectives of the research and their role in achieving its objectives, she prepared the interview guide including the following steps:

#### **1- Determine interview objectives:**

The interview aimed to obtain information that reveals the reality of qualitative research in the field of English language and the obstacles to its use by English faculty members and how to overcome them and find appropriate solutions to them, through the opinions of a group of faculty members in the English Department at King Abdulaziz University.

## 2- Determine type of interview:

The interview was a kind of semi-codified individual interviews, as the researcher was able to modify and change the asking questions and discussion with the members of the study sample, and clarify some ideas to reach the researcher to the desired and appropriate meaning for the research goal.

## 3- Selection of interview participants:

The researcher selected the participants in the interview, who are the English lap professors who conducted quantitative and qualitative research to help obtain multiple perspectives, especially with regard to the reality of qualitative research in the field of English, and a sample (snowball intentional sample) of female faculty members who hold master's and doctoral degrees interested in qualitative research.

## 4- Interview Guide Design:

After reviewing the theoretical literature, reviewing previous studies, and books related to the topic, the interview guide was prepared, judged by a group of specialists and the guide was designed in the light of their observations.

## 5- Interview Procedures:

The researcher reached with the participants and talked to them by phone to ensure that they accepted the interview and set its date, and it was conducted through the face-to-face interview, and she asked permission from the participants to record the interview by voice to ensure that the data is adjusted when discharge, where (5) English professors were interviewed.

## 6- Writing draft data:

After I had completed the data by audio recording, and reviewed side notes, I wrote the draft statements and included the words as they came from the participants, in accordance with the theoretical literature of qualitative research.

### **2.3. Reliability of the study:**

One of the challenges faced by qualitative research, especially in the academic field, is to prove reliability, as how does the qualitative researcher prove, in light of this flexibility and within the framework of the subjectivity in which he works, that what he does is an exploration that provides something to human knowledge, and not just fleeting impressions of an observer interested in a social phenomenon?. Though, the ideological nature of qualitative research, its impact on the

context of the research, its participants, and the way in which its facts are constructed, make writing this type of research very sensitive even for empowered researchers who are well aware of the traditions of scientific writing (Al-Abdulkarim, 2019).

In this regard, Guba & Lincoln (1985:290) summarize credibility by asking: How can a researcher convince the reader that his results deserve to be taken into account? Accordingly, in this study, several strategies were used to increase the compatibility between the results of the research and the real reality, first and to increase the credibility of the results second, on the criteria of credibility and reliability, which are the two pillars on which reliability is based in qualitative research, and these criteria as defined by Maxwell (1992) are:

Descriptive honesty, explanatory honesty, theoretical honesty, generalizability, evaluative honesty, and reliability.

**Table (1)** illustrates these criteria and the procedures followed in this study to achieve these criteria:

**Table (1):** Maxwell's criteria and study procedures (Maxwell, 1992)

| No. | Criteria                    | Definition                                                                                                                                                            | Applying in study                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | <b>Descriptive Honesty</b>  | This kind of honesty refers to the degree of Interview, factual accuracy of researchers' reports (Hajar, 2003:142).                                                   | - Use the individual interview.<br>- Audio recording of interviews and direct transcription of them in order to ensure that the largest possible amount of qualitative and moral details are documented. |
| 2.  | <b>Interpretive Honesty</b> | It consists in paying attention to the perspective of the participants, and must ensure that the participants' real behaviors and actions are accurately interpreted. | -Violator analysis strategy: Information and opinions that differ from the results of the research or that do not agree with the researcher's directives were collected.                                 |

Applying in study: - Respondent honesty strategy: The respondent honesty strategy was used, so that it re-presents the initial results reached to the participants themselves in order to ensure the sincerity of the explanations made by the researcher.

- Violator analysis strategy: Information and opinions that differ from the results of the research or that do not agree with the researcher's directives were collected.

- Reflection of the researcher: where the point of view reached was clarified and the cultural background that is imbued with it was explained in order to determine the credibility of the research in the analysis of the results, and the presentation of the results, whether these results agree or contradict the directions of the researcher, to prevent and frame the principle of bias.

### 3. Theoretical Honesty

It consists in linking the phenomenon under study with a more extensive theory.

- The researcher followed the basic reference on which qualitative research is based in her cumulative scientific philosophy, which is the constructivist theory, starting with the problem of the study and its philosophical framework, passing through the study literature, and ending with the stage of data analysis, where the researcher pursued in her analysis and interpretation of the structural philosophy data.

### 4. Generalizability

One of the objectives of qualitative research is to deepen the understanding of the studied phenomenon and that generalization is

done in the new research  
to be conducted by a new  
researcher (Al-Abdulkarim, 2012).

Applying in study: - The case study was used, which is the design in which a specific case is studied in order to understand the apparent details more deeply, without adopting a generalization approach in the context of analysis and interpretation of the results.

- With the researcher's adoption of the rich description in order to clarify the dimensions of the use of this tool, and make the reader beneficiary and similar to the research sample within the limits of time and category, to reach the stage of self-application of the results of this study and benefit from them theoretically and scientifically.

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**5. Evaluation Honesty** It means the process of research  
and conclusions reached according  
to criteria within a specific evaluation  
framework, the most important of which  
are transparency, harmony, homogeneity  
and communication.

Applying in study: - The researcher moved away from presenting the final perception until the researcher's reflexive strategy is applied, and the violator's analysis is analyzed.

- In addition to self-checking the data in order to ensure that there is no conflict or inconsistency in the data.

- She then implemented a peer screening strategy through a colleague who reviews, analyzes, and interprets data, or hires a specialist who reviews, analyzes, and interprets the data.

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**6 Reliability (Persistence)** Stability is defined as: the extent to  
which the results of the research can  
be repeated, but in qualitative research,  
the study can be considered as fixed by  
clarifying how the research was designed  
and implemented, as well as the procedural  
description of data collection, detailing and  
mentioning a reflective evaluation of the

research project to evaluate the effectiveness  
of the research process that took place.

(Al-Abdulkarim, 2012).

Applying in study: - Everything done by the researcher was documented as much as possible without neglecting any aspect of the procedural aspects that were done away from the reader's eye looking.

- The researcher re-examined the raw data to ensure that there were no errors or conflicts.
- Go back and make sure that there is no confusion or error in the coding system, and review it from time to time. It is confirmed by the codes that are inserted on the side of the coding process.
- Then the review and audit track was used in order to carry out the process of matching the results and symbols. The objective of this procedure is to verify that the researcher and other references agree on the analysis of data and on codes given to each part of that data (Al-Qahtani, 2019).

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### 3. Results and Discussion

Based on the fact that the practice of qualitative research requires the acquisition of many knowledge and research skills such as conducting an interview, analyzing content, case study and observation, as well as efficiency in analyzing the qualitative data collected. After collecting information by interviewing the professors of the study sample in the field of English, comes the stage of qualitative data analysis, which is the decisive stage in qualitative research.

The researcher analyzed the qualitative data obtained from the interview questions using the qualitative analysis steps, where the interviews were organized, then transcribed, written and read more than once in order to understand them deeply. After that, the data was classified and coded, as well as special codes were used for each participant in the interview when displaying the data in order to preserve the confidentiality and privacy of the participants' information, and the results of the analysis of the interview items were as follows:

The answer to the first question in the interview was: Do you prefer to resort to qualitative research at the current stage as follows:

All the participants in the interview, including professors and faculty members, stressed the need to resort to qualitative research at the current stage, and their most important justifications were the following:

"Because this type of research provides me with the opportunity to understand human experience and question more easily than to give numbers." "I agree that qualitative research helps us present and give more meaningful meanings than numbers, it addresses how and why, when talking about research questions, and allows us to understand in depth the phenomenon under study and the human experience in general. Also, another professor added "I prefer to resort to qualitative research mainly (sometimes accompanied by the use of simple statistical tools), but basically I prefer the qualitative approach because it allows me to dig deeper and examine the research problem from a closer perspective". Another professor added that she "prefers to use qualitative research because it gives me the opportunity to study the problem in detail."

This result is consistent with the study of Griffin (2004) and Al-Harthy (2017), all of which emphasize the importance and value of qualitative research and the rich information it provides in educational research.

The answer to the second question in the interview was: In your opinion, what are the sources of obtaining information related to conducting qualitative research as follows:

The answer to the second question in the interview was: In your opinion, what are the sources of obtaining information related to conducting qualitative research as follows:

The majority of interviewees admitted that they obtained information related to conducting qualitative research through:

- I think we can do interviews, focus groups, discussions, class notes.
- Books of research methods and training courses.
- Basic books related to the basics of scientific research. is the best source.
- Use of databases.

It is clear from the above, that graduate programs do not focus on qualitative methodology, as the majority of professors in the study sample obtained information related to qualitative research through personal readings in research methods, and this indicates the control of quantitative research in graduate curricula, and this is consistent with the study of Hashem (2013), the study of Noah (2012) and the study of tenderness (2016), which all emphasize the mastery of quantitative research methodology.

The answer to the third question came in the interview: When you used qualitative research, did you find an addition in it as follows:

All the professors confirmed (the study sample) with their answers yes to this question for many reasons, as one of the professors participating in the interview replied: "Qualitative research helps us to give more meaning and deepen when investigating any phenomenon. "One professor added: "In my research on discourse analysis, qualitative research allows me to examine the research problem closely, and to avoid any false generalizations that may lead to distortion of the results." This emphasizes the importance of qualitative research, which is consistent with the answer to the first question of the interview.

#### **4. Limitations of the study**

The current study adheres to the following limits:

Objective limits: The use of qualitative research from the perspectives of faculty members at university.

Human Frontiers: English faculty members at the (Faculty of Arts and Humanities) at King Abdulaziz University. The intentional sample was chosen, which is the sample that is deliberately selected by the researcher because of the presence of some characteristics in this sample and not others. Whereas, the researcher is currently working at the (English Language Institute) at King Abdulaziz University.

Time Limits: First Semester (2022).

#### **5. Recommendations:**

In light of the results the researcher recommended some recommendations as follows:

1. The use of qualitative research in the educational field, especially in the field of English, can contribute to the detection of problems of language education.
2. Holding workshops and training courses for faculty members in universities on how to use qualitative research to solve the problems of teaching English.
3. Raising the next generations of graduate students on the use of qualitative research and its methodology.
4. Introducing specialized approaches in qualitative research methodology, philosophy and application.

#### **6. Acknowledgement**

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