GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Audit Trail
The systematic presentation of material gathered within a naturalistic study that allows others to follow and audit the researcher’s thinking and conclusions about the data.

Bracketing
A process used by researchers working within the Husserlian phenomenological tradition to identify their preconceived beliefs and opinions about the phenomenon under investigation in order to clarify how personal biases and experience might influence what is seen, heard and reported.

Coding
A procedure for transforming raw data into a standardised format for data analysis purposes. Coding qualitative data involves identifying recurrent words, concepts or themes. In positivist research, coding involves attaching numerical values to categories.

Constant Comparative Method
A procedure used during grounded theory research whereby newly gathered data are continually compared with previously collected data in order to refine the development of theoretical categories.

Content Analysis
A procedure for organising narrative, qualitative data into emerging themes and concepts.

Control
Processes employed to hold the conditions under which an investigation is carried out uniform or constant. In a true experimental design, the control group is the group that does not receive the intervention or treatment under investigation. The scores on the dependent variable for the control and the experimental groups are used to evaluate the effect of the independent variable. In other experimental designs, this group may be referred to as the comparison group.

Core Category
The central category that is used to integrate all the categories identified in grounded research.

Data Saturation
The point at which data collection can cease. This point of closure is arrived at when the information that is being shared with the researcher becomes repetitive and contains no new ideas, so the researcher can be reasonably confident that the inclusion of additional participants is unlikely to generate any new ideas. (Sometimes simply referred to as saturation.)

Deductive Reasoning
A logical process of developing specific predictions (hypotheses) from general principles. This type of reasoning moves from the general to the particular.

Descriptive Statistics
Statistical methods used to describe or summarise data collected from a specific sample (eg. Mean, median, mode, range, standard deviation).

Determinism
The belief that everything is caused by specified factors (antecedent factors) in a predictable way rather than haphazardly; a key assumption within the positivist paradigm.

Emic Perspective (Emic View)
A term used by ethnographers to refer to the insider’s or native’s view of his or her world (see also etic perspective).

Ethnography
A research methodology associated with anthropology and sociology that systematically describes the culture of a group of people. The goal of ethnographic research is to understand the natives’ / insiders’ view of their own world (an emic view of the world).

Ethnomethodology
Systematic study of the ways in which people use social interaction to make sense of their situation and create their ‘reality’. This research methodology, associated with sociology, focuses on how people understand their everyday activities.

Etic Perspective (Etic View)
A term used by ethnographers to refer to the outsider’s view of the experiences of a specific cultural group (see emic perspective).

**Experimental Research**

A research methodology used to establish cause-and-effect relationships between the independent and dependent variables by means of manipulation of variables, control and randomisation. A true experiment involves the random allocation of participants to experimental and control groups, manipulation of the independent variable, and the introduction of a control group (for comparison purposes). Participants are assessed before and after the manipulation of the independent variable in order to assess its effect on the dependent variable (the outcome).

**Experimental Group**

In experimental research the group of subjects who receive the experimental treatment or intervention under investigation.

**Field Notes**

Notes taken by researchers to record unstructured observations they make ‘in the field’ and their interpretation of these observations.

**Focus Group**

An interview conducted with a small group of people to explore their ideas on a particular topic.

**Grounded Theory**

A research approach used to develop conceptual categories/theory about social processes inductively from real-world observations (data) from a selected group of people. The researcher may subsequently make further observations to test out the developed categories/theory.

**Inductive Reasoning**

A logical process of reasoning used to develop more general rules from specific observations; this type of reasoning moves from the specific to the more generalised.

**Informed Consent**

The process of obtaining voluntary participation of individuals in research based on a full understanding of the possible benefits and risks.

**Interview**

A method of data collection involving an interviewer asking questions of another person (a respondent) either face-to-face or over the telephone.

**Structured Interview**

The interviewer asks the respondents the same questions using an interview schedule – a formal instrument that specifies the precise wording and ordering of all the questions to be asked of each respondent.

**Unstructured Interview**

The researcher asks open-ended questions which give the respondent considerable freedom to talk freely on the topic and to influence the direction of the interview since there is no predetermined plan about the specific information to be gathered from those being interviewed.

**Likert Scale**

A method used to measure attitudes, which involves respondents indicating their degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. Scores are summed to give a composite measure of attitudes.

**Method Slurring**

This term is used to describe the tendency of some researchers to combine qualitative research approaches without adequately acknowledging the epistemological origins and assumptions that underpin the methodologies they are blending.

**Naturalistic Paradigm**

This paradigm assumes that there are multiple interpretations of reality and that the goal of researchers working within this perspective is to understand how individuals construct their own reality within their social context.

**Observation**

A method of data collection in which data are gathered through visual observations.

**Structured Observation**

The researcher determines at the outset precisely what behaviours are to be observed and typically uses a standardised checklist to record the frequency with which those behaviours are observed over a specified time period.

**Unstructured Observation**
The researcher uses direct observation to record behaviours as they occur, with no preconceived idea of what will be seen; there is no predetermined plan about what will be observed.

**Paradigm**

Kuhn defines a paradigm in two ways: first as the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques shared by a specific community; and secondly as the procedures used to solve specific problems and take theories to their logical conclusion. Kuhn also suggests that paradigms function as maps or guides, dictating the kinds of problem/issue which are important to address, the kinds of theories or explanations that are regarded as acceptable, and the kinds of procedure that are used to tackle particular problems.

Guba and Lincoln (1998, p. 195) argue: ‘From our perspective, both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm. Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.’ They go on to assert: ‘Paradigm issues are crucial; no inquirer ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach (p. 218).’

For the purpose of the distance learning research modules, we use the term paradigm to denote a worldview based on a set of values and philosophical assumptions that are shared by a particular academic community and that guide their approach to research.

**Phenomenology**

A research methodology which has its roots in philosophy and which focuses on the lived experience of individuals.

**Positivism**

This paradigm assumes that human behaviour is determined by external stimuli and that it is possible to use the principles and methods traditionally employed by the natural scientist to observe and measure social phenomena.

**Qualitative Data**

Information gathered in narrative (nonnumeric) from (e.g. a transcript of an unstructured interview).

**Quantitative Data**

Information gathered in numeric form.

**Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT)**

In an RCT, participants are randomly assigned either to an intervention group (e.g. a drug treatment) or to a control group (e.g. a placebo treatment). Both groups are followed up over a specified period of time and the effects of the intervention on specific outcomes (dependent variables) defined at the outset are analysed (e.g. serum cholesterol levels, death rates, remission rates).

**Research Methodology**

Different approaches to systematic inquiry developed within a particular paradigm with associated epistemological assumptions (e.g. experimental research, grounded theory, ethnomethodology).

**Research Method**

Specific procedures used to gather and analyse research data.

**Research Question**

A clear statement in the form of a question of the specific issue that a researcher wishes to answer in order to address a research problem. A research problem is an issue that lends itself to systematic investigation through research.

**Sampling**

The process of selecting a subgroup of a population to represent the entire population. There are several different types of sampling.

**Simple Random Sampling**

This probability sampling method gives each eligible element/unit an equal chance of being selected in the sample; random procedures are employed to select a sample using a sampling frame.

**Systematic Sampling**

A probability sampling strategy involving the selection of participants randomly drawn from a population at fixed intervals (e.g. every 20th name from a sampling frame).

**Cluster Sampling**
A probability sampling strategy involving successive sampling of units (or clusters); the units sampled progress from larger ones to smaller ones (e.g. health authority/health board, trust, senior managers).

**Convenience Sampling (also referred to as Accidental Sampling)**
A non-probability sampling strategy that uses the most easily accessible people (or objects) to participate in a study. Purposive/Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy in which the researcher selects participants who are considered to be typical of the wider population (sometimes referred to as judgemental sampling).

**Quota Sampling**
A non-probability sampling strategy where the researcher identifies the various strata of a population and ensures that all these strata are proportionately represented within the sample to increase its representativeness.

**Snowball Sampling**
A non-probability sampling strategy whereby referrals from earlier participants are used to gather the required number of participants.

**Theoretical Sampling**
The selection of individuals within a naturalistic research study, based on emerging findings as the study progresses to ensure that key issues are adequately represented.

**Statistical Analysis**
Most statistical analysis is based on the principle of gathering data from a sample of individuals and using those data to make inferences about the wider population from which the sample was drawn.

**Survey Research**
A research approach designed to collect systematically descriptions of existing phenomena in order to describe or explain what is going on; data are obtained through direct questioning of a sample of respondents.

**Theme**
A recurring issue that emerges during the analysis of qualitative data.

**Theoretical Framework**
The conceptual underpinning of a research study which may be based on theory or a specific conceptual model (in which case it may be referred to as the conceptual framework).

**Theoretical Notes**
Notes about the observer’s interpretation of observed activities found in field notes.

**Theory**
In its most general sense a theory describes or explains something. Often it is the answer to ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions.

**Triangulation**
This term is used in a research context to describe the use of a variety of data sources or methods to examine a specific phenomenon either simultaneously or sequentially in order to produce a more accurate account of the phenomenon under investigation.

**Trustworthiness**
A term used to describe whether naturalistic research has been conducted in such a way that it gives the reader confidence in the findings. It can be assessed using the criteria of credibility, dependability and transferability.

**Credibility**
With its connotations of ‘truth’, credibility can be compared with internal validity in positivist research. A study’s credibility is said to be confirmed when the reader recognises the situation described by a research study as closely related to their own experience (sometimes referred to as confirmability).

**Dependability**
The dependability of a study is evaluated if it meets with the associated criterion of audibility. Auditability is achieved when a researcher provides a sufficiently clear account of the research process to allow others to follow the researcher’s thinking and conclusions about the data and thus assess whether the findings are dependable.

**Transferability**
Equivalent to external validity in positivist research (it may also be referred to as applicability). A study is said to be transferable if the findings ‘fit’ contexts beyond the immediate study situation. In order to transfer the findings elsewhere, readers need sufficient information to be able to assess the extent to which a specific research setting is similar to other settings.

**Validity**
In research terms, validity refers to the accuracy and truth of the data and findings that are produced. It refers to the concepts that are being investigated; the people or objects that are being studied; the methods by which data are collected; and the findings that are produced.

**Face Validity**
The extent to which a measuring instrument appears to others to be measuring what it claims to measure.

**Content Validity**
This is similar to face validity except that the researcher deliberately targets individuals acknowledged to be experts in the topic area to give their opinions on the validity of the measure.

**Criterion-Related Validity**
This requires the researcher to identify a relevant criterion or ‘gold standard’, which is itself reliable and valid, to provide an independent check of the new measure (i.e. to compare the results from a well established and a new measuring instrument).

**Construct Validity**
This refers to the degree to which a research instrument measures a theoretical concept (or construct) under investigation.

**Internal Validity**
This refers to the extent to which changes in the dependent variable (the observed effects) can be attributed to the independent variable rather than to extraneous variables.

**External Validity**
This refers to the degree to which the results of a study are generalised beyond the immediate study sample and setting to other samples and settings.

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**Suggested Reading & Website Resources for Social Science Training**


The British Psychological Society ethics and code of conduct

The British Sociological Society ethical practice
http://www.britisoc.co.uk/user_doc/Statement%20of%20Ethical%20Practice.pdf

The ESRC ethical framework
http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf#search=%27ESRC%20Ethics%27

The Social Research Association
http://www.the-sra.org.uk/staying_safe.htm

Keele University Faculty of Humanities and Social Science Ethics Committee
http://www.keele.ac.uk/research/lcs/membe