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An Evaluation of The Status of Qualitative Research in Childhood Education

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ABSTRACTS

The need to evaluate the status of qualitative research, particularly in childhood education, is required. Four questions were answered and three hypotheses were tested. A mixed-method approach design was adopted in this research. The population of the study comprised all childhood education researchers from all the teacher training institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. 58 researchers were purposively selected to participate in the study. A questionnaire and interview were used to collect the necessary data for the study. The outcome of the study revealed that the qualitative research method is rarely adopted for research related to childhood education. Also, time, secrecy, participants' unwillingness, cost implication among others were identified as dilemmas to conducting qualitative research in childhood education in the State. The quality of qualitative research conducted in childhood education is on average. The ratio of quantitative research as against qualitative research conducted by childhood educators was found to be 1:8. In other words, there was a significant difference in the number of quantitative and qualitative research conducted. In addition, gender and academic qualification had no significant influence on childhood educators' use of qualitative research methods. Thus, it was concluded that the status of qualitative research in childhood education in Kwara State, Nigeria is ranked low. Among the recommendations made are training and re-training of teacher trainers of childhood education on the benefits and how to use qualitative research methods.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years in so many countries around the world, the outcome of research had informed most of the policies made. In recent times in Nigeria, the government has made better its involvement and investment in childhood education. This is evident in the content of the national education policy which clearly states the objectives of childhood education (early childhood and primary education) and the responsibilities of the government in achieving the stated objectives. To uphold standards and functioning structures in all sectors, quality research becomes inevitable.

Several scholars have expressed their views about what research is. It is said to be an organized, logical, and systematic procedure of finding answers to questions. It is a structured inquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and create new knowledge that is generally applicable. Simply put, it is a search for new knowledge, that is, a discovery of hidden facts about a phenomenon. The purpose of any research is to further understand the world and to learn how this knowledge can be applied to enhance our everyday life. Research has been categorized by different researchers into what is most applicable to their discipline or research interests.

Two types of research which are basic research and applied research. The basic research provides insights into the reasons behind certain occurrences, events, or a process. It may not have direct applications, but usually, the outcomes of basic research form the basis for much-applied research. That is why it is also referred to as theoretical research. Applied research on the other hand investigates established theories and principles. As a result, applied research focuses on solving real-life problems by deriving knowledge that has an immediate application. Most of the experimental research, case studies, and interdisciplinary research are essentially applied research. The outcomes of applied research have immediate application to the existing activities in the society unlike in basic research. Aside from these two, there are other types of research such as action research, exploratory research, and comparative research. Under each type, there are classifications of other research categories and the appropriate methods of data collection.

For any of the research types aforementioned, the collection of data could be through quantitative research method or qualitative research method, or the combination of both. The quantitative collects and analyses numerical data through statistical analysis. It gives room to quantify variables, uncover relationships, and make generalizations across a larger population. Hence, it is frequently used in the natural and physical sciences such as engineering, biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, finance, medical research, and educational research among others.

The qualitative research method on the other hand which is the main focus of this study enables non-numerical data collection through open-ended techniques such as in-depth interviews, case studies, and focus group discussions. In addition, it allows for descriptive, use of words, and application of reasoning. In other words, the qualitative research method is any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification ([Queirós et al., 2017](#)).

[Rahman \(2017\)](#) added that qualitative research usually investigates persons' lives, experiences, behaviors, emotions, feelings, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between people. This implies that qualitative research is not statistical, rather it incorporates multiple realities. Also, established that it gives researchers the opportunity to collect data on personal experiences, feelings, or behaviors, as well as the reasons behind them. Qualitative research is interested in analyzing subjective meaning or the social

production of issues, events, or practices by collecting non-standardized data which can be collected via observation, ethnography, case studies, field research, focus group, structured interview as well as analyzing texts and images.

The qualitative research method is of huge benefit to childhood education researchers as it gives deep insights into issues related to children's feelings, experiences, and actions. The quality of research matters a lot because of the information it represents. Oftentimes this information is needed in the place of critical decisions or policymaking. For qualitative research, some criteria in evaluating the quality of the research include credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and reflexivity. To consider any research to be of good standard particularly the qualitative ones, data collected and results of the study are expected to be trustworthy and should mirror the views of the researchers.

Also, it should be established that the researcher is not careless or make mistakes in conceptualizing the study, collecting the data, interpreting the findings, and reporting results. The more consistent the researcher is in the research process; the more dependable results will be. In addition, verifying the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others research findings of similar research areas. Qualitative study lies in the transparency of its specific paradigm assumptions such as planning, designing, research strategies, selection of participants, and decisions made in collecting and interpreting the data. Moreso, the authenticity of research is established when the researchers' beliefs or mindset do not influence the information gathered during qualitative studies.

Despite the good qualities of the qualitative research method, it has been critiqued by scholars. [Acocella \(2012\)](#) expressed that the method of research focuses more on the participants' experience rather than any other imperative issues in the context. Policymakers sometimes tend to give low credibility to results from a qualitative approach. The quantitative method is preferable and adopted by most researchers, especially for data collection and analysis. In educational research, particularly in the field of early childhood education, several studies have been carried out using either qualitative or quantitative research methods or sometimes both (mixed) methods are used. However, it has been observed that most of the data accessible to scholars specifically in most Nigerian early and primary childhood education journals are quantitative. The persisting imbalance in the methods adopted for research in Kwara State, Nigeria arouses the need for this study to investigate what could be responsible for this one-sidedness.

Research questions are:

- (i) How often do childhood educators adopt the qualitative research method?
- (ii) What are the dilemmas of conducting research among childhood educators?
- (iii) What is the ratio of qualitative research as against quantitative research?
- (iv) How qualitative are qualitative researches conducted by childhood educators?

The following hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

- (i) **H₀₁**: There is no significant difference in the number of quantitative and qualitative research conducted by childhood educators.
- (ii) **H₀₂**: There is no significant difference of gender on the uses of qualitative research methods in childhood education.
- (iii) **H₀₃**: There is no significant main effect of academic qualifications on the uses of qualitative research methods in childhood education.

2. METHODS

This study used qualitative analysis. Qualitative research relies on data obtained by the researcher from first-hand observation, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, participant-observation, the recording made in natural settings, documents, and artifacts. The data are generally non-numerical. Despite the numerous qualities associated with qualitative research, studies have shown it is being underutilized. Hence, the need to evaluate the status of qualitative research, particularly in childhood education is required. Four questions were answered in the study and three hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A mixed-method approach of QUANT+qual design was adopted in this research. The population of the study comprised all childhood education researchers from all the teacher training institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. 58 researchers were purposively selected to participate in the study. A questionnaire and interview were used to collect the necessary data for the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Question One: How often do childhood educators adopt the qualitative research method?

The respondents never did the following: I analyze pictures for research purposes (1.17), I also analyze videos covered during research fieldwork (1.09), Focus group discussion is another means for data collection for my research interests (1.19). The respondents rarely did the following: I adopt the interview method in collecting data for most of my research (1.90), I make use of open-ended statements to gather information about my research interest (2.31), I allow respondents to express their opinion or perspective on paper concerning my research focus (1.83), I give attention to detail why on the field (2.45), I reflect and justify the selected framework underpinning my study (1.81), My study showed clear and justified research question that implies that the study is timely, original, rigorous and relevant (1.93). The respondents sometimes did the following: The questionnaire designed for data collection mostly contains more close-ended statements in my research (2.52). The weighted mean is 1.76 which is a numeric indicator that childhood educators rarely adopt qualitative research methods (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Table showing how often the childhood educator adopt qualitative research method.

S/N	Statements	Always	Sometime	Rarely	Never	Mean
1.	I adopt the interview method in collecting data for most of my research.		10(17.2)	32(55.2)	16(27.6)	1.90
2.	I make use of open-ended statements to gather information about my research interest.	10(17.2)	15(25.9)	16(27.6)	17(29.3)	2.31
3.	Questionnaire designed for data collection in most contains more of close-ended statement in me in research.	10(17.2)	20(34.5)	18(31.0)	10(17.2)	2.52
4	I allow respondents to express their opinion or perspective on paper concerning my research focus.	5(8.6)	11(19.0)	11(19.0)	31(53.4)	1.83
5	I give attention to detail why on the field.	5(8.6)	27(46.6)	15(25.9)	11(19.0)	2.45

Table 1 (continue). Table showing how often the childhood educator adopt qualitative research method.

S/N	Statements	Always	Sometime	Rarely	Never	Mean
6	I analyze pictures for research purpose.			10(17.2)	48(82.8)	1.17
7.	I also analyze videos covered during research fieldwork.			5(8.6)	53(91.4)	1.09
8	Focus group discussion is another means for data collection for my research interests.			11(19.0)	47(81.0)	1.19
9	I reflect and justify the selected framework underpinning my study.	5(8.6)	6(10.3)	20(34.5)	27(46.6)	1.81
10	My study showed clear and justified research question that implies that the study is timely, original, rigorous, and relevant.		6(10.3)	42(72.4)	10(17.2)	1.93
Weighted Mean						1.76

3.2. Research Question Two: What are the dilemmas of conducting qualitative research among childhood educators?

Table 2 shows the dilemmas of conducting qualitative research among childhood educators. The following are the dilemmas of conducting qualitative research among childhood educators: Time (1.81), Unnecessary secrecy (1.74), Cost (1.91), Participants' Unwillingness (1.60), Analysis of data gathered (1.79), Technicality of data analysis (1.71). In addition to the open-ended questionnaire distributed to the respondents, the interview was used to generate data. Only 9 out of 58 respondents conducted qualitative research.

Table 2. the dilemmas of conducting qualitative research among childhood educators

S/N	Dilemmas	Yes	No	Mean
1.	Time	47(81.0)	11(19.0)	1.81
2.	Unnecessary secrecy	43(74.1)	15(25.9)	1.74
3.	Cost	53(91.4)	5(8.6)	1.91
4	Motivation	10(17.2)	48(82.8)	1.17
5	Participants' Unwillingness	35(60.3)	23(39.7)	1.60
6	Analysis of data gathered	46(79.3)	12(20.7)	1.79
7	The technicality of data analysis	41(70.7)	17(29.3)	1.71

Their responses to the challenges faced in carrying out qualitative research are thus reported below. Time constraint – is time-consuming considering the workload and other responsibilities they have to attend to. Secrecy or hoarding of information especially on sensitive issues of governance was another difficulty encountered, the cost – in their words, it is expensive to conduct research using a qualitative approach because sometimes the low-class respondents expect a reward for their time taken. In addition, most participants are reluctant to be interviewed or participate in any form of group discussion. The rigor in data collection in qualitative research most of the time is discouraging and energy-sapping. The technicality of data analysis – many of the respondents said they do not have sufficient knowledge on how to analyze data collected via a qualitative approach. Lastly, lack of motivation from the system or management, since there is no special reward for anyone who conducts research using the qualitative research method, it is better to toll the easier path to

get their paper published. Summarily, 6(66.7%) participants indicated that time, cost implication, difficulty in data collection, and technicality of data analysis. 2(22.2%) said participants' unwillingness and unnecessary secrecy was a problem encountered while only 1(11.1%) indicated that lack of motivation is a major challenge.

3.3. Research Question Three: What is the ratio of qualitative research as against quantitative research?

Table 3 shows the ratio of qualitative research as against quantitative research. The respondents had a total of ninety-three (93) and twelve (12) quantitative and qualitative published types of research respectively. Hence, the ratio of qualitative research as against quantitative research was 1:8 which implies that the respondents use one qualitative research after every eight quantitative research.

Table 3. The ratio of qualitative research as against quantitative research.

Variables	Researches	N	Ratio
Qualitative Research	12	58	1:8
Quantitative Research	93		

3.4. Research Question Four: How qualitative are qualitative researches conducted by childhood educators?

Table 4 shows the quality of the qualitative research conducted by childhood educators. The qualitative research conducted were adjudged very well in the following areas: Research could be replicated elsewhere and/or in a similar situation (3.63), the researcher was able to give detailed descriptions and/or discussed the research outcomes (3.50). However, the qualitative researches conducted were adjudged good in the following areas: The research findings are credible and realistic (3.38), there is relationship between theory, research question(s), hypotheses, data collection, analysis and results (3.13), there is sufficient information provided such that another researcher could follow the same procedural steps, even though each arriving at possibly different conclusions (2.88), there is a clear relationship between the data and the findings of the research (3.00), findings of the study may be transferred to another setting, context or group (3.38), detailed description of the context in which the research was conducted and how this produced the findings of the research (2.88), the research was not rigid as it shows a continual process of engaging with and articulating the place of the research and the context of the research (2.88), there was explanations of how reflexivity was embedded and supported in the research process (3.00). The weighted mean is 3.17 which is a numeric indicator that the quality of qualitative research conducted by childhood educators was on average.

Table 4. How qualitative are qualitative research conducted by childhood educators.

S/N	Items	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Mean
1	The research findings are credible and realistic	-	1(12.5)	3(37.5)	4(50.0)	-	3.38
2	There is a relationship between theory, research question(s), hypotheses, data collection, analysis, and results	-	1(12.5)	5(62.5)	2(25.0)	-	3.13

Table 4 (continue). How qualitative are qualitative research conducted by childhood educators.

S/N	Items	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Mean
3	Research could be replicated elsewhere and/or in a similar situation	-	-	4(50.0)	3(37.5)	1(12.5)	3.63
4	There is sufficient information provided such that another researcher could follow the same procedural steps, even though each arriving at possibly different conclusions	-	2(25.0)	5(62.5)	1(12.5)	-	2.88
5	There is a clear relationship between the data and the findings of the research	-	-	(100.0)	-	-	3.00
6	The researcher was able to give detailed descriptions and/or discussed the research outcomes	-	1(12.5)	2(25.0)	5(62.5)	-	3.50
7	Findings of the study may be transferred to another setting, context, or group	-	-	5(62.5)	2(37.5)	-	3.38
8	A detailed description of the context in which the research was conducted and how this produced the findings of the research	-	1(12.5)	7(87.5)	-	-	2.88
9	The research wasn't rigid as it shows a continual process of engaging with and articulating the place of the research and the context of the research	-	1(12.5)	7(87.5)	-	-	2.88
10	There were explanations of how reflexivity was embedded and supported in the research process	-	1(12.5)	6(75.0)	1(12.5)	-	3.00
Weighted mean							3.17

Low: 1.00-2.99

Average: 3.00- 3.99

High:4:00-5:00

3.5. Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the number of quantitative and qualitative research conducted by childhood educators.

Table 5 shows the difference in the number of quantitative and qualitative researches conducted by childhood educators. There was a significant difference in the number of quantitative and qualitative research conducted by childhood educators ($t = 15.51$; $df = 57$; $P < 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore rejected in light of the result since the significant value (0.000) is less than 0.05. The childhood educators conducted more quantitative research (Mean = 11.98) than qualitative research (Mean = 1.21).

Table 5. Difference in the number of quantitative and qualitative researches conducted by childhood educators.

Research Methods	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig	Remark
Quantitative	11.98	6.54		57	.000	Significant
Qualitative	1.21	2.17	15.51			

3.6. Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on gender.

Table 6 shows the difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on gender. There was no significant difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research method based on gender ($t = .377$; $df = 56$; $P > 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in light of the result since the significant value (0.708) is greater than 0.05.

Table 6. Difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on gender.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig	Remark
Male	41	18.39	3.36	.377	56	.708	Not Significant
Female	17	18.06	2.08				

3.7. Research Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on academic qualification.

Table 7 shows the difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on academic qualification. There was no significant difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on academic qualification ($F_{(1; 56)} = 1.353$; $P > 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result the significant value (0.250) is greater than 0.05.

Table 7. Difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on academic qualification.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.316	1	12.316	1.353	.250
Within Groups	509.701	56	9.102		
Total	522.017	57			

The outcome of this study revealed that childhood educators within the scope of this study rarely adopt the qualitative research method. In other words, the majority of the studies conducted by childhood educators and researchers were quantitative-oriented. This outcome affirms the assertion that most researchers are more comfortable with reporting data quantitatively much more than qualitative reporting.

Also, it was shown that time was a major challenge for many of the researchers in childhood education. They consider the qualitative research method to be time-consuming. Considering their official workload and other personal commitments, making time out to organize focus group discussion, arrange for in-depth interviews among others are highly demanding. Secrecy on the part of the participants especially on sensitive issues or topics, many of the participants usually withhold useful information and sometimes they blatantly refuse to respond to your questions. To some, the cost of conducting qualitative research is high compared to quantitative research and since there's no motivation or incentives, they rather adopt the cheaper method of research, that is, quantitative. People's unwillingness to participate in the study is another major challenge. Most of them feel it's a waste of time because it has no instant benefits for them therein. The study also revealed that most of the

participants dread the stress involved in collecting data for qualitative research and lastly, the knowledge or technicality of data analysis was another major factor that impedes frequent usage of qualitative research methods.

This study also revealed the ratio of qualitative to quantitative research as 1:8; that is, respondents use quantitative research more than qualitative research in ratio 8:1. These findings support the findings of Jayachandram, Hill, and Walmsley whose study posited that the quantity of qualitative research in dental implants remains low; however, the quality has improved in the past two decades. Despite these improvements, there is still a lack of research in understanding both patients' and dentists' views qualitatively.

The quality of the qualitative research conducted by childhood educators was investigated in this study; the weighted mean is 3.17 which indicated that the quality of qualitative research conducted by childhood educators was on average. This implies that qualitative research is rarely used by childhood educators. This agreed with the finding of [Rahman \(2017\)](#) who concluded that, despite the great benefits of qualitative research in education, the method has not often been used.

This study shows that there is a significant difference in the number of quantitative and qualitative researches conducted by childhood educators, the mean score of quantitative research is 11.98 while that of qualitative research is 1.21, and this implies that childhood educators conduct more quantitative research often than qualitative research. The study revealed how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on gender, it revealed that there was no significant difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on gender, both male and female researchers adopt the use of qualitative research almost at the same level.

The result further shows the difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on academic qualification. It shows that there was no significant difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on academic qualifications, thus it revealed that academic qualifications do not affect the use of qualitative research. In addition, the finding also shows that there was no significant difference in how often childhood educators adopt qualitative research methods based on gender and academic qualification. This means that both gender and academic qualification does not influence the rate at which childhood educators adopt qualitative research method.

4. CONCLUSION

The imbalance in the methods adopted for research was also established in this study. More quantitative research is conducted than qualitative research. In other words, the status of qualitative research among childhood educators in Kwara State, Nigeria is low.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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