

# **London South Bank University**

## **Module Guide**

*Qualitative Methods in Social Research*

DSS\_5\_QM2

Division of Social Sciences

Level 5

Module Title:	Qualitative Methods in Social Research
Level:	1
Student Study Hours:	Contact hours 30
Student Managed Learning Hours:	110 hours
Pre-requisite Learning:	None
Requisites/Excluded Combinations:	None
Parent Faculty:	Law and Social Sciences
Parent Course:	BSc (Honours) Sociology, Sociology with Criminology, Criminology and Criminology with Psychology

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### Short Description

The social sciences are centrally concerned with asking and seeking answers to questions in order to better understand social life. Research methods are the tools we use to search for solutions and deepen our understanding of social processes. In this module, we will explore methods for collecting and analysing qualitative data. The module has three main goals:

- 1) To develop your understanding of the nature of social science explanations, especially qualitative explanations;
- 2) To develop your understanding of how qualitative data are generated; and
- 3) To develop your qualitative data analysis skills.

The module will provide a base of knowledge and hands-on experience of the collection and analysis of qualitative data through a range of techniques

including interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation and qualitative documentary analysis as preparation for the construction of a research proposal.

## **Aims**

The principal aims of the Module are to:

- Provide a base of knowledge about core perspectives and approaches to qualitative social research methods in preparation for independent project work and the concepts and principles in terms of which they are applied and evaluated;
- Explore in group exercises and through the analysis of practical examples, the strategic decisions involved in collecting, interpreting and analysing qualitative research data;
- Increase the appreciation of social ethical and practical issues faced by researchers collecting evidence in real world contexts; and
- Equip students with sufficient background knowledge about different research strategies to enable the construction of a small scale individual research proposal.

## **Learning Outcomes**

- 1) **Knowledge and Understanding-** Show knowledge of a range of qualitative research strategies available to the social researcher and the elements that enter into the research process.
- 2) **Intellectual skills-**Show critical awareness of practical, social and ethical issues that arise in practical research settings; and develop an understanding of the relationship between methods and theory.
- 3) **Practical skills-** Apply appropriate techniques to the collection and analysis of qualitative data through interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation and documentary analysis.
- 4) **Transferable skills-** At the end of the module you should have broad knowledge about a variety of qualitative research strategies and be able to undertake basic research tasks such as conducting an interview, making and recording an observation, develop a framework for the analysis of qualitative data, and prepare a coherent proposal for a practically feasible minor research project using qualitative research techniques.

## Teaching and Learning Pattern

The module will be taught in two-hour sessions over twelve weeks. The sessions will consist of a combination of **interactive lectures and practical activities**, including set tasks. You will be expected to participate in these tasks and to give a report of your activities in the final Portfolio Workbook assignment. You will be given guidelines on the tasks you are expected to undertake. Many of the tasks you will be expected to do during the sessions themselves, but you will occasionally be asked to do something in between sessions in the study time allotted to the module. The module is textbook based, and in your private study times you are expected to read relevant chapters in advance of each session and to keep a running record of work throughout the module

## Assessment

The assessment of the module will consist of:

- a) Written Workshop Reports (400 words each) on the activities undertaken in class, **FIVE** individual reports to be submitted (70% of the total mark); and
- b) A Research Proposal for a small-scale qualitative research project (1500 words) on a topic of investigation of the students' own choice.

The assignments will be assessed on the basis of evidence of reading and understanding of the core issues as well as of a critical appreciation of practical activities undertaken in class. The quality of the presentation will also be taken into account.

### **Workshop Reports (70% of total marks) Submission date: 25 May 2020**

Each week you are expected to write up notes from the workshop, your reading and your reflections on your own learning. Each report will be typed onto an A4 sheet (400 words each). At the end of the module you will submit a portfolio of work and the five reports submitted will form the basis of assessment for the module. It is useful to think of these reports as detailed revision notes with your own reflections about what you learned from doing the tasks. Each report will be assessed according to the criteria listed below and in terms of the following components.

- 1) **Title and Date** of each session
- 2) **Brief description** of the main themes and activities of the workshop including the method(s) and/or methodological issues covered.
- 3) **A discussion** of the strength and weaknesses of each method or methodological approach.
- 4) **Wider reading** reflected in a summary of key issues arising from your reading of the literature relating to this session including references.
- 5) **Reflections**: You should include your reflections on your own process of learning from the workshop and reading. What did you learn from this session? What did it leave you asking? What ideas does it provoke and

how might you apply these ideas? What do you still need to clarify how you might do this?

**Research Proposal (30% of total marks)** Submission Date: 25 May 2020

The second piece of assessed work will be a research proposal for a small-scale **QUALITATIVE** research project on a topic of investigation of your own choice (1,500 words). This can be a proposal for a hypothetical research project, but you are encouraged to be realistic about the practicalities of doing the research you propose. Further details will be given in class

The proposal should include:

- Specification of the research question
- Aims and subsidiary questions
- Concepts used
- Statement of research design and a justification of its appropriateness to the research question
- Methods that will be employed and their strengths and weaknesses in the context of the proposed project
- Sampling plan
- Issues of ethics and access

**The programme of teaching learning and assessment**

**WEEKLY LECTURES**

**Week 1: Self-guided preparation**

There will be no class on week one. You will have a chance to purchase the book we will be following in the course and to read the introductory chapter for week 2.

The book is **Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*** – you can find cheap second hand earlier editions online.

**Week 2: Introduction to Qualitative Research**

We will discuss the basics of qualitative approaches. This will include an introduction to qualitative research design and data analysis.

*Reading: Bryman ch 17*

**Week 3: Ethics in Qualitative Research**

We will explore ethical issues and researcher reflexivity in qualitative research

*Reading: Bryman ch 6*

**Week 4: Observation and Ethnography pt 1**

This session will discuss the uses of observation and ethnographic descriptions.

*Reading: Bryman chs 19*

**Week 5: Self-study week**

There is no class this week. You will have a chance to catch up with further reading and start exploring possible research projects.

**Week 6: Observation and Ethnography pt 2**

We will continue the discussion of observation and ethnographic descriptions.

*Reading: Bryman chs 19*

**Week 7: Qualitative Interviewing pt. 1**

This session will cover interviews and the design of interview schedules for qualitative individual and group interviews.

*Reading: Bryman chs 20 and 21*

**Week 8: Qualitative Interviewing pt 2**

We will continue our discussion of interviews and the design of interview schedules for qualitative interviews, revising and piloting the interview guide.

*Reading: Bryman chs 20 and 21*

**Week 9: Qualitative Data Analysis**

We focus on qualitative techniques of data analysis such as grounded theory. We think about how to develop inductive approaches to coding.

*Reading: Bryman ch24*

**Week 10:** There will be no class this week

**EASTER HOLIDAYS****Week 11: Content Analysis**

In this session we focus on ways of analysis qualitative texts. Deductive approaches to coding are considered.

*Reading: Bryman chs 13 and 23*

### **Week 12: Conversation and Discourse analysis**

(This week's session will happen after the bank holiday)

This session will discuss the use of conversation and discourse analysis. We will be examining the role of language in social life and methods for critically analysing it.

*Reading: Bryman ch22*

### **Week 13: Triangulation**

This session will review the use of mixed methods approaches.

*Reading: Bryman chs 26 and 27*

## **WEEKLY SESSION EXERCISES (PORTFOLIO PROJECTS)**

### **Week Two Exercise**

Develop four research topics that you might like to pursue which would be suitable for exploring using qualitative methods. They should be topics you would be interested in and able to do some research on. You should give a rationale for why you think the topics would be suitable for qualitative methods rather than quantitative ones and offer suggestions for how you would select research participants, indicating strengths and weaknesses in your method of selection. You should base your research questions on areas of literature you have become familiar with in earlier parts of your degree studies.

### **Week Three Exercise**

Imagine you are researching one of the following topics:

- A study of drug use among students at LSBU
- A study of attitudes towards sexual violence among male undergraduate students at LSBU
- A study investigating the reasons why young men carry knives.

Consider and discuss the following issues that would shape your research:

- What opportunities and problems would you anticipate arising for you as an interviewer on this study?
- How you might the knowledge you elicit be shaped by these dynamics?
- What are the implications for the 'integrity' of the research, and for your role as a researcher?

### **Weeks Four and Six Exercise (only one workshop report can be submitted for these two weeks)**

Daily, most Londoners spend time on some form of transport: on buses, in cars, on trains, or on bikes. During the periods of transportation from one place to

another there is considerable amounts of social interaction, albeit mostly silent, even when travelling by individuals means of transport such as cars. These interactions are quite complex and governed by social rules, both by formal regulations and by informal customs and conventions of “group behaviour”.

- Write a brief description of your journey here today. Remember the key concepts of setting, layers of meaning, different perspectives on events, interactions between behaviour and symbols and making the familiar strange.
- Having written a short piece, please compare each other’s descriptions and see if you can find a few common themes emerging, from which you could draw up a more general interpretation of travelling situations.
- Finally, having drawn up a few themes, what indicators could you use to try to establish whether such themes could be seen to apply more generally. What possible explanations can you think of for the significance of these themes.

This exercise will take place over two sessions.

### **Weeks Seven and Eight Exercises (only one workshop report can be submitted for these two weeks)**

In Weeks 5 and 6 the group will develop an interview schedule of open questions for a qualitative interview based on a suitable topic with clearly identifiable themes to be decided by the group. Each member of the group is then expected to engage in a few interviews, record the responses and attempt a brief thematic analysis of the completed interviews.

In the first session the questions should be piloted with the group.

Between the two sessions you will be asked to conduct at least three interviews based on the interview schedule with other students outside the module group.

In the second session, the group should critically discuss the experience of interviewing using the following guidelines;

- What difficulties were experienced by the interviewer in asking and recording the answers?
- How did respondents react to the questions?
- What could have been done to improve the interview situation and the questions asked?

### **Week Nine Exercise**

In this session transcripts from a project on hate crime will be summarised and analysed according to identifiable themes using a developed coding scheme. You should be prepared to discuss the outcome of your analysis and the strengths and weaknesses of your method of analysis with the group as a whole.



### **Week Eleven Exercise**

In this session you will work with data taken from the popular press. You will be given a series of advertisements depicting men and women in various roles and positions. The aim is to try to develop a frame for the analysis of gender roles and representation in advertisements.

### **Week Twelve exercise**

In this session you will be given a speech made by a famous politician. Using tools from discourse analysis you will examine the mechanisms used in the speeches to construct interpretive repertoires. What rhetorical devices does the politician use? How are they constructing a version of social reality that reflects their interests and world view?

### **Week Thirteen Exercise**

In this session we will consider the costs and benefits of employing mixed-methods designs. Using existing pieces of research we will discuss how they could be expanded by mixing methods and what they might lose. The focus will be to deepen your understanding of the relationship between theory, methods, research questions, design and analysis.

## **Core Readings**

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*

Creswell, K.W. (2002) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*

Gilbert, N. (ed.) (2001) *Researching Social Life*

Mason, J. (1997) *Qualitative Researching*.

Robson, C. (2002) *Qualitative Researching*.

Walliman, N. (2001)

## Marking criteria

At all levels, five areas of assessment objective can be recognised:

1. Knowledge of the topic - ideas, concepts and institutions
2. Analysis of issues and an awareness of different viewpoints
3. Evaluation of competing explanations or theories applied to a problem
4. Ability to identify relevant sources of evidence, both empirical and theoretical, and to use these to produce an informative referencing system
5. Skill in the presentation of an answer with accuracy, clarity and coherence.

With these objectives in mind, the following model marking scheme should apply:

Fail	0-30%	Badly misunderstands the question; contains factual errors; none of basic objectives are achieved
	30-35%	Some knowledge of topic and examples, but objectives 2-5 not met
	35-39%	Exhibits some knowledge of topic, but essentially descriptive; cannot identify alternative viewpoints; objective 1 is present but 2-5 poorly met
Third	40-49%	Demonstrates limited basic knowledge of the topic, but essentially descriptive; displays an attempt at evaluation of material, but low on clarity and coherence; limited achievement of objectives 1,2,3,4,; low on objective 5
2:ii	50-59%	Exhibits good knowledge of the topic; can distinguish different approaches or viewpoints, and some ability of evaluation present, but may to some extent lack clarity and coherence; reasonable attempt at referencing; very good on objective 1, weaker on 2-5
2:i	60-69%	Very good knowledge of basic ideas, concepts and institutions with good analysis of issues and evaluation; good uses of sources and references; meets objectives 1,2,4,5, weaker on 3
First	70+%	Excellent knowledge of the topic, with high level analysis of a balanced nature. Strong on critical evaluation, clarity, coherence. All assessment objectives covered

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of taking the words or ideas of others and passing them off as your own. In many cases plagiarism takes the form of copying from books and articles without full and accurate acknowledgement of sources. This can happen unintentionally when you use notes taken from a book/journal article and put them directly into your essay without properly attributing the source. Whether intentional or not, plagiarism is not acceptable in any circumstances. It is regarded as a form of cheating and there are strict University regulations to deal with it if it is discovered. You will find a summary of the University regulations & procedures governing plagiarism in your Student Handbook. You must read this carefully.

It is vital when taking notes to:

- (1) Note the FULL reference of the book/article at the top of the first page of notes.
- (2) Keep a precise note of the page numbers of any quoted material (for example in the margins of your notes)
- (3) Use precise double quote marks at the beginning & end of any quotes in your notes and check that any quotes/material used in your essay is accurately and carefully attributed.