Qualitative Research Methods (ME305)

Course duration: 54 hours lecture and class time (Over three weeks)

Summer School Programme Area: Research Methods, Data Science, and Mathematics

LSE Teaching Department: Department of Methodology

Lead Faculty: Dr Daniela Lai (Dept. of Methodology)

Pre-requisites: The course assumes little or no knowledge of qualitative methods. There are no formal prerequisites, however applicants should be at advanced undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to equip participants with the skills to be able to sensitively and critically design, carry out, report, read, and evaluate the quality of qualitative research projects.

It is taught by qualitative research experts who regularly use the methods they teach, making the course practical and realistic. It covers the full cycle of a qualitative research project: from design, to data collection, analysis, reporting and disseminating. Over the course of three weeks, students will learn how to formulate good qualitative research questions, how to use different methods of data collection and data analysis, and how to critically evaluate qualitative research.

The course has the dual aims of equipping students with both conceptual understandings of current academic debates regarding different methods, and the practical skills to put those methods into practice. ME305 will provide students with:

- a solid understanding of the core methods of qualitative data collection and analysis;
- critical skills in interpreting and evaluating reports of qualitative studies;
- experience in putting qualitative skills into practice;
- realistic and practical teaching from established researchers who put these tools to use in their ongoing research projects.

This course is ideal for advanced undergraduates and postgraduates, as well as professionals with an interest in using qualitative methods to undertake social research.

The twelve daily sessions for the course consist of a lecture that includes discussion, followed by seminars which will allow for practical exercises and group work.
Teaching faculty: Dr Daniela Lai
Dr Chris Chaplin
Dr Ellie Knott
Dr Audrey Alejandro
Cristian Montenegro

Reading:
The syllabus below lists ‘required’ readings that we expect students to read before each session. It also includes ‘additional’ readings and an extended reading list by topic that students can consult when preparing for their assignments. The reading list includes methodological texts, examples, and references to contemporary debates in qualitative research, and we expect students to be able to identify, with the help of tutors, the readings most relevant for their work.

Course Structure:
- Lectures: 36 hours
- Classes: 18 hours

Formative course work:
- A qualitative research question and topic guide/plan for observation due by Friday 3 August at 17:00.

Assessment:
The assessment consists of:
- A data collection exercise of no more than 1500 words (bibliography does not count, word-count must be stated on the first page of the essay), submitted as an email attachment to be sent to the class teacher by Friday 10 August at 17:00. The exercise will count for 40% of the final mark.
- A two-hour written exam at the end of the programme. The exam will count for 60% of the final mark.

Lecture Schedule:
1. Introducing Qualitative Research & Asking Research Questions (Mon 30 Jul)
- Welcome to the Summer School
- What is qualitative research & why do we need it?
- Asking good qualitative research questions
2. Qualitative Interviews (Tue 31 Jul)
- Types of qualitative interviews
- Sampling in qualitative research
- Designing interviews: topic guides & interview questions
- The advantages and challenges of interviewing

3. Focus Groups (Wed 1 Aug)
- What are focus groups and how do they differ from interviews?
- Focus group design
- Conducting focus groups
- What makes a good focus group?

4. Participant Observation & Ethnography (Thu 2 Aug)
- What is ethnography?
- The role of the participant observer
- Doing PO: selecting fieldwork sites
- Doing PO: writing fieldnotes

5. Research Ethics & Reflexivity (Mon 6 Aug)
- Reflexivity in qualitative research
- The origins of research ethics
- Key principles in research ethics
- Ethical debates & controversies

6. Documents and archives (Tue 7 Aug)
- What are documents & how are they used in qualitative research?
- Types of documents
- Selecting and accessing documents
- Quality criteria

7. New media, digital and visual methods (Wed 8 Aug)
- How do we do qualitative research online?
- Using social media for qualitative research
- Doing research with images & other visual materials
8. Thematic analysis (Thu 9 Aug)
- Analysing qualitative data
- What is thematic analysis and why do we use it?
- Doing thematic analysis: coding & themes
- Writing up your thematic analysis

9. Discourse Analysis (Mon 13 Aug)
- What is discourse?
- Discourse analysis: what for?
- Conducting discourse analysis

10. Participatory Research (Tue 14 Aug)
- What is Participatory Research?
- The rationale behind this approach
- How to do Participatory Research?

11. Ethnographic Analysis (Wed 15 Aug)
- What does an ethnographic analysis look like?
- How does ethnographic analysis differ from thematic and discourse analysis?
- Using fieldnotes in ethnographic analysis

12. Writing, Evaluating & Disseminating Qualitative Research (Thu 16 Aug)
- Quality criteria for qualitative research
- The process of writing up
- Making research accessible & relevant
- Revision and Q&A

Friday, 17 August – Final Exam
Seminar Schedule:

Seminar 1: Qualitative research questions

Key questions:
- What is qualitative research?
- What is the purpose of qualitative research?
- How do we formulate qualitative research questions?

Required Reading:

Additional Reading
- Flick, Uwe (2014). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. (Chapter 2, Qualitative Research: Why and How to Do It)

Seminar 2: Qualitative interviews

Key questions:
- How do we design and conduct interviews?
- What kind of questions do we ask, and how do we structure an interview?
- How do we sample and recruit participants?

Required Reading:
  And at least one of the following:

**Additional Reading**

- UK Data Service (online resource). Interview Methods. [https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/teaching-resources/interview](https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/teaching-resources/interview)

**Seminar 3: Focus groups**

**Key questions:**

- Why conduct a focus group?
- How do we design a focus group study?
- How do we structure focus groups, sample and recruit participants?

**Required Reading:**


**Additional Reading**


**Seminar 4: Ethnography and participant observation**

**Key questions:**

- What role does the researcher play in participant observation?
- How do we select, and get access to, fieldwork sites?
- When and how do we write up fieldnotes?
Required Reading:
- Andersson, R (Website) Ethnography – What is it and why do we need it? http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/16mlCRBLD67XtL4hIvMMHdF7/ethnography-what-is-it-and-why-do-we-need-it

Additional Reading

Ethnography is commonly written in book-length publications. Here you can find few significant examples:

Seminar 5: Research ethics & reflexivity

Key questions:
- Why are research ethics important?
- How do we address ethically challenging scenarios in qualitative research?
- What is the role of reflexivity in qualitative research?

Required Reading:

Additional Reading


**Seminar 6: Using documents in qualitative research**

**Key questions:**
- How do we select and collect documents in qualitative research?
- What kind of research questions can documents be used to answer?
- (discuss feedback & prepare for first summative)

**Required Reading:**
- Bring draft assignment outline to the seminar

**Additional Reading**

**Seminar 7: New media, digital and visual methods**

**Key questions:**
- What challenges do new media present for qualitative research?
- How can we use social media for research?
- How do we use images in qualitative research?

**Required Reading:**
Additional Reading

Online research and social media:

Visual methods:

See the extended reading list for examples.

Seminar 8: Thematic analysis

Key questions:
- How do we conduct thematic analysis?
- How do we code texts in thematic analysis?
- How do we elaborate coherent and meaningful themes, and how can these be used to answer our research questions?

Required Reading:

Additional Reading
Seminar 9: Discourse analysis

Key questions:
- What is discourse?
- Discourse analysis: what for?
- How do we conduct discourse analysis?

Required Reading:

Additional Reading

Seminar 10: Participatory research

Key questions:
- What is Participatory Research?
- What is the rationale behind this approach?
- How do we do Participatory Research?

Required Reading:
- Park, P. People, Knowledge, and Change in Participatory Research. Management Learning, 30(2), 141-157.

Additional Reading
- Gonsalves et alii. (2005), Participatory Research and Development for Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management - A Sourcebook Volume 1: Understanding Participatory Research and Development, CIP-UPWARDS, CRDI

Seminar 11: Ethnographic analysis

Key questions:
- What does an ethnographic analysis look like? How does it differ from thematic analysis?
- How do I use my fieldnotes when doing ethnographic analysis?
- What is the role of reflexivity in ethnographic analysis?

Required Reading:
- Andersson, R (2014). Illegality, Inc, Oakland: University of California Press – Scene 1 (27-30); Scene 3 (208-211); Scene 4 (241-244)

Additional Reading
Seminar 12: Writing up qualitative research & revision

Key questions:
- How do we write up qualitative research?
- What makes a good piece of qualitative research? How do we evaluate it?
- Revision

Required Reading:

Additional Reading

Credit Transfer: If you are hoping to earn credit by taking this course, please ensure that you confirm it is eligible for credit transfer well in advance of the start date. Please discuss this directly with your home institution or Study Abroad Advisor.

As a guide, our LSE Summer School courses are typically eligible for three credits within the US system and 7.5ECTS in Europe. Different institutions and countries can, and will, vary. You will receive a digital transcript and a printed certificate following your successful completion of the course in order to make arrangements for transfer of credit.

If you have any queries, please direct them to summer.school@lse.ac.uk
Additional readings by topic:

1. Introducing Qualitative Research & Asking Research Questions

2. Qualitative interviews

**Note: For material on elite interviews, any of the Symposium, ‘Interview Methods in the Social Sciences’, (2002) *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35(4): 663-88 are good but particularly:
- Goldstein, K. ‘Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews’, 669-72
- Aberbach, J. and Rochman, B. ‘Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews’, 673-76

3. Focus groups
Examples and articles on different approaches to focus groups:


4. **Ethnography and participant observation**

Ethnography is commonly written in book-length publications. Here you can find an extended list of classic and recent examples:


Additional readings on ethnography and current debates:


5. **Research ethics and reflexivity**
6. Documents


7. New media, digital and visual methods

Online research:

Visual methods:


Examples:


8. Thematic analysis


Examples:

9. Discourse analysis


Examples:


10. Participatory research

11. Ethnographic analysis


12. Writing up, evaluating and communicating qualitative research