

FREE COMMUNICATION

DEVELOPMENT OF A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT IN NURSING AND HEALTH IN TEN STEPS

HIGHLIGHTS

1. New researchers are supported in qualitative research.
2. Ten steps are highlighted to develop a qualitative project.
3. Essential literature is identified to support a qualitative project.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to describe the recommendations for developing a qualitative research project in nursing and health in ten steps. **Development:** brief theoretical communication, built from reflective integration based on a literature review on qualitative research in nursing and health during 2024. Ten steps and recommendations stand out: define the idea and develop research questions; define the object of study; explore literature; choose and delve deeper into the epistemic approach; develop the theoretical-philosophical framework; select the method and approach; define the methodological path; define qualitative criteria for methodological rigor; be creative and revolutionary; and write and generate ideas, question and analyze. **Conclusion:** the formulation of a qualitative research project in nursing and health can be developed based on recommendations that guide researchers' critical reflection, which will allow the integration of a sustained and rigorous research project proposal.

KEYWORDS: Qualitative Research; Nursing Care; Life Change Events; Nursing Methodology Research; Knowledge Management for Health Research.

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INTRODUCTION

The development and need for qualitative research to understand the phenomena of nursing care and human health in general continue to be an important challenge for researchers¹⁻², since, as they are trained in a positivist paradigm, there is a greater tendency towards the quantitative, leaving aside the qualitative³.

Developing qualitative research implies not only doing, but also knowing and being, as even researchers' thinking styles influence research ideas and qualitative methodological beginning. To develop qualitative research in nursing care and in any health discipline, it is necessary to return to the epistemological position, necessary in research, as research cannot be limited to just a rigid and linear methodology⁴⁻⁵. It is necessary to recognize that researchers must realize that the knowledge generated with research and especially with qualitative research is socially constructed and becomes a contribution to knowledge about human care, which is subjective and complex.

Maintaining an epistemological stance also means developing research methods that allow reflecting and deepening the personal meanings and interpretations of people who are cared for and who experience health themselves⁶.

Nursing research with a qualitative approach requires the same rigor as quantitative research⁷, in addition to being considered a reflective and at the same time creative process. In this integration, the influence of qualitative methods in generating knowledge about care and health as meaning-building human experiences continues to be recognized.

The design of a qualitative research project focused on nursing and health is essential to provide new aspects of these realities. Therefore, an exhaustive literature review, an adequate formulation of research questions and objectives as well as knowledge of methods, qualitative approaches and methodological trajectory are essential for researchers.

Qualitative project formulation involves challenges that every beginning researcher can overcome by deepening the theoretical and philosophical bases of the research. We must never forget that research is also an art and requires creativity: it is not just a series of steps to follow to determine relationships or verify reality, but rather seeks to understand it from a contextualized perspective. Therefore, this communication aims to describe recommendations for developing a qualitative research project in nursing and health in ten steps.

METHOD

A literature review was carried out on SciELO and Google Scholar in March and April 2024 on qualitative research, health and nursing care. Based on literature review of qualitative studies, theoretical and reflective essays, the authors integrate a proposal for the development of qualitative research projects in ten stages.

Step 1. Define the idea and develop research questions

The development or definition of research question or questions arises from ideas that researchers have in their contact with the lived reality and with the health and care phenomena they face⁷⁻⁹. It is essential to define ideas, recommending the creation of conceptual maps with multiple ideas and generating different questions, which can be

approached from different paths and epistemic methods. In research development, new questions may arise, and this explains the flexibility of openness to reality.

Step 2. Define the object of study

The object of study is the focus of the research, and it is important to delimit the central topic that will be investigated from the ideas generated and the questions¹⁰, considering essential aspects of the reality experienced by researchers, their contact with the phenomenon, which allows delimiting a certain object. Sometimes, the same object is not previously defined, and doubts may arise and, as the investigation develops, objects of study are generated, and it may even be that the object does not behave as expected.

Step 3. Explore literature

To explore the object of study, it is necessary for researchers to explore existing literature¹¹⁻¹². In fact, interviews can be carried out with researchers who are experts in the topic they wish to cover. The idea is to determine what is known about the object, under what approach it was studied, what knowledge was contributed and, in itself, to delimit new contributions in the path of qualitative approaches.

Likewise, literature review allows to support the study, identify gaps and define the scope of research.

Step 4. Choose and delve deeper into the epistemic approach

When we talk about an epistemic approach, we are talking about a perspective that allows us to understand and explain how researchers acquire knowledge¹³, how they generate it and how they develop it. The epistemic approach is derived from epistemology that allows knowledge to be validated. In this case, epistemology defines what is considered scientific based on nursing care and health phenomena. Through epistemic approaches, ways of knowing and understanding the lived reality are explored, instructing about the relationship between the research subject and the object of study. In qualitative research, it is recognized that the guiding approach is the interpretative experiential approach¹⁴, since it is characterized by focusing on lived experiences and the subjective construction of knowledge based on the reality experienced by people in human care and health.

Step 5. Develop the theoretical-philosophical framework

Having a view or perspective on care and health is crucial. It is important in literature analysis to identify and assess theories, models, approaches and concepts related to the research topic¹⁵⁻¹⁷. Qualitative research must delve deeper into the concepts that will guide the analysis of the object of study and that guarantee that the results are not a random construction by researchers. The framework will determine the method necessary to study the topic. There is a world of theories and philosophical frameworks to address certain concepts of care and health. It is necessary not to always limit oneself to medium-range theories, as the scope of the theory will depend on the object of study itself and, at the same time, the scope of the objective will depend on the theoretical or philosophical approach. It should also be considered whether it will be developed without theories, as may be the case with phenomenology (consider the phenomenological framework) or some Grounded Theory approaches.

Step 6. Select the method and approach

Many researches do not consider a method. In some cases, the text “study with a qualitative approach”¹⁸⁻¹⁹ was identified, when qualitative research does not generate approximations, but rather a deepening of the subjective reality experienced. The objective of the study must be determined and there must be no fear when using verbs such as to understand, to describe, to interpret or to analyze^{13,20}, because normally the depth of the objective will depend on its understanding and construction derived from the theoretical-philosophical framework.

In qualitative research, it is important to define the method and approach; the latter is a perspective of reality, whereas the method is a process, a set of strategies to approach or identify reality, therefore they are not the same, since the method considers the approach or approaches, being necessary for researchers to distinguish between them and select¹³. Within qualitative methods, one can find phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, ethnography, ethnonursing, Grounded Theory, participatory action research, convergent care research, among others. The method originates from approaching the theoretical-philosophical framework, as it is the path that is followed to approach the object from a certain perspective.

Step 7. Define the methodological path

The methodological path development requires broad integration of researchers into different techniques, strategies and methods. There needs to be methodological coherence²¹⁻²². For instance, there are methods and techniques that are not compatible with their philosophical or theoretical approaches, such as having a theory to analyze data in a phenomenological study, when admitting that it must be based on lived experience. Furthermore, if we talk about data collection, the semi-structured interview cannot be used in a phenomenological study²¹, as phenomenology has its own technique, which is phenomenological interview, and this has particularities in its approach.

Furthermore, it is necessary for researchers to define the method, design, sampling, data collection and analysis technique, in order to interpret and present the results, and this must consider the objective of the research^{7-8,23-24}. There are no restrictions, as data saturation is not always sought. Sometimes we want to analyze a certain group, and the availability of participants provides an understanding of the object of study.

Step 8. Define qualitative criteria for methodological rigor

Researchers must indicate the criteria that guarantee research quality and validity and also that the results are complete. Among the criteria that researchers can consider are credibility or truth value, transferability and dependence²⁵⁻²⁶. This will allow the study to be presented from an objective perspective, in addition to making the process transparent and consistent with the reality studied.

Step 9. Be creative and revolutionary

All qualitative research that addresses care and health seeks to be innovative²⁷. Sometimes, the application of results in nursing practice is underestimated, but this corresponds to the epistemological limitation of some researchers. As a researcher, always consider that new ideas and approaches can be explored to address the subject of study, and this sometimes involves the integration of unconventional methods. Researchers must always think beyond traditional limitations, remember that research seeks to question existing paradigms and explore new ways of facing the challenges of nursing and people's

health. Qualitative research seeks to improve this care and explore how people perceive it and how they experience human health²⁸ to contribute to develop the discipline with this person-centered approach.

Step 10. Write and generate ideas, question and analyze

Every qualitative researcher can develop an integrated project with support and quality²⁹. It is important and advisable to record the entire research process, as this will allow researchers to ensure quality and also make decisions throughout the qualitative process. It is important to always consider the present and future study limitations, as well as the generally expected results, in addition to the practical implications that the study will have. The results are constructed not only from speeches, but from contextualization of the study; therefore, they must record, question what is presented in the process and delimit situations that allow the results to be presented in a transparent manner.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

These ten steps are considered to open the door for researchers to a substantial exploration of the entire qualitative research process. The development of the steps does not correspond to a structured guide, but seeks to generate a reflective awareness of the qualitative implications for researchers.

The application of qualitative research seeks to deepen care and its complexity in nursing and understand that health linked to care is an equally complex and very vast phenomenon; therefore, the same object can be approached from different approaches and methods.

Nursing researchers can generate results that allow a better understanding of how the people they care for experience care and their health. Therefore, its practical application allows nurses to innovate care and contribute not only in reflective aspects, but also to develop public health policies, improve decisions in health systems and provide a current vision, because care and health are phenomena that evolve according to people's historical, cultural, personal and social context.

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