

VALIDITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In qualitative research, validity is “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 87).

“Validity ... depends on the relationship of your conclusions to the real world, and there are no methods that can assure you that you have adequately grasped those aspects of the world that you are studying” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 86).

Whereas quantitative researchers uses methods and designs to address threats to validity in advance of the research, qualitative researchers “must try to rule out most validity threats after the research has begun, using evidence collected during the research itself to make these alternative hypotheses implausible” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 88).

Types of Validity in Qualitative Research

Description: “The main threat to valid description, in the sense of describing what you saw and heard, is the inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 89).

Interpretation: “The main threat to valid interpretation is imposing one's own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied and the meanings they attach to their words and actions” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 89-90).

Theory: “The most serious threat to the theoretical validity of an account is not collecting or paying attention to discrepant data, or not considering alternative explanations or understandings of the phenomena you are studying” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 90).

Generalization: Internal generalization, which is the type of interest to qualitative researchers, “refers to the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studies” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 97).

It is the qualitative analog of the quantitative statistical conclusion validity.

Validity Tests

1. Modus Operandi Approach: “Searching for clues as to whether or not [threats to validity] took place and were involved in the phenomenon in question” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 92).
2. Searching for Discrepant Evidence and Negative Cases.
3. Triangulation: “collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 93).

4. Feedback: “Soliciting feedback from others is an extremely useful strategy for identifying validity threats, your own biases and assumptions, and flaws in your logic or methods” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 94).
5. Member Checks: “systematically soliciting feedback about one's data and conclusions from the people you are studying” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 94).
6. Rich Data: collecting “data that are detailed and complete enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 95).
7. Quasi-Statistics: “the use of simple numerical results that can be readily derived from the data” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 95).
8. Comparison: either through the data (e.g., multisite studies) or through the literature.
9. Data saturation: sampling until saturated (no new information).

Reference

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). Qualitative research: An interactive approach. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.