

3rd Class | G10B401

Philosophical Foundations, Paradigms, and Interpretive Frameworks in Qualitative Research

Methodological Synthesis: Perspectives of Creswell, Flick, Lamont & Bryman

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Learning Objectives

01 Analyze the five philosophical assumptions that underlie every qualitative inquiry.

02 Identifying various paradigms (worldviews) and understanding how the choice of paradigm limits research procedures.

03 Explains the significance of qualitative methods in capturing complex phenomena of International Relations (IR) that are beyond the reach of statistical data.

04 Understand the hierarchy of research design from the abstract philosophical level to technical procedures in the field.

PART 1

Definition & Characteristics of Qualitative Research

What is Qualitative Research?

Definition of Qualitative Research According to Creswell

"Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."

— Creswell (2018)

1

Starting from philosophical assumptions and worldview

2

Emphasizing the meaning given to individuals/groups

3

Produces complex interpretive descriptions

Core Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Natural Setting

Researchers go into the field to understand the context in which phenomena occur, rather than bringing subjects to a laboratory.

Researchers as Key Instruments

Researchers collect data themselves through documents, observations, or interviews without relying on third-party questionnaires.

Multiple Sources

Using words, pictures, or artifacts to build a complete picture of the phenomenon being studied.

Flexible & Narrative Writing Style

The report is narrative and literary in nature, reflecting the complexity of the reality being researched.

Significance in International Relations: Why Qualitative?

Qualitative methods offer a depth that goes beyond statistical data in understanding complex IR phenomena.



Exploration of Difficult to Measure Variables

Useful when variables are difficult to identify: the process of state identity formation, the evolution of human rights norms, or changes in global public opinion.



Hearing the Silenced Voices

Focus on non-state actors, marginalized groups, or grassroots movements that are often erased in the grand narrative of foreign policy.



Understanding Causal Mechanisms





Statistics show correlations, but qualitative research explains how and why national leaders make decisions in a crisis.

P A R T 2

Five Philosophical Assumptions of Qualitative Research

(Philosophical Assumptions)

Summary: 5 Philosophical Assumptions of Qualitative Research

Assumptions	Main Question	Implications within IR
 Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	The reality of IR is multiple & subjective, not a single fact.
 Epistemological	How is the relationship between researchers and subjects?	Knowledge is built through direct interaction in the field.
 Axiological	What is the role of values in research?	Research is value-laden; researchers must be reflexive about bias.
 Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	Narrative, personal, and uses distinctive terminology.
 Methodological	What is the research logic?	Inductive: from micro data to macro themes (ground-up).

 Source: Creswell (2018) Table 2.1 — Philosophical Assumptions with Implications for Practice.

Ontological Assumptions — The Nature of Reality



ONTOLOGICAL

"What is the nature of reality?"

Reality is viewed as subjective and multiple.

Researchers do not seek a single "objective truth," but rather evidence from various participant perspectives.

Applications in IR Research

Study Example

The reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict differs for US diplomats, Gazans, and Hamas leaders — all versions are valid for qualitative examination.

Implications

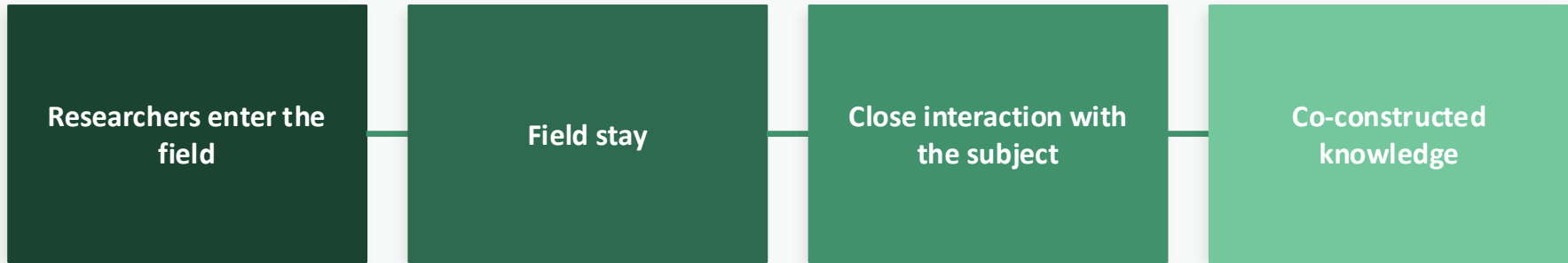
Researchers present multi-perspective evidence, rather than concluding a single 'truth' about the conflict.

vs. Positivism

Positivists: seek a single objective fact. Qualitative constructivists: map various constructions of meaning on the same fact.

Epistemological Assumptions — Researcher & Subject Relationship

Key Principle: Knowledge is constructed through close interaction between the researcher and the subjects being studied.



Example in IR: Interviewing refugees in camps to capture firsthand realities. Researchers cannot understand the experience of trauma solely from statistical reports.

Other example: Conducting participant observation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the negotiation process of international agreements to understand the dynamics of diplomacy.

Differences with Surveys: In contrast to questionnaires that maintain distance, qualitative research demands physical closeness and empathy from the researcher towards the subject.

Axiological Assumptions — The Role of Values & Reflexivity

Qualitative Research: Value-Laden

Value Loaded

No research is neutral. The choice of topics, methods, and interpretations is always influenced by the researcher's values.

Reflexivity

Researchers are required to explicitly report their values, biases, and positions in research reports.

Positionality

The researcher's cultural background, gender, or political affiliation influences how the data is interpreted.

Examples of Reflexivity in IR

- Researchers from Western countries who study the Non-Aligned Movement must acknowledge how its geopolitical position influences its interpretation.
- Female researchers studying the military must reflect on how their gender shapes access to informants and the way they ask questions.
- Human rights activists researching deportation policies must acknowledge their personal advocacy in research reports.
- Must be included in the Methodology section: 'As a researcher from [background], I recognize that...'

Rhetorical & Methodological Assumptions

Rhetorical Assumptions

Language Used in Qualitative Research

Personal & Narrative

Using first person pronouns ('I observed that...') instead of passive impersonal style.

Typical Terminology

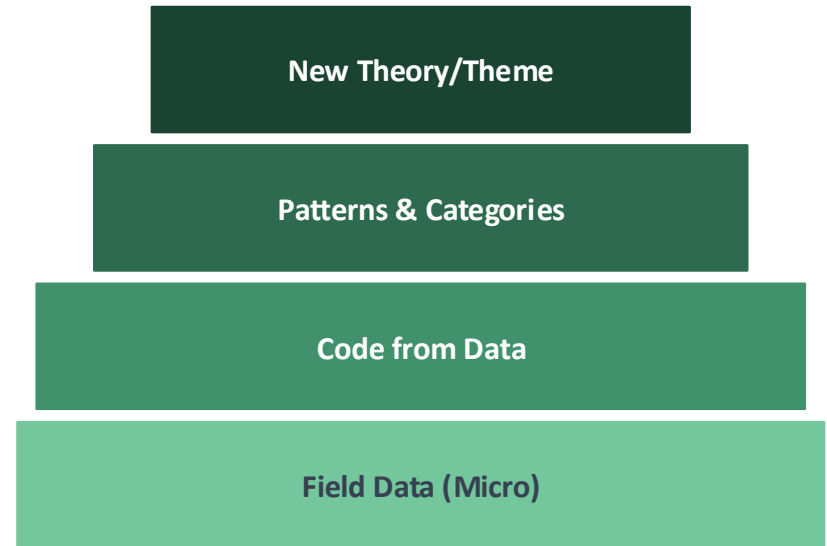
'Credibility' is not 'internal validity'; 'transferability' is not 'generalisability'.

Definition of Developing

In contrast to quantitative, terms are defined by participants as the study progresses.

Methodological Assumptions

Inductive Logic: Ground-Up Approach



↑ Inductive process: from data to theory

PART 3

Paradigm & Worldviews

Worldviews that Guide Research

Hierarchical Framework of Qualitative Research Design

⚠ Consistency is key: Decisions at the top level determine choices at all levels below.

L1 **Philosophical Assumptions**
Fundamental beliefs about reality, knowledge, and values

L2 **Worldview / Paradigm**
Post positivism | Constructivism | Advocacy | Pragmatism

L3 **Theoretical Lens / Interpretative Framework**
Feminism | Critical Theory | CRT | Postcolonialism | Queer Theory

L4 **Research Procedure (Strategy)**
Ethnography | Case Study | Grounded Theory |
Phenomenology | Narrative

Four Main Worldviews / Paradigms



Post positivism

- Scientifically rigorous approach
- Logic, determinism, systematics
- Suitable for large case studies with high rigor

IR: IR researchers who maintain relative rigor and objectivity.



Advocacy/Participatory (Transformative)

- Action agenda for social reform
- Focus on power, oppression, hegemony
- Participants are actively involved

IR: Research with refugee communities to change immigration policies.



Social Constructivism

- Reality is constructed through social interaction
- Dominant paradigms in contemporary IR
- In line with Alexander Wendt's thinking

IR: How are norms of sovereignty understood differently by different actors.



Pragmatism

- Focus on 'What Works?'
- Free to choose the most appropriate method
- Basis mixed methods dalam kebijakan luar negeri

IR: Policy research that requires a combination of statistical data and interviews.

Social Constructivism: The Dominant Paradigm in IR

"Anarchy is what states make of it." — Alexander Wendt (1992)

Core Assumptions

International reality is not merely the distribution of material power (weapons/GDP), but rather the result of the construction of meaning through social and historical interactions.

Identity & Interests

State identities and national interests are not fixed — they are shaped and reproduced through diplomatic interactions, norms, and discourses.

Methodological Relevance

Qualitative research appropriate for constructivism: diplomatic discourse analysis, ethnography of foreign ministries, or case studies of international norm socialization processes.

Research Example

How the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) norm is constructed and debated differently by states in the UN Security Council.

PART 4

Interpretive Framework & Theoretical Lens

Interpretive Frameworks & Theoretical Lenses

The Role of Theoretical Lenses in Qualitative IR Research

The theoretical lens serves as a filter for viewing data — it influences who, what, and how research is conducted.

Choosing WHO to Study

- Feminist: female diplomatic officer
- CRT: diplomats from Global South countries
- Transformative: communities impacted by foreign policy
- Postmodernists: the 'invisible' actors in the dominant narrative

Determining the Issue to be Explored

- Feminists: gender bias in diplomatic protocol
- Critical: the hegemony of Western powers in multilateral institutions
- Postcolonial: the legacy of colonialism in the international legal system
- Queer: normativity in asylum & refugee policy

Forming a Data Interpretation Method

- Determining the meaning that is considered significant from the interview transcript
- Guiding the analysis of power relations in diplomatic documents
- Forming arguments about who benefits/is harmed by the policy
- Influences how researchers position their findings in the literature

Feminist Theory & Critical Theory in IR Research

♀ Feminist Theory

Core Assumptions

Gender as a fundamental organizing principle. An analysis of how patriarchy shapes international power structures.

Research Focus

How are women underrepresented in diplomatic positions? How does conflict impact women and children differently?

IR Scholars

Cynthia Enloe, Ann Tickner, Christine Sylvester — 'Where are the women in IR?'

Method

In-depth interviews with female officials, analysis of policy documents with a gender perspective.

⚡ Critical Theory

Core Assumptions

Focuses on human empowerment and the struggle against the constraints of power, hegemony, and global hierarchical control.

IR Research Focus

Criticism of Western dominance in the IMF, World Bank, and UN Security Council as mechanisms of hegemony.

IR Scholars

Robert Cox, Jürgen Habermas, Antonio Gramsci — konsep hegemoni dan counter-hegemony.

Method

Critical analysis of policy discourse, studies of transnational social movements, participatory action research.

Postmodernism, Queer Theory & Critical Race Theory

Postmodernism

Critique of 'meta-narratives' or universal knowledge.

- Deconstruction of diplomatic texts and global media
- Uncovering hidden power hierarchies in policy discourse
- Rejecting the Western claim of universality of human rights
- Scholars: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault

Queer Theory

Challenging gender and sexuality binaries in international social research.

- Rejecting the normalization of heterosexuality in international law
- Research on asylum policies for LGBTQ+ refugees
- Analyzing how sexual identity shapes experiences of conflict
- Relevant for non-mainstream human rights studies

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Analyzing how race and systemic racism shape global laws, policies, and hierarchies.

- Highly relevant for postcolonial studies in IR
- Analyzing institutional racism in multilateral institutions
- Research on disparities in the representation of Global South countries at the UN
- Scholar: Kimberlé Crenshaw (intersectionality)

P A R T 5

Qualitative Research Design in International Relations

Qualitative Research Design in International Relations

Five Qualitative Research Strategies in IR

Case Study

Example within IR:

An in-depth analysis of the Paris Agreement negotiation process as a case of climate diplomacy.

Ethnography

Example within IR:

Participant observation within the ASEAN Secretariat for 6 months.

Grounded Theory

Example within IR:

Developing a new theory of the radicalization process from interviews with ex-combatants.

Phenomenology

Example within IR:

Capturing the lived experiences of Syrian refugees in the process of building identity in a new country.

Narratif (Narrative Inquiry)

Example within IR:

Analysis of Indonesian foreign policy narratives from official documents and presidential speeches.

Conclusion: Integration of Foundations in Excellent IR Research

The quality of superior IR research is determined by internal consistency — from philosophy to field practice.

01

Philosophical Awareness

Understand whether you view international anarchy as a material reality (positivist) or a social construction (constructivist). This will determine the entire research design.

02

Paradigm Consistency

Don't use postpositivist (rigid, deductive) procedures if your lens is Critical Theory or Feminist. Inconsistency undermines the credibility of the research.

03

Researcher Reflexivity

Acknowledge your position in the global political hierarchy (country of origin, gender, affiliation) as integral to the validity and credibility of the research.

04

Cohesion of Argument

Strong IR research requires alignment between philosophical assumptions, chosen paradigms, theoretical lenses, and field procedures for arguments to be coherent and persuasive.

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Thank You

Questions & Discussion

**Philosophical
Assumptions**

**Paradigm
& Worldview**

Theoretical Lens

Design Consistency

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