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A Book Review: Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches

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Abstract

This paper presents a review on the textbook, 'qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches'. This book was written by John W. Creswell and published by Sage in 2013. The first and second editions of this book were published in 1998 and 2007 respectively. This third edition provides an effective tool for both students and researchers to make the best choice among the many qualitative methods. It is a book worth studying by all who want to develop a sound research career in pure qualitative or mixed research methods.

Keywords: book review, John W. Creswell, qualitative inquiry, research design, research method, third edition.

Book Review

John W. Creswell: Qualitative Inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches. 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013.

The struggle to make the best choice among the many qualitative approaches, often leaves some researchers and students alike – in a fix. Creswell's first, second and third editions of this textbook are all driven by his sole purpose to answer the question – "*how does the type or approach of qualitative inquiry shape the design or procedures of a study?*" (Creswell, 2013: 2). This question is very relevant in both modern day pedagogy and research methodology. Though answering the same question in this third edition, the approach he uses in this book is extensively an improvement of the previous editions.

Unlike the first and second editions of the book (Creswell, 1998; 2007), the key goal of this third edition is to offer a more helping hand to readers in order to make a more practical and refined decision when selecting among the several qualitative approaches. This review follows guidelines prescribed by the Textbook Committee to evaluate *quality* textbooks. In a more contemporary format, the authors conducted this review under the following headings; content, language, learning and teaching, structure and organisation, and textbook layout as summarised in Table 1 (Education Bureau, 2016).

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In connection with content, this third edition of John W. Creswell's textbook takes up another new challenge to re-examine and to enhance the five key approaches to qualitative inquiry – narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. This revision lightens up the complex but yet, detailed methods and procedures described by qualitative researchers. Creswell does not only details why he selected simply – five key approaches but emphasises on their significance in modern day research space. Readers will appreciate how these approaches were not arbitrarily chosen by the author to be discussed in his book. Their selection according the author is consistent with the premise that these key methods are the most common and more acceptable types of qualitative approaches.

In addition, this basis makes the content of this third edition very relevant as these approaches are frequently found in many literatures. Essentially, this seems as a merit as Creswell's revision works to confine researchers to a well-defined scope, considering the multiplicity of practices engaged by different qualitative researchers over the years. Though, the five approaches have been justified by Creswell, other approaches like the discourse analysis could have been considered by the author too (Jørgensen, Phillips, 2002).

Table 1. Novelties in the Book: 'Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches'

Elements of Quality	Description
1. Content	Enhanced the existing key approaches to qualitative inquiry; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative research, • Phenomenology, • Grounded theory, • Ethnography, and • Case studies.
2. Language	Usage of clear and concise English expressions.
3. Learning and Teaching	Interactive and incorporated with specific examples.
4. Structure and Organisation	Well organised and systematic
5. Textbook Layout	Good layout with adequate illustrations.

Adapted from the Education Bureau (2016)

In terms of language, Creswell did a very good job by using clear and concise English expressions. There is no evidence of grammatical errors also. It is evident that even non-native English researchers and students can make a good use of this textbook due to its streamlined and coherent nature. The intent of every chapter is clearly shown from the beginning and each chapter is concluded appropriately with a summary. As an improvement of the previous editions, this book opens with a more engaging introduction. One good thing about Creswell's writings is that, just like the second edition (Creswell, 2007), he constructively expresses the purpose and basis for this revision too. This effort by the author will engage every readers' interest to progress from one of a passive 'book reader' to become a growing 'qualitative researcher'.

The learning and teaching component is also well captured in this revision too. Readers will clearly appreciate the interactive nature of this third edition. This edition explains clearly what qualitative inquiry is all about. Creswell carefully summarises all important concepts of the book better than previous editions. As a result, readers may soon find out that this textbook will easily empower them to "arrive at several common characteristics of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2013: 3). In addition, the book offers critical analysis of several findings of recent qualitative researchers like LeCompte, Schensul, Hatch, Marshall and Rossman. This writing style provides a good lens for existing and future qualitative researchers to appreciate the qualitative research process to a higher degree.

Another valuable component of this book is the incorporation of specific examples of each approach just like the previous editions (Creswell, 1998; 2007). Notwithstanding the fact that this seems to be a known writing style in his previous editions, he selectively chooses relevant topics of

well-structured qualitative studies to serve as examples in the appendices (A - F). Bearing in mind the perceived flexibility expressed by some qualitative researchers when it comes to building their qualitative studies (Charmaz, 2006), the chances that a good presentation of a specific approach by Creswell without an example, may lead to additional confusion. Creswell foreseeing this challenge provides readers the best teaching and learning illustrations to exemplify what exactly is being explained apart from the appendices. In effect, this book is filled with illustrations, summary tables and figures to serve as visual aids to the reader. Just like the second edition (Creswell, 2007), this book also offers the reader the privilege to conduct a good qualitative study without being flooded with the many poor standards.

As a tradition, all of Creswell's previous editions have good structure and organisation. All through the eleven chapters, Creswell highlights the systematic techniques for undertaking all of these five major forms of qualitative research – without sacrificing their fundamental philosophies and research questions. The careful application of each philosophical underpinning and related research question to all the approaches makes Creswell's third edition of the textbook, 'qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches', a worthy teacher. Basically, the detailed discussion of these five approaches to qualitative inquiry could not have been done better, considering the depths of philosophies and research questions displayed.

As highlighted, the scientific propensity of the qualitative research process is again well demonstrated in this book. This is an important consideration as the author provides adequate theoretical assumptions to support each approach. These philosophies and viewpoints are evidently discussed by Creswell in Chapter 2 of this book, just like the second edition (Creswell, 2007). One important consideration observed in this text is that, all subsequent discussions are hinged on these theoretical issues. These theories are well linked to the statement of research problems, purpose statements, research questions, and data analysis of each qualitative approach.

More so, these comprehensive analyses by Creswell inform readers about the pool of philosophical assumptions or worldviews, and how they tend to influence the researchers' prospective choice for a specific type or groups of methodologies. More so, the author makes it clear that a good qualitative research needs to be founded in this regards. Of course, looking at the highly contested scientific basis of qualitative approaches in some scientific arenas (Murphy et al., 1998), the expectations and knowledge of researchers who want to venture into the qualitative research method should be well informed. Thus, the conscious need to reconsider these perspectives by researchers when framing their research questions and studies at large, are both reinforced and made manifest in this edition.

Finally, John W. Creswell undoubtedly offers a good layout for his third edition. This textbook is well demarcated margins with legible fonts. The addition of font colours to headings, page numbers, tables and figures makes it very readable. This excellent layout for presenting concepts is vital to offer a good pictorial image to the eyes of future readers.

In summary, the third edition of the book, 'qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches' is an essential tool for all who are ready to build a research career in pure or mixed qualitative research methods. Within this book, John W. Creswell carefully selects and builds his readers from theoretical standpoints to specific examples in the appendices. Under each approach, he takes time to provide; the definition and background of the approach, types of studies under the approach, procedures for conducting research in that approach, and possible challenges to be anticipated.

Apart from the theoretical and scientific adequacies, Creswell builds an engaging comparative analysis of the five selected approaches using conceptual questions, summaries, additional readings and exercises in each chapter. Consequently, the reader does not only get the concept being shared in this book, but is gradually empowered step-by-step to undertake a good qualitative study. These supports provide both empirical and systematic techniques and tools, especially to readers who are not adept in the field of qualitative study.

Others within the quantitative field may also benefit from its simplified but concise presentation. Thus, the examples in the appendix section may also serve as best standards for the practice of each qualitative approach. Reiterating his concept in the second edition, Creswell again advanced his dream of making this revision "as a procedural guide for research" (Creswell, 2007: 11). It is plausible to note how Creswell addresses issues that qualitative researchers are likely to face on the field and accompanying ethical concerns in this textbook. As a general rule, this

book is useful to both early career researchers and advanced career researchers. Regarding the increasing acceptance of the qualitative domain into many traditional quantitative fields, this book will not only serve as a guide to conduct qualitative studies, but also to preserve quality standards. As reviewers, we recommend this third edition to students, examiners and researchers who are building a career in the field of qualitative research. Any reader at all who chance upon this book will find it exciting to read anytime.

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