

Editorial: Quality vs quantity: a study of experience in education

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Modern education systems are characterised by the quality paradigm (Biggs et al., 2022; Sallis, 2014). Policy-makers, education experts, and scholars prioritise advancing the teaching methods, enhancing the knowledge and the research-based solutions to the problems of education irrespective of the development level of the education system. A study of experience in education becomes all the more important for the quality of education paradigm (Boud et al., 2013; Neubauer et al., 2019). It becomes a valuable resource for the further international development of education systems; it stimulates teacher's professional self-development and contributes to their research competence. Furthermore, a study of experience reveals new methods and strategies of education, facilitating higher efficiency in teaching. Several scholars focus on the assessment of education programmes' methodology and effectiveness (Tatur, 2017). It drives an identification and analysis of the specific educational results, and a determination of students' knowledge gaps and lack of practical skills (Carmichael et al., 2018; Markova & Narkoziev, 2019; McDavid et al., 2018). Case studies conducted in a research-based manner are a valid means of updating the ongoing education programmes.

Quantitative studies of the education system sometimes prove to be somewhat limited due to their focus on mainly measurable variables. This might compromise research on complicated and complex phenomena. Social, cultural, and contextual aspects might not be taken into consideration despite their relevance to the validity of research. Identifying the underlying origins of correlations in a study and their explanation may also pose a problem, thus greatly limiting the in-depth comprehension of the phenomena. The scholars emphasise that quantitative studies might oversimplify complex phenomena under study while omitting the nuances and peculiarities relevant to their full comprehension (Pregoner, 2024). The study data often requires considerable time, funding, and expertise, as well. In addition, quantitative research relies on a predetermined approach to data collection and analysis, thereby complicating the required changes in the research plan or further questions to be asked during data gathering.

These constraints impose that researchers in the field of education must apply qualitative methods as well, particularly in the study of teaching experiences. If applied, they extend beyond the results of test scores, offering a more integrated picture of a particular educational environment with detailed descriptive data.

The main goal of an educational researcher working with qualitative methods is a clear understanding of the participants' behaviour in the educational process, as well as the underlying drivers of this behaviour, which may not necessarily be numerically quantifiable. For the most part, the researcher studies smaller, focused samples, uncovering valuable data on experiences in education, future learning prospects, and behavioural prognosis, thus allowing for the reconsideration of teaching strategies and the design of efficient school policies.

Common qualitative research methods in education include structured and unstructured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation (Makarova & Drobotenko, 2014; Ruslin et al., 2022; Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). Here non-numerical data representing a contextualised overview of learning difficulties and educational experiences is the primary assessment tool. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, can be used to assess students' and teachers' perceptions of different teaching methods, to identify the impact of teacher burnout on students' performance, to explore students' perceptions of their learning experiences or teachers' expertise in classroom management, etc. If the interaction between the teacher and the students, as well as the students' engagement in the learning environment, is of particular concern to the researcher, then a classroom observation should be applied. The focus group method is pivotal in identifying how different groups of people perceive an issue in the educational environment. It is designed to gather subjective information from a group of students or teachers on a particular topic or issue. Qualitative case studies in education bring unique factors that impact the learning of a particular group of individuals to light. Ethnographic qualitative research also allows to immerse oneself in the educational environment so as to identify the culture of a particular group, the dynamics of the students' union, and so on. The qualitative method of analysing narratives in education is applied to study students' personal stories, and the feedback from participants of the educational environment, and to understand their experiences. Records, such as student work samples and teachers' logs, may also be reviewed in order to understand it. Qualitative evaluation materials become the research basis for developing grounded theories aimed at improving transformational processes in education.

It is important to highlight not only the benefits of qualitative research methods but also their constraints. Among them is the results' bias, as they are mainly shaped by the researcher's personal convictions. The limited generalizability of qualitative research is another drawback (Prabhu, 2020; Schofield, 2000). Qualitative research is conducted in a specific context, on a particular group of people. Hence, the results cannot always be transferred to other contexts and people as the replication may not be possible under new circumstances. The labour intensity and the need to engage substantial resources in the implementation of qualitative research in education should also be noted. Interviews, observation, and data analysis demand a significant amount of time and effort. Ultimately, a large amount of data can complicate an analysis, and make it harder to identify key research strategies.

The constraints of qualitative methods in the research in education should be taken into consideration. If applied, qualitative methods should be combined with quantitative, especially in a study of the educational experience. This would result in a clearer picture of the educational process, proper evaluation of the results, and strategic development of the system.

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