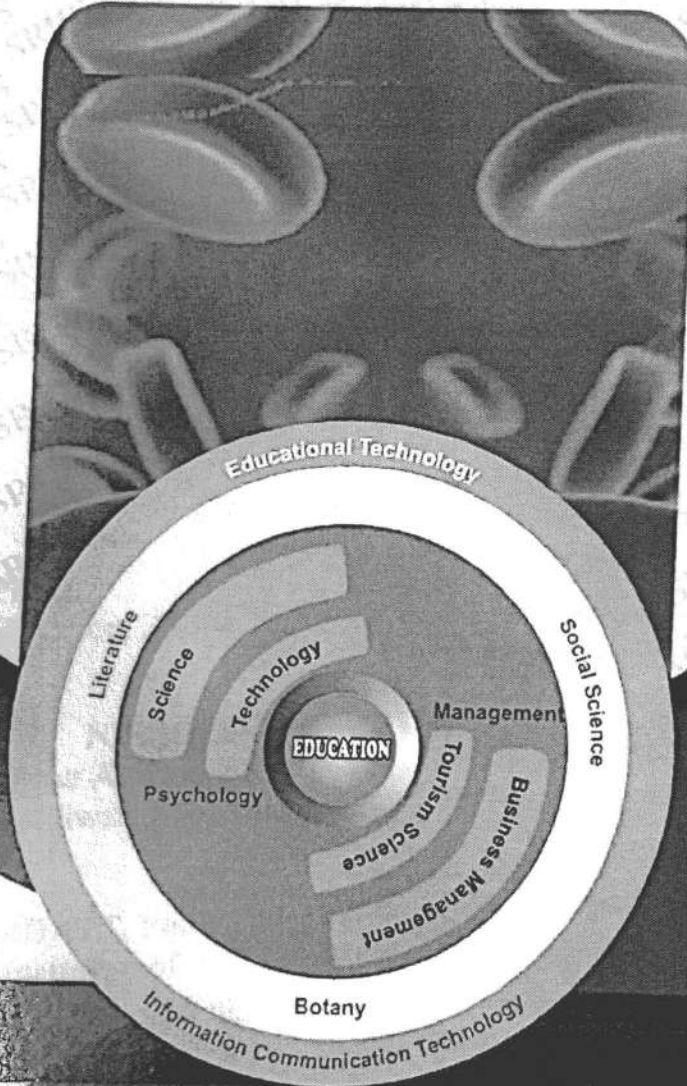
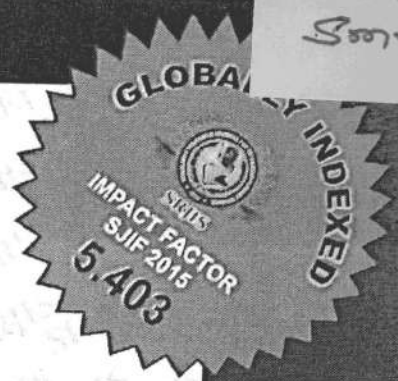


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EDITOR IN CHIEF : YASHPAL D. NETRAGAONKAR, Ph.D.

8.	AFFIXATION: A MAJOR PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING WORD POWER <i>Dr. Simal Pawar</i>	37-43	19.	RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN USE OF ENGLISH IN TEXT MESSAGES IN MOBILE PHONES <i>Dr. Preeti Parmar</i>	105-108
9.	ECOCRITICAL READING OF INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION <i>Dr. Manshar D. Duggave</i>	44-50	20.	PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER – A LITERATURE REVIEW <i>Prof. Rahul S. Sonawane</i>	109-112
10.	MEDIA WITH CHANGING LITERATURE <i>Nikhil Upadhyay</i>	51-55	21.	IMAGE BLACK WOMAN IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE <i>Prof. Mrs. Susan Lawrence</i>	113-118
11.	SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSITION AND AUTHENTICATION OF STEREOTYPED IDENTITIES IN MODERN WORLD <i>Kagole Sachin S.</i>	56-62	22.	PLANTS AND TRIBAL WEDDING RITUALS: AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH <i>Shirish Bhatnagar</i>	119-124
12.	STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM 'HARP OF INDIA' <i>Ms. Pranshata Ramtirth</i>	63-66	23.	COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION <i>Anand Jagannath Sanap</i>	125-132
13.	STRUCTURALIST APPROACH IN LITERARY RESEARCH <i>Dr. Sharad Khanderao Binur</i>	67-72	24.	A PSYCHO-SOCIO GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MAHESH DATTANI'S PLAY: TARA <i>Mr. Rajendra B. Shinde</i>	133-141
14.	MYTH MATTERS: RESEARCH AVENUES IN CULTURAL STUDIES <i>Dr. Pranavkumar Ulhas Ratnaparkhi</i>	73-82	25.	MEDICAL HUMANITIES: AN EMERGING INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH IN LITERARY RESEARCH <i>Sharayu O. Sonawane</i>	142-147
15.	ROBERT FROST'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE REALISM IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF ROBERT FROST <i>Pankajkumar Damodar Patil</i>	83-88	26.	LITERATURE REVIEW: AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF RESEARCH <i>Anil Gaman Ahire</i>	148-155
16.	APPLICATION OF THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC THEORY IN TRANSLATION STUDIES <i>Dr. Leena Pandhare</i>	89-93	27.	INDIANISM IN OLD STONE MANSION: A TRANSLATED PLAY BY SHANTA GOKHALE <i>Prof. Mahesh Shivaji Holkar</i>	156-159
17.	THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS: A GLOBAL ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE <i>Dr. R. D. Ghotap</i>	94-99	28.	THE PORTRAYAL OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES IN KEKI N. DARUWALLA'S POETRY. <i>Dr. D. J. Nerpagar</i>	160-167
18.	DISINTEGRATIVE IMAGE OF INDIAN WOMEN IN SHOBHA DE'S STARRY NIGHTS <i>Mr. Milind G. Thakare</i>	100-104	29.	METAPHORICAL DISCOURSE IN ANITA DESAI'S FASTING FEASTING <i>Mr. Kailas N. Bodke</i>	168-173

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

Qualitative Research is more naturalistic and explorative in nature that tries to understand behaviour in a natural setting through interviewing, observation, ethnography, participant observation and focus groups, emphasizing the subjective experiences of participants. In qualitative research the hypothesis is refined and developed during the process. This may be thought of as a 'bottom-up' or emergent approach. Hypotheses begin to emerge, which are tested against the data of further experiences. Qualitative sampling requires sampling of appropriate participants, who can contribute rich information to the study. It also requires adequate sampling of information sources i.e. people, places, events, types of data. The commonly used research designs are Comparative Design and Triangulate Design. The analysis is done using the methods of Content / thematic analysis, Grounded Theory in Psychology, Discursive Psychology / Discourse analysis, Narrative Psychology and Phenomenological Psychology methods such as interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Key words: Qualitative research, Subjective Experiences, bottom up approach

Qualitative Research in Psychology: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts." The quote of Albert Einstein catches the essence of and importance of Qualitative Research. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln define qualitative researchers as people who usually work in the 'real' world of lived experience, often in a natural setting, rather than a laboratory based experimental approach. The qualitative researcher tries to make sense of social phenomena and the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative Research is a research whose findings are not arrived at by statistical or other quantitative procedures that begins with more general open-ended questions and moves towards greater precision as more information emerges and thus pre-defined variables are not identified in advance. It is more Naturalistic and Explorative in nature.

The goals of Qualitative Research are to

- understand behaviour in a natural setting
- understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the research participant
- Understand the meanings people give to their experience. It attempts to do this by using naturalistic methods—interviewing, observation, ethnography, participant observation and focus groups.
- Understand sample studied, rather than generalizing from the sample to the population. However, the results of qualitative research can be applied to other settings—as long as the reader of the research understands the limitations

It is acknowledged that the researcher is an integral part of the process and who may reflect on her/his own influence and experience in the research process. The qualitative research accepts that researcher is not 'neutral'. Instead he puts himself in the position of the participant or 'subject' and attempts to understand how the world is from that person's perspective. The quantitative approach states the hypothesis from the outset, (i.e. a 'top down' approach), whereas in qualitative research the hypothesis or research question, is refined and developed during the process. This may be thought of as a 'bottom-up' or emergent approach. Hypotheses begin to emerge, which are 'tested' against the data of further experiences e.g. people's narratives. It may be helpful to think of qualitative research as situated at one end of a continuum with its data from in-depth interviews, and with quantitative 'measurable' data at the other end. At the centre-point of this continuum may rest such data as content analysis and questionnaire responses transformed from the written or spoken word into numerical 'codes' for statistical analysis. Qualitative research is usually not anticipatory. Whatever the study and whatever the method of carrying the research, the indications of form, quantity, and scope must be obtained from the question, from the chosen method, from the selected topic and goals, and also, in an ongoing process, from the data. Thus research design is both challenging and essential. Research design is created by the researcher, is molded rather than dictated by the method, and is responsive to the context and the participants. The overall design of the project must be aimed at answering research question. It is needed to design a project that both fits and is

obtained from the question, the chosen method, the selected topic, and the research goals. The research design should be treated as a problem to be considered carefully at the beginning of the study and reconsidered throughout—it is never a given. The design starts with two questions: A. What is the scope of this project? Scope refers to the domain of inquiry, the coverage and reach of the project. Scope involves both the substantive area of inquiry (the limits of the research topic) and the areas to be researched (the setting[s] and the sample). B. What is the nature of the data required? The nature refers to explore the possible ways of constructing data within a setting and to select methods that will combine to ensure that the data will be sufficiently rich, complex, and contextual to address the question and support the required analysis. Qualitative sampling is concerned with information richness for which two key aspects are to be considered: appropriateness and adequacy. It requires identification of appropriate participants, who can contribute rich information to the study. It also requires adequate sampling of information sources (i.e. people, places, events, types of data) so as to address the research question and to develop a full description of the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative sampling is described as purposive when it aims to select appropriate information sources to explore meanings, and theoretical when its aim is the selection of people, situations or processes on theoretical grounds to explore emerging ideas and build theory. In either case, sampling is ongoing through the course of a study and intimately linked with the emergent nature of the research process, previously noted. Qualitative sampling may involve small numbers of participants, while the amount of data gathered can be large, with many hours of participant interviews, or multiple data sources related to one setting including interviews, observation-based field notes and written documents. No fixed minimum number of participants is necessary to conduct sound qualitative research but sufficient depth of information needs to be gathered that fully describe the phenomena being studied. The rise of technology and digital photography and use of the internet and video editing tools, have enabled researchers to consider the potential of these newer, and potentially rich, resources of data from film, video and DVD. Newer, emergent, qualitative methodologies especially

in technology and visual research methods, can prove attractive and useful to researchers. Accessing information resources online can provide today's psychology researcher with rich data and fruitful new areas to explore. Examining resources such as diaries or personal eye-witness accounts can also provide the researcher with data. Again, these become easier to access if they have been uploaded as a research resource online, although with any such repository it is advisable to seek permission to use before beginning a research project since such data may raise copyright issues.

The types of Qualitative Research Design

- **Comparative Design:** If the question demands to determine what is special about a group or identify particular conditions or circumstances, then a two-group design is needed. Ideally, the data from the two groups shall be kept separate, as well as theoretical sampling driven by each group, and the data will be saturated separately. Later in the research process, it will be compared and contrasted to determine similarities and differences between the two groups. Comparative qualitative research is important, for example, in evaluation.
- **Triangulated Design:** It refers to the gaining of multiple perspectives through completed studies that have been conducted on the same topic and that directly address each other's findings. The qualitative researcher may be aided by drawing from different perspectives on the same question or topic. Triangulation requires careful research designs to ensure the same question will be addressed, and answered, by each of the proposed approaches.

Analysis of Qualitative Data offers the researcher an opportunity to develop an idiographic understanding of participants' experiences and what it means to them, within their social reality, to be in a particular situation (Bryman, 1992). The analysis is done using the methods of Content / thematic analysis (CA/ TA), Grounded Theory in psychology (GT), Discursive psychology / Discourse analysis (DA), Narrative psychology (NA) and Phenomenological psychology methods such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Good qualitative research is characterized by congruence between the perspective or paradigm that informs the research questions and the research methods used. The quality of qualitative research and standards for ethics in qualitative research are also interconnected, so that central to both issues is whether the subjective meaning-actions and social context of those being researched is illuminated and represented

faithfully. The principles of good practice in the conduct of qualitative research and the trustworthiness of the interpretation of information gathered are both essential to psychological research. Qualitative research methods have much to offer which may not have been explored in much detail. This in-depth approach can help us understand experiences of the lived-world, and participants' behaviours, feelings and emotions. As with any research approach, there are strengths and weaknesses. One of the main strengths of the qualitative approach, and thus its attractiveness to psychologists, is that it allows the researcher to explore the meanings people give to their experiences. These approaches can help provide us with more insightful information and quality data on how people think about their world, their lived-world experiences. It provides the researcher with an open-ended approach and one where the participant takes the lead in data collection. The usual use of a smaller sample size also enables that this detailed, richness of data, can be finely nuanced and in-depth. Furthermore, the researcher is able to utilise complementary data sources. There are opportunities for the researcher to incorporate multiple methods in order to obtain richer data. Still, the findings of research cannot be generalized to other contexts due to small size of data collected in particular context.

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