



The dilemma of indigenous researchers: A review to qualitative and quantitative research methods with reference to children with special educational needs

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Abstract: *There is a growing concern among indigenous researchers with the reliability of the methods used to get insights into the phenomena of concern. This study explores the techniques/methods used to collect information on children's special educational needs within Libyan mainstream schools. This is with the aim to underline the advantages and disadvantages of each method used within unfamiliar context to where they initially created. Moreover issues relating to validity and reliability, sampling and generalisability are considered here and attention is drawn to the sample and population selected.*

Keywords: *Indigenous Researchers; Qualitative and Quantitative; Special Educational*

I. Introduction

The relevance of this study to current educational practice in the Arab world is supported by insights from previous research (see Gadour, 2006; Gadour, 2009). These research findings have pointed out the difficulties encountered by indigenous researchers to have face to face meeting e.g. interviews with different sex of gender. In Libya, children, especially boys, are segregated from other pupils as well as being referred to professionals e.g. school social workers and psychologists (Gadour, 2009). A similar gender ratio is found in other research of the assessment of pupils with special educational needs (Armstrong et al., 1993). Consequently, many of Libyan children abandon their mainstream schools for technical and vocational institutions. In the 2009 study, teachers maintained the view that family factors were the main causes of children's behavioural problems e.g. illiterate parents and the dynamics of relationships, even though the majority of the children were ostensibly referred to school psychosocial services because of learning difficulties and lack of concentration. In fact, teachers in mainstream schools were found to spend considerable time on managing difficult behaviour in order to maintain classroom control (Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). Likewise, teachers in Libya feel that managing difficult behaviour in the classroom is one of the major difficulties they are faced with (Gadour, 2012). Regardless to why teachers feel the way they do, this study is particularly concerned with the research methods used to generate desirable information on children's SEN and reach certain conclusions.

An examination of the literature on the research methods used in similar studies has revealed that the majority of the studies have been done in a different context from Libya, namely in Europe and the USA, where people are more familiar with research and surveys. This fact had led the researchers to consider carefully the method chosen for this study, so that when a method is adopted variations in cultural background may be taken into account. The experience gained by the researchers from previous studies made them conscious of the sensitivity of data required for this study. Thus, success depends very much on the co-operation of the people selected for the study.

Ettir (1976) highlighted the lack of understanding of research surveys in Libya; he argued that it is not easy to assess the level of honesty of the information being collected by those who are conducting social research in Libya. He also stated that such researchers know that a low rate of responses will not be sufficient to reflect the true feelings of some individuals. Indeed, collecting any information depends entirely on the choice of methods or techniques that is adopted by researchers; yet it is a very difficult task facing researchers especially when each single method has its own advantages and disadvantages and not one is free from bias (Verma and Beard, 1981). Consequently, to choose appropriate research methods suitable for the objectives of the research and for more meaningful outcomes, it is essential for researchers to comprehend and familiarise themselves with the various research techniques in order to know their strengths and weaknesses.

Indeed, all descriptive research is created to obtain information concerning “the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study” (Ary, et al, 1972: 286). Therefore, the fundamental aim of descriptive research is to describe what exists with relation to different variables in a particular context at a particular time. In line with this, Cohen and Manion (1989) claimed that nearly all educational research methods are descriptive in nature and tend to describe and interpret a particular situation. Similarly, the aim of this study is to describe children’s special educational needs (SEN) in the classroom, and in doing so it looked at teachers’ attributions of the causes of children’s SEN.

Most research methods, can be classified into two theoretical paradigms, the qualitative and the quantitative. These two approaches use different techniques and tools for data collection, such as: interviews, observations, analysis of documentary sources, case studies and surveys or questionnaires. Although each technique has its own strengths and weaknesses which are reflected in its design, administration and interpretation, a combination of two or more is preferable to avoid biases and limitations, and consequently a researcher can check one method against the other (Turney and Robb, 1971). The preference then of using either qualitative or quantitative approach, or a combination of both, is influenced by the information needed, objectives, nature and context of the research. Thus, it is up to researcher to choose a research method that is capable of exploring the hypothesis that has been posed. A fundamental distinction between qualitative researchers and quantitative researchers has been clearly demonstrated in the literature (see for instance, Bell, 1993). Generally qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things; while quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things. Drawing on this distinction, one may understand why qualitative research has begun to be dominant and acceptable in any research setting. It is for providing perspectives and insights concerning a particular phenomena or event. To a certain degree, researchers adopting this approach are reflecting a phenomenological perspective (Bogdan and Biken, 1982). Although various researchers have endeavoured to define qualitative research in a precise fashion, it is still difficult to find one definition commonly agreed upon. Nevertheless, a fundamental feature of its followers is attempting to “gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives”, (Bogdan and Biken, 1982: p.31) which allows for inquiry from inside rather than inquiry from outside. The emphasis here is placed on studying the subjects’ perspectives in their natural setting. In this sense researchers view themselves as part of the setting and are aware that their presence may have an influence on the participants.

Some researchers use the term interpretative research paradigm instead of phenomenology. Such research focuses on particular individuals and does not attempt or

claim to provide general conclusions. In short, qualitative research is a process of close interactions between researchers and subjects. The aim of the former is to try to produce a series of descriptions of the latter's own written or spoken words or observable behaviour (Taylor and Bogdan, 1975).

In contrast, quantitative research is essential for involving a large number of the population, where the subjects receive standard instructions free from the influence of the investigator (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). Using this approach however, for some researchers, is not without problems which can be found in the risk of neglecting the meanings and interpretation of the information and its incapacity to capture "the fluidity, spontaneity and creativity of classroom life" (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: p. 27). This may suggest that each technique has its own shortcomings, and consequently there is not any single research method that can fully secure an understanding of all social interactions and events. This is perhaps why a great number of researchers feel strongly about combining qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to get more reliable data (Leedy, 1993; Judd, Smith and Kidder, 1991; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Denzin, 1989). Thus, in order to construct a rich picture of the children's SEN, this study combined quantitative and qualitative methods in the form of triangulation. Denzin (1989: p.512) perceives that "the most fruitful search for sound interpretations of the real world must rely upon triangulation strategies. Interpretations which are built upon triangulation are certain to be stronger than those which rest on the more constricted framework of a single method". Therefore, triangulation was used in this study to provide a comprehensive perspective of the factors that are held responsible for children's SEN, and if possible to compare the data with previous results. A quantitative method (e.g. questionnaire) then was used to identify the number of children viewed as having SEN and the number of interviews held with teachers concerning children's SEN. In addition, qualitative methods (e.g. participant observations and interviews) were used with pupils and teachers to complement and clarify in more depth the information gathered by the questionnaires and consequently to obtain more meaningful and reliable findings. The implications of this piece of research are envisaged as being extremely relevant as it will bring a significant contribution to educational literature on research methods in the Arab world as well as shed a light on the difficulties encountered by indigenous researchers.

Recently, as mentioned above, one of the researchers (Dr. Gadour) completed a study relevant to this one in relation to Libyan primary school teachers' perceptions of the most troublesome behaviour in the classroom. The main method used in that study was the questionnaire. This was distributed to eighty nine primary school teachers after being adapted to the Arabic language. However, lessons were learnt from the previous studies indicating that without personal contact the chance of having the questionnaires completed might be very small, since the return rate last time was rather disappointing. It was believed, it would be much easier to approach the same schools as he was known to most of the headteachers there so the chance of co-operation this time may increase, reflecting the understanding of the nature of research by school teachers. This does not mean that the researcher would only approach the same schools as before, but rather all the primary mainstream schools that are situated in the city of Derna in the Eastern part of Libya. As a result, all the Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) in this city were visited in order to get access to mainstream primary schools and get permission to carry out the research; they were also informed about the nature of the research. Having gained an access letter from the LEAs, telephone calls were made to headteachers, prior to the visit to schools, asking them for a meeting to explain the purpose and the nature of the research and its value. The researchers also gave reassurances that all teachers' comments would be treated in strict confidence. No one else would have access to

them and their anonymity would be protected. Finally, it was left to headteachers to distribute the questionnaires to primary classroom teachers, emphasising that teachers must be free to choose whether to participate in the study or not. Therefore, the primary aim of the questionnaire was to identify primary school pupils experiencing SEN. Obviously prior to the approval of the final form of the questionnaire, it was distributed to four primary schools located in different LEAs in Derna, in order to determine the adequacy of the questions, suitability of the terms and the design of the questionnaire, and also to assess non-response rates.

II. Research methods

2.1 Issues related to validity and reliability

There are very important issues related to validity and reliability in qualitative research. For validity “refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of inferences researchers make based on the data they collect” and reliability “refers to the consistency of these inferences over time” (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993: p. 400). Similarly issues regarding the validity and reliability were considered in this study, and consequently several techniques used in the pilot study. Validity can be understood in two ways; internal and external validity. The internal validity refers to the extent “to which results can be accurately interpreted” and the external validity refers to the extent “to which results can be generalised to populations and conditions” (Wiersma, 1991: p.4).

In ethnographic research, reliability can also be distinguished in two ways: internal and external reliability (Goetz and LeComte, 1984). The former refers to the consistent results obtained by independent researchers working on similar studies. The latter refers to the extent in which two or more researchers reach an agreement on their observations and interpretations. Yet, different techniques are used by qualitative researchers to enhance the validity and reliability of their data. For internal and external reliability can be improved by administering good methodology and describing it in a comprehensive way. Using multiple data collection procedures (triangulation) is another way of enhancing reliability of the research (Wiersma, 1991). Internal validity can be secured if the researcher makes deductions and inductions, and interprets the data critically. Although external validity is reinforced by multisite studies, very few ethnographic studies meet this criterion. Another possibility of enhancing the external validity is by varying the research context in the same study i.e. using two or more classrooms in the same school (Wiersma, 1991).

One type of triangulation that is consistently used by researchers as a means of cross validation is methodological triangulation. This may include participant observations, interviews and questionnaires; all of these were used in validating the data of this study. In line with this, Wragg (1994, p.105) claimed that “triangulation in classroom research involves checking the perceptions of more than one person to see if one’s own interpretations have any support.” This may however involve checking a teacher's description against the pupils' descriptions of the same issue. While variance in descriptions can indicate that data is invalid, they may result from differences in views and perceptions. This process of monitoring is also applicable to the researcher’s own thoughts when he or she gives an account of the observations and interviews, and checks this later against other observations or remarks (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993)

As the case with other qualitative research techniques, there are ethical implications when children are involved. Fine and Sandstorm (1988) stated that there are very sensitive

issues that may arise in terms of responsibility of the adult in dealing with possibly harmful situations or when there is no clear adult authority, so one may have to make quick decisions in order to protect the children involved. Other issues are related to children who may be concerned about the use of the information they provide, and observers quite often find difficulties in breaking the ice to get full access to the children's private behaviour; so for this to happen they must perceive him/her as trustworthy. Participant observers must also be aware of the different status of children who are involved. The social roles of the participants will undoubtedly be influenced by variables such as: age, cognitive development, physical maturity and acquisition of social responsibility. Moreover, there is a problem of explaining the research in a comprehensible way so the researcher can get the consent of the children themselves. From personal experience of working with pupils in the Libyan school context, the researchers were able to take the headteachers' permission for granted when they wanted to interview pupils. Pupils have always been picked to contribute to research activities without it being necessary to inform or ask for their parents' permission. Although this may sometimes give pupils some anxiety if they are selected rather than asked to volunteer for an interview, they still comply because they feel honoured to be chosen and they actually enjoy the attention given to them. Parents in Libya seem to accept and trust the headteachers' responsibility for giving a researcher permission to interview their children. Moreover, in observation, generally, the researcher must be aware of the potential effect of the research process and of the characteristics of the researcher on the behaviour of the observed (creativity). The observer also must remain aware of the possibilities of bias, of misperception and erroneous inferences and assumptions through constant monitoring.

III. Results and discussion

3.1 Sampling and Generalisability

In educational studies, it is rare to investigate entire population of individuals because of the factors of expense, time and effort involved (Borg and Meredith, 1989; Verma and Beard, 1981). This is true when the group of interest to the researcher is unmanageably large or widely scattered. Since it is generally unnecessary to study all possible cases in order to understand the phenomenon under consideration, sampling techniques are employed in order to provide a smaller group which can be more profitably investigated. Thus, collecting information from a small group of any population, usually called a sample (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Sampling then is "the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected" (Gay, 1976: 66). Thus, educational researchers make use of sampling techniques to get information about a population through investigating a small proportion of that population. In other words, a sample implies a wider group from which the sample is taken, this wider group is referred to as the population (Verma and Beard, 1981; Gay, 1976). Gay called them "the group of interest to the researcher, the group to which he/she would like the results of the study to be generalizable" (Gay, 1981: 67). On the other hand, researchers sometimes have very limited choice to draw a sample from any population, and therefore they use convenience sampling because the subjects are the only ones available. However, different valid techniques are available for researchers to use in selecting their samples. Two types of generally recognised sampling are: probability samples and non-probability sampling (Cohen and Manion, 1989). In contrasting these two types, it is generally recognised that random sampling represents the best way to obtain a representative sample; this is for the possibility that this technique can provide more generalisable findings. Also it is perhaps due to the fact that with this technique "each individual in the defined population has an equal and independent chance

of being selected for the sample” (Gay, 1976: 69). Unfortunately, this sort of sampling is not always possible to handle because it necessitates “an enumeration of all the individuals in a finite population before the sample can be drawn. This often presents a serious obstacle to the use of this method in practice” (Ary, et al., 1972).

Furthermore, this type of sampling if conducted in a culture which is not familiar with research in general and does not appreciate the inquisitiveness of the researcher, the response rate may be disappointing. Therefore, as previously mentioned, in such a culture the co-operation of the subjects depends very much on the way they perceive the researcher and the sensitivity of his topic. Social researchers in Arabic society know in general the sceptical nature of ordinary people when they are approached by strange researchers for information (Ettir, 1989). There seems to be a strong correlation between the nature of research carried out and the level of subjects’ distrust; this relationship however may dramatically increase, if related to religion or political matters (Ettir, 1989). This is believed to be the norm and any failure on behalf of the researcher to make himself and the purpose of his study known is thought to deny the subjects’ right. Consequently, personal contact was badly needed with headteachers to help as much as possible in understanding the nature of the research.

Indeed, the sample has to be very carefully selected in which the target population is well defined in order to determine the limits within which the research is carried out; and consequently this would lead to more generalizable results (Verma and Beard, 1981). However, using a random sample technique with a substantial group of subjects in a non-western culture and context such as in Libya would not be without problems; as many influential factors appeared to have an impact on this study. Thus, due to the time limit available for the researchers and the constant war after the uprising in 2011, and also because of the geography of Libyan cities, only five LEAs located in one of the major Libyan cities (Derna) were used in this study .

Therefore, it was impossible for the researchers to draw a sample from all of the Libyan cities due to the travel restriction between the west and east of Libya imposed by the government due to the war. Moreover, for this research to be conducted, it was planned that each teacher had to spend at least five-six months with their pupils, so they would be able to describe pupils’ SEN adequately. This meant that the researchers had to contact teachers at least two months prior to the end of the school year to leave time for the observations and interviews with pupils.

Consequently, a small and more easily accessible sample was chosen. The accessible population is one that is manageable both in terms of time and resources, and also in terms of the instruments to be employed (Borg and Meredith, 1989). Thus, the target population of this study were primary school teachers and pupils. Therefore, the researchers envisaged that a random sampling for this study could not be employed; instead, this research used convenience, or opportunistic, sampling to obtain information from a large and representative sample of teachers reflecting their views on pupils with SEN. So, due to the very similar qualifications that primary school teachers hold and to the fact that all mainstream primary schools in Libya follow the same national curriculum; it would seem unlikely that the schools and their teaching procedures in other cities in Libya would differ substantially from those in Derna. Consequently, the selected sample of schools in Derna may be considered as representative and the findings of this study could possibly be generalised to other Libyan schools with some degree of confidence.

The sample technique adopted in the present study was based on the administration of the questionnaire. Several criteria were set however to include a teacher and child in the population of this study: this was entirely based on the return of the questionnaires, teachers' responses and their selection of pupils as having SEN, and more importantly, on their willingness to be interviewed. For this, it was not appropriate for the researchers to go and observe a pupil whose teacher refused to be interviewed. Similarly, it was not ethically possible to go and ask teachers to declare his/her pupils' names for observation who would rather have their names remain anonymous in the first instance.

3.2 Quantitative research in the form of questionnaire

The questionnaire is one of the several research techniques which is frequently used in social sciences research. It is widely believed that a questionnaire is a reliable research instrument for collecting a large amount of data in a very short length of time, especially when it is spread over a wide geographical area (Bryman, 1992). Yet, it is a technique whereby data are obtained without direct interaction between the researcher and the respondents. In this sense it is believed that the questionnaire is an incomparable research technique which gives the respondents a feeling of anonymity, freedom and enough time to express their views more accurately (Judd, Smith and Kidder, 1991). Verma and Beard (1981) think that the questionnaire is a popular research method for its low cost, avoiding potential interviewer bias and lessening pressure for immediate response on the subject. Moreover, it has many other advantages which make non-western researchers more interested in adopting it for collecting their data. Yet, for many of them, carrying out research in their context and cultures by using other techniques than questionnaires may seem impossible. However, questionnaires may appear as the sole research technique, as will be mentioned later, for eliciting information. Thus, respondents would deal freely with the questionnaires according to the attached standard instructions and acting outside of the influence of the researcher.

Similarly, instructions were provided in this study explaining the nature of the research for teachers and why it was being conducted, who was doing it, and what it was for etc. Also, anonymity was guaranteed for every individual taking part in this study, and a space provided for those who would like to give their consent and be interviewed by the researcher regarding the information given. A request was made to every headteacher for a fixed day to collect the distributed questionnaires and also asking them to help as much as possible to overcome any problems that may result in a low response rate.

Yet the researchers are aware that questionnaire is not an absolutely perfect research method, and its disadvantages should be borne in mind when a decision is taken to use it as a way of collecting data. One of its limitations is that if mailed the number of questionnaires that are returned may be disappointing; it also may include inaccurate and incomplete responses due to lack of motivation; a lack of control over question sequence and context; and the inability to correct any misunderstanding of questions by the respondents (Judd, Smith and Kidder, 1991).

In order to avoid any limitations that may arise as a result of designing the questionnaire we tried to follow certain rules such as being as clear as possible in our questions including examples of how to answer them; the questions also were brief, specific, well printed, well organised and ordered. It should also be stressed that for a questionnaire to be administered effectively one needs to consider carefully its construction and wording items in order to convey to the respondents what sort of information is required of them (Judd, Smith and Kidder, 1991; Van Dalen, 1973). A further and worthwhile point for researchers to consider

when carrying out a questionnaire in their studies, are the circumstances and the time required of the respondents to complete the questionnaires.

Questionnaires are normally used in survey research to collect data such as facts, attitudes, opinions, feelings and experiences (Slavin, 1984; Wiersma, 1986 and Hitchcock and Hughes, 1988). Thus, the aim of this questionnaire was to investigate teachers' views of children's SEN and what might contributed to that. All on all, questionnaires consist of a series of written questions which are initially created to test or explore people's attitudes, views and opinions on a particular issue. These series of questions are developed in two common forms: the close-ended type of questions or restricted questions in which respondents are asked to choose from the certain responses given usually yes/no or agree/disagree or multiple scales that represent his/her view most closely (Ary, et al., 1972); and the open-ended or unrestricted form in which respondents are given space to answer the questions in their own words reflecting their views, opinions and attitudes (Borg and Meredith, 1989; Ary, et al., 1972). On the other hand, both have their own disadvantages in that they may affect the outcome. Close-ended questions are sometimes blamed for forcing respondents to choose only one from two or more responses in which none of them represent their genuine feeling; and also responses to open-ended questions are blamed for being too long or short, or for their ambiguity on the point that the respondents are trying to make; besides, more problems may arise if the handwriting is not clear. However, while under certain circumstances close-ended questions tend to be used often by researchers for providing an easy and quick way of tabulating data, yet, open questions are criticised for being difficult to summarise and tabulate (Leedy, 1993).

In this study, elements of both closed-form and open-form items were used in the questionnaire to elicit information from teachers. The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections, consisting of 28 items. Most of these were based on close-ended questions with multiple choice answers in which some of them were set according to a Likert scale. Every teacher was asked either to cross the suitable box or insert a number against the answers given. Also, in other occasions teachers were asked to choose from the Likert scale one response that represented their feeling most from the positive and negative statements given such as: strongly agree or agree; undecided, or disagree or strongly disagree. Thus, the five options "are arbitrarily given weights of 5 to 1, the highest value always being given to the responses that demonstrate the greatest degree of favourableness to the topic" (Lovell and Lawson, 1970: 105). However, for the open-ended questions spaces were provided for respondents to express their views, feelings and attitudes. Section A dealt with personal data about the individual teacher as well as with basic data about the number of children in the classroom. Information on factual background such as: sex, age, qualifications and experience of teaching etc., were sought to understand the differences in the behaviour and attitudes of the respondents. Section B sought information about pupils' SEN and the contributing factors to these. Most of the remainder of section B consists of questions about how teachers perceive the concept of SEN and whether there is a link between pupils' learning and behaviour difficulties. Section C was concerned with data on the supporting procedures of pupils experiencing SEN. Information was required on whether schools have special policies and procedures to tackle pupils' difficulties. The aim was to highlight both the availability and the type of support services e.g. involvement of other than the teacher with pupils. However, in section C and the following one D, items were arranged in a Likert form in which teachers were given response options of whether they: strongly agree or agree; were undecided, or disagree or strongly disagree. In addition to the above sections, teachers were asked to add anything they believed was valuable and related to the topic in the space given. Thus, for the

purpose of this study, the questionnaire was not considered as the main research instrument as pointed out above, but rather as a method of triangulation for providing a means of testing one source of information against other sources. This technique was adopted for more verification and validation by checking out the level of consistency of the findings gathered.

3.3 Participant observation and Interviews

A qualitative dimension is often incorporated in the form of observation as well as interviews which are intended to complement and give a better understanding of the data obtained through different approaches. Qualitative research has also been seen as necessary and complementary to quantitative research in that it may justify the findings of the latter. A simple distinction then can be drawn between the two methods of research, while the former is concerned with the meanings, the latter is concerned with numbers. However, different qualitative researchers approach their data for analysis from different perspectives indicating a variety of approaches. The particular procedure adopted depends very highly on the data to be analysed, along with the principals and the capability of the individual researcher. Despite the range of methods that can be used by qualitative researchers in analysing their data, all qualitative research at least shares some basic characteristics (Lindlof, 1995). For example, researchers may be interested in interpreting human actions in a particular setting through a process of interactions between themselves and the subjects. Thus, these researchers use mainly theoretical approaches to utilise humans as the primary research instruments and this involves the application of reflexive analysis.

Although many researchers would agree with the advantages that the qualitative method can offer in terms of its flexibility for the researcher to change or modify his/her intervention, others would argue that, it is very subjective and entirely depends on the researcher's own perspective of what he/she sees or hears. Indeed, interpreting qualitative data is still a complicated process where many researchers encounter difficulties when they reach the stage of construing what they have gathered (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). This happens because the process of interpretation would require the researcher to be able to use effectively his/her conceptualisation and imagination. For Ritchie and Spencer a good analysis of qualitative data should be based on defining concepts, theorising, categorising, exploring and mapping. What acts here as important for the researcher is his/her own familiarity with the range and diversity of the gathered data and also the way in which they initiate the process of conceptualisation during the attempts to recognise the key issues, concepts and themes according to which the data can be referenced.

On the personal level we could describe the traps that may lie along the path when carrying out qualitative research in a culture or context that differs from the one in which it has been invented. Yet, it should be noted that the researchers are not trying to be so critical of using qualitative research but rather pointing out the dangers that may arise when using such method. Qualitative research to non-western researchers i.e. (post graduate students) can be a very frustrating process since in some parts of what are so-called developing countries; i.e. in the East, it is quite an unacceptable way of collecting data. This sort of feeling is made worse when it is known that using a different method would not be sufficient for answering the posed questions. Ettir (1976) stated that Libyan researchers know that they would receive little co-operation if questionnaires were sent out. Consequently, a low rate of response will not be sufficient to reflect the true feelings of some individuals.

Nonetheless, the case would not be the same if non-western researchers had carried out research in a Western context. Thus, indigenous researchers would have more trouble if asked

to conduct research in their homeland. Likewise, it would be senseless for those who are born and educated in the West to be so judgmental about a culture and context that differs from their own. Probably this is an invitation for the Western educators to enhance their awareness of the different systems that have developed in a non-American or European context. To illustrate this issue more we need to know what is acceptable and what is not in such cultures when using qualitative tools as a mean of collecting data. Personal interviews are a good example for demonstrating the difficulties that qualitative researchers may encounter i.e. a male researcher will be undoubtedly in an unenviable position if he has to elicit information from female subjects. The same scenario will arise if his role were as a participant observer in a school where all teachers and students were female or vice versa. Perhaps these and other reasons have led many non-western researchers to favour executing questionnaire in their homeland. Thus, using surveys and questionnaires has begun to be the norm for many researchers given the advanced technology available for their data. However, the question of the validity and reliability of using these methods is still puzzling many non-western researchers, if accuracy of the collected data has to be assured, and also if meaningful and useful inferences are to be drawn from subjects. Obviously, this in turn has its consequences for such researchers to think of applying qualitative methods in their own lands in a manner that neither offends the subjects nor the present methodological problems. Another difficulty for qualitative researchers is the reduction of their data for the purpose of analysis and the management of the massive amount of material they obtain. Thus, questionnaire can be quite a justifiable technique in a sense for controlling the vast quantity of very rich and unstructured material i.e. field notes, tape discussions, or informal interviews. This is through a process of sorting the data into categories, priorities and interrelating data according to a way through which they can be interpreted (Lindlof, 1995). Certainly this has been very unpleasant period for us as we found ourselves surrounded by piles of paper, index cards, sheets, coloured pens etc., spread across the room. Whilst, quantitative researchers possess advanced computer packages which can easily do everything for them. Thus, qualitative researchers are forced to devise their own analysis scheme which depends very highly on the theoretical framework of the research and on the intuition and creativity of the researcher.

Indeed, many qualitative researchers at some point would need to use secret techniques for gaining valuable information. This would undoubtedly collide with the ethical issues which are always emphasised in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers should be able to explain the purpose of the technique they are using, otherwise this would result in some people being negatively affected. Conversely, the presence of an observer in a classroom can have a considerable consequence on the teachers' and pupils' behaviour and hence on the outcomes of the study (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993). Thus, pupils need to become used to the researcher's presence and carry on doing their usual activities, so the researcher can observe their behaviour in a natural way. This may be overcome by the researcher informing the teacher in advance and being introduced to the pupils. They may probably need to spend sometime in the classroom prior to any recording of observations.

With regard to ethical constraints qualitative research like other research methods, would require a sort of confidentiality imparted to all participants. In qualitative research however, the relationship between the researcher and the subject is ongoing and evolves over time. Carrying out qualitative research then is more like having a friendship than a contract. The subjects have a say in regulating the relationship and they continuously make decisions about their participation (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). Yet, qualitative researchers must be aware of their approaches that may be considered from time to time as threatening and over-intrusive; the researcher will need to establish rapport with the informants but not become so

involved that the researcher's perspective is lost and it becomes difficult to make a sharp analysis.

It is essential for qualitative researchers to notice the potential of information their data conveys about people's privacy, secrets, and reputations when finally presented in a form of text books, articles etc. (Lindlof, 1995). Ethical issues concerning what is going to be presented regarding the participants' personal characteristics or actual identities must be protected by the researcher. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) also claimed that subjects should be treated with respect and their co-operation should be sought. Although some researchers would rather have their research done in a covert manner, there is a general consensus that subjects should be told of the research interests, objectives and aims and permission obtained from subjects to record conversations on tape. Moreover, researchers must not deny or fabricate or distort data that does not support or reveal the conclusions they may expect. However, Bogdan and Biklen (1982) stated that there are times when a researcher feels puzzled about whether to hide or to mention the subject's identity i.e. the subject's abuse or misuse of public interests. This in turn would make the anonymity of the subject problematic. Hence, for qualitative researchers to get better access to peoples' minds and behaviour, the above principles need to be considered carefully.

As already pointed out, due to various cultural factors within the Libyan context, conducting interviews was not an easy task. Certainly, using a qualitative method in the present study, especially with a large number of female participants, was a challenge for the researcher (Dr. Gadour). In relation to this, the researcher had to conduct interviews with widows or divorcees regarding their children's SEN. This led to further embarrassment when the researcher knew that there was no way to interview them outside their homes. Hence, some interviews with female teachers were held beside the school's main door and others were in the teachers' room to avoid any awkward situations. Besides, a number of participants found it difficult to stick to the researcher's timetable. As a result the latter had to attempt to contact them several times, visiting their homes only to discover that they were out. These circumstances presented the researcher with real difficulties in completing the study.

IV. Conclusion

An attempt to explore the difficulties encountered by indigenous researchers using various research methods is thoroughly discussed in this study reflecting the advantages and disadvantages of each technique. In addition, the procedures adopted for the administration of the present research study and data collection are also considered. This includes issues related to validity and reliability, sampling and generalisability. The implications of this review study suggest that researchers from Arabic background need to rethink their research approaches/methods carefully prior to initiate their fieldwork. The present study confirm that using qualitative methods e.g. interviews with children and opposite gender sex is far more complicated than initially thought. Finally there is a need for further research exploring the experience of indigenous researchers with regard to their approaches and the problems encountered during their fieldwork.

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