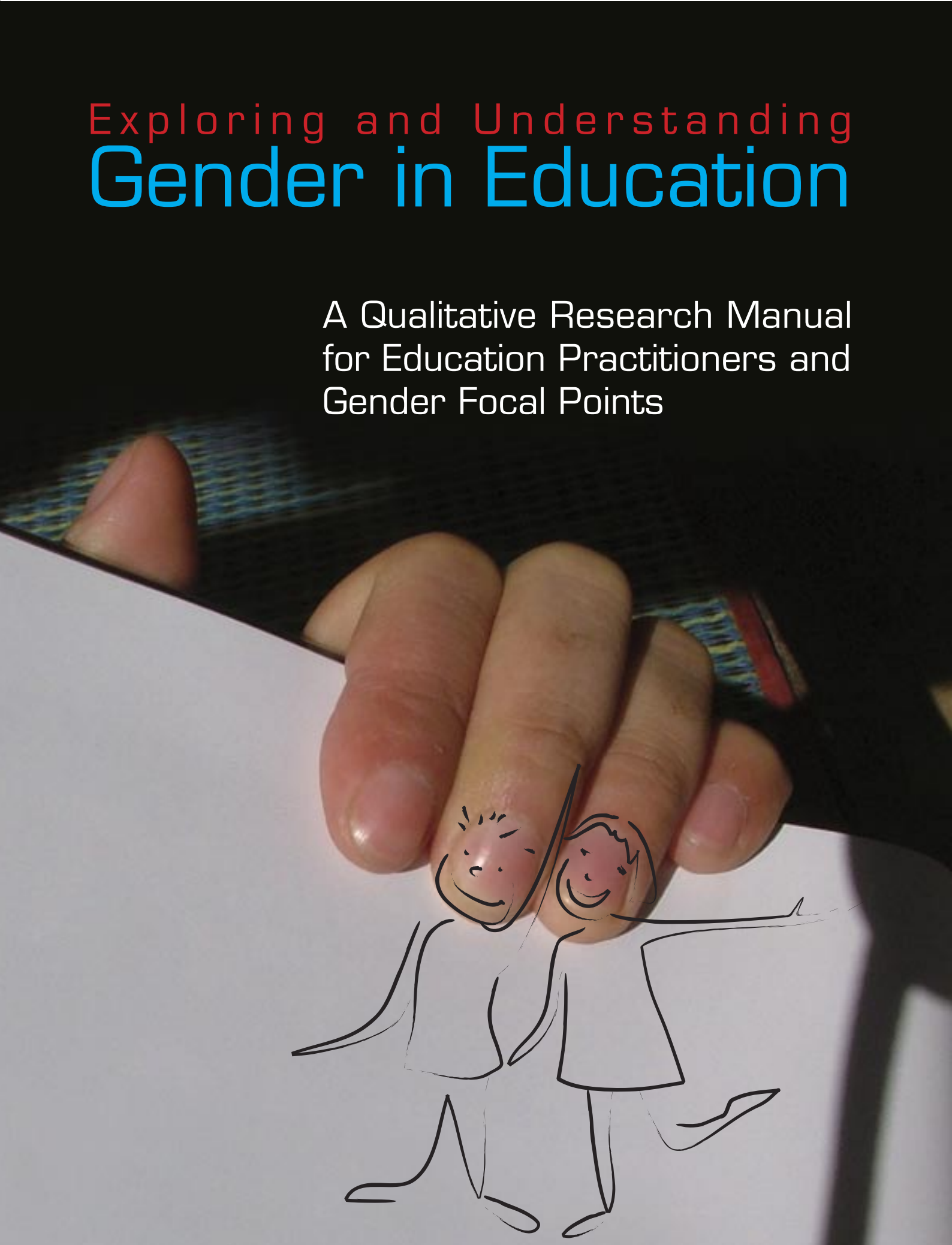
Exploring and Understanding Gender in Education

A Qualitative Research Manual for Education Practitioners and Gender Focal Points



United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO Bangkok

Note to Readers

This manual is meant to be a work-in-progress and will be revised based on your experiences and those of others. If you have any comments or suggestions to further improve the manual, please send them to gender@unescobkk.org.

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FOREWORD

"We can't go on doing more of the same thing – we have to do things differently" was a frequently heard statement in the early nineties just after the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. This statement became even more pertinent as evaluations of the education achievements during the Jomtien decade were completed – especially when it came to girls' education and the difficulty of closing the gender gap. The Dakar Framework for Action, therefore, put specific emphasis on eliminating gender disparities by 2005 and on achieving gender equality in education by 2015.

Although many countries still lack reliable sex-disaggregated data to assess how close they are to achieving the 2005 goal, the 2015 goal of achieving gender equality in education requires even more sophisticated information gathering and analysis. We need to know what is going on in classrooms, and what the learning outcomes are for boys and girls. We need to examine curricula and textbooks, as well as teachers as role models. We also need to assess the school environment from a gender perspective to determine the extent to which our education systems are promoting gender equality or, on the other hand, are reinforcing existing stereotypes.

Such assessments require qualitative research to establish an in-depth view of the actual situation, to guide reforms in the education system, and to facilitate a gender equality agenda. Consequently, *Exploring and Understanding Gender in Education: A Qualitative Research Manual for Education Practitioners and Gender Focal Points* has been developed to assist Gender Focal Points in Ministries of Education and other education practitioners in identifying, conducting, and making use of good quality research. While it preferably should be read and understood in its entirety by all parties, Gender Focal Points in Ministries of Education involved in managing the research process need to pay particular attention to Chapters I to III. Those education practitioners/researchers directly involved in conducting the research will find Chapters IV and V of particular importance.

This manual is truly a collective product. It was first drafted by Anne Bernard, Greg Armstrong, and George Attig. It was then commented on, discussed, and improved upon by the Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA) in Seoul, Republic of Korea in September 2004. Vibeke Jensen, former Programme Specialist and Gender Focal Point of UNESCO's Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, coordinated the process.

Sheldon Shaeffer
Director
UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

I. What is This Manual About?

This manual is about how to conduct qualitative research in order to promote gender equality in the classroom, the school, and, by extension, in the wider educational system. It will give you the knowledge and tools you will need to begin exploring and understanding gender disparities in education, their causes, and the ways they can be overcome.

"Gender" refers to the social roles and responsibilities that are believed to belong to men and women within a particular social group; for example, "men as income earners" and "women as child caregivers." Gender roles are created by a society and are learned from one generation to the next as part of a society's culture. Because gender is a socially learned perception (for instance, learned in the family or in school), anything associated with it can be changed to achieve equity and equality for both women and men. In other words, we can change the gender roles of "women as child caregivers" to "women as income earners," "men as income earners" to "men as child caregivers," or, better yet, "men and women as income earners and child caregivers."

Conducting qualitative research into gender in education means exploring and understanding the ways in which these socially-defined roles and responsibilities are reflected in our classrooms, schools, communities, and the educational system, and how they may place one sex (girls or boys) at a disadvantage. For instance, do they affect whether or not girls and boys have equal opportunities to enter school? Do they affect how girls and boys interact with each other as equals? Do they affect how girls and boys interact with their teachers (male and female)? Are these roles and responsibilities reflected as gender stereotypes in the curriculum the children are taught, in the textbooks that they use, as well as in the wider educational system of which they are a part?

The goal of qualitative research into gender in education is to contribute to ensuring gender equality for girls and boys and to eliminating gender stereotyping. This means that girls and boys have equal opportunities to enter school as well as equal opportunities to participate in, and benefit from, the range of subjects or other learning experiences that are offered in classrooms and schools. They are equally equipped with skills and attitudes that will help them to achieve their fullest potential within and outside of the educational system regardless of their sex.

II. Why is This Manual Important?

The 2000 Education for All (EFA) Assessment revealed that progress has been made in improving access to primary education. However, in many cases, little to no success has been achieved in narrowing the "gender gap." Disparities persist between girls and boys in access, retention, learning achievement, and completion of a primary education. In most countries, girls are at the disadvantage. But in some cases, and increasingly, boys are more disadvantaged within educational systems than girls.

When governments were confronted with the EFA findings during the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, they decided to increase their efforts to close this gap, and they made commitments to achieve gender equality in education by 2015. These commitments took the form of three specific EFA goals, namely:

Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls…have access to, and complete, free and compulsory education of good quality.

Goal 4: Achieving 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women.

Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on encouraging girls' full and equal access to, and achievement in, basic education.

To follow-up on this concern and to contribute to achieving these goals, this manual has been produced to help you:

1. to collect important information to assess gender equality in access to school, as well as the retention, learning achievement, and completion of girls and boys,
2. to analyze this information to identify disadvantaged girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable and excluded;
3. to make effective, inclusive, and gender-responsive policy and programme decisions; and
4. to assess progress toward school and system targets, including national EFA goals.

III. Who Can Use This Manual?

This manual is for YOU! You may be an officer in a Ministry of Education, a Gender Focal Point within this ministry or another unit, a school administrator or teacher in a primary or secondary school, or a member of a non-governmental organization (NGO) working in schools or with government counterparts.

In this manual, all of you are "education practitioners" whose major responsibility is to develop and manage an increasingly effective, high quality, and gender-responsive educational system. Thus, this manual is meant to help you to "gather the evidence" to:

1. explore and develop a detailed understanding of the status or situation of girls and boys, as well as other vulnerable children, in terms of school access, participation, retention,learning achievement, and completion;
2. understand why these situations exist in the way they do;
3. understand how improvements can be made; and/or
4. understand why and how existing interventions are working, or not working.

IV. How Can You Use This Manual?

This manual is not a rigid set rules or procedures. It is meant to be *flexible*. Each qualitative research study, and especially those that explore gender in education, will be designed differently to answer different questions, in different contexts, and among different study groups. This manual thus guides you in undertaking qualitative research through a discussion of the essential steps and examples of previous studies on important gender issues. Furthermore, the various problem areas and methods described herein present *an overall view of the qualitative research process*. You can apply this process if you are exploring an issue (*research*), clarifying a situation (such as in *an appraisal*), tracking a programme (*monitoring*), or assessing results of an intervention (*evaluation*).

This manual can also be used as a tool for a training programme on research methods, as well as a reference for you to use as you work through your research study. Moreover, this manual should be seen as a first step, to be added to and adapted through use. You are encouraged to make it more relevant over time by adding examples, topics, challenges, and successful experiences from your own work on exploring gender in education.

V. How is This Manual Organized?

Following this introduction, the manual contains two broad approaches to "doing qualitative research." The first approach—and the one of most relevance for Gender Focal Points as research managers—can be found in Parts II and III in terms of how the qualitative research process can be applied. Specifically, Part II explores what is qualitative research, why it is important for exploring and understanding gender in education, and how can it be used for gender analysis. Some of the most pressing issues in terms of gender equality, quality education, implementing school policy reform and programme innovations that can be investigated using gender analysis and a qualitative research approach are presented in Part III.

The second approach is found in Parts IV and V, and it is most relevant for those who will actually be conducting qualitative research studies. Part IV provides you with a guide to the major steps and methods of conducting qualitative research. It gives a step-by-step picture of "how to do" a qualitative study, while inviting you to consider choices along the way depending upon the purposes, resources, and constraints of your study or situation. This section is fundamental, since no qualitative research study will be useful if the basics are not well done. Part V then guides you in understanding and dealing with challenges that might arise in undertaking a qualitative research study.

It is strongly suggested that you use this manual interactively, moving back and forth between the two approaches and their parts. The reason for this is that having a good grasp of the process, methods, and techniques of qualitative research is *necessary, but not sufficient*. Why?

1. **First,** there are relatively few major qualitative methods and techniques, and they are relatively straightforward in terms of the actual "things to do."
2. **Second,** the methods are straightforward, but *only superficially*. In fact, they are very difficult to "get right" in actual practice, and this difficulty is not easy to overcome through written descriptions.
3. **Third,** and unlike most quantitative methods, qualitative methods for collecting and interpreting information *can really only be learned by experiencing them,* and most qualitative research *is really good where it is adapted on-the-ground*, that is, by trying things out and seeing what happens.

Consequently, you need an iterative (feedback) process when collecting your information. This usually takes the form of:

1. asking a question, then
2. seeing how the person responds, and then
3. adjusting the question as needed to clarify, probe, or redirect what you meant and what the person answers.

This same kind of iteration is needed when you analyze your information:

1. compiling all of your answers and observations, then
2. asking of each comment and observation: "what does this mean?" "what does it explain?" then
3. going back for more information, and then
4. making correct interpretations of what you have discovered and its implications for policies, programmes, and actions to support gender in education.

VI. A Note on Terms

In using this Manual, it is important that we all have a clear understanding of some very important gender-related terms. Some of the most important terms that appear in this Manual include the following.

Sex describes the biological differences between men and women, which are universal and determined at birth.

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). These roles and expectations are learned. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. The concept of gender is vital because it facilitates gender analysis revealing how women's subordination is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever.

Gender analysis is the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated information. Men and women both perform different roles. This leads to women and men having different experience, knowledge, talents and needs. Gender analysis explores these differences so policies, programs and projects can identify and meet the different needs of men and women. Gender analysis also facilitates the strategic use of distinct knowledge and skills possessed by women and men.

Sex-Disaggregated Data are data that are collected and presented separately on men and women.

Gender Equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural, and political development. Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community, and their society.

Gender Equity is the process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity is a means. Equality and equitable outcomes are the results.

Empowerment is about people – both women and men – taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance. No one can empower another: only the individual can empower herself or himself to make choices or to speak out. However, institutions including national and international cooperation agencies can support processes that can nurture self-empowerment of individuals or groups.

VII. A Note for Translators and Adapters

This Manual was developed originally in the English language. But for it to be used widely, it will need to be translated into different languages and adapted to fit different contexts. For those of you who will be given the task of adapting and translating this Manual, please remember the following important points.

Style, Tone, and Vocabulary

The manual is meant to be inviting and user-friendly. For this reason, it is written in an informal style. You are encouraged to also use this style in your translation, instead of using a formal—often overly complicated—one.

The Manual is written in a positive and encouraging tone. We want to encourage research managers and researchers to learn more, rather than to be condescending and pointing out what they should be doing or are doing wrong. Once again, you are encouraged to use this type of tone in your translation.

In order to make it understandable, the Manual uses a very simple vocabulary. We intentionally tried not to use complex terms and "jargon" (that is, words or expressions that some professionals may understand, but which are difficult for others to understand). However,

some special terms can be difficult to translate. For example, the term "gender" may not exist in your language, but it is important to translate it accurately. If you find terms that you are not sure how to translate, check with professionals or agencies who may already be using the term and may have already translated it. For instance, "gender" is a term that is widely used in the areas of education, population, reproductive health, and children's rights. Check with national and international organizations that work in these areas to see how they have translated it.

Context and Content

We have drawn from qualitative research experiences and examples from many countries within and outside of the Asian Region. However, this may not be relevant for your national context. In such cases, you are encouraged to search out and use other examples instead of the ones in this Manual. However, please make sure that they agree with what is being explained in the text.

Overall, the Manual's content must be meaningful in terms of the context of the communities in which the research is being undertaken. Don't be afraid to adapt the Manual's content in such ways to fit your community context.

In adapting the Manual's activities, techniques, and case studies to fit your local conditions, work with researchers who are already involved in undertaking qualitative research, and especially participatory research. They can help you to identify what other (or more appropriate) activities, techniques, or methods can be added to help design your research project in the best way possible.

Finally, when the Manual is to be "repackaged," it needs to be durable and user-friendly (for instance, able to be photocopied easily). You should consult local researchers to see what they feel is the best, particularly if the Manual is to be used in the field, not just the classroom.

Chapter Two

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FOR GENDER IN EDUCATION

In one family, the mother did not like the fact that both she and her husband were illiterate. "All children must be educated at least till Grade 10." But then why is she not sending her children to school? "How can I? We are hardly ever there in the village and education hardly has any role in our profession (as street sellers and beggars). It is essential to involve children in begging as people tend to be more sympathetic towards them." Her husband adds, "Moreover, the village school is hardly functional. Teachers come and go as they please. The government hardly has any control over them." Like her mother, the daughter too does not see education as relevant in her life. This applies to her brothers as well. "There is no difference between boys and girls. Both are equally important in our kind of work[1]."

I. What is Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research is one type of social research. Social research is the process whereby we produce new knowledge about the social world using a systematic, "scientific" process. This process usually contains seven overall steps, namely:

1. Choosing a general topic;
2. Focusing a project or area of interest, such as identifying what important question or questions need to be answered;
3. Designing your study;
4. Collecting your information;
5. Analyzing your information;
6. Interpreting findings and drawing conclusions; and
7. Informing others in a report.[2]

Why is this systematic research process necessary? Many of us learn about the world around us based on what our parents, teachers, or others have told us; what we have learned from personal experiences; what we have read in books or magazines; what we have seen in movies or on television; and our own common sense. While in most cases the knowledge that we gain from these alternative "ways of knowing" is often correct, knowledge based on research is more likely to be true and has fewer potential errors. Through good research, we can gain information that is more objective and free of bias (for instance, free of the opinions of persons in authority), free of the traditional ways of knowing or understanding (such as free of traditional gender norms and beliefs that may discriminate against women), and free from the effects of distorted information in the media. Good research also means that we need to ask many people, rather than just relying on our own, limited experiences. Social research, and qualitative research especially, is thus a process for producing new knowledge about the world around us in more structured, organized, and systematic ways than these alternatives.[3]

1. Jha J, Jhingran D. *Elementary Education for the Poorest and other Deprived Groups: The Real Challenge of Universalization. Centre for Policy Research*, New Delhi, 2002, p. 87.
2. Neuman WL. *Social Research Methods*. Allyn amd Bacon. Neeham Heights, Massachusetts. 1991, p. 10.
3. Ibid. p. 11

In doing qualitative research:

> we are trying to understand the world *from the perspective of those living in it*, whether this is the world of a teacher managing a crowded classroom, a girl trying to go to school, or a family deciding not to send their children to school;
>
> we are *looking for reasons and assumptions—the why—behind what people say, what they do, and what they choose not to do* with respect to a situation or decision and usually based on their experiences or perceptions (for example whether they value education, their own experiences in school, or their beliefs about the roles and responsibilities of girls and boys in the family);
>
> we are focusing on *the processes—the how—of an activity* by exploring the interactions between people and their environments, or between an intervention and its setting; the ways in which decisions are made and actions are implemented; and how people and institutions (such as schools) are changing (or not) as a result of an innovation, new experience, or a new understanding (such as how gender affects access, retention, and learning achievement); thus
>
> we are *building increasingly more comprehensive and dynamic pictures* so that we can understand *under what circumstances* parents, children, teachers, or others make the decisions they do.

Qualitative research, therefore, is the process whereby we try to understand the context in which decisions, actions, and events occur.[4] Its important characteristics are listed below.

> *Qualitative research aims to be cumulative*, to describe a situation and the factors underlying and guiding it, over different times, and in different circumstances.
>
> *Qualitative research is holistic*, focusing on collecting a variety of in-depth information so that the researcher is able to see behind a person's surface behaviour to his or her expectations, beliefs, and intentions that determine it.[5]
>
> *Qualitative research assumes that people rarely act, or fail to act, for only one reason*. It tries to untangle the subtle differences in attitudes, values, and expectations, as well as conditions in the wider school, family, and community environments to understand how these interact to determine what people do.
>
> *Qualitative research* also *assumes that people generally act logically, according to the world as they see it*. It seeks to understand what people's underlying explanations for what they do are, and how these affect decisions about important issues, such as sending daughters to school or sending boys into the labour force. In this way, it can more appropriately relate goals, like those of EFA and gender equality, to the practicalities of how people live.

II. Qualitative and Quantitative Research

This manual should be used along with, not instead of, quantitative research. Such studies focus on determining "how many," or the magnitude of a problem, by using such tools as surveys. Quantitative (statistical) research is important. To say "many girls in this country do not go to school" is less likely to mobilize action than saying "1.2 million girls in this country do not go to school, and those from rural areas represent a statistically significant number." Qualitative information can complement this quantitative picture by allowing you to deepen your understanding of why, how, and under what circumstances these girls do not attend

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4. Yoddumnern-Attig B, Attig G, Boonchalaksi W. *Benefits and Precautions in Qualitative Research.* In: Yoddumnern-Attig B, Attig G, Boonchalaksi W (eds.), A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods. Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991, p. 3.

5. Podhisita C. Theoretical. Terminological and Philosophical Issues in Qualitative Research. In: Yoddumnern-Attig B, Attig G, Boonchalaksi W (eds.), A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods. Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991, p. 11.

school. This deeper understanding can lead to actions to get all girls in school, to help them remain there, and to learn to their fullest.

Comparison between quantitative and qualitative research

	Quantitative research	Qualitative research
Research planning		
Theory-research relationship	Structured: logically sequential phases Deduction (theory precedes observation)	Open, interactive Induction (theory emerges from observation)
Psychological researcher-subject interaction	Neutral, detached, scientific observation	Empathetic; Identifies with the respondent's perspective
Physical researcher-subject interaction	Distant, detached	Close proximity
Role of subject studied	Passive	Active
Data collection		
Research design	Structured, closed	Unstructured, open
Representativeness representative	Statistically representative	Single cases not statistically
Recording instrument	Standardized for all subjects; objective	Varies according to subjects' interests
Nature of the data	"Hard," objective, standardized	"Soft," rich, deep
Data analysis		
Object of the analysis	The variable; impersonal	The individual; personal
Aim of the analysis	Explain variation ('variance')	Understand the subjects
Statistical techniques	Used intensely	Not used
Production of results		
Data presentation	Statistical tables	Extracts from interviews and texts
Generalizations	Correlations; Causal models	Classifications and typologies
Scope of results	Generalizable	Specific

Source: Corebetta P. 2003. Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques. Sage Publications, London. 2003, p. 37.

III. Why is Qualitative Research Important for Gender in Education?

The qualitative research process can highlight "hidden" gender issues and bring them into the spotlight. For example, parents, teachers, and often girls and boys themselves may deny that they are biased in terms of gender, and they may be quite truthful that this is what they believe. It is difficult for them to see a "problem" when it has become a normal, ingrained part of their lives. But asking probing questions such as "Are there alternatives to girls doing the housework?" or "What would happen if a boy did the housework?" can cause them to reflect, reconsider, and look more closely at their own assumptions. They can begin to see how traditional gender norms can affect their decisions and behaviours, which is an essential first step on the road to gender equality.

Qualitative research can distinguish those factors that are important from those that are necessary. For example, many actions are now being taken to "get all girls in school" (such as community outreach, sanitation improvements, feeding programmes, scholarships, and female teachers). These actions are very *important*, and they make a difference in girls' *access* to school. However, the results of a good qualitative study may show that what is *necessary* is for girls to *remain* in school and *succeed* in sufficient numbers. It may also reveal what factors

affect their remaining in school, and what needs to be done to ensure that they stay in school, learn well, and complete their education. From this high level of success, parents, daughters, and the community will come to *expect* girls to go to school and complete their education. The same situation applies to boys in societies where they are encouraged to begin their working lives early, without completing their primary education.

Qualitative research findings can challenge longstanding assumptions. Because qualitative information often comes in the form of people's beliefs, decisions, and actions—rather than statistics—they can be interpreted and "fine tuned" in several ways. For example, while a study might show that some families are desperately in need of food—and this may affect girls' access to school—results may also show that these same families are actually sending their daughters to school, and they are also the ones who show the most optimism for the future. They view girls' education as a long-term investment, rather than as a short-term liability.

Qualitative analysis is important for looking at, and answering, the question: "What is the result of doing that, in this particular time and place, and with this particular group of people?" For example, it moves beyond simply saying that "gender bias exists in textbooks" to focus more heavily on "what is the effect of this gender bias on girls' learning achievement, retention, and choices in their lives." Will they believe that they should be satisfied with only being mothers and housewives, rather than pursuing a career and raising a family? Does this belief hold for children living in urban or rural areas, or those with diverse backgrounds and abilities?

Above all, **qualitative research can explain why a certain phenomenon is happening.** For instance, while a quantitative study may show that only 20 per cent of the girls in a village attend school, a well-designed qualitative study can reveal the major reasons *why* this is occurring. Similarly, girls may score consistently low on mathematics examinations, but this can partially (if not largely) be explained by classroom observations that reveal that teachers rarely call on girls to answer mathematics questions, and they may actually say in class that, "It is enough if the boys in class understand the concept. They'll need it in their future work."

IV. The Gender Analysis Process and Qualitative Research

Gender analysis is a process for understanding the differential place of women and men in society, as well as of girls and boys in the classroom. While it can be used for quantitative studies, gender analysis is particularly suited for qualitative research because it seeks answers to the "why and how" of gender inequality.

The following is an example of using gender analysis in qualitative research at a macro-level for policy and programmes. The Status of Women Canada, a government agency responsible for policy analysis and development on gender in that country, developed an essentially qualitative *gender-based analysis* approach for assessing

> *"…the differential impact of proposed and/or existing policies, programmes and legislation on women and men. It makes it possible for policy to be undertaken with an appreciation of gender differences, of the nature of relationships between men and women and of their different social realities, life expectations and economic circumstances. It is a tool for understanding social processes and for responding with informed and equitable options."*[6]

Though not aimed at education *per se*, the analytical process can certainly be applied to this sector. The process is considered to be a *cycle*: both guiding creation of new gender-responsive policy, as well in assessing existing national and local (community, school, NGO) policy. Its eight steps are not meant to be used as a check-list, but to stimulate reflection and further

6. *Status of Women Canada. Gender-based Analysis: A Guide for Policy-Making.* Government of Canada, 1996, p. 4. Revised edition, 1998, is obtainable from: www.swc-efc.gc.ca/pubs/gbaguide/gbaguide_e.html

inquiry. Moreover, the steps assume that those responsible (such as Gender Focal Points) will adapt the method to their own style and circumstances.[7] Each step includes a series of analytical questions. The questions listed below are adaptations from the original version, tailored to the context of gender and education by way of example.

1. **Identify, Define and Refine the Issue:** "…begin with identifying a problem or an opportunity requiring policy development or analysis …; determining the nature, scope and importance of the issue within the context of the current policy environment."[8]

   - What is the education issue, problem, or opportunity (such as access, learning outcomes, progression to secondary education) around which the policy needs to be assessed or generated? How is the issue expressed in terms of its relevance to gender equality and equity?
   - Who says it is an issue, problem, or opportunity? Do men and women as well as boys and girls differ in how they talk about it and the importance they give to it? Do rural women see it differently than urban ones?
   - Why has it become important at this time, or in this place?
   - What are understood to be the causes or factors linked to the issue? Do these differ between male and female stakeholders, such as do women teachers or girl students see the factors the same way as male teachers and students?
   - What are the factors influencing the issue? Do these factors relate differently to men/boys and women/girls?
   - How does your professional background, experience, and gender as a researcher affect your understanding of, and ability to address, the issue? Does it make a difference in how you ask the question and what kind of answers you can expect to get if the analysis being done from inside the system (such as through the Ministry's Gender Unit), or from outside, such as by a research team contracted by donors?

2. **Define the Desired – or Actual – Policy Outcomes:** "…examine the degree to which the policy can meet or hinder other policies or government objectives. Outcome indicators, monitoring processes, partners involved in defining outcomes and in being accountable for achieving outcomes are usually considered."[9]

   - What outcomes does the government or community leadership want to achieve by the education policy? Are these outcomes differentiated in terms of gender equality and equity? Have gender-sensitive baselines been done to see where boys and girls may be in different positions with respect to the seriousness of the issue and types of outcomes needed?
   - What outcomes would other stakeholders expect, such as parents, teachers, students, or children outside the system? Are these different as expressed for and by men/boys and women/girls?
   - Are specific outcomes suitably defined or focused in terms of recognizing gender differences and helping to "break down the societal barriers or ameliorate current inequitable situations" as perceived by male/female stakeholders?
   - Are there other, perhaps better, ways of achieving the desired outcomes rather than through policy (e.g., through different application of resources? better training of programme implementers?)

7. Ibid. p. 11.
8. Ibid. p. 13.
9. Ibid. p. 16

- Does the policy complement or undermine other policies, values, priorities of the government in terms of gender equity and/or EFA?
- What factors in the policy "environments" (school, community, physical, etc.) might be limiting expected policy outcomes?
- What monitoring and accountability systems are in place to ensure policy implementation and outcomes? How effective are they, including their ability to distinguish effects on and for men/boys and girls/women? What is limiting/facilitating their use in general, and in terms of gender sensitivity?

3. **Define the Information and Consultation Inputs:** "…look at what knowledge is needed and what sources can best provide it. Available and relevant data sources, and partners in data gathering and analysis, are identified."[10]
   - What do we need to know about the issue or problem being addressed by the policy, in terms of its possibly different impacts on females and males? What and whose values are influencing it?
   - What information is required to ensure all perspectives are taken into account, especially those of the most marginalized, excluded parts of the affected community? How can we ensure information is gender-sensitive in terms of who provides it and how they are allowed/able to express it?
   - Who should be involved in deciding what information is included, how it is collected, and from whom?
   - What information is already available? In what formats? Is it disaggregated by sex? What sources of new data are available? What data have to be collected first-hand?
   - Who will be partners in information collection and analysis? What has to be done to enable especially excluded groups and women/girls to participate: resources, training, opportunities for collaborative action?
   - Is the policy expressed in such a way to enable collecting appropriate data to analyze its relevance and outcomes? Is it clear enough; broken down enough?

4. **Conduct Research:** "…hone and clarify …the type of analysis to be done…. Tasks and methods of analysis and approaches to data presentation are discussed."[11]
   - What is the analysis seeking to learn about the policy, such as its cost or benefit, social impact, effectiveness, etc.? In all of these, is gender reflected in the types of assumptions made, questions asked, and people involved?
   - Who can and should define the research focus and questions? Are they in a position to do so? Have women and other vulnerable groups, especially where tradition or other factors discourage their input, been given appropriate support, resources and/or training?
   - What are the main and sub-questions? How do the nature of the questions, the scope of the policy, capacity of the research team, and availability of data influence the research design?
   - Who will be involved in the research? In what capacity: as participants, as data sources, as commentators on the analysis and interpretation, etc.?
   - What methods will be used to ensure the security and participation of the full range of affected people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized? What language will be used (local or national, formal or informal, etc.)?

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10. Ibid. p. 19.
11. Ibid. p. 21.

5. **Develop and Analyze Options:** "…options indicated by the research are articulated and refined. Implications and outcomes of options are identified and analyzed (and) relationship of options to, and their impact on, existing policies, programmes and legislation…. Responsibility for implementation and the resources required are also examined."[12]

   - What options for maintaining, extending, or changing the policy are indicated by the research/analysis?
   - How are these research options likely to complement or impede existing policies, programmes, or practices, including those in other sectors relevant to women and girls, such as health and security, inclusion in decentralized agencies, income generation, etc.?
   - How do these relate to (change, influence, etc.) the initially expected policy outcomes with respect to gender-equity and education goals? Do the options imply unplanned outcomes, negative or positive, which are gender-related?
   - How are the values of the education system and various stakeholders likely to influence (limit or promote) the range and acceptability of options? For example, where the culture considers gender-stereotyped opinions correct, how can options favouring gender neutral textbooks be phrased or displayed?
   - Are the options or implications "realistic" in terms of current government and community resources, capacities, and other priorities?
   - What do the options require in terms of different advocacy and mobilization strategies, such as more resources or further technical capacities?

6. **Make Recommendations/Decision-seeking:** "…often a collaborative effort; sometimes draws directly on public input and consultation. The rationale for the recommendation is derived from the analysis of options, and presents the recommendation in terms of its favourable and unfavourable impacts and implications, and the policy environment."[13]

   - Who needs to be consulted and/or active in the selection of the options to present, either because they will be affected or because they will have to take action?
   - On what basis will the recommendation be made: ideological/philosophical (e.g., reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child), pragmatic (because it will "work" better), political (because certain constituencies will be positively or negatively affected if it does or does not happen), economic (because it is more cost-effective), etc.?
   - What kinds of documentation and/or presentations are needed to support the recommendation, *remembering that the best a recommendation can do is "convince" policy makers; it can never force a certain action?*
   - What characteristics of the policy and programme delivery "environments" need to be taken into account in making the recommendation, such as other resource and| time pressures, internal disagreement about appropriate policy directions, strains of decentralization, etc.?

7. **Policy Communication:** "…can play a significant role in [policy] acceptance and implementation. Timing, choice of media, language and public involvement are important to ensure that government intent and the impacts of the policy, programme and legislation are understood. The participation and acknowledgement of partners and consulting groups can be a key part of communicating policies inside government and to the public."[14]

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12. Ibid. p. 23.
13. Ibid. p. 25.
14. Ibid. p. 27.

- What is the core of the message needing to be communicated?
- To whom does it need to be communicated, including those who will need to implement the required activities, those who are expected to participate, and those on whom it may have an impact, either positive or negative?
- How does the recommendation have to be tailored to ensure it is understood by these different stakeholders, especially the most excluded and vulnerable and for whom the changes might imply risk? How does it need to be differentiated for male and female audiences?
- Through what channels and modalities will the policy changes be communicated, and how interactively (such as will feedback be invited)?

To promote the use of qualitative gender research findings for policy communication and development:

- identify and relate the relevance of your research findings to the existing policy climate (why are they important);
- decide how to highlight the gender implications of your research findings and their policy implications in an interesting, yet non-threatening, manner;
- create message(s) that clearly address the needs and interests of both women and men (decision makers and the general public);
- design communication strategies that reach both women and men (decision makers as well as the general public) and including aspects of appropriate timing, media selection and coverage, as well as language;
- decide how the participation and contributions of both women and men in the research, policy development, and analysis processes will be acknowledged and communicated;
- decide how to involve organizations, which share similar equality-seeking goals, in the communication and policy development process; and
- decide how to ensure that examples, language, and symbols used in the communication process are gender-sensitive and appropriate.

8. Assess the Quality of the Analysis: "…review the analysis process."[15]

- Who will establish the criteria for judging the quality of the analysis and the relevance, appropriateness, and feasibility of the advice developed from it?
- Who is accountable for tracking results, and to whom? Does this include only policy makers, system managers, or school heads? How much focus needs to, or can, be given to accountability to user-beneficiaries of the policy and recommendations?
- Who else needs to be involved in this and what resources, capacities and arrangements have to be provided to enable them to do so?

In conducting qualitative research for a gender analysis, the challenge is thus to create the questions and develop a research process that will produce valuable information that can lead to actions to support gender equality. An important, initial step in this process is identifying what priority gender issues should be the focus of our qualitative research.

15. Ibid. p. 29.

V. Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research

No matter whether it is a qualitative or quantitative investigation, the main source of data for all researchers is the 'subject' which may include individuals, groups, communities, or other types of organizations. By providing personal information, subjects help to create mutual understanding and shared benefits for the researcher, other people within the subject's and/or researcher's society, and, in certain cases, the world at large.[16]

In obtaining information from subjects, the researcher must keep in mind several crucial considerations regarding her (or his) own ethical position and its responsibilities which form a part of the data collection and reporting process. Each subject has her own dignity and worth as a human being, and safeguarding her welfare, at least as regards her participation in the research process, is one of a researcher's paramount ethical responsibilities. Other key issues which surround a researcher's freedom of inquiry and communication center on her own roles, research competency, objectivity in reporting findings, and considerations of the best interests of colleagues and society.

Roles and Responsibilities of Researchers

In communicating about a research activity, each researcher must observe a set of responsibilities. The first of these arises in deciding the objectives and purposes of a research study. In general, objectives are the measurable outcomes a researcher wants to attain in conducting her project, and they are developed in such a way that they do not infringe upon the rights and privacy of the subjects to be studied. Objectives are usually guided by a purpose which is the ultimate benefit to be gained from conducting the research. More often than not, researchers equate their objectives with the purpose, particularly if the research is conducted only for the sake of increasing the knowledge of the researcher, her academic colleagues or to test a certain theory. In this case, subjects are delegated to the role of 'guinea pigs' who serve a useful purpose for the researcher, but that is about all.

On ethical terms, though, while a project's objectives may be in the interest of the research, the project's purpose should reflect *the realistic, potential benefits to be gained by the subject(s) and/or the society in which the subject(s) live.* In short, subjects become beneficiaries of the research process, not simply participants.

Confidentiality

No matter how one puts it, collecting research data involves an 'invasion of privacy.' A researcher must be sensitive, objective, and realistic in protecting the confidentiality of her subjects. The purpose of qualitative research is to identify important behavioural patterns that will help build theories of human behavior. It is *not* to identify the subjects who are producing such behaviours. The researcher's foremost responsibility is thus to protect the confidentiality of her subjects, usually be restricting the number of outside persons who know about or come into contact with a subject so that personal information cannot be used against the person or group. All information that is not already generally known, or which could be damaging to the subject, therefore, should be kept strictly confidential. Information obtained from subjects should be discussed only among research team members and only for research purposes. Written and oral reports are a necessary research outcome, but they should only include a general reporting of relevant data necessary to fulfill the research objectives. If a researcher needs to use the subject's name (more common in the case of organizations and communities), official permission must be sought and granted. In any case and at the beginning of the research process, researchers are responsible for informing subjects not only about the nature of the investigation, but more importantly about the exact means by which information will be kept confidential.

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16. Sirirassamee B. *Ethical Responsibilities in Qualitative Research.* In: Yoddumnern-Attig B, Attig G, Boonchalaksi W (eds.), A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods. Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991, p. 58-63.

The most common and practical strategy used to protect a subject's confidentiality is to code a subject numerically or alphabetically using some system which does not contain the subject's name. The only person who knows this coding system is the researcher (principal investigator), herself. But sometimes removing a subject's name is not enough. The characteristics and circumstances surrounding a person's life, for instance, can be enough to indirectly disclose the subject. This is especially the case where certain circumstances are out of the ordinary and unique to that person (or even a small set of subjects) and/or in the case of small communities where the subject can be identified through a process of elimination. In this case, certain details about the informant, which will have no effect on research findings or outcome, can be altered (such as place of residence, age family composition, marital status, etc.).

What is not realized, or seriously considered, is that by abiding by strict codes of confidentiality, a greater amount of data a good quality information can be obtained. People are more willing to share their ideas, attitudes, emotions and beliefs if they are absolutely certain from the outset that their anonymity will be strictly protected. When doubts about confidentiality arise, data quantity and quality decline.

The Welfare of Respondents

Another important ethical consideration is subject welfare which includes organizations and other resources from which data are collected. Researchers often work in different contexts ranging from communities and factories to political parties and special interest groups. In the process of collecting data, conflicts may arise between different parties (school teachers and parents, for example). Where research findings may result in undesirable consequences for the subjects, it is the researcher's responsibility to detect and remove or minimize them.

Legal and Moral Standards

One duty of a researcher is to familiarize herself as much as possible about the legal and moral standards of the research community in order to avoid violating important written and unwritten social rules. Moreover, the researcher also needs to keep in mind that the moral and legal standards which make up her society and culture may not be the same as those of her research community. Nonetheless, those of the research community must prevail, and it is necessary that the researcher find ways of detecting and correcting any problems in these areas. One method is to recruit field assistants from the area who will not only serve as informants. They will also act as informal teachers for the researcher in helping her to learn about and abide by important community standards.

Another important legal and moral consideration is informed consent which is exceedingly important in qualitative studies aimed at uncovering in-depth information. Obtaining subject consent is perhaps the most important researcher responsibility, since it is a prerequisite for conducting, or ending, a project. Free and informed consent involves three important aspects. First, free consent includes the condition that respondents are not influenced by the actual or preconceived possibility that services they would receive in the normal course of events, or rights they have, might be withdrawn if they refuse to cooperate in a study. Second, free consent also includes the provision that subjects may stop their cooperation at any point in the research process without any actual or perceived repercussions. Lastly, informed consent includes the conditions that subjects are told the purposes and all procedures of the study in advance. Subjects must also be given enough time to reflect on the study, its objectives and activities; to ask any questions they might have; and to receive full and truthful answers before they finally agree to, or withdraw from, the project.

In some countries, assurances concerning the use of human subjects and the obtainment of free and informed consent must be officially and legally obtained before any project receives funding or commences. In other nations where such stringent regulations do not exist, researchers must take it upon themselves, and their consciences, to routinely obtain free and informed consent as a part of their own research skills and responsibilities.

Subject Compensation

Whether or not to compensate subjects for their time and cooperation in participating in a project is one area that has not been decided upon. In some localities, it is customary to give some sort of gift to respondents, while in others this is considered an unusual procedure. Compensation can be in the form of money, gifts in kind, or services to the individual or community in which the subject resides. These are usually not of great value, since they should not be used as an undue inducement to get people to participate and give their consent to be studied. This is especially the case if the research involves a certain degree of risk on the part of the subject. To avoid this problem, researchers often wait until after the project is over before presenting any gifts of appreciation. These gifts are not only meant to compensate subjects, but also as a sincere thank you for their time and efforts which might very well have gone for more economically valuable pursuits. Compensation for research purposes, therefore, must abide by the gift giving rules of the society in which the study takes place as well as the nature of the research itself. No strict rules exist, except those which the researcher holds within herself.

Reporting and Public Statements

In presenting knowledge or research findings to the public, through either direct or indirect means, the researcher must remember that her own knowledge is also limited. She has a responsibility to report findings accurately and avoid exaggeration, sensationalism, superficiality, and other forms of inaccurate reporting. Precise statements must be made concerning the research project's procedures, methods and sample, particularly if a project's findings are reported over mass media and may cause public unease.

One common ethical question that arises is 'how much of the data should be reported.' In reporting data for these types of problems or others of a similar nature, the researcher must remember that her prime responsibility is to analyze data and report on this analysis. She should limit the amount of reported data to only that which is directly relevant. The indiscriminant or overly extensive reporting of respondents' personal information, even when anonymity is secured, serves no purpose and is often unethical despite the intent. What must be remembered is that the borderline between illustrative description and respondent exploitation is a very thin one, and many researchers unknowingly cross it.

The ethical and conscientious researcher generally knows what data should be reported and what should simply be a part of the analysis as necessary illustrative material. The general rule, though, should be the least explicitly said the better, and only that which is absolutely necessary for allowing an audience to understand the researcher's interpretations.

In conclusion, for every type of research and every researcher, ethical considerations are crucial in planning and undertaking projects and in reporting findings. The researcher must remember that the subjects who have been providing information for the research endeavor are to be honored, respectedm and thanked for their contributions by all team members, not treated as isolated dehumanized objects of study. A number of important ethical considerations have been noted in this chapter, but ultimately the degree with which they are abided by depends upon the quality of the researcher herself, her conscience and her concern for the welfare of others.

Ethical Issues Checklist[17]

1. **Explaining purpose.** How will you explain the purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used in ways that are accurate and understandable?
    - What language will make sense to participants in the study?
    - What details are critical to share? What can be left out?
    - What is the expected value of your work to society?

17. Patton MQ. Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, 3rd Edition. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California. 2002. pp. 408-409.

2. **Promises and reciprocity.** What's in it for the interviewee?
   - Why should the interviewee participate in the interview?
   - Do not make promises lightly, for example, promising a copy of the tape recording or the report. *If you make promises, keep them.*
3. **Risk assessment.** In what ways, will conducting the interview put people at risk?

   Psychological stress?

   Legal liabilities?

   In evaluation studies, continued program participation (if certain things become known)?

   Ostracism by peers, program staff, or others for talking?

   Political repercussions?
   - How will you describe these potential risks to interviewees?
   - How will you handle them if they arise?
4. **Confidentiality.** What are reasonable promises of confidentiality that can be fully honoured? Know the difference between confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality means you know but won't tell. Anonymity means you don't know, as in a survey returned anonymously.
   - What things can you *not* promise confidentiality about, for example, illegal activities, evidence of child abuse or neglect?
   - Will names, locations, and other details be changed? Or do participants have the option of being identified?
   - Where will data be stored?
   - How long will data be maintained?
5. **Informed consent.** What kind of informed consent, if any, is necessary for mutual protection?
   - What are the guidelines of your local institutional review board or national ethics committee and/or their requirements, or those of an equivalent committee for protection of human subjects in research?
   - What has to be submitted, under what timelines, for approval, if applicable?
6. **Data access and ownership.** Who will have access to the data? For what purposes?
   - Who owns the data in an evaluation?
   - Who has right of review before publication? For example, of case studies, by the person or organization depicted in the case; of the whole report, by a funding or sponsoring organization?
7. **Interviewer mental health.** How will you and other interviewers likely be affected by conducting the interviews?
   - What might be heard, seen, or learned that may merit debriefing and processing?
   - Who can you talk to about what you experience without breaching confidentiality?
   - How will you take care of yourself?
8. **Advice.** Who will be the researcher's confidant and counselor on matters of ethics during a study? (Not all issues can be anticipated in advance. Knowing who you will go to in the event of difficulties can save time and bring comfort.)
9. **Data collection boundaries.** How hard will you push for data?
   - What lengths will you go to in trying to gain access to the data you want? What won't you do?

- How hard will you push interviewees to respond to questions about which they show some discomfort?

10. **Ethical versus legal.** What ethical framework and philosophy informs your work and ensures respect and sensitivity for those you study, beyond whatever may be required by law?

    - What disciplinary or professional code of ethical conduct will guide you?

Chapter Three

GENDER ISSUES FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

While good quality qualitative research is often time-consuming and labour-intensive, it is often very powerful. It can make visible to policy makers and the public the realities of effective learning, inclusive education, and gender equality as they affect the most vulnerable communities.

Consequently, it is important that education and gender researchers as well as evaluators—and those who assign them—focus on the most pressing issues. This section, therefore, discusses some of the priority gender issues identified in the region and globally, namely, constraints to gender equality, understanding and achieving "quality" education, and implementing school policy reform and programme innovations. These are by no means the ONLY priority issues that exist, but they are the most common. You are encouraged to also think about your own situation and what other important gender issues in education need to be explored and understood in your own community and country contexts.

I. Constraints to Gender Equality

Limited progress on gender equality (as opposed to equity) in the region's education system persists as a critical challenge.

> "Many of the countries in which girls' enrollment still lags have expressed a strong commitment to promote the education of girls, but their efforts are constrained by three challenges. First, as countries make progress in extending educational access to education, the marginal cost of reaching those still not served increases. Second, strategies that were successful in extending educational opportunity when access was low may not yield the same returns as the proportion of children out of school shrinks. Third, the nature of the problems girls face is changing. In many countries, the emphasis on raising initial enrollment is giving way to promoting the conditions that encourage girls' persistence and achievement in schooling."[1]

As this quotation suggests, there are many dimensions to the issue of equality. One is especially notable given its seriousness and its particular relevance to a qualitative research approach, that is, sexual harassment. According to the UNESCO Monitoring Report, more research on the *protection* aspect of schools as "safe havens" for vulnerable children, especially girls, remains an imperative.

> "…schools are often sites of intolerance, discrimination and violence. Girls are disproportionately the victims….closing the gender gap means confronting sexual violence and harassment of girls in schools"[2]

Sexual harassment is a growing problem for several countries in the region, one requiring more qualitative research into:

- *the nature of the harassment,* i.e., what is happening; who is involved and what various forms it is taking in and around the school; and to whom: which students (especially girls, but also boys), teachers, or parents (such as mothers being asked for favours to enhance their children's chances of enrolment or their grade scores); and

1. Chapman D. *Promoting education access, persistence, and achievement for girls: What works.* Paper presented at the SEAMEO-UNESCO Education Congress and Expo, 27-29 May 2004, Bangkok.

2. UNESCO. *Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality.* EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4. Paris. 2003. p. 143.

- the *dynamics of harassment*, i.e., the culture of silence and/or complicity which allows it to go unreported and unaddressed.

Both of these issues are linked to gender discrimination and unequal power relations in the school itself, as well as in the family, the workplace, and the wider community, which are creating obstacles to making the *fact* of harassment visible and to taking action.

Qualitative research in this area is especially relevant for two reasons.

- It is critical not simply to count the incidents (difficult to do, in any case), but to understand the subtleties of thinking and behaviour that allow victims to accept harassment and cause abusers to do it.
- Qualitative data are able to build these kinds of factors into a coherent and textured picture. This picture can help those in key mitigating positions (teachers and school heads, students, parents, etc.) to be sensitive to those irregularities in a classroom, school yard, or community setting that might identify children (and adults) who are in trouble.

Qualitative research here is also very difficult to do, however. Neither victims nor perpetrators are typically eager to talk. Direct observation is not usually an option. It is an area, therefore, where the analysis needs to:

- reflect an understanding of harassment in context;
- come to the core of the problem through more indirect channels; and
- set the results of the analysis in broad learning-for-protection terms by:
  - focussing on both victim and abuser sides of the relationship;
  - from the perspective of children being able to protect themselves; and
  - toward schools and communities establishing "cultures of equality and tolerance" through improved assessment, prevention, and intervention systems to protect children as well as teachers.

As a case in point, one country analysis done in Africa suggested a three-tiered strategy:

- Awareness raising campaigns at all levels that send clear messages explaining what sexual harassment is and making it clear that it is totally unacceptable whether it happens among teachers and students or among students themselves.
- Clear rules and regulations including sanctions should be set, disseminated, and reinforced.
- Pre- and in-service teacher training, including training of school directors and higher education management levels.

The analytical aspect of the pilot would explore several main issues.

- What was happening and, especially, how it was being dealt with.
- Who appeared to care, and who needed to care.
- Who were the victims, who the perpetrators.
- What were the conditions allowing it to happen, and to continue.
- What were the implications on/for everyone involved.

It would also assess each of the proposed interventions with respect to their individual and collective effectiveness, comprehensiveness, reach, and ability to introduce sustainable change.

II. Understanding and Achieving "Quality" Education

Education quality is a major issue across the region as Ministries grapple with the Dakar EFA Framework.

- What does it actually mean, in both general (global) and specific (national and classroom) terms?

- Does it mean different things for different children, for girls, for boys? In some cases, quality is felt to be achieved when more girls come to school; in others, it is achieved when those girls get good exam results; and for others, it is achieved when they go on to secondary level or graduate and find work.
- Irrespective of the criteria used to indicate quality, how can it be achieved?
- How do we know it is being achieved in each school and for each child? What are the quality indicators?

One lesson being learned in the region is that there are no easy, nor single, right answers to these questions: the matter of quality has to be worked out by each society progressively over time. Another lesson is that it needs to happen at every level of the system; *establishing quality targets and indicators overall requires establishing them vis-à-vis*:

- *quality of schools*: accessible, good construction, adequate and safe water and sanitation facilities, appropriate furnishings and materials;
- *quality of teachers*: professionally well-trained, child-centred, gender-sensitive and responsive, democratic, and responsible persons, supported by competent teacher-friendly school managers and supervisors;
- *quality of curriculum*: relevant, age and grade appropriate, free of bias (gender, ethnic, social, sexual), accurate, life skills and activity-based;
- *quality of community involvement*: informed and responsible, regular, inclusive of all sub-groups including women and men, meaningful;
- *quality of the system*: inclusive, appropriate, and equality-framed policies; free of bias (gender, ethnic, social, sexual); technically sound and child-centred pre- and in-service teacher training; informed and learning through continuous planning, monitoring and revision processes.

The region is clearly not without good intentions and creative, professionally thoughtful, innovations. Understanding and finding constructive ways through such innovations—especially those requiring changes in basic values and attitudes of parents, head masters and curriculum designers—is a critically important task of qualitative research. Those introducing change need to look *behind the surface of their innovation and its apparent straightforwardness* to see if and how it is happening, and with what effects.

In many cases, for example, school quality initiatives have included new teaching approaches aimed at making learning more "joyful." Analyses of these programmes, in several countries, are starting to suggest similar and mixed results:

- some children—girls and boys—and teachers are enjoying classes more, with greater interaction both among themselves and with the learning materials;
- some parents, misunderstanding the methodology, are complaining that the children are doing little traditional learning of the basics, little more than "singing and dancing;"
- some parents are less concerned about their children's absence from school (especially for girls), and more inclined to keep them out to do other tasks that are seen as more useful than "singing and dancing;"
- some teachers who have learned some of the techniques of the method, but not the underlying principles, are in fact doing little more than "singing and dancing;"
- some children are actually learning better, in more positive, interactive, and activity-based ways;
- some children are learning more critical thinking and life skills, but doing less well on national memory-based exams;
- some head masters are critical of teachers' lack of discipline and order in "joyful" classes;
- some teachers are uncomfortable with the contradiction between the interactive methods of the training and the structured requirements of the curriculum.

Making sense of such apparent contradictions, in ways that enable researchers/evaluators to advise ministries, donors, and schools about what to do with an innovation to make it more gender-responsive, is a major and urgent responsibility, particularly given the time and resources being given them. It is one only realizable through on-the-ground, in-class, and qualitative information collection and analysis.

III. Implementing School Policy Reform and Programme Innovation

All countries in the region are undertaking some kind of reform within their education systems. Most are working their way through more than one such initiative, both major and more limited: EFA National Plans of Action; education sector/sector-wide reform; introduction of HIV/AIDS, gender equality, and life-skills into curricula and teacher training; promotion of decentralization and community-school linkages; creation of Child-Friendly Schools; etc.

In many, if not all, of these efforts, research and analysis tend to be reasonably intensive (sometimes extensive) in the beginning. In most countries, efforts are also being made to track quantitative progress: increases in enrolment, retention, and completion, especially for girls; curriculum modules completed and distributed; teachers trained; schools refurbished and classrooms built; school-community management committees set up; etc.

However, considerably less is being done to "look behind" the numbers at the more qualitative issues, such as:

- at why numbers are going up for some children and not for others (especially girls);
- whether those children being retained are learning any better, or whether those who complete their primary education can actually read, write, and demonstrate learning-to-learn life skills;
- at the quality, relevance, accessibility, and gender-sensitivity of materials, or if/how they are used in the classroom;
- whether the trained teachers are applying this learning in the classroom *and* changing the learning outcomes of children accordingly for girls and boys;
- who is coming to the improved schools, whether patterns of exclusion are continuing with only better-off children (or mainly boys) getting into these; or
- whether School Management Committee members include active participation of the most marginalized families, and women, and whether they are providing more than their free labour or extra fees to school management.

Also, there tends to be much less qualitative research as *a core element of reform implementation* itself, as formative tools for determining:

- continuing validity of the initial design assumptions;
- the quality and relevance of inputs, as well as whether and how well they are being designed, delivered, and used;
- how well critical barriers to, and facilitators of, the reforms are being identified and addressed (removed/mitigated and encouraged, respectively);
- the results being achieved; in particular, what differences reforms are making in access and learning outcomes, especially for excluded children; whether such reforms are sustainable and at what costs; and
- whether and how effectively steps are being taken to consolidate and institutionalize the changes at all levels, especially in terms of strengthening capacity for continuing the reforming process.

Examples of Innovations of Concern in the Region

Effectiveness of Re-Entry, Equivalency, and Bridging Programmes

Two sets of questions pertinent to qualitative research persist here:

1. From a needs assessment/planning perspective:

- What kinds of re-entry or bridging courses work most effectively, for which kinds of children (girls and boys), in getting them back into the formal system?
- How should they be aligned with the formal school in terms of their timing (e.g., held on successive weekends or as vacation sessions) and of preparing the teachers who receive them back (especially where these children are typically old for the grade level and less adaptable to classroom regimes)?
- What types of programme content and delivery methods work best for those who will not go back?
- What type of assessment can determine which children are in which group?
- What should the curriculum include: how much of the regular school curriculum and how much of a specifically life/livelihood-oriented one, with links to the community (e.g., mentoring and apprenticeship), and an equivalency certification?

2. From a monitoring and evaluation perspective:

- What kinds of re-entry or bridging courses *are proving* most effective, and for which types of children, in getting them back into the formal system and/or providing them effective and relevant learning where they do not go back?
- Are the right children going, including girls; where programmes are proving successful, are well-performing children attending them as make-up classes (which is reported in some countries) and so taking up spaces?
- Are the best decisions being made in terms of placing children in re-entry versus equivalency programmes; to what extent are exclusions continuing, with some children being *perceived* as permanent drop-outs because they are girls, ethnic minority or rural poor children, children with disabilities, etc.?
- How are children responding to being in these programmes: do girls feel that they are second-class?
- Is there evidence that alternative or bridging programmes are *institutionalizing exclusion*, such as through hiring untrained or poorly-paid teachers, providing inadequate or irrelevant materials, or not creating a specifically tailored curriculum?
- What are the children doing after completing the programme? What difference has it made to them versus those out-of-school children who received no other intervention?

Effectiveness of Non-Formal Mechanisms for Promoting Gender Equality in the Community and in the Education of Girls

Almost all of the countries in the region are developing a version of the Community Learning Center (CLC) model as a means of delivering non-formal education to out-of-school youth, with special attention to girls, young adults, women, and mothers.

The numbers of participants are generally being tracked, and, in some cases, descriptive reports of courses taken and exit-assessments of learners' satisfaction are being made. Most analyses are fairly narrow and task-oriented, however, focusing on activities completed rather than on longer-term results achieved. More qualitative research is urgently needed:

- To monitor and assess the *relevance* of the courses to specific types of learners, girls and boys (are interactive needs assessments being done to tailor content and processes to participants' actual needs, both current and future), as well as to monitor and assess the *appropriateness* of the methods used for adolescent and adult learners (are participants being treated as children, for example, where the teacher/facilitators are from the formal school?);
- To ensure effective coordination between the programmes offered by the CLC and other initiatives in the community also focused on women's empowerment (e.g., primary health or mother-child programmes; income generating or small business-development projects); and

- To assess the role of the CLC as a mechanism for facilitating overall gender equality and inclusion goals, such as by mobilizing community discussion or mapping exercises, engaging women and men in political and policy debate, providing women-oriented programmes in communication, analysis and negotiation skills, effective management in violent and abusive settings, etc.

Relationship of ECCD to Success in Primary School

There is growing evidence that *good quality* support for learning in early childhood facilitates a stronger basis for later learning. Many countries are introducing Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) in a variety of forms, from nonformal, family-centred programming through to kindergarten programmes that are essentially an early start to primary school. However, questions remain to be well-answered as to:

- what "good quality" means in particular community, family, and programming contexts; and
- for which children and under what circumstances: what characteristics of children (girls and boys); attitudes, situations, and expectations of parents (mothers and fathers); type of learning programmes; nature of teachers, etc.

In one study in India, the "informality … and self-paced learning through activities" was helping children from poor families "adjust to the idea of a school as a learning environment."[3]

- Under what circumstances and through what specific interactions might this be happening elsewhere? To all poor children equally, and both girls and boys?
- The analysis also suggested that this "same informality", if continued through into the primary classes, should enable the children "to adapt themselves to the pressures of the formal system".
- What might be happening to children where the approach it is not being continued to the next stage?
- Might the impacts, negative and positive, on different types of children be different?
- Is such "informality" appropriate for more complex learning tasks?
- Is there an analogous situation for children moving from "child-friendly" primary schools to less-than friendly secondary?

Deciding and Assessing Content, Delivery Modes, and Application of Curriculum Reform

These are two very different questions here from a qualitative research perspective.

The first question requires a thorough policy review and situation analysis aimed at:

- looking at what the learning priorities are for the country's children and from a wide variety of perspectives (civil society, the various private and public "sectors," education experts, policy makers, etc.);
- looking at what already exists and where changes are needed; and
- looking at the capacity of the system to manage the new content and approach in terms of aspects like teaching practices and training, materials design and production, as well as delivery mechanisms and school infrastructure.

The second question is an even more complicated one from the perspective of implementation. It includes a number of dimensions:

- looking at the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the initial development process;

3. Ramachandran V. *Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education: Hierachies of Access. European Commission.* New Delhi. 2002. p. 90.

- looking at the appropriateness and quality of management of the phasing and try-out processes (e.g., did implementation begin at the right level, with the right schools, and was the process handled well, by the right mix of practitioners and users?);
- looking at the effectiveness and timeliness of the introduction to, and training of, teachers and, consequently, how well teachers are understanding and applying it;
- looking at the quality of the match between demands of the curriculum and capacities of the school and staff, such as appropriateness of time allocation/subject; relevance to especially excluded/hard to reach children; viability in incomplete schools;
- looking at acceptance, difficulties and strengths in terms of students using it and parents supporting it; and
- looking at the ability of the system to maintain required teaching manuals and learning materials, equipment, assessment tools, remedial programmes and adaptations (such as for children with special needs), etc.

The Use of Female Teachers as "the answer" to Girls' Participation

According to one assessment, "…there is strong suggestive evidence that moves toward equalizing gender balance among teachers will promote gender parity…"[4]

However, according to another assessment, whether a teacher is male or female is important, but only as a complement to their "regularity, commitment and motivation" especially at the primary level.[5]

- What is the truth about affirmative action efforts, or is there one?
- Under what circumstances?
- What are the effects on female teachers: do they see value in it? What do they see as the personal and social costs to them of being urged into the more difficult schools and made the "focal points" for girls? On what basis are they likely to stay on?
- What factors are making it "work" for some schools and teachers and not for others: salary, security, status, etc.?
- What are the implications for, or effects on, parental attitudes toward education, girls' education, the role of women, etc.?

Research on the link between the gender of the teacher and "who learns what" in the classroom is a further key area for qualitative research.

- How is the sex of the teacher mitigated by teaching style and ability to tailor to child's learning style irrespective of gender?
- What are other intervening factors, from the perspectives of teachers, children, parents, head masters, and others?
- Does ethnic background, and whether they are from the community, matter?
- Are female teachers good with boys? Can "either teach either" if well trained to understand gender bias and, in general, be child-centred?
- Is the cost-benefit of female teachers sometimes too high for them (in one study, for example, especially younger teachers were being given the heaviest workload, and being mistreated by male colleagues)?
- Is the cost-benefit too high for the community (e.g., where female teachers do not stay long because of exclusion, marriage, etc)?

4. UNESCO. *Gender and Education for All: The Lead to Equality. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4.* Paris. 2003. p. 60.

5. Ramachandran V. *Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education: Hierarchies of Access.* European Commission. New Delhi. 2002. p. 70.

Chapter Four

STEPS IN DOING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This part is the core of this manual in that it details, step-by-step, the major procedures for doing qualitative research that can be applied for exploring and understanding gender in education. Unlike the rest of the manual, which is essentially in the form of a narrative explanation, this part is expressly intended to be *an elaborated guide*. As such, the format is as uncluttered as possible, and the presentation attempts to guide you as you work through the steps. Please remember also that while these steps can be conducted by yourself, as the researcher, they can also be used as part of a "participatory research process" where the beneficiaries of your research (such as school teachers, school management committees, community leaders, students) are actively involved in undertaking each step with you.

I. Define the Nature and Scope of the Problem

Step 1: Identify the Problem

The first important task in developing a research study is to **identify the problem** you are facing. Why?

- *If there is no problem*, then you do not need to do research.
- This is not an academic exercise. We are not doing research for fun. We are trying to understand real situations and solve the practical problems girls and boys have in succeeding equally well in school. We do research to get accurate, comprehensive, and useful information that will help us to solve these problems.

A problem is a perceived difficulty, a feeling of discomfort about the way things are, or a discrepancy between what someone believes should be the situation (such as textbooks should not contain gender bias) and what is in reality the situation (textbooks portray girls as homemakers and boys as professional workers).

While all research is set in motion by a problem, not all problems require research. A potential research situation (or topic) arises when three conditions exist:

- There is a perceived discrepancy between what is and what should be.
- A question exists about why there is a discrepancy.
- At least two possible and plausible answers exist to the question.

The last point is very important because if there is only one possible and plausible answer to the question about the discrepancy, then there is no need to do research.[1]

However, perhaps the problem is that we do not know what the problem is.

In this case, your research simply starts further back. The purpose is *to explore*, and the approach is open-ended and inductive. You can do this by:

- gathering opinions from others—such as children, parents, and teachers—about what problems girls and boys face in entering school, remaining there, and learning to their fullest potential;

1. Fisher AA, Foreit JR. Designing HIV/AIDS Intervention Studies: An Operations Research Handbook. The Population Council Inc. Washington DC. 2004. p. 8.

- collecting sharable evidence, such as documents that reveal the problems of girls and boys in attending and succeeding equally in school, or textbooks that show an obvious gender bias;
- making observations, for instance, of classrooms to see whether they are "child-friendly," whether girls and boys participate equally in learning, or whether teachers show favouritism towards boys over girls overall or in certain subjects (like mathematics or science); and
- undertaking progressive analysis, that is, gradually putting together the information you collect from the methods above to begin identifying the major factors that may be affecting the education of girls and boys, as well as how these factors interrelate.

In defining and clarifying a problem, you will need to pay special attention to:

- the magnitude at which the problem exists, for instance, the number of children it affects;
- where does it occur most often (such as a geographic location like a rural community, or a specific place like a school playground or a textbook);
- what are the characteristics of the people who are affected by this problem (either as victims or perpetrators) or the location in which it occurs; and
- what are the possible reasons for the problem, and what potential solutions may exist (we will learn more about this in Step 4 below on Learning from Earlier Research).

If you do this "preliminary research" gradually, you will be able to identify and explain patterns and pictures of what the problems are for children and their learning.

Step 2: Ask – Why Do We Need Information?

The second important task is to justify why this problem this important, as well as how the information you obtain from your research will make a difference in understanding and solving the problem.

Justifying a Problem

Qualitative research can be expensive and time-consuming. Consequently, you need to ask yourself *why* the problem you want to study is important. You have probably already started this process as part of Step 1 above. However, it is also important to ask yourself a series of questions and then try to answer each of them.

- Is the problem you want to study a current and timely one? Does the problem exist now?
- How common is the problem? Does it affect many people living in many areas?
- Does the problem affect children, especially, or girls, in particular? Does it affect their families and schools?
- Does the problem exist because of current activities or programmes (e.g., because there is gender bias in textbooks, or because families do not think girls should be educated or boys are needed to work to earn the family's living)?
- Is the problem related to broad social, economic, or educational issues, such as unemployment, poverty, status of women, or education policies?
- Who else is concerned about the problem? Are top government officials concerned? Are community leaders concerned?

Write out your answers to these questions, and arrange them in one or two paragraphs that justify why your problem is important. Start by discussing the broad issues that justify the problem, and then start to focus on the more specific issues related to a particular group or setting.[2]

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2. Ibid. p. 17.

Determining What Information is Needed

Qualitative research studies often have different purposes and problems to solve. Consequently, they require different information. The type of information you seek to collect will determine your study's design and the methods to be used in collecting your information. Therefore, we need to ask the following questions before we design the research study.

- **Why do we need information? How will this information be used?** The most common reasons for needing information are to:
  - understand situations,
  - clarify problems,
  - define policy options,
  - monitor, correct, and improve actions, and
  - evaluate programmes or projects.
- **Who will use the information?**
  - Is it policy makers who need the information? If so, why?
  - Do teachers or school administrators need the information? If so, why?
  - Do funding agencies need the information? If so, why?
  - Does the community and its families want the information? If so, why?
  - Do children/students want the information? If so, why?

For example:

1. **Do we need basic information about the situation?** Are we trying to understand the problems and needs of the community or school, so we can design a better gender-responsive education programme and perhaps seek funding for it?
   - If so, then we will be doing "*needs assessment research."* This type of research will ask questions like the following.
     - What major problems exist in the school and in the community that may affect girls' and boys' access to school, their retention, and completion?
     - What knowledge or skills does the community (children and families) and school (teachers and students) have *now* to deal with these problems?
     - What *additional* knowledge or skills does the community and school need to have to deal with these problems?
     - What resources does the community and school have *now* to provide the needed knowledge and skills?
     - What additional resources are required to meet the educational needs of girls and boys equally?
     - What educational institutions currently exist?
     - How effective are these institutions in providing gender-responsive education?
     - Where can additional resources be acquired, for instance, from government, the private sector, or community groups?
     - What types of programmes should be designed and delivered through which institutions, and in which communities, in order to alleviate problems?
     - What are the advantages and disadvantages of different programmes?
     - What will it cost to use the different programmes?
   - After conducting this needs assessment, a report would answer these questions and make recommendations about how to design a programme to provide better education and skills training.
2. **Do we need information because we want to monitor the effectiveness of an ongoing programme,** and possibly make changes to the programme before it is completed?

- If so, then we will need to do a *formative evaluation*. Formative evaluation research will ask questions such as the ones below.
  - What is the underlying problem this programme was designed to address (such as gender bias in the curriculum or textbooks)?
  - As a result of the ongoing programme and its activities, is the original problem still relevant? Is it still a problem?
  - What are the specific goals of this programme? Are those goals still relevant to the problem?
  - How is the programme now conducted?
    - What are the roles and responsibilities of administrators, parents, teachers, and other groups?
    - What resources are provided to meet the goals of the programme?
  - Is the programme reaching the goals it was intended to reach? *Is it making a difference?*
    - What do parents, teachers, administrators, students, and other groups think about the programme?
  - What are the problems in the *way* the programme is now working?
  - How can the programme be improved?
  - Whose behaviour needs to be changed to improve the programme?
  - What additional resources are required to improve the programme?

3. Do we need information after a programme is complete to determine if it was successful?

- If so, then we will need to do a *summative evaluation*. Summative evaluation research will ask questions like the following.
  - What is the underlying problem this programme was originally designed to address (for instance, the low achievement levels of girls in math and science)?
  - At the end of the programme is the original underlying problem STILL a problem?
  - What were the specific objectives of this programme?
  - What means were used to achieve the objectives, such as new teaching and learning methods, revised materials, or increased community participation?
  - Did the programme meet its objectives?
  - What *changed* as a result of the programme?
    - Can we see changes in *learning?*
    - Can we see changes in *attitude or motivation?*
    - Can we see changes in *behaviour?*
    - Can we see changes in *policy?*
  - If the programme met its objectives, *what were the major factors* that helped it achieve the objectives?
  - If it did not meet its objectives, *what were the major problems?*
  - *What lessons have been learned* as a result of this programme meeting, or not meeting, its objectives?
  - What recommendations would we make for the future?

Whatever type of qualitative research we do, **we are always looking for lessons we can learn** from a situation. Failures as well as successes can give us useful information that can help us design better programmes in the future.

Step 3: Define the Time Available

The next important task is to find out **how soon** the information is required.

- Obviously, if we need the information very soon, the type of research we do will be different from what we can do over a longer period.
- The longer the time we have to do the research, the more people we can interview or observe, the more documents we can review, and the more information we can collect.

Step 4: Learn From Earlier Research

The next important task is to find out what **previous research** has been done about the problem identified in Step 1, as well as about the specific situation and questions in Step 2. This is an important activity.

- Sometimes a topic or problem may be too broad for conducting research; for instance, "gender in education" is a very broad topic. Consequently, you need to focus it down into a specific question, or questions, that you can feasibly answer through a qualitative research study, such as, "Are the text, language, and pictures in textbooks free of gender bias?" or "Are community leaders and parents equally supportive of boys and girls attending school?"
- We also do not want to waste our time asking questions for which there may already be answers. While learning about a topic and narrowing its focus, you will need to review reports of past research or other materials, such as the following.
  - Previous needs assessments and evaluations may be on file with government departments or with research institutions.
  - Non-governmental organizations or international agencies, such as UNESCO or UNICEF, may have commissioned research on the problem you have identified. We can interview staff members from these agencies to find this research, or, if we have access to the internet, review documents there.
- Find the strong and weak points in the previous research.
  - Is the information in the earlier research still valid, or is it out of date?
  - Has the situation changed substantially since the earlier research was done?
  - What questions does the earlier research answer?

If previous research provides answers, then we should ask ourselves: Do we still need to do new research, or can we use the earlier research?

  - If the earlier research answers some of our questions, then we can include this information—with references to the research—in the background to our own research study.
- If the earlier research does not answer all of our questions, then we can proceed to the next stage.

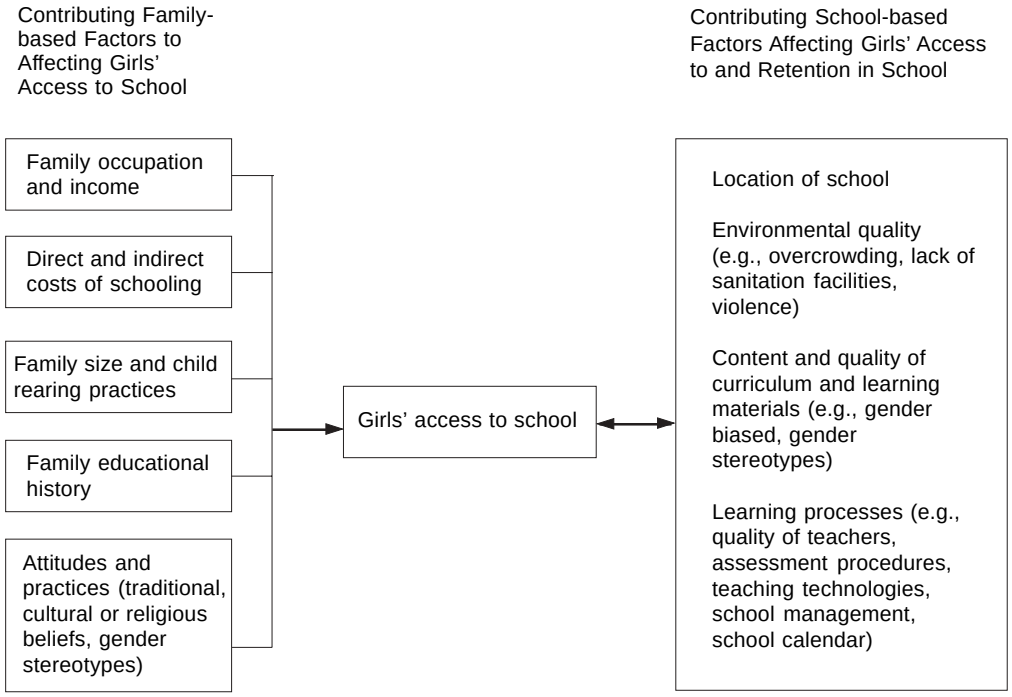
Step 5: Develop Your "Explanatory Framework"

As part of your learning from earlier research, you will probably uncover a lot of information about what may be causing a problem to exist. For instance, it may be related to the traditional roles and responsibilities of men and women (as well as boys and girls), to family income and

occupation, to a lack of school resources, to a lack of gender training for teachers, and so forth.

What you need to do now is to put all of this information together in an explanatory framework (also known as a conceptual framework). This framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the key factors or issues that you need to study. It also shows how these factors might relate to each other; for instance, how the traditional roles of men and women may affect family income; how this situation may affect how early children enter the work force; how it might determine which children (boys and/or girls) enter the workforce as opposed to those who stay at home or go to school, etc.

Figure 1. Sample Explanatory Framework for a Qualitative Research Study on Girls' Access to and Retention in School



Based on a review of the literature, observations, and discussions with relevant persons, this sample explanatory framework was developed with two related dimensions that, when working together, can affect girls' access to and retention in school.

The first dimension entails those key contributing factors within the family that may affect whether or not parents decide to send their daughters to school, namely: family occupation and income, which can affect whether or not families can pay for the direct and indirect costs of schooling; family size and child rearing practices, which may be related to the role girls traditionally play in the family (caring for younger siblings); family educational history (whether parents value education); as well as traditional attitudes, beliefs, and practices. All of these factors need to be explored to determine whether or not they actually play a role in affecting girls' access.

If a family decides to send their daughters to school, then a second set of contributing factors related to the school may come into play to determine if they can actually get to school (school location) and remain there in a high quality, safe, meaningful, and gender-responsive learning environment (i.e., quality of the environment, quality and content of the curriculum and learning materials, and learning processes). Once again, all of these factors need to be explored to determine whether or not they actually play a role in influencing girls' access to and retention in school.

These frameworks may come in many different shapes and sizes. They can be very simple or very elaborate, theory-driven or based on common sense, descriptive or causal. In any case, these frameworks are your "road map" for designing and conducting your study, as well as in analyzing your information to see how different factors relate to other factors, when, where, why, how, and among whom. Consequently, determining your explanatory framework is critical as the means of putting order into the particular "world of the problem or situation" that you are trying to understand, analyze, and—ultimately—influence. In summary, they will help you to organize your thinking:

a. **ahead of time:** to decide what factors should be explored, and what design makes the most sense, in effectiveness and efficiency; to decide what questions to ask, whom to ask, and what to look for and at;
b. **during information collection:** to help explain and guide what you see and hear; to know what follow-up questions to ask; where to look further; who else to talk with;
c. **in the analysis:** to bring order to the information, deciding what pieces of information go where, in interpreting the data and explaining what they might mean; and
d. **in presenting the findings and making recommendations:** to present a clear picture to those people expected to use the results of the analysis; to make the links clear to them between the conditions in the environment and the decisions made about who goes to school or not, and what they learn, if they stay, etc.

II. Identify What Research Resources are Required

Now you know *what* the problem is, *why* our research is required, as well as *what* issues and what *factors* you should explore. The next step is to identify what research *resources* are required.

Step 1: Find Out How Much Information is Available Now

Before you waste time designing a complicated method of collecting information, you should find out what kinds of information now exist.

- This does **not** mean research that might specifically answer our questions, such as previous evaluations on the same topic as mentioned in Step 4 in the previous section, but **general information** about the issues in which you are interested.

You should answer these questions.

1. **Where** is information about this issue now?
   - Is information available in reports?
     - For example, if you want to know something about student learning in primary school, you should first look for previous research that summarizes learning issues. But if that is not available, you could try to find *raw information*, such as test results or notes produced by teachers or principals that have not been used in earlier research.
     - If you can find this kind of information, you may not have to do testing again, or you may need to do less original research.
   - Is information available from schools, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, or donors?
2. Do you know who the *specific people* are who **control** this information?
   - You should check with donors, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, community groups, schools administrators, and teachers to make sure they really know where the information is located.
3. Is this information really *accessible?*
   - This means can you, in fact, get that information and use it?

- Some information may be confidential, protecting the privacy of students.
- Some information may be classified for security reasons.
- Some information may be in a remote location.
- Some information may be in a form or language you cannot understand.

If the information is not accessible, then it is, in fact, worthless to us, and you will need to design a research strategy to get new and usable information.

- If you can get this information, however, it may save you a lot of time.

4. Is this information really **relevant** to our research question?
   - You may be told that test scores exist, for example, but if you are interested in literacy, and the test scores deal with math, you will need to do more of our own research.
   - The information may exist, but it may be about a different geographic, ethnic, or cultural group. It may be information about girls, or boys, or students who are older or younger than the group in which you are interested.

Step 2: Define How You Will Collect New Information

There are many ways of collecting information. Which ones you choose depends on the type of information you want. For those of you who are doing policy research, however, not all types of research are feasible. For example, while conducting pilot interventions may be useful in some situations, this research method takes time, a particular expertise, and will probably not be practical. Similarly, widespread testing of students or surveys can provide useful quantitative information, but not much insight into *why* students, teachers, or parents behave the way they do, or think the way they do.

However, some types of qualitative research are more practical for policy and programme researchers and evaluators, and they can provide useful insight into how people think. Here, we will talk about the three most affordable, and most practical, forms of qualitative research: documentary research, observations, and interviews (individual and focus group).

1. If we know information is available already in reports, then we will do:

   Documentary research

   - Documentary research obtains information from reports, tests, newspapers, or other written sources.
   - For documentary research, we must clarify the questions we want to answer, *before* we start reading the reports and looking for information to answer our questions in these reports.

2. If we need to *see* what is happening, then we can do:

   Observations

   - Observations allow us to recognize “hidden” problems or a discrepancy between what people say they do and what they actually do.
   - Observations not only give us important information, they also help our informants (such as teachers) to see how their actual behaviours are different from their perceived behaviours. This realization is an important step towards changing their behaviours.

3. If we need to know what people think, then we can do:

Interview research

- We can get useful information from documents or surveys, but this is second-hand information, at best. It may not tell us why people do the things they do.
- Interviews can clarify issues that are only suggested by documents, surveys, or testing.

III. Documentary Research

Advantages and Disadvantages

Government departments, schools, and other organizations record a lot of material, such as minutes of meetings, memos to senior staff, directives to junior staff, student records, and newspaper or newsletter reports. In addition, they often have research reports, which are the most useful from a researcher's perspective.

The advantages of documentary material for the researcher include the following.[3]

1. Documents can sometimes be more accurate than personal memory for information on events that occurred some time in the past. People can forget what happened, but a report written at the time may contain a lot of detail that people miss when interviewed.
2. Lists of employees or programmes can be more efficiently obtained through reviewing documents, rather than using the time of busy officials to report verbally on these issues.
3. Quoting internal memos gives credibility to verbal reports obtained during interviews.
4. Some important individuals may not be available for interviews, but the documents they write can often be reviewed weeks, months, or years later.
5. Documents are easy to work with. Once we have them, we can review them several times, whenever we want, without worrying about scheduling appointments.

The **disadvantages** of documentary material include the following.

1. We are limited to the information inside the documents. We cannot explore the implications of issues.
2. Many documentary sources concentrate on activities, not on results, and because there is no interaction between the researcher and the information source, you cannot find out what changed as a result of the activities described.
3. Some documents are deliberately designed to present only one side of an issue; that is, they are deliberately misleading.

    - This can also be true for people being interviewed. However, during an interview, the researcher has the opportunity to clarify misunderstandings, and to seek out other information that will confirm, or not, the information being presented. With a document, you can scribble "why" in the margins, but you cannot cross-examine. You cannot assess a person to make a judgment about his reliability as a reporter.[4]
    - Quantitative documentary material, such as test scores and progression rates, can tell us about general trends in education. However, they often cannot tell us *why* things are happening, *how* they are happening, and *to whom*.

> It is important not to make the automatic assumption that all quantitative information is, in fact, accurate.

3. Jerome T, Murphy JT. Getting the Facts: A Fieldwork Guide for Evaluation and Policy Analysts. Goodyear Publishing, Santa Monica, Calif. 1980. p. 121-122.

4. Ibid. p. 123.

- Among the factors that can produce inaccurate quantitative information are:
  - poor definition of the problem,
  - poorly trained researchers, and
  - poorly trained or culturally uninformed data analysts.
- Quantitative information can be useful, but it should form the basis for developing questions for further qualitative research using documents, observations, or interviews, to confirm how and why things are happening.

Doing Documentary Research

Step 1: Focusing the Research on Important Issues

We discussed above the need to focus our research on a few, simple questions that are relevant to a problem in education.

- Research done by other organizations and presented in reports can be very useful for us, and save us a lot of time. However, it can also waste time if it leads us away from the problem on which we should be focusing.
- Therefore, we should list the issues that are important to us, and then look specifically for information on those topics in the documents we are reviewing. We should ask questions like the following.
  - Do the documents focus on the same *problem* we identified and in the same way?
  - Do the documents focus on the same groups that are important to us, such as teachers, girls, boys, or minority groups?
  - Do the documents talk about specific policy choices of interest?
  - Do the documents talk about specific programmes of interest to us, such as primary education, gender programmes, or literacy programmes?
  - Do the documents talk about results?
    - Changes in knowledge and attitudes?
    - Changes in policy?
    - Changes in professional practice or behaviour?
  - Do the documents talk about what affected these results, why results were achieved, or why they were not achieved?

Step 2: Finding Documentary Information

When we are designing our study, we can look for documents to help us define the research problem or the research design. When we are conducting interviews, we should ask the people we talk to if they can suggest documents that could support what they are saying, or be useful to us in other ways.

Documentary research can be done in the following ways.

- **In libraries or offices of government agencies** where we can review:
  - memos,
  - letters,
  - consultant reports,
  - financial statements or budgets,
  - operational plans or annual work plans,
  - evaluations,
  - reports from principals or inspectors, and
  - policy documents.

- **In libraries or offices of donor agencies** where we can review:
  - consultant reports, and
  - agency annual or semi-annual reports.
- **In libraries or offices of non-governmental organizations** where we can review:
  - expert reports,
  - semi-annual or annual reports, and
  - records of public meetings or consultations.
- **In schools** where we can review:
  - test results,
  - principals' reports,
  - teacher evaluations, and
  - community or parents' comments.
- **In universities** where we can review:
  - text books,
  - consulting reports, and
  - academic research journal articles.
- **On the internet** where we can review:
  - government, NGO, and expert reports, as well as
  - newspaper or magazine articles.

Step 3: Analyzing Documentary Material

> It is important to remember that just because information is contained in a report, this does *not* necessarily mean it is (a) important or (b) accurate.

Like everything we see or hear in qualitative research, we must carefully check the validity (utility or truthfulness) of what we read in documents. Those who write reports have their own reasons for writing them, and we must be careful when we analyze the information they present.

We should ask ourselves the following questions, when we are doing documentary research.

1. Do the documents contain: (a) information, (b) opinions, or (c) a combination of both?
   - We should be careful to note the difference between the writer's opinions and other information being reported.
   - When we use the report in our own research, we should tell the reader clearly what it is we are reporting on.
2. Do the writers cite other reports, or did they do their own research (surveys, experiments, testing, interviews, or observations)?
   - If the writers did their own research, we should think about how they collected their information.
   - Did they describe their research methods in a way that gives us confidence in what they are reporting?
3. When was the research in the report done? Was it done recently? If so, it is more likely to be useful to our research.
4. Where was the research in the report done?
   - If the research was done in the same country, province, or district that we are interested in, then it is more likely to be useful to us, than if it was done elsewhere. If it was done in another province, or even another country, it might still be useful to us if it deals with similar problems or ideas, or it deals with similar groups of people.
5. Does the report support its conclusions with logical reasoning?

- The writers should provide the arguments and evidence to support their conclusions. If they do not, then we should question the validity of the research.

Step 4: Summarizing Documentary Research

You will usually consult many different documents. When you summarize the research, you should pay attention to the following issues.

1. Note and categorize the information in documents about the problem we have identified at the beginning of our research process.
2. Discuss the similarities and the differences in the programmes or research that are described.
3. Summarize information provided as opinions.
4. Provide references for information we use from the documents:
   - the page number,
   - the name of the document,
   - names of the authors of the document,
   - the name of the organization publishing the document, and
   - the date of publication.
5. Provide our own opinions and analysis about what we found in the document.
6. *Identify issues discussed in the documents that need to be* confirmed or challenged.
   - We can use these issues as the focus for analyzing other documents, or as the focus for interviews and observation.

IV. Observations: Gaining Insights Through Behaviour

Advantages and Disadvantages

Among the many qualitative methods used for research, the observation method provides a very strong basic framework that gives crucial credibility to the qualitative study. Its major advantages include the following.

1. By directly observing a classroom or a school, you will be better able to understand the context within which children are expected to learn.
2. First-hand experience with how a classroom works allows you to be inductive in your approach, that is, you can use what you learn from your observations to identify common patterns. For instance, a teacher may not realize that she usually asks boys questions about mathematics. From your observations, though, you can see this actually happening, and you can tell her how many times she calls on boys and not girls.
3. You thus have the opportunity to see things that may routinely escape the conscious awareness among teachers and school administrators.
4. You can learn important information about aspects that teachers or school administrators may be unwilling to talk about in an interview (such as the use of corporal punishment). You can thus gain information that otherwise would not be available.
5. Observations permit you to move beyond the selective (biased) perceptions of others.
6. You can take in information and form impressions that go beyond what can be fully recorded in even the most detailed interview notes. This reflection and introspection aid in understanding and interpreting what you are evaluating.

One major disadvantage of the observation method is that when people (such as a teacher) know that they are being observed, they may try to act the way that they want you to see them, rather than behaving normally. In other words, they try to act "like they are supposed to act" rather than how they normally act. One of the ways to deal with this issue is to try and observe persons (or classrooms) as many times as possible, rather than only one time. By observing many times, those who you are observing are constrained to act as they normally

would. They may also become more relaxed in having you in the classroom. You can also ask others whether your observations in a classroom, or other setting, appear to be "usual" or "normal" ones that they also see.

Making Observations in the Classroom

Step 1: Decide on a Relevant Explanatory or Conceptual Framework

This framework may be one that is fairly focused, such as looking for patterns in the ways teachers and students interact, verbally and non-verbally. Alternatively, it may be more complicated, such as using these patterns to understand how girls or other specific children are being excluded or included.

- The framework will likely have to be modified as the research progresses. Starting out with one clear framework is important, however, in order to determine the data collection strategy, methods and tools to be used.
- Deciding on a framework also has to be done both when the analysis is open-ended/exploratory (such as do teachers differentiate between boys and girls and how); and when it is focused (such as how are teachers applying the learning-centred policy/training in the class?). In both cases, deciding what characteristics of the classroom will "count" in answering the question is fundamental.

Step 2: What Indicators or Factors You Will Observe

These factors will usually need to be modified (added to, dropped, or revised) as the research progresses and gaps, inconsistencies, and new insights appear in the analysis. Some examples of classroom characteristics often used to explain issues of exclusion and learning outcomes for girls (and boys) include:

- **where children sit:** boys and girls, ethnic minority children, those who are obviously poor, children with disabilities, etc.;
- **how desks are arranged:** in rows, working group circles, or haphazardly; are there enough for all children, are they movable;
- **who initiates and manages classroom talk:** does the teacher ask questions, of all children equally; are they open-ended questions, looking for what the child really thinks or for specific memorized answers; does she invite the students to ask her and/or each other; does she provide feedback for right and wrong answers;
- **how active or passive the classroom is:** do children move freely; does the teacher move to meet the children in their place or stay at the front; so different children move differently, or to do different types of tasks;
- **how children are guided, controlled, and disciplined:** is there evidence of physical, psychological, or sexual abuse or harassment; does the teacher use corporal punishment or positive discipline; are the rules of behaviour clear, fairly applied, and learning-oriented; are children encouraged to talk about their hopes, worries, and problems;
- **how visible children are:** does a child respond and interact as an identified individual or "a student"; is student work displayed; do girls and boys participate in class decisions equally; does the teacher call on girls and boys equally; and
- **how self-directing is the teacher as a professional:** is the teacher regularly there and on time; does the teacher plan and execute lessons; does the teacher seem happy/relaxed or distracted/anxious; does the teacher reach out to colleagues to exchange teaching experience or to parents to discuss children's progress; is the teacher involved in school "visioning" and management activities.

Step 3: Choose Appropriate Observation Instruments

These instruments (checklists, matrices, maps, etc.) should be able to collect different types of information, and in as much detail as possible, so you can answer your research question.

They should not be overly intrusive or difficult to adapt when needed. They should not produce too much ambiguous or irrelevant information. This balance is never easy; flexibility is a critical quality of all qualitative analysis. Some points to keep in mind:

- Given the complexity of the classroom environment, more than one type of instrument may be needed to reflect different explanatory frameworks.
- Behaviours and situations will never be straightforward or definitive. Most questions will likely be answered with qualifiers: sometimes, often, some of the children, a few of the girls.
- There will always be surprises: teachers not turning up; parents, especially mothers, refusing to give an opinion; children claiming their school is 'child-friendly' when observations suggest the opposite.

Step 4: Set Ground Rules for Observations

The quality of your observations rests not only on your ability to observe, but also on how you are observed, and how you act. Setting ground rules for making observations can improve the quality of your information. Some of these ground rules include the following.

- Be discreet in the way you dress and in your attitude.
- Do not disturb the classroom to the extent possible.
- Arrive in the classroom before the class starts.
- Do not leave the classroom before the end of the class.
- Do not talk during the class.
- Do not talk with the students or the teacher during the class.
- Remember your role: an observer/researcher, NOT a member of the Ministry of Education.
- Do not judge what you see.
- Adopt the attitude of a learner, receiving information from the people, NOT of a teacher, giving advice or saying what is right or wrong.
- When discussing informally with people, do not take notes; write your comments later on.
- If you are working in a team, debrief systematically with the other team members after classroom observations. Debrief every night with the other team members and fill your comments form.

Step 5: Check Back Regularly with All Data Sources

The "constant comparative" approach to analysis is useful here. In this approach, you are continually verifying your interpretations of what you see and hear with the interpretations of those involved. It means asking follow-up, clarifying, and elaborating questions. Two critical points in all qualitative analyses in education warrant repeating.

1. There are few, in any, unambiguously "right" ways of managing teaching, and learning events. Actions are "more or less right/effective" depending on the results they produce on a child's learning outcomes, participation, self-image etc.

2. It is as important to understand the reasons why people (teachers, children, and parents) believe certain things or behave in certain ways as it is to understand what they believe and do. Effective interventions are those based on the "why" rather than the "what" because they address the person's own explanatory frameworks and it is usually on the basis of these that changes are most important and sustainable.

You can also ask questions about the observations you have made. Some examples of questions to ask the persons you are studying are given below. Asking for the same information from different sources (triangulation) is a good way to test the accuracy of your information

and its completeness; for instance, asking the teacher, boys, and girls "what happened in that math lesson?"

Of the teacher:

- What did you expect the children to answer when you asked them "xxx?" (repeat the specific question)? What did you expect would happen when you arranged the desks in a circle? What do you think happened? How do you know?
- What results do you expect when you use corporal punishment? Are you seeing these results? What was different when you used other, non-physical, methods of discipline?
- How did you feel in the classroom today—relaxed, worried, in control? Why? What happens in the class or the school that makes you feel less or more confident or satisfied in your teaching?
- What messages/lessons were you intending give the children today? Do you think you did this? What worked? What was problematic?

Of the child:

- What do you enjoy doing most in the class? Why? What do you not like about the classroom life? Why? What do your friends enjoy? Do you talk about what you are learning?
- What did you want to learn in school today? Did you learn that? Why not (or) what helped you learn that?
- What was the main message the teacher was telling you when she talked about "xxx" (or) when she did "yyy"? (identify a specific topic or event)
- Do you come to school everyday? What happens to make it difficult for you to come? How do you feel when you cannot come? Are you happy to come every day? What makes it a happy experience for you?

Of the parent:

- You said you kept your daughter at home to take care of the younger children. Why did you make that decision? Why did you choose your daughter and not your son? Have you or your neighbours ever tried other arrangements for minding young children? What happened?
- Do you go regularly to the school? Why/why not? Are you comfortable going to there? Under what circumstances?

Classroom Observation Tool 1

Use: To fill in on a visit to a school and in a classroom observation, then analyze in order to identify gender bias in the school and classroom environment and in the teaching learning process.

Guidelines for Classroom Visits:

1. Divide into pairs so that no more than two people are in a classroom at a time. The presence of visitors changes students' and teachers' classroom behaviour; attempt to change it as little as possible by limiting the number of observers to two. Divide up tasks with your partner so that you can fill in all the charts within one class period.

2. Tell the teacher you are here to learn from her/him and her/his students as part of the workshop you are attending, so you will be writing down many things while you are there. Have your pencil/pen and worksheet ready so you can begin as soon as you sit down.

- Take off your "teacher or supervisor hat" and put on your "researcher hat." Your role is to watch carefully, and not judge what the teacher is doing.
- Use what you know as an educator to help you think about what you are seeing but do *not* participate in the class in any way. Do *not* give suggestions to the teacher or participate in the class, even if you are asked.
- Watch. Record. Take notes.
- After the class, ask to interview five students (volunteers) and interview the teacher.
- After you interview the teacher, you may show her/him what you have done (e.g., drawing the classroom map). Explain about "Education for All," and that you are observing in the school and the classroom in order to better understand the goal to have gender equality in schools by 2015.

Source: Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA). A Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education. UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand. 2004.

Classroom Observation Tool 2

Guidelines for Collecting School-level Data:

1. All observers can look around the school as they are walking to and from their classrooms to take note of:
    a. images of males and females on the school walls (posters) and
    b. how spaces are used by girls and boys (e.g., football field, location and use of separate toilets).
2. One or two pairs can collect the enrolment information and data on teachers from the school director.
3. In addition to what is asked for on your observation sheet, ask "child-seeking" questions:
    a. If the school has a record of how many girls and boys have dropped out of school in the last three years, get this information.
    b. Does the school know how many children in the community are not in school and may never have enrolled (e.g., disabled children whom parents are keeping at home, children who are working and not enrolled)?
    c. Do the non-formal schools know how many students have dropped out? Re-enrolled? How many people in the community are not literate and how many are enrolled in literacy classes?
4. The goal is *Education for ALL.* This will help you understand if your schools have the necessary information to make sure that *all* children are enrolled in school.

Source: Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA). *A Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education*. UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education,Bangkok, Thailand. 2004.

V. In-depth Individual Interviews

Interviews – The Heart of Qualitative Research

In one way, interviews are more important than observations. Watching what someone does is necessary to give you a complete picture of what is occurring. This is important because frequently what someone says they think or do is not actually what happens. In addition, people do not always know what they do because many of their behaviours are autonomic or subconscious. For example, teachers may not be aware that they change their tone of voice or style of questions when talking to a boy versus a girl.

However, only through talking to the participants themselves is it possible to understand from *their* perspective:

- their motivations (the "why") for what they are doing;
- their processes (the "how") of what they are doing; and
- their assessment of the value, risks, or potential benefits of the situation or innovation ("under what circumstances").

No matter what you think should be the reason someone does, or fails to do, something, and under what circumstances, in the end it is the individual—the teacher, principal, policy maker, or others—who decides what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Any intervention to influence that decision, therefore, needs to take into account the participant's perspective. This is when interviewing is the appropriate research method.

Intensive Individual Interviewing

Some interviews can be highly structured and limited in scope. These types of interviews often use fixed questions, or questionnaires, and researchers often try to obtain quantitative data from this process.

For our purposes, however, we will talk about intensive interviewing that usually uses relatively unstructured questions, but they are always focused on the research problem.

The advantages of intensive interviewing as a research method include the following.

1. It helps us to find out how and why events occur, information we often cannot get from other sources. It allows us to explore the **context** for behaviour.

2. It is flexible. Where some questions cannot be anticipated, intensive interviewing allows us to add questions, or vary them, during the interview and to follow-up on new information.

"*Intensive interviewing is an exploratory tool that can get at the nitty-gritty of program operations, revealing what actually happened, why, and with what impact. It is not the only [research] tool…. But intensive interviewing is ideally suited to gathering data about crucial steps in program implementation*."[5]

The disadvantages of intensive interviewing include the following issues.

1. Interviews that produce good quality information are probably the most difficult of the qualitative methods to use. These interviews require a great deal from you as the central information collector and processor. You need to communicate well, understand your informants, be sensitive to them and their surroundings, know when to allow for silence, when to probe for more information, and when to change the interview's direction. You also need to be tolerant of ambiguity. There are no set procedures or protocols that can be followed step by step. Researchers who prefer neatly-packaged answers are better suited for quantitative research.[6]

2. Intensive semi-structured or unstructured interviews may be more subjective than structured interviews, because your questions will vary in wording, sequence, and context.

3. It takes a lot of time. The whole point of intensive interviewing is to allow us as researchers to search for details in responses, and to follow-up on new information by asking more questions. All of this can sometimes take more time than would a structured interview or a questionnaire.

4. Interview research can be either the main source of information for a researcher, or it can be part of a strategy that also includes observation and documentary analysis. But to get accurate information during an interview, you have to think carefully about:
   - who will be interviewed;
   - how they will be interviewed
   - how the information will be recorded.
   - the types of questions to be asked.

Conducting Results-Based Interviews: An Introduction

Conducting good interviews and analyzing the information from them is a time-consuming process, and a process that can vary widely with the skill and experience of the interviewer. What is presented here is an introduction to that process for new researchers, and it can be applied for qualitative research on gender in education.

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5. Murphy JT. *Getting the Facts: A Fieldwork Guide for Evaluators and Policy Analysts.* Goodyear Publishing: Santa Monica, California. 1980. p. 77-78.

6. Miske S. *Qualitative Research Training Manual. Developed under auspices of "A Multi-site Case Study on the Implementation of the Language Policy in Six Schools in Ghana,* supported through Improving Educational Quality ProjectII, in partnership with CRIQPEG, University of Cape Coast, University College of Education/Winneba, Institute of African Studies and University of Ghana/Legon. 1999. pp. 5-6.

Step 1: Selecting Informants

The people who talk to us in interviews, and provide us with information, are called informants. In survey research, we may select a large number of informants randomly because we want a very broad picture of what is occurring. But in qualitative research, we need to select the people we will interview carefully.

- If we have been working with a group as observers, or if we know the group well, we will know whose opinions we want and need. If we focus on the problem we have identified as the main criteria for selecting informants, then our selection process becomes clearer. For example, if we are doing needs assessment research for a literacy programme, we will interview principals, literacy experts, teachers, parents, and students. On the other hand, if we are assessing national progress on internationally accepted indicators of literacy performance, we may interview only policy makers, evaluation specialists, politicians, or senior civil servants.
- If we began our research with documentary research, the documents will often lead us to the people we need to interview.
- If we have been observing groups as they work, then we will have questions about what specific people think, or why they behave the way they do in the groups. Those are the people we will interview.
- If we are in a professional situation, we should not limit ourselves to interviews only with participants in a particular activity. Other people may see changes in their behaviour.

Step 2: Focusing the Interview

As we discussed earlier, if an interview is highly structured, the interview questions will be specified in detail before the interview, and they will often be exactly the same questions for every informant. But if you "control the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally, in his or her words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range of interviewing."[7]

Alternatively, completely *unstructured* interviews (like simple conversations or "chatting") can provide interesting new ideas. However, they probably will not permit you to collect information on all of the important areas of the research, nor will they permit you to collect common information among all of the informants.

The practical alternative is to do **semi-structured and focused interviews** that include a set of common questions, but ones that allow you to proceed as an interesting conversation while focusing on the topics of the research.

If the interview is unstructured or semi-structured, but focused, you should prepare for the interview, by:

- listing the main general issues to be covered during the interview;
- listing specific issues arising from observation, from documentary research, or from interviews with other people; and
- forming general questions to guide the interview.[8]

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7. Bogdan RC, Biklen SK. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods.* Allyn and Bacon, Toronto. 1982. p. 136.

8. For assistance in developing interview guidelines, see: Soonthorndhada A. *Constructing Qualitative Research Interview Guidelines. In: Yoddumnern-Attig B, Attig G. Boonchalaksi W (eds.), A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods.* Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991. pp. 58-69.

Step 3: Gaining Entry for the Interview

It is important to remember that while some people want to be interviewed, to get their point of view on the record, many people will feel threatened by the interview process. This is particularly true if you are doing evaluation research, and especially where there is a large status or cultural gap between researcher and respondent.

1. First, you should explain the purpose of your research carefully to senior officers in an organization, such as a Ministry, department, or school, before asking for permission to conduct interviews. Junior officials may have more time to talk, but they may be worried about giving interviews without permission.
2. Interviews should be organized to fit into the informant's schedule, not just your own.
3. Tell the informant how long the interview will take before the interview is scheduled. Most good interviews will take at least a half an hour if we have prepared well, and some will last much longer, if the researcher is following up new information.
4. Interviews are best conducted at the informant's workplace, such as a school or community centre, or where he or she lives. In some cases, the informant may ask for the interview to take place elsewhere to provide privacy.
5. Researchers should dress appropriately for the work situation of the informant. Dressing too informally, or too formally, for the situation can distract the informant and make it more difficult for him or her to relax with you.
6. One important question is whether to interview people in a group or individually.
    - The advantages of interviewing people in a group are:
        - We can get access to a lot of people, at the same time, when time for the interview is limited.
        - People will sometimes react in interesting ways to each others' responses to the researchers' questions.
    - The advantages of interviewing people individually are:
        - You can spend more time with each individual, and you will have more time to follow-up on comments. Each individual informant will provide more detail.
        - People may be more honest and uninhibited in individual interviews than they will be in groups, where they know their colleagues or neighbours are listening to what they say.
    - In general, if there is enough time, the researcher will get more valuable information by conducting individual interviews. These can be supplemented by group interviews if time permits.

Step 4: Recording the Interview

1. The first issue you will face is **how to record the interview.** There are basically two practical alternatives: using a tape recorder or taking written notes.

    The advantages of using a tape recorder are:

    - You can concentrate on the discussion without having to write extensive notes.
    - The record of the interview will be very detailed. You will not forget any of the information provided during the interview.
    - Quotes will be accurate.
    - If you choose to use a tape recorder, you should ask your informant if he or she is willing to have the recorder used.

The disadvantages of using a tape recorder are:

- Many people will be more cautious about providing information when a tape recorder is present. They may not want other people to hear what they are saying. Language may impede some if they feel that they cannot express themselves or they are embarrassed by their accent.
- The mechanics of using the recorder (microphone, changing tapes or batteries) may interfere with the natural flow of the interview.
- The researcher will have to go back to the recording later and take notes. In some cases, if people know the researcher is making a recording, they may ask for an exact transcription (written record) of the interview. This can take a very long time to prepare.

The advantages of taking notes during the interview are:

- It is less obtrusive than using a recorder, although the researcher should also, at the beginning of the interview, ask permission to take notes.
- The mechanics of taking notes are much easier than making a recording. We know how to use a pen and paper. There are no tapes to change, and there is no need to worry about the power supply (batteries running out, electricity failing).
- Most of the people who work within an educational environment are comfortable with people taking notes. It is part of the educator's, the policy maker's, and the civil servant's life. It is probably also true for parents, if they are used to the ways of the school.
- Taking notes is cheaper than making a recording, and then paying for someone to transcribe the notes.
- Because we are taking notes as we listen, we are already in the process of concentrating on important issues and summarizing the interview. Writing up the final record of the interview after it is finished will be much faster than if we have to listen repeatedly to the recording.
- The act of writing notes helps many people to focus on the discussion.

The disadvantages of writing notes, instead of making a recording, are:

- The record will not be complete, and you will not have a record if the interview is challenged later.
- It will be more difficult to make accurate quotations.
- You may confuse your own analyses of information with information provided by the informants. For this reason, if we are taking notes, we should use a system, such as different colours for recording information from informants and making our own comments in the margin. For example, we might write all information provided by an informant in blue, and then any comments we have in red.

Whatever method is used, either note-taking or using a tape recorder, it is absolutely essential that the reviewer ask at the beginning of the interview, if the informant agrees to either the recording or note-taking.

Under no circumstances should recording ever be done secretly.

2. **Working in a second language** (interpretation and translation).

   Whether we take notes or use a recorder, we often have to make a decision about the language in which an interview will be conducted. If our informants do not fluently speak the same language you do, then you will have to either accept the limitations of the interview, and seek frequent clarifications to overcome language problems, or use an interpreter.

   The major **advantages** of using an interpreter are:

- We hope that the informant will understand our questions and that we will better understand their answers.
- We have time to think about questions, and to take notes, while the interpreter is speaking.

The **disadvantages** of using an interpreter are:

- Some respondents will worry about confidentiality and may be reluctant to speak frankly in front of an interpreter.
- It is more difficult to quote informants accurately after their words have been interpreted.
- We must always be concerned about the accuracy of the interpretation, and about whether the interpreter is inserting his or her own opinions into the response.

Step 5: Asking Questions

Every interview will have its own direction and form depending upon the purpose of the research. In general, however, there are things that you can do during an interview to improve the quality of the information you collect.

1. Understand the context of the situation, and how the informant fits into the situation. Questions about context let the informant relax, and they can provide you with valuable information.
2. Ask all of the questions that focus on the research problem. You should outline these core questions when preparing for the interview [Step 2].
3. During the interview, leave room for new ideas and new questions to emerge from the experience and interests of the informant.
4. Always ask for clarification, and details.
   - **Ask for examples** to illustrate the points that an informant is making.

> The whole point of qualitative research is this: it cannot provide the scope of information that quantitative research can, and it cannot be generalized as easily. However, it can and should provide details and examples of information.

5. Never make judgements about what the informant is telling you during an interview.
   - Let the informant make the judgements. If you have observations to make for your own reference in your notes, you should distinguish your observations from the information provided by the informant (such as through using different coloured pens as discussed above).
   - Do not complete thoughts or sentences for the informants. This may prevent them from providing their own examples or interpretations.
6. If you get controversial or discordant information in one interview, ask other informants about the subject.
   - This comes back to the issue of *validity* discussed earlier and the need to get confirmation from several sources, such as documents, observations, or interviews to confirm our information (known as triangulation).
   - What an informant says may be an accurate representation of his or her understanding of an issue. But other people may disagree, and it is your job to get evidence from many sources.
7. Ask for follow-up information at the conclusion of the interview, such as the names of other people who may be useful contacts for interviews, or documents we may review.
8. Thank the informants for their time and their ideas.

Tips for Encouraging Discussion[9]

Atmosphere. Maintain a friendly and warm attitude to make the participants feel comfortable. Being non-judge-mental and open can help a lot. Aim to be somewhat casual, but not too much so in case the participants do not take the session seriously.

Pauses and Prompts. Pausing to allow a participant to think more on the topic being discussed is a very useful technique. It can also allow a new speaker to comment. Some participants who are shy may not compete for time to speak, but these people will often talk if there is a break in the discussion.The pause should not last more than five seconds (which can seem like a lifetime if you are anxious!). You can also use the pause to make eye contact with someone. This can encourage that person to speak. Just try not to embarrass anyone, particularly the shy ones. Establishing eye contact can also be a means of prompting someone to continue to talk. Raising your eyebrows, nodding, and other gestures (which vary from culture to culture) may also encourage people to continue to talk. Other prompts are verbal – some have meaning ("I see, that's interesting, keep on …"), others are simply reassuring sounds ("mmm", "uh-huh") to encouraging a speaker to continue his or her line of response.

Rephrasing. A question can be rephrased if an individual or group members are finding it difficult to answer. Be very careful not to change the meaning of the original question and do not hint at the answer. For instance, "I was referring to access to the school. What I meant to ask you was, are there any factors that either prevent you going to the school or make it easy for you?"

Reminder Questions. This technique is supposed to keep the conversation lively. It also reminds the group of the question being asked. For example, "Mrs X, you told us that your child cannot always go to school because transport is difficult. Mrs Y (who has not yet said anything), does anything prevent your daughter from going to school?"

Example of How an Interview Could Proceed

This set of questions is taken from *guidelines* for results-based interviewing.[10] They provide the general direction of the topics to be covered in an interview, but not the exact wording of questions. The topic of the interview may be one of importance for gender in education, such as girls' access to school or gender bias in the curriculum or textbooks, and for which a programme is being designed or evaluated.

Types of Questions:

1. **The researcher should first summarize,** very briefly, the purpose of the interview.
   - What, very briefly is the purpose of the research?
     - Is this an evaluation?
     - Is it a project planning exercise?
     - Is it a general policy review?
     - Is it a needs assessment?
   - How does this interview fit into the research?
   - How many other interviews are being done?
   - How long will the interview take?

9. Adapted from: Dawson S., Manderson L., Tallo VL. A Manual for the Use of Focus Groups. International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries, Boston, Massachusetts. 1993. pp. 79-80.

10. Derived from Greg Armstrong. Results-Based Management Reporting Guide, Discussion paper, Canadian International Development Agency. June 2002.

2. **Begin with general background questions.** This will help you to understand the context and help ensure that you ask the right questions. It also helps the informants understand that we are interested in them and in their ideas and experience.
   - What is the informant's role?
     - Teacher?
     - Policy maker?
     - Manager?
     - Evaluator?
     - Funder?
     - Parent?
     - Community leader?
     - Student?
   - How long as the individual been in this role? (How many children does he or she have/teach, etc.).

3. **Ask questions about activities.**
   - What activities, projects, or programmes are planned?
   - What activities, projects, or programmes have already taken place?
   - What does the informant think are the most interesting elements of these activities?
   - What does the informant think are the purposes of these activities?

4. **Ask questions about results.**

> Completed activities are **not** results. Results are changes that occur in part because of an activity. As researchers we are interested in learning what changes occurred, or are expected to occur, because of an activity, a project, or a programme; in other words, **what works?** [11]

What changed in part because of the activities, programmes, or projects, or what do our informants hope will change if these activities are implemented?

a. Will there be, or have there already been, **changes in knowledge** because of these activities, about issues, processes of decision making, technical skills related to work, or policy alternatives?
   - If so, what do people know at the end of the activity that they did not know before, or what do they expect that people will know?
   - Get examples of these changes, such as specific examples of knowledge change for specific groups in the activity, project, or programme.
   - Did the informant himself or herself learn anything new from the activity? Be sure to distinguish knowledge from the simple receipt of information or materials.

b. Will there be, or have there already been, **changes in attitudes or motivations** because of these activities?
   - If so, what will people think that they did not think before these activities took place?
   - How, specifically, did people change their thinking, or is it expected that they will change their thinking?
   - Did the informants themselves change the way they thought about a policy, an issue, or an innovation of some kind?
   - Did the change in attitude or motivation lead to any change in decision making or behaviour? If so, see the next two questions.

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11. For a more complete discussion of how results can be explained, see Greg Armstrong. What are results? Applying Results-Based Management in Policy and Practice, Training paper. The Administrative Court of Thailand/CIDA. Bangkok, January 2004.

c. Will there be, or have there already been, **changes in decision-making or policy** because of these activities?

- If so, what change in decision making or policy was there?
  - At the family or individual level (for example, a decision to attend a course; to drop out of school; or by teachers, a decision to change the way they work).
  - At the level of the school (for example, a decision to try a new teaching innovation or to assess and develop textbooks that are free of gender bias).
  - At the organizational level, in regulations of a department, a division, or even just informal decisions on how to work together.
  - At the national level, in laws, or, in the ultimate case, in the Constitution.
- Was the informant involved in this decision? If so, how? If so, why? If not, who was involved?

d. Will there be, or have there already been, **changes in professional practice or personal behaviour** because of these activities?

- If so, what changes in practice or behaviour occurred?
  - Get *examples* of how individuals changed practice or behaviour.
  - Did teachers, researchers, managers or principals change the way they worked?
  - Did parents or children change the way they behave?
- Is there a direct link between this change in behaviour or professional practice, and the project or activity we are studying?

e. Will there be, or have there already been, **other changes** that can be traced to these activities?

5. Ask questions about the factors that affected the success of activities or programmes in leading to results, or not leading to results.

> If we are to learn about what works, we need to know *why* some projects or activities produce results—positive or negative—and others do not.

Many factors affect the extent to which results are achieved by a project. These include, among many others:

- *motivation for participation,*
- the extent to which the project meets *the real needs of participants*,
- *freedom to adapt the* learning experience to their own needs, and
- the extent to which participants feel *ownership of the process*.

Therefore it is useful for us to ask the following questions of participants, as well as of their supervisors (school principals, department chairpersons) if they are available.

1. Value of the project

- Would informants participate in a similar project again, if they had the chance? Why or why not?
- Would their bosses or supervisors (such as school principals) allow them to participate? If so, why or why not?

> This question can often provide useful information, getting beyond polite responses.

2. Motivation of participants

- Why did our informants participate the first time?
- Were they ordered to participate, or did they choose to participate for their own reasons?
- If they were ordered by their supervisors to participate, why did their supervisors want them to attend? Follow-up on this question by asking the supervisor the same question.
- If they attended for their own reasons, what were these reasons?

3. Relevance of the project

- Did the project meet the professional needs of participants?
- Get examples:
  - How?
  - If not, why not?

4. Ownership and adaptation

- Were there any signs that the participants were not satisfied with any of the activities of the project?
- Did the participants find a way to adapt the learning, or the activities of the project to their own situation?
- If so, how did they adapt it?
  - What changes did they make, and why?
  - If they were not able to adapt the process to their needs, why not?

In all of the above questions, it is **critical to differentiate** respondents in terms of their being male or female, as well as to make this same distinction with regard to references to participants, and to tie your information and interpretations to this distinction.

VI. Focus Group Discussion Sessions

In addition to interviewing individual persons, focus group discussion (FGD) sessions are another popular way to collect qualitative information. An FGD session is an interview where a small group of informants (about 7 to 10) are guided by a moderator to talk freely and spontaneously on an issue considered important to the research study. The session is held in an atmosphere that is considered natural (and relaxed) for the interviewees, who are chosen from a larger target group that share similar ideas, opinions, and attitudes. In some cultures such as India, Africa, and Thailand, indigenously-initiated focus groups develop without prior planning, as neighbors and friends join in household and reference group interviews.[12] Hence, focus groups in a way are natural extensions of existing group organizational practices and patterns.

The **advantages** of FGDs is that they can give you important insights into what a group of people jointly believe (for instance, they are not gender biased) and why. Like other qualitative methods, focus groups can be used to focus the research and formulate questions for structured quantitative interview questionnaires, or for individual qualitative interview guidelines. In addition, FGDs are valuable as a technique for checking information with a large number of people, especially if it pertains to reactions towards intended innovations. Usually more than one group session is held, using different members, to assure adequate coverage. Alternatively, they can be refined by selecting out specific sub-groups within a population for comparative analysis.

12. Scrimshaw S., Hurtado E. Rapid Assessment Procedures for Nutrition and Primary Halth Care. Tokyo: The United Nations University, Tokyo. 1987.

The main **disadvantages** of FGDs are that a single focus group session usually cannot be readily generalizable as reflecting the larger population as a whole; it can only indicate a range concerning group knowledge, attitudes and the like. Further, focus group sessions, by their very nature, are not useful in obtaining information considered private or behaviors that might be looked down upon by others. People are generally very reticent about sharing their personal thoughts, feelings and experiences in a group setting.

Group Member Selection and Recruitmen[13]

For the focus group session to be maximally productive, group members should be selected based on their commonalities rather than an emphasis on variety. Participants should share the same ideas, opinions, and attitudes, in addition to being the same sex; within a cohort age group which shares similar experiences; and comparable in terms of socio-economic background, ethnicity, marital status, educational level, etc.

One week to three days before the session, the research team should visit the community, become acquainted with its members for screening purposes, and extend invitations to participate in the session. In inviting the participants, the following steps should be followed.[14]

1. Talk about something of interest to the potential participant, such as their children, the climate, or the market place.
2. In a sincere way, tell the participant about the institution sponsoring or conducting the study, the persons (moderator, note-taker, others) to be involved in the session, and the general purpose of the visit to the community.
3. Explain the nature of the session planned and invite the person to participate along with neighbors, friends and others in the community. Do not, however, mention the specific subject of the session in advance or this may predetermine who the person may invite as well as the session's content (i.e., they may discuss the subject in advance of the session and thereby lose the latter's spontaneity and data quality). Do mention names of some of those who have volunteered to come (only when respondents know each other).
4. Confirm the date, time, and place of the session, how long it will last, and that refreshments will be served.
5. If the person does not wish to participate, or cannot, emphasize the importance of everyone's contribution. If the person still declines, sincerely express your appreciation and leave graciously.
6. If the person is interested in participating, confirm the day, hour, and place, and briefly state the importance of participation and punctuality so that the others are not kept waiting.

Conducting a Focus Group Discussion Session[15]

Like virtually all interview contexts, focus group sessions entail three main stages: pre-session, the session itself, and post-session.

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13. Vong-ek P. Focus Group Technique. In: Yoddumnern-Attig B., Attig G. Boonchalaksi W. (eds.). *A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods*, Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991. pp. 92-99.
14. Scrimshaw S., Hurtado E. *Rapid Assessment Procedures for Nutrition and Primary Health Care.* Tokyo: The United Nations University, Tokyo. 1987.
15. Vong-ek P. Focus Group Technique. In: Yoddumnern-Attig B., Attig G. Boonchalaksi W. (Eds.). A Field Manual on Selected Qualitativ Research Methods, Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991. pp. 92-99.

Pre-session

Based on the research project's topic and specific objectives, you will need to develop an interview guide containing as many pertinent questions as possible. These questions usually arise as part of your literature review (learning from earlier research) or other data collection methods. This interview guide should be as focused as possible and include open-ended questions centering on group-perceptions (What do people do here?) rather than individual-perceptions (What do you do here?). One example of a focus group discussion guide is the following.

Sample Interview Guide on Exploring Gender and the Child-Friendliness of Schools and Communities[16]

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Opinions of CFS

What does everyone here know about child-friendly schools (CFS)? (If no one knows about CFS, give a short orientation on its major components.)

What good things do you think CFS could achieve in your community?

What is your opinion of that?

What bad things might happen?

What is your opinion or that?

Do you think a CFS could help to develop your children and the community as a whole? How?

School Enrollment Practices and Obstacles (focusing especially on girls)

Would community leaders and parents be equally supportive of boys and girls attending this type of school or the local school (if the community does not have a CFS)? Why or Why not?

Why do you think some parents in this community might not enroll (or are not enrolling) their children, especially girls, in this school or the local school?

What community conditions might prevent a girl or boy from coming to school? (For instance, do community leaders and parents value girls' education? Do they value female and male teachers equally?)

What school-based factors might prevent a girl or boy from attending this school? (For instance, is the school close enough for all school-age boys and girls to walk safely to it? Do teachers encourage girls and boys to speak and contribute equally?)

Programme Intervention Support and Ideas

If we wanted to get all children in school, especially girls, what do you think a programme or message should say so that parents would enroll them in school?

Who should give this information?

In this community, what medium do you think would be best to convey this information?

Why do you select this medium?

Do you have any other ideas for developing and implementing such programmes and making them successful?

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16. Adapted from: *Gender Lens - Measuring the Child-Friendliness of Schools. In: A Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education. Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA).* UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand, 2004. See also: http://www.unescobkk.org/gender.

Once the interview guide is constructed, it should be pre-tested, preferably by the moderator who will be guiding the actual focus groups. This will aid the moderator in revising or refining the questions themselves, as well as giving the moderator an early opportunity to orient herself as to the questions' contents and their presentation. Both are crucial in aiding the respondents in understanding and answering the questions.

During the Session

Other than the interview guide itself, the moderator is perhaps the most important data collection tool. She should be a person who can speak the local dialect and who can simultaneously adopt a number of roles. Although the moderator might be a professional social researcher, she does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. She should, though, be familiar enough with the subject to ask relevant questions. In actuality, the moderator should not overtly convey the impression of being an expert or she may "turn off" the respondent's by virtue of his domineering attitude. Instead, she should be sensitive and polite, yet enthusiastic enough to put the participants at ease; she should lead the group, but not be led by it. The moderator must be flexible in using the interview guide and able to organize her thoughts logically in order to maintain the flow of conversation. She must be careful, though, to formulate appropriate questions and to respond to their answers and participants' reactions in a neutral manner. She should not express his opinion (through either verbal or non- verbal means) that could influence the participants.

Moderators must also be sensitive to the atmosphere surrounding and permeating the session. She must observe the participants and recognize how much involvement each person is expressing as well as their reactions. All participants need to be encouraged to talk, not just a few who monopolize the discussion. Her ability to do this effectively will be enhanced as she builds up her rapport with the participants and gains their trust and confidence. Her ability to empathize with them will also give her a chance to probe for more in-depth information, the real meaning behind what is being said, and the tone with which it is being communicated. This can also be supplemented through observations of participants' non-verbal communication patterns (e.g., gestures, seating patterns). And lastly, she will need to control the time allocated to each question as well as the rhythm of the session itself.

Other than the moderator, a note-taker is also present at focus group sessions, primarily as an observer and a recorder. The information collected by the note-taker should include: 1) the session's date, starting and ending times; 2) the community's name and a brief description; 3) the meeting place and a brief description; 4) number of participants and relevant descriptive data; 5) the interview's atmosphere (interruptions, distractions, comical moments, etc.); 6) group dynamics (e.g., participation levels, interest levels, dominant or uncooperative participants); and, most importantly, 7) as close a transcription of the participants' verbatim words as possible and in the local language. Although a tape recorder is often used, its purpose is only to amplify notes taken during the session, not replace them. In general, the note-taker should not direct the discussion and moderate the meeting unless requested by the moderator. Usually this will occur if the moderator misses important comments or the conversation requires additional input in order to maintain its flow.

A third optional person involved in managing the focus group session is the caretaker. This person's main responsibilities are to provide for the needs of the moderator, note-taker, and respondents as they arise. In addition, they monitor the interview context by not allowing external persons to disrupt the session.

At the session's opening, the moderator needs to make all appropriate introductions and explain the roles of the moderator, note-taker, and caretaker. She should also briefly explain the session's aims and objectives, and emphasize the importance of everyone's contributions and opinions. She must also explain that each speaker should address only the topic under discussion, and only one person should talk at a time. To make the participants feel more relaxed, warm-up questions can be used to stimulate interest and conversation so that everyone feels he/she can have the chance to talk. Warm-up questions thus tend to center on neutral issues.

As the session commences, specialized techniques are used to manage the focus group, as well as to determine the subjects for discussion and the exact questions to be asked. The first technique is *clarification,* whereby the moderator repeats the respondent's answer in the form of a question (e.g., "Can you tell me more about that?"). *Substitution* is used when the moderator rephrases a question but retains its original meaning. This technique aids in cross-checking information and eliciting increased discussion. The latter can also be achieved through *re-orientation.* This involves using one participant's response or comment to make a new question for another participant (e.g., "*Mrs. A, you said that your daughters go to school everyday. And you Mrs. B., how often do your daughters attend school?*").

But in focus groups, oftentimes exceptional persons require special treatment. Dominant participants, especially, must be managed by trying to elicit more information from other participants. This involves encouraging reluctant participants to contribute more by directing attention to those person's using their names and openly asking for an opinion. At the same time, the moderator should avoid eye contact and/or change the subject to discourage dominant participants from speaking. More eye contact, though, may be needed with reluctant participants. If "experts" or "specialists" (e.g., district education officials, someone with authority) are present, they should be told before the session begins that their best contribution is to listen to the discussion and share their opinions with project personnel *after* the meeting.

Other techniques for eliciting group participation include a list of information needed on the topic and emphasizing the group's value in providing it, pictures and other audiovisual materials, as well as periodic summaries of what has been said so far.

At the end of the focus group, a small gift is usually given to compensate the participants for their time and effort. The gift should be an inexpensive but useful item. It should not, however, be one that highly motivates discussants to attend, or unwanted persons may attempt to join the discussion group simply to receive a gift.

Post-Session

Transcriptions are made from the tapes and notes by the note-taker, using the notes as a guideline for transcribing. In listening to the tapes, hesitations, enthusiasm, silences, and other psychological indicators should be noted in the transcriptions to reduce bias when the researcher interprets the data. To make a one hundred percent, eighty percent, fifty percent, or thirty percent transcription, or just a summary depends on the topics that the researchers are investigating. If it is a cultural topic, the researchers want the wording to be a quotation for a one hundred percent transcription. If eighty percent, the researcher will remove something that is not relevant to the topic. Fifty percent transcription is also focused but more selective to specific issues or relevant factors. Thirty percent transcription is sometimes a summary, especially for programme evaluation.

When the researchers analyze the data, they need to read the text transcription as well as listen to the tapes. The investigators should make a card catalog from the transcriptions in order to categorize the data, and also refer back to important wordings from the quotation when writing the report (see the previous section on analyzing interview data).

When writing the report, and if possible, the researchers should try to integrate quantitative or other qualitative information with the focus group data to make it more valid. It is recommended that the focus group technique not be used alone, but as a complementary method. For ethical reasons, the investigators should also change the discussants' names and site of the study when they analyze the data as well as quote from the sessions.

In summary, FGDs are exploratory discussions, the main aim of which is to determine those opinions, attitudes, and knowledge held by the target group that regulate how people behave and the effectiveness of potential intervention strategies and programmes. Generally, they are not intended to collect specific background information that is more readily obtainable using individual interviewing methods. However, focus groups can indicate to the researcher which discussants might be valuable for in-depth interviewing. The key to successful focus group discussions is, as the name implies, to be focused. The interview guide, the moderator's questioning patterns and communications skills, and participant selection should be precise

(focused) enough to elicit spontaneous, voluntary, and in-depth information during the session. To do this, the research team must also be prepared in advance in how to manage the group discussion effectively.

VII. A Practical Guide to Analyzing Qualitative Interview Information

Individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) can provide you with great detail about how specific gender in education programmes and projects have been undertaken or what key issues need to be addressed. They will also provide you with ***a lot*** of written text that may be almost overwhelming unless it is well managed.

Start Analyzing Your Information Early

The analysis of qualitative information is an ongoing process. It begins as soon as you start interviewing people and continues until you write your final report. It is very important that you continually review the information that you are receiving from your respondents. If you leave the analysis until the very end, you could discover large gaps in your results or unanswered questions. At that stage, it would be too late to correct any problems you have discovered. Ongoing analysis thus serves three main purposes:

1. to enable you to focus quickly on the main issues that are important to participants (for instance, the roles and responsibilities of girls in the family as affecting their enrolment in school), and then explore these issues more closely;
2. to check that the interviews (individual, FGD) are being conducted in the best possible way (such as being held at convenient times for respondents, naturally flowing discussion, interviews not being disrupted by others or by noise, etc.);
3. to review the results of your interviews early enough so that you can determine if the information you are collecting is actually meeting your study's objectives.[17]

Sort Your Information

The sorting process usually begins as soon as you start collecting your information. For instance, every evening (and lasting sometimes into the night), a researcher may write-up her interview notes from individual interviews or FGDs in a systematic way or make transcriptions of taped interviews. Each completed write-up, or transcript, should contain at least the following elements:

1. the people met as well as events or situations experienced that day and the exact context in which they occurred (even the smallest, seemingly insignificant meeting should be noted in detail since, at a later time, it may become exceedingly relevant);
2. the main themes or issues discussed in each interview, described in as complete a manner as possible;
3. the issues on which you should concentrate during the next interview; and,
4. the specific types of data sought about these issues.[18]

In writing and reading your transcripts early, you will gain a better understanding of:

1. what information you have actually collected;
2. its connection with previous information;
3. what information still needs to be obtained;

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17. Dawson S., Manderson L., Tallo VL. A Manual for the Use of Focus Groups. International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries, Boston, Massachusetts. 1993.

18. Miles MB., Huberman AM. Qualitative Data Analysis. A Sourcebook of New Methods. Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, California. 1984.

4. what common topics, patterns, and themes are emerging; and

5. major research issues that you may not have been anticipated.

In writing-up your interview information and sorting it, you are beginning the process of "content analysis." In content analysis, you are taking a large amount of qualitative information—usually from interviews rather than observations—and then looking for common patterns or themes that are emerging from it. A "pattern" is usually a descriptive finding, such as "Almost all of the participants believe that the primary responsibility of girls is to take care of their families, while boys are responsible for earning an income." A "theme" is a recurring topic or category; for instance, "gender stereotype."

After you have completed your write-ups, read them in different ways. First, read them as a whole (in their entirety), and make notes of your general impressions, such as by writing notes in the margins. For instance, if you see a sentence that talks about girls' work in the home, write in the margin "girls' work in home." Also, keep in mind your project's objectives and explanatory framework as you read the transcripts. Look for, and highlight, major opinions and attitudes, issues, and recurring or emerging themes that are related to your project's objectives, explanatory framework, or research question.

Next, read the transcripts again, but look for more specific issues or themes. Take out your list of objectives or a list of the information that you feel you need, such as the factors (variables) you identified in creating your explanatory framework. Read your transcripts to see if any new issues, factors, or themes are emerging from your interviews that were not included in your original list or framework. Highlight these and list them.[19]

Code Your Information

When you are sorting your information and seeing what it is telling you, you are starting the process of organizing your information so that it begins to mean something, rather than being just a jumble of words and sentences. You are trying to simplify and make sense out of what you are being told, which is the challenge of content analysis.

Developing some manageable classification or coding system will help you to take the next step in analyzing your information. Consequently, while you are sorting your information, you should also start to code your transcripts. The codes you select should represent the general topics that are important for understanding the issue you are studying and that are evident in your transcriptions or interview notes. These may even equate to the factors or variables that you used in making your explanatory framework. As you read your transcripts and sort your information as noted above, you are actually looking for these topics, and new ones, in order to determine your coding or indexing categories. Examples of these are shown in the sample coded transcript below. Coming up with these topics is like constructing an index for a book or labels for a file system.

Once you have these coding (or indexing) categories, and during your next reading of the transcripts or notes, you can begin to code your information. To do this, you mark sections of the transcript in a way that indicates what the respondents are talking about. For instance, in a study of girls' roles and responsibilities in the family, every time a respondent mentions girls going to school, you mark the section to indicate this. You can mark this section in one of two ways. The first way is to simply mark it "girls' access to school." The second way is to use code words to make it faster, such as GACCS which is short for "Girls' Access to School." If the respondents talk about girls caring for their younger siblings, you can code this with "GCCR" or "girls' child care responsibilities." These codes are written directly beside the relevant passages.

19. Dawson S., Manderson L., Tallo VL. A Manual for the Use of Focus Groups. International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries, Boston, Massachusetts. 1993.

Sample Coded Transcript	
Text/Transcript	**Code (indexing category)**
Mrs. A said that she did not like the fact that both she and her husband were illiterate.	**PRNT_LIT***(short for "parental literacy")*
She said that, "All children must be educated *"child* at least until Grade 10."	**CHIL_ED/GIRL_ED***(short for education or girls' education")*
She also said that she cannot send her children to school. "How can I? We are hardly ever there in the village and education has no value for street sellers."	**PRNT_VALU_ED***(short for "parental value of education")* **PRNT_OCCUP***(short for "parental occupation")*
Her husband also said, "Moreover, the village school is hardly functional. Teachers come and go as they please. The government hardly has any control over them."	**SCHL_QUAL** *(short for "school quality")*
Their daughter also said that education is not relevant in her life. *education")*	**CHILD_VALU_ED** *(short for "child value of*
"I'm needed to work at home and care for my younger brother so my parents can work. I have no time for school"	**GRL_FAMRESP** *(short for "girls' family responsibilities")*

After your transcript is coded, you will have a list of code words running down the side of the page, as shown in the box below. These codes make it easier for you to identify important issues or sections of interest later on. For instance, if you are looking at the issue of girls' responsibilities within the family, all you need to do is run your eyes down the transcripts and find all of the responses marked "GRL_FAMRESP" or "girls' family responsibilities". The copy of the transcript on which these codes are written becomes your indexed copy. For those who have access to computer software, the programme

"The Ethnograph" can be used to manage and sort your coded transcript.[20]

Create Files

Your coding system will allow you to organize your information into files known as "analytic files." Each analytic file is just a place to keep all your responses together according to your specific topic of interest. In the example of girls' responsibilities within the family, let's say you have decided to have GRL_FAMRESP as your code to indicate all responses that discuss this issue. In the analytic file for "girls' family responsibilities" or GRL_FAMRESP, you should enter *every* response that is coded this way in your transcripts. Even if the same information is given by two or more different people or FGD session, write each response down separately. In this way, you will keep track of how many times this response is made, and you can then more easily identify common patterns and themes. Create an analytic file for each topic or indexing category that is relevant for your study, such as those used in the above sample coded transcript. These "topics" represent your "units of analysis" that you will use to analyze and interpret your findings.

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20. Seidel JV., Kjolseth R., Seymour E. The Ethnograph: A Program for the Computer Assisted Analysis of Text Based Data. Qualis Research Associates, Littleton, Colorado. 1988.

In addition to analytic files, you should also keep two other files. The first is a *fieldwork file* that contains materials on the process you used in conducting the research. It should include the step-by-step procedures used in collecting information, personal experiences, feelings and observations of the researcher himself as these may or may not affect data collection, any logistical problems encountered, and the like. By having a file on this topic already built up, you will find it much easier to write-up the final report's section on research methodology or research strategies. You will also be able to look back on how your personal actions and reactions might have affected, or were affected by, the community itself. For instance, you can assess if your experiences as a participant were actual, normal reflections of natural community and individual behavioural patterns, or whether certain community members changed their behaviour because of your presence.

In addition, a *mundane or background file* is used to keep track of people, places, organizations, documentsm, and so forth. Mundane files should be organized in such a way that information is grouped under obvious categories so as to facilitate its later retrieval. For instance, when an in-depth interview is conducted, you will almost certainly want to have a folder on the person you interviewed, in addition to subsequent persons. Data related to the community under study – such as its history and development, material resources, family organization, and so forth – should also be filed under specific thematic categories.[21]

Analyze and Interpret Your Information

To analyze and interpret your information, you will need to examine the responses in each analytic file and ask yourself, "What does this mean? What does this tell me about, for instance, girls' access to school? How does the information in the file GRL_FAMRESP fit with or relate to the information in the file PRNT_VALU_ED (parental value of education) as well as the file CHLD_VALU_ED (child value of education). In asking these questions, you will work back and forth between your information and your own perspective and understanding in order to make sense of the information.

Also look again at your explanatory framework. Does the information you have collected support it? Do the relationships that you "mapped out" in your framework actually exist based on the results of your interviews? For instance, does family occupation and income affect girls' access to school? Is this finding related to other factors like costs of schooling or family size?

Some of the tools you can use to help you analyze and present your information are summarized in the box.

21. Yoddumnern-Attig B. *Data Analysis and Report Writing: What to Know before You Start.* In: Yoddumnern-Attig B., Attig G., Boonchalaksi W (Eds.). A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods. Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991.

Selected Tools for Data Analysis	
Tool	**Usefulness**
Graphic devices such as organizational charts, flow charts, etc.	Useful in showing the relationships between structural or hierarchical levels, or to describe and contrast events.
Causal networks	Describe deterministic relationships between independent variables (describe a process); for example, how girls' access to education is affected by family size, (which reduces) family income, (and thus the family cannot pay for) school costs (direct and indirect)
Conceptually clustered variables	Bring together data or important issues that, working together, affect a situation; for instance, five major factors that work together to reduce a girl's chances of going to school include: 1) girls' responsibilities within the family; 2) family income; 3) parental education; 4) location of school; and 5) relevance of the curriculum to daily life.
Adapted from: Yoddumnern-Attig B. Data Analysis and Report Writing: What to Know Before You Start. In: Yoddumnern-Attig B, Attig G, Boonchalaksi W (eds.) A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods. Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand, 1991.	

VIII. Reporting

Qualitative research can give you very detailed insights and a greater understanding of gender issues in education. When reporting, you need to use this detail to support the conclusions you reach. Some reports may be oral, but most will be written. Written reports provide the opportunity for you to use the details you have acquired during our research.

If you have carefully organized the research process, from problem identification, to selection of research methods, to identification of sources, to analysis of your information and its interpretation, the reporting becomes easier.

Summarizing Information

Once again, the strength of interviewing as a research method is the detail it provides. While we do not want to get lost in the detail, we do need to use this to our advantage in writing our reports.

- If you have analyzed the information from interviews by focusing on your major themes and using your explanatory framework as a guide, summarizing the data for your report becomes easier.
- When you summarize interview information for your report you can:

  1. Discuss the patterns you found during analysis (such as how the information in different "files" relates to each other).
  2. Provide examples from the interviews to illustrate the points and conclusions you are making.

3. Use quotations to illustrate the respondents' point of view.
   - If you used an interpreter for the interview, you should indicate quotations in some way that illustrates that these are not in the original language. For example, such quotations could be *in italics* or [they could be in square brackets].
   - Whatever method you use, it should be clear to the reader which quotations are directly from the informant, and which have been interpreted from the original language.
4. Discuss the agreements or disagreements among respondents or in the data.
5. Link the information you obtained from interviews to information obtained from documentary research or from observations.
6. Make our own comments and distinguish our comments from our direct reporting of what the informants have told us.

Report Format

A) Format: A good report should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following sections.

1. Background

- Clearly identify the problem and the reason why the research was conducted.
  - Who needs the research, and why do they need it?
- Clearly identify your study's explanatory framework or core concepts. These should have served as the guiding reference for selecting respondents, focusing questions, interpreting information, etc.
  - Readers need to understand where you are coming from in order to assess the credibility of the story you are trying to tell.
- State what was learned from other research.
  - Identify the sources for earlier research.
- Specify the time period during which your research was done.
  - Readers will need this in future to judge the utility of the research for their own problems.

2. Research Methods

- State what methods you used: observation, documentary review, interviews, etc.
- State how many documents you reviewed, how many and what types of people you interviewed, how many meetings you observed, etc.

3. Findings

- Summarize the major issues and what the information tells us about these issues.
  - Provide examples from the information to help illustrate the points you are making.
  - Where the sources of information are from documents, state the name of the document, author, year, publisher or responsible organization, and page number in a footnote or reference note.
  - Where the source is an informant, and the information comes from interviews, provide selected quotations.
- Summarize the conclusions you have reached from your research about the major problem and the research questions specified earlier.
  - Make clear what exceptions there may be to your conclusions, such as evidence that may contradict it, and why you have reached your conclusions.

- If the research is about policy issues, list several possible alternatives for action that arise from your conclusions.
  - State what you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each of the alternatives.
- Recommend one or more of the alternatives, and state why.

4. Attachments (appendices)

- Place any longer examples, such as case studies, copies of memos, other reports, or very long quotations, at the end of the report.
  - Not everyone will read these, but other researchers may read them, and the information could be useful.
- Documents reviewed for the research should be included in a bibliography or list of references.
- If informants have no objection to being identified, then a list of people interviewed can be included at the end of the study.
  - For more structured interviews, a list of questions can be included at the end of the report.

B) Length

Reports based on qualitative research may be fairly long because, to be credible, they should provide examples of the evidence supporting the conclusions.

Every report, however, should also include an **Executive Summary**, which is usually only one or two pages in length and placed at the beginning of the report. This will provide information on the major topics listed above: Background, Research Methods, and Findings, but not the attachments.

Our objective in reporting on qualitative research is to provide the reader with enough information to illustrate your points and conclusions, but not so much detail that it is impossible for the reader to understand the report or to read it entirely because it is too long.

Chapter Five

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

I. Core Issues in Doing Qualitative Research

Researcher Selection

For administrators of research studies (qualitative or quantitative), and especially for those who commission the research, knowing how to make a good Terms of Reference for selecting researchers is an important skill. Before you can engage a researcher, you must prepare clear instructions explaining exactly what you want. These instructions are known as a brief, a scope of work (SOW), or a Terms of Reference (TOR). All these terms mean the same thing, but TOR is the most commonly used term.[1]

A TOR is a set of explicit instructions about what you want a researcher to do and a guide to the size and scope of the work. It also serves to:

- give a clear description of the project, its objectives and anticipated outcomes and deliverables to enable researchers to clearly understand the project;
- explain what is expected of the researchers;
- describe the importance and complexity of the work;
- guide the researcher on what they are accountable for and how the project will be managed;
- ensure that there is no confusion about what is to be achieved so that the project does not go off track;
- remember that a TOR forms the basis for a contractual relationship with the researcher. The clearer and more straightforward it is, the better for the project manager and the researcher. It facilitates monitoring and the ability to take corrective action when things are not going according to plan. However, one needs to keep in mind that a TOR cannot cover every possibility. For example, there could be unforeseen and unavoidable influences that impact negatively on the delivery of the work.

The following questions provide a useful base to developing a good TOR:

- Is there a specific time by which the project must be completed?
- How will I know if the project is successful?
- What are the expected outcomes?
- Are the deliverables quantifiable?
- What are the major work processes or methods to be used?
- How will information be gained during implementation?
- What kinds of skills are required?
- Why do we need this service?
- What objectives do we hope to achieve?
- How much will it cost?
- How long will it take to accomplish?
- Who should be involved in the project?

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1. Adapted from: European Union Parliamentary Support Programme. A Guide to Managing Researchers. http://www.parliament.gov.za/eupsp/researchs/guide/sc4.html

A Basic TOR Format

There are many ways of drafting a TOR. The format below discusses the essential elements and broad guidelines for developing a basic TOR.

Key Elements

- Background
- Project Description
- Purpose
- Policy framework
- Project goals
- Implementation framework
- Timeframes
- Deliverables
- Accountability
- Levels of authority
- Communication
- Reporting framework and schedule
- Required competencies
- Remuneration (cost/budget)

Background

The background provides general information about the context of the project. It highlights why there is a need for the project and provides a perspective on the broader initiatives within which the project will take place (for instance, development of a gender-sensitive national curriculum).

Project Description

The project description details the scope of the work in broad terms. It also indicates who the client or beneficiaries of the project are and who the project will have an impact on (stakeholders and other role players). It also defines where the project is to take place.

Purpose

Under this heading an explicit definition of the aim of the project and the reasons for doing the project should be provided.

Policy Framework

It is sometimes necessary to give prospective researchers an understanding of the policy framework within which a particular intervention is envisaged.

Project Goals

This section states the goals and objectives of the project. How clear the goals are depends on how well the problem, need, or issue has been analyzed, and the type and level of expertise that is required.

Implementation Framework

The implementation framework gives a description of how the project is expected to be carried out. This will include the key tasks to be performed, what methods or techniques will be applied, and what working procedures will be used by the researcher.

Timeframes

It is important that the project starting date and ending date be provided. This is useful for budgeting purposes (time, money, and people) for both the organization managing the research

project and the researcher. It also has relevance to the monitoring role that will come into effect once the project begins.

Deliverables

This clearly defines the results to be achieved. The aim here is not to focus on the input or process of delivery, but on the outcomes. Deliverables must be formulated in such a way that they can be objectively identified in a tangible and quantifiable or measurable way. It is sometimes important to indicate the level or quality of outcome that is expected.

Accountability

For reasons of good management and control, it is important to clarify who will be responsible for what during the implementation of the project. This promotes accountability and ensures that there is no confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the researcher and the project leader in the organization.

Levels of Authority

This sets out who is responsible for what level of decision in the organization managing the research project so that the researcher can deal with issues at the right level.

Communication

The TOR must spell out the channels of communication on the project and who the project leaders are on both sides.

Reporting Framework and Schedule

This explains what reports are needed at what stages of the project. For a simple project, only one report would probably be required at the end of the project. For more complex or longer projects, it is better to insist on regular feedback at predetermined intervals. You must specify what types of reports should be provided (written or verbal or both) and at what intervals they should be submitted.

Required Competencies

In order to ensure that you get the right researchers, particularly for qualitative research studies, you must develop clear criteria for their required competencies. Competence refers to skills (technical and behavioural), knowledge, and attitude. The more precisely you describe the required competencies, the more self-selecting the researchers will be (that is, researchers who do not meet the requirements will not apply) so that identifying the right researcher is easier.

Remuneration

This section states the total amount of remuneration that a researcher will receive over what period(s) of time, in addition to other expenses that will be covered by the project's budget, such as travel, accommodations, daily stipend allowance (DSA), etc., as well as those to be covered by the researcher herself.

Researcher Capacity

For the researcher, the challenge the challenge that they face in conducting qualitative research is how to make valid sense out of each person's or group's way of life in light of the diversity and complexity in which each lives.[2] To meet this challenge requires that you have capacities that go beyond simply having the right theoretical and methodological training. These include:

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2. Yoddumnern-Attig B., Attig G., Boonchalaksi W. *Benefits and Precautions in Qualitative Research.* In: Yoddumnern-Attig B., Attig G., Boonchalaksi W. (eds.). A Field Manual on Selected Qualitative Research Methods. Publication No. 127. Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand. 1991. p. 1.

- **stamina, rigour, and flexibility** in applying concepts and methods as well as in dealing with changing conditions that may affect how well you can do a study;
- **responsiveness, empathy, and a clear sense of ethics** in dealing with the people you will be studying;
- **an ability to stand in two worlds:** to recognize the concepts, values, and perceptions of persons who may be very different from you; and to move into that "other world" sufficiently to understand and learn from it, but to remain sufficiently outside to interpret it in support of policy and programme actions; and
- **skills to communicate with others** and enable them to communicate with you.

Information Collection and Analysis

The main strength of qualitative research is its flexibility. You can adapt your study to fit your specific situation, and you can redefine the issues you are exploring during the process of doing the research to meet changing needs and conditions. But, it is a strength that comes with cost.

The collection of qualitative information is labour and time-intensive. Qualitative methods often produce very large amounts of apparently unrelated information that need to be catalogued, stored, and accessed both during and after the collection process.

Equally, *the analysis of qualitative information is labour and time-intensive*. Qualitative findings usually cannot be summed up in numbers and presented in tables, and they cannot be left simply as narrative statements. For these reasons, it is critical that their analysis is on-going within the information collection process itself, so that you gradually learn the meaning of the information you are collecting and its importance in the lives of those persons you are studying. You must continually work to determine distinct classifications, categories, and over-arching general patterns that emerge in the information you are collecting so that you can accurately interpret your findings and understand the complexity of the lives and issues you are exploring.[3]

Additional care is required when using a team. Team members need to plan the approach and the questions everyone will use. Before the end of the information collection process, they need to share their ideas, their assessment of the limits of the information, and elaborate on the patterns, concepts, and gaps in knowledge that have emerged. It is a process that can bring significant added-value, but it requires a considerable amount of patience.

Quality and Consistency of Information

"Good" qualitative research and the information it generates will capture what people think, believe, and value with respect to a situation or problem, and, in this case, how gender affects girls' and boys' access to school, their retention, learning achievement, and completion. In many instances, you will obtain information that is sometimes complementary or at least in agreement. In most cases, however, this information can easily be competing or conflicting, as in the case below.

> In one case, a teacher explained children's failure to come to school as the lack of mid-day meals, which the government was failing to provide. Local government members, on the other side, explained the failure as one of a dysfunctional school, one unable to bring enough children into school to justify meal provision. The truth was likely partially in both accounts; and most likely in a third one: that community-school relations were bitter.

3. Ibid. p. 4.

Causes for the differences in information may be clear-cut. Your respondents may be incomplete or vague in their answers, or they may lie to please you (the researcher), avoid embarrassment, or because they do not know the answer. More typically, the differences in the information you collect are less easy to address because people are often inconsistent; they do not do what they say they do, and they hold contradictory values.

To understand why some of the information you are given appears to be inconsistent, you will need to go back and make further observations, ask more questions, involve other respondents, etc. It also means *triangulating*. This means bringing together different information collected using different methods (such as observations, interviews, and documents) and among different people. The aim is to confirm an important finding by looking at the situation from different angles in order to paint a complete picture, as well as to find variations in the findings uncovered through different methods. Qualitative research, therefore, is really an "art" form that rests not only on the insights of your study's subjects, but also on your own abilities and insights.

II. Challenges in Doing Qualitative Research

No one wants or intends to do a piece of research or evaluation analysis poorly, whether quantitative or qualitative. The difficulty with qualitative analysis, however, is that its weaknesses are also its strengths. It is flexible and context-sensitive. Not only are there few fixed "rules", as there are in statistical design, data collection, and analysis, but researchers are actually encouraged to tailor all of these elements to the reality they find on the ground; and qualitative research is better when they do so.

That said, *qualitative research can, and definitely should, meet certain standards of quality, dependability, and accuracy*. For this reason, it is critical that all researchers be very thorough in taking action to meet these standards *and* very clear about what limitations they faced in doing so.

Below are examples of the kinds of limitations faced by one qualitative analysis of girls not going on to secondary school in one country inhe region.[4] The types of limitations identified are not at all unique; most, if not all, studies will face them and have to solve them in a suitably effective way. Of particular note was the problem of *the research team having too tight a schedule and budget for the type of analysis it was trying to do*. This left *no flexibility for adapting to unexpected situations* that will invariably have come up. The aims of the work were hindered accordingly.

As you read through the sections below, think about how they might apply in your own work, what the risks to your information might be, and how they might be mitigated.

Sampling and Sample Size

How many cases do I need? This question is at the heart of both qualitative and quantitative studies, and it often involves deciding upon whether you want "breadth" or "depth" in your study. As we learned earlier, quantitative studies usually ask standardized questions on a limited number of issues. However, they ask these questions to a large number of respondents in a particular population (good "breadth" because your sample size is large, even into the hundreds and thousands). Although you have many cases, comparison and statistical aggregation of the data are possible, usually through computer programmes such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The aim is to determine whether these responses or reactions are "statistically significant," that is, whether they are representative (typical) of the population to which your respondents belong.

4. Excerpted and edited from an internal UNESCO/PROAP review document by Laetitia Antonowicz.

Selected Sampling Strategies for Qualitative Research[5]

Type	Purpose
Extreme or deviant case (outlier) sampling	Learning from unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, for example, outstanding successes/notable failures; to of the class/dropouts; exotic events; crises.
Intensity sampling	Information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely, for example, good students/ poor students; above average/below average.
Maximum variation sampling	Document unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions. Identify important common patterns that cut across variations (cut through the noise of variation).
Homogeneous sampling	Focus; reduce variation; simplify analysis; facilitate group interviewing.
Typical case sampling	Illustrate or highlight what is typical, normal, average.
Critical case sampling	Permits logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases because if it's true of this one case, it's likely to be true of all other cases.
Snowball or chain sampling	Identify cases of interest from sampling people who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview participants.
Criterion sampling	Picking all cases that meet some criterion, for example, all children abused in a treatment facility. Quality assurance.
Theory-based or operational construct sampling	Finding manifestations of a theoretical construct of interest so as to elaborate and examine the construct and its variations.
Confirming and discon-firming cases	Elaborating and deepening initial analysis; seeking exceptions; testing variation.
Stratified purposeful sampling	Illustrate characteristics of particular subgroups of interest; facilitate comparisons.
Opportunistic or emergent sampling	Following new leads during fieldwork; taking advantage of the unexpected; flexibility.
Purposeful random sampling (still small sample size)	Add credibility when potential purposeful sample is larger than one can handle. Reduces bias within a purposeful category. (Not for generalizations or representativeness.)
Sampling politically important cases	Attract attention to the study (or avoid attracting undesired attention by purposefully eliminating from the sample politically sensitive cases).
Convenience sampling	Do what's easy to save time, money, and effort. Poorest rationale; lowest credibility. Yields information-poor cases.
Combination or mixed purposeful sampling	Use a combination of the above sampling methods for triangulation purposes (cross-check information); flexibility; meet multiple interests and needs; etc.

5. Patton MQ. Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, 3rd Edition. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California. 2002. pp. 243-244.

In qualitative research, however, we ask questions on selected issues in great depth, paying particular attention to detail, context, and nuance. The data that we collect are not limited to predetermined analytical categories as it is in quantitative research. Consequently, qualitative methods allow us to produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases.

Although a large number of sampling strategies exist, it is important to remember that **no rule of thumb exists to tell a researcher precisely how to focus a study.** Likewise, **there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research**.[6] The extent to which a research study is broad ("breadth") or narrow ("depth"), as well as its sample size, depends on what you want to know, the purpose of your study, what is at stake, what is useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and other resources.

In summary, the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from a qualitative study have more to do with the richness of information that is obtained from selected cases (individuals, groups) and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size. The issue of sample size is a lot like the problem that students have when they are assigned to write an essay.

Student: "How long does the paper have to be?"
Teacher: "Long enough to cover the assignment."
Student: "But how many pages."
Teacher: "Enough pages to do justice to the subject—no more, no less."[7]

Site Access

Transport issues were taken into account during the study design; those remote districts/ villages too far or difficult to reach were not selected for the study. However, even quite accessible places happened to be difficult to reach because of bad weather conditions. *Delays on arrival at sites* had repercussions on the number or on the length of interviews and *reinforced the superficiality of the data collected*. As schedules and budgets were tight, the team could not be flexible or adapt very much to these unexpected circumstances.

Participants' Schedules

Heads of selected villages were informed of the team's arrival, but stopping all activities for the interviews was not an option, as people do have their lives and work to do. The team had difficulties in gathering the population for group discussions, which took much more time than expected, especially when the people were working in fields far from their village. Consequently, interviews were shortened, and the number and diversity of the respondents were not as wide as expected. In particular, *the time constraints limited the efforts that could have been made to assure the participation of the very poor and marginalized groups.*

Documents

Analysis of documents relied on the translation of, often non-official, laws, white papers, and other related materials released by the Government and its various Ministries. *Small errors, or lack of precision in the English version, may have resulted in wrong interpretations*. Moreover, when undertaking gender research, the issue of sex is crucial, and often in official documents, the *mention of "student" did not indicate whether the reference was to boys or girls*. When analyzing school regulations and penalties that may have applied to students who were engaged in flirting or sex within the context of school, the differentiation between girls and boys would have been necessary, but was often not available. For instance, in one secondary school, students who engage in sexual affairs were penalized and could be expelled from the school. However, there was no mention of whether the girls were exempted from these penalties in case of sexual abuse.

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6. Patton MQ. Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, 3rd Edition. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California. 2002. pp. 227-228, 245.
7. Ibid. p. 245.

Respondents' Ease with the Methods

Records of focus group discussions showed that often only a *small number of individuals was talking while many remained quiet.* The lack of involvement of a number of respondents necessarily affected the quality of the information collected and its representativeness. A related problem was that there was *no way to know, in retrospect, whether the ones who did not speak had different opinions and views than the ones who did*. Recordings of the sessions did not indicate who remained quiet, nor did interviewers appear to have put extra attention to drawing them out or making other arrangements to collect their opinions.

A different issue related to interviews and focus group discussions concerned with the *level of questions asked*. Dealing with gender and inclusion concepts is difficult for many people, and some (perhaps the most affected) may have been reluctant to disclose thoughts on sensitive or personal issues.

Language of the Research

When conducting the interviews in areas where the national (majority) language was not spoken, questions had to be translated into minority languages; then answers had to be translated into the majority language again to allow the team to record them. An English translation was then provided for the consultants who analyzed the data. *Many subtleties are lost in translation*, and the more translations the *more simple and possibly inaccurate the answer* of a respondent will tend to be. When dealing with qualitative information, this issue has *significant consequences on the level and confidence of the analysis that is made from them.*

Researcher Values and Attitudes

It is difficult to approach research with a completely open mind about what the findings might or should show. Culture, existing knowledge, and beliefs, especially on sensitive issues such as gender and ethnicity, can be strong, preventing researchers from seeing a different version of the reality than they are used to or expect. In this case, some of the team firmly believed the reason girls dropped out between primary and secondary school was poverty. As a result, answers by respondents indicating pregnancy and marital issues were not investigated further, although they seemed to play a role in the decision of girls (and their families) to drop out, as a married woman cannot attend school by law, and a pregnant girl does not by tradition.

Related to this was the matter of whether the researcher's values and experiences influenced what he or she actually saw and heard (as opposed to looked at or asked about). In this study, *differences were found when comparing findings of researchers coming from the capital, researchers recruited at the province level, and foreign consultants.* Researchers from the first category identified differences in the teaching style compared to the rest of the country; researchers from the district/province easily explained attitudes of certain groups of pupils or teachers; foreign consultants noticed differences or similarities with other settings they were exposed to in developed or developing countries.

Researchers' Identity

Ways in which the identity of the researchers affect a study should not be minimized. When conducting interviews, the *sex or ethnicity of the facilitator and recorder do play a role* in the kind of answers given by respondents. Even issues of self-presentation (how the researchers dress or whether their manner is courteous) have their impact.

- **Sex:** although each team was composed of both men and women, some focus group discussions may have been influenced by the presence of a man, such as in a group of dropout girls, or a woman, such as in interviews with male district officials.
- **Ethnicity:** researchers were mainly from the predominant ethnic groups, while respondents were from many different, largely minority, ethnic backgrounds.
- **Socio-economic background:** researchers were employees of the Ministry of Education, other national institutions, or members of the local government, while respondents were mainly people working in the subsistence agriculture sector.

- **Rural/urban background:** researchers were mainly coming from the capital, the most urbanized city in the country, while respondents were living in smaller townships, as well as rural and remote mountainous areas.
- **Education:** researchers were literate, holding university degrees, while many respondents were not literate or not as well educated.
- **Language:** most of the researchers could only speak the national language, which was not the native language of many of the respondent ethnic groups.

In this study, the gaps between researchers and respondents were probably important, although in what ways was not fully explored.

That said, the most crucial issue appeared to be the researchers being part of the national Ministry of Education or Provincial Education Office. Rules and regulations of the Ministry require its representatives to introduce themselves and inform villages of their visit; their identities and jobs were, therefore, known. Moreover, wearing two hats was difficult for researchers; they sometimes made advisory or corrective remarks during interviews. Although the focus of the study was kept somewhat vague, as gender and ethnicity are sensitive topics,

- *the presence of Ministry representatives did impress villagers and school staff, and probably prevented them acting naturally while being under observation; and*
- *there was a risk that school staff and students confused the research and inspection roles of the team, which suggests that the honesty of their answers may be legitimately questioned.*

> Adding to the complexity of qualitative research here is the issue of *research ethics*: is it ever appropriate to keep the fact and purpose of a qualitative study secret from those being studied? Under what circumstances? There is also a *practical issue*: where the analysis is expected to lead to policy and programme reform, does it make sense not to engage with the stakeholders who are expected to benefit from, and contribute to, the thinking and action of that school improvement effort? How can the results of a study be considered valid, and the basis for interventions, if the people involved are not able to understand why the questions are important and help the researchers (as well as policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, etc.) to address their concerns?

On a less than positive note: during a three-day training workshop on school and classroom observation techniques held before the fieldwork, the activity which worked the least well for the team focused on the influence a researcher's identity has on the information that is collected. Questions of personal views of the world, identity construction, and influence of education, background, gender, and ethnicity proved, understandably, difficult to grasp.

On a positive note: one member of the team happened to be from one of the minority ethnic groups, which helped to ease a lot of the interviews in the province where that group was numerous. Schoolgirls, in particular, felt much more confidant to talk to this researcher than to any other member of the team, which probably enhanced the quality and completeness of their information.

III. Limiting Risks: Establishing Rapport

Quantitative analysis stresses the importance of "objectivity," where the researcher stays "outside the lives of those being studied" so as not to influence the situation being observed or the data being collected. Qualitative research does not claim to be able to maintain distance in this sense. Asking clarifying questions, probing for more detail, prompting people to express an opinion by presenting observed evidence or contradictory ideas—all of these put the researcher very much "in the picture." Moreover, in most cases, it is impossible for a researcher, set within the centre of a classroom or community, not to be acknowledged. In the above case,

SUGGESTED READINGS

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… traditions of hospitality and ways of living made staying outside of the community/ school life not possible. (At the same time), the research team searched to reduce the gap between them and the community they were studying to the extent possible within the timeframe. The idea was that people would feel more comfortable and would be more inclined to act naturally if the researchers seemed less strangers to them.

As noted earlier, what is critical for qualitative research is that, as much as possible, the researcher and the referent community be aware of, and manage, the interactions between them. In the case described above, the team did take action by developing a "*Charter for the Observer…* based on their previous experience as researchers (and aimed) to avoid mistakes or unconscious attitudes that may have enhanced the gap between them and the communities….". As noted in the report, and in the earlier section on classroom observations in this manual, it is a guideline that can, and should, "be developed further and used in other contexts."

Charter for the Observer:

- Be discreet: cloths/attitude
- Do not disturb the classroom to the extent possible
- Arrive in the classroom before the class starts
- Do not leave the classroom before the end of the class
- Do not talk during the class
- Do not talk with the students or the teacher during the class
- Remember your role: an observer/researcher, NOT a member of the Ministry of Education
- Do not judge what you see
- Adopt the attitude of a learner, receiving information from the people, NOT of a teacher, giving advice or saying what is right or wrong
- When discussing informally with people, do not take notes; write your comments later on
- Debrief systematically with the other team members after classroom observations
- Debrief every night with the other team members and fill your comments form
- Be polite with the people and use the strategies developed in the workshop to reduce the gap between you and the community.

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