

## Theory of Relatability as a Possible Alternative to the Issue of Generalising of Research Findings: The Case of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) at Universiti Utara Malaysia

Hisham Dzakiria

Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages  
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia  
hisham@uum.edu.my or hdzakiria@col.org

### Abstract

Generalisation is widely-acknowledged as a ‘quality standard’ in quantitative research but it is more controversial in qualitative research. The goal of qualitative studies is not to generalise but rather to provide a rich and meaningful contextualised understanding of human experience through the intensive study of a particular phenomenon. Despite many positive aspects of case studies in qualitative research, qualitative case studies continued to be criticised for its lack of objectivity and generalisability. It is common for a qualitative research to be criticised and regarded with suspicion and hostility particularly on the value of its dependence on small samples which is believed to render it incapable of generalising conclusions. This article suggests that although qualitative studies are not intended to be generalisable in the way that most quantitative studies do, qualitative research and its output can have other worthy features which make the research and its findings appreciated. This can be achieved by extending the power to generalise to readers or other researchers through the concept of *relatability* in responding to the issue of generalisability in qualitative research. In doing so, this article discussed and response to Michael Bassey’s argument that case study research and educational social research generally ought to aimed at producing *generalisation and prediction*. An alternative to Bassey is to focus on the power play that readers can have in generating generalisation particularly in qualitative research. The concept of “relatability” has its own merits, one that is justifiable and has its own potential to be developed. This article is based on a qualitative case study on the experiences and perspectives of a small group of distance learners as they progress through their courses at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM).

Keywords: relatability, quantitative research, generalisation

## **Introduction**

It is becoming increasingly accepted within social sciences that qualitative research methods have a profound contribution to the understanding of the complexity of human behavior and activities, and the issues that arose from it. There is, however, less understanding of the theoretical principles that underpin qualitative research, and consequently of its appropriate application.

One particular issue that this paper addresses is on generalisation of qualitative findings which differ profoundly from those that inform the more dominant tradition of quantitative research. An appreciation of these principles is necessary not only for the understanding and application of different strategies available for data analysis in qualitative, but also for an understanding of issues relating to the quality or rigor of qualitative research and the application of its findings within the wider world of policy and action. This paper is intended to provide “alternative” or solutions (partly or as a whole) to the intricate issue of generalisation particularly for qualitative research – that it is a myth for qualitative findings must be made generalisable.

One of the greatest strengths of the qualitative approach is the richness and depth of explorations and descriptions. The mission of qualitative research, as I understand it, is to discover meaning and understanding, rather than to verify truth or predict outcomes.

However, the fact remains; generalisation has always been a “stumbling block” for researchers across the social sciences (Bassey, 1999; Fahrenberg, 2003; Hamilton, 1980; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Polit, 2010; Stake, 1978; Yin, 2003; 1994; 1984). This is even so in research culture where quantitative methods of research dominate over the use of qualitative research. Qualitative research remains poorly understood and consequently its potential remains underdeveloped (Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins, 1980; Sandelowski, 1986).

This scenario is true within the educational research community in Malaysia. As a researcher, you are always faced with the questions of: Are your findings generalisable? What can your research contribute? The use

of qualitative method complicates the issue of generalisation even more. This is especially so in a “hostile” research environment for such research approach. Qualitative researchers will inevitably have to confront not only with the above questions, but also with other critics and questions. For example, if you use case study, why use case study?, What is its significant?, How will it be carried out?, Can “X” number of respondents produce generalisable findings?, Why use just “X” number of respondents?, Are the samples representative of the population? etc. A familiar criticism of qualitative methodology questions the value of its dependence on small samples which is believed to render its incapable of generalising conclusions (Hamel, Dufour and Fortin, 1993; Fahrenberg, 2003; Yin, 2003; 1994; 1993; 1984; Gillham, 2000).

Stake’s (1978) concept of “naturalistic generalisation” and Hamilton’s (1980) notion of a “science of the singular” refer to evaluation research; and draw heavily on Polanyi’s (1958) notion of “personalised were among plausible alternatives that are available.” Nevertheless, Michael Bassey’s call for fuzzy generalisation is one that caught my attention the most. Even though, there have been many who responded both positively and negatively on Bassey proposition over the last almost two decades, this article, besides commenting on Bassey’s position, also extend the Relatability Theory as a measure to defend particularly qualitative researchers from believing that we have no choice but to generalise our research findings. This paper intends to provide an alternative to the worries of many researchers and graduate students on the necessity of generalising one’s findings to the mass population.

Bassey suggests that as researchers we are longing to produce predictions, which I think is not the case in all research. I feel that prediction is not our business, and it must not be the primary objective in pursuing a research activity. I remembered vividly that just reading Bassey’s title had me troubled with the word fuzzy. What does the word *fuzzy* entail? Bassey just did not stop at X may influence Y, but went further to develop what he called a Best Estimate of Trustworthiness (BET) to help estimate the likelihood of the influence.

Is it always true that “Do X in Y circumstances, and Z may be the case” is always an effect as claimed by Bassey? The author object to Basseys’

thinking on two accounts: vagueness and contradiction on the use of BET. He encourages us to increase attention to generalisation, universal and away from the particulars of what was actually observed in a particular research.

In relation to BET, researchers particularly qualitative researchers do not always think about who are going to use the research findings and how useful it may be to them, but rather we are more immerse into understanding the case, and answering to the Who, What and How questions, and not so much on how findings of X can be used by W, and certainly are never about predicting future events.

The important aspect here is the function of research and the role of researcher and practitioner within it. From the *point of viewing* of the researcher, the aim of the research is to analyse a situation in order to understand it better and then to disseminate this new understanding for others to share and learn. From the practitioner's perspectives, the aim of the research is to make use of fresh insights in effecting changes to his or her own context.

Note that, in the first of these, the aim is the formulation of understanding, whilst in the latter, the aim is the utilisation of understanding. If research merely aims to describe a studied case then an analysis of what happened to the practitioner suffices. However, if it aims to offer the opportunity for practitioners to change their practice as a result of understanding the studied case, then it seems sensible for the research to present the analysis in a form that emphasises the action that may be taken to facilitate that change. Indeed, this is what Bassey (1999: 52) seems to be proposing:

A fuzzy generalisation carries an element of uncertainty. It reports that something has happened in one place and that it may also happen elsewhere. There is a possibility but no surety. There is an invitation to “try it and see if the same thing happens for you.”

This article, however, suggest that Bassey's idea lacks the motivational component on the readers part. Invitation “to try” does not always been made explicitly and implicitly to readers. Rather, realisation of what can or cannot be used, or whether do X, and that will lead to Z are very

circumstantial. At the end of the day, a particular research may not at all be beneficial to a reader because the research and its findings are just not related and share no similar circumstances. It is all a matter of “relevance” of one study to what a reader thinks to be beneficial, replicable, and may help to improve their institutions. If that is the case, then why don’t us – researchers allow the readers to make generalisation? Why not give the readers, the power to generalise?

A research for that matter cannot easily impose change on others. It may help to suggest or negotiate for improvements within the research setting. My research on distance learning at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) for example helps the institution to listen to the learners’ voice and experience on the distance learning programme. Such understanding in turn helps UUM perhaps to look at issues that surfaced and make necessary changes to improve the educational experience of distance learners at UUM.

However, as noted earlier on, it is important to note that the findings of my research may or may not be relevant to other ODL providers and institutions in Malaysia. Some of the findings in my study may be generalisable internally within UUM, but not externally to distance learners at other institutions.

The author believe the power of extending the internal to external generalisation is not within the reach of any researchers. It is however, the power possess by the readers, and other researchers. They know best on which research and findings that are related or not related, usable or not applicable to them. It is then only natural to allow them (the readers) to make generalisations based on the simple premise of relatability:

*If X produces Y, and if Y is related to Z, do Y it **may** change Z*

The key concept here is the word “related.” Relatedness is a prerequisite for any generalisation to take place. Understanding the concept, and most important of all, understanding the semantic of the word “related” only does one thing – it allows the reader to ask the basic question of: Is this research and its findings related to his or her interest?, Circumstances?, Institutions?, and Is it applicable, transferable? These basic questions ultimately will help the reader to benefit or discard it as being not related

and applicable to them. My argument is, only when one research finding is related to your interest, research and context, you would then have the privilege to transfer and generalise those findings to your research. It is not the former researcher that has that ultimate power to generalise to a bigger population.

### ***Relatability***

The primary objective of qualitative research is to offer a perspective of a situation and provide well-written research reports that reflect the researcher's ability to illustrate the corresponding phenomenon in great detail and meaningful way. Qualitative researchers should not worry if their research findings are not generalisable. By virtue of the **Theory of Relatability**, we can resolve this issue and put more focus on the research.

This concept of relatability evolved in my attempt to steer away from science, to steer away from grand generalisation all together. Rather than the researcher making generalisation based on the findings surfaced in a particular study, why not leave the act of making the grand generalisation to the readers, or other researchers. Let them make that very decision to generalise, or not to generalise. If the findings are related to a particular organisation, setting or circumstances say “Y”, than the findings surfaced “may be related to Y;” the reader, other researcher(s) may then apply the findings to their situation.

As researchers, the primary task is to do the research well by describing the *persons, places, happenings* and *events* of the research in sufficient detail so that readers can reason or intuit the applicability of the vicarious experience to the population of their concern.

The concept of *relatability* entails the degree of relatedness on whether knowledge gained from one context is relevant to, or applicable for other contexts, or the same context in another time frame. It assumes a role similar to generalisation. The act of making generalisation is the responsibility of the reader who seeks to make the application of theory elsewhere, and of the original researcher.

But, what one needs to understand is that qualitative case study enables the researcher to have a deep understanding of the reality. It provides a

sense of “being there.” Such deep understanding in turn enables us to understand much about what will never be understood by other research strategies.

The question about generalisability implicitly assumes that theories are only built upon statistical inference. However, it tends to forget that statistics are but one instrument to assist human minds to arrive at theories. Insightful findings in a case study is a theory in its own whether or not it is further developed to a theory about more cases. A theory which is well tested over one population does not necessarily apply to another population.

In fact, this article argues that it is a common mistake to over generalise what is true in one educational research to other situations, contexts or even countries. In addition, generalisation will decay over time. This article suggests that while qualitative studies are not generalisable in the traditional sense of the word, nor do they claim to be, they can have other redeeming features which make them highly valuable in the education community so long as the research findings are credible, and dependable.

Most important of all is its contribution to a better and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. That understanding can be leveraged through the Theory of Relatability which argue: If X (research findings) is related to Y (issue, situation, case, research), then X may be transferable to a bigger population – which gives one the power to generalise. In short, this theory argues that if a particular research finding is relative to one’s interest, issue, phenomenon, case then, it is the individual researcher or researchers that could transfer that findings (knowledge) to a bigger population determined by the researcher. This article will now use the following study to illustrate this proposed theory.

This study focused on students’ perspectives and experiences on distance learning at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). This study seeks knowledge to generate insights into *how, why, when* and *where ODL* at UUM undertake their learning in particular ways. This research is a single case study focused on a small number of Universiti Utara Malaysia open distance learners. Twelve distance learners were involved and selected on the basis of voluntary participation and ability to share their distance

learning experience and perspective with much openness. Different research methods were used with interview remains as the primary method for data collection, supplemented by students' journals and photographs.

The information needed for this study was individual, detailed and contextual. Finding out about the circumstances under which UUM DLs study, the practicalities of studying and getting into the mind frame of learners were important elements of this study. This research was based on the following three epistemological attitudes adopted from by Segall (1990; 1998):

1. Metaphysical: What is the story – exploring how the learners address causality, intention, existence and truth about their distance learning.
2. Historical: search for understanding of how learning barriers and challenges began. How or what causes the learning barriers that learners face in their pursue of distance education?
3. Pedagogical: What can the institution do to improve the educational experience of distance learning at UUM?; How can the institution make changes to the existing distance learning courses and programmes and assist learners in their endeavours based on feedback and knowledge generated from this study?

The findings shared in this study can be seen as providing a holistic understanding or conceptual framework for understanding student learning from the learners' perspective.

It is important to listen to and understand the learners' voices and perspectives on the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Malaysia because of the complex mix of cultures, languages and urban and rural factors. Additionally, there is a need to reflect on the effectiveness of the ODL programmes, teaching and services provided from time to time. In doing so, ODL providers and institutions need to get a balanced picture of what is "right" and "wrong" in their ODL programmes, courses and administration. Understanding how the ODL experience discourages or frustrates learners enables the providers and institutions, lecturers and other stakeholders in ODL to reflect and make constructive changes to create the condition for a better open distance learning in the future.



A study that focuses on the learners' perspectives and experiences in ODL and their learning interactions is important for several reasons. First, there have been very few studies that have sought the voices of the learners in Malaysia. For this reason, this research sought to explore and offer an understanding of the learners' perceptions of their educational experiences in ODL and to construct a rich and detailed account of the wide range of factors that might have influence and build the learners character and behaviour at UUM.

Second, the current definitions of the term open distance learning are at best vague, and vary within and across ODL literature. For some it is synonymously equated with distance learning, open learning, modular approach, online learning, e-learning, mobile learning, and other terms. The convergence of technology today has brought demise to the concept of "learning at a distance," so what does "Open-Distance Learning" mean is relative to one's understanding of ODL, its history and context.

Therefore, much confusion exists as to what open distance learning really entails. This in turn has created expectations that define what open distance learning is all about from other stakeholders' point of view, not that of the learners themselves. Considering the experiences of the learners themselves in formulating definitions can help to clarify the term, perhaps creating new approaches to addressing the needs of this population. Why not, considering that the learners are truly the primary clientele of ODL institutions and providers!

Third, in order for UUM, and for other ODL institutions to improve and sustain its ODL programmes, it is essential for the institution to gain an understanding of the learners with whom the institution is dealing with – an understanding that goes beyond attendance records and academic achievements.

Finally, the implications of this study are pertinent to how UUM ODL administrators, lecturers and educators organise courses and programmes, and educational activities in order to meet with the needs of the learners. Ultimately, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how the learners perceive and experience ODL at UUM. Such understanding will

enhance our knowledge of how to go about designing and implementing effective future DE programmes and services for DLs in the future.

An instrumental qualitative case study (Stake 1995; Yin, 2003; Gillham, 2000) approach was employed to understand the experience of individual learners as they progressed through their study careers. The research used three different research instruments: the interview being the primary instrument, supplemented by students' journals and photographs. All the DLs involved in this study were interviewed on a one-to-one basis.

### **Relevancy of Findings**

This study offers research potential regarding learning support in open distance education. The challenge, however, is to ensure that learning support in ODL is sufficiently addressed in striving towards a better distance learning experience. This may be true for all institutions, but the relevancy of the research findings may differ, and have different implication to readers and researchers.

UUM may be similar or vastly differ on practices and what is important in relation to the proposed theory is its relevance to the readers and how this research, and its findings may be useful to them. That choice to transfer of knowledge, to accept or to reject the relevance falls on the shoulders of the readers, and not on myself as the researcher for this research.

UUM, like any other dual mode institution, aims to be an effective ODL provider in Malaysia. If UUM, or for that matter any ODL provider or institution, wishes to promote ODL, issues pertaining to learning support must be addressed effectively. Apparent neglect of learning support which clearly link the learning environment, physical and social to student engagement and learning outcomes; inappropriate ways of measuring the learners' satisfaction need attention. The students as evident in this study needed continuous human contact-the presence of a teacher figure to guide their learning. The meaning of such frustrations is not well understood by many UUM lecturers, possibly due to the fact that a majority of them are "products" of a face to face (f2f) institution themselves. As such:

1. They do not have any distance training and experience as far as developing distance course material is concerned.
2. They may be subject specialists, but with very little or no experience in ODL.
3. They have not experienced the frustration that a distance learner does.
4. They may not understand what is involved for the student in being deprived of f2f interaction with their lecturers.

The consequence is that the lecturers and educators have very little sympathy with the learners. They do not understand the degree of difficulties that learners may have in pursuing their distance course. ODL lecturers should be seen not just as knowledge providers but as learning support providers. In reality, the process of student learning at a distance as revealed in this study is more complex than the conventional f2f setting, the reason being, that the obstacles that these DLs encounter may differ from one distance learner to another, with varying degrees of complexity.

The task is to design and offer an open distance educational experience that encourages learning. ODL providers need to understand that its educational products and services are to service the learner and provide an encouraging educational experience. We must consciously and actively develop and maintain approaches which enable learners to have their voices heard, and for lecturers, and UUM itself to be able to listen and understand the practical implications of what is being said. The learners should never be perceived as the problem, but should be perceived and integrated as part of the solution. Such an approach and attitude will benefit all stakeholders in ODL.

Various conclusions can be drawn with respect to the role of the lecturers in providing learning support to facilitate ODL and subsequently striving towards providing a better learning experience.

1. As evident from the findings of this study, many of the respondents agreed that a strong concern in distance learning is the aspect of the “loneliness” or “isolation” experienced by the learner. It is for this reason the learning support needs to be as *supportive and non-judgemental* as possible.

2. The learners' dependencies on the lecturers, and their desperation, were constantly evident in the data. Contrary to the assumption of many ODL institutions, that "it is a mistake to assume that physical distance means loss of intimacy in interaction," "loss of intimacy in interaction," particularly learning interaction, was strongly felt by students
3. It is also evident that there is an urgent training and development need for ODL lecturers at UUM practice regarding learning support and the role that it can and should fulfil.
4. The learners value timely feedback from their lecturers regarding course assignments, exams, projects and their inquiries. It is important then for the lecturers to attend to their students promptly and efficiently. Such commitment as evident in this paper will help to improve learning and ease many frustrations.
5. *Institutional policy* and the *role of management* are crucial in the establishment of an effective learning support to facilitate open distance learning.

In designing the learning support, the study encourages the ODL providers to choose appropriate combinations of methods for particular learning contexts. There is no "ONE" ODL solution that can best fit any ODL institutions and issues. It is important to note that the recommendations that this research proposes for UUM are certainly not the ideal solution to learning support concerns in distance learning. Nor do they necessarily provide optimal advice pertaining to components within the learning support. They are, however, made in an earnest effort, firstly to sensitise the ODL lecturers of the importance of their role in providing learning support in distance learning and, more importantly, to stimulate thought, dialogue and future research in providing learning support to ODL programmes.

### ***Revisiting the Issue of Generalising and "Relatability"***

The employment of qualitative methodology in this research does not mean that this research was intended to polarize *qualitative* versus *quantitative* research methods. Rather it was to the contrary. Although Morgan (1990) states that there can be factors within an organisation in ODL which lead to what has been labeled a "hegemony of survey method," this is not to claim superiority for one or the other method. The

position set out by Saljo (1988:35) provides a useful statement of a “position” for this study on student learning:

...there is no necessary conflict between qualitative and quantitative approaches for generating and analysing data. ...Given the conception of learning outlined – it is evident that the family of methods conventionally referred to as qualitative is of primary importance. A thorough understanding of what learning means in concrete terms in various settings presupposes a detailed analysis of how students deal with the tasks they are presented...In saying this we are trying to establish another fundamental assumption behind the research into everyday human learning...Access to the learner’s perspective on the activities of teaching and learning is essential for understanding educational phenomena...and for improving education.

Considering that the focus of this research is the world of distance learners as they experience and perceive it, led me to conclude that:

1. As the phenomenon is heavily contextualised, developing an understanding of the macro and micro-contexts of the world of the distance student needs to be a central feature of the study.
2. The research must be “naturalistic” in the sense that I should experience the reality of those involved in the study and, further, that I should attempt to convey this understanding to the reader.

As an ODL researcher myself, I believe the individual learners’ perceptions, as well as their actions, play an important part in the expression of their reality and that this perceptual knowledge must be integral part of the research. Accordingly, this research study needs to harmonise an interpretative paradigm and a subjective-qualitative inquiry with value mediated results. The methods of gathering data should match those assumptions.

Multiple qualitative research methods situated in naturalistic inquiry and interpretive methodology were used on the advice of Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 2), who state that “the use of multiple methods or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure in depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured.”

There is a final point to be made in relation to methodology that relates to the issue of “research tradition,” since my decision to undertake a qualitative approach in this study was intended to contribute to the popularisation of qualitative research in Malaysia. As noted earlier on, qualitative studies in educational research are very limited in Malaysia, and to date, there has been very little work done using this form of educational inquiry, and few that I could find in the context of open distance education.

The dominant tradition has followed the positivist paradigm. A qualitative study offers a different approach from educational research in distance learning and generates a range of information of a different quality from that obtained in traditional approaches. Qualitative studies have been well developed and practised in developed countries, but the situation is not the same in developing countries like Malaysia. The research, and consequently this paper, I hope, will contribute to the growing field of qualitative educational research in Malaysia to use a qualitative methodology in the country, and elsewhere.

Open distance learning and qualitative research share the mutual goals of dealing with subjectivity, describing the complexity of lived experience and appreciating realities where holism and intuition are valued. Qualitative methodology is, therefore, conducive to research that attempts to understand such human experiences as learning at a distance. Yin, in discussing the case-study approach, stated that “the case study allows an investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events...” (Yin, 1989: 14). This description covers the potential range of ways in which the case study approach might be used in researching distance learning or other educational problems and phenomenon. I strongly believe that when the aims of research are understood, the experience extended and the conviction on what is already known increased, the qualitative study is by far the better choice for a study on distance learning and may prove to produce the strongest data (Merriam, 1988), that was the research discourse and motivation that I had pursuing this research. Should it be generalised to all ODL institutions and learners?

The issue therefore remains on the extent to which qualitative case study can or should address the issue of generalisation. Different scholars (Polit,

2010; Stake, 1978; Hamilton, 1980; Polanyi, 1958; Dilthey, 1976) and researchers provide strong case for rejecting the traditions of generalisability that are associated with the natural sciences. Many of them argue that traditional ways of thinking about generalisability are inadequate.

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 90) talk about *transferability* which they refer to whether knowledge gained from one context is relevant to or applicable for other contexts, or the same context in another time frame. Transferability assumes a role similar to generalisation. Any transferability is the responsibility of the reader who seeks to make the application of theory elsewhere, and of the original researcher.

Case study as it is used to study distance learners in this research can provide *vicarious experiences* that other approaches cannot. It offers an opportunity to experience vicariously, unique individuals within our own or another culture. Research on students' learning in my study permits readers to experience vicariously about students undergoing their own learning experience which I have communicated in a narrative portrayal of their experiences. For Schostak, generalisation is produced by the way in which we agree to use language in order to map our world, co-ordinate our behaviour towards each other and to the objects of the world and to account for our actions to each other within it (Schostak, 2002: 83).

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the use of case study is always justified. Yin identifies three situations which justify the use of case studies: a critical case to confirm, challenge or extend a well formulated theory; and extreme or unique case which is so rare that it has value of its own; and a revelatory case, which presents an opportunity to reveal what is otherwise inaccessible for researchers (Yin, 1984: 42–43).

The use of single cases like my research is almost a general approach in human learning. Medical students understand human bodies by dissecting only one body, or at most a few. Car driving is often learnt on one particular car, and one can then drive any car. The single case adopted in my study allow me to fully understanding the internal relations within the complexity of ODL reality, and that kind of understanding allows the

learners to generalise to other cases, but not in the statistical sense of knowing the pattern across the population.

One's learning about one car allows him or her to transfer the knowledge to drive other cars, but would not provide any knowledge of variations over different cars. Similarly, the study on students' perspectives and experiences on open distance learning at UUM would allow the transfer of the findings internally to the bigger population of learners at UUM.

Even so, the degree of relatedness between the 12 learners in this study with the bigger UUM students' population varies as learners are heterogeneous in many ways. They could be similar, or vastly different from each other. On an equal note, the findings would not provide a base for generalisation to other students' population across different ODL providers and institutions as there could be vast similarities and differences between ODL systems, courses, and programmes, across the country. It all depends on the degree or relatedness and similarities of circumstances, and the context between ODL experience at UUM and other ODL institutions that will dictate for the transfer of knowledge from this study to another.

## **Conclusion**

Qualitative research which is commonly criticised for its lack of generalisability has much potential in making valuable contributions to the field of education despite resistance. Based on my own experience and perspective conducting research in distance learning, I strongly acknowledge the importance of case studies in qualitative research and believe that it contributes to advancement knowledge and promotes action in the area of the circumstance studied. As advanced by Kuhn (1970), there is more than one way of knowing, and conducting case study in qualitative research is one such way. So researchers let's rise, let's particularise more and generalise less. Let us liberate ourselves from worrying too much on the issue of generalisation, and transfer that act of generalising and making generalisation to the readers. After all, the concept of *relatability* is an approach to transforming research knowledge into a form which can readily enter the professional discourse through which educators, researchers, practitioners "may" enhance their craft



knowledge of teaching and so improve the learning of the their learners. It is you the “readers” not the researcher that make the generalisation call!

## References

- Adelman, C., S. Kemmis and D. Jenkins. 1980. Rethinking the case study: Notes from the second Cambridge conference. In *Towards a science of the singular*, ed. H. Simons. Norwich: CARE.
- Allison, G. T. 1971. *Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban missile crisis*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- Bassey, M. 1999. *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Denzin, N. and Y. Lincoln. 1994. Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In *Handbook of qualitative research*, eds. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dilthey, W. 1976. *Selected writings*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fahrenberg, J. 2003. Interpretation in psychology and social science, new approach or a neglected tradition? *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum Qualitative Social Research* 4(2): Art. 45.
- Gillham, B. 2000. *Case study research methods*. London: Continuum.
- Hamel, J., S. Dufour and D. Fortin. 1993. *Case study methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hamilton, D. 1980. Some contrasting assumptions about case study research and survey analysis. In *Towards a science of the singular*, ed. H. Simons, 10: 76–92. University of East Anglia, Norwich: CARE Occasional Publication.
- Kuhn, T. 1970. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and E. G. Guba. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Maxwell, J. A. 1992. Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review* 62(3): 279–299.
- Merriam, S. 1988. *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, A. 1990. Whatever happened to the silent revolution? Research, theory and practice in distance education. In *Research in Distance Education*, ed. T. D. Evans. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press. <http://wwwicdl.open.ac.uk/icdl/database/literatu/lit03/00003608.htm> (accessed 5 February 1997).
- Polanyi, M. 1958. *Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Polit, D. F. 2010. Generalization in quantitative and qualitative research: Myths and strategies. *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 47(11): 1451–1458.
- Sandelowski, M. 1986. The problem of rigor in qualitative research. *Advances in Nursing Science* 8(3): 27–37.
- Saljo, G. R. 1988. Learning in educational settings: Methods if inquiry. In *Improving learning: New perspectives*, ed. P. Ramsden. London: Kogan Page.

- Segall, G. R. 1998. *A point of viewing children's thinking: A digital ethnographer's journey*. Mahwah, New Jersey: LEA.
- . 1990. Learning constellations: A multimedia ethnographic research environment using video technology for exploring children's thinking. Unpublished dissertation. Cambridge, MA: MIT Media Laboratory.
- Schostak, J. F. 2002. *Understanding, designing and conducting qualitative research: Framing the project*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Shumway, R. H. and D. S. Stoffer. 2006. *Time series analysis and its applications*. 2nd edition. New York: Springer.
- Stake, R. E. 1995. *The art of case study*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- . 1978. The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher* 7(2): 5–8.
- Verma, G. K. and K. Mallick. 1999. *Researching education: Perspectives and techniques*. London: Falmer Press.
- Yin, R. K. 2003. *Case study research: Design and methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- . 1994. *Case study research: Design and methods*. 2nd ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications .
- . 1993. *Applications of case study research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- . 1989. *Case study research design and methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- . 1984. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.