Can quantitative and qualitative methods be combined?
A comparison of quantitative and qualitative interviews

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Abstract
In our research, following Denzin, Lincoln and Guba we assumed that quantitative and qualitative methods indicate two different research areas. So we have conducted two separate researches both using interview as a data gathering method. We hypothesized that “The data and the findings of these two different types of techniques which have different point of views will be different”. In order to test the hypothesis, two different researches have been made on the same subject, which is to find out identity of Turkish Cypriot students. First, survey interview has been used in a quantitative research and then focus group interview has been used in a qualitative research. In survey interview, 30 university students were interviewed and in focus group 6 students were interviewed. During the survey interview, a structured questionnaire was used to gather objective data although in focus group interview open-ended questions were used to reveal understandings of participants.

Key words
Methodology: quantitative-qualitative methods / interviews; identity.

Conceptual Framework
In social sciences, there are different approaches for making distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods. According to some authors, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods represent different “researches” whereas others think that such a distinction only represents a distinction in "technical" dimension. The foremost advocates of the first group, Denzin, Lincoln and Guba (1994) accept quantitative and qualitative research methods as two “different research methods”, base the distinction between them upon paradigmatic distinction and state that they are incommensurable. In this way, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is carried to a point much far from a technical distinction and the possibility of using these techniques together is eliminated. Authors who claim that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is a technical distinction emphasize that “subject of research” has principal importance for researcher and researcher can use both methods if need arises (Bryman, 1988; Blaikie, 2000).

In this research, following Denzin, Lincoln and Guba we assumed that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is more than a technical distinction and it is an extension of ontological-epistemological-methodological distinctions. In this context, in order to compare quantitative and qualitative interview methods we conducted “two separate researches”, one quantitative and the other qualitative. Subject of both researches was “identity of Turkish Cypriot students studying in the
universities in Ankara”. We aimed to examine the same subject by two different methods and to find out the effect of the data obtained by quantitative and qualitative interviews on result of the research. In this context, we hypothesized that “The data and the findings of these two different types of techniques which have different point of views will be different”.

While conducting two different (quantitative-qualitative) researches on identity of Turkish Cypriot students we paid attention to carry out basic requirements of the research strategies we applied. These requirements for conducting quantitative and qualitative researches are an extension of methodological approaches. It can be summarized that quantitative research tradition in social sciences are basically compliant with positivistic epistemology. And it depends on a certain ontological view related to social reality. According to this view, social reality is out of us and has a characteristic that has factual, law-like patterns. Thus, by using a positivist approach it can be accepted epistemologically that objective information of these facts is possible. When quantitative research process depending on positivistic methodology is examined, it is seen that the predominant elements are the concepts like objectivity, generalization, validity and reliability. In order to realize objectivity, the whole research process is carried out in a rather structured way. Researchers are expected to conform to standard principles in order to ensure validity and reliability of data. Since the aim is to obtain data that can be generalized on factual reality, choosing the space and sample group is important in quantitative researches (it is important to select sample group in a random way) (Bailey, 1987; Bryman, 1988; Creswell, 1994, Silverman, 1993; Neuman, 1997).

A researcher using quantitative research strategy, tests the hypothesises he removed from his conceptual frame by using hypothetic-deductive reasoning method. An important point in this process is being operational. Concepts should be made measurable by indicating what they correspond to in concrete dimension. At the end of the process of operationalizing, hypothesis can be formulated as variables. The
techniques used during data collecting process (survey, interview, observation) are/should be in a completely structured and standardized form. If interview technique will be used, all phases from questionnaires to behaviour of the interiewer are structured such a way that the interviewer is expected to behave almost as a robot. In quantitative interviews, the interviewed people are accepted as only a “respondent” (stating his information of the outside reality, an answer container). The reason for preferring interview instead of a mail-questionnaire is to increase answering rate and to have more control on validity and reliability. The main problem that decreases objectivity and validity of quantitative interviews is “the effect of the interviewer” (damaging effect of the interviewer). Advices on minimizing effect of the interviewer take a significant part of the method textbooks. The interviewer is expected to strictly obey questionnaires structured to obtain information of factual reality and to behave towards all respondents in a standard way. It is thought that only in this way information on “there-outside” reality can be obtained without “damaging” it.

Qualitative research process that is formed as opposite/alternative of quantitative research process is generally compliant with conventional epistemology. Basic assumption of conventional epistemology states that social reality is not a factual reality that exists outside of us “there” but a process we reconstructed everyday by our acts. The main point of this construction process is understandings and interpretations of individuals. Thus, it is accepted that information of this reality can be known by understandings and interpretations of individuals.

Understanding and interpretation are the foremost concepts of qualitative research process that is carried out by depending on conventional methodology. The aim is to find out the point of view of research subjects instead of objectivity and generalization. Research process is rather planned.¹ In general it is assumed that theory should be constructed from data instead of starting from a theory. By getting rid of limits of the theory, it would be possible to increase diversity and deepness of data. Even though there are various interview techniques used in qualitative
researches (focus group, life story, life history, etc.) their common point is to find out the point of view of subjects. In order to find out subject’s point of view, understanding, meaning making and interpretation process of research subjects, interview is carried out in a rather flexible and unstructured way. Questions are open-ended and interviews are conducted as conversation. During the interviews the interviewers can act freely. Interview process is a social process constructed by contribution of the participants. (Silverman, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 1991; Miller & Glassner, 1997; Mason, 1996).

During our research on identity of Turkish Cypriot students we paid attention to apply the characteristics summarized above on conducting quantitative and qualitative researches. According to this, in our quantitative research we conceptualised identity as an outside, factual reality. Identity as a factual, structured reality is in a structured, ossified form in the individuals. During the interviews questionnaires that had been structured to obtain information of this identity was used. Since our aim was to obtain the data on ossified identity in individuals without “damaging”, we devoted special care to achieve objectivity during these interviews.

In the qualitative research we conceptualised identity as a process that is being continually constructed by understandings, interpretations and interactions of individuals. Focus group interview was used during data collection phase. During these interviews open-ended questions were asked and participants interacted with each other. It was aimed to obtain deep, detailed, diverse data on understandings of the participants without having objectivity and generalization concerns.

Result

The hypothesis of our study that compares the interview techniques used in quantitative and qualitative researches in scope of social sciences is as follows; “The
data and findings of these two different types of techniques which have different point of views will be different.”

In social sciences quantitative and qualitative research mean two different even two opposite research methods. Different ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches of these research methods determine design of the whole research and completely different strategies are applied even though the technique used may be the same. As stated in the conceptual frame, this study examines different uses of the two different research methods that have fundamentally different point of views and points out that data obtained by these two different research methods will result in different research findings.

The hypothesis of our quantitative research was as follows; The Turkish Cypriot students are already in a structured and ossified form, so they will have common ideas on their identity, its parts and components. In this scope, interviews were conducted with 30 Turkish Cypriot students that are studying in Ankara. The result of the interviews showed that they have common ideas on Turkish Cypriot identity and proved the hypothesis of the quantitative research. According to these students, being Cypriot is the predominant element of Turkish Cypriot identity and there are differences between them and the Turks in Turkey. They leave ‘being Turk’ outside and desire a political structure that ideally covers the whole Cyprus and gives Turkish and Greek Cypriots equal rights. The majority of these students gave priority to being islander and having island culture. They stated that being islander, having a Western life style or Western values are their predominant common characteristics whereas being Muslim or being religious are basically unimportant. In the same way they stated that following Turkish traditions and customs are an unimportant characteristic of Turkish Cypriot identity.
The hypothesis of qualitative field research is as follows; “Turkish Cypriot students will be able to clarify their identities during construction process”. The data that were obtained by focus group interview was analysed depending on nationality and citizenship categories and identity construction processes of the participants were included in the analysis. 6 participants of the focus group interview answered open-ended questions and stated their ideas and opinions via their interactions with the other participants. With the help of the fact that the participants were members of a homogenous group, their opinions were not very different or contradictory and participants realized the construction process by usually supporting or completing their opinions. Since the data obtained from this construction process made determination of a single profile or ideal type of a Turkish Cypriot young possible, hypothesis of our research was verified. The results indicated that being Cypriot, being born and living in the island and having island culture were predominant parts of the Turkish Cypriot identity constructed by these young. By comparing themselves with the Turks in Turkey these young left ‘being Turk’ outside and the majority of the participants stated that they did not feel themselves as Turk. Some participants brought up being Cypriot in terms of a cultural difference whereas others brought up it in terms of a political demand. Even though Cypriot young gave different meanings to being Cypriot all of them emphasized being Cypriot as the predominant element. In political terms, they emphasized a political structure different than the current one. They stated their demand for a government that cover the whole of Cyprus and give equal rights to the Turkish and Greek Cypriots living in the island. In this context, the desire for a Federal Cyprus stated by majority of the participants results from the demand indicated above. According to these young, the foremost characteristics of being Cypriot is being different than the Turks in Turkey. They brought up these differences on the basis of cultural differences, religious beliefs, values and life styles. From the point of view of adopted values and life style, they stated that the Turkish Cypriot had more western characteristics whereas the Turks in Turkey had more eastern characteristics.

Even though the data obtained from both quantitative and qualitative field researches were obtained from small sample groups and thus they cannot be
generalized and they are limited with sample groups of the study, both data sets indicate the same facts about identity of the Turkish Cypriots. Even though both of these researches were designed and carried out in completely different ways, they presented the same findings about what this identity includes and excludes. The fact that the students had presented common opinions on quality, parts and components of the Turkish Cypriot identity shows that this identity has an external, factual characteristic and has been structured in the individuals as we advocated in our conceptual frame. The data of quantitative field research shows that these young inform this identity to us via construction. Even though at first it may seem that these two researches are contrary to each other and depend on two different reality understandings they present us same data since social world cannot be reduced to only a factual or constructive reality and in fact these two aspects of reality are interconnected and individuals are sometimes a part of the structure and carrier of factual reality and sometimes constructors of reality, that is actors of it. As Cangizbay stated “Even though human is subjective, he has a dimension that have objective characteristics. However, in the widest sense every kind of education and raising are activities and productions of human and human is not only a object and product of social determinism but also an individual or collective subject of this determinism” (1996, 36). In this point of view it can be said that the Turkish Cypriot students have a structured, ossified identity and everyday they reconstruct this identity via their understandings, interpretation and interaction. The fact that the identity informed via constructive method during focus group was the same with the identity informed during quantitative interview indicates that these young not only have a factual and structured identity but they also reconstruct this identity everyday.

The data obtained from the two different interview methods designed and conducted in completely different ways did not show great differences. Even though the data of qualitative interview method aiming to obtain deeper, more diverse and detailed data presented somewhat more detail about understandings of individual compared to quantitative interview method, they were not completely different than the data of quantitative method and they can be obtained also by this method. In this way the hypothesis of our research aiming to compare quantitative and qualitative interview
methods, that is “The data and findings of these two different types of techniques which have different point of views will be different” was not verified.

Interviews were conducted with 30 students in one research and 6 students in the other and this requires comparison of the data obtained from this study to be made more carefully. However, this research also provides a hint which indicates that a research method combining these two techniques is a better approach that accepting they are very different than each other and they should be conducted by applying two different research strategies.

Contrary to the view pioneered by Guba, Denzin and Lincoln, quantitative and qualitative research techniques are not completely separate from each other and they are not incommensurable. According to the result of this study that compare the two techniques, it is better to adopt an approach that accepts both quantitative and qualitative research methods can be applied for different problems and the method chosen should depend on subject of research. An advocate of this view, Walker states that “certain questions cannot be answered by quantitative methods whereas the others by qualitative methods” (quoted from 1985, 16 by Bryman, 1988, 106). According to this view the decision on using a quantitative or qualitative method should base on ‘technical’ matters on suitability of a certain research method for a certain research problem. This view stated that both quantitative and qualitative researches have strong and weak points and thus which one meets requirements of the research better is a technical decision. The authors who accept the differences between quantitative and qualitative researches as technical differences claim that these two techniques can be used in the same research.

Depending on the findings of the two field researches conducted it can be said that the main point is to bring up ontological and epistemological approaches about how to handle the subject before beginning the research and to move from a conceptual frame in this direction. In this frame researcher can chose the technique suitable for the subject and can use quantitative and qualitative techniques together if need arises. As stated by Mason (1996), the main problem is not “unifying or not unifying the techniques” but being aware whether quantitative is connected with qualitative or qualitative is connected with quantitative.

As a result it can be said that quantitative and qualitative approaches are not two opposite poles and researchers are not obliged to choose only one of them. Such an approach only makes one or the other of them a fetish. However, “the techniques used in sociological examination are nothing else than operation methods that provide application of sociological technique to the matter that will be examined” and
“sociology is a field where making this or that operation, device or method a fetish is most unacceptable” (Granai, 1999, 193). This fact stems from nature of social reality.

1 Here we should mention that, “flexibility” is interpreted differently among qualitative researchers. Some of them (Mason, Silverman) find hypothetic-deductive reasoning as the appropriate approach whereas some of them advocate grounded theory.

2 Even though we move from identity definition of Celebi (1993;1996) in our quantitative and qualitative researches, parallel to our ontological approach this definition is used in both researches by limiting them in different ways.

REFERENCES


