

Strengths and Weaknesses of Qualitative Case Study Research

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ABSTRACT

Whether case study research is a legitimate form of research, or merely a focus of research, remains controversial. However, despite the controversies, case study research is still widely used by researchers in various disciplines and academic fields. This suggests that there are strengths of this approach which cannot be ignored. The major concern of this paper is the qualitative single case study. The controversial aspects, including sampling, data collection, analysis, generalization, reliability and validity, of this type of case study are addressed.

Key Word: Case Study, Qualitative Research, Research Method

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to data and various research components such as timing, resources and purposes were among the main reasons that teachers chose to apply case study research (Adelman et al. 1976; McDonough and McDonough 1997). Case study was also a popular choice for research students who wanted to investigate their interests in language teaching and learning. Within their time scale that they could manage, they studied a small number of subjects in detail.

However, criticism of the design of case study research, especially of the single case study, has never subsided. Disputable issues include methods of sampling, data collection, analysis, generalisation, reliability and validity. The purpose of this paper is to offer insights for researchers who may want to utilize this research strategy in small-scale qualitative single case studies for developing professional knowledge. To begin with, this paper delineates the nature of case study research and the typology of case studies. It then addresses the distinctive features that are commonly considered the strengths and weaknesses of case study research.

2. The Nature of Case Study Research

This section addresses conceptual issues in case studies. It begins with one of the most controversial issues in case study research: a definition. A brief introduction of a number of types of case studies follows. The final section discusses the general characteristics.