

Exploring Students' Difficulties In Learning Qualitative Research Methods In Higher Education

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Abstract

Learning qualitative research methods has become an essential component of higher education, particularly in English Education programs where students are expected to develop research competence and academic literacy. However, many undergraduate students continue to experience difficulties in understanding and applying qualitative inquiry in research methodology courses. This study aimed to explore students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods in higher education. The study employed a qualitative case study approach involving undergraduate students from an English Education Department at a private university in Indonesia. The participants were selected purposively based on their experience in taking research methodology courses and conducting qualitative research projects. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective documents and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed four major challenges experienced by students: difficulties in understanding qualitative research concepts, challenges in developing research problems and research questions, difficulties in conducting qualitative data analysis, and limited confidence in conducting independent qualitative research. The findings also indicated that practical learning activities, lecturer feedback, and collaborative discussion contributed positively to students' methodological understanding. This study highlights the importance of implementing student-centered and practice-oriented instructional approaches in qualitative research methodology courses to support students' analytical competence and research readiness in higher education. The findings offer practical implications for research methodology lecturers and curriculum developers, particularly in designing more experiential, reflective, and mentorship-based learning strategies to strengthen students' qualitative research competence in higher education

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research competence has become one of the essential academic skills that university students must develop in higher education (Guetterman, 2023). In English Education programs, students are expected not only to understand theories of language teaching and learning but also to conduct scientific investigations related to educational phenomena.

Consequently, research methodology courses play a significant role in preparing students to develop academic inquiry, critical thinking, and scientific writing skills. Among various research approaches introduced in higher education, qualitative research has increasingly gained attention because it allows researchers to explore human experiences, perceptions, classroom interaction, and sociocultural realities in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

The growing importance of qualitative inquiry in educational research has influenced universities to strengthen students' methodological understanding through research method courses (Merriam & Grenier, 2021). Qualitative research is widely used in language education because many issues in English language teaching involve contextual interpretation and social interaction that cannot be fully explained through numerical data. Through qualitative inquiry, students are encouraged to examine educational realities from participants' perspectives and to construct meaningful interpretations based on authentic experiences. Therefore, the ability to understand and apply qualitative research methods has become increasingly important for undergraduate students, particularly those in English Education programs.

Despite its academic importance, many students still experience difficulties in learning qualitative research methods (Guetterman, 2023). Compared to quantitative approaches, qualitative inquiry requires deeper interpretative understanding, analytical sensitivity, and reflective thinking. Students are required to formulate exploratory research questions, conduct interviews or observations, interpret textual data, and develop themes systematically. These academic demands often become challenging for novice researchers who have limited research experience and insufficient methodological understanding.

Several recent studies have reported that undergraduate students encounter various obstacles in learning qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2021). Students frequently struggle to determine appropriate research problems, select suitable qualitative designs, conduct effective interviews, and analyze qualitative data meaningfully. In addition, qualitative data analysis is commonly perceived as complicated because students must organize extensive textual information, develop coding categories, and interpret findings critically. The flexible and interpretative nature of qualitative inquiry often creates confusion among students who are more familiar with structured learning procedures and objective measurement.

Another challenge relates to the gap between theoretical understanding and research practice (Creswell & Poth, 2023). In many cases, students are able to memorize methodological concepts presented in classrooms but still experience difficulties when applying them in actual research contexts. This condition indicates that learning qualitative research should not only emphasize theoretical explanation but also provide opportunities for practical engagement, reflection, and research-based learning experiences. Without adequate instructional support, students may develop low confidence in conducting qualitative studies and become overly dependent on procedural examples rather than analytical understanding.

The issue of learning qualitative research methods has become increasingly relevant in contemporary higher education contexts where universities encourage students to produce scientific publications and conduct independent research before graduation (Guetterman, 2023). In English Education programs, methodological competence is particularly important because students are expected to investigate educational problems related to language learning,

classroom interaction, learner identity, and teaching practices. Therefore, improving students' understanding of qualitative inquiry is necessary to support the quality of undergraduate research and academic writing.

Although previous studies have discussed research learning and methodological competence in higher education, studies specifically examining students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods within English Education contexts remain limited, especially in Indonesian universities (Merriam & Grenier, 2021). Existing research tends to focus on general research competence rather than students' lived experiences in understanding qualitative inquiry. Consequently, further investigation is needed to explore how students experience the process of learning qualitative research and what specific challenges influence their methodological understanding. Therefore, this study offers novelty by providing an in-depth, context-specific exploration of English Education students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods within an Indonesian higher education setting, an area that remains underexplored compared to studies conducted in other international educational contexts (Mpofu et al., 2024).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods in higher education. The study focuses on English Education students' experiences in understanding and applying qualitative research concepts during research methodology courses. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the improvement of qualitative research instruction and provide pedagogical insights for lecturers in designing more effective and student-centered research learning environments. This aim is particularly relevant considering that recent empirical studies continue to report similar methodological and pedagogical challenges among students learning qualitative research across different educational contexts (Almasan & Viñas, 2023; Mpofu et al., 2024).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Qualitative Research in Higher Education

Qualitative research has become one of the most widely used approaches in educational studies because it provides opportunities to understand social phenomena through participants' experiences and perspectives. Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes numerical measurement and statistical analysis, qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning, interpretation, and contextual understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2023). In higher education contexts, qualitative research is frequently used to investigate classroom interaction, learning experiences, teacher identity, student perception, and educational practices that require deeper exploration.

The increasing use of qualitative research in educational settings has influenced universities to strengthen methodological instruction for undergraduate students. Research methodology courses are designed to help students develop research competence, critical thinking, and academic literacy. According to Merriam and Grenier (2021), qualitative inquiry encourages students to examine educational realities critically and interpret human experiences systematically. Through this approach, students are expected to become reflective and

analytical researchers who are able to understand educational issues from multiple perspectives.

In English Education programs, qualitative research plays an important role because language learning and teaching are closely connected to communication, classroom interaction, sociocultural experiences, and learner identity. Many educational phenomena in language classrooms cannot be fully understood through statistical data alone. Therefore, qualitative inquiry becomes highly relevant in investigating issues related to students' experiences, teaching strategies, motivation, classroom participation, and language learning challenges.

However, learning qualitative research methods is often perceived as challenging by undergraduate students. The interpretative nature of qualitative inquiry requires students to understand abstract concepts such as reflexivity, trustworthiness, credibility, and thematic interpretation. Students are also expected to engage actively in the research process by collecting and analyzing rich descriptive data. Consequently, many novice researchers experience difficulties in understanding how qualitative research is conducted in authentic educational contexts (Guetterman, 2023).

Students' Difficulties in Learning Qualitative Research

Learning difficulties in qualitative research have become an important issue in higher education. Several recent studies have shown that students frequently encounter problems in understanding the conceptual and practical aspects of qualitative inquiry. One major challenge relates to students' limited understanding of the philosophical foundations of qualitative research. Many students are more familiar with structured and objective learning approaches; therefore, they often perceive qualitative research as subjective and difficult to interpret (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Another difficulty commonly experienced by students involves formulating research problems and research questions. In qualitative inquiry, research questions are generally exploratory and open-ended, requiring students to identify meaningful issues from real-life situations. Students who have limited experience in observing educational phenomena critically may struggle to develop researchable and relevant questions. This condition often affects the overall quality of their research proposals and research designs.

Data collection procedures also become a significant challenge for undergraduate students. Qualitative research requires students to conduct interviews, observations, and document analysis systematically. However, many students experience difficulties in developing interview guidelines, interacting with participants, and asking probing questions during interviews. According to Guetterman (2023), novice researchers often lack confidence in managing participant interaction and maintaining the flow of qualitative interviews effectively.

In addition, qualitative data analysis is frequently considered the most difficult stage in the research process. Students are required to organize large amounts of textual data, identify patterns, develop codes, and construct themes meaningfully. This process demands analytical sensitivity and interpretative thinking skills that many undergraduate students have not fully developed. Nowell et al. (2021) explain that thematic analysis requires careful interpretation and consistent analytical procedures to ensure research trustworthiness. As a result, students

often feel confused when interpreting participants' responses and connecting findings with theoretical frameworks.

Academic writing competence also contributes significantly to students' difficulties in learning qualitative research. Writing qualitative findings requires students to present detailed descriptions, critical interpretation, and coherent arguments systematically. Many students still struggle to organize findings logically and explain participants' experiences analytically. Limited academic writing experience may reduce students' confidence in presenting qualitative research findings effectively.

Teaching Qualitative Research Methods

Effective instructional strategies are essential in helping students understand qualitative research methods. Traditional lecture-centered instruction is often insufficient because qualitative inquiry requires experiential learning, reflection, and active engagement. Therefore, lecturers need to provide opportunities for students to practice conducting interviews, analyzing qualitative data, and reflecting on research experiences directly.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of student-centered learning approaches in research methodology courses. Inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and project-based learning are considered effective in supporting students' methodological understanding because these approaches encourage active participation and practical engagement. Through research-based activities, students are able to connect theoretical concepts with real research experiences more effectively.

Reflective learning practices are also important in qualitative research instruction. Reflection helps students evaluate their learning experiences, recognize methodological challenges, and improve analytical thinking skills. Feedback from lecturers and peers may further support students in developing research competence, particularly in proposal writing and qualitative data interpretation.

Moreover, technological advancement has influenced the teaching and learning process in higher education, including research methodology instruction. Digital platforms, online learning resources, and artificial intelligence tools provide students with broader access to academic references and research support. However, technology alone cannot replace conceptual understanding. Students still need strong methodological foundations to ensure that qualitative inquiry is conducted critically, ethically, and systematically.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods in higher education. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to investigate students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in understanding qualitative inquiry within their academic context. According to Creswell and Poth (2023), qualitative research is suitable for studies that seek to understand participants' perspectives and interpret social phenomena in natural settings. The case study approach specifically allowed the researcher to examine students' experiences in depth within a bounded educational context.

The use of a qualitative case study in this research was intended to provide detailed descriptions regarding the difficulties encountered by English Education students during research methodology courses. Through this approach, the researcher was able to explore how students perceived qualitative research, what challenges they experienced, and how those challenges influenced their research learning process.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in an English Education Department at a private university in Indonesia. The participants of the study were undergraduate students who had taken or were currently taking a Research Methodology course focusing on qualitative research. The participants were selected purposively because they were considered capable of providing relevant information related to the objectives of the study.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who had direct experience in learning qualitative research methods. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling enables qualitative researchers to select participants who possess specific experiences relevant to the research focus. In this study, the participants consisted of students who had experience in developing qualitative research proposals or conducting qualitative mini-research projects during their coursework.

A total of 12 students were involved in this study to obtain rich and in-depth information regarding their learning experiences. This number was considered adequate because participant recruitment continued until data saturation was reached, as indicated by the recurrence of similar themes and the absence of new information in subsequent interviews.

Technique of Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective documentation. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provided flexibility for participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and difficulties openly while still allowing the researcher to maintain focus on the research objectives. Braun and Clarke (2022) state that qualitative interviews are useful for exploring participants' subjective experiences and generating detailed information.

The interviews focused on several aspects related to students' experiences in learning qualitative research methods, including understanding research concepts, developing research problems, conducting interviews, analyzing qualitative data, and writing research findings. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted in a flexible setting to ensure participants' comfort and openness during the conversation.

In addition to interviews, reflective notes and students' research-related documents were used to support data triangulation. These documents included students' research proposals, reflective assignments, and classroom learning notes related to qualitative research methodology.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data obtained from interviews and documents were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected because it allows researchers to identify, interpret, and construct patterns of meaning from qualitative data systematically. According to Braun and

Clarke (2022), thematic analysis is a flexible analytical method that is widely used in qualitative research to examine participants' experiences and perspectives.

The data analysis process involved several stages. First, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings and read the transcripts repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Second, initial codes were generated based on significant statements related to students' learning difficulties. Third, the codes were categorized into broader themes representing major issues experienced by the participants. Finally, the themes were reviewed and interpreted to construct comprehensive findings related to students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, several data validation procedures were undertaken. Data triangulation was carried out by comparing findings from interviews with those obtained from reflective documents and research-related artifacts to ensure consistency of interpretation. Member checking was conducted by confirming several interview interpretations with participants to verify the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of their experiences. In addition, peer debriefing was carried out through discussion with colleagues familiar with qualitative research to minimize subjective interpretation during the coding and thematic development process. These procedures were undertaken to strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, consistent with recommended qualitative validation strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that English Education students encountered various challenges in learning qualitative research methods. Based on the thematic analysis of interview data and reflective documents, four major themes emerged: (1) difficulties in understanding qualitative research concepts, (2) challenges in developing research problems and research questions, (3) difficulties in conducting qualitative data analysis, and (4) limited confidence in conducting qualitative research independently.

Difficulties in Understanding Qualitative Research Concepts

One of the primary difficulties experienced by students was related to conceptual understanding of qualitative research. Most participants perceived qualitative inquiry as a complex and abstract approach due to its interpretative and flexible characteristics. Unlike quantitative research, which is often associated with structured procedures and numerical measurement, qualitative inquiry required students to interpret meanings and understand contextual realities critically.

The interview data indicated that many students still experienced uncertainty in differentiating qualitative research from quantitative approaches. Several participants tended to associate research procedures with fixed stages and measurable outcomes; therefore, they found qualitative inquiry more difficult to comprehend. Concepts such as thematic analysis, credibility, reflexivity, and interpretation were frequently described as confusing because students were not yet familiar with analytical and reflective research processes.

The findings also showed that students' understanding remained largely theoretical. Although participants were able to explain basic definitions of qualitative research, many of

them experienced difficulties when attempting to apply methodological concepts in actual research activities. This condition suggests that students still struggled to connect classroom learning with authentic research practice.

Challenges in Developing Research Problems and Research Questions

Another significant finding concerned students' difficulties in determining research problems and constructing research questions. Many participants reported uncertainty when identifying educational issues that could be explored qualitatively. Students often hesitated in selecting research topics because they lacked confidence in determining whether a particular issue was suitable for qualitative inquiry.

The findings further revealed that students experienced difficulties in developing exploratory research questions. Since qualitative inquiry emphasizes open-ended exploration rather than measurable variables, participants found it challenging to formulate questions that could guide in-depth investigation. In several cases, students depended heavily on examples from previous studies because they were unsure how to construct research questions independently.

This condition indicates that students still had limited experience in critically observing educational phenomena and transforming those observations into meaningful research inquiries. Their dependence on previous research examples also reflects limited confidence in developing original research ideas.

Difficulties in Conducting Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis emerged as one of the most challenging aspects of learning qualitative research methods. Most participants described the analysis process as complicated because it involved organizing extensive textual data, identifying patterns, and interpreting meanings systematically.

The interview data demonstrated that many students experienced confusion during the coding process. Participants frequently reported difficulties in determining which information were relevant and how responses should be categorized into meaningful themes. The interpretative nature of thematic analysis required analytical sensitivity that many students felt they had not fully developed.

In addition, students often perceived qualitative analysis as subjective because different interpretations could emerge from the same data. This condition created uncertainty among participants regarding the validity of their interpretations. As a result, many students relied heavily on examples from previous studies or lecturer guidance when analyzing qualitative data.

The findings suggest that students required more intensive practice and methodological support in conducting qualitative analysis. Limited experience in handling qualitative data appeared to influence students' analytical confidence and ability to construct meaningful interpretations independently.

Limited Confidence in Conducting Independent Research

The findings also revealed that students experienced limited confidence in conducting qualitative research independently. Many participants expressed uncertainty during various

stages of the research process, particularly when interacting with participants, conducting interviews, and interpreting findings.

Several students appeared to feel anxious about making methodological mistakes because qualitative inquiry does not always provide fixed procedural standards. The flexibility of qualitative research, while academically valuable, was often perceived as challenging by novice researchers who preferred more structured guidance. This condition influenced students' confidence in making decisions during the research process.

Furthermore, participants frequently questioned the adequacy of their interpretations and analytical conclusions. Since qualitative inquiry involves subjective interpretation, students often doubted whether their findings were sufficiently accurate or academically acceptable. Such uncertainty reflects the challenges commonly experienced by undergraduate students who are still developing research competence and methodological understanding.

The Role of Instructional Support in Learning Qualitative Research

Despite the difficulties experienced by students, the findings demonstrated that instructional support contributed positively to students' learning experiences. Participants emphasized that practical activities, classroom discussion, lecturer feedback, and collaborative learning helped them understand qualitative inquiry more effectively.

The data suggested that students benefited more from experiential learning activities than from theoretical explanation alone. Practical exercises such as conducting interviews, analyzing sample transcripts, and discussing coding processes collaboratively enabled students to understand qualitative procedures more clearly. Peer discussion also appeared to support students in reducing anxiety and improving methodological understanding through shared learning experiences.

In addition, lecturer guidance played a significant role in helping students navigate methodological challenges. Constructive feedback and detailed explanation were perceived as important in supporting students' confidence during proposal development and data analysis processes. These findings indicate that student-centered and practice-oriented instructional approaches may enhance students' understanding of qualitative research methods more effectively than traditional lecture-centered instruction.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that students experienced multiple challenges in learning qualitative research methods, particularly in understanding methodological concepts, constructing research questions, conducting data analysis, and developing confidence as novice researchers. These findings indicate that learning qualitative inquiry involves not only cognitive understanding but also interpretative, analytical, and reflective abilities that require continuous practice and academic support.

One important finding of this study concerns students' difficulties in understanding the conceptual foundations of qualitative research. Many participants perceived qualitative inquiry as abstract and difficult to apply because of its flexible and interpretative nature. This finding aligns with Creswell and Poth (2023), who argue that qualitative research requires researchers to engage deeply with meaning-making processes rather than relying on fixed procedural

structures. Students in this study appeared to struggle because they were more familiar with structured learning approaches commonly associated with quantitative research. Consequently, the absence of rigid procedural stages in qualitative inquiry created uncertainty during the learning process.

The findings also suggest that students' understanding of qualitative research remained largely theoretical. Although participants were able to explain methodological concepts in classroom contexts, they experienced difficulties when applying those concepts in actual research activities. This condition reflects the gap between conceptual knowledge and practical implementation in research methodology learning. Guetterman (2023) emphasizes that students' methodological competence develops more effectively when theoretical understanding is combined with experiential learning activities. Without sufficient opportunities for authentic research practice, students may find it difficult to internalize qualitative inquiry as a meaningful research process.

Another significant issue identified in this study relates to students' difficulties in developing research problems and research questions. Participants frequently experienced uncertainty in identifying educational phenomena that could be explored qualitatively. This finding indicates that students still lacked critical observation skills and analytical sensitivity in examining educational realities. In qualitative inquiry, research questions are exploratory and contextual, requiring researchers to investigate experiences, meanings, and social interactions in depth (Merriam & Grenier, 2021). For novice researchers, constructing such questions may become challenging because the process demands reflective thinking and familiarity with real educational contexts.

The findings further revealed that qualitative data analysis became one of the most challenging stages for students. Participants described coding, categorizing data, and constructing themes as complicated and confusing processes. This result is consistent with Braun and Clarke (2022), who explain that thematic analysis requires interpretative skills and analytical reflexivity to identify meaningful patterns from qualitative data. Students in this study appeared to experience difficulties because they were unfamiliar with interpreting large amounts of textual information systematically. In many cases, students expected clear procedural formulas similar to statistical analysis, whereas qualitative analysis requires flexibility and interpretative judgment.

In addition, students' uncertainty during data interpretation reflects broader issues related to research confidence and methodological readiness. Many participants questioned the validity of their interpretations because qualitative inquiry involves subjective meaning construction. This finding supports previous studies indicating that novice researchers often experience anxiety when conducting qualitative analysis due to fear of producing inaccurate or academically weak interpretations (Nowell et al., 2021). Such uncertainty may reduce students' confidence in conducting independent research and increase dependence on lecturer guidance or previous research examples.

The issue of confidence also emerged strongly in this study. Participants demonstrated limited confidence in conducting interviews, interacting with participants, and making analytical decisions during the research process. This condition suggests that methodological

understanding alone is insufficient if students are not provided with opportunities to develop research experience gradually. Qualitative inquiry requires researchers to become active instruments in the research process; therefore, confidence and communication skills are essential components of methodological competence. The findings indicate that students who lacked practical exposure to qualitative research tended to experience greater anxiety and hesitation during research activities.

Another important finding concerns the role of instructional support in facilitating students' understanding of qualitative inquiry. Participants emphasized that practical activities, collaborative discussion, and lecturer feedback helped them understand research procedures more effectively than theoretical explanation alone. This finding supports student-centered learning theories that highlight the importance of experiential and collaborative learning environments in higher education. Inquiry-based learning and project-based learning approaches may encourage students to engage more actively in research practice and develop stronger methodological understanding through direct experience. This finding is consistent with international studies on qualitative research learning. For instance, a study among senior high school students in the Philippines similarly found that although learners perceived qualitative research as engaging, they continued to face challenges in research skills such as data collection, analysis, and critical thinking, and expressed a strong need for structured training, mentorship, and experiential learning support (Patria-dy et al., 2025). Likewise, research conducted in the Zimbabwean higher education context reported that inadequate methodological training and limited practical exposure remain major obstacles to students' confidence in conducting qualitative inquiry (Mpofu et al., 2024). These cross-national findings suggest that the challenges experienced by English Education students in this study are not unique to the Indonesian context but reflect a broader, international pattern in qualitative research education, reinforcing the need for practice-oriented and mentorship-based instructional strategies across diverse higher education settings.

Furthermore, lecturer feedback appeared to play a significant role in reducing students' confusion and improving analytical understanding. Constructive guidance helped students interpret qualitative data more confidently and understand how methodological concepts were applied in research contexts. This finding suggests that research methodology courses should move beyond lecture-centered instruction and provide more opportunities for guided practice, reflective learning, and collaborative analysis.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods are influenced by interconnected factors involving conceptual understanding, analytical competence, practical experience, and instructional support. Learning qualitative inquiry requires not only theoretical knowledge but also opportunities for active engagement in authentic research activities. Therefore, improving qualitative research instruction in higher education should involve more practice-oriented, reflective, and student-centered learning approaches that support students' methodological development comprehensively.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored students' difficulties in learning qualitative research methods in higher education, particularly within the context of English Education programs. The findings revealed that students encountered several interconnected challenges during the learning process, including difficulties in understanding qualitative research concepts, developing research problems and research questions, conducting qualitative data analysis, and building confidence in conducting independent research.

The study demonstrated that many students still perceived qualitative inquiry as abstract and difficult to apply due to its interpretative and flexible nature. Although participants had basic theoretical understanding of qualitative research, they frequently experienced difficulties when applying methodological concepts in authentic research contexts. In addition, qualitative data analysis emerged as one of the most challenging aspects because students struggled to organize textual data, construct themes, and interpret findings systematically.

Another important finding highlighted the influence of limited research experience on students' confidence and methodological readiness. Students who lacked opportunities for practical engagement tended to feel uncertain during interviews, data interpretation, and analytical decision-making processes. These findings indicate that learning qualitative research requires not only conceptual understanding but also continuous practice, reflective learning, and experiential engagement.

The study also found that instructional support played a significant role in helping students understand qualitative inquiry more effectively. Classroom discussion, collaborative learning, practical research activities, and lecturer feedback contributed positively to students' methodological understanding and analytical confidence. Therefore, research methodology instruction in higher education should emphasize more student-centered and practice-oriented learning approaches that encourage active participation and authentic research experience.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing discussion on qualitative research learning in higher education by providing insights into students' experiences and methodological challenges in English Education contexts. The findings are expected to assist lecturers and curriculum developers in designing more effective qualitative research instruction that supports students' research competence and academic development.

Despite its contributions, this study was limited to a specific educational context and a relatively small number of participants. Therefore, future studies may involve broader educational settings and explore the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies in improving students' understanding of qualitative research methods. Further research may also investigate the integration of digital learning tools and reflective pedagogical approaches in research methodology instruction.

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